



## BOOK REVIEW

# Writing for Abolitionist Futures

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[W]here life is precious, life is precious.

—Ruth Wilson Gilmore<sup>1</sup>

In the *Fight to Save the Town: Reimagining Discarded America*, Professor Michelle Wilde Anderson addresses how local governments and nonprofits can create collective ecosystems of care<sup>2</sup> despite decades of “austerity, spatial inequality, and citywide poverty.”<sup>3</sup> This history of organized abandonment

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1. Rachel Kushner, *Is Prison Necessary? Ruth Wilson Gilmore Might Change Your Mind*, N. Y. TIMES MAG., (Apr. 17, 2019), <https://perma.cc/M49D-2XGW>.

2. In *No More Police: A Case for Abolition*, Mariame Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie identify how community programs and institutions can become broader community infrastructures of care by asking the following set of questions:

1. Assessment of where cops are present in communities and what they are doing: Whose interests are they serving? What harms are they perpetrating? What is needed there—if anything? Who could be providing what is needed instead? 2. Taking inventory: What already exists that can be woven together into an ecosystem of collective care? Where are there gaps and how can they be filled? What concrete strategies, organizations, or collectives that create safety are already in place? What resources are needed to further that work? What needs to be imagined and built from scratch? Experiments and models from other communities can be helpful in finding what works best in yours and offer important lessons and principles, but it’s almost never a question of simply replicating programs developed elsewhere. Each ecosystem of care is unique to the time, place, and people that make it up. 3. Building skills, relationships, and infrastructure: What skills do individuals and communities already have that can be put to use to create safety? What skills and relationships do we need to strengthen and build? What infrastructure needs to be created or funded? Where are the spaces where decisions about safety and accountability are made? What roles might community care coordinators, community safety councils, tenant associations, Harm Free Zone coordinating committees, or labor unions, cooperatives, and workers’ associations play in stitching together an ecosystem of care?

MARIAME KABA & ANDREA J. RITCHIE, *NO MORE POLICE: A CASE FOR ABOLITION* 265-66 (2022).

3. MICHELLE WILDE ANDERSON, *THE FIGHT TO SAVE THE TOWN: REIMAGINING DISCARDED AMERICA* 256 (2002).

guttled city governments across the country. As a result, people living in cities affected by “decades of deep cuts to local government”<sup>4</sup> are no longer able to take care of themselves, their households, and their communities.<sup>5</sup> While many residents of such cities choose to survive by leaving, the people who remain are often left in spaces without public goods such as clean drinking water, sewage disposal, internet access, street lights, and sidewalks.<sup>6</sup> Institutions that promote the sanctity of life—such as libraries, public transportation, and community colleges—are no longer the face of local governments. Instead, government is reduced to lackluster public schooling, local police, and eviction courts. Under these conditions, low-income city residents have “too many experiences of government that punishes, delays, or collects” rather than a city government that invests in their future, or improves their quality of life.<sup>7</sup> By focusing on four places with “citywide poverty”<sup>8</sup> (Stockton, California; Josephine County, Oregon; Lawrence, Massachusetts; and Detroit, Michigan), Anderson illuminates how different communities, affected by this history of austerity, spatial inequality, and citywide poverty, relied upon “a heritage of resilience wired in town culture” to address problems ranging from unemployment to unstable housing.<sup>9</sup> While these cities differ in terms of racial composition, urbanization level, and politics, a unifying characteristic of the four locations is chronic, citywide poverty.<sup>10</sup>

The four locations in *The Fight to Save the Town* are not an American aberration. On the contrary, they are simply part of a larger tapestry of American policy failures. From climate change to criminal justice to healthcare, these systemic failures were fully on display in 2020. Motivated by the courage of activists addressing the systemic failures of the moment, Anderson wrote much of this book in 2020. This is the year that the COVID-19

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4. *Id.* at 9.

5. Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes “organized abandonment” as “racial capitalism’s contemporary self-saving modality—cut costs and evade regulation by starving the welfare state and smashing regulatory and other barriers to rapid accumulation . . . . [This] has put all public agencies on notice by raising the anti-state hue and cry.” RUTH WILSON GILMORE, *ABOLITION GEOGRAPHY: ESSAYS TOWARDS LIBERATION* 306-07 (2022).

6. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 9.

7. *Id.* at 9-10.

8. Anderson defines “citywide poverty” as referring to “(1) a single municipality (whether a city, town, or village) or the unincorporated areas of rural county government (2) that serves a population in which at least 20 percent of residents live under the poverty line, where (3) median incomes are less than two-thirds of the state median income.” *Id.* at 5.

9. *Id.* at 12-13.

10. *Id.* at 13.

global pandemic laid bare our lack of social care systems.<sup>11</sup> This is also the year the California wildfires were so severe that on the morning of September 9th, a convergence of wildfire smoke and fog turned the morning sky red. The air throughout Anderson's hometown of San Francisco was so hazardous that breathing outside was the equivalent of smoking twelve cigarettes a day.<sup>12</sup> That year, Americans flooded the streets in protest of the killings of George Floyd,<sup>13</sup> Breonna Taylor,<sup>14</sup> Tony McDade,<sup>15</sup> and Ahmaud Arbery.<sup>16</sup> Millions of people marched to demand justice.<sup>17</sup> Largely mobilized by the Movement for Black Lives, the marches during June 2020 may mark some of the most significant protests in the history of the United States.<sup>18</sup> Across the country, protestors called to "defund the police."<sup>19</sup> This demand, a principal tenet of abolition, is not a new idea but part of a long history of Black freedom organizing.<sup>20</sup>

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11. For example, between February and May 2020, 5.4 million Americans lost their health insurance because they lost their jobs. COVID-19 surged through states that did not expand Medicaid such as Florida, Texas, and North Carolina. Nearly half of people laid off in those states also lost their health insurance. Gregg Gonsalves & Amy Kapczynski, *The New Politics of Care*, in *THE POLITICS OF CARE FROM COVID-19 TO BLACK LIVES MATTER* 11, 18 (Deborah Chasman & Joshua Cohen eds., 2020).
  12. Umair Irfan, *The Orange Skies and Smoky Air From Western Wildfires, Explained*, VOX, (Sept. 9, 2020, 6:27 PM EDT), <https://perma.cc/T2Q2-988D>.
  13. Evan Hill, Ainara Tiefenthäler, Christiaan Triebert, Drew Jordan, Hayley Willis & Robin Stein, *How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody*, N.Y. TIMES (updated Jan. 24, 2022), <https://perma.cc/PR46-CYXC>.
  14. Richard A. Oppel Jr., Derrick Bryson Taylor & Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, *What to Know About Breonna Taylor's Death*, N.Y. TIMES (updated Dec. 12, 2022), <https://perma.cc/Q8WN-MW93>.
  15. Laura Thompson, *The Police Killing You Probably Didn't Hear About This Week*, MOTHER JONES (May 29, 2020), <https://perma.cc/T33C-2GXE>.
  16. Richard Fausset, *What We Know About the Shooting Death of Ahmaud Arbery*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 8, 2022), <https://perma.cc/LQU8-T42T>.
  17. The calls for defunding police did not spontaneously develop out of thin air but are part of a longer history of organizing. As Amna Akbar highlights: "Minneapolis, for example, is not simply the place where the uprisings began after the murder of George Floyd last month—it is also home to the Black Visions Collective and Reclaim the Block, both of which have been working to defund the police since 2017." Amna A. Akbar, *How Defund and Disband Became the Demands*, THE N.Y. REV. (June 15, 2020), <https://perma.cc/A7PN-742E>.
  18. Larry Buchanan, Quoc Trung Bui & Jugal K. Patel, *Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History*, N.Y. TIMES (July 3, 2020), <https://perma.cc/9YMR-QACE>.
  19. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *We Should Still Defund the Police*, NEW YORKER (Aug. 14, 2020), <https://perma.cc/U6E6-Z7CE>.
  20. As Derecka Purnell notes, "Black abolitionists have condemned the role of prisons and police for centuries, even before W. E. B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*. They imagined and built responses to harm rooted in community and accountability." Derecka Purnell, *How I Became a Police Abolitionist*, ATLANTIC (July 6, 2020), <https://perma.cc/>  
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While abolition is against all forms of criminalization and using police and prisons as a solution for public safety, abolition is also *for* structures that support and encourage care to address all of our crises.<sup>21</sup> Part of dreaming of an abolitionist future is imagining how communities can come together to create broader “community infrastructures of care.”<sup>22</sup> Inspired by participatory action research and portraiture, Anderson conducted interviews and assembled narratives that are for—not just about—the residents of Stockton, Josephine, Lawrence, and Detroit. She does not paint a picture of her own brilliance, but of *theirs*. As a result, her work lifts up an activist playbook of *their* own making. Akin to holding a prism up to the light, Anderson demonstrates how Stockton, Josephine, Lawrence, and Detroit create ecosystems of care. These ecosystems of care are essential not only to building an abolitionist world without police and prisons, but to creating a world with life-affirming social infrastructures that address all systems of inequity.

This piece outlines how *The Fight to Save the Town* can contribute to an abolitionist future in two ways: First, Anderson’s usage of participatory action research and portraiture renegotiates the power dynamics that are typical of qualitative methods by acknowledging that the people most impacted by injustice and inequity are the ones with the most knowledge and expertise to solve the crises. To arrive at an abolitionist future, all systems of oppression must be abolished because all systems of oppression, such as racial capitalism and colonialism, are co-constitutive.<sup>23</sup> Thus, by employing research methods

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D388-7YUT. Part of abolitionist work is imagining a world filled with systems of care. The roots of this work can be found in everything from the freedom dreaming of Black movements during the twentieth century, *see generally* ROBIN D. G. KELLEY, *FREEDOM DREAMS: THE BLACK RADICAL IMAGINATION* (2002), to the righteous rebellion of urban Black women during post-reconstruction, *see generally* SAIDIYA HARTMAN, *WAYWARD LIVES, BEAUTIFUL EXPERIMENTS: INTIMATE HISTORIES OF SOCIAL UPEHAVAL* (2019), to the gardens on small plots of land that were tended to by Black families during the antebellum and Jim Crow South era: “little patches of something, carefully tended to because beyond survival is love,” Imani Perry, *A Little Patch of Something*, *PARIS REV.* (June 3, 2020), <https://perma.cc/W9GF-MHDC>. “While calls to defund are not new, 2020 *was* the first time that local demands to cut police budgets morphed into a national call to action and became a mainstream topic of conversation.” KABA & RITCHIE, *supra* note 2, at 8.

21. *See* KABA & RITCHIE, *supra* note 2, at 204; *see, e.g.*, DERECKA PURNELL, *BECOMING ABOLITIONISTS: POLICE, PROTESTS, AND THE PURSUIT OF FREEDOM* 242 (2021) (“Organizing for abolition alongside climate justice is imperative because policing and carceral responses will continue to manage internally displaced people, especially Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color who are constantly displaced from colonialism, capitalism, and climate change.”).
22. KABA & RITCHIE, *supra* note 2, at 265.
23. *See* Robin D. G. Kelley, *What Did Cedric Robinson Mean by Racial Capitalism*, *BOS. REV.* (Jan. 12, 2017), <https://perma.cc/GH34-MJQM>; *see also* Robin D. G. Kelley, *Foreword to the Third Edition of CEDRIC ROBINSON, BLACK MARXISM*, at xi, xvi (3d ed. 2020) (1983).

that address the inequity within standard research practices, Anderson demonstrates how to write *for* communities building abolitionist solutions. Secondly, Anderson offers us examples that encourage us to imagine the building required for abolition. Anderson holds up the hard work of individuals trying to build systems that can shift the landscape of social welfare systems so that police and prisons are no longer understood as commonsensical solutions.

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Anderson's work is significantly influenced by Participatory Action Research.<sup>24</sup> Participatory Action Research is an umbrella term covering research methods that "have sought to replace an 'extractive', imperial model of social research with one in which the benefits of research accrue more directly to the communities involved."<sup>25</sup> While Participatory Action Research can use various methodologies, one of the main tenets of the practice is to value the knowledge of historically marginalized and delegitimized communities.<sup>26</sup> Rather than just gathering top-down narratives, Participatory Action Research aims to understand how people make sense of the worlds they inhabit and to collaborate with individuals from communities under siege.<sup>27</sup> As Participatory Action Research scholar Michelle Fine explains, Participatory Action Research assumes that "those who have been *most* systematically excluded, oppressed or denied carry specifically revealing wisdom about history, structure, consequences and the fracture points in unjust social arrangements."<sup>28</sup> By prioritizing the perspectives of individuals who are most impacted by injustice, Participatory Action Research aims to produce knowledge that can ultimately fuel movements for social change.<sup>29</sup>

Another methodological practice that influences Anderson's work is portraiture.<sup>30</sup> Originally developed by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, portraiture is a method of inquiry that "combine[s] systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression."<sup>31</sup> Through dialogue between the portraitist and the

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24. See ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 256.

25. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH APPROACHES AND METHODS: CONNECTING PEOPLE, PARTICIPATION AND PLACE 1 (Sara Kindon, Rachel Pain & Mike Kesby eds., 2007).

26. *Principles*, PSP, <https://perma.cc/Q2GA-S9JN> (archived Jan. 1, 2023).

27. See MICHELLE FINE & MARIA ELENA TORRE, *ESSENTIALS OF CRITICAL PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH* 10 (2021).

28. Michelle Fine, *An Epilogue, of Sorts*, in *REVOLUTIONIZING EDUCATION: YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH IN MOTION* 215 (Julio Cammarota & Michelle Fine eds., 2008).

29. *Id.* at 10.

30. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 256.

31. SARA LAWRENCE-LIGHTFOOT & JESSICA HOFFMAN DAVIS, *THE ART AND SCIENCE OF PORTRAITURE* 3 (1997).

subject, the portraits enable both individuals to influence the authenticity of the rendered piece.<sup>32</sup> Portraiture also aims to document human behavior and experience within a community context.<sup>33</sup> With a focus on the convergence of narrative and analysis, the goal of portraiture is to address broader audiences beyond the academy in order to link academic scholarship with public discourse and social transformation.<sup>34</sup>

Relationships are fundamental to the portraiture methodology. Through the act of building relationships, a portraitist approaches individuals with the understanding that they are the best authorities on their own experience.<sup>35</sup> In developing relationships, a portraitist looks for “strength, resilience, and creativity in the people, cultures, and institutions she is documenting.”<sup>36</sup> By listening and responding to individuals, a portraitist also attempts to develop an understanding of their perspective.<sup>37</sup> Rather than simply portraying a facile and sympathetic character, a portraitist is committed to describing multi-dimensional individuals with complicated histories and perspectives.<sup>38</sup>

By relying on the above-mentioned methodologies, Anderson develops her own methodological intervention by crafting “narrative portraits of border-to-border poor places through the people who care for them.”<sup>39</sup>

In her Author’s Note, Anderson is self-reflective and identifies her positionality as “a white woman living in San Francisco and a law professor at a privileged university” and “an outsider to the events, hardships, and hard work recounted here.”<sup>40</sup> Well aware of the power dynamics as an outside researcher and Stanford Law professor, Anderson is committed to her book project because she believes that writing “has a role to play in social change” and can “lift up others’ wisdom and connect work across towns.”<sup>41</sup>

Over the course of 2016 to 2020, Anderson conducted about 250 semi-structured interviews.<sup>42</sup> Anderson initially established connections with individuals who became early instrumental navigators for each of the four locations.<sup>43</sup> Through the hard work of relationship building, Anderson

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32. *Id.*

33. *Id.* at 11-12.

34. *Id.* at 13-14.

35. *Id.* at 141.

36. *Id.* at 158.

37. *Id.* at 146.

38. *See id.* at 158-59.

39. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 256.

40. *Id.* at 257.

41. *Id.*

42. *Id.* at 256.

43. *See id.*

continued to develop a network within each location by attending community meetings, touring neighborhoods, observing local programs, and conducting informal interviews with locals.<sup>44</sup> For many of the narratives featured in her book, Anderson conducted second and third interviews to ensure her understanding of social phenomena.<sup>45</sup>

During the pandemic, Anderson continued to foster her relationships with her interviewees through phone calls, Zoom, and texting.<sup>46</sup> Upon finishing her manuscript, Anderson shared quotations, passages, and whole chapter drafts with interviewees whose names would appear in the text. She described how their stories fit within larger narratives, and shared chapters with the hope of receiving a final blessing from community members. She worked to locate people she had written about but not directly interviewed, including the surviving relatives of deceased persons. Since publication, Anderson has involved leaders from each place in press and interviews about *The Fight to Save the Town*, and she is returning to each location to share the book in public venues alongside individuals whose narratives and insights are featured.

*The Fight to Save the Town* is not meant to be representative. There is already ample research discussing poor cities and poor people. The purpose of Anderson's interviews was to enhance our understanding of communities living within impoverished cities.<sup>47</sup> She aimed to tell a story where people can *speak for themselves*. This intervention is a methodological strategy not just to describe society, but to change it alongside the members of each community.

To arrive at an abolitionist future, the goal is not simply to rid society of police and prisons. Policing and prisons are each an apparatus of criminalization, and criminalization is a function of structural racial oppression. Systems of structural racial oppression, such as racial capitalism and colonialism, are co-constitutive not only with other systems of racial oppression, but with all systems that promote inequity.<sup>48</sup> Thus, abolition requires not simply a dismantling of one oppressive system, but of all of them. To arrive at an abolitionist future, researchers need to practice dismantling

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44. *Id.* at 256-57.

45. Interview with Michelle Wilde Anderson, Larry Kramer Professor of Law, Stanford Law School, in San Francisco, California (Nov. 6, 2022).

46. *Id.*

47. See Mario Luis Small, "How Many Cases Do I Need?: On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research," 10 ETHNOGRAPHY 5, 24-27 (2009).

48. See *supra* note 23 and accompanying text; Kelley, *What Did Cedric Robinson Mean*, *supra* note 23; see also Lannan Foundation, *Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Talk, 17 April 2019*, YOUTUBE, at 44:35 (Apr. 17, 2019), <https://perma.cc/HCE2-VG22> ("Capitalism requires inequality, and racism enshrines it."); Haymarket Books, *Change Everything: Racial Capitalism and the Case for Abolition*, YOUTUBE, at 13:25 (Sept. 3, 2022), <https://perma.cc/9R4M-FZJJ> ("If race is the modality for which class is lived, then mass criminalization is class war.").

inequity within their own research practices. One way to do this is to follow the lead of Anderson and write *for* communities, rather than simply write about them. For writing and research to make change, it must empower agents and activists on the ground, not just academics themselves.

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How do you write about people whose lives are shaped by organized abandonment?<sup>49</sup> How do you write for an abolitionist future? I spent ten years working with youth and youth leaders in Stockton, California, one of the cities where Anderson roots this book. Residents there often told me with pride: “Stockton is the future.” Based on my ethnographic work in the city, I believe this is true. Stockton *is* the future. As the most diverse city in the country and a city plagued by systemic problems that are endemic across the country, Stockton is also the home of residents who are sculpting abolitionist solutions. Lawrence, Josephine, and Detroit are, too.

However, the struggle of writing an ethnography for an abolitionist future is that people’s lives are constantly slipping away. There are too many Stockton youth who told me that by the age of thirty, they would either be dead or in prison. Despite my optimistic urgings that their lives could be different, one of the youths that I worked with was killed by gun violence and two others are serving life sentences.

When you talk to youth in Stockton whose lives are already affected by incarceration, death is a frequent part of their childhood. When I ask Stockton youth to take me places in Stockton that “felt like home,” all of them took me to a place that was connected to a loved one’s passing. One took me to where his baby sister was hit by a car. Another took me to a bench in the park where she used to hang out with her late cousin. We visited the homes of many grandmas. Frequent deaths reconceptualize time for Stockton youth, making time not a linear process marked by days and hours, but a series of chapters defined by one devastating loss after another. For some youth, a minute no longer represents merely sixty seconds, but rather one more chance to curb fate. The Stockton youth I worked with moved through their lives aware that a minute here or a minute there could permanently alter people’s lives.<sup>50</sup> As one youth counselor described:

Out here, you know, life and death is a matter of minutes. Matter of hours. A matter of seconds. A matter of time and space. It is just a matter of time. You know, if a certain person is on one corner, at a certain time, because you talked to him for five minutes, that stopped him from going down the street, where he was about to run into someone he had a problem with or had a problem with him,

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49. *See supra* note 4.

50. JULIA MENDOZA, *THE MISEDUCATION OF THE BARRIO: THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE IN STOCKTON, CALIFORNIA* (forthcoming 2025) (on file with author).



that would have erupted into a gun fight. And just you holding him at the corner for five minutes, talking to him, just hearing him, trying to help him through this situation, could domino effect to him not going to where he was initially going to go at the time he was going to go. And that saved his life. I mean, it happens like that.<sup>51</sup>

*The Fight to Save the Town* lifts the voices of Stockton community members dreaming of an abolitionist future. Anderson writes:

For decades, police and prisons were the city's main answer to the dangerous synergy of chronic economic stress, drug markets, and gun violence in the city's many poor areas. This approach will one day be as discredited as the era of treating pneumonia with bloodletting, or syphilis with mercury pills. Stockton is seeking better answers.<sup>52</sup>

Those answers, she teaches us, are rooted not just in police reform, but in deep healing and violence prevention work outside the police department.<sup>53</sup> She describes trauma counseling to “heal victims, witnesses, and survivors of violence.”<sup>54</sup> She celebrates youth and community groups “reclaiming sidewalks and public spaces to allow people free movement outdoors.”<sup>55</sup> She lifts up activist strategies to give people back agency, pride, and hope. This work, she writes, “is not only a humanitarian intervention, it is a public safety strategy.”<sup>56</sup> People must believe that they have a future in order to invest in it.

In her other chapters, Anderson also discusses how individuals create ecosystems of care. In Lawrence, Massachusetts, Anderson lifts the voices of Lawrence Community Works activists who, alongside other Latina leaders, model a “people-centered” vision of positive change for the city by addressing everything from youth programs to housing.<sup>57</sup> By tackling “one issue at a time in partnership with residents,” the citizens of Lawrence realized an antidote to helplessness and apathy was to “identify problems in their communities, brainstorm solutions and actively implement them.”<sup>58</sup> At dinners called “NeighborhoodCircles,” residents of Lawrence organized to improve their neighborhood by, for example, “getting four-way stop signs at a busy intersection outside a nursery school, cleaning up a local park, boarding or demolishing a blighted home, chipping in to buy a shared snowblower for the block, lobbying the city for a new street light, or organizing a block party.”<sup>59</sup>

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51. *Id.* at 200-01.

52. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 14.

53. *Id.* at 60-74.

54. *Id.* at 15.

55. *Id.*

56. *Id.*

57. *Id.* at 157.

58. *Id.* at 157-58.

59. *Id.* at 158.

During this time period of organizing, crime fell dramatically in Lawrence and reached twenty-year lows,<sup>60</sup> rebutting the supposed need for prisons and police.

In Detroit, Michigan, Anderson highlights the voices of activists “drawing on a heritage of resilience to invest ways to block displacement and restore Black land ownership.”<sup>61</sup> Detroit, Anderson shows, is “reaching for a twenty-first century vision of reconstruction and reparations.”<sup>62</sup> In the aftermath of “displacement disaster”<sup>63</sup> she highlights the works of Detroit activists, many of whom are united under the Detroit People’s Platform, who have mobilized their compassion and justifiable anger over the housing crisis into protests and campaigns to prevent foreclosures.<sup>64</sup> For Anderson: “Detroit is a city of radical imagination followed by hard work. . . . Black Detroit’s history of landownership has cycled through proud gains and damaging losses. But [that] history is the source of the city’s courage.”<sup>65</sup>

While the Detroit People’s Platform may not be directly related to abolitionist principles, the fundamental basis of their advocacy asserts that housing security is a necessary component of “urban recovery.”<sup>66</sup> Yet available and affordable housing does not only provide for urban recovery, but also for the ability of people to fully engage with other aspects of their citizenship such as employment and healthcare. This is why abolitionist organizations such as Critical Resistance and the Prison Moratorium Project center housing rights as an essential aspect of an abolitionist future.<sup>67</sup>

In her chapter on Josephine County, Anderson gives voice to community members who are struggling with a range of social problems. Anderson opens the chapter with a story of a young woman who not only suffered from domestic abuse, but also died at the hands of her abuser. Writing on a community that is not only skeptical of police, but of government in general, Anderson details the groundswell of effort it took to raise taxes to ensure that a basic police unit could sufficiently address extreme violence. In Josephine, disinvestment in police came with cuts to other social services and without

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60. *Id.* at 171.

61. *Id.* at 18.

62. *Id.*

63. *Id.* at 204.

64. *Id.* at 227.

65. *Id.* at 231-34.

66. *Id.* at 234.

67. Norrinda Brown Hayat, *Housing the Decarcerated: Covid-19, Abolition & the Right to Housing*, 110 CAL. L. REV. 639, 649-50 (2022); see also *Mission & Vision*, CRITICAL RESISTANCE, <https://perma.cc/Z9DM-4LFS> (archived Jan. 2, 2023); *About Us*, THE PRISON MORATORIUM PROJECT, <https://perma.cc/NWJ6-ZNR6> (archived Jan. 2, 2023) (to locate, select “View the live page”).

reinvestments in alternatives to police such as drug treatment and restorative justice.<sup>68</sup> However, abolition must not be misinterpreted as merely getting rid of police and prisons, but must also be understood as a reinvestment in communities to address violence. By listening to survivors of interpersonal and state violence, abolitionists are aware that strategies involving friends, neighbors, and community-based solutions can change the social relationships in which violence occurs. These solutions aim to ensure safety and accountability for all survivors.<sup>69</sup>

Abolitionist scholars and activists such as Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Rachel Herzog, Mariame Kaba, and Andrea J. Ritchie show the importance of this work and these stories. Abolition, they show, is not just about getting rid of the carceral state that uses police and prisons as the solution for public safety.<sup>70</sup> Abolition is about organizing and experimenting with solutions to create safer communities. As Rachel Herzog asserts, abolition requires working together to build a “more authentic and grounded coherence rather than dissention and fragmentation that ultimately disempower us.”<sup>71</sup> As Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes it, “Abolition is a movement to end systemic violence, including the interpersonal vulnerabilities and displacements that keep the system going. In other words, the goal is to change how we interact with each other and the planet by putting people before profits, welfare before warfare, and life over death.”<sup>72</sup>

The stories in this book help us imagine how communities can come together to weave mutual aid projects, transformative justice practices, and community institutions into broader “community infrastructures of care” that

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68. ANDERSON, *supra* note 3, at 106.

69. For example, in 2001 a group consisting of members from Critical Resistance and INCITE! created the *Statement on Gender Violence & The Prison Industrial Complex*. See *INCITE!-Critical Resistance Statement: Statement on Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex (2001)*, INCITE!, <https://perma.cc/7TCS-6TDB> (archived Jan. 2, 2023). This statement called upon social justice movements “to develop strategies and analysis that address both state [and] interpersonal violence, particularly violence against women.” *Id.* It also included calls to action such as creating “community-based responses to violence that do not rely on the criminal justice system [and] which have mechanisms that ensure safety and accountability for survivors of sexual and domestic violence.” *Id.* Members of INCITE! alongside other organizers work to create options by household- and community-building rather than criminalization.

70. ANGELA Y. DAVIS, GINA DENT, ERICA R. MEINERS & BETH E. RICHIE, *ABOLITION. FEMINISM. NOW*. 25 (2022). The authors describe abolition as “a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment.” *Id.*

71. KABA & RITCHIE, *supra* note 2, at 204.

72. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Foreword* to DAN BERGER, *THE STRUGGLE WITHIN: PRISONS, POLITICAL PRISONERS, AND MASS MOVEMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES*, at viii (2014).

can reinvent the denuded, punitive state.<sup>73</sup> As Mariame Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie describe in *No More Police: A Case for Abolition*, “All of us are constantly manifesting potential abolitionist response, even if we don’t call them that. The places we care about most—our homes, schools, and neighborhoods—are precisely where we can nurture and develop them.”<sup>74</sup> Kaba elaborates: “Abolitionist organizing insists that we focus on divesting, investing, and experimenting.”<sup>75</sup> For Kaba and Ritchie, “we need experimentation and innovation towards building safety specific to each community—there is no single ‘evidence base’ ‘one-size fits all’ solution.”<sup>76</sup> The work of abolition, then, is not just dismantling, but rebuilding. To do that, we need examples of good work to do and good work being done. Anderson’s book gives us those examples.

When Amanda Alexander, a Detroit social justice activist and movement lawyer, was asked to define social justice, she articulated a vision of an abolitionist future that involves not only dismantling the carceral state, but also creating systems that support life:

[H]ow do we create the types of communities that would allow Black people, trans people, native people to have all of the elders that we are supposed to have? What will it take for us to transform our society such that we would be able to delight in watching each other grow old? Because it’s not just police violence that’s the problem—it’s all sorts of causes of premature death, and all of the ways that the state has abandoned entire populations to die. . . . And what that shift will entail is an entire range of things that go far beyond the carceral system or police reform. And actually thinking about as a society, how are we investing in and committing to a completely different type of community, where people have excellent health care, excellent nutrition, phenomenal schools, all sorts of things that will make it possible for people to live long lives, fulfilling lives, in communities that are thriving.<sup>77</sup>

Amanda Alexander—alongside Stockton activist Jasmine Dellafosse, Lawrence activist Destiny Rodriguez, Josephine County activist Gina Angelique, and all the other activists featured in *The Fight to Save the Town*—demonstrates how abolition can come to be. While each example may not be a perfect solution for every community, together these activist efforts direct us to experiment and to build a universal system of care that not only supports public safety, but also creates conditions under which we all can thrive.

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73. KABA & RITCHIE, *supra* note 2, at 265.

74. *Id.* at 269.

75. *Id.* at 197.

76. *Id.* at 196.

77. The Quarantine Tapes, *How Amanda Alexander of the Detroit Justice Center Thinks About Justice*, LITERARY HUB (June 30, 2021), <https://perma.cc/XUC9-P98R>.

As Saidiya Hartman says: “care is [an] antidote to violence.”<sup>78</sup> Anderson demonstrates this not only by writing people’s narratives with dignity and addressing the inequity within qualitative research practices, but also by celebrating the stories that give us a map of the abolitionist experiments and possibilities that are already here.<sup>79</sup>

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78. Mariame Kaba, *Free Us All: Participatory Defense Campaigns as Abolitionist Organizing*, THE NEW INQUIRY (May 8, 2007), <https://perma.cc/CFL8-L7AC>.

79. This sentence, along with all my thinking about abolition is inspired by Ruth Wilson Gilmore. Ruth Wilson Gilmore reminds us, “Abolition is not *absence*, it is *presence*. What the world will become, already exists in fragments and pieces, in experiments and possibilities.” Léopold Lampert & Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Making Abolition Geography in California’s Central Valley*, THE FUNAMBULIST, (Dec. 20, 2018), <https://perma.cc/5FA6-ZLNT>.