

“If You’re Going to Be Beautiful, You Better Be Dangerous”

Sex Worker Community Defense

Heather Berg

“We wake up every morning and stretch our bodies,” writes the Clandestine Whores Network in a dispatch on “a revolutionary horizon beyond the violent contradictions of a world we wish to leave behind.” “There’s an understanding of care, everyone knows that the goals to be won are not based on individual but collective skill.” Armed cells can be called on for “revenge,” and clients who cause harm “are not shown much mercy.” The network trains in jujitsu “because learning to defend from the bottom when someone is in your guard is an important way to think about how to defend yourself when you’re on your back, on your bed, weighed down being choked.” After they train, organizers take time to dance, rest, and strategize. “Tonight,” the network writes, “is a great night to refuse our deaths.”¹

The dispatch’s language makes it clear that a war is raging. The network is made up of “cadres”; there is a “war room”; it articulates “occupation” as a “generalized . . . tactic.”² This sense that there is a war on reverberates throughout sex worker radicals’ thought. Non–sex workers are dubbed “civilians”; “Stop the war on whores!” reads a popular protest poster each year at International Day to End Violence against Sex Workers marches; sex workers organized in community defense assemble as “armies.”

I asked Hookers Army Los Angeles (HALA) founder Vanessa Carlisle about the group’s name and whether I was right to read it as a kind of confrontation, a

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threat. “Yes, yes,” they replied, “the threat is the opposite of trying to get protection from the outside through proving ourselves deserving.” A lot of policy advocacy seemed to attempt the “humanizing of the sex worker . . . always a woman who deserves to be protected from the harms of out-of-control masculinity.” But the appeal never seems to work. Racist and anti-trans exclusions are built in to nominally protective policy, and the state forces being called on for protection are too often the same ones delivering the original harm. HALA refuses that sort of appeal. Instead, it says: “I don’t give a fuck about any of that. If you touch me in a way I don’t like, you get hurt.” “I really like the idea of us being able to say ‘no,’ and then backing up our ‘nos.’ . . . That’s foundational for any kind of movement building to me.” HALA is inspired here by histories of Black radicalism: “It’s why people got so scared of the Panthers, they back up their ‘no.’”

HALA is part of a broader movement in sex worker theory and practice. Refusing both sex workers’ state-produced vulnerability to violence and the state’s monopoly on violence, sex worker radicals articulate self-defense as a practice of community care. They investigate the history and theory of community defense through group study, train in defense tactics, and build networks to keep each other safe. In the process, contemporary sex worker thinkers search for conceptual resources in Black radical and anticolonial traditions of the latter half of the twentieth century—other communities whose members understood that their vulnerability to violence was structurally produced and thought about what it meant to “defend from the bottom.” This article explores sex worker community defense with an eye to its relationship to past struggles and contributions to future ones. Chief among those is the contributions of the sex worker Left to the abolitionist struggle for a world beyond prisons and policing.

The essay is based in an archive of interviews with current and former sex workers who responded to my call for thinkers on the (self-defined) sex worker Left. It also draws on writing (e.g., zines, agitprop, and essays) by sex workers on the political Left broadly conceived. Our conversations focused on their thinking around key issues in left politics and on what moving through left spaces as sex-working people has taught them about politics. I approached our transcripts and their writings with an eye to the pressure points that emerge when sex workers read broader left thought against the grain of sex-working life. I also (re)read the texts they identified as formative in their thinking. When interlocutors make direct reference to a text, I cite this as part of the conversation; when their words conjure other thinkers in my own readings, I note these echoes.

Acutely understanding the violence of the carceral state, sex worker radicals come to their abolitionism organically. Sex workers—especially criminalized survivors—are a core abolitionist constituency. Yet sex worker abolitionists point to tenets in popular abolitionist discourse³ that seem to be “not for us,” as Clara, one interviewee in this project’s archive, put it. Sex worker abolitionists identify a

tension between many abolitionists' preference for a transformative justice that rejects all punitive responses to harm and the sense that transformation may not come without injury to those who profit from the status quo. Seeking historical resources for navigating tactical ambivalence in the present, many wonder if building new worlds will require a transitional program of militant community defense, even retribution. "I'm interested in art, writing and action that calls for autonomy, revenge or extra-legal refusal as opposed to justice, equality or legal recognition," writes Sophia Giovannitti.⁴

Sex workers' visions for what this might look like articulate a revision of "stranger danger" and a set of tactics that treats harm that comes from outside their communities differently than harm that comes from within. Some wonder if the popular abolitionist refrain that individual retribution cannot address structural harms still holds when individual violence does the work of a state that wants sex workers dead. Finally, some thinkers in this archive are frustrated with popular abolitionist discourse's line that punishment from individuals and communities mimics the carceral impulses of the state. They yearn for an abolitionism that views retribution from the people as distinct from violence from the state. If the most publicly visible abolitionist thought tends to treat the utility of violence and the temporality of defense as settled questions, sex worker abolitionists ask us to stay ambivalent.

The abolitionist thinker Dylan Rodríguez responds to a roundtable question on abolitionism's limits with the rejoinder that the better question is "how *multiple abolitionisms* can articulate with each other in a way that poses a legitimate threat to transform the current condition."⁵ I am arguing here that sex worker abolitionisms can help do that articulating work. Their interventions can help us think through the politics of justice for sex workers, but also for other targets of harm that comes at the intersection of state and extrastate violence.

Violence as the Work of the State

Sex worker community defense emerges in response to state violence and state neglect, forces that converge to produce vulnerability to harm. The thinkers in this archive hail from criminalized, decriminalized, and legalized regimes and have a range of orientations to leftist politics—from socialist feminist to anarcho-communist. But they overwhelmingly agree that across these contexts and frames, no outside force can be counted on to keep sex workers safe. Yoshi Maximus put it this way: if you're "a sex worker, the police don't care about you. . . . If you're going to be beautiful, you better be dangerous."

Maximus is a sex worker who also moonlights as a bodyguard for other sex workers. Workers in his community have taken to "freestyling" (picking up clients in hotels or bars, rather than through web advertising) more often since the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) undermined their ability to advertise online. But it is harder to screen for safety this way, so friends pay Maximus a small cut to

wait outside during sessions, ready to step in if clients become violent. He started this practice because he himself had been “hurt, a lot.” People target sex workers for harm, Maximus said, because “we’re disposable people.” The state manufactures that disposability and, at the same time, criminalizes workers’ self-activity geared toward contesting it. Like others in this archive, Maximus has faced pimping charges for his community defense work.

Whether violence comes directly at the hands of state agents, as in the high incidence of police abuse, or from civilians, vulnerability to it is the work of what we might call “the state.”⁶ Here I am thinking with scholars of settler, anti-Black, and anti-queer and trans violence, who make a case for civilian violence as doing the white supremacist, capitalist state’s work for it.⁷ This can be true even if we know that the state is not a thing, that its logics are not uniform, and that state agents do not always work in concert.⁸ Even in their incoherence, the forces that make up “the state” have a momentum. The state, such as it is, makes sex workers available for death, and then, writes Irene Silt, “our dead bodies serve as justification to fund vice units.”⁹ Those who cause harm do not work alone. This understanding of civilian violence as doing the work of the state shapes sex workers’ critiques of the popular abolitionist line that individualized responses to violence never work; if abusers are not operating as individuals but rather as representatives of a structure, tactics that target the individual might weaken structures too. The *might* here is key because, as we will see, sex worker radicals are ambivalent about this potential.

That violence is state produced is doubly true when nonwhite, trans, poor, and youth workers are made vulnerable to harm. “Racist and sexist state practices” shape “the density and velocity” of the harms sex workers (and other “sexually policed” people) face, writes Anne Gray Fischer.¹⁰ The sex worker theorist and abolitionist Chanelle Gallant told me that reckoning with this reality was politically “catalyzing” for her. Organizing in the wake of the 1980s and 1990s serial murders of forty-nine Vancouver sex workers, mostly Indigenous, she came to understand that “if capitalism and colonialism and patriarchy decide you’re not worth anything to them, there’s no safety net. You can just be picked off.” From this Gallant learned that “sex workers needed to rely on each other to protect ourselves.” They know policing offers no protection.

In carrying out the state’s violent momentum, citizens take cues about who is available for disposal. “The police hunt down hookers, so the message is that anyone can hunt down hookers,” remind the sex worker activists in Fischer’s book.¹¹ The state, meanwhile, maintains its monopoly on violence by punishing sex workers who contest disposability. When carceral systems punish survivors who self-defend, this is to send a message to others who might too. Writing on criminalized self-defense more broadly, Victoria Law cites a 1978 case. The judge sentenced a woman who had shot her abusive husband to twenty years not to rehabilitate her, he said, but to “get the word out to other wives in similar circumstances.”¹² This

gets the word out to abusers, too. When this same system metes out harsh punishment to people like Cyntoia Brown, a youth sex trafficking survivor originally sentenced to life for killing her adult assailant in self-defense, this communicates to other abusers that the state is behind them, and to other survivors that to self-defend is to risk further violence (this time directly from the state). Feminist anti-rape activists have long understood self-defense and community vigilantism as direct challenges to the state's monopoly on violence, one reason the criminalized self-defenders in Emily L. Thuma's history, sex workers among them, explicitly understood their position as "political prisoners." Thuma figures the Black, Brown, and Indigenous, the crazy, and the sex working at the forefront of a politics that "analyzed the interrelationship of state abandonment and state violence."¹³ Their everyday acts of community care and self-preservation were the foundation of the politics that flowed from them.

Though some make a case for "assuming positive intent," as Lady Elizabeth put it, most of the sex workers in my interview archive had come to believe that the state has "always wanted us dead."¹⁴ In articulating the experience of living under state forces that will never serve them, sex worker radicals find affinities with others (and with overlapping communities) who know that full citizenship is not on the table. This is the message that "no humans involved"—police code for murdered sex workers of color—communicates, and many of the sex worker thinkers in this archive came to radical politics through hearing it.

When the state offers nothing, it also loses some of the power attached to its performance of protection. This is the risk states take in dealing violence and neglect—those conditions set the stage for the dreaming up of alternatives. "People have such a hard time envisioning what community safety looks like without the state, without police repression," said Lucia Rey. But sex workers already know, "because the state has failed us consistently." This was in response to my question about what Rey thought the civilian Left could learn from sex worker organizing. They added, "I think that leftists have a lot to learn from us, too, about how to organize your own community defense, how to keep your own community safe and do it in a way that keeps you out of the state's grasp, because we've had to." "At every turn," Rey said, "the state and all these institutions have failed us, and we have always found ways to survive and to be resilient. . . . We are keeping each other safe."

On the Politics of Translation

Conceived during the summer of 2020—a moment marked by protests in defense of Black life, state abandonment surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, and ever-increasing assaults on sex workers' livelihoods—Who Revolution ("whore revolution" when spoken) started meeting online to talk theory. The multiracial group's members represented varied sectors of the sex industry and incomes within it. Some had already read a great deal of political thought (some self-taught, others

in college courses) and others none at all; all were sex workers invested in anticapitalist struggle. The group's readings were made available for free, and there was a standing offer to reach out to founding members for help thinking them through.

Who Revolution's reading list started with Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Mao Zedong, then moved to Frantz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, and C. L. R. James, parsing the history of racial capitalist state formation and the stakes of revolutionary struggle against it. Next, it moved to Harry Haywood and Milton Howard, Eldridge Cleaver, Huey Newton, and Angela Davis, thinking through the politics of violence and community defense. Sometimes the group talked about how this connected with sex worker politics; at other times they focused on close readings geared toward building a shared theoretical language.

Who Revolution's readings are an exercise in translation at least twice removed—the Panthers salvage what they can from Fanon on self-defense in the Algerian context, and half a century later, a multiracial group of sex workers borrows from the Panthers. As Davis did with Marx, sex worker readers grapple with the politics of borrowing, translation, and citation. This work of extrapolation, scavenging abstract lessons for today's struggles from thinking firmly rooted in the concrete struggles of its own present, is always the task for readers of "militant texts."¹⁵ Who Revolution is just one space where sex workers undertake this project. Other interviewees read alone or with friends in in-person groups loosely formed around those who work at the same strip club, or groups formed around sex worker organizations and mutual aid collectives or sponsored by the sex worker-owned bookstore Bluestockings. Many are studying the same thinkers, and readers here will notice shared affinities in the analyses that follow. This intellectual history is shared, too, with broader abolitionist thought, a framework deeply informed by the Black radical tradition. Part of what is notable in this story is that abolitionist thinkers can engage the same traditions and arrive at sometimes different tactical conclusions.

Sex worker readers approach these texts not in search of a correct line but as tools for grappling with ambivalence. Sex worker abolitionism, like the broader abolitionist project, is not uniform, not finished. Sex worker abolitionists disagree with each other about tactics, and they are open about the ambivalence they feel in their own ideas. SX Noir puts it this way: "I'm giving myself space for conflict within my own thinking. Giving myself the space to say, 'I'm trying to survive under these extreme circumstances. . . . I need space for my ideology to change.'" This embrace of process and contradiction is in the spirit of abolitionist thought more broadly.¹⁶

Inspired by histories of radical community defense and also cautious of the risk of appropriation, sex worker radicals "acknowledge and honor the hard work, risks, and death endured by many over the past century in order to create a framework for the sex worker specific organizing and political analysis we use today."¹⁷ The Other Weapons collective goes on:

The longevity of our struggle relies on our ability to continue the militant practices of the black radical tradition, to stand in solidarity with those defending their indigenous land from pipeline development and other state-sanctioned genocidal expansions, and to remember that the hope for queer liberation was fought against the police in a riot at Stonewall by black and brown trans women, prostitutes, queens, dykes, and other gender traitors.¹⁸

Interlocutors echoed these commitments in our conversations. Clara talked about reading Fanon on the utility of violence in her reading group with other Black sex worker radicals, offering the caveat that they were not under the impression that sex workers' struggles in the United States were parallel with anticolonial ones. "I don't want to sound like white women who think [Audre] Lorde's radical self-care was about taking a bath," she joked. Participants in another reading group told me that they take care to "call in" white sex workers who suggest that contemporary sex workers' struggles are akin to struggles for Black civil rights historically, not least because the long civil rights movement is ongoing and not all contemporary sex workers are vulnerable to state violence in the same way. But sex worker radicals echo other thinkers who argue against the tendency to "provincialize" decolonial and Black radical thought, as Eric Stanley puts it, even as they know that this tendency comes in response to real concerns about the risks of bad translation.¹⁹

From this refusal to provincialize they glean, too, lessons about the risks of what the sex work historian Melinda Chateauvert calls "street justice."²⁰ These traditions teach what is at stake, and sex worker radicals take up community defense in the shadow of a long history of state repression. In her history of the Black Panthers, Robyn Spencer reminds that "the gun turned out to be a weapon turned on them more than they ever turned it on others"; no serious student of the Panthers reads their history as a romantic story about militancy.²¹ So the legacy of Black radical freedom movements informs HALA's practice, but it also highlights the stakes of defense against an abusive state. Still, sex worker thinkers are careful not to confuse the immediate tactical risks of self- and community defense (or even preemptive violence) with ethical arguments against their practice.

Community Defense as Imaginary and Practice

"You're taking a huge risk by defending yourself," Emily said. She talked about "Joey the Player," a serial rapist who targeted sex workers for years. He was all over bad date lists but continued to contact sex workers under new aliases, targeting especially those who were too precarious to do a full screening before meeting. "We couldn't seem to do anything about it," she told me. "My response after the second time this guy contacted me was, 'I'm going to organize a group of women with bats to go meet him.'" But she did not want her friends jailed because of this man, and jailing sex workers for community defense is almost certainly how the state would have

responded. “You’re fucked no matter what.” This was especially so, she said, because a lot of sex workers at the time assumed that Joey the Player was a police officer. He knew too much about how to weaponize the law, and so many of their other abusers had been cops. That did not turn out to be true this time, and unlike most people who harm sex workers, he was prosecuted after years of abuse. Still, the win felt hollow. There would be more people like him, and like most of the thinkers in this project’s interview archive, Emily is a prison abolitionist who does not measure success by prosecutions. Community defense is all that is left, but in pursuing it “you’re taking a huge risk.”

Calculating the risk of further criminalization is integral to the theory and practice of sex worker self-defense. The Victorian-era sex worker and madam Josie Washburn described a vision for community defense against rapists but noted that “the unwritten law” of self-defense “benefits the rich only.” Washburn anticipated that, were circumstances otherwise, “there would be a sudden increase of male funerals.”²² These are tactical rather than ethical claims. Washburn does not seem vexed by the possibility of this militant backing up of boundaries, just acutely aware that the law is designed to visit yet more violence on survivors who push back. Today the legal stakes figure centrally into sex worker self-defense trainings. This was true for HALA and also for Paris’s Sex Worker Antidefense Group (SWAG), where peer trainers teach not just self-defense tactics but also law. SWAG teaches “around” the legal concept of “legitimate self-defense,” Charlotte L. told me, even as most of its practitioners do not accept the law’s capacity to confer legitimacy. (French law did not affirm sex workers’ “legitimacy” as workers until 2016, after all, and continues to undermine it through policy that chips away at their ability to work safely.) SWAG cautions sex workers never to attack abusers from behind because “that could be used against you” in court. The stakes are even higher when the abuser is a cop, Charlotte said. Many of SWAG’s trainees are undocumented migrants who work on the street, vulnerable not just to criminalized self-defense but also to deportation. “We definitely make it clear that if you defend yourself against a police officer, you will not be found to be legally legitimate in what you did. . . . We talk about what the law would say, and then people can figure out what they want to do with that information.” To warn that some forms of community defense are not safe under current conditions is not to argue against their ethics or political value.

The state is uninterested in protecting sex workers from harm—instead, state agents regularly cause harm—but it also clings tightly to its monopoly on violence. “I think it is truly unjust that the state has the monopoly on legal violence,” said Carlisle, “so yeah, I want there to be a sense of self-advocacy around the use of violence in my community.” They went on: “We are never allowed to fight back. . . . The fact that you are not allowed to beat the shit out of someone who rapes you is so ridiculous to me. I can barely stand it.” If thinkers in this archive calculate that the costs of violent community defense may be too high, it matters that this, not

nonviolent ethics in the abstract, is why they retreat. If messaging on transformative justice often condemns vigilante violence on broad ethical grounds, many sex worker thinkers instead caution against vigilantism simply because, under current conditions, vigilante tactics might bring sex worker survivors more harm. The distinction is worth making because it differently hails survivors. It is also something to be strategized around because the balance of risk and urgency might tip. Clara talked about wrestling with exactly this question: “There might come a time,” she said, “when the alternative is just to watch your friends die.” Clandestine Whores Network’s dispatch, and its vision of armed cells prepared to mercilessly “refuse our deaths” is, after all, set in the not-too-distant future of 2026.²³

For most of the thinkers in this archive, militant community defense is something to dream about that is not safe yet. Maria, who shares self-defense tactics informally in her community of trans sex workers, talked about her vision for justice: “holding people accountable for violence against us.” “That doesn’t really happen because we’re all fucking terrified all the time,” she told me, but “at this point, to protect ourselves, we’re going to have to commit more crimes.” Like many others in this archive, Maria gestured to the story of Aileen Wuornos, the sex worker who killed seven men in self-defense before her 1991 arrest and later state execution. “She fought back and was put to death for it,” Maria said. “They were warning the rest of us,” she said of Wuornos’s execution. Feminist activists at the time of Wuornos’s incarceration saw this too, writes Chateauvert, understanding her as a “political prisoner.”²⁴ Wuornos is one of many sex workers who, in the language of the abolitionist project organized to defend criminalized survivors of gendered violence, “survived and [were] punished.”²⁵ Understanding that the cure for sex workers’ vulnerability to violence is not intensified contact with the same systems that produce it generates an organic abolitionism among thinkers of the sex worker Left.

Sex Workers on Transformative Justice

“We are keeping each other safe,” Rey told us at the start of this story. The tactics they describe—community defense, blacklists, networks of care—answer Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s call to think about abolitionism as a project concerned with “presence, not absence,” building alternatives rather than simply negating carceral systems as they are.²⁶ The sex worker radicals in this project’s archive disproportionately hail from the Black, Brown, Indigenous, disabled, trans, and poor communities most viciously targeted by the carceral state. Many were politicized through early and violent encounters with policing (or, for those most insulated by relative privilege, navigating its constant threat). Before sex work, and once there, they learn that policing and prisons are more likely to bring harm than remedy. Many of these thinkers were practicing organic abolitionist politics even before they named them, already expert at taking care of each other outside state institutions. Sex workers, writes Gallant, “have a lot to share with the prison abolition movement, because

the big boogie man in the prison abolition movement is, ‘What about the rapists and murderers?’ Well, sex workers know about the rapists and murderers, and have all kinds of strategies to protect themselves.”²⁷ Information sharing, mutual aid, and community defense all do more to keep sex workers safe than the state ever could.

“I’m a mutual aidist. I’m a prison abolitionist,” responded Carlisle when I asked how they wanted to be identified politically in writing that came from our interview. Others in this project’s interview archive share this sense. In reading groups and in self-study, they read Mariame Kaba, Angela Davis, Andrea Richie, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, adrienne maree brown, and others, and it is here that they find resources for making sense of the criminalization of both sex work as a survival strategy and the community defense that tries to keep people alive once there. Their stories, activist energy, and analysis are at the heart of vibrant abolitionist efforts such as the *Survived and Punished* project, which Kaba cofounded. They are drawn to abolitionist thought’s incisive critiques of the carceral system and its reminder that other ways of being in community with each other are not just possible but already flourishing. While some want sex work decriminalized but the broader carceral apparatus left intact, most join Davis and others in framing decriminalization as part of an expansive abolitionist program; the call is not that “we do not deserve prison” but that “no one does.”²⁸ They also understand deeply the abolitionist refrain that the carceral system extends far beyond the prison’s walls. And they know that fellow abolitionists are right when they say that giving people resources reduces harm, not because deprivation creates criminality (as liberals often suggest) but because it makes us more vulnerable to abuse.

These thinkers approach tactical debates as committed abolitionists, not as people skeptical about the possibility of life beyond policing and prisons. It is against that backdrop that I understand the tensions they identify when reading popular abolitionist discourse against the grain of sex worker politics. These tensions are most present when abolitionist alternatives get sutured to a version of transformative justice that is less useful in the wake of the harms sex workers are most likely to experience.²⁹ If sex worker abolitionists agree with other abolitionists that Joey the Player’s incarceration is no win, the vigilante defense (and even retribution) some dream of instead has little place in the nonviolent abolitionist alternatives they see offered up, which are premised on a vision of community that sex workers do not share with perpetrators like him.

This does not account for the diversity of abolitionist thought and the internal debates that flourish in organizing spaces and on the page. There are abolitionisms that do not make the moves that are the subject of interlocutors’ comradely critiques.³⁰ But I was struck by the patterns sex worker radicals identified in our conversations, patterns that dominate the abolitionist appeals that are most visible to them. These appeals frame abolitionist alternatives as principally nonviolent and with the potential to restore community ties between abusers and survivors (or

even to destroy the false binary between the two). If there is internal debate about the politics of vigilantism, for example, those conversations are quiet, with a different apparent consensus making its way to the most publicly visible work.

Puzzling out why is not this essay's project, though one answer is in some ways obvious: popular address requires careful calculations about audience, rhetoric, and sometimes even respectability and legality in an increasingly authoritarian moment. At the level of movement strategy, it may not feel safe, or smart, to interrupt the political momentum abolitionist ideas now have by publicly engaging internal debate (not least when that debate includes what might be read as a call for extra-legal violence). Not all our tactical debates need to be public facing, but it is not nothing if sex worker abolitionists sometimes feel ignored as a public worthy of address. "I get it," said Clara of appeals to think beyond violence and retribution, "they're writing for civvy liberals—to convince them—not for us."

That is not true of the whole abolitionist project; abolitionism is grounded in the same Black radical tradition that inspires many of the sex worker thinkers in this archive and that informs internal debate on shared questions about the right to violence, the boundaries of community, and so on. Transformative justice emerges not as an appeal to liberal reformists but rather as a tool for intracommunity healing for those who know that state responses will only do more harm. So I read interlocutors' critiques as less about what gets said than about what often does not, less concerned with appeals to think beyond punishment as a response to intracommunity harm (appeals that make a lot of sense in their context) than with the relative absence of a public-facing conversation about those harms (and those perpetrators) that are less amenable to transformative justice responses.

These questions reverberated throughout our conversations: To what tactics should sex worker radicals turn when the rapist and the state agent are the same person? If transformative justice prioritizes a process that understands both victims and perpetrators to be "integral parts of the community who require holding, healing, and support," do perpetrators who do the work of the state merit support too?³¹ The chief lesson of transformative justice, said Clara, is that "we need to target structures, not individuals." But, she asked, "what about individual abusers who form a structure?" Can or should they be healed? If transformative justice's invitation is to look toward systems rather than individual acts of harm, what to do with an analysis that sees individual violence as doing the state's work for it?

The theory and practice of transformative justice hinge on a critique of "stranger danger" and a crucial effort to refocus on how to sustainably address intracommunity harm.³² But sex worker abolitionists remind us that, for some, harm *does* come from strangers who are dangerous. This is, of course, not news to the broader abolitionist movement, with thinkers grounded in the Black radical tradition and its analysis of the white supremacists who (like bad johns) come from outside to do violence that is endorsed by the state. Sex workers' theorizing around the politics of

transformation draws on this history together with their particular knowledge about “the rapists and murderers.” It does so while avoiding normative renderings of stranger danger, steeped as they are in racist fantasy and a refusal to acknowledge that, for non-sex workers, most harm does come from closer to home. In the history of white-dominated gay and feminist campaigns to “take back the night,” writes Christina Hanhardt, community defense figures as a means of defending against outsiders imagined to be men of color.³³ The sex worker community defenders who volunteered for this project take care to avoid this tendency, both because of their political commitments and because it does not serve their needs. For HALA, writes Carlisle, trainings work against the “myth that the most dangerous person is a man (of color, or poor) *out there*.”³⁴ Echoing other abolitionists’ critiques of liberal feminist articulations of stranger danger, Carlisle reminds us that most violence comes from “people we know.” SWAG likewise found that liberal feminist articulations of self-defense alienated sex workers not just conceptually but also strategically. Those trainings focused on defending against “that guy in the street,” Charlotte L. explained, “not on situations when you’re already alone with a guy in a room.” Still, those people sex workers know—regulars on the vice squad beat, clients known but not really—are usually not members of the communities of which sex workers are a part. Instead, they come from outside to do the violent state’s work for it.

Part of transformative justice’s force is its invitation to “choose love” in a “monstrous world,” as the writer, social worker, and former sex worker Kai Cheng Thom asks us to do in her collection of abolitionist essays and poetry.³⁵ Most of the thinkers in this interview archive are drawn to the promise of this way of doing politics. When confronting harm within their (overlapping) communities as sex workers, people of color, trans people, anarchists, and so on, many said they work from an abolitionist understanding that revenge does not heal, that transformative justice is possible, and that “no one is disposable.”³⁶ In other moments, though, hopes for justice that transforms at the same time as it leaves all parties intact shatter. When agents of the state perpetrate harm, and when individual abusers self-deputize to do that work for them, some sex worker radicals do want their abusers disposed of. The stakes of prefigurative politics are high; abolitionists—abolitionist sex workers among them—want to respond to harm in ways that prefigure the worlds they hope to build. But prefiguration can start to feel like a trap for sex worker radicals who wonder if transitional programs necessitate different tactics than the ones they hope will animate futures to come. Approaching this possibility through the lens of comradely curiosity, they have more questions than answers: What does a politics informed by desires for revolutionary violence suggest about the abolitionist futures one wants? What futures, conversely, are conjured up in renderings that figure violence and punishment as always belonging to the state? Who is imagined to exist in the future? What happens to sex workers if everyone, including bad johns, gets to stay?

Sex worker abolitionists take up abolitionism's call for a justice that transforms and its insistence that this will not come from the state. But they push back, lovingly, against the core transformative justice principle that violence outside the state replicates the harm we want to render unthinkable.³⁷ The *army* in Hookers Army gestures to the group's intent to "build a real fighting force in an oppressive system," not one that acts like the state but an "ad hoc guerrilla resistance movement."³⁸ I am struck by the tensions this brings to light; there is not a lot of space for guerrilla resistance in invitations to refuse abusers' disposal.

adrienne maree brown warns that "judgement and punishment are practices of power over others. . . . The injustice of power is practiced at an individual and collective level." It is from this place that some abolitionists come to the conclusion that to pursue punishment and exile is to take on state-like power. "Instead of prison bars we place each other in an overflowing box of untouchables," writes brown.³⁹ Sex worker radicals in this project's archive are not so sure that these are the same. Instead, they advocate an analysis of violence that differentiates between its exercise by institutions (or their individual proxies) and by oppressed people. Clara talked about reading Huey Newton in her reading group, and said she had been thinking about what a dictatorship of the lumpenproletariat might look like. It would, to be sure, not look like the carceral systems that uphold the racial capitalist state, but it would require taking real power. Inspired by Newton's critique of liberal pacifism, she pointed to a moment in his "In Defense of Self-Defense" where Newton marks the point of departure between Black radicals and liberal assimilationists: "the principle that the oppressor has no rights that the oppressed is bound to respect." Newton urges readers to "destroy him [the oppressor] utterly," and Clara thought this might be sometimes necessary.⁴⁰

"We're not ready to do anything like this now," Clara said. "The Panthers were crushed." And radicals are surveilled in ways that were unthinkable when Newton wrote in 1967. Contemporary internet surveillance would give a modern COINTELPRO breathtaking new force; sex workers know this because such surveillance is first tested on them. But Clara hoped that organizing might build both capacity and the ability to evade, and her reading group was thinking hard about the ethics and politics of what to do when that time came. They debated "the usual questions," she said: "What harm merits the most extreme response?" "How will we know when we've gone too far?" Earlier in our conversation, Clara had identified as a prison abolitionist. So I asked her how she navigated the tensions between "destroy him utterly" and "no one is disposable." "I'm stuck there," she said. "I have so much love for civilian abolitionists, but every time they say, 'nobody is disposable' I think, 'they haven't met my rapist johns.' I don't know if 'hurt people hurt people' is the best explanation for what they do." Those rapist johns were, "nine times out of ten, white men with money who seek me out because they can." I felt stuck, too. In the spirit of a method that lingers on the encounters that bring us up short, let us spend more time here.

First, a caveat: It reflects the self-selecting nature of this archive that interlocutors focused their analysis (in interviews and in their own writing) on police and white cis men clients (or perpetrators who pose as clients) who do harm—that is, those who are most obviously outsiders and can be most easily understood to be doing the work of a violent state. Broader sex worker discourses are rife with racist ideas that sound a lot like conventional liberal feminists’ stranger danger, including the myth that clients of color are more dangerous. I am not arguing that all sex workers avoid this framework, just that the sex worker leftists who volunteered to talk to me did. For white sex workers who felt hailed by my call for participants this might be traced to antiracist practice of the sort Carlisle describes, where part of the work of self-defense training includes teaching against racist ideas of why we need it. It might also be traced to the readings in antiracist thought that multiracial radical reading groups do. *Who Revolution*, for example, includes readings that help white members unlearn the racist and classist ideas that undergird the “whorearchy.” That interlocutors focused on harm that comes from outside also reflects the revolutionary thought they are drawn to, texts whose grounding in anticolonial and antiracist struggle generates a focus on perpetrators not of the community, ones who do the work of a violent state.

Most interlocutors did not turn to what to do about harm in that remaining one time out of ten that Clara identified, when it does come from people who are also targeted by state violence. Those that did advocated different responses depending on the source of the harm. One anonymous interlocutor said she believed deeply in using accountability processes for intracommunity harms in her own community of trans sex workers of color but advocated a “kill your rapist” approach (one that she, like others in this archive, calculated not to be worth the risk right now) outside it. Among the tactical questions left unanswered in these conversations is where exactly to draw the line between inside and out, and what to do when it gets blurry. Abolitionists who condemn punishment as such have resolved those ambivalences in one way, mitigating the risk of retributive harm by turning away from retribution altogether. Some sex worker radicals want to leave these ambivalences open.

Transformative justice practitioners know that politics are about feeling, and much of the work of advocating it operates at the level of affect. How to transform cultures of harm so that not just the state institutions that mete out punishment but our everyday desires for it wither away? How to “kill the cop in your head”? Kaba brings us here in a conversation about the foundations of transformative justice, a practice that could replace the prisons we will tear down. It requires divesting from the carceral state and social services, finding responses to harm that do not create more of it, and prioritizing prevention and structural analysis rather than reactivity and a focus on individuals. Crucially, it “takes as a starting point the idea that what happens in our interpersonal relationships is mirrored and reinforced by the larger systems.”⁴¹ We must avoid “mistaking emotional satisfaction for justice,” urges Kaba,

and, later, “remember again, the systems live within us.”⁴² These are all good reasons to refuse a distinction between desires for punishment at the hands of the state and outside it. Thinkers in this project’s archive suggest, though, that there might elsewhere be good reasons to parse them out.

Transformative justice is also—and this is where sex worker radicals place the greatest distance between their abolitionism and popular frames in transformative justice—“militantly against the dichotomies between victims and perpetrators.”⁴³ Transformative justice emerges directly from communities of color who cannot afford exile when those among them cause harm, who do not want to aid the white supremacist and colonial state by inviting it in, and who know that calling the police will not help anyway. Knowing that “hurt people hurt people,” as the maxim goes, and that intracommunity violence is so often a symptom of structural trauma, advocates for transformative justice seek healing over retribution. This hinges on a crucial critique of the myth of stranger danger. If racist fantasies of dangerous outsiders authorize the carceral state, knowing that most harm comes at the hands of people we know (and often love) changes the terms. Most sex worker radicals work from this understanding when confronting violence within their communities. But they also remind us that some perpetrators really are from outside; there is a dichotomy between sex workers and the clients and cops (and client cops) who target them, and another kind of militancy in organizing around the concreteness of that line. Citing Newton citing Fanon, Who Revolution members talked about internal colonialism as a framework for understanding this separateness. There are victims and perpetrators, and only one has the backing of the state. “Our abusers are never part of our community,” said Rey. “Clients are clients and sex workers are sex workers.”

Rey’s abolitionism was hard-earned, first through growing up in an immigrant community where cops brought arrest and deportation, and later as a sex worker who knew that police were more likely to be perpetrators of harm than anyone you would call on for protection. She learned that mutual aid, community defense, blacklists, and outing bad dates are all part of a set of tactics sex workers use to keep each other safe. Some of these tactics sit uneasily alongside abolitionist critiques of violence, banishment, and public shaming as ways to address harm. But Rey reminds us that the core of transformative justice is that it is “tailored to meet the needs of the people who are harmed.” They are a reader of Kaba, who takes care to note that accountability processes have their limits. Sex worker radicals have a particular view of those limits: the processes prized in transformative justice responses to harm rely on openings for accountability that do not exist when sex workers confront abusers from outside. Rey puts it this way: “When we fall into the hands of police or clients, neither of which are part of our community, it’s difficult to keep them accountable.” But, they add, “if accountability doesn’t exist, there are still ways to keep our community safe from those people.” An abolitionist politics

that meets sex workers' needs requires a particular theory of community, one that leaves spaces for an inside and an outside.

This was an ongoing tangle for Gabe, an abolitionist and trafficking survivor who organizes with campaigns for decriminalization that seek to undermine the whole carceral system, not just protect (some) sex workers from some of its violence. "I do want to believe in transformative justice, it's something I've dedicated myself to," he said. But "a lot of our transformative justice in the present moment relies on the social pressure to engage in a process that's only accessible to people who have community supports," and none of Gabe's abusers had been a part of the communities he inhabited. "I definitely used to be more in the 'kill your rapist' camp," he said. "What changed that for me was existing in trans communities for 5–6 years and seeing mentally ill trans women over and over again get bullied out of their only source of social support after rape accusations—which sometimes were true, sometimes weren't, usually were somewhere in between." He learned that "we can't just abandon people." Wanting to carry the thread initiated in other interviews, I asked what this meant for abusers who come from the outside. "Yeah, I get stuck on that too. [Transformative justice] is a framework that's built for [perpetrators who are] already marginalized people who are at risk for state violence themselves." This is not the case for clients who do harm with the tacit approval of the state, and it is these perpetrators that are the primary target of interlocutors' concern. This stuckness is, then, not a critique of transformative justice so much as it is a reminder of its specificity. Sex worker abolitionism poses a challenge to frames that give all targets of community defense—or revenge, and we will get to whether there is always a clear difference—an equal claim to nondisposal.

Our conversations reverberated with this ambivalence. "I really like transformative justice, at least in theory," said an anonymous thinker in this archive. "In practice, it's messy." It is in confronting client violence, she said, that "I'm more in the anarcha-feminist 'kill your rapist' camp." But, she noted, "there are lots of situations in which that won't work either. I don't really know the answer." Sex worker radicals' embrace of ambivalence (or the stuckness Clara and Gabe marked earlier) highlights what is at stake here: not a contest between abolitionists and carceral liberals but a comradely difference among abolitionists who share a commitment to radical world building but have not yet settled on what that looks like. If broader abolitionist movements are to take sex workers seriously in this spirit, these are tensions that cannot be explained away with the charge that it is the cops in sex workers' heads doing the talking.

As they wrestle with the politics of community defense and militant texts on its historical practice, sex worker abolitionists suggest that it may be too early to say that violence, even vengeance, has no place in the process of getting from here to there. I wonder if this might meet Kaba's invitation for "a million different little experiments" as we strategize "how we get from where we are to where we want to

go.”⁴⁴ Ambivalence runs through the abolitionist text. In parsing the distinction between “consequences” (an ethical good) and “vengeance” (a political dead end), Kaba writes, “I also don’t think that using extreme violence to address extreme violence ever works.”⁴⁵ But later she wonders whether “we’re going to need a war again” to make the next phase of abolitionism possible. Here she’s remembering Civil War–era contestations over violence, and Frederick Douglass’s insistence that “the war had to come.”⁴⁶

Douglass is on Clara’s reading group list, too, and she and her comrades charted the shift from his commitment to nonviolence to a belief in violence as one of the tactics enslaved people would need to take up. Like other Black sex workers in this project’s archive, and following the through line some abolitionists draw from enslavement to mass incarceration, Clara talked about modern police as “slave catchers.” She pointed me to Douglass’s words on their predecessors: “The man who rushes out of the orbit of his own rights, to strike down the rights of another, does, by that act, divest himself of the right to live.”⁴⁷ She was stuck, here again, on how to square this meditation on the ethics of violent community defense with the abolitionist rejoinder that violence will never get us where we want to go. “Even though it feels good to wear the ‘kill the rapists’ T-shirt,” writes the abolitionist organizer Shira Hassan in conversation with Kaba, “that isn’t the thing that is actually going to get us the world we want to live in.”⁴⁸

It is in abolitionist texts that the sex workers in this archive find the greatest resources for thinking about individual acts of violence as inseparable from their structural contexts. In their foundational document on prison abolition and gender violence, Critical Resistance and INCITE call for antiprison activists to understand the structural roots of individual acts of harm, and this invitation reverberates throughout abolitionist writing.⁴⁹ But whereas transformative justice advocates typically frame this reminder as evidence that retribution against individual abusers can never be transformative, some sex worker radicals read it the other way. They overwhelmingly agree with the idea that our tactics should target structures, not individuals. But they push for more clarity on where structures end and individuals who do structural work begin. Thinkers in this article’s archive brought me up short at moments when they insist that it is precisely through understanding violence against sex workers as doing the work of an abusive state that the connections among community defense, vigilante punishment, and revolutionary violence become most clear. That is how Cassandra Troyan connects the image of a single sex worker wielding a crowbar to its utopian promise: “You have heard last gurglings of power.”⁵⁰

Clara was another student of Malcolm X’s thought. She took her understanding of the limits of nonviolent transformative justice from his analysis of the impossibility of moral suasion as a tool against white supremacy. She turned me back to “The Ballot or the Bullet” and its insistence that (she paraphrased) “you can’t

change a white man's mind." "I'm not sure how to square this with civvy abolitionists' idea that everyone can be healed, brought back in," she said. For Clara, as for Malcolm X, this impossibility applied to individual abusers and to the state as abuser. Again, they are doing the same work. "That whole thing about appealing to the moral conscience of America—America's conscience is bankrupt. She lost all conscience a long time ago," Malcolm X said.⁵¹ "They"—and I think Malcolm X's ambivalence about whether this refers to America or the white man is purposeful here—only eliminate an "evil" "when it threatens their existence." Quoting Kwame Ture—her study group watched *The Black Power Mixtape*, too—another interviewee talked about the tactical problem of nonviolence: "For nonviolence to work, your opponent must have a conscience. The United States has none."⁵² "The United States has no consciousness of my humanity," Clara said, and "bad Johns don't, either." This is the political landscape that the phrase "no humans involved" conveys. In search of a politics of violence that works on such terrain, sex worker radicals seek out useable pasts from others who theorize self-defense when outside recognition of one's humanity cannot be taken for granted. This is in deep conversation with, rather than antagonistic to, other abolitionist work on self-defense. Black women criminalized for self-defense are understood to have "no selves to defend," as Kaba's zine by that title suggests.⁵³ Sex worker radicals highlight tactical questions about what routes will best restore those selves.

Against framings of violence as toxic to a politics that is humane and transformative, some are drawn to the idea that violence might be necessary to asserting one's humanness. In this spirit, one anonymous interviewee talked about reading Fanon in the Who Revolution reading group. She was struck by his theory of violence as a "cleansing force" for colonized people.⁵⁴ A US-born Latina, she was careful not to claim symmetry between her experience and that of Fanon's colonized subjects. She was not saying that her situation was like that of the people at the heart of Fanon's work, but it resonated when she read that violence can restore the self-confidence of those beaten down by oppression. For Fanon and for her, too, violence has a cleansing force even when it is "symbolic," and at the individual level it pushes against the idea that the problem with violent responses to harm is that they do not get at its root causes. Where transformative justice advocates often warn that violence does not work because it does not reliably function as a deterrent, she wanted to claim the violence as "just for me." "I'm tired of centering Johns," she said. Here she echoes another reader of Fanon, Malcolm X, who concluded, "you can't change his mind about us." Of the white man and the white supremacist state, Malcolm X said, "We've got to change our own minds about each other."⁵⁵

Its focus away from trying to change others' minds was part of what drew Charlotte L. to self-defense. In a refreshing departure from sex worker activism that focused on "trying to change someone's mind," self-defense says, "I don't give a fuck what you think, our bodies are worth defending. And we're going to do it."

Where appeals to change civilian minds engendered much division across lines of race, citizenship, and whorearchy, she found that self-defense trainings equalized sex workers: “We’re all there for the same thing, we all find ourselves alone in a room or on the street with a man (usually a man). . . . We’re all learning from each other’s working strategies, without judgement.” Whorearchical judgment is a product of tactics that, in seeking to change civilian minds, trade in a politics of respectability.

Healing and community defense might count as transformative ends, whether or not they change abusers’ minds (and whether or not those minds are changeable). Thus the historian Catherine Jacquet measures the effects of 1970s feminists’ antirape vigilantism by what it did to nurture women’s sense of agency.⁵⁶ To locate the political value of community defense beyond its deterrent effects is also to make a feminist move against the centering of perpetrators. In this spirit, Hookers Army, said member Lauren Kiley, “doesn’t exist for a greater cause, it exists to teach sex workers self-defense, it exists for the people who are in the room that night.” “I don’t think the point of sharing our stories is limited to the consequences for perpetrators. Otherwise we’ve already lost,” Kiley adds. “We have to shift most of the point to healing and supporting each other. Not because I don’t believe in consequences, but because they aren’t happening and they wouldn’t be enough anyway.”⁵⁷ If self-defense does healing work, maybe it does not matter if it works to deter.

But if sex worker community defense exists for “the people in the room,” it is also true that it has reverberating effects on others, not least those invested in sex workers’ undoing. As the history of Black radical thought teaches, people in positions of power rightly understand community defense—in all its manifestations, peaceful and otherwise—as violence because it *does* do violence to dominant systems and those who benefit from them.⁵⁸ Troyan echoes this understanding when they name sex worker survival, however won, as “the greatest revenge.” Here revenge is the stuff of “joy” and “possibility.”⁵⁹ Whereas transformative justice theory often strongly disidentifies with revenge, draws a hard line between retribution and self-defense, and insists that revenge only perpetuates harm, many of the sex worker abolitionists in this archive approach the temporality of community defense with some ambivalence. Nods to vengeance emerge too often to ignore this tension.

Other sex worker abolitionists do want to maintain a hard boundary; this is the subject of debate when sex worker radicals gather for group study. For another member of the Who Revolution reading group, a communist and believer in the necessity of violent revolution, such revolution will not be waged through individualized retribution. “Revenge, killing your rapist, isn’t revolutionary,” she said; we need to focus on “actual healing work.” But for others, the blurry line maintains. The armed cells of the Clandestine Whores Network can be called on “when we need revenge, or to show our connective force, maybe just for a ride.”⁶⁰ “The

whore must believe in revenge,” Troyan insists.⁶¹ The tension lies in how to square the whore’s necessary belief in revenge with the abolitionist rejoinder that, as Thom puts it, “we must not give in to the urge to do harm, even in justice’s name.”⁶² Fiction lets Thom get at exactly this tension; her novel *Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars*, which follows a vigilante gang of trans sex workers organized in community defense—“creatures out of a suburban businessman’s nightmare: Fierce femmes on a mission of vengeance. Trans girls out for blood”—explores the tactical and ethical ambivalences that emerge for them.⁶³

The blurry boundary between revenge and self-defense haunts abolitionist feminist history. Thuma’s history of anticarceral feminism tells a story grounded in campaigns to defend criminalized survivors—the women and gender-nonconforming people incarcerated for fighting back. Antirape feminists in the 1970s calculated that, faced with a state built to perpetrate and enable abuse, extra-legal self-defense was justified. But the line between self-defense and revenge was not solid. Thuma cites a 1974 proposal in the radical feminist publication *Off Our Backs* for “immediate and drastic retaliation against all rapists,” for instance, and many of the criminalized survivors whose cases galvanized the movement struggled with the state over exactly the distinction between revenge and self-defense.⁶⁴ Contemporary self-defenders, too, confront prosecutors’ claims of revenge, not immediate self-defense, a key state strategy for criminalizing survivors for acts of self-preservation judged to be out of time.⁶⁵

If defense of self and community makes the threat “If you touch me in a way I don’t like, you get hurt,” does it matter whether that hurt comes at the moment of original violence or after? In vigorously defending self-defense at the same time as it condemns vigilantism and revenge, transformative justice theory says yes, that boundary matters a lot. Thinkers in this archive, though, suggest that politicized revenge and defense of self and community are not so easily distinguished on the ground. What becomes of the boundary between revenge and structural transformation when individual violence does the state’s work for it? Might individual revenge be better understood as preemptive community defense, given that bad johns so rarely do harm just once? Where one falls determines the shape theories of revolutionary struggle take and the tactics they inform.

“What violence do we need to engage in,” asks the sex worker theorist Irene Silt, “to escape the expansive partnership of the making of law and that which conserves it?”⁶⁶ This question, and its urgency for a community especially targeted by the deadly partnership of law and those who conserve it, animates sex worker radicals’ engagements with the theory and practice of community defense. They ask what it means to “keep each other safe” in the face of a state that marks sex workers as available for harm, and they advance a sex worker theory of transformative justice in the process. To “stop the war on whores” will require stopping the institutions that fuel it and, maybe, the individuals who help.

Heather Berg writes about sex, work, and social struggle. Her first book, *Porn Work* (2021), explores workers' strategies for navigating—and subverting—precarity. Her second project is an intellectual history of the sex worker Left. Her writing appears in *Feminist Studies*, *Signs*, the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, and other journals. She is an assistant professor of women, gender, and sexuality studies at Washington University in St. Louis.

Notes

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1. Clandestine Whores Network, "Beneath Everything."
2. Clandestine Whores Network, "Beneath Everything."
3. I use the term *abolitionist discourse* to describe the abolitionist appeals that have a particularly high profile in popular left publishing, mainstream media, activist sloganeering, and movement spaces and that are most visible to the sex worker thinkers in this archive.
4. Giovannitti and Hogeveen, "Transactional Dynamics."
5. Gossett, "Abolitionist Imaginings," 370.
6. On the ubiquity of police abuse and sexual extortion, see Chateauvert, *Sex Workers Unite*, 173.
7. See Simpson, "The State Is a Man"; Stanley, *Atmospheres of Violence*; and Gago, *Feminist International*.
8. See Currah, "State."
9. Silt, "Tricking Hour," 38.
10. Fischer, *The Streets Belong to Us*, 176.
11. Fischer, *The Streets Belong to Us*, 176.
12. Law, "Sick of the Abuse," 48.
13. Thuma, *All Our Trials*, 3.
14. Silt, "Tricking Hour," 46.
15. Althusser, "From *Capital* to Marx's Philosophy," 33.
16. On contradiction as a resource for abolitionist thought rather than something that should be smoothed over, see Davis et al., *Abolition. Feminism. Now.*, 5. See also Gossett, "Abolitionist Imaginings," 370.
17. Other Weapons Collective, "Sex Workers against Work," 3.
18. Other Weapons Collective, "Sex Workers against Work," 3.
19. Stanley, *Atmospheres of Violence*, 12.
20. Chateauvert, *Sex Workers Unite*, 156.
21. Spencer, *Revolution Has Come*, 2.
22. Washburn, *Underworld Sewer*, 228–29.
23. Clandestine Whores Network, "Beneath Everything."
24. Chateauvert, *Sex Workers Unite*, 166.
25. Survived and Punished, <https://survivedandpunished.org> (accessed May 15, 2022).
26. Gilmore, "Keynote."
27. In Lam et al., "Roundtable."
28. See Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, 113.

29. Some sex worker radicals embrace tactics that line up neatly with a nonviolent transformative justice approach. In *Beyond Survival*, a collection of “stories from the transformative justice movement,” Gallant interviews activists Elene Lam and Monica Forrester on the tactics sex workers deploy to keep each other safe without police, and they focus on prevention, community healing, and justice defined as political reform (“When Your Money Counts on It”).
30. Rafi Reznik, for example, argues that the two alternative approaches to harm most often offered by abolitionists—preventative justice and transformative justice—are inadequate. But retribution, he maintains, is not incommensurate with abolition as such. “Non-carceral punitiveness” is both analytically coherent and defensible (“Retributive Abolitionism,” 145, 125).
31. Thom, *I Hope We Choose Love*, 81.
32. Kaba, *We Do This 'til We Free Us*, 154.
33. Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, 87.
34. Carlisle, “How to Build a Hookers Army,” 294.
35. Thom, *I Hope We Choose Love*.
36. *No One Is Disposable*.
37. See Mingus, “Transformative Justice.”
38. Carlisle, “How to Build a Hookers Army,” 302.
39. brown, *We Will Not Cancel Us*, 43, 75.
40. Newton, “In Defense of Self Defense,” n.p.
41. Kaba, *We Do This 'til We Free Us*, 149.
42. Kaba, *We Do This 'til We Free Us*, 133, 141.
43. Kaba, *We Do This 'til We Free Us*, 149.
44. Kaba, *We Do This 'til We Free Us*, 166.
45. Kaba, *We Do This 'til We Free Us*, 153.
46. Kaba, *We Do This 'til We Free Us*, 184.
47. Douglass, *Frederick Douglass*, 180.
48. Kaba, *We Do This 'til We Free Us*, 47.
49. Critical Resistance, and Incite!, “Critical Resistance-Incite!,” 144.
50. Troyan, *Freedom and Prostitution*, 121.
51. Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” 40.
52. In the film Ture is quoted as Stokely Carmichael, the name he used at the time. *The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1975* (dir. Göran Olsson, 2011).
53. Kaba, *No Selves to Defend*.
54. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 51.
55. Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” 40.
56. Jacquet, “Fighting Back, Claiming Power,” 73–74.
57. Kiley, “Red Flags,” 138.
58. Sawyer, *Black Minded*, 121.
59. Troyan, *Freedom and Prostitution*, 89, 115.
60. Clandestine Whores Network, “Beneath Everything.”
61. Troyan, *Freedom and Prostitution*, 121.
62. Thom, *I Hope We Choose Love*, 89.
63. Thom, *Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars*, 83.
64. Thuma, *All Our Trials*, 46.
65. Kaba, *No Selves to Defend*.
66. Silt, “Tricking Hour,” 18.

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