Introduction to the Special Issue

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We have to change everything (Gilmore and Kaba).

We begin the introduction to this special issue by paraphrasing abolitionist organizer and scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore.

Change is at the heart of abolition—not small, meaningless, incremental change, but radical change. Abolition is—and has for centuries existed as—a set of liberatory practices developed by Black and Indigenous communities that not only seek to combat colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy, but also strive to construct life-affirming systems in their place—where everyone can have what they need to survive and thrive (Ervin; Hayes and Kaba; Maynard and Simpson).

As has been documented time and time again, the interlocking crises that humanity faces are immense, to say the least: countless police abductions and killings, rising wealth inequality, the erosion of labor rights and worker protections, continued genocide in Palestine and Sudan, planetary degradation, ongoing colonial rule and extraction, global hyperincarceration, rampant surveillance, and unchecked tides of fascism and white nationalism. The harm perpetuated by such violence is, of course, disproportionately visited upon Black, Brown, Indigenous, queer, trans, immigrant, and/or disabled people.

In the face of these death-making systems, we believe that abolition is the only way forward.

As urgent as calls are to abolish ICE, abolition necessarily precedes this current iteration of American fascism—just as it precedes 2020's global uprisings for racial justice. As stated by Critical Resistance, a US-based abolitionist organization created near the turn of the twenty-first century, abolition entails "building an international movement to abolish the prison-industrial complex" (Critical Resistance). We can trace this work even further back to nineteenth-century efforts that put an end to chattel slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Hartman). We can also find abolition involved in anti-carceral movements after the Attica Prison uprisings, during the United States's "war on drugs," and during the post-9/11 Islamophobic surveillance state. Abolition's historical legacy in scholarship and activism proves it is not new, despite its uptick in interest during the 2020 uprisings. As we argued in the call for papers for this issue of *LiCS*, "[T]he time for literacy and writing scholars to critically address abolition in all its forms is long past (formerly: now)" (Cavallaro, Green, Middleton, and Navarro). Therefore, "What should we do?" responses to this call are

not only reminiscent of the performative "anti-racism" of 2020 (and thereafter) but also ignore the ongoing work of prison abolitionists since the 1970s.

All of these dynamics are incredibly relevant to literacy studies. The material conditions of our social and political worlds shape the dispositions and actions of undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, researchers, staff, and community members alike. Many of us in and around the field are employed by the imperial university (Chatterjee and Maira), whose neoliberal operations harm minoritized and multiply minoritized workers (Kannan, Kuebrich, and Rodríguez), gentrify and raze surrounding communities (Baldwin), and suppress student activism and protest (Rallin). The majority of our professional organizations, academic journals, and many leading scholars have chosen to remain silent while witnessing Gaza's destruction and the ongoing massacre of Palestinians. Abolition means centering solutions that come from those who bear the brunt of oppression and colonization. For example, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) was created in 2004 (Palestinian BDS National Committee), and, in the midst of the most publicly visible genocide in world history, continues to be ignored by many of our governing institutions, including flagship organizations in our disciplines like the Rhetoric Society of America and the (now de-chartered) Conference on College Composition and Communication. We believe the job of potential allies is to self-educate, to educate within their communities, and to listen to and amplify Palestinians and Palestinian organizations. Though many would like to think otherwise, the fields of rhetoric, composition, and literacy are animated by this same machinery of oppression endemic to the global university. Given these fields' ongoing obsession with generative AI—itself a tool of racism, fascism, theft, anti-cognition, violence, and planetary degradation—there does not seem much by way of critical (scholarly) mass that would lead us toward liberatory visions for literacy and writing.

It's all the more reason that we hope the pieces in this special issue provide glimpses into what these abolitionist futures—and present-day contexts—can look like. Whether through explorations of on-the-ground tenant organizing, border checkpoints, or death row counterstorying, among other topics, the writing featured here shines a light on how literacy is entangled in struggle, freedom, and imagining life otherwise (Sharpe).

Both Anne Wolf's "Queer Black Imagination & Abolitionist Futures: A Community-Based Approach to Narrative Change" and Joesph Patri Brown and Alison Turner's "Magnifying Dissent: 'Illuminating' the Capital Appeals Process through Abolitionist Literacy Narrative" employ narratives and storytelling to amplify the experiences of individuals who are formerly incarcerated or on death row. Wolf analyzes their experience facilitating a workshop to engage Black community members through theory, community-building, conversation, and worldmaking with hopes to inspire radical imagination for abolitionist futures. Brown and Turner explain Brown's appeal process and the literacies necessary to navigate a carceral system. With the need for people impacted by the carceral state to have their stories humanized, you may appreciate how both articles' storytelling exemplifies abolitionist literacy practices.

Brynn Fitzsimmons's "We Keep Us Safe: Abolitionist Literacies in the Work of Lu Lu Livingston, At Your Service" and Nick Sanders's "Mapping the Emergent

Abolitionist Literacies of White Racial Un/learning" help us consider how abolitionist literacies are a reflexive process as we continually deconstruct carceral logics. Fitzsimmons makes evident the literacy skills used in abolitionist housing justice organizing like self-determination, interdependent safety, and liberatory care. These abolitionist literacies are further explored by Fitzsimmons through the organizing work of a housing justice organizer named Lu Lu Livingston, At Your Service. Sanders reckons with how white people can, through emergent strategies, un/learn the white worldviews, policies, and practices that contribute to the carceral state. Sanders's white un/learning is an abolitionist literacy practice useful in disrupting the white supremacist imaginations that foreclose abolitionist futures. Through these practices, both contributors suggest models for you to gain insight into the recursive literacy work necessary for abolition.

The final two pieces in this issue are Larry Morgan's "Border Checkpoint as Literacy Technology" and Filimon Fregoso's book review of *Abolitionist Intimacies: Queer and Trans Migrants Against the Deportation State*, both of which invite us to think about the role of borders and deportation within the carceral state. Morgan's argument for seeing borders as spatial literacy technologies that—as carceral tools sustained by hegemony—continue to harm communities is timely as we witness ICE inflicting violence in cities that are hundreds of miles from the physical US–Mexico border. Fregoso's review continues this thread. In his review of *Abolitionist Intimacies*, he showcases how queer migrants move toward abolitionist practices and offers his own reflection on the continued violence of deportation infrastructure and how it impacts academic life. Both pieces offer you a chance to understand how borders and deportation are tools of the prison-industrial complex and how abolition is crucial for transformation.

It is our hope that you will engage holistically and reflexively with these pieces, and that you will bring them into your classes, into your communities, and into your scholarship. New ways of doing things are needed. It is quite possible that our work will look radically different in the next ten years. And yet, our work must center our students and the communities we belong to and live among. Each of these pieces is a reminder for us to do this work, despite the distraction and noise of the crumbling empire we find ourselves in.

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