

JOYeux NOIR

BLACK JOY.

AN AFRO-FUTURIST
HARM REDUCTION
ZINE

FREE



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YOU HAVE

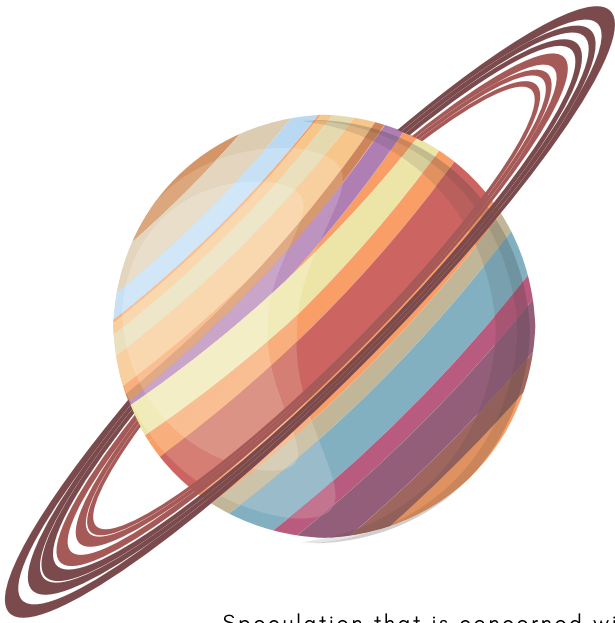
**NOTHING TO
LOSE**

BUT

YOUR

CHAINS.

TERMS YOU SHOULD KNOW



ABOLITION

Political vision with a goal of eliminating imprisonment, detention, policing, and surveillance while creating lasting alternatives to incarceration.

INTERSECTIONALITY

A term created by Kimberlé Crenshaw that means people disadvantaged by more than one form of oppression based on how they are identified by the dominant culture (ex: Black women, queer immigrants)

FUTURISM

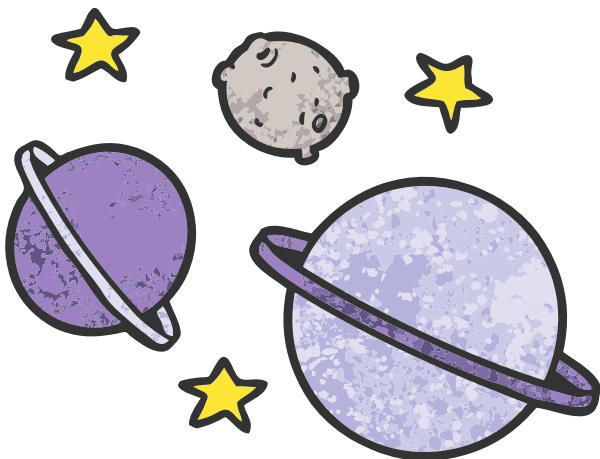
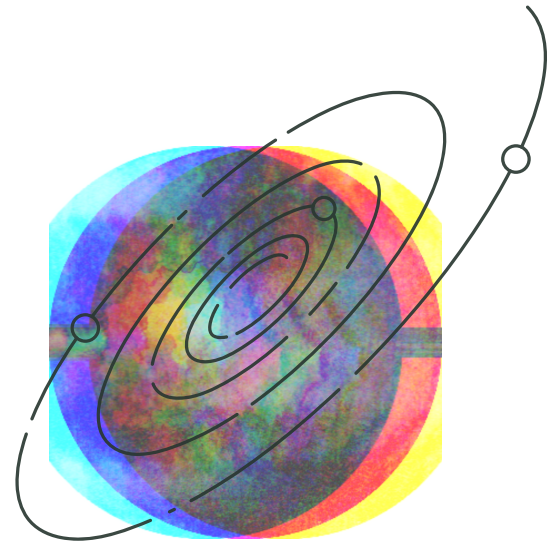
Speculation that is concerned with shaping the anticipated future through technology. There are different types of futurism like Afrofuturism, Latinofuturism, etc.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Legal philosophy which focuses on healing and rehabilitation through a human rights lens.

PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

The legacy of slavery and the Black Codes in the Jim-Crowe us south. The PIC is a system of control that organizes the overlapping interests of government & the private sector that uses surveillance, policing, & imprisonment as solutions to economic, social, political problems.



EUGENICS

A set of beliefs and practices to "improve" the human race by excluding & eliminating groups that are considered undesirable by the dominant culture. Ex: The Jewish Holocaust, the Black Holocaust


HEGEMONY

"Hegemony is defined as the predominant and pervasive influence of one state, religion, region, class, or group. ... A hegemonic society functions not just to establish a homogeneous way of thinking, but also to try to make any alternative disappear. ... One might say hegemony is 'the language of conquest.'" - Paul Kivel




"Science fiction isn't just thinking about the world out there. It's also thinking about how that world might be—a particularly important exercise for those who are oppressed, because if they're going to change the world we live in, they—and all of us—have to be able to think about a world that works differently."

—*Samuel R. Delany*




The end of the prison-industrial complex and the release of all prisoners are in humanity's best interest. Disabled people are more likely to be arrested & abused by authority figures/cops. Black people are arrested & jailed for drug-related charges at 2x the rate of whites, despite using drugs at the same rate. People who use drugs are punished for needing healthcare and/or minding our own damn business. We can do better.



The afro future cannot exist with harm reduction. We must address harm to the "afro" (Black) community in the form of reparations. For Black Americans reparations are due for slavery and for the racist drug war that incarcerates Black people disproportionately. After the civil war, 40 acres of land and a mule were promised to us. Without reparations, Black Americans today have 1/10th of the wealth of white Americans.

We are looking towards the future. We must be able to envision the future in order to build the future! In the Afrofuture, where we fully own our own bodies, drug use is a fact of life. Why? Because we can determine what best works for us!



We imagine an **inclusive** future that intentionally makes space for the perspectives & needs of historically excluded groups of people.

**AN AFRO-FUTURIST FUTURE IS A
HARM-REDUCTIONIST FUTURE.**



WHAT IS AFROFUTURISM?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE BLACK... IN THE FUTURE?

"The first Afrofuturists envisioned a society free from the bondages of oppression—both physical and social. Afrofuturism imagines a future [without] white supremacist thought and the structures that violently oppressed Black communities. Afrofuturism evaluates the past and future to create better conditions for the present generation of Black people through the use of technology, often presented through art, music, and literature" [1].

Afrofuturism is a direct contrast to Black Pessimism, a belief that considers Black people not as Humans, but as things to be watched and used by white and non-Black people. Black Pessimism examines the unique horrors of anti-Black violence, the endurance of anti-Blackness in the US after emancipation of enslaved folks and racial desegregation, and those aspects of Black suffering that cannot be fully explained by political economy or class conflict.

Black (capitalized, like every ethnic group) doesn't just include people descended from enslaved peoples in the Americas, but is a term that describes the systematic devaluation of Black labor and bodies in a racial capitalist hierarchy. Whew, that was a mouthful!

This can look like Black laborers making a portion of what non-Black laborers make for the same work (devalued). It can look like Black neighborhoods being used as waste dumping sites by the local government (devalued bodies). It looks like racial segregation and whites moving away en masse to keep away from Black people. It is based in slavery with the idea that Black people are replaceable animals and not human. "Black" encompasses many culturally distinct groups of Indigenous peoples across the world, like the people of the Mer Islands of what is now called Australia or the Siddi people of Southeast Asia. Black folks span the spectrum and the globe; yet there is one universal experience between us--experiencing anti-Blackness, racial prejudice against Black people. This experience varies across cultures and depends on how race is socially understood and constructed in each one.

Afrofuturism escapes us to a different world, a world of our own creation. Black joy is not found in the absence of pain and suffering. It exists through it, even if injustice is inescapable. "So yes, I want the world to recognize our suffering. But I do not want pity from a single soul" [2].

**ANTI-BLACKNESS IS BAD:
BEING BLACK IS NOT.**



AFRO-FUTURISM

(n). A cultural movement that reimagines an inclusive sci-fi future through a Black lens, rooted in the unapologetic celebration of Black culture and innovation. It is a product of the abolitionist imagination and, by definition, a rejection of White Supremacy. Afrofuturism aims to connect the African Diaspora to our ancestry.

"I BEGAN WRITING ABOUT POWER
BECAUSE I HAD SO LITTLE."

Act Courageous
Act Confident
Act quietly Intelligent.
* When you can contribute
to the discussion at hand
Speak UP. Louder than
* When you have nothing to
Don't worry.
Simply say nothing.
Take the pen.

Octavia Butler (Afrofuturist Writer) by Fabari Jacobs



⚡ (nazis)

EMPOWERED



WHAT IS POWER?

It is the key to understanding how society is structured and how that shapes our interactions with one another.

Power may be defined as:

- the ability to self-determine
- control over your own body
- control over your own circumstances
- the ability to carry out your will despite opposition (Max Weber, a famous sociologist)

According to science, power is "a universal element of human existence and it is present in all forms of social relationships." In the united states, power usually means the same thing as money because money (like donations to PACs and non-profit organizations) is how we can buy political influence.

Power is "socially-constructed." This means that our social groups create (construct) meaning and give it importance. Even though it is basically made up, social constructions have very real impacts on our lives. For example, money is also socially-constructed. Without the meaning we give it, ca\$h is just weird green fabric-paper. With the meaning, it can change or save your life.

Since power is socially-constructed, those with the most "social power" have the most say. We create meaning through culture which is heavily influenced by the dominant culture. Our individual, subjective opinion becomes objective fact when other people buy into it. It also means that those at the top of the power hierarchy are in power *because of* the people they rule over. Without collective agreement, power has no meaning.

This collective agreement can be created by force. Total control over violence (like the military or armed police) helps unpopular leaders maintain power.s

2 LEGIT 2 QUIT?

Whose power is truly legit?

It is a question of **legitimization** (lay-jit-em-eye-zay-shun), the process of making something legitimate or justified. According to sociology, there are four levels [3].

Level One

The first time the idea is spoken out loud. The power of words (which is really the power to maintain or upend the social order) is based on the power of the spokesperson. Words without power cannot create belief!

Level Two

Using proverbs or other theoretical sayings to describe how this idea exists in daily life and culture.

Level Three

A body of experts creates theories to support social institutions (established laws, practices, or customs). This specialized knowledge is used to exercise power over everyone affected by the institution.

Level Four

Symbols are used to establish ideas that are bigger than us. Everyday ideas like "solidarity," "liberty," or "religion" are expressed through symbols with established meanings in our society. This expression is part of a "symbolic universe" that brings together expert knowledge with all other sectors of the institution to create a cultural reference point. This reference point (transmitted via "machines" like mythology, science, or religion) consists of both objective social fact and our individual subjective experience.

Whoever has the power can manipulate that reference point to push ideas that uphold the systems that keep them in power. When alternatives to this worldview are presented, society is forced to somehow bring them together in its collective cultural imagination. Otherwise, the symbolic universe that is backed by the most powerful group is the one that becomes a part of the culture! In this way, power produces reality.

It is up to us to decide if that reality is just. If not, we have the power to change it through collective action!



German sociologist Heinrich Popitz classifies power three ways [3]:

- Power of Action - violence exercised over possibly vulnerable human beings. Ex: the us's hyper-militarized police that enforces the War on Drugs
- Instrumental Power - ability to give/take resources, affection, knowledge, etc. and give punishment or gratification. Threats that protect the status quo. Ex: how the us gov't treats people who use drugs (PWUD)
- Authoritative Power - based on the voluntary agreement of subordinates. Ex: experts

Do you feel that these forms of power are legit? Do you think it's fair?

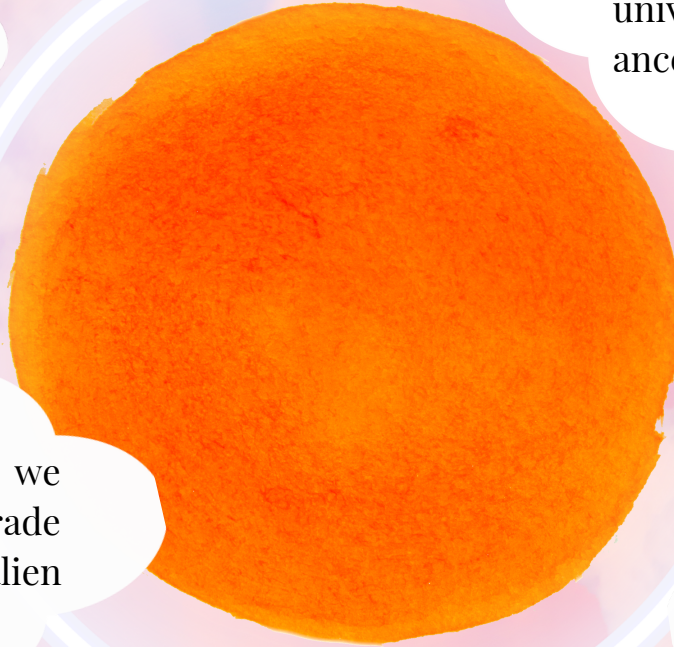
IMAGINE THIS!

Leading with imagination leaves no room to be limited by our current biased understanding of things.

new songs really capture that zero-gravity feeling

hover boards *do* work on water

we have all the space in the universe to re-establish our ancestral traditions



instead of a space force, we have space *explorers* who trade fun technologies with our alien neighbors.

we share knowledge so we can all be safe in space

we have so much free time to pursue our passions because time is much slower around the nearest black hole

we trust the folks in our communities to do their parts; everyone has something to offer

getting high on alien drugs makes you feel like you're touching god...but in a sexy way

PRINCIPLES OF HARM REDUCTION

FROM THE NATIONAL HARM
REDUCTION COALITION @
HARMREDUCTION.ORG


1. Accepts, for better or worse, that licit and illicit drug use is part of our world and chooses to work to minimize its harmful effects rather than simply ignore or condemn them
2. Understands drug use as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that encompasses a continuum of behaviors from severe use to total abstinence, and acknowledges that some ways of using drugs are clearly safer than others"
3. "Establishes quality of individual and community life and well-being — not necessarily cessation of all drug use — as the criteria for successful interventions and policies
4. Calls for the non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services and resources to people who use drugs and the communities in which they live in order to assist them in reducing attendant harm
5. Ensures that people who use drugs and those with a history of drug use routinely have a real voice in the creation of programs and policies designed to serve them
6. "Affirms people who use drugs (PWUD) themselves as the primary agents of reducing the harms of their drug use and seeks to empower PWUD to share information and support each other in strategies which meet their actual conditions of use"
7. Recognizes that the realities of poverty, class, racism, social isolation, past trauma, sex-based discrimination, and other social inequalities affect both people's vulnerability to and capacity for effectively dealing with drug-related harm
8. Does not attempt to minimize or ignore the real and tragic harm and danger that can be associated with illicit drug use

WHEN BUILDING ANYTHING, YOUR
FIRST STEP IS TO SEE WHAT YOU'RE
WORKING WITH:

- WHAT DO WE HAVE?
- WHAT ARE WE MISSING?
- WHAT IS BROKEN/NEEDS FIXING?

THE FIRST STEP TO BUILDING A
BETTER WORLD IS HARM REDUCTION.
ONLY THEN CAN WE TRULY MOVE
FORWARD!

HOW TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD





Artist Mickalene Thomas embraces how Black femininity is seen by white society. She shows Blackness as loud, brightly-colored, sexual...and still; regal. Being those things doesn't make someone any less worthy of respect or safety.

**"LE DÉJEUNER
SUR L'HERBE
LES TROIS
FEMME NOIRES
#6." 2017**

On Being Clean

Cleanliness is not next to godliness—that's White Supremacy talking. White Supremacy is not a problem of personal prejudice, it is the historical and contemporary system of exploitation and oppression of peoples of color by the white ruling class. It is a "political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings." We have been taught to implicitly understand what is white as what is good, moral, fair, logical, clean, and valuable. To be not white is to be unclean is to be "trash."

An explicit illustration of the equation of whiteness and cleanliness is the mythology of white women's sexual 'purity.' Included in this is a mythologized conception of Black men as innately and savagely driven to rape white women—the Rape Myth. This supposed innate quality is cited as justification in lynching Black boys and men. Cannabis was outlawed based on white American narrative that Mexican men would 'act out' sexually with white women. Cocaine was criminalized based on that same narrative: that it drove Black men to have sex with white women (and that it made white women want sex with Black men). Opium was criminalized because of the narrative that a growing Chinese immigrant population would be competition for white men...that white women would want Chinese men. The Rape Myth positions white women's purity, and coveted access to it, as the antithesis to Blackness, which is regularly accessed and exploited for the progress and reproduction of the inaccessible whiteness of the 'master race.'

So, for the 'unclean'—people with darker skin, gender non-conformists, drug users, disabled people, working-class people and the like—segregation and eugenics policies push us into the 'unclean' underbelly of society, underfunded, underutilized, and undervalued. This shows up in daily life when products marketed towards Black women are more likely to have toxic chemicals in them, but we are expected to use them to stay clean. Cleanliness standards for Black women are heavily informed by an unsaid understanding that we are the cultural opposite of "pure" white women.

Gender is connected to race in a complex way, rooted in American slavery. While white women were seen as too frail to be out in the sun, dehumanized Black women were "bred" for hard physical labor outdoors. The cleanliness standards that come from this legacy require daily use of products like talcum powder, harsh soaps, and toxic hair products, which build up to cause bodily harm over the course of our lives.

Dehumanization and forced assimilation are traumatic experiences. Minority stress is the unique and excess recurring stresses that systematically oppressed people are subject to as a result of their position as an oppressed social minority. Stress from social exclusion accumulates over time and results in health issues: fatalism and other forms of mental distress show up when we feel personally responsible for our oppression; experiencing discrimination damages sleep and increases likelihood of contracting diseases through diminished immune function. Genocide across the globe is justified in appealing to the ever-so-ethical pursuit of ethnic purity, that is cleanliness. To be dirty is not only an inherent quality of a person, it's also treated as an inherited quality, inescapable and in need of a cure, assimilation, or elimination.

Race in the United States is ever-changing & scientific racism falsely and loudly 'proves' a spectrum where to be Black/brown (a person of the global majority) is to be dirty, to be white is to be clean, and miscegenation between the two should be punished to the fullest extent of the law. Even the idea of 'white trash,' the necessary specification of trash as white in comparison to the implied standard non-white trash, has its roots in United States eugenics practices and segregation laws, both inspirational for Adolf Hitler's Nazi "Final Solution."

People who do drugs are not inherently dirty; abstaining from drugs is not inherently clean. The history of a word is important—what shared cultural meanings allow us to create a mutual understanding? What associations and biases have we attached to certain words individually and as a culture? Cleanliness is political and its standards change over time.

Bottom line: you are not for anyone else to define, especially if you aren't a part of the hegemonic culture. Whether you use drugs or not—you are not dirty, and you are loved.

SELF CARE NURTURES YOUR TOTAL BEING

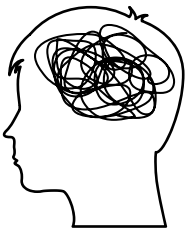
Self care is a journey of deepening self-discovery and nurturing the true nature of one's total being physically, mentally, and spiritually.

→ THE PHYSICAL



Physically, this includes nurturing the physical body through food, movement, and rest. Ex: "grounding" practices, exercise, activities, self-defense, yogic breathing, sports...

→ THE MENTAL



Mentally, this consists of deepening your knowledge of your inner self and increasing self-awareness. Ex: Positive affirmations, mindfulness, Qi Gong, reading...

→ THE SPIRITUAL



Spiritually, self-care aims to release trauma and connect to your inner power (everyone's got some!) Ex: meditation, religion, Ceremony

Rest is Revolutionary

Rest is not something you must earn. Napping is a political act in a society that values its inhabitants for our productivity and capacity for overwork. What privileged few are allowed to rest, and who chooses?

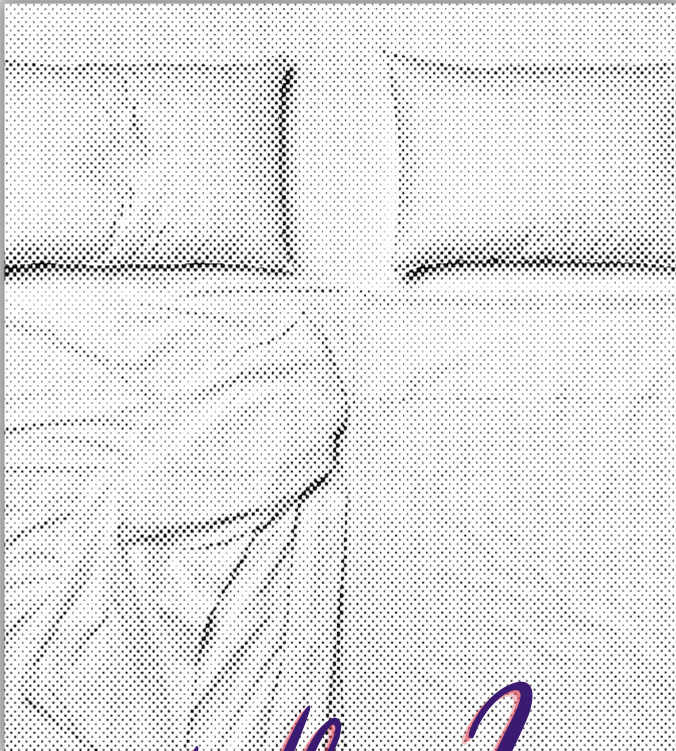
The well-documented racial sleep gap "shows that Black Americans are five times more likely to be sleep-deprived than their white counterparts (3)." This is about more than just sleep. The nap revolution, led by theologian Tricia Hersey, has roots in slavery when more slaves were whipped for oversleep than anything else (4). In Haiti, zombie lore permeated the culture of enslaved people for whom death was the only escape from the brutal horror of slavery on sugar plantations.

Self care and rest are cornerstones of revolution; without it, martyrdom will consume you. Dealing with oppressive authorities can feel crushing, witnessing the people around us stay disenfranchised and under-resourced and disregarded, explicitly excluded from growth and prosperity. To combat this, we must take action in our own lives, our own communities, for our own health.

Self care is about more than just bubble baths and long sunset walks. Self care, especially for women of color, necessitates the decolonization of our minds. To truly care for ourselves, we must process and then destroy the concept of ourselves that was created and limited by the white supremacist patriarchy in which we live. This might look like finally accepting all of your emotions as valid, even the ones that correlate with stereotypes (e.g. Angry Black Woman). It's okay to be angry—in fact, it is only right to be angry in the wake of injustice. It is self care to make Good Trouble.

Self care comes from systemic nurturing, not individual boot-strapping. We may feel so disempowered that we feel that nothing will ever change, but that's not true. We cannot control other people, but we can change and grow ourselves and our communities and our cultures in collaboration with our allies. To do this, we must decolonize our minds..

To survive white supremacy, we must cultivate safe spaces to heal intergenerational trauma, whether those spaces be in a journal or in a race caucus at work. Self care is surviving the systems we've been thrown into, like roses growing through concrete until we can break through and thrive in the sun.



Why?

Rest is the opposite of capitalism's "grind culture," which only values people for their production output. This system exhausts people to the point of collapse. Without rest, there is no capacity for resistance nor dreaming of a better world.

According to the mission of The Nap Ministry, the folks at the forefront of nap activism, this work seeks to "honor, reimagine, and recapture the dream space that was stolen for centuries."

The "nap gap" is real: Black folks & other people of color are more likely to have sleep issues than white people due

to the stress of racial oppression.

This intersection with other forms of inequality leads to gaps in both physical and mental health as well as decreased productivity at work (which factors into income inequality!)

Self-care is a necessity for all oppressed folks who are healing from intergenerational Trauma--Black women especially.



DID YOU KNOW?

The concept of "zombies" as we know it can be traced back to the lore of enslaved folks in 17th-century Haiti (then saint-domingue). The majority of the Slaves brought into the french colony from Africa were worked to death within a few years. A very scary idea for an enslaved person was zombiehood --no agency over their own bodies, even in the afterlife.

WHO STARTED THE WAR ON DRUGS?

MY MONEY'S ON HARRY ANSLINGER.

The Drug War was started by a man who said "Doctors could not treat addicts if they wished to" and that judges should not be afraid to toss "killer-pushers into prison and throw away the key." Beginning under president Hoover, Harry Anslinger's racism and xenophobia as head of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics shaped drug policy for over 30 years.

After talking with my community elders, I found out that "The War on Drugs" is not how the legacy of Anslinger's work is understood in the Black collective imagination. My father, a retired gang member and baseball player, scrunched his face up in confusion at the mention of the War on Drugs. "Is it really a war on drugs?" he asked. He was right, "The War on Drugs" is a euphemism. "It's really a war on us."

Under the system of racial capitalism in the United States, power is expressed as control and exploitation of non-white bodies. I say "bodies" instead of "people" because U.S. White Supremacy culture dehumanizes people who aren't white and only values us for the labor our bodies can do. With that in mind, Harry Anslinger was a perfectly American man. His success was directly tied to how much his policies legally restricted and punished people of color (specifically Black people, because racial capitalism came from the race-based enslavement of African peoples). The developing United States depended on the economic value of Black people and their forced labor to create wealth for white Americans. The result: Black slaves and their labor *equal* the mighty American dollar. In the United States and those under U.S. influence, Black people are the currency of power.

Harry Anslinger hated jazz music. Under his direction, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (once the Department of Prohibition) kept a steady focus on cocaine and heroin. The bureau honed its sight on Billie Holiday, "Lady Day," who was rumored to favor heroin and alcohol over the other drugs she used. She was coping. Lady Day grieved the dead of the Black Holocaust* using music and drugs.

Each performance was a protest. She sang in a beautiful and haunted voice about:

"Southern trees bearing strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the roots
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

"Pastoral scene of the gallant south
Them big bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolia, clean and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh
"Here is fruit for the crows to pluck

For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the leaves to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop"

Ms. Holiday had witnessed the painful aftermath of lynchings before. She was from Louisiana, after all. Each time she sang Strange Fruit, maybe she was brought back *there*, smelling the pepper that mamas put in their boys' shoes to keep dogs away, smelling charred flesh left in the sun too long.

Before she could bring herself to sing about Southern White Supremacy to integrated Northern audiences, she had to steel herself. Because each time Ms. Holiday began to sing Strange Fruit, Harry Anslinger and his legal lynch mob rushed the stage from their front-row seats to arrest her before she could finish. Anslinger's favorite agent, a sadist named George White, "whole-heartedly" harassed (even planted evidence on) Ms. Holiday unto her death at age 44 because she was a rich Black woman who didn't know her place. White was a "red-blooded American" man known to spike women's drinks at bars with LSD just for fun. Backed by the Bureau, he lied, killed, cheated, stole, raped, and pillaged "with the sanction and blessing of the All-Highest" [4].

The Federal Bureau of Narcotics justified ripping apart families and communities because Black americans were "10 percent of the total population, but 60 percent of the addicts" [4]. After Harry Anslinger heard about white actress Judy Garland's dependence on heroin, he gave her some friendly advice and a letter of recommendation. For a white socialite in D.C., he refused to taint her reputation with an arrest and helped decrease her substance dependence. Harry Anslinger hunted and tortured (yes, actually!) Billie Holiday like an animal for daring to drugs while Black. Punishing Black people was and is a business. From slave-catching to the prison-industrial complex, money *is* Black bodies. Power can be measured by who *controls* Black bodies and their labor. With \$ few uSer\$ of heroin and cocaine, the Federal Bureau of Narcotic\$ increa\$ed their power by expanding drug law\$ to target cannabi\$ user\$.

Anslinger's office, backed by powerful politicians and the pharmaceutical industry, publicized pseudoscience from "experts" which associated cannabis and violence. He ramped up prison sentences and implemented harsh drug laws to keep america clean during the radically free Jazz Age. He campaigned to white Protestants to convince them of the dangers of drug use:

REEFER MAKES DARKIES THINK
THEY'RE AS GOOD AS WHITE MEN...
THERE ARE 100,000 TOTAL
MARIJUANA SMOKERS IN THE U.S.,
AND MOST ARE NEGROES, HISPANICS,
FILIPINOS AND ENTERTAINERS. THEIR
SATANIC MUSIC, JAZZ AND SWING
RESULT FROM MARIJUANA USE. THIS
MARIJUANA CAUSES WHITE WOMEN TO
SEEK SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH
NEGROES, ENTERTAINERS AND ANY
OTHERS.

-HARRY ANSLINGER

Like I said, Harry Anslinger hated jazz music. The free-form sounds and improvisation somehow proved that drugs made people crazy. The jazz community was tight-knit; sistas and brothas rarely snitched. More than that, he hated "jazz musicians" (which was code for Black men) and jazz concerts that "reeked of filth" [4]. Famous jazz musicians like Louis Armstrong promoted cannabis to Black folks as a relaxant that makes "you forget all the bad things that happen to a Negro" [5]. Armstrong was arrested in 1930 for possession.

JIM CROW & THE PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

“Jim Crow” refers to state and local laws in the former Confederacy that systematically enforce racial segregation [8]. Even when Black people were legally allowed somewhere, the culture of segregation kept people separated by race. The goal was to disenfranchise Black people and take away any political or economic power gained after the Civil War. Ole Jim Crow came in the form of voter-suppression laws. It expanded criminal laws that made it practically illegal to exist in a world where being Black or poor makes one worthy of suspicion.

The prison-industrial complex describes a system used to profit from mass incarceration. It depends on policy to punish drug dependency rather than treat it. Private businesses (big names like IBM, Microsoft, and Victoria’s Secret [12]) and the government benefit from prison operations. In fact, large corporations are treated more like humans under the law than real incarcerated people. Prisoner labor is free or cheap, contracts to build and supply prisons are lucrative, private prison lobbying groups donate big to punishment-minded politicians, and a “tough on crime” political stance is the best way to get re-elected. An always-rising prison or immigrant detention center population is great for shareholders and “from a business model perspective ... clearly good news” [12]. The more “criminals” the better.

Now that racial segregation isn’t technically legal, the expansion of the criminal-justice system in the u.s. allows us to discriminate against “criminals” the same way Jim Crow did Black people. Someone with a criminal record faces the same employment discrimination, housing discrimination, voter suppression, exclusion from opportunity, and denial of public benefits like food stamps. They are considered more deserving of prison than anything else. Mass incarceration based on drug-related crimes allows the u.s. to seem “race-neutral” or colorblind while taking away the constitutional rights of Black people—men, in particular.

THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION

President Nixon officially declared the war on drugs in June of 1971. The announcement confused the public, especially law enforcement, since drug use in the u.s. was on the decline [9]. In 1972, tough-on-crime Nixon rejected recommendations to decriminalize possession and distribution of cannabis for personal use [6]. Instead, he placed cannabis in the most restrictive drug classification, Schedule One. Drugs’ potential to mess with society’s status quo was so high that the government even stopped research into the *medical applications* of illicit drugs.

In the warm afterglow of the 1960s, drugs were symbols of rebellion and subversion. Nixon argued that drug dependency strongly correlated to criminal behavior—only undesirables and white hippies used drugs. Nixon aide (and Watergate co-conspirator) John Ehrlichman famously stated:

“YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT THIS WAS REALLY ALL ABOUT. THE NIXON CAMPAIGN IN 1968. AND THE NIXON WHITE HOUSE AFTER THAT. HAD TWO ENEMIES: THE ANTIWAR LEFT AND BLACK PEOPLE. YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT I’M SAYING. WE KNEW WE COULDN’T MAKE IT ILLEGAL TO BE EITHER AGAINST THE WAR OR BLACK. BUT BY GETTING THE PUBLIC TO ASSOCIATE THE HIPPIES WITH MARIJUANA AND BLACKS WITH HEROIN. AND THEN CRIMINALIZING BOTH HEAVILY, WE COULD DISRUPT THOSE COMMUNITIES. WE COULD ARREST THEIR LEADERS. RAID THEIR HOMES. BREAK UP THEIR MEETINGS. AND VILIFY THEM NIGHT AFTER NIGHT ON THE EVENING NEWS. DID WE KNOW WE WERE LYING ABOUT THE DRUGS? OF COURSE WE DID.”

In July of 1973, the Drug Enforcement Administration was founded. The agency trains u.s. police to legally conduct discriminatory stops and searches [10]. Nixon’s war on drugs was waged on our streets and through the so-called justice system to round up a record number of americans.

THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION: “JUST SAY NO” & MILITARY POLICING

The 1980s saw widespread fear of drug use. President Ronald Reagan prioritized the War on Drugs while Pablo Escobar rose to fame and Cold War tensions were high. In 1981, the administration passed the Military Cooperation with Law Enforcement Act which allowed local police to access military knowledge and weapons to fight the Drug War. The act was in direct violation of the Posse Comitatus Act which bans using the military to police civilians. Regardless, local, state, and federal law enforcement worked together to wage war on urban (Black) neighborhoods.

In 1984, Nancy Reagan began the “Just Say No” to drugs movement. Ironic, because her husband’s administration is rumored to have pushed crack into Black neighborhoods. It was also the year that Congress amended the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control act. The act allows local law enforcement agencies to keep up to 80% of the value of items seized or forfeited during the Drug War. Property and cash could be seized if there were “probable cause” that someone was involved in a crime.

In a 1985 poll, only 2–6% of americans thought of drug use as the united states’ “number one problem” [6]. Enter, television. Everywhere TV commercials popped up that featured people addicted to crack-cocaine. This was a racialized fear of drugs. The Reagan administration then began giving federal money to local law enforcement as part of the 1988 Byrne program. The Byrne program funded the creation of a specialized drug task forces across the united states. It gave many police forces the large budgets they needed to order military-grade weaponry from the Pentagon, including “tanks, bazookas, anything [you] wanted” [11].

By the 1989 poll, a whopping 64% of americans considered drug us the united states’ most important issue. Within a year the media lost interest, however, and that percentage dropped below 10%. The beginnings of mass media fueled mass hysteria about drugs. Though the immediate threat was neutralized, the laws and policies put in place still had momentum.

Since 1980, the incarceration (imprisonment) rate skyrocketed (even though the violent crime rate steadily decreased). In the 21st century, there are more people incarcerated in jails or prisons just for drug offenses than the number of all incarcerated people in 1980 [10]. Today, as the result of decades of hard work (slavery), fear of jazz music, and racism, the united states imprisons more of its citizens than any other nation in the world.



“Black Holocaust” broadly refers to the 400-year enslavement and oppression of Black people in the u.s. “Black Genocide” refers to the murders of Black people by lynch mobs or police. In 1951, the Civil Rights Congress used this term to campaign for the government of the united states to be held accountable for genocide against Black americans.

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