



**New York
Liberation
School**

Study and Movement for
the People's University

Conor Tomás Reed

NEW YORK LIBERATION SCHOOL: STUDY / MOVEMENT GUIDE

Welcome to your *New York Liberation School* study/movement guide! This resource is designed to accompany you while reading and discussing this book with others. Study groups are a sacred, crucial part of building social movements. How we intentionally study with each other informs how we can create transformative relationships, strategies, organizations, and communal power.

Participation: Consider with whom you'd like to spend one to two months in a weekly or biweekly meeting rhythm: Only close friends and comrades? People who you may not know but who share political analyses? Colearners in a formal classroom? Coworkers in a break room? Neighbors in a park? Family or housemates in a living room?

Prioritization: Consider consciously inviting and centering people who have been historically excluded from educational access or are otherwise marginalized: Black, Indigenous, Third World, Global South, people of color, women and gender nonbinary folk, queer and trans folk, migrants, workers, incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people.

Commitments: Invite participants to read and discuss the whole book together at a pace that feels good for everyone. Create a study calendar at the beginning and save these dates on your calendars. Rotate facilitators so that everyone can practice facilitating a discussion.

Focus and care: Whether meeting in-person, online, or in a hybrid format, encourage participants to enter fully into the study group process. Invite folk to bring food or drinks, get comfortable, and take bathroom or stretch breaks when needed. Feel free to begin each session with a check-in question to assess how everyone is feeling coming into the dialogue. Respect each other's physical boundaries, and name when aspects of the group process could be improved for the benefit of all.

Feel free to check out these additional resources for creating study groups:

- Do-It-Yourself Strategies for Revolutionary Study Groups (Black Orchid Collective), <https://undercommoning.org/do-it-yourself-strategies-for-revolutionary-study-groups-black-orchid-collective/>
- Study and Struggle, <https://www.studyandstruggle.com/>
- #Because We've Read, <https://becauseweweread.com>

Below are some questions for each chapter to incite your own reflections and share with each other. Please reach out if you have questions or feedback!

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NEW YORK LIBERATION SCHOOL – INTRODUCTION

- What do you think of some themes presented here: a coalitional framework of identity formation, a focus on how writing shapes our self/social composition, and how history can prophetically operate like a “boomerang”?
- I question why the “floating tactics” of *exodus*, *fugitivity*, *marronage*, *pessimism*, and *refusal* from previous epochs of struggle have gained popularity in the present, which has inspired a broader “anti-institutional” movement analysis that urges radicals to flee the university as a site of struggle (10–11). How do we draw from past movement lessons without uncritically reapplying them in different conditions? What does the debate over whether we can transform institutions like universities suggest about the scales and locations of struggles?
- As you continue reading, pay attention to the various institutions that you’re embedded in or encounter (schools, workplaces, apartment buildings, transit, healthcare, food systems). How do these institutions function to meet people’s needs (or not)? How could institutions be operated differently when those who use them have the power, rather than those who manage them from up high and afar?
- How do your experiences of learning (in formal schooling and informal study) relate to your political consciousness and organizing patterns? What do you recall from your best learning or organizing experiences to envision how study and movement lessons can conjoin?

CHAPTER 1 – FREEDOM LEARNING: LINEAGES AND OBSTACLES

- What do the overlapping examples of Black, Puerto Rican, Jewish, and Asian migration to New York City offer about the possibilities and challenges of creating anti-racist solidarity—and new political identities—in coalitions?
- As a United States colony since 1898, Puerto Rico was both the original site of mass surveillance that became COINTELPRO and at the forefront of challenging the US war in Vietnam. What does this say about how we can predict what forms of colonial repression empires may then inflict on their own internal populations? How do anticolonial struggles also challenge narrow anti-war claims to simply improving imperial foreign policy?
- What lessons of study and movement (and political backlashes) can be drawn from the various examples of struggles across Chapter 1: 1950s and ‘60s civil rights struggles and school community control campaigns, NYC antipolice riots, the creation of Harlem University and radical community learning initiatives, how Open Admissions shifted to imposing tuition at CUNY, and the 1999 condemning of CUNY as a “third-world university”?

CHAPTER 2 – CREATING THE “BLACK UNIVERSITY,” “BLACK CITY,” AND “LIFE STUDIES” WITH TONI CADE BAMBARA, DAVID HENDERSON, AND JUNE JORDAN

- Toni Cade Bambara emphasized the need to desegregate and decolonize curriculum, open up teaching access to excluded knowledge-bearers, and transform the overall learning intentions in constructing a “Black University.” How may this relate to current calls to create “abolition universities”?* What kinds of “skills banks,” potential courses, and community participation could be offered inside of them (73)?
- David Henderson dedicated close attention to the pedagogical space of street rebellions, the boundless ways that Black and Puerto Rican kids express creativity, and the potential for Black liberation to traverse the scope of entire cities. How could we synergize his analyses within our current epoch of urban abolitionist uprisings, dynamic BIPOC youth defiance, and municipalist Black Power initiatives like Cooperation Jackson?
- Thinking with June Jordan’s argument on “the difference between the Host and the Parasite,” what are some other examples that illustrate this exploitative relationship (77)? How does Jordan’s invocation of “Life Studies” and “community machines” invite us to dramatically re-envision study and movement in our schools and neighborhoods today (81)?

CHAPTER 3 – AUDRE LORDE AND ADRIENNE RICH: SISTERS IN STRUGGLE

- Absorbing insights from across Audre Lorde’s “Blackstudies,” “Deotha,” and CUNY teaching archives, how can our contemporary movements more amply support the lives and work of Black feminist educators? How may we more fully engage with Lorde’s legacy given this earlier context?
- Absorbing insights from across Adrienne Rich’s “Diving Into the Wreck,” arguments about “motherhood as institution,” and CUNY teaching archives, how can our contemporary movements create abolitionist coalitions to “*directly co-realize*” institutions that nourish our lives (115–116)? What does Rich’s poetry offer about how to recompose our identities and relationships through our writing process?
- What do the longtime radical complicities between Lorde and Rich suggest about how we can commit to lovingly practice reciprocal study and solidarity across our differences and positionalities?

*Abigail Boggs, Eli Meyerhoff, Nick Mitchell, and Zach Schwartz-Weinstein, “Abolitionist University Studies: An Invitation,” 2019, <https://abolition.university/invitation/>.

CHAPTER 4 – THE POWER OF STUDENT WRITING AND ACTION

- How could the historic campus/neighborhood direct action initiative of Harlem University be remixed and reactivated for our struggles today? What can we learn from the successes and challenges of the 1969 City College takeover as we practice transforming institutional spaces in the present?
- Reading the “Five Demands” and these other student texts forged in university struggles, what do we think are the most effective ways to make radical demands upon universities (131–132)? What kinds of “non-reformist” demands could we affirm so that university administrators ultimately lose power, rather than retain their centrality to grant or refuse these demands (133)?
- Learning from these 1960s–70s NYC educational movements, what tangible steps could we take to synergize high school and college student struggles, practice writing composition as an element of movement composition, support comrades who may be forced to go underground, and create more powerful collaborations between students, teachers, and surrounding neighborhoods?

CHAPTER 5 – CONTEMPORARY STRUGGLES FOR OUR FUTURES

- One arc of this chapter outlines how, after 9/11, the US government’s attacks on civil liberties, anti-Arab and Muslim xenophobia, and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq spilled into the militarization and surveillance of CUNY. In solidarity with anti-imperialist groups like About Face and Dissenters, what could a revitalized US antiwar movement look like in which university struggles play a central role?
- CUNY’s involvement in Occupy Wall Street, anticolonial solidarity with Palestine and Puerto Rico, and democratic sovereignty initiatives like Reclaim the Commons has sustained important debates on such terms as occupation, decolonization, and the commons. How do our language choices inform our political orientations in efforts to transform spaces on stolen lands?
- From 2020 to 2023, CUNY movements have navigated the overlapping tumultuous waves of COVID-19, the George Floyd Rebellion, the Supreme Court’s erasure of federal abortion rights protections, and more. Building on these condensed lessons, how can we “arise to our already-existing powers to transform” the conditions of our lives?

CODA – CUNY WILL BE FREE!

- What do we think/feel/daydream/worry about when we envision our individual and collective futures? How has reading this book impacted your sense of the possibilities for revolutionary change?
- How has reading this book in a study group impacted your sense of what education could and should do in our lives?
- What would it look like to archive our social movements with integrity and responsibility to each other, our ancestors, and our descendants?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Conor ‘Coco’ Tomás Reed is a Puerto Rican/Irish gender-fluid scholar-organizer of radical cultural movements at the City University of New York. Conor is codeveloping the quadrilingual anthology *Black Feminist Studies in the Americas and the Caribbean*, and is the current comanaging editor of *LÁPIZ Journal* and a contributing editor of *Lost & Found: The CUNY Poetics Document Initiative*. Conor is a cofounding participant in Free CUNY, Rank and File Action, and Reclaim the Commons, and a member of CUNY for Abortion Rights.



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