The following is a chapter from *Let This Radicalize You*, a collection of stories, lessons, and advice geared towards young, budding activists by longtime organizers, Mariame Kaba and Kelly Hayes. As we read, I'd like for us to pay attention to how the writers' craft space and place and how that informs their practical advice. Here are some guiding questions:

- On page three, Gilmore describes how her conception of space and place informs her liberatory work. What are your reactions? How does this accord with your own sense of space and place? How is this impacted by the digital?
- Gilmore asks, "What is it about information that becomes knowledge that becomes useful for shaping action?" (7). What are your thoughts?

CHAPTER 4: Think Like A Geographer

Life-giving organizing in this catastrophic era will require us to chart new political and social maps of the world. Our movements are already practicing and shaping new visions of how we might better relate to one another and to the Earth itself. While some people engage in politics for the sake of debate or to defend their sense of moral identity, radical organizers are attempting to create something new. In addition to being an organizer who's been working toward prison-industrial complex abolition for decades, Ruth Wilson Gilmore is also a professor of geography and directs the Center for Place, Culture, and Politics at the City University of New York. Geography is a discipline that focuses on demystifying "relationships between people, places, and things," as Gilmore put it in a conversation with us. It is, therefore, an especially useful discipline to engage with as organizers, as we pursue new landscapes, new maps, and new formations.

While most organizers are not scholars of geography, we can, as Gilmore explains, enrich our work by thinking like geographers. "One of the things that thinking like a geographer can do is help people see, pull back the veil that makes something that's social seem natural, and something that sometimes is natural, seem social," Gilmore told us. Geography, she said, helps people ask the question, "Why is this place

the way it is? Why is it like it is?" And the answer generally has got to be more detailed than "racism" or "colonialism," although those two categories and sets of relationships matter. So we can talk, for example, about how Chicago came to become the city that it is, and then think about all of the relationships that people have, or have had, as long-distance migrants, as people who've worked through the various rise and fall of industrial sectors in Chicago and Cook County, why the built environment there looks as it does, and the kind of movements of capital across territory. So when people rightly denounce gentrification, a geographer will say, "Well, what do you think that means? How does it work?" Because when we think about how it works, then that gives us some opportunity to think about what the remedy for this organized abandonment might be.

This call to understand the relationships and dynamics that inform our experience of oppression is an urgent one, because our ultimate goal is not simply to label or identify our oppression, but to upend and dismantle it. If one hopes to sabotage a machine, being able to identify the machine is a start, but understanding how the machine functions, what its various parts do, and what blows could actually disable it, are also essential. To take dynamic action against a system, we must have a dynamic understanding of how it functions. To create something new, we must likewise understand how the people of a place relate to the land and to each other and what developments have driven their current condition. Any reimagining of a community that does not take these factors into account is speculative fiction.

"What I find the most exciting about being a geographer is thinking about how we make the world, and make the world, and make the world," Gilmore told Kelly on Movement Memos. "The concept of place, which for many people, understandably enough, seems only to mean location, has actually a dynamic, expansive fullness to it

that I love to think about." Gilmore explained that geographers examine how people are making the world, or making place, as geographers say. "It occurred to me, I don't know, twenty, twenty-five years ago, to realize that freedom is a place. That it's not like a destination, it's the place that we make."

According to Gilmore, by doing this liberatory work of making place, we can "share that freedom by sharing space that every embodied consciousness who joins together in that struggle is then joining together, at least provisionally, in being free there." Whether that space is the Republic of New Afrika, a camp of water protectors, a co-op, or a mutual aid outpost, Gilmore explained that "a place need not be geometrically unbroken" and that a shared place "could be an archipelago in which people at each of the … same [metaphorical] elevations are doing the same thing." To think of freedom as a place we create, share, and inhabit is instructive. We live on a planet in the throes of climate chaos, where powerful actors will use borders and captivity to maintain the norms of capitalism for as long as possible. To think of our organizing efforts as the work of making place helps ground us in the larger reality of what we are fighting for: not mere words or ideas, but transformed lives in transformed places. In working toward liberation, we are making place in opposition to those who would rob us of time, space, togetherness, and possibility itself.

What are the ways that people make the places they inhabit, daily, through their participation, cooperation, and interdependence? What would those dynamics look like if those people were truly free? How can we manifest those ideas, values, and visions in the spaces we create together?

Learning as Rebellion and Rehearsal

Reading can play an important role in the exploratory work Gilmore describes. For some activists, a regular practice of reading—particularly in discussion groups and book clubs with co-strugglers—helps advance their work. Before the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE) took control of the Chicago Teachers Union and saw the union through two strikes, the group began as an informal reading group. Staten Island organizers with the Amazon Labor Union, the first group to successfully unionize an Amazon warehouse, read and discussed William Z. Foster's Organizing Methods in the Steel Industry and distributed copies to workers. And in Pennsylvania, behind prison walls, imprisoned organizer Stevie Wilson hosts abolitionist reading, study, and discussion groups. In a prison where official education programs have been gutted, Wilson facilitates group discussions of books like *Are Prisons Obsolete?* and *Captive Genders*. Due to people's varying academic backgrounds, Wilson said he found it "easier to copy out chapters of books and to work through them together." Wilson also uplifted the importance of zines (self-published print work, usually created for small-scale circulation) in a 2019 interview with Rustbelt Abolition Radio. He explained, "Zines were really big for us "because it was more intimidating to give someone a book that's two hundred to three hundred pages long … they probably wouldn't pick it up. But if I gave someone a zine and it was three or four pages long, they could take a week and read that and we'll come back and we discuss it. So I tell you, the zines play a major role in the work inside the prison also because even for me to disseminate zines and books, it's less costly and the administration doesn't see it."

Wilson also stressed that reading is a subversive act in prison, and passing around large numbers of books might result in the confiscation of those texts, in addition to harassment or punishment of those circulating them. Zines can also be

shared in a more clandestine manner. “If I went to the yard and tried to give out ten books, I wouldn’t make it. But if I have ten zines there, I can give them out, you see? So part of it also is knowing the inside of here because, remember this much: learned prisoners are an affront to the [prison-industrial complex].”

Activists often quietly feel embarrassed about the important books they have not read. We have news for them: most people in movement spaces have not read the books everyone seems to quote. There are many reasons for this. Capitalism robs us of our time, exhausting our bodies and minds while pollution, stress, and shifting media patterns shorten our attention spans, and other mediums offer effortless modes of escapism. The gutting of public education was geared toward the prevention of an “educated proletariat”—as a Reagan adviser once put it while denouncing free college—and has robbed many young people of the opportunity to explore a great deal of history and literature and to develop a personal practice around that exploration. Consequently, most people do not read as much as they would like to. Of course, reading is not the only way to learn, and for some people, it is not the means best suited to them. But capitalism also makes it difficult for people to access information in other ways. How many times have you planned to check out a museum exhibit, a lecture, a podcast, an art installation, or any other opportunity to learn and expand your analysis, and found that you simply do not have the time or energy? Some people will call themselves “lazy” for missing such opportunities without recognizing who or what seized the time or energy they might have devoted to such tasks. We are not simply “missing out” on knowledge; we are being robbed of it. To succeed in our movements, we must resist this theft and reclaim what has been stolen from us.

Many of the histories that delivered us to this movement, the science and data of our struggles, the poetry and stories that have propelled struggle, are hidden in plain sight: in books, in documents, in films, in recordings. The ruling class is going to great lengths to obstruct the journey of discovering those lessons and tools. As the conservative movement to ban books that discuss anti-Black racism, Indigenous genocide, trans identities, and more builds momentum, organizers must fight the erasure of knowledge with the collective expansion of knowledge. Histories of the oppressions our communities have faced, as well as the struggles they have waged, have been largely suppressed in the mainstream. Learning and reclaiming those histories and ideas are essential to our movements. In addition to reading groups where entire books are discussed, zines, podcasts, teach-ins, and webinars can also create opportunities to deconsolidate crucial ideas.

For some people, making time to read and learn can be difficult. If you have a habit you are trying to cut down on, like doomscrolling, you might start by intentionally swapping out some scrolling time for an audiobook or an ebook on your phone. We urge organizers to spend more time with books and other modes of learning, not as an admonition (after all, you are reading right now) but to encourage you to claim an inheritance of knowledge your oppressors hope you never discover, embrace, or build from—the stories, wisdom, hope, and imaginings of organizers who came before us.

If you are unsure where to begin, we recommend you begin with the words or ideas that have already had an impact on you. As an exercise, pick out a quotation that has had a deep impact on your politics. Write it down. Now let's elaborate upon its context. What injustice was being challenged? What did the speaker want most immediately? Was the quote part of a statement to the press, a line from a speech or

book, or a comment to a friend? Was it in a letter from a jailhouse? Who was president of the United States when these words were spoken? What was the economy like? Who might have disagreed with this quote at the time it was spoken, both within and outside of social movements? If the quote is from a book, have you read it? If not, is it possible these words are calling you on a journey?

One way to enrich our practice of reading is to rehearse, rather than recite. Ruth Wilson Gilmore has drawn the distinction between "recital" and "rehearsal" in political education. Information, Gilmore notes, does not automatically translate into knowledge that makes organizers more effective. "What is it about information that becomes knowledge that becomes useful for shaping action?" Gilmore asked in a conversation with us. To explore this question further, Gilmore examined her own reading habits.

She noted that when reading novels and poetry, she found she was pursuing the experience of joy or pleasure or "finding a thrill." Gilmore said that while reading fiction or poetry, she is searching for a recognizable pattern and enjoys the anticipation of wondering whether she's "wily enough to outsmart the wiliness of the writer, or the narrator, or the character, or whoever." Gilmore says that even as she reads poetry, that anticipation exists: "Am I catching the rhythms and the rhymes or the shape of the poem in such a way that I might be able to anticipate a feeling? Which is really thrilling. Not to know what the poet's going to say, but to kind of almost be prepared in my feelings to receive the shape that the poem puts to me."

When Gilmore assesses her manner of reading for knowledge, she sees a different picture: I realized that a good deal of the practice of reading that I brought to my work, my work as a scholar, my work as an activist, my work as a reader, was kind of extractivist in its character. I was reading things in order to pull something out that I

could then use. I was reading political economy and social theory and so forth in order to extract certain bits of knowledge that I could then hold up, like, I pulled this chunk of copper ore from the ground, see it? I pulled this other thing from the ground, see it? This extraction then left me with something I could show to people, "See, I have this copper ore, see, I have this sentence from Karl Marx," or sentence from Claudia Jones, or even an entire paragraph from C. L. R. James that I could recite. And people would just look and say, "Wow, that's really nice copper ore."

This extractive approach to reading is something many people can relate to, especially those who have mostly read for academic purposes. When doing school work, we might search for and extract whatever information helps us complete our assignments. In some cases, we might read or learn in an extractive manner because we are only seeking to confirm or reinforce our position, rather than exploring the complexities of the text, its context, or the author's perspective.

Gilmore explained how she began to counteract that extractivist tendency in reading: That's where I got to thinking that maybe what we should do, in thinking about reading social theory, reading history, reading this kind of work, is to approach it as though we were actors… Not ones who were going to stand up and present the pages to an audience with a dramatic reading, but rather to approach the writing in such a way that actors approach the scripts that they study, in order to act from, to say, "What makes this sentence become something in the human world?" What makes this sentence or this paragraph, or this way of thinking, or this combination of thinkers, or this particular rhythmic timeline through the colonial struggle, whatever it is we're reading—what makes this something that I can sort of put my body/mind to, in order to

rehearse the revolution I'm part of now, or rehearse the preparation for the revolution I'm part of now?"

When we pursue information in an extractive manner, diving for facts rather than immersing ourselves in histories and ideas and engaging with them imaginatively, we often miss the larger stories, undercurrents, and motivations that give history its context. Those larger contexts contain many precious lessons that the powerful have worked hard to erase. As Diane di Prima told us, "history is a living weapon in yr hand."

Charting Your Own Terrain: "Why Not Chicago? And Why Not Us?"

During the pandemic, a group of activist researchers in Chicago saw their work deployed by a rising movement against policing in their city. Lucy Parsons Labs (LPL) describes itself as "a charitable Chicago-based collaboration between data scientists, transparency activists, artists, and technologists that sheds light on the intersection of digital rights and on-the-streets issues." Freddy Martinez, one of the co-founders of LPL, told us the project emerged in 2015 after a late-night conversation between friends in a hotel hallway. "You can imagine, that's where great decisions get made," Martinez joked. The effort was partly inspired, according to Martinez, by "some personal experiences of one of our founders being under intense police surveillance during Occupy" and also a desire to "engage in activism outside of going to protests." Martinez and his cofounders wanted to explore new ways of organizing against police surveillance, and they saw that opportunity in research. "Really, we were looking at some places doing stuff like researching and writing about surveillance in other parts of the country and we thought, why not Chicago? And why not us?"

Today, LPL offers digital security trainings for activists and at-risk communities and maintains a secure system for whistleblowers to report misconduct. The group is also developing an open-source police misconduct reporting tool, OpenOversight, and regularly fact-checks police and city officials by filing public records requests under the Freedom of Information Act and local equivalents. The group has exposed numerous city government deceptions, provided activists with data for their campaigns, and collaborated with journalists to inform the public about practices like civil asset forfeiture (in which police keep valuables they seize during arrests and investigations) and the use of Stingray technology for surveillance.

LPL's years of research on surveillance was of great help to activists during the pandemic, as opposition to police practices of brutality and surveillance escalated. People who wanted to highlight the abuses perpetrated by the Chicago Police Department had a treasure trove of organized data to work with. Then, in late March 2021, a Chicago police officer gunned down thirteen-year-old Adam Toledo in Little Village on Chicago's West Side. Body cam footage of Adam's death revealed he had followed the police officer's commands and that his hands were in the air when he was killed. The killing was the result of a foot chase instigated by the city's ShotSpotter surveillance apparatus. ShotSpotter is an AI surveillance system that uses miles of microphones to generate gunshot alerts for police. But as LPL has revealed, claims about the technology's accuracy are highly suspect.

As Martinez told Kelly on Movement Memos, "ShotSpotter claims that it's something like 97 percent accurate. And the way that they get to that number is quite clever. What they do is that they classify basically every sound that they pick up as either one, a gunshot, a single gunshot, multiple gunshots, or what they designate as a

probable gunshot. And that's included in their accuracy number." According to a report from the MacArthur Justice Center at Northwestern University School of Law, for example, 89 percent of ShotSpotter deployments in Chicago turned up no gun-related crime. Eighty-six percent led to no report of any crime at all. The report indicated that, over the 21.5 months researchers studied, there were more than forty thousand dead-end ShotSpotter deployments in Chicago. Even if ShotSpotter were accurate in its alerts, the deployment of police does not undo, prevent, or heal violence in our communities but serves to compound it. However, LPL's research into the particulars of the technology helps reveal broader systemic injustices.

"We're abolitionists, and have long pointed out that surveillance technologies lead to further criminalizing people along racial and economic and religious lines," Martinez explained. LPL's long-term research has put the group in a position to help propel movement work during heated moments. As Martinez explained to Kelly on Movement Memos in December 2021, "I remember at one point there was a journalist on Twitter who had said that weekend that Adam Toledo got murdered was like, 'I think I'm going to spend this weekend looking into everything I can about ShotSpotter.' And I said, 'Hey, don't worry about it. Go to our website, chicagopolicesurveillance.com. It's all on there.' And having those resources ready to go is really critical for just organizing work.

Following the murder of Adam Toledo, LPL joined a coalition to end the ShotSpotter contract in Chicago. As the campaign moved forward, the need for political education around the issue quickly became apparent. Martinez acknowledges that the educational process takes time, even when information has already been assembled, but he notes, "It would have taken much longer had we not spent years doing

documentation and writing, trying to fully understand surveillance systems at a time when nobody else was. We anticipated the moment. As organizers, it's important to plan for the future we are creating and then actively create it."

Some people find research intimidating and are afraid they will miss key information and make mistakes. "My advice to younger people is to not overthink it," says Martinez. "Asking questions and looking for answers is basically what every journalist starts out doing. I remember one time someone told me at a public records training they were worried about getting their request for records thrown out on some technicality. Who cares? Give it a shot." Martinez had another crucial piece of advice to offer organizers venturing into research: "Our number one piece of advice is to be obnoxious. Yes, actually obnoxious. People will do anything to get away from answering your questions. I've emailed people ten times until they responded to me." Persistence, says Martinez, is key to the process. "So much of research is just not giving up until you get answers."

A final lesson for organizers, from LPL: deep and thorough research is worth the time. In fact, it is essential when going toe to toe with powerful forces, Martinez says. The information wars are stacked against dissenters. "The police and the mayor's office know how to defuse social pressure with misleading information," Martinez notes. "Our research has to be fifteen to twenty times better than theirs."

Learn More Than One Way to Solve a Problem

As organizers, we have seen technology evolve over the course of our work. Some of these changes have been groundbreaking, making activism more accessible and creating opportunities for collaboration and public exposure of the work, which had

been extremely difficult or impossible under previous constraints. These innovations have also brought about less welcome developments for organizers, such as enhanced surveillance. We have also noticed that the popularization of digital methods of mobilization has led to a reliance on social media event pages and online announcements to spark mobilization.

Activists who experience success using online tools sometimes undervalue or neglect the kind of on-the-ground work organizers practiced before social media, and which many still practice today. But online mobilization born out of interest in event pages or the hot political topic of the moment can be fleeting, and organizers who rely on their ability to summon large numbers of people for protests and actions via social media, without developing any fabric of community between participants, often find themselves adrift as high-intensity political moments ebb. The bonded energy of protesters in the streets can help sustain the momentum of a protest, but it does not, in and of itself, create a sustained capacity for organized political action.

It's also important to remember that social media platforms are corporate products governed by algorithms and human beings who have repeatedly stifled leftist voices, obscured state violence, and facilitated right-wing radicalization. As important as these platforms are, overdependence on them weakens our movements. We need to practice a diverse spectrum of outreach methods in digital spaces and in physical spaces, and we need to do skill-building work in our movements around those methods. Sometimes, we need to be literal about meeting people where they are at. Think about all of the places people congregate in person and remotely where conversation is possible, from restaurants to schools, parks, porches, places of worship, street fairs, text message threads—and so many more.

We also have to prepare for the eventualities of becoming a threat to the status quo. The more successfully our work challenges the status quo, the more likely social media platforms and other digital services are to blacklist us or otherwise impede our efforts. For example, we have created many effective social media kits that provided participants with sample tweets to use during moments of concentrated activity on Twitter—digital efforts that are often called "Twitter storms." These tweets have allowed us and other organizers to get hashtags trending, which in turn has allowed us to raise millions of dollars to free incarcerated people and to educate people about how they can help fight injustices. In 2022, Twitter created user guidelines prohibiting the use of replicated content (copy/pasting), which puts users who use sample tweets from social media tool kits at risk of having their accounts suspended. By deprioritizing political content, Facebook has severely undermined groups who came to rely on the platform to publicize their issues and events.

Given how revocable and alterable these corporate-owned mediums are, we must consider, *What would we do in the case of a major political event if social media were no longer at our disposal?* And what about all the people we're not connecting with in our own communities due to some people's lack of social media use or the invisible constraints of corporate algorithms?

More than four decades before the advent of social media, when Rosa Parks was arrested, the Women's Political Council spread news of the Montgomery bus boycott throughout the city's Black community overnight. These organizers swiftly made a compelling and unifying case for a collective refusal, on the part of Black people, to use public transportation that would last thirteen months—until the Supreme Court ruled that segregation on public buses was unconstitutional. Today, most groups and

organizations lack this capacity, outside of corporate-controlled technology. While it makes sense to use tools to save time and maximize our reach, we must also remember that we live in an ever-changing world and that our work must be adaptable. Work that can only occur within corporate confines can be eliminated according to corporate whims. We need to strategize around alternative modes of digital outreach and use in-person outreach methods, such as canvassing, flyering, in-person mutual aid, and other community events. Today's organizers need to use new and old methods to motivate people toward spaces where work is happening and where relationships are being built.

Many of the technologies that presently strengthen our work are fully revocable, either by the state or by corporate entities themselves. What will we do if our revocation nightmares come true? We will need to train up and familiarize ourselves with time-tested tools. Many young people, for example, have never used a paper map. In an age when we can verbally ask our phones how to get somewhere and receive verbal instructions as we move, the idea of carrying and reading a paper map seems antiquated. But what if we suddenly had to get by without GPS navigation because an internet outage or state interference prevented us from relying on the apps we are used to? What if we had to not only read maps but also draw up simple maps for our comrades to help them navigate a changing protest or police landscape, or to direct mutual aid? When we become wholly reliant on a shortcut that disappears, we are left with a knowledge deficit that can become a roadblock.

If you are a young person, you will surely see evolutions in technology that will both aid and impede your work in the coming decades. While utilizing that technology, it's important to be suspicious and observant of the forces that control and profit from

it. It's also important to be aware of the precarity of its usefulness. We are not saying that you should take the time to learn every skill that technology has spared you the trouble of acquiring, but we do advise you to think critically about what services and platforms you rely on, what could be taken away, and what you would do in their absence. Many of our movements happen in public online, but our movements would still exist if every activist's social media account were purged tomorrow. What tools would we have amassed to meet that moment?

Change the Landscape

Sometimes we may find ourselves without the tools we need in a crisis. In 2018, Halle Quezada was on a Lake Michigan beach near her home in the neighborhood of Rogers Park, in Chicago, when she and others spotted two teenage girls who were drowning. The girls had fallen off a pier into an area that is known among lifeguards as a danger zone, due to a particularly dangerous current. Quezada and her family were among those who helped one of the girls out of the water, but the other girl was pulled under by the current. Six people entered the water in a desperate effort to recover the teen, but the waves were so violent that each of the would-be rescuers wound up in need of rescue. Quezada told us the fire department first went to the wrong beach, then, upon arriving at the correct beach, found the entrance blocked by a police car. Quezada says thirty minutes passed between the onset of the emergency and the arrival of firefighters. During those thirty minutes, Quezada's husband and others, who realized the water was too dangerous to enter, searched for anything in the area that might float, that they might throw to people who were fighting a washing-machine-like current and struggling to keep their heads above water. When firefighters arrived, they helped those would-be

rescuers from the water with flotation devices. They were bruised and bloody from being thrown against the break wall by the waves. One of the young girls was still missing.

Two hundred community members gathered to mourn thirteen-year-old Darihanne Torres. One of her eighth-grade classmates had managed to grab hold of Darihanne's hand at one point during the crisis but could not hold on. Her friends had no flotation device to throw her.

To Quezada, the solution was clear: emergency flotation devices were needed on the beach. There had been no shortage of brave people eager to help each other, but they lacked the necessary tools, and some had nearly lost their lives attempting to help. If there had been a life ring available, Quezada felt sure things would have been different. Quezada and other activists started Chicago Alliance for Waterfront Safety (CAWS), a movement to educate Chicagoans on beach safety. CAWS pushed for better signage, indicating which areas were dangerous for swimmers, and the installation of safety devices.

CAWS began circulating petitions. Quezada researched the issue relentlessly and shared her findings with the city. CAWS reached out to Great Lakes advocacy groups and bereaved families, talked to the media, hosted meetings, and challenged their neighborhood on the Chicago City Council to take action. The alderman launched a task force to address the issue, but a year went by, and as Quezada says, "The work of the task force never left paper." Then, in September 2021, nineteen-year-old Miguel "Maicky" Cisneros drowned on the same beach, only blocks away from where one of the teenage girls had been lost. Cisneros was within feet of the pier, and witnesses felt sure they could have saved him, if only they had access to a life ring.

“The teen’s death was the last straw for Quezada and her friends, who were tired of tangling with bureaucracy. They ordered a life ring online and installed it on the pier themselves. As expected, the park district removed the unauthorized rescue device—and local media captured the removal on film. Other community members joined the effort and replaced the life ring, which the parks department removed again. Four days in a row, the rings were replaced and removed and replaced again. Each time another life ring was taken down, public outrage grew. The park district was losing a narrative war. Lawyers for the city had previously argued that if the city installed life rings, the devices would only be stolen, creating a new liability in the event of wrongful-death lawsuits over drownings. But now it was the city stealing life rings, and community members were loudly naming that the park district would be responsible for the absence of those devices the next time someone drowned.

Public pressure grew, and finally the city yielded, installing its own life ring on the pier. Quezada and other local activists also worked to help pass legislation that made the change a matter of law. Quezada stresses that it was the power of direct action that made these victories possible.

The fact of the matter is, we had worked for three years while people, including kids, died preventable deaths due to known hazards in public parks and nothing was being done,” Quezada told us. She said people in power had the solutions and the funding to enact those solutions, but they also had what Quezada describes as “a competing need to be the authority.” These officials “deeply resisted” being told by the community, or even their own experts, what needed to be done. “A single lawyer who wanted his job litigating wrongful-death suits to be easier was suddenly more important than preventing those wrongful deaths in the first place,” Quezada said. The city

government was unwilling to prioritize human lives, so Quezada and others had to place human life ahead of the rules.

When our community took action, hanging our own rings without permission and hanging them again when they were taken down, we changed what the park district had authority over," Quezada said. "This direct action meant the choices in front of them were no longer life rings or no life rings; now they were left only with the choice of installing their own rings or dealing with ours." The direct action Quezada and her neighbors carried out reframed the crisis, and the life ring controversy became a narrative war the city could not win. For the government to reclaim its authority and to avoid being blamed for the next tragedy, says Quezada, "they had to first cede to what we wanted."

Thanks to the legislation Quezada and others pushed for and efforts supported by a new alderwoman in Quezada's neighborhood, there are now life rings stationed throughout Chicago's lakefront beaches and overlooks. Two people in Rogers Park have been rescued using the life rings since their installation. Those lives were saved by a community's willingness to commit defiant acts of care at the intersection of direct action and mutual aid.

Sometimes, systems of power can obscure our ability to act on our environment directly and make changes that can have transformative impacts. In Rogers Park, there are people who are alive today because some of their neighbors decided to break the rules together. This is a story worth remembering when we consider how we, as Gilmore says, make and remake the world."