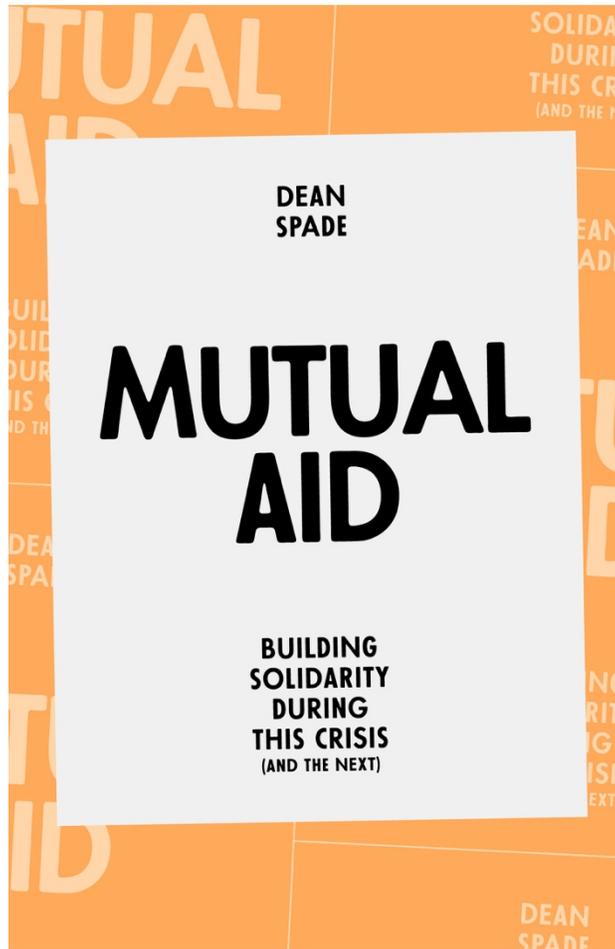


TEACHING GUIDE



by Dean Spade
Verso, 2020



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Introduction and Chapter 1: Three Key Elements of Mutual Aid

1. How is the story of the Hong Kong protest movement's response to the COVID-19 pandemic significant to Spade's argument about mutual aid?
2. What did you learn about the Black Panther Party's survival programs? Why were they such an important part of the Party's work?
3. What other mutual aid projects, besides the ones discussed here, have you heard of or participated in?
4. Why is mutual aid so significant during disasters? Have you seen any mutual aid organizing in response to disasters in your lifetime, or are there historical examples you know about?
5. What does it mean to "mobilize" people? How do mutual aid projects help achieve this?
6. Spade gives the example of seeing people practice new forms of solidarity through their collaborations at the Sylvia Rivera Law Project. What do people learn—about themselves, about each other, about society—from working in mutual aid projects? Have you ever experienced, in your personal experience, that your concern for others' struggles grew by working together with people something you all cared about? When and how?
7. Spade says that mutual aid is inherently anti-authoritarian and participatory. What does this mean? How is this connected to survival and liberation?

Chapter 2: Solidarity Not Charity!

1. What characterizes the dominant model of "charity"? What does the charity model say about people who receive charity and people who give charity? Where and when did you learn about these ideas growing up?
2. How is mutual aid different from charity?
3. What are Spade's concerns with the non-profit system?
4. What are Spade's concerns with "elite solutions" to poverty? What does he think could solve poverty?

Chapter 3: We Get More When We Demand More

1. Spade argues that governments respond to mutual aid in three ways. What are they, and how did they play out in the example he gives of Hurricane Sandy? Can you see any of these government responses in another current or recent disaster you are aware of?
2. On page 36, Spade argues that movements might celebrate moments when, in the face of disruptive uprisings, government provide concessions. Yet he also suggests that these concessions are limited and insufficient. Why would movements want to both celebrate concessions from the government and be cautious about them?
3. Spade questions whether the government can do a good job meeting people's needs and solving problems. Do you agree? How much faith do you think social movements should have in the governments they live under? How should that shape their actions?
4. Spade suggests that people are not naturally greedy, even though many people believe that. What do you think about this question?

Chapter 4: Some Dangers and Pitfalls of Mutual Aid

1. What is an example of how social service programs, and sometimes even mutual aid projects, divide people into "deserving" and "undeserving" categories? What is the problem with that, according to Spade?
2. Have you seen saviorism and paternalism appear in response to situations where people are in need? What does Spade argue is harmful about these approaches? Do you agree?
3. Spade describes how the feminist movement against domestic and sexual violence experienced co-optation that shifted many of its mutual aid projects into more traditional social services. How did that happen, and what effect did it have on the movement's goals?
4. Why is it important to have mutual aid groups refuse to work with law enforcement?
5. What kinds of "strings" can be attached to funding, and how can it create problems for mutual aid projects? Do you think receiving funding is always harmful to mutual aid groups, or can there be ways to address the problems it might create?
6. Does the "Characteristics of Mutual Aid vs. Characteristics of Charity" chart remind you of real-world experiences you have had? Are there any items on

the chart that don't make sense to you or that you disagree with? What is missing from this chart?

Chapter 5: No Masters, No Flakes!

1. When you look at the “Qualities of Group Culture” chart, what looks familiar? Do you recognize some of those qualities in groups you have been in, such as schools, faith groups, family groups, friend groups, student organizations, or other groups?
2. Why does group culture matter?
3. Why does it matter how groups make decisions together?
4. Why does Spade think that consensus decision-making is superior to hierarchical decision-making?
5. What seems difficult about consensus decision-making?
6. Have you ever been part of something—a friendship or a group, where you practiced consensus decision-making? What was it like?
7. Have you been to meetings that you thought were well-facilitated? What do you think makes for good facilitation?
8. What did you learn about leadership and “being a good leader” growing up? Do you agree with what you were taught?
9. How do the dominant norms about what “good leadership” looks like reflect racist norms? How do they reflect patriarchal norms? How are they ableist?
10. When you look at the “Qualities of Leadership” chart, what qualities do you already see in yourself? What qualities would you like to cultivate? What other qualities of leadership would you add to this chart?
11. What leadership qualities are prevalent in groups you are part of at school, at work, in faith communities, in student groups, or in your family? What could help cultivate qualities you think are beneficial and reduce ones that are harmful in the groups you are in?
12. On page 102, Spade argues that social media has increased individualism and social climbing, which creates obstacles in mutual aid work. Do you agree or disagree? What examples would you cite to make your point?
13. What dilemmas do mutual aid groups face about raising money for their work?

14. What can help address the potential problems that handling money raises for groups?
15. When you read the section on burnout, was any of it familiar to you from your own experience, or from things you have seen in others? How does this relate to cultural messages about work, leadership, and worth?
16. What does Spade think can be harmful about burnout for both individuals and groups? What does he think can help? Do you agree? What is missing?
17. Why do you think Spade included a section on conflict in this book?
18. Did any of the tools suggested for addressing conflict stand out to you? Are there other tools you think could help groups prevent and address conflict well?
19. Why do you think Spade included a section on perfectionism in this book?
20. How might perfectionism be related to white culture and racism?
21. Do you identify with any of the behaviors associated with perfectionism? Which ones? Does anything help you when perfectionism comes up?

IN-CLASS EXERCISES

For Individuals

1. Using the Mad Mapping materials provided by Spade in Chapter 5, make your own Mad Map for something stressful or disorienting that you have to go through regularly. Examples might include: exam period, going home for the holidays, applying for jobs, break-ups, or falling in love.
2. Write a one-minute “elevator pitch” about what mutual aid is and why it’s so important. Imagine you are explaining this to a classmate in another class who has never heard of the idea before.
3. Write a two-minute “elevator pitch” explaining the difference between charity and mutual aid. Imagine you are explaining this to a classmate in another class who has never heard of the idea before.
4. Write a two-sentence description of co-optation. Next, list three dangers that co-optation could pose to an organization’s starting goals. Finally, list three ways that participants can guard against these dangers using ideas from Spade’s text or your own ideas.
5. Using an example from Spade’s book, your own experience, or your knowledge of past social movements, describe one example of how mutual aid has been important to a social movement or during a crisis. How did mutual aid help communities in crisis or protesters? Do you think it changed how people thought about the issue or crisis? Are there ways it could have been more effective?
6. Looking at the “Working Joyfully” chart, what aspects of your own working style or work habits did you recognize? Are there areas where you would like to move toward working joyfully? How do you think you might do that? Journal for seven minutes about this and then we will discuss our impressions voluntarily as a group.

For Small Groups

1. Pros and Cons of Accepting Funding

We are in a group that is running a jail support project. We set up a table on the sidewalk outside where people get released from our local jail and we have a schedule of volunteers who provide rides, phone calls, info about shelters, services, and public benefits, clothes, and transit cards to people who walk out of the jail. These days we have enough volunteers to do three-hour shifts three days per week, during the hours when people are most often released from the jail. We've been at it for six months and recently have gotten some positive media coverage as an example of local, grassroots, anti-criminalization work. Recently, we were offered a grant of \$2500 from the City Council that would help us buy transit cards, food, clothes, gas, and other things we use. In your group, form a list of pros and cons about taking this money.

(For further discussion, ask "What if it was Ford Foundation funding rather than City funding?" "What if it was \$75,000 per year for three years and allowed us to hire a staff person to maintain and expand the program?")

2. Mutual Aid and Eligibility Criteria

We are in a group that is helping homeless individuals and families take over empty, publicly owned housing and live there. Some people in our group work on opening the empty homes, turning on water and electricity, and making necessary repairs. Others work on defending the homes from police raids once people are inside. This is bold work—we are both providing people with urgently needed housing, we are breaking the law, and we are making a public spectacle of the fact that the government isn't helping people out even though it could.

Some people in our group think that anyone we are going to house should have to agree to not take any illegal drugs, and that we should exclude people if they are known to use drugs. They worry that if someone is using drugs it will cause more conflict between people sharing the houses, might endanger kids living in the houses, or might make that person less responsive or helpful if there is a police raid, a fire, or other emergent situation. Other people in the group think it is a problem to exclude people on this basis.

Make a list of the pros and cons of excluding people in this way. Then, discuss what alternatives might exist to excluding people that might still address the conflict and safety concerns.

3. Mutual Aid to Address Campus Gender Violence

Imagine that you and your classmates are interested in using mutual aid to address campus gender violence. You are aware that sexual assault and intimate partner violence are big problems on your campus, but that the only things in place to address these issues are making complaints to the campus security or police, or other official channels on campus. You've read about how responses to gender violence that center punishment don't work well, and you want something different. Review the discussion in the "Cooptation" section of Chapter 4, and sketch out some ideas for how you could create mutual aid projects to prevent and address gender violence on campus.

4. Work Overload

We are in a group made up of students at our school and a few community members that supports families of people in prisons in our state. At first, we primarily gave people rides to visit their family members in far-away prisons, but now we also do other kinds of support, like tutoring kids with an imprisoned parent, helping people find lawyers, helping fill out paperwork for public benefits, hosting online fundraisers for families' expenses, delivering groceries and prescriptions to sick people and elders, and whatever else families need.

Our work grew organically, but now it's starting to be too much for the number of group members and the time that we all have available for group work. Brainstorm together what we can do. How might we limit the work? How can we make good decisions about our limits? How could we bring in new people? What might be hard about that and how could we do it well?

5. Group Dynamics

We are in a group that provides free food at a local tent city. Lately, there has been conflict in the group. There is lots of gossip. When people think someone is being flakey, or too bossy, or otherwise difficult, they tend to tell each other instead of the person with whom there is a problem. There is a culture of distrust growing between group members and it seems like it might blow up soon into bigger and more damaging accusations. Somebody suggested we have a workshop about giving and receiving feedback directly. How would you design that workshop? What would you want it to include? What would be a good way to make it interactive so people can learn and practice new skills? How would we get group members to want to participate when people are feeling so distrustful of each other?

6. Growing and Sustaining Student Groups

We are part of a student group that writes letters to prisoners in our state and sometimes visits our pen-pals. Word has spread in several prisons about our group, and we are now getting more requests for pen-pals than we can

fill. Some people in our group are graduating soon and we worry the project will fall apart if we don't get more people involved. Make a plan for attracting more people to this group. How would you get people to come to a meeting? How would you plan that meeting to make it welcoming and make them likely to stay for the long haul? What else would you want to do to help attract new people and prepare them to do the work well?

OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write a one-page reflection putting Chapter two's "Solidarity Not Charity!" chapter in conversation with one of these two articles:
 - a. Carl Rhodes and Peter Bloom, "The Trouble with Charitable Billionaires," *Guardian*, May 24, 2018:
www.theguardian.com/news/2018/may/24/the-trouble-with-charitable-billionaires-philanthrocapitalism
 - b. "How Mark Zuckerberg's Altruism Helps Himself." *New York Times*, December 3, 2015:
www.nytimes.com/2015/12/04/business/dealbook/how-mark-zuckerbergs-altruism-helps-himself.html
2. Read Movement Generation Justice and Ecology Project's zine, "From Banks and Tanks to Cooperation and Caring: A Strategic Framework for a Just Transition," from November 2016: movementgeneration.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/JT_booklet_English_SPREADs_web.pdf

Write a two-page reflection on how mutual aid fits into the vision for a new world being articulated in the framework for just transition.

3. In groups of three to five, research a contemporary or historical mutual aid project that has a sufficient online presence, or has been written about enough in media or scholarship to get a firm understanding about it without having to interview anyone. Together, create a ten-minute presentation for classmates about the project you researched. A good presentation will include: context for the social need provided by the mutual aid project, strengths and challenges of the project, obstacles participants faced or are facing and tactics used to address them, and lessons learned by participants or observers. You can find examples and inspiration for the research at in the Mutual Aid Toolbox at bigdoorbrigade.com and at itsgoingdown.org.
4. Listen to this interview about mutual aid in the wake of California's Camp Fire and write a two-page reflection on the themes from the book that are illustrated in the interview and any questions the interview raises about mutual aid:

"Autonomous Disaster Relief Organizing in the Wake of the #CampFire" November 26, 2018. In *It's Going Down* (podcast). 59:26.
<https://itsgoingdown.org/organizing-in-the-wake-of-the-campfire/>.
5. Choose one of the interviews in this series of interviews with mutual aid projects, published on Black Agenda Report in 2020, and write a two-page

reflection on what the interview teaches you about mutual aid and what further questions it raises. Interviews can be found here:

<http://www.deanspade.net/projects/black-agenda-report-abolition-mutual-aid-spotlight/>.

6. Read this article, “A Dozen Vacant Homes Reclaimed by Unhoused Tenants in LA as Calls for a Rent Strike Grow Across the US.” It’s Going Down, March 19, 2020: <https://itsgoingdown.org/a-dozen-vacant-homes-reclaimed-by-unhoused-tenants-in-la-as-calls-for-rent-strike-grow-across-us/>

And listen to the interview with a Reclaim Our Homes activist in this podcast: “This Is America #112: Choosing Sides, Getting Organized,” April 3, 2020, <https://itsgoingdown.org/this-is-america-112-choosing-sides-getting-organized/>.

Now, write a two-page reflection on how this work demonstrates principles of mutual aid and on what special considerations and tactics are needed for doing mutual aid work that breaks the law.

7. Read this: Crimethinc, *Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook* (2004) “Food Not Bombs” chapter, p. 248-257, <https://we.riseup.net/assets/35370/crimethinc.recipes.for.disaster.an.anarchist.cookbook.pdf>.

And listen to this: Frontline Praxis Podcast, Episode 5, “Food Not Bombs with co-founder Keith McHenry, Part 1, Feeding a Revolution,” and Episode 6, “Food Not Bombs with co-founder Keith McHenry, Part 2, Compassion Needs No Permit.” (2019).

Now, write a two-page reflection on how Food Not Bombs demonstrates mutual aid principles. Why do you think Food Not Bombs has been so widespread and lasted so long? What about its practices might be useful for other mutual aid projects to replicate or learn from?

RECOMMENDED READINGS TO ASSIGN WITH *MUTUAL AID*

Batza, Katie. *Before AIDS: Gay Health Politics in the 1970s*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.

Beam, Myrl. *Gay, Inc.: The Nonprofitization of Queer Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

bergman, carla, and Nick Montgomery. *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times*. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017.

Creative Interventions Toolkit. creative-interventions.org.

Davis, Angela Y. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* New York: Seven Stories, 2003.

Dixon, Ejeris, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. *Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement*. Chico, CA: AK Press 2019.

Enck-Wanzer, Darrel. *The Young Lords: A Reader*. New York: NYU Press, 2010.

Flaherty, Jordan. *No More Heroes: Grassroots Challenges to the Savior Mentality*. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2016.

Antonia Noori Farzan, "We Stuck Together Like Neighbors are Supposed To': A Community Thwarts Father's ICE Arrest," Washington Post, July 23, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/07/23/we-stuck-together-like-neighbors-are-supposed-do-community-thwarts-fathers-ice-arrest/?fbclid=IwAR1Z_SgikQ83iB1wL9GaYC6bjoh0wNmmAp99C7tDYYcd_VTBZVv4Jftks0&noredirect=on

Gelderloos, Peter. *Anarchy Works: Examples of Anarchist Ideas in Practice*. 2nd ed. London: Active Distribution / Sto Citas, 2015. First published 2010 by Ardent Press (San Francisco).

GenerationFIVE. *Transformative Justice Handbook*. generationfive.org/the-issue/transformative-justice.

The Icarus Project. *Madness & Oppression: Paths to Personal Transformation and Collective Liberation*. fire-weedcollective.org, 2015.

INCITE!, ed. *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.

Klein, Naomi. *The Battle for Paradise: Puerto Rico Takes on the Disaster Capitalists*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018.

Koyama, Emi. "Disloyal to Feminism: Abuse of Survivors within the Domestic Violence Shelter System." *eminism.org*.

McGuire, Danielle. *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*. New York: Vintage, 2011.

Movement Generation Justice and Ecology Project. "From Banks and Tanks to Cooperation and Caring: A Strategic Framework for a Just Transition." November 2016. *movementgeneration.org*.

Nelson, Alondra. *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Seattle Solidarity Network, "Building Your Own Solidarity Network," <http://libcom.org/files/seasol-pamphlet-expanded-US.pdf>.

Spade, Dean, and Roberto Sirvent. "Abolition and Mutual Aid Spotlight" interview series. *blackagenda.org*.

Tufekci, Zeynep. "How Hong Kong Did It: With the Government Flailing, the City's Citizens Decided to Organize Their Own Coronavirus Response." *The Atlantic*, May 12, 2020. *theatlantic.com*.

Walia, Harsha. *Undoing Border Imperialism*. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2013.

YWEP, "Girls Do What They Have to Do to Survive: Illuminating Methods Used by Girls in the Sex Trade and Street Economies to Survive and Heal," <https://ywepchicago.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/girls-do-what-they-have-to-do-to-survive-a-study-of-resilience-and-resistance.pdf>

RECOMMENDED VIDEOS TO TEACH WITH *MUTUAL AID*

Barnard Center for Research on Women. "Queer Dreams and Nonprofit Blues" video series. bcrw.barnard.edu.

Barnard Center for Research on Women, "Building Accountable Communities" video series, <http://bcrw.barnard.edu/building-accountable-communities/>

"Battle of Chile, Part 3: Popular Power" (1979)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBMOPQMui8Q>

"COINTELPRO 101" at <https://vimeo.com/15930463>.

"Consensus: Direct Democracy @ Occupy Wall Street." October 13, 2011.
[youtube.com/watch?v=6dtD8RnGaRQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dtD8RnGaRQ).

Morales, Iris. *¡Palante, Siempre Palante! The Young Lords*. Video. New York: Third World Newsreel, 1996.

"Jane: An Abortion Service." Women Make Movies, 1995.
<https://www.kanopy.com/product/jane-abortion-service>

Klein, Naomi, and Avi Lewis. *The Take*. Brooklyn, NY: First Run / Icarus, 2004.

Take Back the Land videos, posted at videos: "Take Back the Land's Work," Big Door Brigade, June 22, 2019, <http://bigdoorbrigade.com/2019/06/22/take-back-the-lands-work/>

"The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution," on Kanopy or
at <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/the-black-panthers-vanguard-of-the-revolution/>

FURTHER TEACHING MATERIALS

You can find the syllabus Dean Spade created for a class on Mutual Aid at the University of Chicago in Fall 2019 at:

<https://bigdoorbrigade.com/2019/08/29/first-draft-of-mutual-aid-syllabus/>

You can find the reading questions he used for each week's class at:

<http://www.deanspade.net/2019/09/30/reading-questions-for-mutual-aid-class/>

You can find an involved group project assignment about police abolition and group dynamics that Dean Spade created for his fall 2020 Poverty Law class, using resources from *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)* to help student create establish a fictional campaign to abolish their campus police and get their university to cut ties with the city police at:

<http://www.deanspade.net/2020/08/01/abolition-focused-full-class-group-project-assignment/>