

Dear friends,

I hope this note finds you as well as possible. As we are a national organization, and the newspaper goes all over the country, it takes a lot of reminders to myself not to start these letters with comments on the weather and how springtime is here in New England. Given that we are a group of folks all over, you probably don't want to hear about the little flowers poking out of the ground here in Boston. You probably don't care that it has been sunny and warm for days now, allowing me to bicycle around the city in just a t-shirt. But unfortunately for you, I'm a New Englander, and it is nearly impossible not to start everything with a comment on the weather.

While thinking about the weather I find myself remembering that April is the month when we celebrate and honor Earth Day. I recently looked up some of the history about Earth Day. The first Earth Day was planned in 1969 in California by a peace activist by the name of John McConnell. McConnell planned the celebration of the Earth at a United Nations gathering that was happening in San Francisco. His hope was that people would be moved to protect all the creatures of the planet with a respect for all life. This meant not only passing legislation to save forests, oceans, and the air but also to end the violence of war. While McConnell intended Earth Day to be on March 21st, the first day of Spring in the northern hemisphere, one year later a Democratic senator by the name of Gaylord Nelson introduced his own version of Earth Day to be honored on April 22nd. Following Senator Nelson's lead, an organization called the Earth Day Network came into being to create resources to push forward policies that would protect the Earth. Today, however, the Earth Day Network is headed up by a person who spent many years as a corporate defense attorney, defending corporations who were violating environmental regulations. It makes me wonder what has happened to John McConnell's original idea of Earth Day.

I must admit that I have not always been good at remembering to care about the environment. I forget to put things in the recycling bin. I use Styrofoam cups. It can be a bit embarrassing. The reality, though, is that things are really scary with our planet right now. The harms of global climate change are pretty terrifying. In our *analysis*, Black and Pink says that our goal is liberation. Our collective liberation is in jeopardy when our earth is in danger. As our ocean levels rise, we see island countries losing land and coastal cities losing homes. Rising sea levels harm poor communities first, those who are unable to get away or who depend upon the ocean front economy to survive (including those involved in the sex trade). On a global level, and right here in the United States, climate change causes the greatest immediate harm to communities of color and communities most marginalized by many forms of oppression. If we are serious as a family that we care about liberation, then we must also care about what is happening to our planet.

Climate change affects prisons too. How many of you have been in a cell with no air conditioning on a hot day? As the temperature continues to rise, those hot days are getting worse and worse. In an article about the prison, Rikers Island, Brentin Mock writes, "Rikers is an island inside of the urban heat island New York City, where temperatures can be up to 20 degrees F hotter than in surrounding rural areas...That intensifying heat felt by prisoners trapped in the un-air-conditioned facility is joined by denser concentrations of ozone pollution that worsens as the temperatures rise. The heat alone is a certified killer. The ozone only quickens death by exacerbating asthma and making it otherwise harder to breathe." You may also remember when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. The Orleans Parish Prison (OPP) was directly affected by the storms and the racist neglect of the government. According to a report by the Americans Civil Liberties Union, "As floodwaters rose in the OPP buildings, power was lost, and entire buildings were plunged into darkness. Deputies left their posts wholesale, leaving behind prisoners in locked cells, some standing in sewage-tainted water up to their chests." This is unacceptable.

Extreme weather, like the increase in destructive hurricanes, is a consequence of global climate

change. It is important that we remember to include attention to our planet as we continue in our work to challenge the prison system. All of our efforts are interconnected and inform one another. During this month, I encourage us all to look at ways we can integrate work against climate change in to our abolitionist organizing. We become stronger when we act in solidarity. We do all of our work knowing that once there were no prisons, that day will come again.

In loving solidarity,

Jason