

THE ELEMENTS OF MUTUAL AID

DOCUMENTARY
DISCUSSION GUIDE

CH. 1

◆ EXPERIMENTS TOWARD LIBERATION ◆ TOWARD THE ABOLITION OF THE STATE ◆



Colonization & capitalism are dams holding us back from each other. This chapter is all about tearing them down so we can let mutual aid flow between us. We discuss creating safer spaces, handling crisis without police, & navigating power dynamics, burnout, & conflict.



CH. 1

FIRE

RUNTIME—54 mins

Before 2020, mutual aid lived in the margins of organizing spaces, rooted in radical traditions of community autonomy and antifascism. When the pandemic hit, the term exploded. But with that popularity, its political edge was blunted by a misconception that mutual aid boils down to just distributing goods.

That misunderstanding has led to burnout and apathy. But liberatory mutual aid transforms our relationships, sustains us as we fight the State, and prepares communities to defend their autonomy. It's time to resharpen mutual aid's edge together.

How do we move out of reacting to crisis and into responding with strategy and vision? How do we prepare ourselves and our communities to live freely beyond the State?

This series is a tool to help communities reflect on their efforts, build strategy together, and sow real relationships and infrastructure that will sustain us as the systems around us crumble.

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STEP 1 HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



FACILITATION TIP: *Feel free to read the sections of this guide aloud together as a group!*

The Elements of Mutual Aid is a four-part series made to spark conversations. Today's episode is *Chapter 1, Fire* and this discussion guide offers a few **QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES** to help dig into some deep conversation afterward.

Ideally everyone has a copy of this guide so everybody can help move the conversation along together.

Use the **NOTES** section at the end to jot down thoughts, the **GLOSSARY** section for helpful terms, and the **RESOURCES** section to find other powerful media.

The entire series is freely available on YouTube and PeerTube with English and Spanish subtitles. For support with organizing more screenings and discussions, visit: theelementsofmutualaid.com/screen-the-series

STEP 2 ABOUT THIS CHAPTER

◆ ◆ ◆

Before pressing play, let's check out a few of the main ideas in this chapter. This introductory chapter to the series defines what liberatory mutual aid is, how it's different than charity, and why it's such a threat to those in power.

LEARNING GOALS

- *Develop an understanding of mutual aid as a radical way of living rooted in Native practices and nature*
- *Think critically about how to break down the borders of “giver” and “receiver” of aid*
- *Understand why mutual aid and those in power are at odds with each other*
- *Understand how mutual aid can support our resistance to oppression*

Does everyone have what they need before starting the film?

STEP 3 AFTER WATCHING



3.1 THOUGHTS OR QUESTIONS?

Does anyone have any immediate reflections they want to share? Did anyone hear any terms they weren't familiar with? (*Check out the **GLOSSARY** if helpful*).

Optional: Take a quick 5-10 min break for people to use the bathroom before discussion.

3.2 SET AGREEMENTS

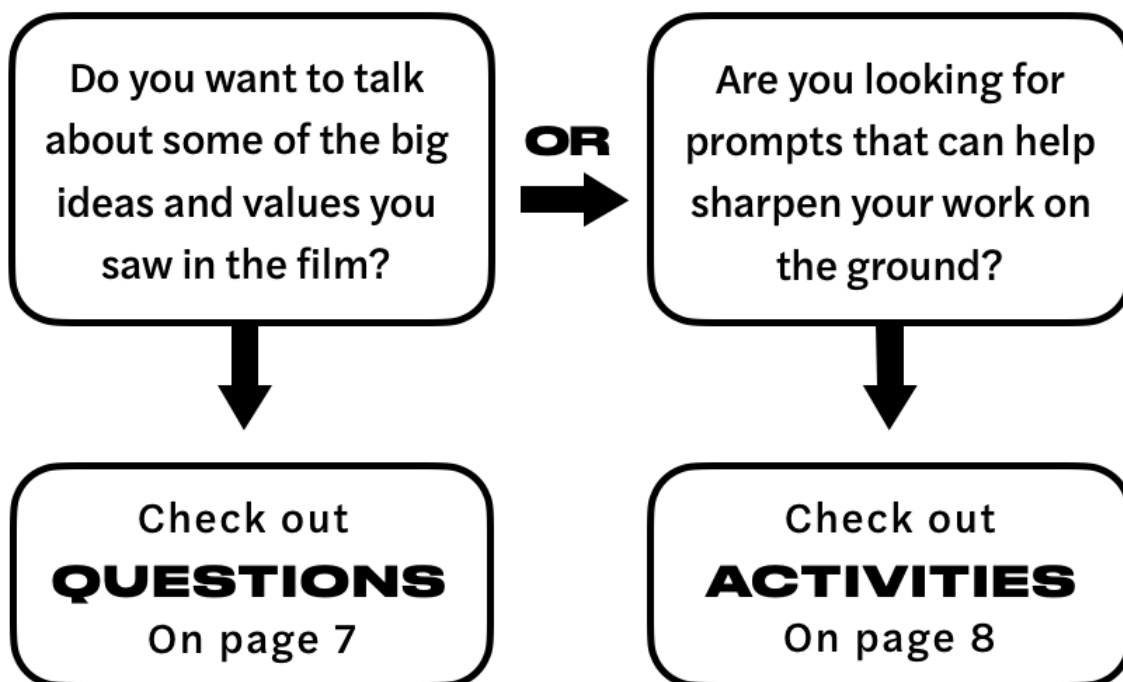
Before getting into discussion, it can be helpful to set a couple agreements to call back on. Here are some basics:

- *make space for quieter voices*
- *help keep the conversation focused*
- *be mindful of time*

Does anybody have others they want to add?

FACILITATION TIP: *If the conversation meanders, you can say something like: "That's a really great point but could we refocus on the question?" If a few people are talking a lot while others are quiet you can say: "Can we make some space to hear from voices we haven't heard from yet?"*

STEP 4 PICK A TOPIC & DISCUSS



Take a few minutes to look over the **QUESTIONS** or **ACTIVITIES** as a group and pick one to focus on. Throughout the discussion, refer back to this list if you need more inspiration.

FACILITATION TIP: *Do you have a larger crowd? Divide up into smaller breakout groups and set an amount of time for discussion. At the end of the time, have all the groups come back together and share their main takeaways.*

QUESTIONS



1. Did anything in this chapter challenge or expand your understanding of what mutual aid is or isn't?
2. Charity models often assume people receiving aid will be greedy or incompetent. How can building models that encourage people to share and take care of each other impact how they show up?
3. What are some different ways you've seen charity mentalities show up in mutual aid efforts? (e.g., focusing on number of people served / supplies given, doing things for people because it's "more efficient")
4. How do we move away from doing the State's job for it and start building power outside of it through mutual aid?
5. How do strong mutual aid networks support our ability to resist oppression and build political empowerment? (e.g., *Neighborhood assemblies were born out of the George Floyd uprisings in Minneapolis in 2020 and became the backbone of resistance when ICE occupied the city six years later.*)

ACTIVITIES



1. Take some time to list how the division between "givers" and "receivers" is showing up in your work. Then come up with a few ways you can break down that divide so that you can collaborate with neighbors and solve problems together.
2. Spend time researching police mutual aid agreements in your area. What equipment do they share, do they have formal partnerships with ICE, how have they worked together in the past? How could these relationships affect your work or be used to increase repression locally? Draw a bubble map or write up a short overview of this network and share it with your community.
3. List a few differences between liberatory mutual aid and direct aid. Then brainstorm ways you can help more people in your community differentiate the two.

STEP 5 NEXT STEPS



It's hard to take time away from the work of caring for our communities to have these conversations. But they're so important to our ability to doing this work well and to moving intentionally toward liberation instead of just reacting to crises. We encourage communities to continue prioritizing conversations like this. Here's a couple ways to keep using this series as a tool in your community:

- *Apply key takeaways from this discussion into your organizing.*
- *Plan a screening of another chapter with this group.*
- *Plan a screening with the wider community and offer the lessons you learned here.*
- *Dive into some of the resources and form study groups to digest them.*

GLOSSARY



- **Abolition:** The ending of systems of oppression -- *such as slavery, prisons, or police.*
- **Capitalism:** An economic system where wealth is taken from the lower class (workers) and is concentrated in the upper class (bosses, landlords, etc).
- **Charity:** The most common way people are taught to share resources, where an empowered giver manages who gets what and dis-empowered recipients are excluded from the process.
- **Colonization:** The process of invasion, enslavement, genocide, and theft of resources that imperial countries have practiced for centuries -- and continue to practice on Native people around the world today. Colonization takes the land and people of a region and makes them work for their conqueror.
- **COINTELPRO:** The Counter Intelligence Program; An off-the-books FBI project in the 60s and 70s that infiltrated civil rights, Black power, Native, Chicano, and anti-war organizations and slandered and assassinated radicals.
- **Cooptation:** When words, phrases, and tactics from social justice movements are taken and watered down by nonprofits, businesses, and politicians.

- **Distro:** Short for "distribution." People will distro things like food, clothes, or medical supplies, usually in a pop-up setting like a park, and sometimes in a brick and mortar space.
- **Eviction Defense:** When neighbors band together to help each other from getting kicked out of their homes. This can look like phone call pressure campaigns or physically protecting the home with a crowd of people.
- **Liberation:** When domination and supremacy are no longer possible because our communities have become strong enough to resist them and prevent them from taking root in our hearts.
- **Mutual aid:** A way of caring for each other where everyone gives what they have and takes what they need. A way of meeting our collective needs where the helpers and helped aren't separate.
- **Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC):** The industry of charity organizations and philanthropists that gives out enough resources to ease poor people's suffering so they don't rise up but not enough to actually change what causes poverty.
- **Political Education:** The practice of sharing knowledge about systems of oppression, the conditions we're living under, and how we can build power together to confront those systems and change our conditions.
- **Solidarity:** A practice of connecting our struggles across issues, communities, and borders so that we can fight against the dominant systems oppressing us. None of us are free until all of us are free.

- **The State/the Nation-State:** The borders, laws, police, and corporate powers that determine who's a citizen, what's legal, who gets to live, and how much we have to pay for it all. The Nation-State is just one form of government that comes from Europe and has spread around the world through colonization. The concept of a state is at odds with the concept of liberation.
- **White Supremacy:** The individual experience of having hatred toward or fear of non-white people (*The Global Majority*), and the institutional violence that colonization has baked into the state and capitalism.



RESOURCES



Driven By The Movement

by JoNina Abron-Ervin (*Book*)



Anarchism and The Black Revolution

by Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin (*Book*)



No Spiritual Surrender

by Klee Benally (*Book*)



The Nation on No Map

by William C. Anderson (*Book*)



The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex

by Incite! (*Book*)



Red Flags: Before you Join That Org

(*Zine*)



An Indigenous People's History of the United States

by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (*Book*)



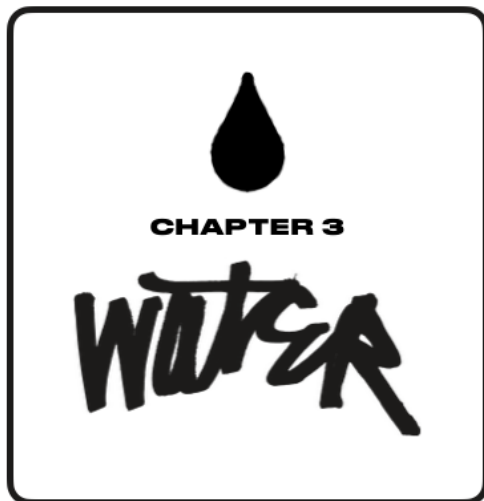
Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During

This Crisis (And The Next) by Dean Spade (*Book*)



InterRebellion #1: The Estallido Social

by SubMedia (*YouTube*)



Watch the full series for free on
YouTube & PeerTube!

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