

So, you want to volunteer at Left Bank Books! We have devised this informational take home packet in order to illuminate some of the nuances of the project and empower you to co-create your experience in the shop.

What the hell is a Left Bank?

Left Bank came to fruition in 1973 when a group of people left Red and Black Books in the University District in favor of a project that was more anarchist/anti-authoritarian in nature. Left Bank operates as an independent bookstore, which is run as a worker owned, anarchist/anti-authoritarian, not for profit project. We value independence and self-motivation; we hope to inspire, not to be anyone's boss.

Two of the primary drives behind the project are to serve as an educational tool, and to create a space to foster intentional community.

Comprised of a diverse, sometimes semi-invisible community of radicals, we work to challenge all forms of privilege and oppression, both individual and institutional, and to encourage and empower each other to create a space in which we fight for our individual and collective liberation.

How does Left Bank operate as a collective?

In order to get essential financial tasks done Left Bank operates as a two-tiered collective, and as such there is an imposed hierarchy in our working relationships. This system is imperfect but has served to keep the front doors open as a business for the last forty years or so. There is a core of roughly 6-8 paid staff who work 1-3 8 hour shifts a week. They perform a majority of the financial tasks. There are also 14 or so volunteers who work 3 hours a week. Paid collective members can have a more in depth knowledge base of the shop, which can create uneven access to power, so we do what we can to intentionally subvert this hierarchy when we can. This can look like sharing skills and knowledge about the project and checking in with volunteers to see what they are interested in doing and learning about. We also hold monthly general collective meetings in the store where we make decisions on a consensus basis. Volunteers are welcome and encouraged to attend.

Another tool that we use that does not have a fixed process is being accountable to each other as well as ourselves. Awareness of the space we take up, how we take it, and the impact of our actions are all integral to working next to each other. Being proactive about setting boundaries and mindfully listening to and respecting them is essential to that process.

We hire paid staff internally from our pool of volunteers when the workload is over collective capacity; often this coincides with another core collective member leaving.

Troubleshooting 101

Left Bank does not have a set process for dealing with conflict. Each collective member brings a different conflict resolution set of skills to the table. It is important to remember that if you are experiencing conflict or misunderstandings with other collective members, we want to hear from you, and we encourage you to reach out to others. Conflict does not have to be stressful, although it is not always easy. leftbank@leftbankbooks.com is a place you can contact the collective by email. Feel free to ask someone to sit down and talk with you about concerns or conflicts as they arise, and expect confidentiality if that's what you need. You can also write a note in the journal, come to a meeting, etc. Please feel empowered to find ways to address conflicts, or help us empower you.

Barriers to Communication

Often the inequalities we are socialized to accept and reproduce can affect our ability to relate to and communicate with each other. We ask people to consider these kinds of oppression and how they manifest at an individual as well as institutional level, courtesy of the AORTA Collective, updated by Left Bank.

Levels and types of oppression:

Individual conscious

- Telling a racist or anti-semitic joke - Beating someone up because they are Muslim or queer - Letting the air out of someone's bike or car tires because they are a person of color or are disabled - Telling a rape joke

Individual unconscious

- Laughing at a racist or anti-semitic joke
- Assuming someone doesn't know how to do something because they are poor or working class
- Pointing out how oversensitive a person of color is for "always" bringing up racism
- Calling people by the incorrect gender pronouns (she/he/they/zie)
- Laughing at a rape joke
- Using ableist words, i.e. "Lame, crazy, etc."

Systemic/Institutional Conscious

- Forced sterilization of women of color by the US government - Forcibly sending millions of Native children in the US and Canada to Christian

- Boarding Schools - Laws and sanctioned practices to terrify and force immigrants

and undocumented
peoples out of the US

-Allowing access to certain rights only through marriage

Systemic/Institutional Unconscious

Racism in the prison industrial complex: Black boys/men are 7 times more likely to be incarcerated in the US than White boys/men. Schools serving mostly poor and/or students of color have a lower rate of success and a significantly high rate of violence by peers and by police, and often create what is called a “school to prison pipeline” – where these inequities set up poor and youth and youth of color on a path towards detention centers and prisons. European and Christian perspectives and experiences are normalized in the design of school curriculum, texts and standardized tests.

Books to Prisoners

Left Bank Books sponsors the Books to Prisoners (BTP) program that works to provide free literature to prisoners. We do this by purchasing cheap books from them to re-sell in the front of the store, and by acting as their mail room and sometimes donation intake center. They can send books to prisoners due in part to Left Bank’s publishing status, and operate as an umbrella under our 501 status.

BTP started almost six years after LBB was founded. BTP provides free books to people in prison all over the United States. The project receives over 700 requests for books each month & attempts to send 1-3 books to each person in prison they receive a request from. The project relies wholly upon donations to cover costs of operation, so financial support & books are in constant demand.

Benefits of Volunteering at Left Bank

30% discount on all books, shirts, zines and stickers. 20% discount on all magazines. An opportunity to learn about working collectively. Bus fare to help you get to your volunteer shift. Experience working at a bookstore. Introduction to and immersion in radical politics. We hire from our volunteer pool.

Expectations of Volunteers at Left Bank

1. Six month commitment/3 hours a week
2. During this time, going through a three month trial period before being asked to join our collective and continue as a volunteer
3. Respecting the boundaries and identities of other volunteers and collective members. (i.e. don’t misgender people. if you’re not sure what this means, please ask!)
4. Showing up on time

- a. Calling to let us know you'll be late.
 - b. Trying to find a sub to work a shift you know you'll miss.
- Participating in our annual retreat. Letting us know why and when you stop volunteering.

Basic working practices

1. Security culture

a. Left Bank is a historical place of interest to the FBI and the police. It is a good idea to presume that there are bugs in the store and to intervene if you overhear people talking about "unsafe" topics, especially if they are using other people's names or specifics of a situation. If conversations of this nature must be had, don't hesitate to demand that people step outside to have them.

i. "Unsafe topics" include illegal actions, selling/taking/producing drugs, squatting, or anything you wouldn't want a cop to overhear.

b. Do not give out any information about current or past collective members, or friends of the store. People are welcome to leave notes in the journal for collective members if they need to get in touch.

c. Please intervene if people are taking photos in the store; you can politely inform them that they are free to take pictures of the actual store or books, but to get consent from other customers/staff if they want to take a picture of them.

2. Ordering tactics/walking the "constantly broke" line

a. Left Bank is constantly struggling to pay our incurring debt from our book distributors. Many people presume that since we have the budget to order new titles, we must be making enough to easily pay our bills. Because of the endemic nature of theft in our store and the quickly changing book industry, this is just not true.

b. Theft: we are an easy target. If there are many people in the store, please be sure to prioritize walking the shop and being present (vs. checking email or Facebook and disappearing into a computer/book/task). Checking bags behind the counter is an easy way to deter in-store stealing. Be sure to pay attention to people who are wearing baggy clothing, or people who are nervous looking and darting from room to room; shelving or organizing books in the same room as someone acting paranoid is another good way to deter theft.

c. If there are books on the shelves that you are excited about, particularly New Arrivals or Featured Fiction, please make a special order slip for them. Ideally we would love to give volunteers first dibs on what we carry, and there are always going to be exceptional moments when that is appropriate, but for the most part this helps us in the long run.

3. Left Bank is a place full of big ideas

- a. Our project can be intimidating to people. This means that treating everyone who walks into the store with respect, each other included, is important. When Left Bank was founded in 1973, it was intended to be a place where people could talk about ideas, issues, and the news. However, everyone who passes through the front door is not going to have the same analysis or be on the same page as other folks, and that's okay!
- b. Being respectful of each other does not include taking abuse from customers or enduring oppressive behavior. We stand by volunteers who want to ask customers to leave if they are intentionally crossing boundaries or being rude.

Fun fact: the wooden shoe and black cat in our iconography are throwbacks to labor history. The cat is an anarcho-syndicalist symbol for the wildcat strike. The wooden shoe, or sabot, literally translates into "sabotage," and refers to the tactic by early Dutch unionists of throwing wooden shoes into the gears of factory or farm machinery to stop work.

Resources

Many folks come to Left Bank to get a better grounding in their understanding of anarchism or collective process. The current collective has devised a list of reading material relevant to consider when dipping your toes into making your life project revolutionary

Consent/Rape Culture:

1. "The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities," by Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, and Andrea Smith
2. "Yes Means Yes!: Visions of Female Sexual Power and a World Without Rape," edited by Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti
3. "Learning Good Consent Zine," edited by Cindy Crabb
4. "Support," edited by Cindy Crabb

Collective Organizing

6. "The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Nonprofit Industrial Process," by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence

7. "Tyranny of Structurelessness," by Jo Freeman
8. "The Tyranny of Tyranny," by Cathy Levine
9. "Derailing for Dummies," <http://www.derailingfodummies.com>

Prison-Industrial Complex

10. "Are Prisons Obsolete?," by Angela Y. Davis
11. "New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness," by Michelle Alexander
12. "Alternatives to the Police," by Rose City Copwatch
13. "Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex," by Eric A Stanley and Nat Smith
14. "Resistance Behind Bars: the Struggles of Incarcerated Women," by Victoria Law

Strategy

15. "The Coming Insurrection," by the Invisible Committee
16. "How Nonviolence Protects the State," by Peter Gelderloos

Feminism

17. "Whipping Girl," by Julia Serano
18. "Feminism is for Everybody," by bell hooks
19. "Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation," by Sylvia Federici
20. "Sister Outsider," by Audre Lorde

Racism/Struggles of People of Color

21. "The Color of Violence," by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence
22. "Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times," by Amy Sonnie and James Tracey
23. "Class Matters," by bell hooks
24. "Black Skin, White Masks," Franz Fanon

Anarchism

25. "Anarchism and its Aspirations," by Cindy Milstein
26. "A Thousand Rioters," by Lucy Parsons
27. "At Daggers Drawn," by anonymous
28. "Mutual Aid," by Peter Kropotkin
29. "Chomsky on Anarchism," Uncle Noam Chomsky
30. "Living My Life," volumes I and II, by Emma Goldman
31. "Revolt and Crisis in Greece," edited by Antonis Vradis and Dimitris Dalakoglou

Anti-Civ

32. "Bloodlust," by the Medusa Collective
33. "The Garden of Peculiarities," by Jesus Sepulveda
34. "Against His-Story, Against Leviathan!," by Fredy Perlman
35. "Coming Home to the Pleistocene," by Paul Shepard
36. "Desert," by Anonymous
37. "Origins: A John Zerzan Reader," by John Zerzan

Queer and Gender Studies

38. "Out of the Closets, Into the Libraries," by the bangarang collective
39. "Queer Ultraviolence: A Bash Back! Anthology"
40. "Toward the Queerest Insurrection," by the Mary Nardini Gang
41. "Against Equality: Queer Revolution, Not Mere Inclusion," edited by Ryan Conrad