Capitalism asks us to believe that people are naturally greedy and competitive. However, in times of crisis and scarcity, people more often practice generosity and connection. Our current moment is defined by worsening crises of many kinds—climate crisis, housing crisis, health and child care crises, and other ongoing crises produced and reproduced by capitalism, colonialism, white supremacy and patriarchy. Mutual aid is one name for the work people do in community to provide for each other’s basic survival needs based on a shared understanding that the systems in place, not people in need, are to blame for the crisis. This talk will explore why mutual aid is such a significant tactic in this moment, how it is showing up on the front lines of crisis and disaster, how it is different from charity, and what it means to imagine a world based on mutual aid rather than extraction and exploitation.

Dean Spade has been working to build queer and trans liberation based in racial and economic justice for the past two decades. He works as an Associate Professor at Seattle University School of Law. Dean’s book, Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics and the Limits of Law was published by South End Press in 2011. A second edition with new writing was published in 2015 by Duke University Press. Bella Terra Press published a Spanish edition in 2016. In 2015, Dean released a one-hour video documentary, Pinkwashing Exposed: Seattle Fights Back!, which can be watched free online with English captions or subtitles in several languages. Dean’s new book, Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the next) was published by Verso Press in October 2020.

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