A PUBLICATION OF CRITICAL RESISTANCE

THE ABOLITIONIST

SUMMER 2021

FREE TO PEOPLE IN PRISONS, JAILS, AND DETENTION CENTERS • ESPAÑOL AL DORSO

ISSUE 35: Defund Policing

FEATURES ANALYSIS

The Demand is Still Defund the Police

By Andrea J. Ritchie

In 2020, incited by the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Rayshard Brooks and hundreds more Black people killed by police in the midst of a global pandemic and the ongoing economic and environmental crises devastating Black communities, the civil rights movement of our generation united against police brutality. Organizers across the country brought the power of the streets to bear to push policymakers to cut over $840 million nationally from police department budgets, to terminate public school contracts with over 25 police departments, saving an additional $35 million, and advocating to invest over $160 million into public safety initiatives beyond policing.

#DefundthePolice was - and remains - the demand as organizers entered the 2021 budget season armed with a deeper knowledge of the operation of city, county, and police budgets, a clear commitment to non-police, community-based safety strategies, broader networks of communication for sharing skills, strategies, and successes, and a website (defundpolice.org) created by dozens of national partners, including Critical Resistance (CR), gathering resources, legislation, trainings, and budget tools to calculate the costs of policing and alternatives. Groups in Seattle and beyond are working to #DefundThePolice victories they won in 2020, while pushing for deeper cuts and investments.

But this is neither the beginning, nor the end, of the story of demands to defund police – nor are they isolated from broader struggles for prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition. The notion of divesting from police and investing in community-based safety strategies is deeply rooted in Black radical abolitionist traditions. It represents a step in the long arc toward the abolitionist horizon of dismantling policing, and the PIC that requires it, altogether.

Image by Art Hazelwood, courtesy of Western Regional Action Project (WRAP).

WHERE DO DEFUND DEMANDS COME FROM?: A LONGER HISTORY

Calls to divest from policing, imprisonment, and prosecutions echo the demands of the Black Panther Party's 10-Point Platform for Black Liberation: "We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of Black people…We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace." The demands were articulated by former Panthers and political prisoners like Eddie Ellis, who, speaking about his concept of "human justice," explained, *"right now the [PIC] is so massive that it's almost beyond our imagination. But if we shrink it, not only in terms of the number of people who are captive within it, but also in terms of the money that's being spent as a consequence of it, we begin to make it more manageable."* They are also rooted in global struggles to divest from the state violence that maintained apartheid South Africa and militarism worldwide that many organizers of my generation cut their teeth on.

Since the 1970s, demands to defund the police and prisons have paralleled spikes in prison populations and the size, scope, and budgets of police departments. In a 1995 *Nation* article about California's booming prison industry, fueled by exponential growth in the number of imprisoned people driven by newly enacted "three-strikes laws," radical geographer and historian Mike Davis observed, "To keep even the most rudimentary shackles on this huge population, the state will have to loot its higher education budget for dozens of new prisons." Davis went on to report that, in response to projections of skyrocketing prison costs, a gubernatorial spokesperson admitted, "If these additional costs have to be absorbed, I guess we'll have to reduce other services. We'll have to change our priorities." Davis also cited a RAND report that concluded: *"To support implementation of the [three strikes] law, total spending for higher education and other government services would have to fall by more than 40 percent over the next eight years... If the three strikes law remains in place by 2002, the state government will be spending more money keeping people in prison than putting people through college."*

This prediction came to pass, not only in California, but across the US. As Mariame Kaba and Erica Meiners pointed out in a 2014 article, *"Because many states spend more on prisons than education, we have to change funding priorities as well. Take Illinois, for example. Between 1985 and 2005, the state built over twenty-five new prisons or detention facilities. Over the same span, no new public colleges or universities were established. Funding reform initiatives for K–12 education, mandated by the Illinois State Supreme Court, have stalled for decades—ensuring that poor communities and communities of color still receive significantly less money."* Kaba and Meiners go on to articulate demands that laid the foundation for current calls to defund police and for #PoliceFreeSchools: *"Why not shift budgets from cops in schools to counselors, from building prisons to opening up additional spaces in free public colleges and universities? Instead of more militarized borders, why not ensure that all youth have access to meaningful, discipline-building co-curricular activities such as music, drama, art, and sports?"*

Absence of—and cuts to—education funding paralleling the growth of the PIC prompted the formation of groups such as CR in 1998 and 2001, as well as the California Prison Moratorium Project (CPMP), founded in 1999 by Craig Gilmore, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and others to advocate against new prison construction. In fact, as shared in CR's "Our Communities, Our Solutions: An Organizers' Toolkit for Developing Campaigns to Abolish Policing," released in October 2020, one of CR's first campaigns led by the late, great Rose Braz was in partnership with CPMP to stop a new prison in California through a divest-invest strategy to "shrink and starve" prison construction. Even though the prison was ultimately built, California abolitionists successfully halted the world's most aggressive prison construction project through this anti-

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Letter from the Editors

Beloved Readers,

What a year 2021 has already been and we are only halfway through. We welcome you to Issue 35 of *The Abolitionist*, our second issue of the year, with features on the defund policing movement and a return of each of our columns.

This issue was written, edited and printed at a time of transition and the continued fortification of grave inequity as we've entered the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the US reopening to "business as usual" as more people in the US have accessed COVID-19 vaccines this spring, the pandemic rages on throughout many communities, around the world, and inside and outside of cages. 43.3 percent of people in the US have been vaccinated (according to Our World in Data), supposedly slowing transmission rates, though testing sites have become more limited. UNAIDS reports that wealthy nations like the US are vaccinating one person every second, while the majority of poor countries have yet to administer a single dose, and continue to face critical shortages of oxygen and other medical supplies to combat the virus. Meanwhile, the US, UK and entire European Union are blocking poorer countries of the Global South acquiring access to the vaccine through the World Trade Organization.

According to the Marshall Project, by the beginning of June 2021, at least 398,623 imprisoned people in the US have tested positive for COVID-19, 248,099 of whom have recovered, with 2,702 reported deaths, yet the Federal Bureau of Prisons' adopted a policy in recent months of removing COVID-19 cases and deaths from reports. As a result, the Marshall Project has been unable to gather accurate data on COVID-19 in federal prisons, which have had the highest spread than any other institution. The Marshall Project has been able to report that 31,000 federal US prisoners requested compassionate release during the COVID-19 pandemic so far, while the Bureau of Prisons has only approved 36 cases. Based on the data the Marshall Project does have access to, California prisons continue to have the highest COVID-19 rates, followed by federal prisons and then Texas.

This time has been marked by the passing of so many people, particularly many movement elders. We are grieving the **passings of Linda M. Thurston** and former Black Panther and political prisoner **Romaine "Chip" Fitzgerald**, and include efforts to honor them both in **"Until All Are Free"** Political Prisoner Updates, and The Abby Throwback. May 2021 was the one-year anniversary of George Floyd's death and the rebellions that spread across the world in his name. We reflect on this past year of collective grief as organizing to defund police and dismantle policing programs burst into the mainstream in a **three-angle interview** for this issue's **featured reflective piece "One Year Later"**, with **Miski Noor from Black Visions** in Minneapolis, **Aima**, a UK-based youth activist who founded **All Black Lives UK** last year, and **Lara Kiswani** from the **Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC)** in the Bay Area. Additionally, **Andrea J. Ritchie** contributed this issue's **featured analysis** piece breaking down the origins of the defund policing movement and how its connected to the movement to abolish the entire prison industrial complex (PIC).

These two central pieces are accompanied by **a set of action-oriented articles and interviews** *with organizers across the US that explore in detail some of the robust anti-policing organizing our communities have been advancing this past year*. These pieces cover a range of topics from getting **cops off campuses** in K-12 schools and post-secondary education in a joint interview with **Black Organizing Project** in Oakland, CA and **Police Free Penn** in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to **data-driven policing** and surveillance-technologies, like the work of **Stop LAPD Spying Coalition**, or the organizing by **Stop the Sweeps PDX** and others **against Business Improvement Districts** and **Enhanced Service Districts**. We also include organizing examples to **decriminalizing weed** through the fight for cannabis legalization, and challenging and **replacing the '94 Crime Bill** with legislation created through a People's Process with **the People's Coalition for Safety and Freedom**. Together these grassroots examples demonstrate a range of creative and diverse strategies used and angles leveraged to resist policing and further the abolitionist movement. Noncoincidentally, many of these example campaigns touch on similar points and lessons for sharpening our organizing in our present moment and beyond. **We offer these articles as resources** for *understanding and strengthening defund strategies for abolition, and to enhance our collective resistance across cages and walls.*

As demonstrated in **the Movement Highlights** of this issue, and several of the features particularly "One Year Later," we see the global character of the PIC and its role in protecting racial capitalism, and we understand defunding as one of many abolitionist strategies. **For Critical Resistance, PIC abolition is an internationalist politic rooted in anti-imperialism and an anti-colonial vision**. Whether the struggle is defunding police departments and dismantling policing programs in the US, or resisting the ongoing occupation in Palestine, or against neoliberal austerity policies in Colombia, or standing up for each other when cops or guards brutalize one of us, CR will continue to fight alongside those working to eradicate the apparatuses of state violence on our journey toward abolition.

Our final issue of 2021, Issue 36 to be printed by December, will feature "Pathways toward Freedom," where we will explore different strategies for getting people out of cages inside and outside the US. We invite all our readers to help shape the content of our newspaper, by reviewing our submissions guidelines in our Call for Content on page 22 and submitting content for this issue or other issues to follow (Note: Our mailing address has changed!).

As always, we hope Issue 35 fuels your spirit and sharpens your tools for resistance, collective liberation and self-determination.

Onward,

Critical Resistance and *The Abolitionist* Editorial Collective ♦

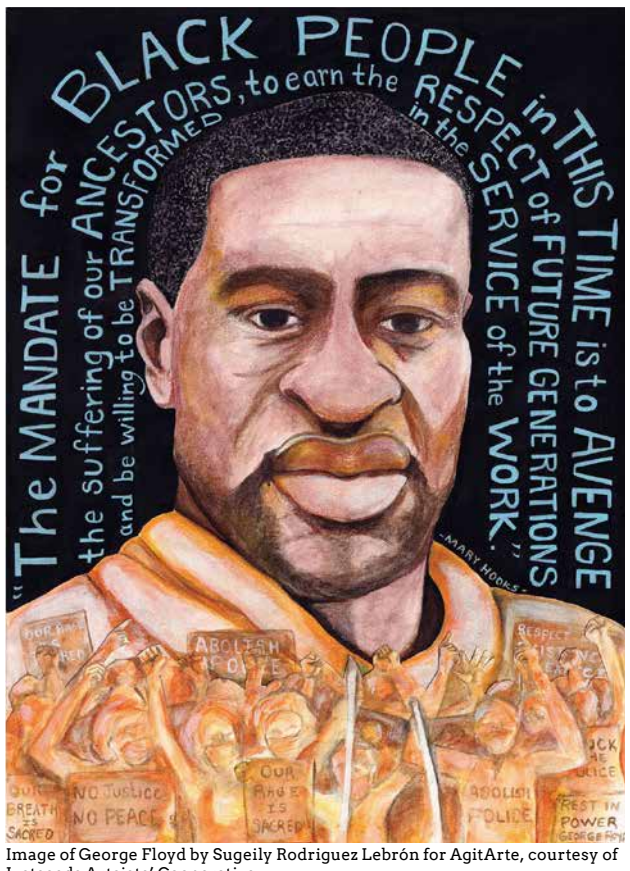

Image of George Floyd by Sugeily Rodriguez Lebrón for AgitArte, courtesy of Justseeds Artsists' Cooperative.

"Repair" by Molly Costello, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

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Critical Resistance (CR) seeks to build an international movement to end the prison industrial complex (PIC) by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe. We believe that basic necessities such as food, shelter, and freedom are what really make our communities secure. As such, our work is part of global struggles against inequality and powerlessness. The success of the movement requires that it reflect communities most affected by the PIC. Because we seek to abolish the PIC, we cannot support any work that extends its life or scope.

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expansion, anti-prison strategy, and California has not built a prison in the over twenty years since.

This campaign also led to the formation of Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB), an alliance of now over 70 anti-prison organizations continuing to lead abolitionist divest-invest work and budget organizing in California. In 2004 CURB helped found the No New Jails coalition in Los Angeles, which successfully defeated a measure to introduce a new sales tax to hire 1,000 more cops, while in 2010 CR Oakland members applied their "shrink-and-starve" anti-expansion strategy fighting prison construction to "chipping-away" at policing by victoriously defeating gang injunctions in Oakland, California through the Stop the Injunctions Coalition.

These strategies are in no way unique to California organizing. Across the country, New York City's Prison Moratorium Project fought to stop the construction of youth jails at a cost of $64 million, calling instead for investment in schools and youth programming, and an end to the school-to-prison pipeline. While not always organized explicitly under the banner of "defund the police," demanding divestment from all arms of the PIC has been a long-standing strategy for abolition, inherently connected to resisting the expansion and fortification of systems of surveillance, policing, punishment and exile, and of racial capitalism as a whole.

Explicit calls to defund police began to emerge in post-Ferguson liberation movements when Mariame Kaba penned a blog post in 2014 for organizers seeking solutions beyond expensive body cameras and fruitless DOJ investigations that outlined a list of non-reformist police reforms that could move us closer to the abolitionist horizon. The blog post, reproduced in Kaba's recent book, *We Do This Til We Free Us*, placed cuts to police department funding at the top of the list. In 2015, CR co-founder and former staff person, Rachel Herzing, wrote that the surest way to decrease police violence is to reduce police contact in an essay entitled "Big Dreams and Bold Steps Toward a Police Free Future," and described a campaign by California's Youth Justice Coalition to divert just 1 percent (roughly $100 million) from the Los Angeles Police Department budget and direct it toward programs and services for young people instead of youth suppression. Also in 2015, Oakland's Anti-Police Terror Project launched their Defund Oakland Police Department campaign, and in 2016 Chicago youth organizers fought to halt construction of a $95 million dollar police academy, demanding that these dollars be reinvested into communities devastated by cuts to education, mental health services, and subjected to organized abandonment.

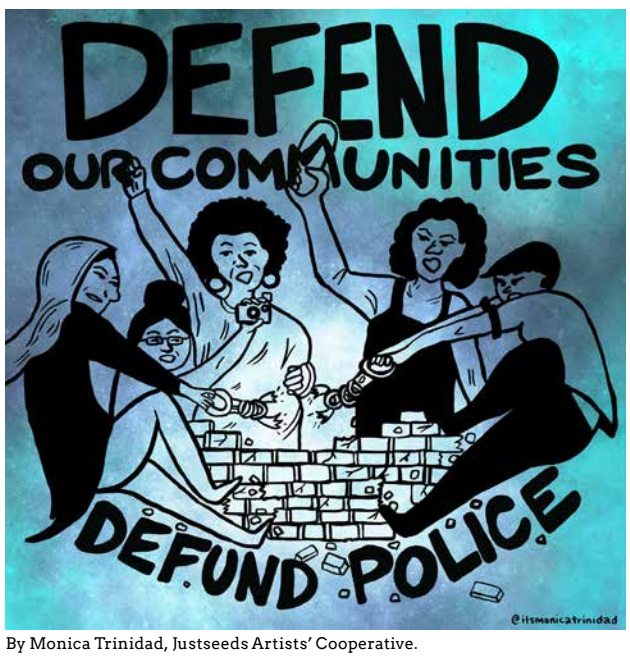
In 2016 the Movement for Black Lives released its Vision for Black Lives, featuring demands to divest from policing and invest in life-affirming institutions at its core. In 2017, Seattle groups led a campaign to "Block the Bunker," a $150 million new police precinct. In 2019, Interrupting Criminalization shared the 6Ds Until She's Free framework for addressing mass criminalization and incarceration of women, girls, trans and gender nonconforming people – calling for decriminalization, divestment from and dismantling of systems of punishment, and dreaming new approaches to safety. Organizers across the country, including in Minneapolis, have been fighting to decrease police budgets and resist increases in police force size, equipment, and power for decades.

WHY NOW?: RACIALIZED CRIMINALIZATION AND NEOLIBERAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

Over the last 40-50 years, criminalization has become the go-to response to every harm, conflict, and need, while simultaneously consuming the bulk of resources required to prevent, address, and repair the fallout of the persistent structural inequality and exclusion the US is built on. As Beth Richie and I point out in the 2017 report *The Crisis of Criminalization*:

Increasingly, surveillance, policing, arrest, and criminal punishment have become the default response to drug use and addiction, poverty, mental illness, youthful behavior and school discipline, and countless other social problems, real and imagined. Criminalization is seeping into virtually every aspect of society and every institution, including schools, hospitals, social services, public and private housing, and child welfare, dramatically increasing the number of people caught in the web of the criminal legal system, often with devastating consequences beyond the walls of a jail or prison cell.

The exponential expansion of criminalization since the 1970s and 1980s is no accidental or isolated phenomenon—it is a corollary to the economic policies of the neoliberal era that produce the city budgets that are the targets of defund demands. Each fuels the other: neoliberal policies gut the social safety net and loot the commons for private profit, causing widespread unemployment, poverty, and homelessness. The fallout of these economic policies is met with increased criminalization, requiring more and more police and pushing more and more people into jails and prisons. The costs of criminalization are then in turn used to justify further cuts to social programs and basic infrastructure, and the cycle continues.



By Monica Trinidad, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

Epicenter Chicago, a report I drafted in partnership with Black Lives Matter Chicago and Political Research Associates, quotes Ruth Wilson Gilmore's observation that the rise of the neoliberal state has "depended on mass criminalization to mark certain people as ineligible for, as well as undeserving of, social programs." The report goes on to note that *"criminalization serves as a shield behind which neoliberal agendas can advance, hidden behind universally palatable messages of 'fighting crime' and creating 'safer neighborhoods,' while simultaneously diverting resources from meeting community needs, and effectively undermining arguments for change with the specter of increased violence, crime, and harm to those deemed both 'innocent,' and 'deserving.'"* These patterns have been glaringly apparent in cycles of debate around defund demands, in which opponents have raised the (frequently racialized) specter of unchecked violence and crime—fueled by deprivation and increasing desperation—as a reason to continue to siphon desperately needed resources into police budgets even as ever more drastic cuts are made to violence prevention and intervention programs and infrastructure to meet basic needs. They are also apparent in the context of pandemic recovery – as documented in the COVID-19 Policing Project's recent report, *Divesting from Policing and Investing in a Just Recovery*, cities like Chicago spent significant portions of federal funds intended to support individuals and communities reeling from COVID-19 related health, housing, and economic crises on police. Cops across the country continue to line up at the trough to divert American Rescue Plan Act funds away from a just recovery and into their coffers.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?: DEFUNDING, DISMANTLING, REBUILDING

Defunding the police means investing the billions currently poured into policing and the PIC – and much, much, more money - into non-police community-based safety strategies, and into meeting basic needs like housing, health care, access to healthy food, safety from violence, youth enrichment, access to care for disabled people, childcare, elder care, and living wage jobs accessible to people regardless of immigration status, which all enable people to prevent, escape, intervene in, and transform the conditions that create violence and criminalized behaviors. As an abolitionist strategy, it is a process of creating, building, and resourcing tools, skills, relationships, and institutions that will create genuine and lasting safety for all. Centering human needs and collective care, **defunding the police is also an *anti-capitalist* organizing strategy**. By reducing the power of police to enact violence and working to ensure that survivors of violence – the majority of whom neither seek or obtain protection from police – have access to a multitude of options and resources to prevent, interrupt, avoid, and escape violence, **it is also a survivor-led *anti-violence strategy*.**

Defunding policing is far more than a budgetary exercise – ***it means striking at the root of the socio-economic and political forces* that have created a society that extracts resources from Black, Indigenous, migrant, disabled, and low-income populations, deprives them of the means to meet basic needs, infrastructure, and shared public goods, and then criminalizes them for struggling to survive.** It means more than just reducing and ultimately eliminating the resources spent on policing, but rather **shrinking the size, scope, equipment, and power of police departments** with a view to dismantling them, as well as the PIC that they fuel. It is a step toward divesting financially, practically, ideologically, and emotionally from policing as a strategy to keep us safe, meet our needs, or resolve harm or conflict –which it has failed to do. It is a strategy that brings us closer to the long-term goal of abolishing policing in all its forms. Because the goal is not to simply replace one form of policing with another in a different institution or different uniforms, it is to create safety and conditions under which communities can thrive without the threat of violence, exile, or punishment.

According to the Marshall Project, **defunding the police enjoys support among 80% of imprisoned people** surveyed in the fall of 2020, with levels of support of **up to 90% among Black imprisoned people**. Many incarcerated people surveyed named interventions that could have prevented the circumstances that led to their incarceration, including access to mental health care, drug treatment, education, mentorship, youth and violence prevention programs.

While defund demands continue to enjoy higher levels of support among Black communities and democrats than among white republicans, defund organizers are fighting backlash at multiple levels and from all sides of the political spectrum: a Democratic establishment deeply invested in policing – and the neoliberal agenda it enables - blaming support for cuts to police departments for electoral losses in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary; Republicans passing state laws to penalize municipalities who chose to cut police budgets; police fraternal associations working overtime to discredit defund organizers and maintain control over police functions and funding through budget fearmongering and closed-door contract negotiations; reformers undermining defund demands with policy proposals intended to recuperate police in the face of growing challenges to their legitimacy, entrenching power into policing by pouring funds into training and oversight in the name of expensive and ineffective consent decrees and "reimagining policing" initiatives; and leftists attacking defund demands as premised on a misguided investment in a rotten democracy and an insufficient

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demand on the road to abolition. Exhausted by a year of non-stop pandemic mutual aid, uprisings, ongoing police violence, voter mobilization, and budget advocacy, beleaguered but undeterred, organizers are banding together to share skills, strategies and successes through learning communities, networks, and fellowships hosted by the Community Resource Hub, Interrupting Criminalization, CR, and the Movement for Black Lives. Communities are fighting to implement task force recommendations to make further cuts to police budgets, hold back proposed police budget increases, generate additional revenue to meet community needs as documented in a recently released Revenue Generation Playbook, and to secure investments in unarmed non-police crisis responses, housing, health care, education, public transportation, jobs and more.

An indisputable win of the past year is the dramatically increased number of people who are grappling with what is needed to achieve genuine and lasting safety, and whether and how police play any role in that. An unprecedented number of people are engaged in conversations about police budgets, and how we allocate resources in the wake of the year that was 2020. Critical questions are being raised in the context of these conversations, including the strategic likelihood of success of appealing to the state to dismantle its own enforcement arm, the role of the state in centralizing and distributing resources to meet material needs, and how we create and build the multiplicity of relationships, programs and infrastructure needed to prevent, interrupt, and transform harm at the scale we need. Other strategic considerations include how to drive a wedge between police fraternal associations and the labor movement, what to do with all the cops who will be displaced by successful defund demands, and most importantly, how not to replace cops with intervention by other carceral actors and institutions such as the medical industrial complex or social workers who invoke family and other regulation systems. For example, Interrupting Criminalization recently released a report outlining critical questions to consider when evaluating non-police mental health crisis responses, including how to avoid simply replacing handcuffs and jails with forced medication and locked hospital wards.

Grappling with the questions of what defunding means, how to avoid pitfalls that lead back to policing in new forms, how to connect the defund movement to a larger abolitionist strategy, and how to navigate the shifting terrain, **organizers are pushing forward with new visions of safety, making deeper demands to defund police budgets and refund communities, to decrease police contact and decriminalize communities, and building power to diminish the legitimacy, weaponry, and influence of policing across the US. The demand is, still, defund the police.**

About the Author: *Andrea J. Ritchie is a Black lesbian immigrant whose organizing, research, litigation, and advocacy has focused on policing and criminalization of women and LGBT people of color for the past two decades. She is the author of* Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color, *co-author of* Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women *(AAPF 2015) and* Queer (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States. *She works with groups across the country to support campaigns to defund police and end police violence, criminalization, mass incarceration, and deportation through the Interrupting Criminalization initiative she cofounded with Mariame Kaba and with the Community Resource Hub. She has been learning from CR since she met Rachel Herzing in 2003 and attended the CR South conference. This essay is dedicated to the memory of Linda Marie Thurston.* ♦

Defund the Police

By Ross Cullen Plumb

Defunding the police is a movement to save lives, countless lives, like the life of Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old shot to death by police only seconds after they arrived on the scene. The stories are endless…Trigger-happy police and wild-west policing are the standard practice and can no longer be tolerated. Countless lives are being destroyed as those responsible hold themselves above the law.

We can no longer stand idle as people's lives are being thrown away, eaten alive by the ever-expanding prison industrial complex (PIC).

The courts are out of touch, unsympathetic, and outright corrupt. The policing system is not based in a love for the community and it refuses accountability, answerability, and responsibility. Prosecutors demand responsibility and accountability from everyone except themselves and law enforcement fail to turn over and even destroy critical exculpatory evidence, send informants on missions to get testimony or make up testimony and regularly engage in misconduct as part of the widespread "win at any cost" attitude.

By moving to defund the police, we move against exploitation, the greatest theft of our time. We don't have a justice system; it isn't about justice, it's about money and oppression. It's the sword and shield of systemic racist capitalism, completely illegitimate and for profit, hiding behind its few excuses for existing. The war on drugs, the war on terror, the war on crime—lies. Oh, you have rights—lies. Legal recourse—lies. Keeping many idle as the system continues business as usual killing our people, disenfranchising people as "offenders", expanding the value gap between have and have nots. How fast? 73 million arrests between 2009 and 2014. With thousands killed, the massive corruption of the police is beyond reform.

Look to the hundreds of documented examples of law enforcement's raw corruption, drug deals, rapes, murders. I'm still talking about the police [don't look the other way]. They are documenting insane overtime (One Seattle police sergeant last year made over $400,000), fabricating evidence, being on affidavits, entering homes without warrants, straight up robbing people, conducting illegal surveillance and planting guns and drugs on innocent people, all in the name of public utility and the general good. The police are using tanks, grenade launchers, and military equipment, making claims they are amassing

San Francisco high-school youth joined activists from San Francisco's housing, labor and immigrants' rights movements to paint in permanent yellow letters "Defund the Police" outside San Francisco City Hall on June 20, 2020. Drone shot taken by anonymous photographer, courtesy of Brooke Anderson.

these weapons to protect and serve us, but use them against us. Police officers are telling people to "relax" as they kneel on their bodies and asphyxiate them, then have medical examiners lie and another cover-up begins.

The police are not reforming while we cry for justice. They offer us crumbs and words to continue their true purpose, all the while gaining power, expanding "carceral technologies" and the PIC. Expanding corporations to embezzle public funds. Expanding policing from reactive to proactive. Expanding their political base and cabals. They will not relinquish their power voluntarily, they have too much [money] to lose… too much. *"As long as money economics is a factor over morals in decision making, regarding law, it will divest the citizens of rights for capital,"* Jason Balaski #814999.

We all have to overcome our fears. All around us there are signs that the systems over us are collapsing and something better is becoming more clear… Don't be afraid. Our visions for community support, mutual aid projects, and mobilizations of grassroots organizations must be made into clear demands to have resources and community support. We have to organize our hard push to defund the police and redirect funds toward human need. Decades of work developing community support, mutual aid, and transformative justice projects have already laid the foundation of organizations to which we can direct resources. These are the compassionate activists we should be joining, with grassroots tools already in place to bring the transformative change our communities need… Let's lock arms with them in solidarity. What do you say?

About the Author: *Ross Cullen Plumb is an imprisoned writer in Washington state. Passionate about social change, he is a white anti-racist, writing in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement behind the walls. Write to him at:*

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"Our visions for community support, mutual aid projects, and mobilizations of grassroots organizations must be made into clear demands to have resources and community support. We have to organize our hard push to defund the police and redirect funds toward human need."

One Year Later: Reflections from Minneapolis, Palestinian Solidarity, and UK Youth on George Floyd Summer of Global Rebellion

With Miski Noor, Aima and Lara Kiswani
by Molly Porzig

***"Daddy changed the world,"* - Gianna Floyd,** George Floyd's daughter, 6 years old.

On May 25, 2020, Minneapolis police arrested a 46-year-old Black man for allegedly using a "counterfeit" $20 bill at a corner store. The lethal position George Floyd was thrown into while being handcuffed by several cops kneeling on his back and neck killed him. As video of this common but deadly policing move went viral, just two months after hundreds of cities internationally mandated COVID-19 quarantine procedures, protests of all kinds spread worldwide. Fed up, we burst into a historic moment where abolition and "defund the police" entered the international mainstream. To delve into the complexity and dynamism of 2020's summer of global rebellion as a historic moment in the struggle for prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition, *The Abolitionist* Editorial Collective interviewed abolitionist organizers from three different geographical standpoints and focuses: One angle from on the ground in Minneapolis, one youth perspective from the UK, and a third on Black and Palestinian solidarity in the diaspora and Palestine.

First, we interviewed **Miski Noor** (pronouns they/them), a co-founder and co-executive director of **Black Visions**, a power and base-building organization for Black queer and trans communities in Minneapolis founded in 2017. Second, we interviewed **Aima** (they/she pronouns), a 19-year-old new abolitionist and activist based in London, who co-founded the organization **All Black Lives UK** last year. Finally, we interviewed **Lara Kiswani,** Executive Director of the **Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC)** based in the Bay Area, California, Palestinian organizer, long-time friend and comrade, and current Community Advisor of Critical Resistance (CR). We present each organizer's responses as a collective conversation, sharing their reflections alongside each other.

What work was your organization doing leading up to and following the death of George Floyd?

Miski, Minneapolis: Black Visions was founded out of learnings from the fourth precinct occupation in Minneapolis after police killed Jamar Clark in 2015. We realized Black folks deserve organizations that are sustainable, visionary, and strategic, to move beyond responding to Black death and trauma, and build long-term, visionary plans for a world in which Black life can thrive. Our coming-out campaign was around the 2018 Super Bowl. As the NFL took over our city, criminalization increased, especially of sex workers, houseless folks, and youth in an attempt to make Minneapolis look like a corporate utopia. This hindered access to hospitals and other social services. Cops checking IDs, undocumented folks were endangered. The day of the Super Bowl, light-rail tickets were around $1,500. No public transportation to work, to do laundry, or to get groceries. For our first campaign, we shut the light-rail down. We said, "If our folks can't use it, nobody is going to." The tagline was: *Divest from violence, invest in our communities, and imagine what's possible.*

Following, we got into a budget fight, identifying where our city's bloated budget needed shifting to invest in our people's safety. In 2018, with Reclaim the Block and others, we moved $1.1 million from the police department into the Office of Violence Prevention, an experiment with alternatives to public safety. Fast forward to George Floyd's murder, City Council and the Mayor propose cutting $8 million from police. We had been sharpening our leadership and lens around abolition, the state, and transformative justice, changing our demands. In 2015, we were asking for the names of cops and for tapes of Jamar Clark's murder to be released for a Department of Justice (DOJ) investigation. Now we know the investigation under Obama's administration created no changes and was a distraction. When George was murdered, it was really clear to us we could push the demand to defund the police. It took hold of people's imaginations across the world.

Since, we've been in a fight to amend our City Charter. In Minneapolis, the police are the only institution written into the city constitution, meaning the police are the only institution that are guaranteed to exist. It says, per x number of residents, there must be x number of police officers, about 800 cops right now. Amending the charter is a way to change the city infrastructure, to remove power and scope of the police.

Aima, UK: We started All Black Lives UK last year, as protests in response to the murder of George Floyd went global. We're a youth-led organization committed to the liberation of Black people in the UK. The UK's Black youth are suffering, and it's never really spoken about; the Stop and Searches, for example, especially targets young Black men. We focus on *all* Black lives, especially trans and queer lives, because Black trans women need to be protected, with so much transphobia and racism. We do community education and organize a lot of protests against police and racism in particular.

Since George Floyd's death and all the protests, the government cracked down and is trying to pass a new policing bill - the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. The Kill the Bill movement is opposing it in Parliament now. Introduced by Priti Patel, the bill allows police to deem a protest "too noisy" or disruptive and then stop it instantly. If you resist, cops can use any violence against you by law. You can also go to jail for 11 months for organizing a protest the police don't like. Throwing a tomato at a statue gets 10 years in prison. If you're not from the UK, and police stop you at a protest, they can deport you just because you're foreign. Then the bill also expands discrimination against the Roma community, requiring that they have "traveler" passports. Then there's "secure schools," which basically makes schools prisons. We've been organizing protests against the bill, and we delayed it in Parliament two months ago.

Lara, Palestine: Before the death of George Floyd, AROC was a lead organization with CR in **Stop Urban Shield** to defund the world's largest SWAT training and militarization expo. AROC joined to expose the relationship between policing, militarism, and surveillance, as it relates to both apartheid Israel and war-making more broadly. We knew our Bay Area corner stores had surveillance cameras, handing footage to local law enforcement. That beat cop was a friend of the store owner and was trained by Israel. That surveillance was also used by the FBI. Since our community understood the FBI and the Israeli military, we could use that. Since people most impacted know what it takes to shift our conditions, we ensured those most impacted by militarism and policing were at the forefront. We successfully defunded Urban Shield; those funds are now reprioritized and redistributed toward our communities' well-being. ***Defunding Urban Shield*** *provided our own community practice of solidarity as joint struggle, while offering a concrete win for the Bay Area and the world against racism, surveillance, militarism, and Zionism.*

We've also worked on **Block the Boat** to stop port workers unloading an Israeli ZIM ship. In 2014, Israel was bombing Gaza; a spectacle of

Photo of a Minneapolis protest. Courtesy of Black Visions.

Palestinian families and children massacred was all over the news. We decided to build with the port workers' union in Oakland, in solidarity with workers in Palestine. We built that coalition similarly to Stop Urban Shield, with deep anti-militarist principles around abolition. We built directly with ILWU Local 10 rank and file, a predominantly Black union, that historically chose not to unload apartheid ships, stood against the Holocaust, in solidarity with the Justice for Oscar Grant movement, and in this case in solidarity with Palestine. Through on-the-ground outreach for weeks, our youth and community spoke to union members about why to not unload that ship, and how a ship bringing in weapons from Israel impacted communities in Palestine and US Black and Brown communities. We got a statement from Palestine saying, "Please stand in solidarity with us, as workers." The union –a Black labor union that has historically stood up against US imperialism, capitalism, and racism—responded to that call and did not unload. This shows what's possible when you build relationships with communities who are impacted, who share struggles and fates, taking collective action together, to chip away at the systems that are harming us.

AROC has also worked on **creating alternatives to policing**. Through our partnership, CR's analysis of the PIC and abolition has very much informed ours. Wanting to translate that analytical work in a way we could bring to our Arabic-speaking base, AROC worked with Rachel Herzing (CR co-founder and long-time former member) to develop alternatives to policing in the Arab-Muslim community. *What does it mean for Arabs to be abolitionist? What does it mean for Arabs and Muslims in this country to stand against the PIC?* The language doesn't exist in Arabic. We didn't want to just come up with a document; we wanted to come up with practices. ***What could we actually do to embody an abolitionist worldview, and what could we do to put that into practice, to protect our own communities and also be in solidarity to protect others?*** We're still working on those practices, but we developed this document, translated into Arabic in 2017, and made it available again after the death of George Floyd. It became much more sought-after in 2020 because there hadn't been such frameworks in the Arab-Muslim community prior. It also was a building block for us: Now we do trainings for many organizations, are in conversation with businesses, with community partners around what it could look like to have alternatives to policing, to not call 9-1-1, and to not be in compliance with the FBI.

Right after George Floyd was killed, we did a series on the history of Black-Palestinian solidarity. If you weren't raised in that tradition, our organization's historical memory ensures that people understand the history of struggle. From its inception, AROC has been deeply committed to Palestinian liberation as a contribution to all

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movements against US imperialism and settler colonialism, a belief shaped by and informed by the Black radical tradition. Anything we do should also be in service of our collective liberation, and anything we do that undermines anyone's liberation actually undermines our own.

Aima, what was the response in the UK after George Floyd was murdered and rebellions spread around the world in his name?

Aima: The main response was anger, not shock, especially from Black Europeans. One thing we spoke about is the link between policing in the US and in the UK. A lot of us understand police violence and killings happen here, too. We, like everyone, realized that it's a global issue. George Floyd showed how much the death of Black people in the UK is ignored because British media likes to focus on the US and US racism but ignores the amount of anti-Black oppression in this country. We were marching for George Floyd last summer, but we were also marching for the Black people in this country who have died or been harmed by the government; the British media never focuses on it. A lot of the response in the UK to George Floyd's death has been about exposing anti-Blackness and racism in the UK.

The UK response has also been to resist police more. There's a great organization in the UK that is mobilizing regularly called the 4Front Project. When a young Black person is arrested, they march to that station, gather and fight against the police outside. All Black Lives UK has been protesting and going to the streets countless times. Again, the Kill the Bill movement is working to stop Priti Patel's bill that attacks our rights to protest, discriminates against the Roma community, but also increases the amount of policing we have. The fact that our protests made the government delay on whether they are going to pass the bill or not shows how much people are out on the streets and how much people are pressuring the government. They knew that if that bill had passed, it would not end well.

Lara, what are some of the roots of Black-Palestinian solidarity? How has Black-Palestinian solidarity been a part of the response to George Floyd's death and the rebellions in his name?

Lara: For a lot of us, Black-Palestinian solidarity didn't recently emerge; it's a part of how we understand Palestinian liberation. Specifically, we have an analysis of racial capitalism and liberation of Black and Indigenous people, in the US but also globally. The roots are quite deep, in terms of the dialectic between how internationalism is informed by the Palestinian movement, how the Black radical tradition is very much informed by internationalism, and how the Palestinian movement is informed by the Black radical tradition. The tenets are internationalism, anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism, a deep emphasis on base building, on grassroots organizing, and on cross-movement building locally and internationally. That is reflected in the Palestinian left, globally, in diaspora, and on the ground in Palestine. We trace it back to political prisoners in Palestine reading Angela Davis, how Malcolm X shaped and influenced the Black liberation movement in the US but also solidarity with Palestine, and how that shaped the Palestinian movement's understanding of Black liberation.

Today, the movements in the US against the PIC still inform the movements on the ground in Palestine and the ways people in the US understand policing, imprisonment, and militarism as global in character. Palestine offers a lens for everyday people—a window into internationalism and why it's important because of the relationship between US imperialism and the construction of the state of apartheid Israel. While over 400 police departments around the US get trained by Israel, solidarity means not making the fact that the Israeli defense forces come and train or bring police departments from the US to Israel the problem with police; instead, policing itself is the problem, like we focus on in our campaigns. That collaboration exposes the role of Israel in *global* policing.

The murder of George Floyd propelled newly formed commitments toward understanding anti-Black racism both within the Arab community and the US. The fact that the corner-store where George Floyd was killed was Palestinian-owned is not unique; many corner stores are Arab-owned. People moved very quickly to condemn that it was an Arab corner store or to speak out about anti-Blackness within the Arab community. While that's a sensical reaction, it distracts from a clear critique of racial capitalism, from asking the needed questions: *Why is it that those corner stores exist in the first place, and why is it that they are rewarded for calling 9-1-1 for a counterfeit bill? Why are corner stores deputized to become their own form of law enforcement in communities, and how are we rewarded and also punished if we don't? How has that been enforced and enabled and normalized in this country?* Beyond that: *What's the history of solidarity, movement building, and relationships between the struggles of Arabs, Palestinians, and other Black and Brown communities in the US and globally?* Many people made it seem like the first time Palestinians realized that we own corner stores, that we in many ways reinforce oppressive relationships, or that Palestinians are learning about policing or anti-Blackness—all of which is absolutely not true; it's ahistorical.

Mural by artist Walid Ayyoub, painted on apartheid-Israel's annexation wall in the West Bank, depicting George Floyd wearing a kufiya, a symbol of Palestinian resistance and solidarity. Photo from The Popular Chorus.

Particular to this last year, people were forced into a deeper conversation into what principled solidarity looks like and how we can take on campaigns that advance Palestinian liberation without undermining abolitionist movements in the US. So many more people finally ask about alternatives to policing, what defunding the police means, and what will be refunded.

In many ways, Black-Palestinian solidarity looked like solidarity period. In other ways, it was very particular because of our relationship to militarism. Our folks in Palestine marched for George Floyd, making direct connections between the Israeli occupation and what's happening in the US with another settler colonial state. During the Ferguson rebellions, Palestinians tweeted from Palestine: "This is how you deal with tear gas—we have a long history of dealing with tear gas; here are some tips." The 2020 rebellions were a little different; they weren't offering advice. It was more: "We, as Palestinians, are with you, in joint struggle. We understand what is happening to you deeply, and we're also learning."

Miski, since George Floyd's death, Minneapolis has become a beacon for defunding work and abolition. What are some challenges with this? What does Minneapolis teach organizers in other contexts?

Miski: Folks always pay attention to the East or West coasts, but there are lessons to learn from the Midwest. There's incredible organizing that's happening. We are not just fly-over country. Black folks live here. It's amazing to finally be heard and for folks to say, "Yes, Minneapolis! We see you." It's not: "What's a minna soda?"

Minneapolis is a poster child for police reform; every police reform has been tried. We currently have a Black police chief. Before, we had a queer, Indigenous woman. The very tactic Derrick Chauvin used to kill George Floyd, he and the entire Minneapolis police department were trained not to do, putting people in prone positions. It's hard being upheld as a model city. We are not special, not different from other cities; organizers in other places face the same challenges.

A couple of weeks before George Floyd was murdered, City Council was planning on giving that $1.1 million we divested back to the police. Literally less than two years, before there was an opportunity to see what that million could do. Following Floyd's murder, they made a public commitment on Prince's birthday to defund the police. People power and organizing did that. Organizers cannot take credit for the energy and the will of the people in the streets, but it is our responsibility to give our folks a framework to understand the moments where we can build collective power—to give a demand or a set of demands that can help understand that.

With the cops' trials, our city is being turned into a spectacle again, from having the National Guard descend on us, to the city and state governments deciding to spend $35 million when the trial started to militarize our city. All folks in Minneapolis want is space to heal, to create real safety with each other. The city is doubling down on violence over and over. We have three more trials during Black August for the other murderers of George Floyd.

Also, there are folks who are not abolitionists but who are trying to organize in this moment around the police, whether through reform, or community control, and so on. We have to have hard conversations with our communities about why abolition is the only way, to bring our people along. In these whirlwind flash moments, so many people pay attention to our issues, but many are white people, wanting to give money and ease white guilt. We're thinking about how we identify and dig in with Black and Brown people, poor people, disabled folks, trans folks, who are really feeling the brunt of policing, as the folks we build strategies with.

Lastly, leadership is hard. The left in general eats its own. Fortify yourself, your relationships; get clear with your team. Last summer would have been harder if we hadn't built alignment with each other around abolition and transformative justice and our practices.

Aima and Lara, has the defund policing movement reached the UK or Palestine? How, if so?

Aima, UK: The defund policing movement is definitely in the UK. We know how much money the government puts toward policing. Last year, Priti Patel announced a $16 billion funding package for the police. The UK's abolitionist movement is getting bigger, but the government increased the police budget. While the movement is growing, we haven't won any major changes yet. There are a lot of community groups, for example the 4Front Project, who are in communities providing support and building alternatives to police, but still these areas are so heavily policed you can't get away from them. A lot of people want to defund and abolish the police, but we're struggling to actually have that conversation. There are some Labour Members of Parliament (or MPs) who have spoken to activists and agree with them. We're continuing to battle unsupportive politicians, but it's disheartening how our government is going.

A lot of the anti-racist and abolitionist activists and organizations in the UK right now are youth. The defund movement is very youth-led. Most of the organizations I speak to on a daily basis are youth, under 25. Leading this movement as a young person myself has been scary but very refreshing and inspiring. We've been doing a lot of education on policing to strengthen the movement, speaking publicly and writing, prompting people: *How can we feel safe when this system that we are paying towards that has so much money is not doing anything for us? The police were made to oppress us. They were never made to protect us. Why put more money into them? What is the point of having any police?* Now more people understand the defund police movement in this country. Social media has been a very big tool for us; we use it to push the abolitionist movement, especially during COVID.

Lara, Palestine: Where we can find some clear connection is with the Boycott, Divest, and Sanction (BDS) movement against apartheid Israel, modeled after the movement against apartheid South Africa. In many ways, that is a defunding campaign: It removes resources from that which is harming our communities and perpetuating social systems that continue to enforce racial and oppressive hierarchies, and then funding and investing in alternatives. Defunding as a direct term perhaps isn't as easily translatable to what's happening in Palestine, but divesting absolutely is, and reinvesting, understanding priorities differently. With BDS, the idea is for the international community to put pressure on Israel economically, politically, and culturally. BDS in the US pushes the US government to stop funding Israel $3.8 billion a year. Many are increasingly challenging the US backing Israel while it neglects investing in basic resources for its own communities at home.

What are some lessons from the last year that you think abolitionists should consider? What have been some of the most inspiring or powerful moments?

Miski, Minneapolis: We need strategies for all our enemies—from the white supremacists and fascists to the neoliberals and reformists. Discernment is a huge tool, sussing out what is strategic, what are the ways we need to build, with whom, where we can compromise, and where we have to stand strong. Sometimes it's convoluted and not easy to tell what is really for us and what is yet another trick. *What does it mean for our folks to call each other in, or call each other out? What does it mean to be able to hold the principled versus the unprincipled? The personal versus the organizational?* We all have to build our skills if we're going to co-govern. It's not just that we get to "freedom land," and we all know how to act, and we're all suddenly decolonized. How are we doing that work right now, as we're dismantling? That is actually how we build at the same time toward the world that we say we want to live in together.

"Sometimes it's convoluted and not easy to tell what is really for us and what is yet another trick. *What does it mean for our folks to call each other in, or call each other out? What does it mean to be able to hold the principled versus the unprincipled? The personal versus the organizational?* We all have to build our skills if we're going to co-govern."

My shining light is George Floyd Square: I want folks to know that since May 25, 2020, George Floyd Square has been an autonomous, police-free zone. The police come to harass and terrorize folks, **but it's been the community that's held down that space.** There are multiple memorials, not just for George Floyd. Folks are fed and cared for each and every day. If there is interpersonal violence, it's the community that deals with it and figures out how to do right with each other. 612 Mash is doing the medic trainings and giving folks the skills we need to show up for each other. It's been a year since May. That's hard work, holding down an intersection for over a year with threats all the time from the City of Minneapolis to shut it down.

Another inspiring but really hard thing is when Daunte Wright was murdered, the way our community was able to spring into action. Most everyone's immediate needs were provided for in the first 24 hours. We have gotten really fucking good at responding to Black death and trauma. That's great for how we can show up for each other; we're creating these ad-hoc networks because the state's not, but it's tragic we're so good at it—the different mutual aid networks that popped up, the organizers that are stepping in. There's even more youth-led formations, which feels really amazing to see.

Aima, UK: This is a global issue. It's very important we all connect on a global scale and have conversations and educate each other about our countries, how we have organized, and how we can resist police and oppression. Another thing is you can't trust anyone. It's terrifying to say that, but I have never experienced so much racist hate in my entire life until last summer started. For example, we hadn't even had our first protest yet when *The Daily Mail* had written an article on us and put our names in it. My mom then called me saying that *The Daily Mail* was at my house threatening to leak my information. I've had to deal with a lot of death threats, racial hate, a whole bunch of stuff because I'm trying to fight for my rights. I know that I have a community that supports me, people to talk to who want the same and who are going through the same thing, but it's terrifying feeling like the rest of the country is against you. Black people are so gaslit, we can't even say that we find something racist without having other people calling us racist for talking about race. Plus, we have the SpyCops, who work to infiltrate activists. You always have to be on alert, know everything that's going on. The way some of these governments are moving, you don't know what could happen one day.

June 4, 2021 Block the Boat Victory. Photo by Brooke Anderson.

Also, take time for yourself. I never knew how much Black trauma there was that I had to witness and still experience, and it really takes a toll. I feel like activists need breaks sometimes, to realize that we can't always take control of everything. If you overextend yourself, you will burn out and break down. It's no good having you not okay, watching what's happening and feeling like you can't do anything about it. I think that is actually the most important lesson.

The most inspiring moment was the first protest we organized, marching from the US Embassy to Westminster with over 20,000 people in London. I didn't realize how many people felt the same way, not until that moment. It made me feel like I wasn't alone as a Black woman in the UK. I felt I actually had people who cared about my life, that my life mattered. I think that was the first time in the UK a lot of people saw how racist the UK actually is and the first time some people heard Black voices. That's why it's so emotional for me, because I've never seen that before, living in the UK. I had never felt comfortable speaking in public about racism. Then there were 20,000 people plus talking about racism in our country. It was a really big moment.

Lara, Palestine: Clear as day to me is **the need for base building**. *If we're not able to move our bases around these questions and build real solidarity in the communities themselves, to build across communities, to move people toward action, then our collective impact is limited.* The most hopeful moment was when I'd be in conversation with elders or youth learning about our shared legacies of resistance. When we did that political education with our members, many people were unaware of that long history of struggle between Black, Arab, and Palestinian solidarity. Pulling out archived photos of leaders—Malcolm X in Egypt, talking about the statement on Zionism from SNCC—and seeing that as part of our history, ourselves as part of that history, applying that to our every day.

Solidarity requires us to look into how we perpetuate anti-Black racism in various ways in our communities, and how we're collaborating with policing in different ways. Having hard conversations in the Arab community has been deeply inspiring for me. It wasn't because George Floyd died at the hands of police; it was the rebellions against the murder of George Floyd and the leadership of queer, Black, and Indigenous people organizing that made this a topic at every dinner table. Look what's possible when movements spark conversations and channel that energy into organized efforts. This is a wide awakening for so many people around an issue and a long-standing movement, and it is an opportunity to situate ourselves and today's work into something much bigger.

Looking forward, what do you hope for the defund policing movement? How do we need to grow or strengthen this movement right now?

Miski, Minneapolis: That we keep building. That we don't let "defund" get co-opted. For people to understand that defund is one strategy toward abolition. We also have to decriminalize. We also have to do harm reduction. We also have to decarcerate. Defunding policing is one piece. I would love for all the other pieces to be as popular or to have as much clarity. We don't talk about prisons enough—about detention, cages in general. Making these connections for folks in more real ways.

Aima, UK: One main goal for abolitionists in this country is the head of the Metropolitan police force leaving—because she is one of the spearheads of the policing of Black people, the increase of stops and searches. Another thing is to speak about policing globally; countries need to have conversations with each other. British people need to have conversations with the US, the US with British people; Brazilian people need to have conversations with people in the US—everyone needs to speak about this collectively together because even though we're in different countries, the same things happen to us. Every single day.

Lara, Palestine: Everything we do must be from an internationalist perspective. Everyone around the world understands it that way. Globally, people suffer due to US foreign policy and ultimately are committed to our liberation in the US; it is in service of their own. As abolitionists, as anti-racists, or as communities impacted by racism and classism, to see ourselves as part of a global movement against racial capitalism, policing, and militarism, we must learn from lessons around the world. We have a responsibility as people in the "belly of the beast" to do better, and to center people within prisons globally. We need to understand the anti-prison movement is inherently internationalist. In Palestine, prisoners, particularly political prisoners, are leaders of our movement. Their photos are plastered all over walls as heroes, informing the movement outside of the prison walls, developing strategies our people are accountable to. About 25 percent of our population become political prisoners at some point. Imprisonment is a huge part of Palestinian everyday lived experience. This offers people not only a look into Palestine but a deep critique of the US prisons, the ways it cages predominantly Black, Brown, and poor people, and how that is used as a way to quell social movements.

Lastly, a tried-and-true tactic of our adversaries is to pit us against each other. While our opposition constantly collaborates to build their power, we often fear that solidarity is taking something away. We must build our collective power by understanding solidarity as **joint struggle**, working in coordination with other movements as essential rather than losing something. Structural change won't happen if we work in silos, not only globally but in terms of movements. Housing justice is not separate from anti-policing work or immigrant justice. **Internationalism is a remedy**, an intervention, reminding us that we, and all our liberation, are bound. ♦

Growing Abolition through Police-Free Schools Coast to Coast: With Black Organizing Project and Police Free Penn

By Jackie Byers, Chris Rogers, and Krystal Strong with Dylan Brown

In June of 2020, in California the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) voted unanimously to pass the George Floyd Resolution, eliminating the OUSD Police Department from K-12 schools. This decade-long campaign against the "school district's special force" was led by **Black Organizing Project (BOP)**, a Black member-led community organization working for racial, social, and economic justice through grassroots organizing. At the same time on the East Coast, a new student formation emerged, **Police Free Penn**, dedicated to dismantling the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) Police Department, abolishing all forms of policing, and transforming community safety. Both BOP and Police Free Penn are organizing their communities to transform educational landscapes to build learning environments from kindergarten through college free of the violence of policing. **Dylan Brown**, from *The Abolitionist* Editorial Collective, interviewed **Chris Rogers** and **Krystal Strong**, members of Police Free Penn, as well **Jackie Byers,** Executive Director of Black Organizing Project to discuss their cops-off-campus work.

What sparked the creation of your work to get cops off campus and out of schools?

Chris: Police Free Penn extends from a petition made in May of 2020 during the height of the George Floyd moment, making a connection between Penn's complicity in the police state within this country. The petition got around 11,000 signatures in a week. We knew the petition alone wasn't going to advance the type of abolitionist praxis that needs to happen, so we discussed how we move from this idea of a petition as reaction—of saying this is what we want of the administration—to moving forward with strategies of direct action, partnerships with Black-led abolitionist movements on the ground in Philadelphia, and to think about our responsibilities and what is the ongoing work we must do.

Jackie: The inception of our campaign came about in a period of time when we started the Black Organizing Project (BOP) as an organizing space for Black people. While thinking about how we build multiracial movements, we recognized it's important to have strong Black organizing and grassroots organizing. The murder of Oscar Grant in 2009 and the subsequent uprisings against policing in Oakland were public and visible challenges to violent systems, yet there was also other less visible murders of Black people by police at the time. When BOP was thinking about campaigns to take on, our members were looking at issues of imprisonment and how many people have been impacted by the policing and punishment systems. Doing initial campaign research, we found a young man named Raheim Brown was murdered by the OUSD School Police. This kind of threw us for a loop. We had no idea that OUSD had its own police force. This led us down a path of doing deeper research and realizing that there was in fact a police force within OUSD along with a huge security officer system that was under the police chief's supervision, as well as OPD having interactions with young people on and off campus. This research raised the issue of how policed—especially Black young people—are in Oakland. It didn't matter how many police were on campus—having a policing structure was dangerous, and the normalizing of it was dangerous—and we needed to take it on.

What are some challenges to and victories in this work? What is the relationship of school/university policing to policing in other communities off campus? How has this relationship presented challenges and opportunities to your organizing?

Black Organizing Project youth march from Eastmont Mall to Youth Uprising to pass the George Floyd Resolution. Photo by Brooke Anderson, June 2020.

Krystal: For decades, universities like Penn—but Penn very specifically—have worked to normalize policing and construct policing as part of our common sense. It's important to reckon with the structural contradictions we have to navigate. When you look at highly resourced Ivy League institutions like Penn—which exist to reproduce the political and economic elites of the world and knowledge systems that justify and continue our current political economic systems—we see a contested organizing landscape. We are working against an institution that exists to incorporate, co-opt, and redirect dissent for the maintenance of the current structures of domination.

Then let's say you want to engage in fugitive study or some kind of insurgent practice within this space that structurally exists for the opposite. We now have to contend with the extractive and antagonistic relationship between the institution and the community. How does one engage with and act in solidarity with the communities that are ravaged by the institution? That's where abolition becomes not only a political objective but an ethical imperative, in order to even imagine being in relationship with the communities that are dispossessed and disenfranchised by the institution. Cops-off-campus is not simply about undoing the police state that is maintained by the university, but abolition is also about repair—the beginning of repair—for the ways in which we are complicit in these kinds of structural relationships.

"Abolition becomes not only a political objective but an ethical imperative, in order to even imagine being in relationship with the communities that are dispossessed and disenfranchised by the institution."

Jackie: There were many challenges and that's really important to underscore. Sometimes when you win a fight, people think "I'll just go do that too! You did that over a summer? No problem!" Then they get discouraged when they hit obstacles or when the system reverts back. It's critically important and powerful to go through the hard work of organizing—the struggles, the ups and downs, the ebbs and flows of having to do and learn from it, and make corrections. From this process, we learned reforms don't work and undermine the larger goal. Sometimes you think you're going to win something, but the compromise is too great. It's important to go for the larger vision. You're really tested during this process, because it's not only transformative in addressing systems and structures, but collectively and individually around our own struggles and questions.

For BOP, our demand was elimination—completely. We did some reforms along the way, but never planned to stay with reforms. In 2011 we did a campaign strategy and said in 2020 we will eliminate the department. That has always been the goal. Building out the organization, getting people involved, and trying to develop systems so we could collect data, we did do some reforms. However, we always were clear that was not the end goal—we had to eliminate completely not only the department, but purge the practices and address all forms of policing. That's where we're still working towards as we are implementing the Resolution.

"It's critically important and powerful to go through the hard work of organizing—the struggles, the ups and downs, the ebbs and flows of having to do and learn from it, and make corrections. From this process, we learned reforms don't work and undermine the larger goal."

One of the systemic challenges that emerged was police don't have to prove themselves, even though all kinds of harm has happened. They can kill people, do harm, and still the burden is on us—as a community—to prove that we have an "alternative" that will solve all of society's ills. That is always a frustration. Every time we've pushed for abolishing the school police force, the OUSD School Board comes back and gives us this impossible task of resolving everything. Even after we won the Resolution, they wanted a plan within six weeks to go forward with elimination. We pushed back. We said this sort of transformation is years in the making, and that we have to let go of an old model in order to put energy and investment into new ways of doing things, but that isn't going to happen overnight. That burden doesn't just lie with us at BOP, that lies on all of us, all of us in this movement, and all of our communities.

What challenges and tensions emerged from conversations with administrators and faculty school boards? How did you attempt to address and transform concerns that were raised in these conversations?

Krystal: Interpreting what is radical, what is abolitionist, and what is even change-oriented as opposed to performative has been a challenge, a huge challenge for campus organizing and organizing in general. I think about the abundance of diversity statements and solidarity statements that happened in the summer and early fall of 2020 and how that has become its own kind of industry of expressing solidarity and alignment with the struggles that have been happening. In addition to those performative acts, we also see a number of convenings that appear to be investigating, like task forces. Task forces are where real transformative shit

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goes to die. We, as Police Free Penn, have had to assess how to engage with those measures and institutional responses. For example, last year there were a set of hearings around campus police which was in part catalyzed by uncovering that Penn police tear-gassed the 52nd street community in West Philadelphia (10-12 blocks from Penn's campus). After this came to light we had to decide whether or not to participate in these hearings. This was an important crossroads common in this kind of work, where you have to decide if you are going to participate in something that is very likely performative.

That kind of cost-benefit analysis of whether or not something is abolitionist, whether or not something is transformative, is a huge challenge and something that we probably don't talk enough about or have enough of a theorization around: *What does it mean to be an abolitionist and to participate in reformist performances? What does it mean to be an abolitionist and be a participant in task forces, committee work, or the things that institutions offer as processes that they promise will lead to transformation or the possibility of transformation?* This is **a really big challenge for not just campus movements but broader social movements understanding how to navigate those openings, because they could be doorways or traps.**

Jackie: This is an entire cultural transformation. It's not just getting rid of one thing. It's a change in the way people have been thinking. Another one of the issues that came up for us was the police calls were coming from teachers and administrators. Even if we eliminate the department, if we don't address the folks calling the police then they'll keep calling 9-1-1 and a different police force will come in. During our campaign we not only had to talk about the elimination of the school police but address the adults on campus calling cops on kids. When we looked at the police call report data, it became clear calling cops was an easy default. That's where the Black Sanctuary Pledge came into play; we used this tactic of taking a pledge that says you will stand up for all young people, all students, all children, all people that are being interrogated or approached by cops in any form, that you will not call cops on kids, and that you will intervene on those things. We asked teachers to take that pledge. With a lot of courageous conversations, a great president of the teachers' union who was willing to work with their membership, and some awesome teachers inside the union, we were able to get teachers, educators and school workers to sign on to the Black Sanctuary Pledge. This was a huge win and other groups across the country are using it. It shows not only that we want to get rid of something, but also we want to create a sanctuary. People tailor it to what that means for their own school community. ♦

FEATURES ACTION

BIDs, Pigs, and Private Security: Resisting Business Improvement Districts in the Fight to Abolish Policing

By Kaitlyn Dey

In the midst of intensified organizing against police departments across the country, the decades-long project of enhancing both private and public police patrols in primarily downtown business districts offers us critical insight to the policing apparatus. In Portland, Oregon, and many other cities, business lobbying groups fund both public and private entities to harass, sweep, target, and cage our communities. Our work for abolition must incorporate defunding public police departments as well as the murky private partnerships that are woven together to legitimize policing and benefit those in power.

A growing coalition—anchored by **Stop the Sweeps PDX** in collaboration with groups such as Sisters of the Road, Right to Survive, Portland Metro People's Coalition, ACLU of Oregon, Portland Independent Business Bloc, Portland Democratic Socialists of America, Mapping Action Collective, and Western Regional Advocacy Project, among many others—is beginning to expose the classism and racism inherent in these private partnerships with the ultimate goal of demystifying, disrupting, and destroying these devious entities called **Enhanced Services Districts (ESDs)** here in Portland.

ESDs are Portland's local version of what are more universally known **as Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)**, publicly funded zones authorized by city governments, in which extra fee assessments are levied on property owners to fund services above and beyond those already provided by the city in the zone. Primarily these "services" work to criminalize and displace unhoused communities through increased policing, security, and surveillance. BIDs emphasize the "livability" and "cleanliness" of neighborhoods, but they only cater to the "livability" of a certain class by actively excluding unhoused people from public space.

> **"Our work for abolition must incorporate defunding public police departments as well as the murky private partnerships that are woven together to legitimize policing and benefit those in power."**

BIDs first emerged in the US in the 1980s, during the era of an emerging global neoliberalism. The rise of public-private partnerships, such as BIDs, coalesced with the era of massive disinvestment and subsequent privatization of public housing under the Reagan Administration. This was also an era of rapid expansion of the prison industrial complex (PIC). Acting as a continuation of the legacy of urban renewal, BIDs created a model for business owners to leverage public tax rolls to 'control' the growing unhoused populations in downtown commercial areas, many of whom were displaced as a result of prior urban renewal policies. Since then, BIDs have steadily transferred control over massive amounts of public space to cities' largest property owners. Today, there are more than 1,200 BIDs in US cities, spanning a few to over a few hundred blocks each.

In Portland, like many cities, the majority of ESD or BID funds go toward increased policing and security in public spaces. For example, Portland Business Alliance uses city funds to increase policing in the Clean & Safe District of downtown Portland by hand-picking four Portland Police Bureau officers to patrol solely within it. These cops are then supervised by a private security contractor. Portland Business Alliance also contracts with the private security company Portland Patrol Inc. to provide extra armed and unarmed security throughout the Clean & Safe District. ESDs directly contribute to a system in which over 50 percent of arrests made by Portland police in 2017 were of unhoused people, with the vast majority of these arrests for so-called quality-of-life "crimes": sleeping, sitting, and standing still. As police commissioner, the mayor is tasked with obtaining and reviewing reports on security officers' activities, including complaints against officers and investigations. A recent, award-winning city audit found zero evidence of any oversight or review process for complaints levied against ESD security officers.

ABOLISH BIDS & ESDS

Clean & Safe's decade-long contract with the city of Portland is up for renewal this year. In response, we are seizing this opportunity by organizing alongside organizations, small businesses, workers, as well as housed and unhoused people who live in the district to oppose Clean & Safe.

Clean & Safe is Portland's oldest and most powerful ESD, encompassing 213 blocks of downtown and Old Town and receiving $5 million dollars annually through property management license fees. The ESD is managed by Portland Business Alliance, arguably the most powerful lobbying group in Portland, which formed in 2001 as a merger between the Association for Portland Progress (former managing organization of Clean & Safe) and the regional Chamber of Commerce. This merger allowed them to use public funds to expand their reach across the city. Over the years, the Portland Business Alliance has been a vocal advocate for more police and more ordinances criminalizing homelessness, such as more "pedestrian-only" zones, contributing to increased police harassment of those who sit or lie down on public sidewalks.

By Art Hazelwood.

Portland Business Alliance has contributed to shaping the public narrative around downtown being dangerous and overrun by unhoused people via op-eds and direct influence over local media. *The Oregonian*, the state's oldest newsprint, is one of its top investors, and *The Oregonian's* publisher is the alliance's board chair. It also opposed many grassroots initiatives including universal preschool, pro-environment policies, and facial recognition technology bans. **No surprise, Portland Business Alliance has become a common enemy of many in Portland.**

In order to prepare for the contract renewal process, we are tapping into the growing resentments against Portland Business Alliance from across the political spectrum, meeting with various stakeholders to find common ground—from environmental groups to civil rights groups, lawyers, researchers, small businesses, and grassroots organizations. We've created public education materials including presentations to various organizations and zines. We are also surveying unhoused people in ESDs to gather firsthand perspectives of private security and police. We're using this survey as a tool to do outreach and begin building coalitions with our unhoused neighbors who are directly impacted by the violence of ESDs every day.

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FIGHTING BACK

We spent much of 2019 and 2020 assessing our strategy. **We want to make it clear that we do not want a reformed ESD. We want to abolish the districts entirely, including eliminating all security and policing within these districts.**

We worked to ensure we knew everything we possibly could about the districts as a means to expose them. One of the main challenges we faced during the Central Eastside formation is that ESDs are deliberately difficult to understand. We began submitting public records requests to the Mayor's Office, Office of Management and Finance (which oversees the ESDs), Council Clerk, and Portland Police Bureau. We sought to obtain any and all memoranda, communications, contracts, scope of work, complaints, etc. in relation to ESDs. During this process we learned the city does not keep many of the documents we were requesting. They attempted to charge us thousands of dollars to search for records which had no guarantee of even existing. We began placing pressure on the City Auditor's Office to do an audit of ESDs, since there had never been an audit in the 25 years since their inception.

Our continued pressure worked. In August 2020, the City Auditor's Office released an audit focused on the management of Portland's three ESDs: Clean & Safe, Lloyd, and Central Eastside Together. The audit confirms what we have long known: The City of Portland collects millions of dollars a year from property owners, only to hand this public money over to privately managed ESDs, which use funds to privately police public space—with nearly NO oversight or transparency. This audit is what helped us launch our current campaign opposing the upcoming Clean & Safe contract.

DEFUND, ABOLISH, RESIST

Meanwhile, our fight has gone hand in hand with local organizing to defund the police. In response to the 2020 uprisings nationwide and locally in Portland, Mayor Ted Wheeler announced a 19-point police reform plan. Part of this plan was a review of Portland Police's "core patrol services." This review is being led by the Portland Committee on Community Engaged Policing (PCCEP), the community oversight board created by Mayor Wheeler.

To begin this process, the Mayor's Office created its own presentation about core patrol services and potential alternatives. One of the alternatives proposed was Clean & Safe. We mobilized quickly to oppose it. We're noticing a trend of private policing filling in the gaps where public policing ends. We don't want policing to be replaced with policing by another name.

Alongside other groups working to defund the police, we flooded the public comment survey and town halls. Our demands included calling on the city to defund the police as well as rejecting Clean & Safe as a viable alternative. Furthermore, we have advocated to defund ESDs during the city's budget process. In addition to the $5 million in ESD funds, Clean & Safe also receives $25,000 from the city's general fund. We are urging the city to no longer provide public funds for ESDs.

"We're noticing a trend of private policing filling in the gaps where public policing ends. We don't want policing to be replaced with policing by another name."

As the city of Portland and its business lobbying groups attempt to regain the flow of tourism and commerce in the city after a year of the pandemic and large-scale protests, they are concentrating significant power in policing. Portland Business Alliance is pushing the city to begin ramping up to clear unhoused camps and strengthen the borders of Portland's ESDs. As ESDs/BIDs expand to meet desires of social elites in high consumer areas in Portland, so too do they in cities throughout the US. It is becoming increasingly necessary, as organizers who take up the call to defund local police departments, to investigate all revenue sources for the police, whether it be ESD/BID funding, private/state/federal grants, or the city's general fund. **The fight against ESDs/BIDs is intimately entwined with the work to defund and ultimately abolish the police.** Where ESDs/BIDs expand, people are fighting back.

RESIST BIDS EVERYWHERE

In response to the growing number of BIDs nationwide, many organizers have begun investigating, exposing, and ultimately organizing against these entities. In San Francisco, BIDs known as Community Benefit Districts (CBDs) have played a large role in increasing surveillance. Most notably, in summer 2020, public records exposed the San Francisco Police Department's use of the security camera network run by the Union Square BID to obtain footage of protestors. The Castro CBD is now considering a proposal to implement the same security camera network in its district to much opposition. Meanwhile, following a small cut to San Francisco's police budget in 2020, the city awarded a huge grant to the Castro BID for additional security—which now works hand in hand with local public works and police departments.

In Los Angeles, BIDs are notorious for their brutality and constant harassment of unhoused communities. In 2020, organizations and advocates, including Chinatown Community for Equitable Development and Ktown for All, organized against the contract renewal for the Chinatown BID. After rallying property owners to vote 'no,' they managed to get more 'no' votes than 'yes' votes. Unfortunately, since votes are weighted by property value, the contract was ultimately approved via multiple 'yes' votes by properties owned by the City of Los Angeles.

In Washington, D.C., the North of Massachusetts Avenue (NoMA) BID drafted an open letter asking the city to implement "pedestrian safe-passage zones" at an underpass where unhoused people were living. Within months, the city removed people from the underpass after putting up signs labeling the area a "pedestrian passageway." BIDs in D.C. have also played a large role in facilitating gentrification and displacement of Black residents. Current Movements, Empower DC, Serve Your City, SW Action, and others have hosted a series of events lifting the veil on BIDs in an effort to begin organizing against them.

Our fight in Portland is a part of a movement to divest and abolish all forms of policing and social control. Dismantling the structures that allow for the private policing and criminalization of poor and unhoused people is particularly urgent in this moment of community demands to defund police. Given the racist, oppressive, and ever-adaptive nature of policing in the US, we need to make sure that as public policing is defunded, private policing does not become the go-to solution.

Author Bio: *Kaitlyn Dey is an abolitionist researcher and organizer based in the Northwest. She currently organizes with Stop the Sweeps PDX and Western Regional Advocacy Project, fighting against sweeps and those who profit from the exploitation of poverty and public space.*♦

FEATURES ACTION

Weed Legalization and Defunding the Police

By Kassandra Frederique

Like many reform movements in the US, the movement to legalize marijuana* is neither monolithic nor unified. Marijuana legalization has the potential to either exacerbate racial inequities or to alleviate them. To realize marijuana legalization's potential as a tool of racial justice, reform efforts must be in service to an abolitionist agenda. Increasingly popular, marijuana legalization can be a tool to disrupt oppressive systems including policing, only if the kinds of policies we craft and promote deliberately reduce, to the greatest extent possible, the power of police to enforce the drug war and respond to substance use.

Drug arrests are the leading cause of arrest in the US, with one arrest every 20 seconds and one possession arrest every 23 seconds, according to a 2016 report by Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). For years, marijuana arrests were the most frequent - with one marijuana arrest happening every minute, on average. Police have used public marijuana use and even the odor of marijuana across the country as pretexts to stop, frisk, and arrest hundreds of thousands of predominantly young Black and Brown people, according to the ACLU. Marijuana has also been used to justify inexcusable police killings, such as the murders of Marvin Scott III and Philando Castille. Marijuana reform, then, has the potential to remove a powerful tool from the arsenal of police.

"Together We Grow a New Path" by Andrea Narno, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

However, marijuana legalization does not inevitably diminish the power of police or promote liberation for Black and Brown people. Some of the first laws passed, which were led by my organization, the Drug Policy Alliance, did not prioritize redressing the harms done to communities of color by decades of racist marijuana enforcement. As a result, thousands continued to be saddled with lifelong conviction records that impede their ability to access housing, employment, education, and public benefits. In fact, some of these laws, like Oregon's marijuana legalization initiative directed tax revenue from the legal sales of marijuana back into policing coffers.

Despite the fears of impacted communities, there was no explicit plan to transition people in the pre-existing, criminalized market into the regulated, legalized market, thereby undercutting those in the criminalized market and in some states banning their participation. These choices, though politically most viable, continued the tradition of building a regulated market at the expense of Black and Brown people in the US. Ending marijuana prohibition created a $40 billion cannabis industry that is largely white, with people like John Boehner - who has long promoted cannabis prohibition and criminalization - joining the market, increasing their

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wealth, and doing nothing to bring in Black and Brown sellers working in the pre-existing market, end ongoing criminalization, or repair the harms of marijuana prohibition. This is why drug policy reform must be in service to abolitionist agendas and movements, centering and led by Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other people of color. If we do not anchor fighting the criminalization of substance use, particularly marijuana, with these principles, legalization will intentionally bolster the police state currently killing Black and Brown people in the US and across the world.

Fortunately, organizers and advocates are demanding we legalize marijuana right; legalization can be done in a way that resists the prison industrial complex (PIC). First, legislation must include automatic expungement and the release of people incarcerated for marijuana cases. It must also address the vast impacts that stem from such arrests and end the continued surveillance and policing of people in our housing, employment, education, child welfare, immigration, and public benefits systems. Evicting people from their homes for suspected drug use or sales, drug testing job applicants and employees and firing them for a positive drug test, reporting students suspected of using or selling drugs to police, mandatory reporting of pregnant people who use drugs to child welfare services, deporting non-citizens for drug possession or sales, and drug testing public benefits applicants and requiring them to enter drug treatment in order to receive benefits all must stop.

Rather than directing tax revenues from sales to policing, money should be reinvested in the communities that have been most harmed by prohibition. Nor should the state be telling communities how to spend that money; rather, revenues should be spent on whatever local communities themselves identify as their greatest needs to repair the generational harms of a racist war on drugs, including community-level healthcare and harm reduction, crisis intervention programs, housing, food, and education. In addition, legislation must create pathways for people of color to benefit from the industry by, for example, designating business licenses for formerly incarcerated people and Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people.

But even the best marijuana legislation only makes a dent in the PIC. Police and courts have no place in addressing any drug crisis or drug-related harm. Since policing is a tool for racial and social control, marijuana reform must be accompanied by calls to decriminalize all drugs and to defund the police. Decriminalization, done correctly, is a parallel and complimentary abolitionist strategy to defunding, both limiting the power of police. All drug decriminalization – like that recently passed in Oregon—is grounded on the premise of taking power and resources away from police and reinvesting money into healthcare and harm reduction infrastructure. Decriminalization involves well-informed and humanizing education that combats and debunks the stigma of substance use, stigma that policing requires in order to legitimize caging, killing and controlling people. Moreover, decriminalization centers bodily autonomy and sovereignty, the pursuit of pleasure, self-determination, and the right to live freely and safely – all things, we note, that many white people and people with class privilege take for granted.

The drug policy reform and drug users movements inherently resist state-sanctioned and state-enacted death. We refuse to let police use a person's intoxication as justification for violence. We refuse prisons and police as responses to rising overdose deaths; we refuse overdose deaths as a crisis with no solution. We are a movement that emphatically insists that regardless of a person's relationship to drugs, we deserve to live and thrive. Marijuana legalization done right is important - but it's not enough. We need to decriminalize all drugs, decriminalize Black, Brown, Indigenous and poor people, and decriminalize the welfare systems and spaces with which people engage, from healthcare to housing to public benefits. We need to do it all walking hand-in-hand with other movements for liberation.

"Decriminalization, done correctly, is a parallel and complimentary abolitionist strategy to defunding, both limiting the power of police."

Kassandra Frederique is the Executive Director of the Drug Policy Alliance.

***Editors' Note:** *Critical Resistance and* The Abolitionist *Editorial Collective ask our readers to be critical of using the word "marijuana," as it has racist connotations in a history of criminalization, particularly used to criminalize Latinx and Brown communities. We understand the author, while critical and aware of this history, chose to use it in order to more precisely refer to the policy work happening in the fight for the substance's legalization and larger movement for drug reform and drug users' rights.*♦

FEATURES ACTION

Data-Driven Policing: Abolition Requires a Culture of Resistance

By Stop LAPD Spying Coalition

Policing is an old, racist institution that keeps renewing itself. The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) has long been at the vanguard of this renewal, spending billions of dollars to pioneer new ways to control and dominate Black, migrant, poor, and Indigenous communities. Throughout this history, the machinery used to police Los Angeles has been renewed and strengthened through the process of *reform*. This process is facilitated largely by people who might be uneasy with policing's optics but remain invested in its preservation.

At the same time that reformers have helped LAPD absorb shocks and strengthen themselves, our communities have resisted the white supremacist state's violence, including by rejecting reform. Today, more and more people see that reform is how police increase their resources and powers. Seizing on this recognition, we need to mobilize fiercer resistance to reform as it happens before it expands police power.

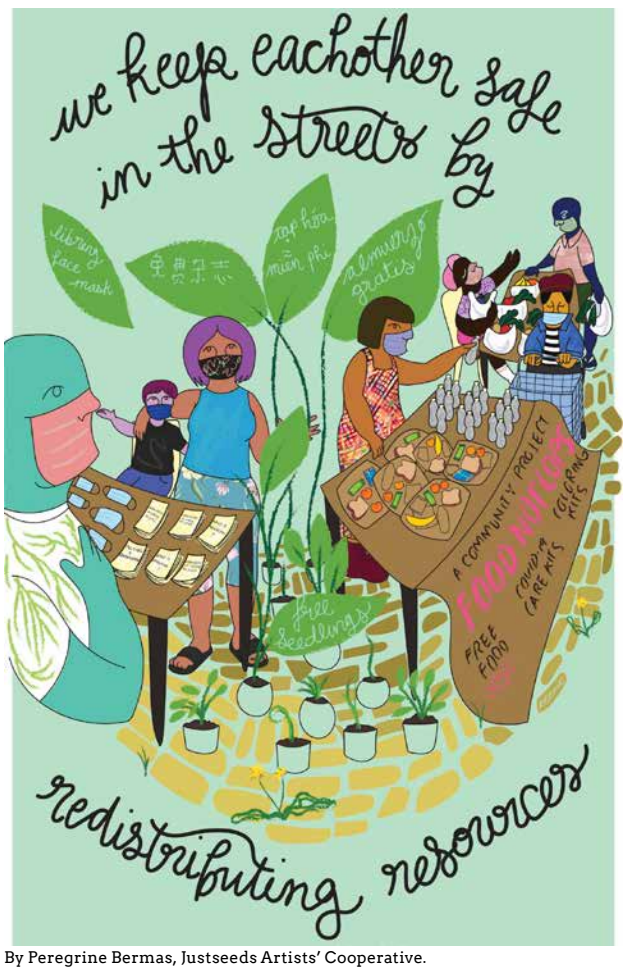
Data-driven policing is the latest shape that LAPD's war on our communities is taking. **The term refers to the collection and mining of mass data to determine which people and places will be policed**. These systems draw from a vast web of surveillance sources, data brokers, state agencies, and open-source information, putting this data at police fingertips. LAPD uses these systems to generate profiles of people, develop hotspot maps, and create secret hit lists of who to target. Many of these technologies and methods were developed for the US's imperial wars abroad, another example of local police adopting military weapons alongside tanks and grenade-launchers.

Today's data-driven policing builds on past practices of speculatively criminalizing our communities and policing Black and Brown identities through the white gaze. While police use of algorithms or artificial intelligence (AI) technology might be novel, the underlying purposes are not. Colonizers, imperialists, and police have long gathered data on the people they subjugate in order to monitor, target, control, or eliminate them. Before modern policing it was lantern laws, sunset towns, slave catchers, and Black Codes. Before LAPD formalized data-driven policing their terror tactics included Operation Hammer (using military equipment acquired for the Olympics to raid Black and Brown neighborhoods) and the Safer Cities Initiative (an offensive of draconian "broken windows" arrests targeting unhoused Black people in Skid Row).

Like many other aspects of policing that communities are working to dismantle, data-driven policing began as reform. In 2014, the national advocacy nonprofit Vera Institute published a report with the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance that described "predictive policing" as a new "paradigm" of police analysis and highlighted LAPD's Operation Los Angeles Strategic Extraction and Restoration (LASER) as "an example" of this trend. The report called on police departments to adopt "data-driven strategies such as hot-spot policing, problem-oriented policing, and intelligence-led policing."

When the Los Angeles community opposed Operation LASER, LAPD officials used Vera's report to defend their violence. But the community eventually prevailed: in April 2019, LAPD ended Operation LASER. One year later, however, after LAPD stopped using another predictive policing program, "PredPol," they also announced "Data-Informed Community-Focused Policing," a program weaving data-driven policing into the reformist pursuits of "community policing" and "data-informed" police accountability. LAPD explained that police would now use data mining to "implement systems that measure results, improve efficiency, and provide overall accountability."

Those reformist notions of "accountability" and "efficiency" are not what the communities who worked to end predictive policing fought



By Peregrine Bermas, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

for. We demanded abolition. But policing exists within an ecology where institutions devoted to reform marginalize community voices and use the people's outrage to reward police with money and surveillance powers. Once the community toppled LAPD's racist predictive policing, police reached for new reformist concepts to regain their footing. Now LAPD's justification for collecting mass amounts of data and harvesting it in their systems to make policing decisions is "transparency" and measuring "fairness, accuracy, and effectiveness."

To build a world without police, and to effectively defeat data-driven policing, we need to organize against reform. In addition to dismantling the things we reject and building the things we want, abolition requires opposing the process used to renew police violence. That means resisting those who advance reform and creating

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crisis for their work. As we wrote in June 2020, reform is a scam:

> **Decades of transparency legislation, civilian oversight, and self-auditing have done nothing to reduce the power and violence of the carceral state. Instead, they helped create a vast punishment bureaucracy that lends political legitimacy and social inertia to mass caging and police violence. It is absurd to hope that applying this same framework to the governance of surveillance technology will do anything other than expand the reach and harm of policing, much like how these reforms have long made the carceral state bigger, harsher, more durable, and racist as ever.**

Based in the Skid Row community of Los Angeles, one of the most heavily policed areas of the world, Stop LAPD Spying Coalition formed in 2011, at a time when reformers sought to "improve" national security surveillance by demanding better rules for it, for example criteria that would not overtly discriminate against Muslim communities. That reformist advocacy claimed to speak on behalf of an "impacted community" (Muslims targeted for surveillance) and the goal was to reduce that harm. We recognized that this reform would empower police everywhere to expand surveillance on everyone whose behaviors they deemed suspicious or dangerous, the very purpose of the Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) behavior surveillance program LAPD launched in partnership with federal officials. SAR was our group's first organizing target.

This pattern of reform arming police with new weapons repeated on a broader scale after the Ferguson uprising, with reformers urging that the answer to police killings of Black people was body cameras. We knew these cameras would be used for surveillance as well as police propaganda. Now, the policing industry seeks to link body cams to artificial intelligence and facial recognition, and the footage is often used to lock up community members. Over the years our communities have watched as constant reforms do nothing to reduce policing's death toll. Instead they keep renewing the violence. From Operation Hammer in the 1980s to Operation LASER in the 2010s, each renewal has left our communities with new suffering while also deepening our critique and our vision.

Thanks to abolitionist movement-building, more people today see the scam of reform, including many who previously championed bias trainings, body cameras, "community control" of police, and other measures that police use to sanitize their violence. While we are grateful that more people are embracing abolitionist critiques, this is also a dangerous moment. We are in a time when donors, universities, and large nonprofits are embracing the language of abolition. *Are those institutions really liberating their resources, or are they just helping the system absorb shocks?* The rise of the prison industrial complex cannot be separated from the advance of neoliberalism, including the growth of the nonprofit industrial complex within the same timespan. As the nonprofit industrial complex begins to adopt abolitionist rhetoric it will use this language to rebrand the scam of reform and increase faith in structures that must be destroyed.

By Molly Costello, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

Abolitionists are sometimes told that we only criticize, that we are too focused on dismantling and not building. Our work is building community, growing community power, and uplifting community expertise. *What are reformers building besides new policies and tools that are used to hunt us?* With surveillance and data-driven policing in particular, reformers benefit from pretending that police technologies are too abstract or complex for non-experts to understand. Our organizing demonstrates how wrong that is. Our people understand the harm of surveillance, which goes deeper than the privileged notion of "privacy" that legal reformers fixate on. Our people also know that proposals like oversight, transparency, and police self-auditing are dead-ends and that reforms like this are as old as incarceration. The reformers winning attention, buzz, and grant funding to push these proposals for surveillance are offering nothing novel. They act like their failed ideas are fresh because the technology is new.

Community accountability is a core abolitionist value. To be abolitionist means undoing one's complicity in harmful social processes. Abolition requires humility and critical thinking about every choice one makes. Otherwise, we are all at risk of giving more power to the system. We all need to ask: *what community base is our work accountable to? When it comes to data-driven policing and police surveillance, how many people took to the streets to demand police self-auditing? Who asked police to use data-mining for accountability and fairness?*

The opposite of reform is building a culture of resistance -- a richer culture of resisting policing. For us, this includes showing up every week in spaces like LAPD's "civilian oversight" body, while at the same time asserting that these violent institutions should not exist. While many see these spaces as places to partner with the police to improve policy, we use them as sites of direct action, collective education, and political agitation. We use the space essentially to cop watch, keeping an eye on police leadership as well as to protest them, to expose the façade of "oversight," to yell at them and confront their lies, to throw what we want in police faces. Sometimes that is literal. At a hearing in 2018, Sheila Hines-Brim walked up to the Police Chief to throw in his face the ashes of her niece Wakeisha Wilson, who had died in LAPD custody.

Our people know what they want: police off their backs, an end to police spying, infiltration, and data-gathering. Even when people don't say "abolition," the vision is there. Abolitionists must prioritize being deeply present in communities. We are inspired by the long histories of resistance to policing and imprisonment, particularly resistance led by imprisoned people. Our group has been devoted to finding the organizer in people from all walks of life, trying to sustain itself without establishment support. Taking inspiration from prisoner movements and our people's long history of resistance, we spend most of our time building community solidarity, taking care of each other, sharing knowledge, studying together, and strategizing collectively.

Policing is an intergenerational war that slavers and colonizers launched against our ancestors centuries ago. For just as long our people have fought back. No matter what we face – data-driven policing today, who knows what tomorrow – our power grows in the culture of resistance we build.

Author Bio: *Formed in 2011, the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition is a grassroots community-based collective in Los Angeles, CA working to expose the inner workings of police violence and end the incorporation of counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency tactics and programs into local policing. Our vision is the abolition of police surveillance, spying, and police infiltration. These practices violate our human rights, undermine basic democratic principles, and impact our political, structural, economic, and cultural lives.*

Website: www.stoplapdspying.org
Email: stoplapdspying@gmail.com
Social Media: @stoplapdspying ♦

FEATURES ACTION

From Cops and Cages to Resources and Repair:
The '94 Crime Bill and the Need for a People's Process

By Kamau Butcher, Kira Shepherd, Erica Perry, and Marbre Stahly-Butts

This September marks the 27th anniversary of the 1994 Crime Bill's passage, one of the most harmful pieces of legislation in modern US history. The flaws within the bill are both substantive and procedural—drafted by then Senator now US president Joe Biden in collaboration with police union leadership and without any substantive input or participation from the communities it would devastate. As the movement to divest from policing and cages gains momentum, it's vital that we change our investments to keep our communities safe, as well as the processes by which we decide how to allocate resources. **The People's Coalition for Safety and Freedom (PCSF)** is ***working to repeal and replace the Crime Bill with a community investment bill of our own***, because we can't rely on the architects of our oppression to legislate us out of it. We must take the reins to create the safety we deserve.

THE POLITICS OF ANTI-BLACKNESS AND THE CREATION OF THE CRIME BILL

Throughout the 1960s-1980s, shifting racial demographics of cities across the country were the backdrop for increasingly neoconservative policies of city governance and the 'tough on crime' approaches to community safety that followed. As severe community divestment and austerity budgets ravaged communities of color, these communities raised concerns over safety that stemmed from lack of resources and opportunity. The scope of policing and its impact on the public's perception of safety also expanded substantially during this time. The broken windows theory influenced a policing institution that maintained racist views of Black people as inherently "criminal." These views informed the federal government's push for punitive measures to surveil and control criminalized neighborhoods and communities.

By the time **the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (aka "the Crime Bill")** was drafted, law enforcement leadership had established dual roles of defining and maintaining "safety." **Joe Biden**, then Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, built a relationship with **Tom Scotto**, then president of the National Association of Police Organizations. At the time, the National Association of Police Organizations represented about 220,000 police department employees across the country. Biden worked closely with Scotto to draft the Senate version of the bill, with Scotto's initial demands centered around funding for 100,000 new police. Biden, Scotto, and law enforcement leadership knew then that expanding the police force would subsequently require more jails and prisons to imprison the people who would be stopped, profiled, and policed by these new cops. **Clearly, both Biden and the police understood the true function of policing: filling cages.**

When the bill was introduced, the core disagreement between advocates on either side did not lie in impact of the bill but in whether these were desirable impacts. An alert distributed by the Center for Constitutional Rights in 1994 warned that "the full impact of the Senate Crime Bill on the lives of poor people, people of color, immigrants, and children is shocking. It will execute or lock-up more people for longer periods of time, disregarding Constitutional protections, without having any appreciable effect on crime in our society."

Community members, legal advocates, and civil rights organizations had the foresight to understand how a bill collaboratively drafted with law enforcement would harm their communi-

Continued on next page

ties. Joe Biden and Democratic leadership rejected that foresight. During a 1993 Senate floor speech, Biden proclaimed that he was "not one of these wacko liberals who only want to look at the causes" when addressing community safety. He went on to say: "It doesn't matter whether or not they were deprived as a youth. It doesn't matter whether or not they had no background that enabled them to become socialized into the fabric of society. It doesn't matter whether or not they're the victims of society. I don't want to ask, 'What made them do this?' They must be taken off the street."

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE CRIME BILL

The Crime Bill has numerous harmful components, including expansion of mandatory minimum sentencing and the Community Oriented Policing Services, or "COPS" Program, explored more below. In order to more clearly reveal the link between policing and imprisonment, and how specifically the Crime Bill expanded both, we highlight a few lesser-known yet devastating pieces of the bill: Three strikes laws, gang enhancements, and immigration.

The Crime Bill enacted a slew of three strike laws, which force an automatic life sentence upon someone who is convicted of certain felonies if this person's record already contains two convictions. These laws are especially harmful to Black and Brown people, since racist laws and inequitable enforcement have resulted in increased arrests and convictions in communities of color. Moreover, shortly after the Crime Bill was introduced, dozens of states enacted three strike laws of their own to meet the conditions for increased federal subsidies. This increased incarceration rates of Black and Brown people substantially in certain states. For example, close to half of the people incarcerated for life under California's three strikes provision are Black.

Additionally, the Crime Bill asserted that someone deemed to be involved in a "criminal street gang" can have an additional ten years added to their prison sentence. Unsurprisingly, the Crime Bill's definition of 'gang' is so broad that a prosecutor could easily tack up to a decade onto someone's sentence for associating with a group of people who have engaged in a number of actions deemed "criminal," such as selling drugs and assault. Predictably, this tough-on-crime approach criminalizes people for their social relationships and life circumstances, which often stem from poverty and harsh social policies.

In addition to gang enhancement and three strikes laws, the Crime Bill made it much easier for the government to deport immigrants without green cards. Specifically, it contains provisions that take away immigrants' due process rights and allow them to be deported without a hearing if convicted of an aggravated felony. This provision was given more teeth in 1996, when Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act and Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, which together broadened the definition of "aggravated felony" and thus expanded the grounds for deportation. Together, these laws disproportionately hurt Black immigrants, who are three times more likely to be deported due to legal records.

The Crime Bill laid important political, financial, and cultural foundations for the prison industrial complex (PIC) as it functions today—entrenching police as arbiters of public safety, financially incentivizing local governments to enact laws criminalizing more people, and expanding the role of policing and prisons in 'addressing' social problems.

POLICING CAN'T BE REFORMED

The pattern of popular reform proposals in the wake of flashpoint instances of police violence is well-known and enduring: More diverse police forces and leadership, better training, more oversight, more community engagement with officers, so on and so forth. These reforms presume the legitimacy of the police as a conduit to public safety, pumping more resources into training, equipment, and payroll. These reforms feed, rather than minimize, the very root cause of police violence: Policing itself. For example, **the Crime Bill's "COPS" Program has granted over $14 billion to local law enforcement agencies since 1994**, subsidizing local police budgets nationwide. Of that $14 billion, **more than $1 billion has been allocated to the expansion of policing and surveillance infrastructure in public schools**.

Additionally, reforms that expand police resources lead to more militarized police. The 1033 Program, established in 1997, empowers the Department of Defense (DOD) to funnel unused military equipment to local police forces. Over $7 billion worth of DOD property has been transferred since the program began, with over 8,000 law enforcement agencies around the country enrolled. These numbers underline the size and influence of policing and draw stark contrast to the local funds allocated for community-led, non-police safety initiatives.

These large investments in policing have inevitably contributed to the continued and accelerated caging of our people. For example, in **Florida**, the total number of incarcerated people increased over 67 percent from approximately 58,000 in 1994 to over 104,000 in 2010. In **Wisconsin**, the total number of incarcerated people increased from just over 9,500 in 1994 to over 22,000 in 2019, an increase of over 134 percent. These data are staggering, though not unique. Since 1994, more people are being locked up for more things and for longer periods of time, despite there being no definitive proof that these investments in policing have actually made communities safer or reduced crime.

The reforms contained in the Crime Bill represent a template for many of the reforms that law enforcement have proposed since it passed. These reforms, like those passed in 1994, will continue to expand the PIC, while our communities fight for resources needed to create true safety.

SAFETY COMES FROM COMMUNITY, NOT COPS

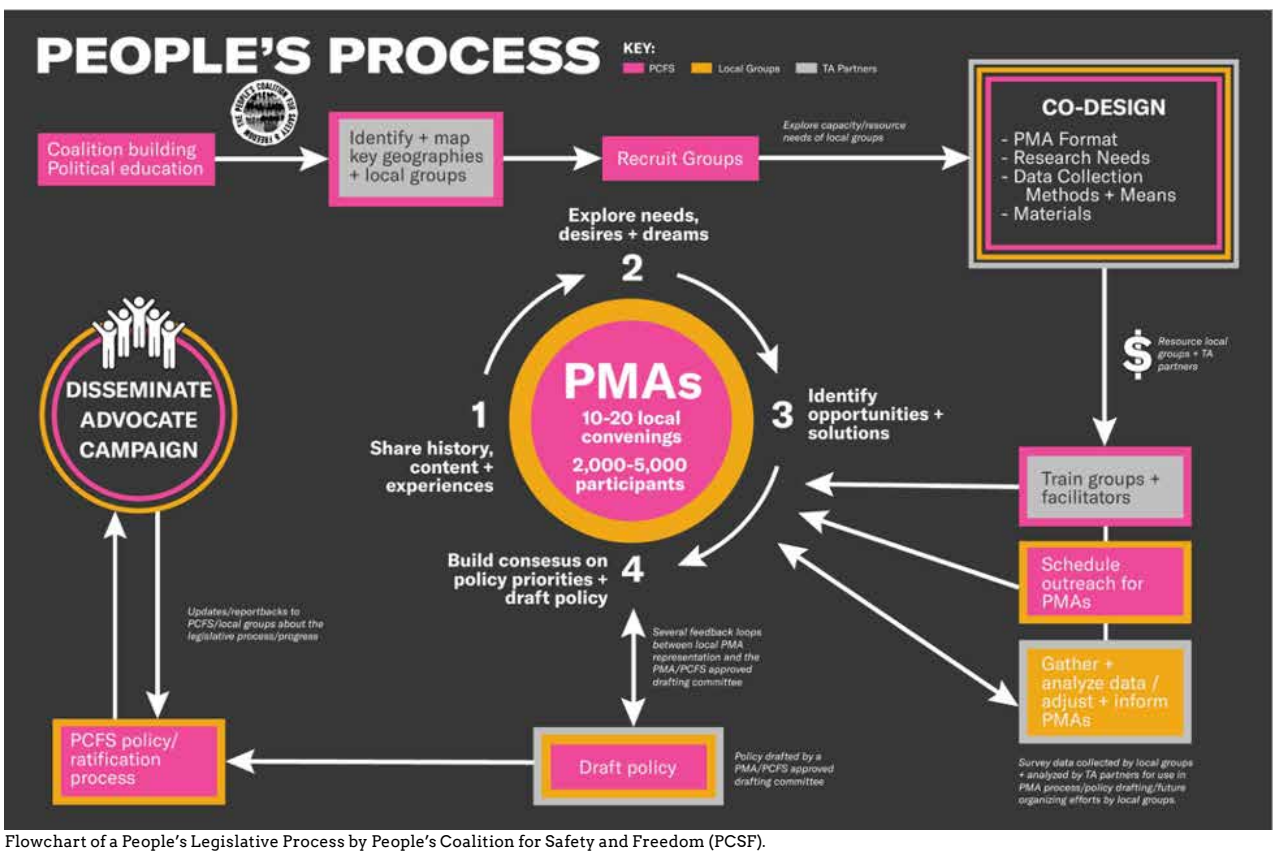
The safest communities across the country are not the communities with the most police—they are the communities with the most resources. The resource deficit fueled by policies that invest in policing, incarceration, and surveillance instead of health-affirming infrastructure has forced communities to exhibit creativity and imagination to create safety for themselves. **In Atlanta**, for example, **the Policing Alternatives and Diversion Initiative** conducts regular outreach to community members experiencing issues connected to mental health, extreme poverty, and substance use, intervening in lieu of police involvement to drive down interactions between the police and the public. This February, **Families for Justice as Healing** and **The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls** established the **Community Love Fund,** *which distributes recurring, direct cash relief to five formerly incarcerated women* in Roxbury, **Massachusetts** for one year. Andrea James breaks down why these networks, led by people directly impacted by incarceration, are so vital: "We are reimagining our communities and creating what different looks like by making investments led by formerly incarcerated women on behalf of the most vulnerable among us." These ongoing initiatives are examples of how we can build safety together more widely, if only we had the resources. Police budgets pull resources away from the infrastructures that we need, undermining attempts to reproduce these community safety initiatives at scale.

BREAKING THE CYCLE THROUGH A PEOPLE'S PROCESS

The federal legislative process lacks accountability, extracts power from Black and other communities of color, creates barriers to participation for the people directly impacted by the legislation, and siloes issues, leading to narrowly crafted solutions which fail to account for the way social phenomena intersect and compound. To overturn the harms of the Crime Bill, we must listen to those most impacted: People in jails and prisons and their family members, communities targeted by police, students who attend schools with school police, and communities impacted by divestments from the social safety net.

Beginning this September, PCSF will facilitate a national People's Process that will shift power to our communities, and collectively create the legislation we want to replace the '94 Crime Bill. Our goal is to establish new federal funding streams that invest in health-affirming infrastructure and resources that actually keep us safe, and to flip the traditional cycle of making legislation on its head. *The People's Process will use focus groups, digital outreach, surveys, and people's movement assemblies (PMAs) to solicit the expertise of those most impacted by the '94 Crime Bill.* It will rely on and strengthen existing grassroots organizations, networks, and other formations of community members fighting to curb criminalization and create safer communities. The conclusion of the People's Process will be a collaborative legislative drafting process, in which participating communities will draft the bill that will replace the '94 Crime Bill with new investments in our communities. We know what we need to create safety for ourselves, beyond cops and cages. Together, we can create policy solutions that center dignity and wholeness instead of punishment and disposability.

About the Authors: Kamau Butcher, Kira Shepherd, Erica Perry, and Marbre Stahly-Butts *are current and former members of Black-led, abolitionist organizations, as well as national movement lawyer and community networks. As individuals, their work and analysis have shaped and been shaped by such spaces as Bronx Defenders Organizing Project, Law for Black Lives, Common Justice, Workers Dignity, Peoples Coalition for Safety and Freedom and many others.* ♦



Flowchart of a People's Legislative Process by People's Coalition for Safety and Freedom (PCSF).

INSIDE-OUTSIDE FISHING LINE:

Repression Breeds Resistance:

Repression Breeds Resistance: Police Violence in ICE Jail

This last year, Critical Resistance has been rebuilding our work in New York. Since the beginning of the pandemic, CRNYC members joined the national call to #FreeThemAll and focused the work on community support and struggle to release as many people from ICE jails as possible. While contributing to different participatory defense campaigns with **Ni Muertas Ni Presas** for the release of Latinx women at ICE-contracted jails, CRNYC also formally joined the **Abolish ICE NY-NJ Coalition** and worked with other grassroots groups to pressure both New Jersey and New York governors and elected officials to use their emergency powers to stop any and all transfers of people from local law enforcement agencies into ICE custody, and end ICE-jail contracts.

As part of this work, **CRNYC organizers have been working with imprisoned people in ICE-contracted jails like Bergen, Hudson, and Essex County Jails in New Jersey.** Since the onset of the pandemic, especially since November 2020, imprisoned people in New Jersey's ICE-contracted jails have been demanding collective release and to be treated with dignity and respect. Many prisoners throughout New Jersey and beyond have protested through hunger strikes and organizing nonviolent disobediences and work-stoppages.

For this issue's Fishing Line, **we share a transcript of a phone conversation between a CRNYC member and an imprisoned person inside Bergen County Jail (BCJ) who witnessed an intense scenario of repression and state violence in early May, 2021**. We refer to him as "Abe" and also change the names of other people mentioned in the transcript to maintain their anonymity and prevent any retaliation. The transcript is a brief part of longer conversations between the CRNYC member and Abe. The transcript may be triggering to readers, especially people who have experienced or are currently experiencing similar situations. *We print it to **highlight the organizing and communication strategies between organizers inside and outside of cages**, and in effort to help **expose the connections between policing tactics in different contexts** by police and guards: from cage to cage and across Black, Brown, and poor communities.*

Abe: Yesterday around 11 o'clock, two officers at BCJ came into someone's cell harassing and searching them. They keep coming and aggressively searching and sexually harassing us. There's nothing they could find; we don't have anything. The guards got so mad and they ordered, "Everybody lock in!" The sergeant kept getting mad and decided to take down "Toussaint," a Haitian prisoner who didn't lock in. So the sergeant attacked him, and Toussaint tried to defend himself. The sergeant punched him and then three other guards jumped in and started attacking Toussaint as well. One of the guards had his foot on Toussaint's neck. While stomping his foot on Toussaint's neck, they started cuffing him. A kid, young guy, also locked up, saw what was happening and started yelling, "Yo, what are you doing?! That's not right what you're doing." He tried to help Toussaint. One guard started going for this other guy and they locked him up.

CRNYC: So someone risked also being brutalized in order to help Toussaint?

Abe: Exactly. Nobody is trying to see another incident where somebody dies, where a guard chokes somebody to death. You know what I'm saying? Nobody would ever want to see this again. So, we try to help each other out. It got bad. 11 or 12 guards started dragging the young guy off the steps. He was holding on to the rails, so his face didn't get smashed; he wouldn't let go. They were struggling, but the guards smacked him down on the floor. Then two other kids tried to help, and the guards arrested them too. It was wild.

They have cameras here 24/7, and I know they recorded it. I called the inspector general, and I reported it to a couple other organizations. The tape needs to be released and something needs to be done. This can't happen.

CRNYC: Are the people who were brutalized by police still in solitary confinement? Toussaint and the young guys?

Abe: Ya, they're all still in lock up. Six people they got in solitary still. They say the guys were resisting arrest. And they kept attacking us; they were pepper spraying everybody.

CRNYC: How many officers were using pepper spray?

Abe: 3 of them. It was bad, they came in wilding out. Eventually like over 25 officers came in, in riot gear. It all happened in like 15 minutes, from attacking Toussaint to attacking everybody.

CRNYC: And what about the guys in solitary, where are they from?

Abe: Two of them are Haitian, one is from Sierra Leone, and the other guys are from the Dominican Republic.

CRNYC: Thanks so much for sharing this with us, "Abe." Did you get injured in the process?

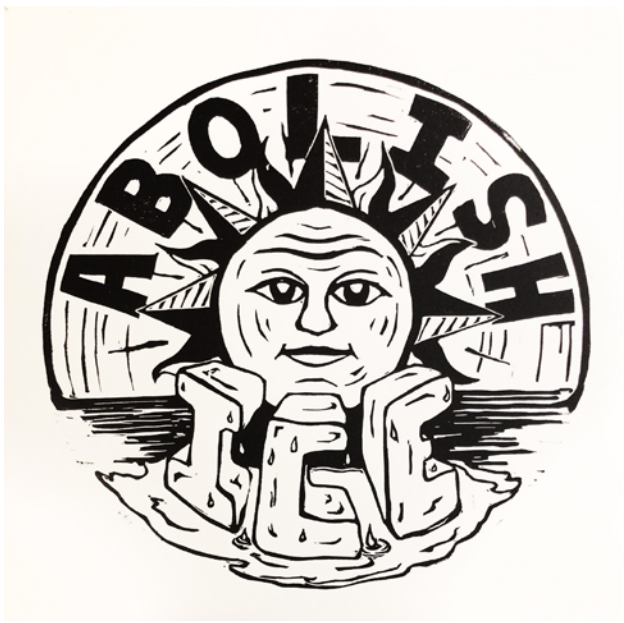
Abe: No, cuz when they said "lock in" I locked in. I've experienced a lot of stuff like this while inside, and so I kinda knew. But something needs to be done: they almost killed at least two people, choking Toussaint and then dragging the other guy down the steps. If he would have let his arms go off the rails, they would have dragged him to death. Even though I've seen stuff like this, this was another level. It was actually unexpected how intense it was. The way they all came in, it's like as ICE officers they thought nothing would happen to them. Something needs to happen. This should never happen to people, whether they resist locking in or help other people or what. It could have happened to me, it could have happened to anybody, out of nowhere. It's heartbreaking.

"Even though I've seen stuff like this, this was another level. It was actually unexpected how intense it was. The way they all came in, it's like as ICE officers they thought nothing would happen to them. Something needs to happen. This should never happen to people, whether they resist locking in or help other people or what. It could have happened to me, it could have happened to anybody, out of nowhere. It's heartbreaking."

CRNYC: It must have been very scary and traumatizing, so I hope you take a second. Call your family members, tell them how much you love them.

Abe: Yeah.

CRNYC: I think we should follow up with the inspector general as you did and demand the video be released. We should also demand the people in solitary be released. This is the same tactic that is being used in police killing people outside cages, so it should be released.



By Pete Railand, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

End of phone call

This was a gross, although perhaps common, incident of violence by guards, who became infuriated when their invasive search tactics did not result in finding any contraband. Rather than walking away admitting mistake or humility to an unnecessary, commonplace procedure, guards escalated the situation by pinning a young Haitian man to the ground using the same tactic that asphyxiated George Floyd to death. Understandably, one of "Toussaint's" peers bravely jumped into action to prevent another killing by a cop. In all, five individuals were put in solitary confinement -- all of African or Afro-Carribean descent. As one of our abolitionist elders reminds us, one of the major differences between police brutality experienced by Black and Brown communities on the outside and violence inside cages is that one does not come with social media videos or sensationalized news headlines. Prisons are increasingly deadly places and mortality figures are increasing with little to no awareness. According to a recent report by the Prison Policy Initiative, in 2018, **more than 1 in 6 state prison deaths (17%) were "unnatural," or preventable**, compared to less than 1 in 10 (9%) in 2001.

"One of the major differences between police brutality experienced by Black and Brown communities on the outside and violence inside cages is that one does not come with social media videos or sensationalized news headlines. Prisons are increasingly deadly places and mortality figures are increasing with little to no awareness. According to a recent report by the Prison Policy Initiative, in 2018, more than 1 in 6 state prison deaths (17%) were 'unnatural,' or preventable, compared to less than 1 in 10 (9%) in 2001."

Luckily, "Abe" and others inside immediately alerted organizers on the outside to draft a list of demands, alert local reporters, and launch a social media action targeting local elected officials and the jail administration. Abe has been in communication with the CRNYC member since late December 2020, so he and others called her and other organizers with Ridgewood for Black Liberation, Borderless Existence Initiative and

Continue on next page

American Friends Service Committee NJ. **Their demands include:**

1. *Immediate release of everyone inside BCJ;*
2. *Immediate release of those in solitary confinement, proper medical follow-up to ensure no severe trauma;*
3. *End the lockdown system;*
4. *All dietary needs must be met including for those observing the fast for Ramadan;*
5. *End random searchers and strip searches that border sexual harassment;*
6. *And release the video footage from the incident on May 3, 2021.*

While their full list of demands becomes public, Abe called CRNYC to share that their **primary demand is to be released from ICE detention**. Outside organizers continue to demand the release of everyone at BCJ and beyond, especially in light of recent threats later in May to transfer everyone out of the NY and NJ facilities to distant prisons. Since this newspaper went to print, Abe called CR to share that **38 people imprisoned under ICE custody at BCJ went on hunger strike once more in order to demand for their release.** He also shared that all the New Yorkers imprisoned at the facility under ICE custody were transferred en masse to other facilities three days before. That morning around 4am, Toussaint was also taken. Although Toussaint is from New Jersey, Abe says he was likely transferred to the Buffalo Processing Center in Batavia, NY. ICE transferred the young man who intervened to protect Toussaint to Krome Detention Center in Florida.

Transfers between caging facilities and indefinite detention are repeatedly used as de facto strategies by ICE to push people into despair and force them to "self" deport. As described by Abe, ICE repeatedly recategorizes and even lies about people's involvement with police and criminal legal systems to justify their mandatory detention and deportation under immigration custody, claiming they are a "flight risk" and "a danger to society." Critical Resistance understands that immigration enforcement is embedded in the racist systems of incarceration and policing in this country, and we need to fight against the entirety of the systems that disproportionately target Black and Brown communities whether immigrant or born in the US.♦

UNTIL ALL ARE FREE: POLITICAL PRISONER UPDATES

In this issue's political prisoner updates, we highlight spring 2021 news regarding several political prisoner cases, including honoring the life, legacy, and sacrifice of Chip Fitzgerald, who passed in March, followed by a few releases and victories, as well as health and legal updates, and calls to action inside and outside of prisons. This column is in no way a complete least of all political prisoner cases. As a prison industrial complex abolitionist organization, Critical Resistance fights for the release and ***freedom of all prisoners,*** *whether recognized as political prisoners or not. We resist the use of imprisonment as a tool for political repression and control across our communities.*

HONORING ROMAINE "CHIP" FITZGERALD

On March 28, political prisoner and Black Liberation fighter Romaine "Chip" Fitzgerald joined the ancestors. Chip was the longest imprisoned member of the Black Panther Party, incarcerated since he was 20 years old. In 1976 Chip first became eligible for parole, yet was still locked away for another 51 years. Continually denied adequate medical care, Chip suffered a stroke in February 1998 that left him partially paralyzed. California would still not release him. Chip was a parent, grandparent, uncle, mentor, and Black Panther. He was 71 years old when he passed. *Rest in power, Chip Fitzgerald!*

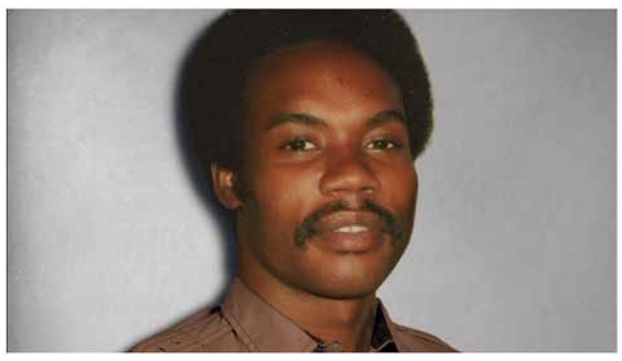


Photo of a young Chip Fitzgerald, from Freedom4Chip.org

From On Behalf Of The Family & Committee To Free Chip:

"Chip never compromised, though he continued to the end to seek redress for this egregious wrong by working with his lawyer, family, and defense committees to end his half-century nightmare of a slow death behind bars. For us the living, Chip's passing is a lesson to keep fighting the good fight. To give when perhaps it's hard to give. And to live when perhaps life seems so empty. Chip's life did not leave us without a clear message. During his final days in the hospital, the authorities felt the need to chain and shackle Chip to his bed. Despite the fact that he was hardly conscious, they saw this demeaning action as necessary. What they failed to understand is that you can neither jail nor shackle the spirit of liberation. May we all aspire to leave this same impression of daring to struggle until our last breath. And may Chip's stalwart example give us the courage to dare to win."

A statement from Chip before he passed, entitled: "Upon My Release"

UPON MY RELEASE,

I will welcome the warmth and laughter of my grandchildren. I look forward to their hugs and smiles. I will be the Grandpa present to soothe them through occasional scrapes after they show me their somersaults and expert bike riding maneuvers.

I will have the chance to witness numerous bird species and listen to their songs. I'll hope for a rain to nourish the vegetables and flowers planted days before, just as my mother used to do, and reach for the rainbow stretching across the sky after the rain. I will feel the mist on my face and rejoice.

I will experience the waves of the ocean reflecting the moon filled sky and the cozy breeze and graceful winds upon my skin. I will be outside in nature's healing environment as it soothes and comforts my body allowing my age filled bones to heal and rejuvenate in ways lost for most of my life. At the end of the evening, I will look forward to a soft bed and sinking my head into fluffy pillows as I curl up in soft covers and dream sweet dreams knowing I will awake to a new day of freedom.

I will have my eyes dazzled by the spectrum of radiant colors that only a city can sparkle. I look forward to enjoying the sights from a car window, recognizing the aroma of the city's possessions all converging together.

I hope to share love and laughter, the joys and hardships of life with a special woman. We will lift each other's hearts as equals to face a brighter tomorrow.

I will continue to appreciate the love and challenges of family. I imagine our dialogue will include our sense of community, our country, the world, our contributions and help to our neighborhoods and, of course, sharing my personal sorrows and hope. I will lead by example with spontaneous acts of love, compassion and kindness thereby demonstrating my belief in the transformation of others. I will enjoy volunteering in preschools and/or visiting the elderly in convalescent hospitals.

I will always give special devotion to finding peace and moving full speed to overcome the damaging impact associated with the daily screams of terror and absence of dignity that have engulfed my prison environment.

Most of all, I will be dedicated to the journey and opportunity of spending my remaining life giving. Giving of myself to achieve the many treasures of what it means to be a valued human being; embracing freedom.

FREEDOM

Red Fawn Fallis – The Standing Rock Water Protector was released from a halfway home in early March. From Red Fawn's statement: "I was born on the Oglala Nation and raised in Denver by my mother — a pipe carrier — and my grandmother. It was a spiritual home. But in 2016, everything changed. After losing both of these powerful women, my guiding lights, I went to Standing Rock to protest the Dakota Access pipeline (DAPL). As you may know, I was subsequently arrested and imprisoned for four and a half years. But today, I am finally home again. And despite the hardships, I would do it all over again."

Michael "Rattler" Markus – Standing Rock Water Protector Michael "Rattler" Markus was released from a halfway house on Friday, April 23. Imprisoned for his brave stand against the Dakota Access pipeline, Michael "Rattler" Markus is finally coming home! We thank Rattler for defending sacred lands and water.

Steve Martinez – NoDAPL Water Protector Steve Martinez has been released from #NoDAPL grand jury detention. After being imprisoned twice in contempt of court for refusing to testify before a grand jury, Martinez has returned home to his partner and community, after over 60 days in custody. Reminder: The government works to repress social movements and uses all tools it can, grand juries being an important way that the government works to silence activists and destroy movements.

Jalil Muntaqim – On March 30, a Monroe County grand jury declined to imprison former political prisoner Jalil Muntaqim. Jalil was facing felony charges for registering to vote and could have been sent back to prison, after recently being freed after being imprisoned for 49 years. We celebrate this victory for Jalil.

OTHER UPDATES

Sundiata Acoli – Long-time political prisoner Sundiata Acoli has a new support website coinciding with a revived campaign to free him. The State continues to deny Sundiata's release even though the 84-year-old is at elevated risk of contracting COVID-19 due to his age, and was in fact already hospitalized with COVID-19 last year, on top of suffering from other health issues. Sundiata has had a clean disciplinary record for more than half of the nearly 50 years he's been in prison. Sundiata's freedom is long overdue. We must continue to fight to ***Free Sundiata!*** For ways to support: https://sundiataacolifc.org/

Mumia Abu-Jamal – In early March 2021, Mumia Abu-Jamal was taken to a hospital and diagnosed with congestive heart failure and also tested positive for COVID-19. During his time in the hospital, Mumia was cruelly shackled and denied contact with his family, continuing a long history of medical neglect and cruelty towards Mumia. In April, Mumia underwent heart surgery and he needs continued support more now than ever. While the surgery was successful and there were no complications, even UN human rights experts agreed the unnecessary and degrading shackling of an aged prisoner is deplorable. Starting on April 23, multiple actions took place in solidarity with the campaigns to free Mumia and to free **Russell "Maroon" Shoatz**. Both are suffering from medical issues, neglect, abuse, and inhumane conditions of con-

Continued on next page

finement. ***Free Mumia, Free Maroon, FREE THEM ALL!***

Jamal Journal - Help print *Jamal Journal*! The restarted newspaper recently saw its first released issue, after it's last publishing in the mid-1990s by the uncompromising International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal (ICFFMAJ). **Donate at jamaljournal.blogspot.com**

Kings Bay Plowshares – A group of Catholic peace activists who broke into the Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base and carried out a symbolic act of protest against nuclear weapons, the Kings Bay Plowshares 7, have been prolific in documenting their experiences and thoughts while locked up. **Read more at kingsbayplowshares7.org**

Oso Blanco – Imprisoned by the US government for expropriating from banks to fund Zapatistas, Oso Blanco has released a new set of four greeting cards featuring his artwork. Proceeds benefit "children in the Zapatista zone of Chiapas, and kids on reservations here on Turtle Island." **Purchase sets of cards here:** https://burningbooks.com/products/oso-blanco-greeting-cards. Learn more about the Zapatistas at **schoolsforchiapas.org**

Ed Poindexter – The campaign to free former Omaha Black Panther leader Edward Poindexter continues to grow. Imprisoned since August of 1970, Ed Poindexter was a leader of a Black Panther Party affiliate chapter called the National Committee to Combat Fascism and was a target of COINTELPRO. Now, the movement to free Ed has erected a billboard calling for his freedom. Get involved, write a letter, and demand Ed's freedom. We raise our voices in solidarity to grant ***"Freedom for Ed!"*** http://freepoindexter.com/

Dr. Mutulu Shakur – Through the fall of 2020 and into winter 2021, New Afrikan political prisoner Dr. Mutulu Shakur has been battling both medical issues while imprisoned and legal struggles with his parole. Shakur went through a stem cell procedure requiring hospitalization in October and November, and then was notified of being denied parole in January. During this time, Mutulu contracted COVID-19, since his immune system was compromised from stem cell replacement. Supporters have petitioned for his compassionate release and are awaiting a district judge ruling while Mutulu attempts to recover from COVID-19, facing intensified isolation. In a communication shared by Family and Friends of Dr. Mutulu Shakur, Mutulu stated: "Again I want to thank you all. There are still some avenues for release to explore available and I'm requesting your support. I continue to hope that you are all healthy and using your wisdom to stay so. This virus is no joke, and clearly apolitical. Mud and Water, Dr. Mutulu Shakur"

Xinachtli, s/n Alvaro Luna Hernandez – Chicano political prisoner Xinachtli calls on all freedom fighters and liberation-movement organizations to unite to build the National United Front Prison Lives Matter movement. Xinachtli, s/n Alvaro Luna Hernandez, is the longest-held Chicano political prisoner in the US, targeted by the COINTELPRO-style police apparatus in order to stop him from organizing oppressed communities and from becoming a stronger symbol of resistance in the occupied territories of Aztlan, the US-Southwest once belonging to the Indigenous peoples of Mexico.

Send solidarity and thoughts to Xinachtli:

Alvaro Luna Hernandez*, #255735
W.G. McConnell Unit
3001 Emily Dr.
Beeville, TX 78102
*Address envelope to Alvaro, card to Xinachtli♦

HONORING LINDA M. THURSTON

Critical Resistance mourns the loss and celebrates the legacy of our Community Advisor Linda Thurston, who organized on the steering committee of the Critical Resistance (CR) East Northeast Regional Conference. Linda passed away on the weekend of May 22, 2021. At the time of her passing, she was the Operations Coordinator at the War Resisters League (WRL) where she had worked since 2007.

Linda will be remembered for her warmth, generosity, and grounding ability to welcome organizers into the movement. Within the varying organizations she'd been part of, she did the hard, consistent work of setting up the back-end systems and infrastructure that integrate and support the everyday participation of many within our movement. She also worked to connect people cross-locally, from local to national and internationally, often through her steadfast communications work and organizing.

Linda's contributions to the abolitionist movement are innumerable. Before CR, Linda demonstrated fierce commitment to the anti-prison movement including her work to free political prisoners. She was a co-founding member of the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal. As the Director of the American Friends Service Committee's National Criminal Justice Program, she coordinated the 200 Years of Penitentiary Project, organized with faith communities around the issue of prison abolition, and edited *A Call to Action* by the National Commission on Crime and Justice. Her commitment to internationalism spanned her support for the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1980s and her work with Amnesty International to abolish the death penalty during the 1990s, through her time with CR and WRL.

Photo of Linda Thurston. Photographer unknown.

We recognize Linda's role in helping to build CR as an organization. She was one of the coordinators of CR's Northeast Regional Conference from 1999-2001, which took place in New York City in 2001. The second of CR's conferences, CR East seeded prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition as a strategy. Geared toward sharing skills to make local organizing against the PIC more effective and prioritizing the participation and leadership of people most impacted by the PIC, this conference helped launch CR as an organization just two months later. Linda contributed to a wide range of essential tasks to move CR's work forward, such as her editorial support in CR's 2005 republication of *Instead of Prisons* by the Prison Research Education Action Project and her work in 2006 to support outreach and communications for the Campaign for Amnesty for Prisoners of Katrina. Over the years, Linda attended CR national retreats building with and guiding younger members, and she supported organizers through CR's New York chapter, regularly sharing her wealth of movement history knowledge. More recently, Linda served on the Community Advisory Board for CR.

During her long, impactful career, Linda was also the Center for Constitutional Rights' Coordinator of Education, Outreach, and the Ella Baker Internship program, and she worked with numerous organizations, including the Brecht Forum, Prison Radio Project, Funding Exchange, and Human Rights Watch. Her contributions were rooted in care for everyday people with a broad vision of liberation for all. In order to uplift some of her robust experience with the abolitionist political framework that she helped advance, we are reprinting an interview she did in 2009 with WRL.

Linda is survived by her mother Barbara Thurston; her brother James Thurston Jr. (both of Bangor, Maine) and his children Rachel and TJ; her sister Nicole Thurston Thibedeau of Rhode Island and her husband Christian and their children--Caleb, Robert Journey and Armani; her cousin Kristine Keeling; and many other beloved kin, mentees, and dozens of organizations and hundreds of activists to whom she gave so much.

In Linda's own words, when honoring Malcolm X only a few days before her passing, "What is remembered, lives."

With Love and Solidarity,
Critical Resistance♦

ABBY THROWBACK:
Prison Abolition, Political Prisoners, and the Building of Critical Resistance: Linda Thurston Talks Community

By Matt Meyer, War Resisters League

Editors' Note: *For this issue's 'Abby Throwback' we reprint a 2009 interview with the late, great Linda M. Thurston when she was the office coordinator at the War Resisters League national office. Though this interview was not in a previous issue of* The Abolitionist, *we thought it important to share with our readers some of Linda's leadership and contributions to building the abolitionist movement in her own words. We are grateful to the War Resisters League for letting us reprint this timeless piece. This piece was minimally edited for length. Long live Linda M. Thurston!*

Matt Meyer (MM): *You have a long history of working for political prisoners, and for the rights and freedom of prisoners in general, as well as for prison abolition. You've worked with a number of key regional and national organizations. Would you share some of those experiences?*

Linda Thurston (LT): When I became the director of the New England Criminal Justice Program of the Quaker-based American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), one of the big issues was a tendency to lock any prisoners who spoke out on any issues in solitary confinement, sometimes for years. These were clear cases of political repression—locking people up not because they posed any threats but because they were willing to fight for their rights, even as prisoners. Many folks whom I worked with then may not have landed in prison because of political activities, but they certainly got politicized once in prison.

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Partly because I was in Boston, where there was a very strong anti-apartheid movement and a very strong Central American solidarity movement, I learned about many people doing time because of refusal to cooperate with federal grand jury investigations. At the Red Book Store in Cambridge, I remember meeting some people—like Tommy Manning and Jaan Laaman of the Ohio 7 case—who are still political prisoners to this day. Kazi Toure, now out of prison and the national co-chair of the Jericho Amnesty Movement, was around in those days, along with his brother, Arnie King, who is also still doing time despite an incredible record of community support and work. I think there are some regional, cultural differences that have shaped people's political development differently. In New York City, for example, most of the political prisoners came directly out of the local Black Panther Party. But in Boston and later in Philadelphia, with the case of MOVE and the MOVE 9, I had a different framework. While I was working for AFSC, I began to learn more about political prisoners through my own writing and radio projects.

As an AFSC staff person, I was involved in the 200 Years of Penitentiary Project, which recognized Philadelphia's Walnut Street Jail as the first prison in the US. The campaign was a way of doing prison abolition work in the 1980s, and I got to dress up in my Sunday best and speak to all the Quaker groups, Methodists, Presbyterians, and United Church folks. From there, I worked with the National Inter-Religious Task Force on Criminal Justice. Those networks, with people like Episcopal Minister S. Michael Yasutake (founding chair of the Prisoner of Conscience Project) building bridges between social and political prisoners, helped create lasting relationships and commitments. Fast forward some years to the early 1990s, I ended up working with Amnesty International USA on death penalty issues.

I actually had, from the beginning, some very real issues with Amnesty International. In part, this was because Amnesty refused to name Nelson Mandela, or any number of other people, as political prisoners. I didn't understand at that moment the human rights movement's nuanced differences in definition regarding political prisoners, prisoners of war, and prisoners of conscience. Nor did I understand how amazingly egg-headedly legalistic and academistic the whole human rights framework could be. At that particular moment, between 1994 and 1995, executions in the US had almost doubled in one year. It seemed important to do that work with those resources, but it was one of the most frustrating experiences of my life. Growing out of the Cold War mentality, Amnesty began as a group that issued bulletins on behalf of prisoners of conscience, one prisoner from the West and one from the Soviet Union, trying to embarrass those governments by bombarding them with letters. While I was there, we did begin trying to get Amnesty to pay attention to the case of Black Panther death row prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. I could not stay at Amnesty for long.

The job I had at the Center for Constitutional Rights was coordinator of the Ella Baker Student Program, which I used to refer to as my job of training little "baby radical lawyers," young people we would recruit from various law schools who thought they wanted to be "movement" lawyers. Whatever issues they were eventually going to work on, it was crucial that they get an education in the history and the current way of looking at the role of prisons in society and the reality of political prisoners. I remember bringing in Attica prison rebellion survivor and representative Big Black, to come and talk to these law students after we'd shown them the film *Attica*. It was a strong way of educating and radicalizing people who could have a direct effect on the lives of prisoners.

MM: *What were and are some of the issues involved in building bridges between the people who do work around political prisoners and those who work around the prison industrial complex or prison abolition?*

LT: I think there are people who come out of a political context, who make many assumptions about categories such as "social prisoners."

Photo of Linda Thurston. Photographer unknown.

Some people who work on political prisoner cases have, in a general theoretical sense, the idea that prisons themselves are bad, but also that prisons are where bad folks are. If you stole something, you're a thief. If you killed somebody, you're a murderer. And that is what you are, that is who you are, and that is all you are. I really have a problem with that idea, maybe coming from my spirituality or maybe just my common-sense political analysis. Nobody is only one thing, and no one is only as bad as the worst thing they ever did. If that were true, we'd all be in big trouble, because we're all human. Some people who won't do work around social prisoners or politicized social prisoners have this perspective, and many people who do work with the general prison population do it purely from a social service perspective and aren't interested in working on political prisoner issues. The key is to see the connections between these struggles and not to pit them against one another. We've got lots of work ahead of us.

"Some people who work on political prisoner cases have, in a general theoretical sense, the idea that prisons themselves are bad, but also that prisons are where bad folks are. If you stole something, you're a thief. If you killed somebody, you're a murderer. And that is what you are, that is who you are, and that is all you are. I really have a problem with that idea, maybe coming from my spirituality or maybe just my common-sense political analysis. Nobody is only one thing, and no one is only as bad as the worst thing they ever did. If that were true, we'd all be in big trouble, because we're all human."

It also has now gotten way more complicated, because more and more political prisoners are spending vast, unbelievable amounts of time in prison, and not getting out. Political prisoners are dying in prison, so the issue becomes more urgent. At the same time, as I've said, vastly increased numbers of people are being sent to prison, also for long periods of time. In countries where the concept of "political prisoner" is recognized as a legal category, there may still be human rights problems and justice issues, but the complications and divisions between tend to be easier to deal with. It is agreed that there are political prisoners, and it is agreed that there are major problems in the prison industrial complex (PIC). Here in the US, an urgent task of the current political moment is for folks doing political prisoner support work to recognize the broader context of the PIC.

One place where we've seen this take place is around the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal. Mumia's case has brought so many people from different political movements and perspectives together. In general, though, with all the cases, we need to make more opportunities for all kinds of interaction and discussion. Not to be naïve, but these dialogues between those of us doing basically similar work are an urgent necessity. We've got to find greater ways to work together.

MM: *You've been active, since the beginning, in the development of Critical Resistance (CR), which in some ways tries to present a new framework about how to do some of this work. And you continue to help bridge the gap between work around prison abolition and around political prisoners. Could you describe the current national scene, around the time of the 10th anniversary of CR, and discuss how things have changed, and how they've stayed the same?*

LT: It may be a new framework and a new concept in this current iteration, but the notion of prison abolition is much older than the 1998 founding conference of CR. I actually didn't get involved in CR until after that initial national conference in Oakland, but I did attend the original conference. There were many folks at the first CR gathering who were overjoyed that people were talking about prison abolition again. We didn't know that over a thousand people would show up, with energy to build local and regional chapters. We clearly hit upon a moment when people were ready to work on issues involving the role of prisons in US life.

One issue that we've been dealing with and need to continue to deal with is the role of people who have been most impacted by the PIC. Our organizations can't only be made up of people who want to work on an issue. They have to include people who did time and people whose family members have done time. These folks must be in the leadership of the movement and the leadership of the struggle, because in many ways they can best understand and convey the complexities of the system on a local and national level. As we all need to step up and become active when that's needed, we also need to learn to step back and take leadership from the folk who haven't been in leadership. Some of us older folks need to learn that in regard to the youth, too.

Another thing that's fairly unique about CR in my experience is the way in which the regional chapters and networks reflect the national program as well as the specific political context in a given region of the country. We've been weaving a sort of web between the local networks and the national group.

There's also a great deal of attention in CR given to political education. Far too often in our movements we don't find out where people are coming from. If somebody shows up for a meeting, we're so glad that they're there, and we'll just give them some things to do and tell them when and where to go for the next meeting. But CR re-

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ally works to build community. I feel very connected to the local folks in the organization even though I work more with CR nationally. We are in a situation where someone can put a call out and say, "Yo, the sister who was at the meeting last night. Her kid just got arrested. Can any of you get to court?" And people do it. It reminds me of working with the groups in Boston when I was younger: that sense of community, of family, of connectedness. That feeling also comes up when I get emails from different political prisoner support groups saying, "So and so on the inside is sick. We've got to jump in here and deal with this."

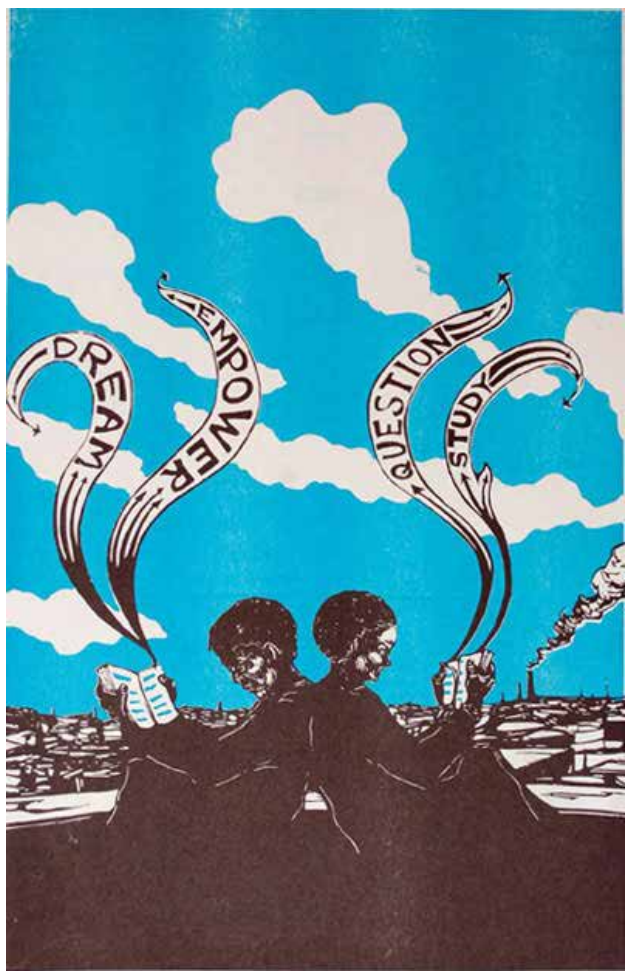
I guess I've come full circle after all these years, realizing that we need the political analysis, we need the political education, we need the strategizing, we need more bodies, and we need resources. But we also damn sure better remember that we're human beings and we need to support one another on all levels or we're not going to make it. Sometimes our failure is as simple as calling a meeting at dinnertime and not having so much as a pitcher of water at the table. If we're going to survive, if we're going to succeed, if we're going to win, if we're going to free folks, we've got to get better at doing the human piece of building movement by building community.

"Our organizations can't only be made up of people who want to work on an issue. They have to include people who did time and people whose family members have done time. These folks must be in the leadership of the movement and the leadership of the struggle, because in many ways they can best understand and convey the complexities of the system on a local and national level."

Interviewer Bio: *Matt Meyer, New York City activist-educator, is founding Co-Chair of the Peace and Justice Studies Organization and co-author (with Bill Sutherland) of* Guns and Gandhi in Africa: Pan-African Insights on Nonviolence, Armed Struggle and Liberation. *A longtime member of WRL's National Committee, he was a public draft-registration resister in the 1980s and served as WRL's Chair. He is author, editor, or contributor to nine other books, including the 2012 WRL co-publication* We Have Not Been Moved: Resisting Racism and Militarism in 21st Century America.♦

9971:
A Column on Abolitionist Study with Stephen Wilson

Editors' Note: For this issue's *9971* column, we share the second and final portion of a 2020 interview from columnist Stephen Wilson with his friend and comrade on the outside, Ian Alexander. This first part of the interview, printed in Issue 34 of *The Abolitionist*, focused on considerations for setting up study groups while imprisoned. This final portion of the interview highlights the importance of study in connection to political struggle.



By Pete Railand, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

IA: ***How do you inspire long term interest and growth in new, old, and potential comrades?***

SW: Really, it has never been about them trusting me because they haven't heard of abolition. It is about getting them to trust themselves and their communities to handle harm without calling the cops. Part of our task is convincing people that we have within us the resources to handle harm. *We can make us safe*. For so long, people have been told only the cops can make us safe. Only prisons can keep us from being harmed. People are starting to see that cops don't produce safety. All of the police violence captured on camera is making people question the supposed link between cops and safety. We need to do more to get people to see that prisons don't produce safety either. Because the quotidian violence of prisons is mostly hidden from the public, this task becomes harder than showing that cops don't make us safer. One of the biggest obstacles in abolitionist organizing behind the walls is convincing people that we can keep each other safe.

"We can make us safe. For so long, people have been told only the cops can make us safe. Only prisons can keep us from being harmed. People are starting to see that cops don't produce safety. All of the police violence captured on camera is making people question the supposed link between cops and safety. We need to do more to get people to see that prisons don't produce safety either."

IA: ***You have told me a lot about the importance of history, and seeing yourself as part of a tradition. Could you talk a bit about that?***

SW: If we don't know the movement history, if we don't know the elders and what they have accomplished, we will find ourselves stuck in old problems, spinning our wheels, and attempting to enact failed solutions. I love studying movement history and elder bios. I find inspiration. I find strategies and tactics I can adopt or adapt. I find confirmation. And that's important too. Sometimes, we wonder if what we are doing is worth it. Reading movement history and elder biographies convinces me that it is. There have been times when I have faced repression from prison officials and began to feel depressed. During those times, I reflect upon what so many others have endured and my spirit is comforted and emboldened. Reading about people like Martin Sostre, who was wrongly arrested and sentenced to nine years because he educated the people, keeps my head up during these periods of repression. Many of our elders have been physically, mentally, and emotionally abused, but they remained strong. History becomes a living tool.

Oppression breeds resistance. And often, resistance breeds more oppression. It is a dialectical relationship. Behind these walls, oppression can take many forms: Solitary confinement, physical assault, constant shakedowns, constant transfers (diesel therapy), destruction of property, denial of parole, and even frame-ups on new charges. The administration will employ many different measures to effect compliance. They don't want us to learn anything that will keep us from coming back to prison. They don't want us to learn anything that will enable us to benefit our communities. I have said before: A learned prisoner is an affront to the prison industrial complex.

IA: ***Beyond study, what about struggle? How do you decide when to jump into action, and when to wait something out?***

SW: How do I decide when something is worth it? Is it the right thing to do? That is the question. I don't tend to think about what the administration will do to me personally. Because the tactics I use aren't those that will give the administration grounds to oppress us, tactics that knowingly subject others to possible harm by officers, my main issue is doing what is right and alleviating oppressive conditions. Recently, I have been thinking about developing a criteria regarding when we implement action plans.

This new way of thinking occurred to me after a recent incident. We are not under normal operations. So our time out of cell has been curtailed. We are being let out 35-40 people at a time. We are given limited time to shower, make phone calls, use the kiosks, and exercise. Certain officers purposely allow us out late and put us in early. This creates problems for us and between us as we try to stay in contact with family and friends and stay clean. I attempted to address this issue with the unit manager. I thought we had come to a solution. But an officer did exactly what we discussed shouldn't happen in front of the unit manager. And the unit manager refused to do anything. Instead, he wrote a false misconduct against me to get me removed from the block. And it didn't end there. The next day, my comrade was placed in solitary for emailing people informing them of what happened to me. Their solution is simple: Whoever is complaining, remove them. And it works to produce a chilling effect upon others.

I began to think about how we could approach this official tactic. What counter-tactic would work? One thing I learned, and [Russell] Maroon [Shoatz] wrote about this many years ago, is that we need to develop hydras and not dragons. There is only so much space in solitary. They cannot lock us all up. Moving together is always much more powerful than moving alone. The incident made me think about deep organizing and assessing just how much strength we have and how much actual support. The deeper the support, the more likely the success and defense against official repression.

Personally, I have a great support team. Their support enables me to keep going. This is why I stress connections across the walls. While I have faced repression here, they are beginning to understand that they cannot harm me without consequences. People care. People will agitate. The administration knows if we have support or not. That knowledge shapes their actions.

IA: ***So the struggle leads you back to study. How do you help others bring those two aspects of the work together?***

SW: Generally, going into any study situation, my goal is to convey meaningful knowledge. I want people to learn things that will enable them to better understand the world and empower them to change it. Specifically, I do an assessment be-

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fore determining what text we will study. I try to figure out what participants already know about certain topics. I try to understand the different ways participants learn. This can only happen if I build relationships with potential participants first. My point is that study circles need to be participant-focused. Often, facilitators focus on the syllabus and getting through the texts. The focus needs to be on those in the group and facilitating understanding and application. If we get through a text and the participants haven't extracted anything meaningful, something they can apply to their lives, I feel we haven't succeeded.

"Generally, going into any study situation, my goal is to convey meaningful knowledge. I want people to learn things that will enable them to better understand the world and empower them to change it."

Out there, you have to talk prisons up. Not so inside. Prison is our environment, our world. So everyone inside has an opinion about prisons and policing. I don't have to create interest in these topics. It is already there. What I try to do is get people to see these issues differently. And many are willing to take another look. One good way to get started is by doing definitional work. Getting people to think about how they define certain terms is really about getting them to think about how they view the world. Two of our first definitions to explore are community and safety. How people define these terms is important. And often, we find that people change their definitions after study.

IA: *How do you combat reactionary tendencies, patriarchal behavior, homophobia and transphobia, misogyny, anti-Blackness, ableism, and other forms of chauvinism and anti-solidarity thinking and behavior?*

SW: Prison is a hypermasculine environment. Patriarchal thinking, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism are rampant behind the walls. The only way to handle these oppressive behaviors is to confront them straight up when they manifest. I do so by questioning the person's motive. We have sports teams inside. Often, teams are created through a draft process. The coaches often don't know whom they are drafting until it's over. During one volleyball season, a coach selected an openly queer prisoner. He didn't know it until the first game. He didn't start the prisoner until late in the first game. That is when he realized the queer prisoner was a great volleyball player. Players on his bench balked at playing with the queer prisoner and began to make homophobic comments. I walked over and asked them if they felt they were better players than him. They knew they weren't. I asked them if they thought they would become gay if he played on the team with them. They vehemently denied this. So what is the problem? They were there to win a game. The best player on their team happened to be queer. So what. When confronted with their bigotry, most prisoners, being unable to defend it, pipe down. When enough of us do this, things will change. And they need to. Homophobia, transphobia, and ableism are prejudices that are still acceptable in our society.

IA: *How have you navigated the guards?*

SW: Most officers stay out of the way. They see us studying and leave us alone. They walk by and spy on us, but they don't try to break us up. They allow us to pass out materials on the block. From the officer's perspective, our studying is a good thing. We are quiet and less likely to get into trouble, especially the kind of trouble that would require more work from them. It is the upper administration that is antagonistic toward study groups. They see us building influence and they don't like it. They are the ones who create obstacles to study, not the front line officers.

At Smithfield, we were able to do more because the administration actively recruited us to create positive outlets for prisoners. Fayette is very different. 180 degrees different. We do more work on our own. But I find that Fayette has created, through its oppressive acts, a hunger for knowledge among the prisoners. The organic desire is greater here.

IA: *Why do you go through all of this, comrade?*

SW: All I am doing is passing along the goodness that has been given to me to make the world better.

Author Bio: *Stephen Wilson is a Black, queer abolitionist writing, (dis)organizing, and building study groups and community behind the walls in Pennsylvania. At the start of 2021 Stevie was transferred from Fayette to Camp Hill, a tactic of repression as mentioned in this interview.* ♦

KITES TO THE EDITORS

THE 'ISMS

By Tasha Brown

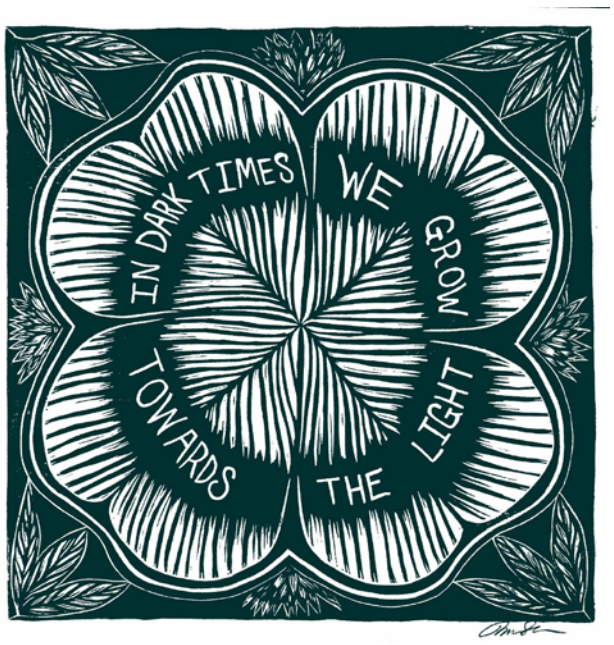
I feel like Sophia, the character played by Oprah Winfrey in *The Color Purple*: "All my life, I had to fight." Born on this physical plane with the double status "Black" and female, I frequently find myself defending my right to be…self. I've waited on the sidelines long enough begging for you to see me; now I am making you see me.

RACISM

In the words of Che Guevara, "A country that murders its own children and discriminates because of the color of their skin, a country that allows the murderers of Negroes to go free, actually protects them and punishes Negroes for demanding respect for their lawful rights as free human beings, claims to be a guardian of liberty?" Che was assassinated in 1967 and America still grapples with this contradiction.

Firstly, your "Black," "Negro," and "colored" terms to describe me were coined to strip me of my identity—did you not think I would find out? Race was created in an attempt to assert control. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr.: "The only race is the human race". So you can bury that lie along with your three fifths of a human, your lies about your Revolutionary War, your idolized presidents, and your organized religion. Your Revolutionary War was about some rich, American/Caucasian men not wanting to be taxed by the King. England (or "Big Pimpin") funded your expedition so you could come "civilize" the Indigenous people, aka brutalize, colonize, and exploit. Oh, and I almost forgot, use your religion for the purpose of the conquest, and enslavement for economic and political power. Whatever happened to the inalienable rights of all members of the human race? The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, Article 6 reads: "*Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.*"

Let us talk about your law. State and government agencies use colorable law to ensure slavery of another kind; imprisonment, American terrorism in the form of law enforcement, the thin blue line, have long plagued communities



By Meredith Stern, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

of color. You call it police brutality; we call it a norm. From hoses, K9s, batons, tasers, to 9 millis, they are weapons of mass destruction. California incarcerates and releases more people per capita than any other state, while Black women comprise the largest proportion of women in the prison and courts systems.

SEXISM

The attack on my womanhood isn't endemic. Woman. Wombed man. I am wounded. Man. Oversexualized, exploited, humiliated, and relegated to third class status. I am challenging gender violence and your decaying, timeworn standards. Your use of judgements designed to compare one person to another using artificial standards are played out. Light skin, pretty hair, big booty, and light eyes, anyone? Your sexist ideology that reduces me to my vortex is an 'ism.

CLASSISM

I'm talking to the upper 1% that controls 40% of this nation's wealth. Corporations. You are the beneficiaries at the expense of the rest of us. It is you that the Trump administration prioritized, and the poor disillusioned Caucasians believe he made "America great again". Tearing our families apart, us poor folk battle like donkeys, kicking each other. We need to learn how to buck like horses—back. Bacon's revolt anyone? Just make 'em fight each other and they'll never figure out who the real enemy is. To make America great would require redistribution of economic and political priorities. We could start there. There are no perfect solutions to end centuries of intolerance and injustice. However, what doesn't help is ignoring it or making excuses; we can't close our eyes and wish it away. Society itself must be reformed.

SOLUTION

I read somewhere, "Liberty is an individual responsibility". In other words, we must attain our own cognitive liberation by awaking from our mental state of lethargy. "Talk is cheap like day dreams". The fact that anti-Blackness has its knee on our necks does not absolve us of our responsibility. Our responsibility to form multiracial solidarity, our responsibility to educate ourselves and our children, our responsibility to call piss—well, piss. You will no longer piss on my foot and tell me it's raining. Underneath the perfume of pretty speech, I still smell urine.

Author Bio: *Tasha Brown is a youth-to-adult prisoner at Chowchilla in CA, doing 37 years-to-life for a conviction at age 15. She asks for readers to consider lending support for a commutation of her sentence www.gov.ca.gov/clemency. Write to Tasha:*

Tasha Brown X08560
CCWF 506-08-03L
PO Box 1508
Chowchilla, CA 93610

DEAR COMRADES AT CRITICAL RESISTANCE AND *THE ABOLITIONIST*,

First of all, I want to thank you for the material you sent. Along with *The Abolitionist* Issue #33, dealing with COVID-19 and other great topics and articles, I also read with great interest the 5-page pamphlet explaining more about CR's vision, goals and methods to organizing against the prison industrial complex (PIC). I like what I'm seeing, and look forward to learning more, and in time, taking a more direct and active role in organizing with you. I think I've always had some awareness of most of this, but I want to commend you for putting it all together and showing the connection between policing, imprisonment and surveillance, and articulating the PIC as a whole, especially the point about the system not being broken, but instead working

Continued on next page

exactly as intended. That one single idea resonated deeply, and stands out as a simple, undeniable truth in your analysis. Thank you.

I'm including a recent article published in *The Echo*, the Texas prison newspaper—essentially an organ of state propaganda. Like most articles published by *The Echo*, on the surface the enclosed "Work in Prison" piece seems positive and intended to highlight the benefits of forming a strong work ethic and some of the "rehabilitative" value in vocational and other on-the-job training programs: "productivity" and "keeping skills sharp," etc. Nobody would deny the benefits of forming good, strong, productive work ethics and habits, even while in prison—or should I say especially when in prison. It might even help maintain sanity, or the last shreds of it in some cases (I'm reminded of the fictional character Dr. Manette in Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, who worked as a cobbler if memory serves me).

But all of this ignores the whole history and foundation of "work in prison" as developed by the Texas state prison labor system which really took off after the Civil War. To this day, any work done in TDCJ is nothing more than modern-day slave labor. To add insult to injury, the "work time" that is "earned" is worthless to many of us as it has no bearing at all on our parole eligibility. In spite of all this we are encouraged to be good little compliant sheep and work for peanuts—actually less than peanuts: *NOTHING*! At least other states pay their prisoners something—not that I'm justifying that exploitation either. Rather, that's my point: if the state was truly interested in "rehabilitation" and giving prisoners real hope for a future they may start by paying prisoners an honest day's wages for an honest day's work. But that's not its goal at all.

As serious as this slave labor issue is, it's not even the worst thing about "work in prison." Although I'm no longer at Ramsey Unit Furniture Factory, it wasn't very long ago that I got up at 3:00 every morning to manufacture for court rooms, Senate chambers, and "special project" orders for other high-ranking government officials. I saw the invoices and work orders with the prices for the products. Thousands of dollars for desks and benches and other fancy pieces of furniture—even the gavels used by judges to sentence people to prison are made by prisoners at Ramsey. To be honest not a lot of prisoners saw the irony of it: *we're forced to make the gavels that sentence us to prison!*

Similar to the "free world", there is a rigid class system in place inside Texas prisons with the more educated and more affluent backgrounds taking the "better" jobs, usually inside air-conditioned offices sitting alongside guards, while the rest of us do the "real" work in stifling, life-threatening heat. If I had to choose, I'd rather suffer in the heat with the people than kiss ass and help oppress my people in an air conditioned office. As Zapata said: *"Prefiero morir de pie que vivir de rodillas" (I'd rather die on my feet than live on my knees)*.

"Thousands of dollars for desks and benches and other fancy pieces of furniture—even the gavels used by judges to sentence people to prison are made by prisoners at Ramsey. To be honest not a lot of prisoners saw the irony of it: we're forced to make the gavels that sentence us to prison..."

Anyway, *The Echo* and "work in prison"—it's a sophisticated way of using propaganda to keep prisoners "thinking the right thoughts," i.e. the thoughts they want us to think. They make such great effort to control our minds with articles like *Work in Prison* because it's like I think Noam Chomsky pointed out in *Manufacturing Consent*: basically, if they control our thinking, they also control our behavior, and what they want is a nice little conformist "model" prisoner who's trained to maybe one day be released into the "workforce" to support their neo-liberal, capitalist system of oppression and corporate domination, all run by Wall Street financial managers, the "masters of the Universe." They took the blueprint from the plantation and applied it to industry, actually the same plan only more sophisticated.

I'm interested in any feedback I can get from this analysis. I'm also interested in learning more about the PIC and how I can help "dismantle" it, "change" and "build," as CR's organizing framework is. Please send one of the three books you offer. Any one is fine, but I would like to read them in logical order if there is one. If not, just send any one of the three. Thank you. I am very much interested in ongoing dialogue and strategizing about specifics of this struggle, and I hope it's clear by now, that yes, I do want to "go deeper" and do what is necessary to help build this movement.

Also, I loved the *Tierra y Libertad* article by Yunuén Torres and Susana Draper in Issue 33 of *The Abolitionist*. I love women's self-determination and challenging entrenched patriarchy and I must admit I was reared in a "macho" culture in Laredo, TX, and it takes real effort on my part to uproot the toxic, unhealthy ideas of masculinity or "manhood", but I'm pleased to report that I'm in full growth mode—in fact I'm in full bloom at this point. At 50 years of age I'm privileged to be growing and fully understanding that lots of my old ideas were in fact harmful and in many cases abusive, and I don't want that for myself or anyone else. I pledge to continue growing into a healthy human being, at peace with all other human beings as much as it depends on me.

Thank you for your time and attention. Hope to hear from you soon.

Siempre Luchando,

-Ricardo

———

Author Bio: *Ricardo is a Texas prisoner. Write to him at:*
Ricardo Vela Jr. #2164340
1300 FM 655
Rosharon, TX 77583

42

by GMA

one, two, fourteen, then I lost count
Watching the news, but not listening
So much to take in, so little care
It's them, but it's also us.
Guilty? Yes, but who isn't?
Broken? Yes, but who isn't?
You pretend I'm not so bad

Then, the other way around.
We both know there is only one truth
But we are afraid of it
Too scared to face it
Too weak to stand up
We're stuck in time,
Stuck in the status quo.
"What would people think if I..."
What? If you're compassionate,
Forgiving, Loving?
We're not blind, only pretend to be.

At the end of the day
There is no end of the day
Just continuation, stagnation.
One side versus another
We forget there are no positions.
Not this time.
The devil lurks around
Coming to get you.

GUSTAVO MARTINEZ-AQUEPUCHO | SID# 18956195 | Oregon State Correctional Institution | 3405 Deer Park Drive SE Salem, OR 97310-9385

Note: *42 is the number of people imprisoned in Oregon state prisons who have died of COVID-19 infection complications.*♦

CRITICAL RESISTANCE (CR) UPDATES AND & MOVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

CRITICAL RESISTANCE UPDATES

Both California-based chapters of **CR, LA & OAKLAND,** have joined **Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB)'s** campaign to push state officials and specifically Governor Newsom to shut down multiple and eventually all prisons in California**.** The administration's own nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) calculated that shutting down five adult prisons in California would save $1.5 billion per year by 2025. CURB's "People's Plan for Prison Closure" advocates for at least 10 to be closed and for those impacted by the prison industrial complex (PIC) to guide how the closures happen, and which prisons are dismantled first, based on a people's analysis of the most harmful institutions. Prior to the release of CURB's prison closure report, the coalition took guidance from those inside and their families on which facilities to target first for closure.

As mentioned in this issue's Inside-Outside Fishing Line, **CR New York City (CRNYC)** formally joined the **Abolish ICE NY-NJ Coalition** to pressure both New Jersey and New York Governors and elected officials to stop any and all transfers of people from local law enforcement agencies into ICE custody and end ICE-jail contracts**.** The chapter took up calls from imprisoned people to end indefinite confinement, continuing the support of the strikes of those imprisoned at Essex and Bergen County jails. Along these lines, CRNYC is working to support and amplify the campaign to #FreeMarvin, a New Jersey resident from El Salvador who has been on hunger strike since March 7, 2021, demanding his release and protesting against ICE's arbitrary and systematic use of indefinite detention.

CR Portland (CRPDX) has also continued to prioritize building solid relationships with imprisoned people through an ongoing correspondence program, the #WriteThemAll campaign and fundraising to support imprisoned firefighters. CRPDX began a new monthly Volun-

By Monica Trinidad, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

teer Workshop Series for our mail program volunteers, with the goal of skilling up volunteers responding to letters in our abolitionist pris-

Continued on next page

oner correspondence program. CRPDX's extensive goal to send a handwritten letter including resources and information on abolitionist organizations to every prisoner in the state of Oregon—**the #WriteThemAll Campaign**—is nearing completion after one year. We have built strong relationships with people inside and outside, as well as shared and developed political education resources statewide. The chapter has also sent in all checks to imprisoned firefighters after raising tens of thousands of dollars. The **Imprisoned Firefighter Fundraiser** organizing body is working on a toolkit identifying how this project came together, pitfalls, and lessons for other organizers attempting to raise funds for prisoners used by the state as firefighters or other laborers on the front lines of the climate catastrophe.

MOVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

After uprisings against state violence and settler colonialism sprung up around the world in the last year after the death of George Floyd and others by police, organizers and communities continuing to work to advance abolition have succeeded in getting police out of schools, cutting police department budgets, and closing jails or starting the process of closing prisons while also fighting back against home confinement and ankle shackles or electronic monitoring. Simultaneously, amidst a rising tide in white nationalism, fear mongering through criminalization of poverty, and pitting communities against each other with the fear of "hate crimes", the Biden administration continues to bolster police departments on massive levels through the guise of reform or training. Last year we learned vital lessons, and we'll keep building on our wins as we break down the PIC and settler colonial state. *From Turtle Island to Palestine to the Philippines to Colombia—we do this 'til we free us.*

NATIONAL

Jailhouse Lawyers Call For National "Shut 'Em Down" Demonstrations

Jailhouse Lawyers Speak national membership has called for mass outside demonstrations on August 21, 2021 and September 9, 2021 "in the spirit of abolition… organizers must highlight prisoners' historical struggles, and the current political struggles to dismantle the prison industrial slave complex."

EAST COAST

Uprising At Allegheny County Jail In Pittsburgh

Prison rebels in Pittsburgh set fire to pod 8e, the segregation, solitary confinement unit of the jail. They are protesting the poor medical conditions and lack of medication that the jail has refused to provide for those caged at the jail before and during COVID.

MIDWEST

Uprising At St. Louis City Jail

Prisoners at the St. Louis City Jail revolted and striked over COVID conditions in the jail for the second time this year on April 4. They are demanding better treatment and timely court dates. At the time of the second uprising, of the 1,003 prisoners held at the St. Louis County jail, 319 have been waiting more than a year for a trial, 127 have been waiting more than two years, and one prisoner has been waiting more than five years. Chants of "we want court dates" could be heard from the prisoners who smashed out windows at the downtown jail.

WEST COAST

'Care First' Resolution Unanimously Adopted By Alameda County Board Of Supervisors

After powerful testimony by family members, providers, and advocates from Decarcerate Alameda County (DAC), the Alameda County Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted the Care First Resolution. This is a crucial first step in ending the mental health crisis in Alameda County and meeting Care First's goals: To end jailing people with mental health and substance use needs and build out community-based models of care.

Kern County Community Holds Peoples' Trial at Detention Facility

In Bakersfield, CA on March 26 community members held The People v. ICE mock trial outside the notorious Mesa Verde detention facility. The people's verdict proclaimed that "*ICE, GEO group, the Biden Administration, City Council of McFarland, and the Yuba County Jail have violated that law and their own detention standards. They keep people locked in detention centers in dirty, unsafe conditions, feed them rotten food, and profit from their forced labor. (They) did everything they could to hide their abuses. For all these reasons, our verdict is that…ALL detention centers must be shut down!!*"

#Blocktheboat Celebrates Historic Victory

In a move of international worker solidarity, the Israeli-operated ZIM shipping-line was blocked by hundreds of organizers and union workers who stood in solidarity with the Palestinian people and workers. The Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) and The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU Local 10) held down the calls to action as they kept the ship from docking for days and ultimately from being offloaded once it tried to sneakily dock at the Port of Oakland. *Long live internaitonal solidarity, free Palestine!*

Expel The Philippine National Police

Malaya Movement NorCal and BAYAN NorCal have launched a campaign to demand the San Francisco Philippine Consulate provide a public report in order to be transparent regarding the consulate's annual budget and the operations of the Philippine National Police (PNP) Outpost with the ultimate goal of ridding the PNP from the Bay Area. The PNP are known for working overseas for the Duterte regime in the Philippines, using "red-tagging" to target and neutralize organizers fighting against imperialism, and enforcing policies set forth by the regime.

INTERNATIONAL

Colombian National Strike against US-Austerity Policies

On April 28, social organizations in Colombia called for a nationwide popular strike against a pandemic-related tax overhaul, one of many US-backed neoliberal austerity policies. Waves of protests rocked the country for weeks. Despite horrific repression by police that killed at least 43 protestors, injured thousands and disappeared hundreds in the past few weeks, the people of Colombia remain committed to resistance and self-determination.

Global Solidarity With Palestine

In the response to escalated violence by the settler colonial state of Israel against the Indigenous Palestinian people, global protests have been held with the largest protests occurring on the 73rd anniversary of the Nakba, or "catastrophe," when Israel started to displace Palestinian people to create the Zionist state. For eleven days Israel bombed Gaza, killing 250 Palestinians, 66 of them children. Israel also bombed several apartment complexes, the associated press offices, a COVID-19 response hospital, and other infrastructure in Gaza. Actions globally have brought attention to the ethnic cleansing currently occurring in Palestine, with the US continuing to back the Israeli state. In the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah in Palestine, an Israeli court is currently processing an 'eviction order' that would clear the historical Palestinian neighborhood for Israeli and US settlers. This struggle has been another catalyst for uprisings and criticism against the apartheid state.♦

June 4, 2021 Block the Boat Victory. Photo by Brooke Anderson.

FEATURED UPDATE: Defund OPD Campaign

In anticipation of Oakland's next two-year budget cycle decision, the Defund OPD Coalition continues to ramp up pressure on City Council to follow the campaign's recommendations aimed at reducing the Oakland Police budget by 50% ($150 million). Launched by the Anti-Police Terror Project five years ago, the campaign has evolved into a vibrant coalition of 13 grassroots organizations with deep roots in Oakland, including: AROC, Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Bay Rising, Black Organizing Project, Causa Justa-Just Cause, Community Ready Corps, Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice, CR, East Bay Alliance for A Sustainable Economy, Ella Baker Center, Oakland Rising, and the Urban Peace Movement. Currently OPD's budget takes up almost half of the city's general fund, and this campaign seeks to keep our communities truly safe through diminishing the size and scope of policing through reinvesting in living wage jobs, housing for all, healthcare, and other essential services that promote strong and self-determined communities.

Despite political maneuvering on the part of Oakland mayor Libby Schaff, the Oakland Police Department, and their allies to sow divisions in our communities, the coalition continues to take great strides in achieving its campaign goals through both advocacy in task forces and city council meetings, as well as on-the-ground grassroots outreach, research, movement building, and community surveys.

On March 17, the coalition mobilized to the final Reimagining Public Safety taskforce meeting. After hours of debate and powerful testimony from community members, the taskforce moved to approve 33 of the coalition's recommendations to City Council, who will have to vote on them before the June 30 budgetary deadline. This was an important win, and it's only the beginning!

On April 18, the coalition held a Community Forum at Akoma Market/Liberation Park in Deep East Oakland. Through speaker programs, flyering, and community visioning activities, hundreds of Black and Brown community members were able to engage with the campaign and get information on how to mobilize in support. Through building radical community, strategically putting pressure on officials, and connecting with allies, the coalition is primed to continue building collective power on its way to victory!

CALL FOR CONTENT

Help shape the content of *The Abolitionist*

Make your voice heard in our paper!

Submit content by writing a piece for either our Features section OR one of our columns!!

The Features section in Issue 36, to be released by December 2021, will focus on "Pathways toward Freedom," or strategies for getting people out of cages. Issue 37's Features will focus on housing and shelter and will be released in late Spring 2022.

Send us an essay, article, research, a poem, a story, a play, a comic, art, personal reflection, or questions on these topics for our upcoming Features sections!

- **Issue 36 Submission Deadline: Friday, August 27, 2021**.
- **Issue 37 Submission Deadline: Friday, January 28, 2022**

There are many ways for you to shape the content of the paper, either by submitting a piece to our Features section or supporting one of our columns. Check out all of the ways you can submit content for *The Abolitionist*:

1. Write a piece for our Features

- Pieces can be in each of these different forms of writing—from the theoretical, to the reflective, and action-oriented—but they will all share a common focus, theme, or topic of consideration. *Check the feature focus for issues 36 and 37!*

2. Submit content for one of our Columns

- Send a **Kite to the Editors**
- Request to be an author of an **Inside-Outside Fishing Line**
- Contribute a report or an update on organizing inside for our **Movement Highlights** column
- **Write a poem or song lyrics.** It can relate to the features or any other topic of your choice!
- **Make visual art** to complement the Features section or one of our columns
- **Create a political cartoon** for our Features focus for either issues 35 or 36, or work with us to become a regular political cartoonist for the paper!
- **Reflect** on how you use *The Abby* in your study and **share that reflection for our 9971 column**—or submit questions on study that you want Stevie to address in future columns

Some approaches to writing Kites to the Editors:

- Elaborate on something that you agreed with in an article and explain why you agreed with it.
- Elaborate on something that you disagreed with in an article and explain why you disagreed with it.
- Relate an article to other things you have read, watched, heard, or experienced.
- Write a note to the editors sharing questions that you believe are timely and needed in this political moment and which you would like Critical Resistance to answer.

Send submissions to the Kites to the Editors section to:

The Abolitionist Paper
Attn: Kites to the Editors
P.O. Box. 22780
Oakland, CA 94609

Please read our Submission Guidelines before working on a submission to ensure your piece aligns with how we decide what to print.

Send your submission to:

Critical Resistance
Attn: The Abolitionist
P.O. Box. 22780
Oakland, CA 94609

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:

SEND US YOUR WRITING AND ARTWORK!

We accept articles, letters, creative writing, poetry, interviews, and artwork in English or Spanish.

IDEAS FOR ARTICLES AND ARTWORK

- Examples of prisoner organizing
- Practical steps toward prison industrial complex abolition
- Ways to help keep yourself and others physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually healthy while imprisoned
- Updates on what's happening at the prison you're in (for example: working conditions, health concerns, lockdowns)
- Legal strategies and important cases that impact prisoners
- Alternatives to policing, punishment, imprisonment, and surveillance
- Experiences of life after imprisonment (or before!)
- Creative or reflective writing *with an abolitionist message*
- Freedom dreams and imaginative pieces with radical vision
- Your opinion about a piece published in a recent issue
- Reflections on how you've used the paper (in your conversations, work, study groups)
- Empowering, liberatory art of resistance and community power (and that will print well!)

LENGTH

- Articles should not be more than 1500 words (about five handwritten pages)
- Letters should not be more than 250 words

HOW TO SUBMIT

- **If you want your name and address printed with your article, please include it as you would like it printed.** If you do not wish to have your name or address included, please let us know that when you submit your piece. Instead of your name, you can choose an alias, publish your piece anonymously, or use your initials.
- If possible, send a copy of your submission, not the original

WRITING SUGGESTIONS

- Even if writing is difficult for you, your ideas are worth the struggle. Try reading your piece out loud to yourself or sharing it with someone else. Doing this might help you clarify the ideas in your submission.

Notes on Editing: We edit all pieces for both content and grammar. We will send you a copy of the piece before printing it. ***As an abolitionist publication, we do not print material we find in some way perpetuates oppression or legitimizes the prison industrial complex***. Given that institutional mail can be slow and purposefully delayed at times (or even disappeared), please make note in your submission of phrases or sections you would like the editorial collective to print untouched, if that is the case.

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