

# INFORMATION SHEETS

It's important for abolitionists to be able to talk about the world we want to build. But it's just as important for us to be able to explain why we're opposed to the violence of the world shaped by the PIC.

THESE INFORMATION SHEETS ARE MEANT TO:

ILLUSTRATE SOME OF THE WAYS THAT THE PIC AFFECTS DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES.

Each sheet is meant to be a tool that you can use to bring an analysis of the PIC into other work you may be doing (around homelessness, or immigration, or queer issues, for instance).

SHOW THAT ABOLISHING THE PIC DOESN'T JUST MEAN WORKING ON PRISON ISSUES.

In fact, it's key that we see how abolition is an important strategy for all social justice work. The PIC is one of the main barriers that stand in the way of creating genuinely safe, lasting communities.

SHOW HOW ABOLITION DOESN'T JUST MEAN SPENDING LESS ON PRISONS AND POLICE AND MORE ON SCHOOLS AND HOUSING.

As they exist right now, institutions like schools and public housing are part of the PIC. We need to weaken their ability to prop up the PIC. As abolitionists, we don't just want better-funded schools (although that might be an important step). We also demand the power to shape the programs and institutions in our communities.

FIT TOGETHER WITH THE KEYWORDS SECTION.

Often, defining terms (and learning how the state defines them) is as important as statistics are in understanding a problem. (You can find the keywords section at the end of the toolkit).

BE JUST A FIRST GUIDE TO SOME OF THE PIECES OF THE PIC. THE RESOURCES LISTED AT THE END OF EACH INFORMATION SHEET HAVE MORE DETAILED ANALYSES OF EACH ISSUE.

# PRISONS

IN THE 1980S, THE UNITED STATES LAUNCHED THE BIGGEST PRISON BUILDING SPREE in the history of the world. More and more people are caged every single year. Native people, people of color, and the poor face the highest risks of being locked up. Fiddling with how prisons are run isn't going to change this basic fact: they're based on racism and repression. As abolitionists, we need to create solutions that guarantee communities' safety and self-determination. Prisons stand in the way of these basic goals.

- There are over 2 million people in cages in the US—about 1,361,000 people in state and federal prisons, and 665,475 people in local jails (as of December 31, 2002).
- 6.6 million people in the US are either locked up, or on parole or probation.
- The US imprisons more of its residents than any other country.

BECAUSE OF THE WAY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT KEEPS NUMBERS ON RACIAL GROUPS, it's hard to give statistics for many groups. Asian Americans, Native Americans, Alaskan Natives, Hawaiian Natives, and other Pacific Islanders are all lumped together as "other." Here is some of what we do know:

- In 1997, about 1% of Native Americans (16,000 in all) were in local jails. This is a higher percentage than any other racial group.
- In 1997, 63,000 Native Americans, or 4% of the entire Native American population, were either locked up, or on parole or probation.
- In 1994, 75 of the 124 federal prisoners under 18 were Native American.
- Since 1980, the percentage of Asian-Americans in federal prison has quadrupled.
- Black men have at least a 28.5% likelihood of being caged during their lifetimes. (Today, this number might even be higher, since the 28.5% figure was based on lower, 1991 imprisonment rates.)
- While Blacks represent only about 13% of drug users, Black people represent 38% of those arrested for drug offenses, 55% of those convicted of drug offenses, and 74% of those sent to prison.
- In 2000, 29% of Black males under 40 who had not completed high school were in prison.
- While only 7% of prisoners are women, the women's prison population has grown 600% since 1980, and it continues to rise.
- Black females are 8 times more likely, and Latina females are 4 times more likely, to be imprisoned than white females.
- 36% of people in jail in 1996 were unemployed before being captured. Another 28% had monthly incomes of under \$1000.
- In 2003, 2.2 million people were employed in policing, prisons, and the courts. States keep hiring more of these people, and not teachers or social workers.

## INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>

THE SENTENCING PROJECT: [http://www.sentencingproject.org/pubs\\_02.cfm](http://www.sentencingproject.org/pubs_02.cfm)

DEEP IMPACT: QUANTIFYING THE EFFECT OF PRISON EXPANSION IN THE SOUTH, JUSTICE POLICY INSTITUTE, 2003: <http://www.riseup.net/jpi/downloads/deepimpactfinal.pdf>

PUNISHMENT AND PREJUDICE: RACIAL DISPARITIES IN THE WAR ON DRUGS, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2000

# HOMELESSNESS AND THE PIC

THERE ARE MANY THINGS THAT THREATEN THE SAFETY OF THE HOMELESS. Not having a reliable place to live creates many of those problems. Without a place to rest or keep clean, it's hard to meet the basic expectations for holding a job. Homeless people are forced to sleep, cook, use the bathroom, and store possessions in public. Homeless people are left open to having these activities criminalized. More and more, our society uses police, prisons, and courts to punish the homeless. People's basic needs, and the causes of homelessness, all go ignored. Advocates for the homeless can work toward abolition by seeing the PIC as getting in the way of people's safety and basic needs.

- Housing costs are way too high for many people, including the working poor. Minimum wage income is not enough to cover fair market rent in any city or county in the US. (See the "Rental Housing" report).
- A study found that out of 57 cities surveyed, not a single one had enough shelter beds for all of the homeless.
- Not having a mailing address makes it hard to register to vote, receive government benefits, or apply for a job.
- Homeless people are punished for non-harmful activities like loitering. These "quality of life" laws are mostly enforced against homeless people. Tourists drinking in public, or napping on a blanket in a park probably wouldn't be arrested. But a homeless person sleeping on a piece of cardboard probably would be.
- In one year, 43,000 people were cited for breaking "quality of life" laws in San Francisco. People who are cited usually have to pay a fine. If they can't pay the fine, they are put in jail.
- Homeless people in Baltimore, for example, spend an average of 35 days per year in jail.
- Because some homeless people end up having criminal records, they have an even harder time finding housing and jobs.

## INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

"ILLEGAL TO BE HOMELESS, THE CRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS IN THE UNITED STATES," NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS AND THE NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY:

<http://www.nationalhomeless.org/crimreport/index.html>

"RENTAL HOUSING FOR AMERICA'S POOR FAMILIES: FARTHER OUT OF REACH THAN EVER, 2002," NATIONAL LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION: <http://www.nlihc.org/oor2002/index.htm>

# QUEER PEOPLE AND THE PIC

QUEER PEOPLE FACE HIGHER SURVEILLANCE AND REPRESSION BASED ON THEIR ACTIONS AND APPEARANCES. Some queer people are not safe at home and end up spending more of their time on the street, which can mean facing the threat of police harassment every day. For queer people who are locked up, their identities are abused and denied. All of the gender "cages" in our society, mixed with surveillance, policing, and imprisonment, put queer people at risk of violence. The risks are even higher for queer youth, queers of color, queer sex workers, transgendered people, low-income queers, and other marginalized queers. Abolition would mean putting an end to tracking people's bodies and behavior based on gender and sexuality.

- Many queer youth are denied a caring home because of their sexuality. They are put in foster care homes that are hostile, where they often experience violence. Or they are forced onto the streets.
- 100% of queer youth in group homes have experienced heterosexist verbal abuse in their foster care. 70% have experience physical violence there.
- 35-50% of homeless youth are queer.
- "Quality of life" laws also target queer youth. They are fined or jailed just for being outside.
- Policing and surveillance often target public displays of affection by queers. Cops often read transgendered people as sex workers.
- 49% of attacks on transgendered people in San Francisco are committed by police.
- Prisoners are forced into living conditions segregated "male" and "female."
- A prisoner who doesn't identify with either of those gender labels, or who identifies with a gender that guards and police don't agree "match" the prisoner's genitals, is often forced into solitary confinement or a cell with people of different genders. However prisoners are classified, it's not based on their choice, or with concern for their safety.
- People using hormones are often denied access, or regular access, to hormones in prison.
- Queer people in prison are at high risk of verbal and physical abuse, from guards and other prisoners.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

"JUSTICE FOR ALL?" A REPORT FROM THE LESBIAN AND GAY YOUTH PROJECT OF THE URBAN JUSTICE CENTER:

<http://www.urbanjustice.org/publications/pdfs/lesbianandgay/justiceforallreport.pdf>

FIERCE! FACTSHEETS: Contact, 646.336.6789 x108, fierceyouthnyc@aol.com

# HEALTH CARE AND THE PIC

THE PIC GETS IN THE WAY OF PEOPLE MEETING THEIR BASIC NEEDS. It does not provide health care, healthy food, shelter, or what makes people safer and healthier. Some of the main reasons that people don't have healthcare are the very same factors that put people at risk of being locked up. Un(der)employment, homelessness, and immigration laws are at the heart of real threats to safety. By not using punishment as a response to human insecurity, we can begin truly to prioritize basic needs like health care.

- More than 40 million people in the United States have no health insurance.
- 34.8% of Latinos and 20.1% of Blacks lack health insurance, compared to 11.1% of whites.
- Insurance doesn't always guarantee perfect healthcare. But people without insurance suffer from much higher rates of diseases such as cancers, heart disease, arthritis, and mental illness. These are all conditions that can be managed with early identification and consistent treatment.
- The health of homeless people is especially vulnerable. 61% of homeless children in New York City have not received complete vaccinations (vs. 85% of housed children). Homeless people experience frostbite, leg ulcers, and respiratory illnesses because of their lack of consistent housing.
- Only about 10% of people in need of drug treatment receive the services they need. More and more, the only way to get any kind of drug treatment is through the courts.

## PRISONERS FACE HUGE RESTRICTIONS TO GETTING THE MOST BASIC HEALTH CARE.

- Prisoners have to jump over hurdles just to see a doctor. Even when they get an appointment, they have trouble getting good care, or the right medicine.
- Prison guards sometimes keep prisoners' medicines from them. Other times, they don't give it out on the right schedule (with food, or on an empty stomach). This is especially a problem for prisoners in control units, or during lock downs.
- Increasingly, prisoners are forced to pay to see a doctor even when they have little or no income.
- In 2000, California women prisoners testified about how their health was endangered. Prisoners were never notified about diseases that they tested positive for. They were denied treatment for deadly cancers. At least two women died from being given medicine for diseases that they didn't have.
- Prisoners are also in danger of sexual abuse from doctors.

## INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

COVER THE UNINSURED WEEK INFORMATION: <http://www.covertheuninsured.org>

NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS: <http://www.nationalhomeless.org>

UNDERSTANDING PRISON HEALTH CARE: <http://www.movementbuilding.org/prisonhealth/>

THE HIV/HCV IN PRISON COMMITTEE OF CALIFORNIA PRISON FOCUS:

<http://www.prisons.org/hivin.htm>

# MENTAL HEALTH AND THE PIC

MENTAL ILLNESS IS OFTEN SEEN AS SEPARATE FROM OTHER HEALTH ISSUES. There are some reasons why it's worthwhile to look particularly at mental illness and the PIC. But it's important to remember that mental health problems are often a sign that people's other health needs aren't being met.

Dealing with mental illness means thinking about the increased support that some people in our communities need. It may be as irresponsible to let some people "fend for themselves" as it is to lock them up. But it's also often as cruel to put them in hospitals as in prisons. As abolitionists, we need to create new options. Locally-based programs should offer personalized support to people, without punishing them for their illness. Care should be based on individualized solutions, not high levels of medication and restrictions.

## SOME FACTS:

- About 283,000 prisoners report suffering from some form of mental illness (about 14% of the prisoner population). The actual number of prisoners with mental health problems is probably much higher.
- The Los Angeles County Jail has ended up being the biggest mental health facility in the US: on a given night, at least 3,300 mentally ill people are locked up there.

## THESE STATISTICS EXPOSE AT LEAST TWO PROBLEMS:

**•Mental illness (and the way that our communities respond to it) makes it more likely that people will come into contact with the PIC in the first place.**

Mental illness makes it harder to hold a job, and it can lead to rejection by family and friends. One common result, unfortunately, is homelessness. When homeless, or even just walking down the street, mentally ill people are at risk of surveillance for "quality of life crimes" like being a "nuisance," or loitering.

**•Prison makes mental illness worse.** Prisoners face stress from physical and emotional abuse. And they lose the treatment and support networks they may have once had.

ONE COMMON SUGGESTION IS THAT PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS DON'T BELONG IN PRISONS OR ON THE STREETS, BUT IN MENTAL HOSPITALS. The idea is that these hospitals are good places to receive treatment.

Huge numbers of mental hospitals have been closed since the 1960s. This means that many fewer mentally ill people are in state hospitals (from 559,000 in 1955, to 70,000 in 2001). This shift is typically called "de-institutionalization." But we need to be aware of how other institutions, like policing and prisons, became substitute "solutions" to mental illness. Mental hospitals and prisons aren't the same, but many of their practices are:

- Both state hospitals and prisons punish by denying freedom of movement.
- Both rely on physically isolating people. They don't use individualized problem solving, or emotionally safe and personalized counseling.

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INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

THE SENTENCING PROJECT, MENTALLY ILL OFFENDERS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM: AN ANALYSIS AND PRESCRIPTION

"THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS BEHIND BARS," TERRY KUPERS, The Harvard Mental Health Letter, 7/2000.

# SCHOOLS AND THE PIC

*We are tracking one group of kids from kindergarten to prison, and we are tracking one group of kids from kindergarten to college. -Lani Guinier*

“SCHOOLS NOT JAILS” AND “EDUCATION NOT INCARCERATION” ARE TWO POPULAR ANTI-PRISON SLOGANS. But we need to do much more work before schools are true alternatives to the PIC. If we just took all of the money out of the prison budgets and put it into the schools we have now, our job as abolitionists wouldn’t be done.

In order to see this, let’s turn another popular saying on its head. People often talk about how public schools are “failing.” It’s true that most schools are failing to educate and empower young people. But they are succeeding in another way. They punish and discipline young people and push them into state institutions.

**As abolitionists, we need to prevent schools from supporting maintaining the PIC.**

Discipline policies push young people out of school. These harsh rules don’t empower people or keep them safe.

- More and more, schools seem like prisons and jails. There are cops on campus, metal detectors in the hallways, and “zero-tolerance” policies for fighting and drugs.
- These punishing responses target students of color. The more students of color there are in a school, the more likely the school is to have police officers in the building, use random metal detector testing, and randomly search students’ possessions
- Teachers and principals are more likely to suspend students of color than white students. The same goes for kicking students out of the classroom.
- Discipline policies in schools push young people into prison. Students who are suspended are more likely to drop out of school. States with higher rates of suspension also have higher rates of juvenile imprisonment.

(See “School to Prison Pipeline” website listed below for these statistics.)

HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAMS ALSO DRIVE STUDENTS OUT OF THE CLASSROOM. These tests don’t build better schools. They just label some students “failures.”

- Many districts require students to pass a test to get a diploma. In 2013, these tests will be mandatory everywhere in the US.
- Testing pulls money away from books, and school programs. Teachers are forced to teach how to take a test, instead of real skills.
- Testing causes students of color to suffer for the failures of the educational system. It makes it look like middle-class, rich, and white students’ succeed because of their “virtues.” It hides the racism and class prejudice that gives some schools more resources.
- In 2002 68% of California students failed the math section, and 46% failed the English section. The failure rates were higher in schools with mostly students of color.

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- Exit exams push students of color into poverty and prison. Out of all Black people who work full-time and without a high school diploma, only 6.8% earn wages above the poverty line. People without high school diplomas are also more likely to be imprisoned.
- Many young people face physical and sexual abuse. Survivors of abuse are much more likely to be suspended, expelled, and also imprisoned. School officials rarely know how to provide support.
- Under the “No Child Left Behind Act,” all high schools have to give a list of students to the military. The military uses this list to recruit students, especially those who don’t graduate.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

THE APPLIED RESEARCH CENTER ERASE INITIATIVE, “Profiled & Punished” &

“Racial Profiling and Punishment in US Public Schools”, <http://www.arc.org/erase/downloads/profiling.pdf>

SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE CONFERENCE, DRAFT PAPERS,

[http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/pipeline03/call\\_reseppapers.php](http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/pipeline03/call_reseppapers.php)

# MILITARIZATION

THE TERM "MILITARIZATION" DESCRIBES BECOMING LIKE THE MILITARY, OR USING military equipment or strategies. Militarization also means links between the military and local agencies, like police. The military teaches these agencies how to "solve problems" by capturing people and using force. In the past 20 years, the military and the police have worked much more closely together than ever before. Abolitionists can challenge the idea that using military ideas and equipment builds safe communities.

- In 1997 alone, the Department of Defense gave 1.2 million pieces of military equipment to police departments. This equipment included assault rifles, grenade launchers, and armored personnel carriers.
- The military has directly trained more than 30,000 police units.
- This military-police cooperation has been deadly. Between 1995 and 1998, there was a 34% increase in police "use of deadly force" (murders by police).
- In 2002, the US Army lent five RC-7 surveillance planes to local police.

ONE PLACE THAT MILITARIZATION IS CLEAREST IS THE MEXICO-US BORDER. Military, police, and border agents use massive, deadly force against people who enter the US.

- Joint Task Force-6 (JTF-6) is a federal program that gives military equipment to local police near the Mexican-US border. The police receive explosives, air surveillance equipment, money, and "intelligence" information.
- In the 1990s, "Operation Gatekeeper" built ten-foot steel walls along parts of the border. These walls have forced people to cross the border in desert areas. Thousands of people die from dehydration and heat exposure trying to cross the border every year.
- The US Border Patrol at the Mexico border has more armed officers than the entire FBI.
- High-intensity stadium lights are turned on along the border every night. This is the same equipment that prisons use. The lights strongly disrupt the ecosystem.

THE US SPREADS ITS MILITARISTIC IDEAS TO OTHER COUNTRIES.

- Most of the "foreign aid" that the US gives to other countries is in the form of weapons. Countries like Israel, Colombia, the Philippines, and Indonesia use these weapons against people in their own country.
- The US has military forces in 156 of the 192 countries in the world.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

BORDER ACTION NETWORK WEB MATERIALS, <http://www.borderaction.org>

NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD MILITARY LAW TASK FORCE, <http://www.nlg.org/mltf/>

WAR TIMES SEPT. 2002, <http://www.war-times.org/backissues/5art6.html>

# PUBLIC BENEFITS AND VOTING

PROGRAMS LIKE PUBLIC HOUSING, FOOD STAMPS, AND WELFARE ARE MEANT TO MEET PEOPLE'S BASIC NEEDS. But people who depend on these programs are observed and investigated in ways that jeopardize their safety. People are often thrown off of these programs, despite their ability to survive. These restrictions often continue to punish former prisoners for life.

Keeping people off of the social safety net doesn't heal harm. It doesn't bring families together, or help people be part of the life of their communities. We need to end restrictions that leave people at risk. Abolitionists can create lasting ways to provide people's basic needs.

PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN PUBLIC HOUSING FACE SURVEILLANCE AND HARSH RESTRICTIONS. The state punishes people by leaving them homeless, instead of providing support or resources.

- Families are punished by "one-strike" rules. If residents or their family or guests break certain rules, they can lose their housing. One example: In 1998, Oakland evicted several elderly people, just because their relatives had been accused of carrying drugs near the housing development.
- New York City has installed over 1000 surveillance cameras in five public housing projects, without consulting residents.
- The Oakland Housing Authority requires residents to submit to "regular home visits for the purpose of evaluating housekeeping habits, social behavior, family practices, parenting and organizational skills." This kind of rule is common under the most recent federal law about public housing (called Hope VI).
- The federal government has built almost no public housing since the mid 1980s.

## WELFARE

- In some states, under federal law, no one with a drug felony record can ever receive welfare or food stamps. Between 1996 and 1999, more than 92,000 women were affected by the lifetime welfare ban. 48% of these women were African-American or Latina.
- Between 1995 and 2000, Alameda County, California, arrested more than 5000 public assistance recipients for making mistakes when filling out confusing paperwork. These people ended up receiving checks that were larger than they were "entitled" to. The County punishes families for mistakes in its mailing and computer system.

## VOTING

- 46 states have some kind of restrictions that prevent prisoners or former prisoners from voting. These laws rob people of an important tool to raise their voices against the PIC.
- Because of felony voting laws, 13.1% of Black men have temporarily or permanently lost their rights to vote. In 16 states, more than 10% of Black men have permanently lost their rights to vote.

## INFORMATION COMPILED FROM/ FOR MORE INFORMATION:

<http://www.hrw.org/reports98/vote/>

<http://www.drugpolicy.org/library/factsheets/barriers/>

AARON SHUMAN, "HOW TO READ A HOUSING CRISIS." Bad Subjects, Issue 47, 2000,

<http://eserver.org/bs/47/shuman.html>

<http://www.gothamgazette.com/iotw/surveillance/>

<http://www.foodfirst.org/progs/humanrts/corpwel.html>

# ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM CAN MEAN NOT ENFORCING ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS, when people of color are the ones mostly harmed. It can also mean choosing to build toxic waste disposal sites only in communities of color. Communities of color and poor communities suffer an unfair number of environmentally destructive land uses-- land uses that take from the community but don't give back to it.

Prisons don't only harm the communities where prisoners come from. Prisons are also environmental and social disasters for the towns where prisons are built. Part of abolishing the PIC also means building communities that have the power to decide how their resources are best used.

Many US states build most prisons where the poor and people of color live.

- Communities are often shut out of the process of deciding whether a prison should be built in their town.
- In Mendota California, the Federal Bureau of Prisons refused to translate its 1000 page environmental impact report into Spanish. 86% of Mendota residents are native Spanish speakers.

IT'S IMPORTANT THAT WE UNDERSTAND WHY PRISONS MAKE BAD NEIGHBORS. It's not because of the people who are locked inside. It's not because of the prisoners' family members (who rarely move to the prison town anyway). It's because prison buildings themselves are environmental hazards.

- Prisons use up scarce water resources and create huge amounts of sewage waste.
- To dispose of waste products, boilers in prisons can burn coal and diesel. These release the same chemicals as hazardous waste incinerators.
- Prison guards usually commute to the prison from dozens of miles away. This creates huge amounts of air pollution. This is one of the reasons why the San Joaquin Valley in California (which has several prisons) surpassed Los Angeles as having the second worst air in the country.
- Prisons use up land that was once used to grow food. This valuable land no longer creates jobs or public resources.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

CRITICAL RESISTANCE AND CALIFORNIA PRISON MORATORIUM PROJECT, "NEW FORMS OF ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM" PAMPHLET Available from CR, and at [http://www.criticalresistance.org/index.php?name=environmental\\_racism](http://www.criticalresistance.org/index.php?name=environmental_racism)