The prison industrial complex is wide and deep and complicated. In order to fight for its abolition, Critical Resistance uses the framework of **Dismantle, Change, Build** to direct our efforts. We fight to break down cages from the inside and out, to strip power from the violence of policing, and to starve the system of the resources it uses to maintain itself. We strive to shift common sense from a logic of punishment and control to one of self-determination and liberation.

We put our hearts and minds and bodies to work establishing the kinds of relationships, environments, and practices that make our far reaching dreams more real. Together, these principles help Critical Resistance keep its feet on the ground and stepping forward even as we keep our eyes fixed on a horizon free from the prison industrial complex.
2013 saw the prison industrial complex hit by some decisive blows: states from Texas, to Florida, to New York announced prison closure plans, New York City won a legal battle challenging the use of stop and frisk, exposure of the scope and scale of the National Security Agency's has reignited attention to US surveillance. Critical Resistance was also hard at work in 2013, steadily chipping away at the PIC. The year got off to a fiery start for CR members in Oakland, CA, as they challenged the city’s proposal to bring on “supercop” William Bratton as a consultant to the Oakland Police Department. CR worked with organizations and individuals across Oakland to reject Bratton and the Broken Windows theory on which his consulting is based. Unimpressed by the public relations efforts surrounding Bratton, Oakland residents articulated how policing fails their city and argued for the kinds of community-based programs and services proven to support long-term community health and stability. In hopes of avoiding the devastating effects Bratton’s zero tolerance has had in other cities, CR Oakland reached out to CR chapters and allies in New York and Los Angeles to sign on to a letter to the Oakland City Council opposing a contract with Bratton. While the contract ultimately included Bratton, strong public opposition to his participation resulted in a more limited role than in the initial proposal. The coordinated opposition to the contract also illustrated a continuing shift in organizing against the violence of policing in Oakland that has seen the creation of new organizations and formations and an increasing durability and consistency in resistance by Oakland residents to policing. The breadth of the opposition, in tandem with the depth of knowledge and unity of messaging speak to the steady, persistent work Critical Resistance and our allies have been doing to challenge the violence of policing in the city. CR also kept up our 15 year fight against the construction of new cages. In New Orleans, CR and other members of the Orleans Parish Reform Coalition continue to advocate for maintenance of the population cap on the Orleans Parish Prison (OPP) won in early 2012. The coalition also continues to push for decarceration strategies to remove people imprisoned in OPP from conditions so deplorable that the jail is under Federal monitoring. According to a consultant hired by the city, the only way to fund the necessary changes mandated by the federal court settlement is to “drastically reduce” the jail’s population. In 2011, a US Supreme Court ruling compelled California to reduce the state’s prison population from 202% capacity to 137% capacity as a means of addressing the horrendous state of medical and mental health care for California prisoners. The
state responded by shifting responsibility for certain categories of imprisoned people from the state to the county level. Faced with an explosive growth in jail construction projects as the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) moves imprisoned people from state prisons to jails as a means of “relieving” crowding in the state system, CR has been leading organizing to oppose jail construction and expansion where our chapters are based. In Los Angeles, Critical Resistance, in collaboration with our partners in Los Angeles No More Jails Coalition, has put up effective challenges to the LA County Sheriff’s proposal expand the county’s jail system. CR’s energy has been particularly focused on preventing the expansion of women’s jails, including the creation of a new jail the Sheriff’s Department calls a “women’s village”. Grassroots organizing contributed to the sheriff abandoning the initial site. Community pressure also influenced the state board charged with allocating jail construction funds to reject LA County’s proposal for funding. Without the promise of state funding, the sheriff now must convince county supervisors and LA County residents of the myth that women’s health and safety are best supported by jails rather than housing, health care, and meaningful employment.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, CR fought jail expansion on two fronts in 2013. In San Mateo County, Critical Resistance ignited community opposition to the county’s jail project by highlighting the fiscal, environmental, and social costs of the project—drawing particular attention to the fact that the site was deemed too toxic to be used for residential purposes, and to the number of people being held on ICE holds in the county. By hosting a series of community meetings, educating allies, and staging protests and rallies, CR brought together service providers, migrant justice organizers, environmental justice advocates, youth workers, and residents across the county understand the harms associated with the proposed jail and to envision how county resources could be used to support community stability and health without locking more of its residents in cages or endangering them with deportation.

This sort of cross sector alliance building is central to CR’s approach to PIC abolition and crucial to demonstrating how broad the reach of the PIC is. CR is bringing that same logic to a fight against a proposed new jail in San Francisco County, as well. Joining forces with architects and planners, organizers for housing justice, former prisoners, children of imprisoned people, and concerned residents, CR has also been part of a broad-based effort in San Francisco County to challenge a proposal for a new $456 million jail project in a county that already has more jail capacity than it uses, in which 75% of all people in the current jails are being held pre-trial and which 56% of the people locked in the jails are Black, while Black people only represent 6% of the county’s population.
In an effort to learn more about the landscape of prison fights in New York State and to assess new areas of work, CR New York City (CRNYC) convened organizers from anti-expansion fights across the state for a discussion about current projects and campaigns, challenges, and opportunities for fighting imprisonment in New York. Even as the state closes prisons, organizers at the meeting discussed the challenges involved with the geographic locations and security levels of those closures, as well as strategic opportunities on the horizon.

Perhaps some of the most important work to dismantle the PIC last year came from people who are organizing on the inside to the end of the use of solitary confinement in prisons across the country. The summer of 2013 saw the third round of prisoner hunger strikes in two years in California prisons. Over 30,000 imprisoned people refused meals and engaged in work and program stoppage to protest conditions in the state’s prisons, with a special focus on solitary confinement. Critical Resistance and our partners in the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition (PHSS) worked outside prison walls in concert with imprisoned people to bring the strikers’ demands to light, to expose the conditions of their confinement, and to demand an end to the use of this torturous practice. CR’s particular efforts resulted in the chairs of the California Senate and Assembly Public Safety Committees agreeing to hold hearings on the use of solitary confinement, which ultimately also impacted prisoners’ decision to suspend their strike after 60 days. Even with the strike suspended, the fight continues. CR will continue to lead media and communications efforts related to the strikers’ demands and to advocate for the abolition of the use of solitary confinement.

An essential piece of CR’s work is making the politics of prison industrial complex abolition not just understandable, but accessible and convincing. CR has been shifting the public discourse about safety, security, and punishment for years and 2013 was no different. At the meeting CRNYC hosted in July, organizers suggested that CR take up a project interviewing survivors of Attica prison, 1971 to present. The project educates our communities about the continuing harms wrought by the prison on the people imprisoned there, and helps make a case for maximum security prisons to be considered for closure by New York State. The project also can be used to illustrate the kinds
of solidarity, community building, and resilience employed by people both inside and outside cages.

Across California, CR is monitoring jail and prison construction and expansion projects, fighting for state resources to be diverted from imprisonment and toward life-affirming programs, services, and practices that create genuine, long-term community safety and stability. We reject the Governor’s claim that a Supreme Court order mandating the state to reduce its prison capacity requires shuffling imprisoned people to jails across the state or to out-of-state private prisons rather than releasing people that the state itself says could leave prison today. To transform the dialogue about what California can do to address its imprisonment crisis, CR met with communities across the state to educate them about the negative impacts of jail expansion and to offer ideas about ways local communities could oppose jails being built where they live. We also collaborated with our coalition partners in Californians United for a Responsible Budget to release “How to Fight a Jail in Your Town,” a toolkit modeled on California Prison Moratorium Project’s “How to Fight a Prison in Your Town”.

CR’s ideas, language, and members were featured in more than 1000 media pieces last year, and our members made more than 250 public presentations across the country. CR facilitated spokesperson trainings with dozens of people impacted by the issues we are addressing in our campaigns and projects. Supporting these same people to be the voices of our movement helps shift common sense about who the experts are on the PIC. CR members who are part of our Abolitionist Educators network gave talks, brought CR into classrooms, and continued to organize themselves to create educational environments that obstruct rather than fuel the PIC. Finally, CR played crucial roles in developing messaging and media strategy for our coalitions, ensuring that abolitionist visions found their way into a range of communications, from educational materials for decision-makers to talking points for prisoners’ loved ones to corporate media.

Even as we are confronted by the daily indignities, violations, and terror of the prison industrial complex, CR knows that confronting conventional wisdom about what we want and need and providing spaces to dream of possibilities we haven’t yet seen is vital to pushing our organizing work forward. In November CR hosted, “Dreaming Wildly, Fighting to Win,” an evening of celebration and imagination featuring Angela Y. Davis and Martín Espada, and hosted by Melanie Cervantes of Dignidad Rebelde. The event included spirited contributions by Rico Pabón, All Nations Drummers, Linda Evans, and Vukani Mawethu and helped bring energy and hope to the end of a long year.
While we keep our hearts firmly set on an abolitionist future, CR attempts to create the physical and social environments we think give us the best chances for empowered, self-determined lives in the here and now. We believe that projects designed to build community safety and stability without relying on the PIC help us learn to operate from positions of power and abundance rather than fear and scarcity. We also recognize that strong, vibrant movements are crucial to breaking down isolation, drawing connections between issues and interests, and building collective power.

Building from our success in fighting gang injunctions in Oakland, CR has begun talking with Oakland residents about their perspectives on policing in the city and their ideas about what kinds of things make their neighborhoods, families, and communities stable and strong. The project explores what might happen if investments were made in the resources Oaklanders think would make their communities healthy and safe rather than the repressive, punitive policing practices currently failing Oakland. The interviews members are conducting will be used to develop projects designed to increase community safety without engaging the police. One of these projects is already underway with CR members who continue to tend to the Fruitvale Community Garden. This project was initiated by people targeted by one of Oakland’s gang injunctions to provide a safe green space, a place for neighbors to meet and work together, and food for local residents.

As a means of building a community that permeates the PIC’s walls, CR members correspond with thousands of imprisoned people across the United States, sharing information and resources, encouraging prisoners’ organizing efforts, and reminding people that they have not been forgotten. CR’s newspaper, The Abolitionist, also helps create dialogue between communities of people across prison walls and helps educate a growing group of readers about aspects of the prison industrial complex and resistance to it. A bilingual English/Spanish publication, the three issues of The Abolitionist produced in 2013 addressed the themes of mental health, borders, and art and abolition. Paid subscriptions help CR distribute the paper to more than 3500 people in prisons, jails, and detention centers across the US free of charge.

CR has also been building its own strength and ability to fight harder and better. We closed 2013 by welcoming our newest chapter, CR Portland, to the Critical Resistance family. We’re proud to have such a great group of people join the organization and anxious to see their efforts start to bear fruit.
CR also closed 2013 by announcing a new addition to our staff. In March 2014, Jess Heaney will be joining CR’s small staff as our new Development Director. We first met Jess through her work with Stop the Injunctions Coalition and in 2011 Jess became a member of our Oakland chapter. Jess’ creativity, compassion, skill, and knowledge will be a huge asset to CR and we can’t wait for her to start!

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And hundreds of individual donors.

Last year, CR tipped the scales toward being supported primarily by grassroots fundraising for the first time—over 75% of CR’s income last year was raised through grassroots fundraising. Thanks to all our donors and funders for contributing to CR’s ongoing success. Many of you donated time, knowledge, skills, and experience, in addition to your financial resources. Our fight against the PIC would not be possible without you. And with your help, we hope 2014 will bring us closer and closer to world without walls.