

# CRITICAL RESISTANCE

## 2015 Annual Report

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**As Critical Resistance has continued to increase and sharpen opposition to the prison industrial complex (PIC), we have seen our organizing lead to powerful victories in 2015. With policing, imprisonment, and surveillance at the fore of public discourse, many are looking for solutions to address these harmful systems. Whether through halting jail construction, stripping power away from police, or bolstering prisoner-led organizing, Critical Resistance has put abolition into practice as a practical solution to the inherent violence of law enforcement and cages.**



In reaction to increased resistance, the prison industrial complex is reorganizing itself to attempt to mask its harm. Cops, prison officials, and politicians from across the aisle claim to be joining the fight by proposing cosmetic changes such as community policing, service-oriented jails, and sentencing reforms that soften punishment for a few yet harden the overall logic of imprisonment for everyone else. We know that the PIC is vast and ever-shifting. CR puts forward strong analysis and strategy to reject reforms that bolster the legitimacy and control of the PIC. In fighting for abolition, we know we can win reforms that shrink, rather than widen, the scope of the PIC. We know that we can win

abolitionist victories. (In fact, we won three this year.) We know that our liberation will only come from our struggle to shift and build grassroots power toward rejecting the logic of punishment, policing and caging.

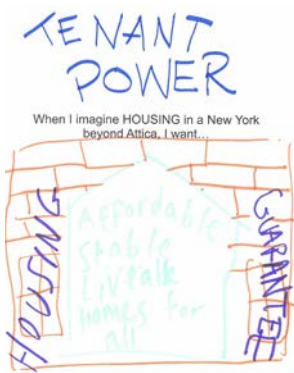
Our successes in 2015 are a testament to the power of amplifying abolition as both a practical strategy and beautiful vision. These gains remind us that dreaming wildly and fighting for what we want – rather than what we think we can get – are crucial to continue growing our movement toward a liberated future. And finally, they remind us we can win.

# Fighting for Abolition

## CLOSE PRISONS

Critical Resistance New York City (CR NYC) is stoking the fire for abolition by advancing the Beyond Attica — Close Prisons, Build Communities campaign and the Attica Interview Project. Beyond Attica has taken off this year, and CR NYC is playing a central role in coalition leadership, campaign planning, communications, media, and outreach. The coalition is demanding that the state close Attica, reduce prison violence by decreasing the number of people in prison, and transform prison-dependent economies by reinvesting in humane alternatives that employ and empower people in New York. In September, CR NYC and the Beyond Attica Coalition hosted a Speak-Out to Close Attica. The event drew hundreds of passers-by in Harlem to join in making banners, connecting to re-entry services, contributing video testimony, and offering their visions of a New York with the vibrancy of education, housing, and healthcare instead of prisons.

CR NYC will soon launch the Attica Interview Project website and zine to engage the public with testimony from people formerly imprisoned at Attica. The interviews highlight themes of repression, survival, and resistance, powerfully amplifying the necessity of closing Attica. CR NYC is proud of a strong year in which we amplified the vision that a New York beyond Attica is not only imaginable, but within our reach.



## NO MORE JAILS!

In Southern California, CR Los Angeles (CRLA) continues to galvanize popular opposition to LA's \$2.3 billion jail plan, focusing our efforts in 2015 against a proposed new women's jail. Despite vocal opposition, a declining jail population, and the plethora of community based, effective (and much, much cheaper) alternatives to imprisonment, the county is deploying liberal rhetoric to prioritize more funding for cages under the cloak of "service provision." CRLA is keeping the pressure on decision-makers with a concerted series of mobilizations, public presentations, and outreach efforts that focus attention on the social and environmental hazards of the jail project.

On Mother's Day 2015, CRLA and our allies in the LA No More Jails Coalition mobilized to the women's jail in Lynwood and held a rally outside in solidarity with all those who are locked inside. A large Mother's Day card was unfolded, and flowers were passed out to family members who were spending their day visiting loved ones inside the jail. The event proved to be a strong opportunity to let the visiting families and loved ones know about the coalition's work fighting the proposed new jail project, collect their visions for practical and necessary alternatives, and offer resources on how they can get involved. We're enthusiastic to see CRLA forging stronger, deeper resistance to more cages in Los Angeles.

CRLA has continued to spread abolition in LA by curating and hosting *Freedom Functions*, a four-part public political education series with the LA No More Jails coalition. Topics included Fighting Gang Injunctions and Criminalization from LA to the Bay, featuring CR-Oakland members and other Stop The Injunctions Coalition allies from Oakland; Community Based





Alternatives to LA County's Dangerous 2 Billion Dollar Jail Plan; and Jails are Not Service Providers: LA's Mental Health and Gender Responsive Cages. By bringing together people across neighborhoods, sectors, and experiences, Freedom Functions has activated people across Los Angeles to claim their stake in the campaign against jail expansion. In total, CRLA made 40 public presentations on the negative impacts of jail expansion in 2015 to a variety of audiences, including Skid Row residents, health care professionals, and LA County decision-makers.

## NO NEW JAIL IN SAN FRANCISCO— A VICTORY!

In San Francisco (SF), a city suffering from a poverty and housing crisis due to gentrification, 80% of the current jail population are imprisoned pre-trial, many of whom simply can't afford bail. The racialized impact of the SF jail system is devastating: 56% percent of people held in jail are Black, yet Black people comprise just 3% of the total city population. It is clear that San Francisco needs affordable housing solutions, diversion programs, and health resources – not a new jail. With CR-Oakland (CR OAK) serving as an anchor organization, the No New SF Jail Coalition had a monumental victory in December 2015 when we defeated the proposed \$278 million plan to build a new jail. CR OAK contributed strategic planning, outreach and media efforts to the campaign and engaged the broader community with mobilizations and communications tools. In addition, we contributed valuable analysis that connects the dots between the violence of policing in SF and the proposed new jail. With the No New SF Jail Coalition, CR OAK mobilized to the Board of Supervisors, placed articles in the media and catalyzed individuals and organizations to oppose squandering hundreds of millions in more cops and cages.



On June 9 CRLA and the LA No More Jails coalition won a momentous toe-hold in the fight when our consistent pressure culminated with a Board of Supervisors vote to stall construction plans over the summer in order to assess alternatives to jail expansion. This signaled that our consistent messaging

and mobilizing were shifting common sense and compelling decision-makers to look beyond cages. While the Board has now created a "mental health diversion plan," it is again moving forward on the jail plan. CRLA also played a lead role in organizing opposition to the draft Environmental Impact Report for the proposed jail, gathering over 200 public comments to the Board of Supervisors opposing the jail as empirically bad for both the environment and the people of LA. The fight isn't over! We will continue to build opposition to jail construction in Los Angeles, including challenging the jail plan on environmental grounds and activating communities to demand investments in a healthier Los Angeles without cages.

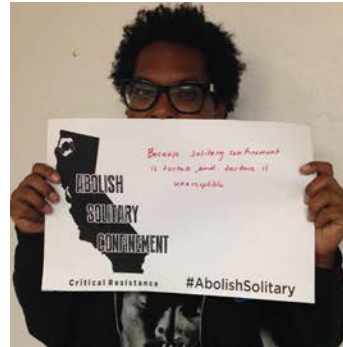
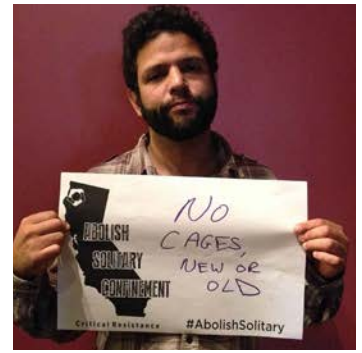
2015 has been a powerful year for our jail fights in California!



CR-Oakland worked throughout the year to galvanize strong grassroots opposition and make the proposed jail project a public controversy, compelling elected officials to publicly question the utility and ideological legitimacy of building a new jail in SF. We supported the SF Letter Carriers Union in passing a resolution against the jail project, made 30 presentations detailing the environmental, social and economic harms of building a new jail in SF, and broadened No New SF Jail Coalition support to include 10 new organizations.

To increase our impact, CR OAK authored the highly cited and influential *No New SF Jail: A People's Report*, which raised up firsthand narratives from San Franciscans impacted by imprisonment and policing, and laid out practical, life-affirming alternative investments that are needed instead. The report was a huge success, catching the attention of NBC News and being oft-quoted through the summer by organizers and decision-makers alike. CR OAK also activated opposition to the City's negligent environmental review and drew public attention to the fact that SF's jail architecture proposal violates California's regulations that prisoners must have access to outside exercise areas.

When the SF Sheriff publicly announced the jail proposal three years ago, he was virtually unquestioned. Yet finally, in December 2015 after a powerful act of civil disobedience shut down the Board Chambers at City Hall, we won the unanimous public support of all 11 members of the Board of Supervisors, who ultimately rejected the proposal to build a new jail!



## BUILDING THE MOVEMENT TO ABOLISH SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

This fall CR and the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition celebrated a decisive step forward in the struggle to abolish solitary confinement in California when prisoners won a groundbreaking legal victory in their federal class action lawsuit, *Ashker vs. Brown*. The lawsuit was brought on behalf of prisoners held for ten years or more in Pelican Bay State Prison's infamous Security Housing Units (SHU). The victory comes as a result of the tremendous organizing by prisoners and the momentum gained with the hunger strikes of 2011 and 2013. CR served as the press office for the strikes, and contributed grassroots outreach, mobilization and legislative strategy to shift power outside prison walls.

Using CR's newspaper *The Abolitionist* as an organizing tool, CR Oakland initiated a letter correspondence project with people currently or recently imprisoned in solitary confinement in CA. We gathered 60+ letter interviews (in English and Spanish) to identify the system's vulnerabilities and shifts following the hunger strikes and lawsuit settlement. We will be releasing our findings in a report to be circulated to organizations, advocates, loved ones and imprisoned organizers by the end of March 2016.

To commemorate the two-year anniversary of the 2013 hunger strike, CR OAK launched an #ABOLISH SOLITARY social media campaign in the summer to keep the spotlight on the fight. The campaign drew participation from organizers, cultural workers, world-renowned artists, and imprisoned people's loved ones, firing up incredible abolitionist conversations online. CR's steady commitment to inside-outside organizing and the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition has paved the way for abolitionist gains that shrink California's capacity to impose this torture on imprisoned people.



CR OAK's work fighting jail expansion continues! Specifically, a municipal working group has been tasked with creating a proposal for the closure of the jail at 850 Bryant. We want real long-term mental health solutions, not locked mental health facilities that become new jails, so our coalition has to continue the work of keeping this municipal working group transparent and accountable to the community. The coalition is simultaneously writing our own decarceration plan for San Francisco to address housing needs, mental health support, substance use support, and re-entry services.



## Building Self-Determination

### URBAN SHIELD OUT OF ALAMEDA COUNTY!

Building off our 2014 victory, when we kicked Urban Shield out of Oakland, this year CR OAK and the Stop Urban Shield Coalition put the pressure on Alameda County decision-makers to stop holding the war-making expo in the neighboring city of Pleasanton. CR OAK helped make the opposition this year vibrant and visible; we took part in organizing a march and rally that shut down an intersection in front of the Sheriff's office where CR OAK members spoke on the mic about the historical legacy of militarized police forces such as SWAT teams and the everyday impact of militarization on urban communities.

The Stop Urban Shield Coalition is building a long-term strategy with our partners to demand an end to Urban Shield and CR OAK is contributing campaign planning, media, and research to the fight. We're bringing our strong analysis of the links between policing, surveillance and the rest of the PIC in order to fight the violent militarization of emergency response services that Urban Shield promotes.

### DECOUPLING POLICING FROM HEALTH SERVICES

We know from personal experience, stories shared in our communities, and mainstream media headlines that cops are not appropriate medical providers. Whether someone is facing a mental health crisis, a social conflict that involves interpersonal harm, a medical situation, or an accident, police on the scene worsen the situation. Not only are the cops the

antithesis of care providers, but there have been too many instances in Oakland and across the country of police harming and even killing the person who needed care. At best, the person requiring care may be subjected to detention, arrest, or deportation.

CR-Oakland launched the Oakland Power Projects (OPP) in 2015 to build Oakland communities' capacity to resist the everyday violence of policing. The first Power Project, an Anti-Policing Healthworkers Cohort, aims to strengthen people's skills and resources to respond to community emergencies in ways that minimize police contact and ultimately decouple access to health care from policing.

The Health Workers Cohort is made up of a range of health care practitioners, including EMTs, free clinic workers, emergency room doctors and nurses, and people providing traditional/non-western remedies such as acupuncture or herbal care. Last fall, the cohort designed three "Know Your Options" workshops around mental health crises, acute injuries, and chronic health issues such as diabetes or a seizure disorder that could escalate into a health emergency. The cohort has begun offering these workshops to ally organizations and health coworkers to great reception, and is developing education tools and strategic media pieces to bolster people's skills and confidence. CR OAK is excited to build on this initial work to plan how we can bring our lessons learned to future cohorts here in the Bay Area and beyond.

Nationally over the past 40 years, we have seen a disinvestment on the part of federal and state governments in the provision of mental health care for marginalized communities across the US. In Portland, OR, a city with a notorious history of police

violence, CR-Portland (CR PDX) is building off our Community Conversation series to begin a campaign to break the connections between mental health crisis and police response.

After a year and a half, CR PDX has established itself in the local community with our prisoner mail program, Anti-Policing Community Conversations series, and regular participation in mobilizations. On April 28th, CR PDX hosted "Alternatives to Policing," the last installment of our series, which focused on practical solutions to address harm in our communities and what Portland needs to erode its reliance on the prison industrial complex. The chapter spent the summer and fall assessing campaign opportunities and beginning research for our campaign, in addition to hosting a film screening and workshops on Abolition of Policing to build up Portland communities to resist policing and decouple healthcare from cops.

## A VICTORY AGAINST POLICING

Last spring Critical Resistance and the Stop the Injunctions Coalition (STIC) won a full victory against gang injunctions in Oakland! On March 5, after six years of community pressure that had stalled these racist and anti-youth policing schemes from being expanded or enforced, the City Attorney officially dropped its two injunctions from the books. At last, the Oaklanders who were targeted got relief from this repressive policy, and were able to celebrate with their loved ones and communities. Oakland is the first city in the country to admit defeat on all fronts, dismiss the cases in court, and drop gang injunctions from their toolbox of repressive policing schemes. In this fight, CR OAK and STIC also stopped youth curfews and loitering ordinances from being implemented in Oakland, and activated hundreds of Bay Area residents to oppose Oakland contracting with notorious "Supercop" William Bratton. This campaign is a reminder that it can take years of committed organizing, a multi-prong grassroots organizing strategy, and a firm refusal to approve any scale of policing in order to win clear victories against the PIC.



## THE ABOLITIONIST GROWS ITS DISTRIBUTION

2015 was a substantial year for Critical Resistance's bilingual newspaper, *The Abolitionist*. Subscriptions from imprisoned people grew exponentially from just over 2,000 in 2014 to more than 4,500 by December. We produced two editions of the paper, one on Education and the PIC and another on Policing, which featured poignant articles by Alex Vitale and Rachel Herzing, a conversation with Fred Moten and Robin Kelley on "Do Black Lives Matter?" and more. Given the growth of the paper's distribution and the participation from multiple chapters and national members on the editorial board, CR shifted *The Abolitionist* from being a project based solely out of the Oakland chapter to being a project of the entire organization. We are engaged in strategic distribution efforts and fundraising to support producing and sending this much needed political education and organizing tool to our readership inside and outside prisons across the country.



# Organizational Development



## CR'S COMMUNITY ADVISORS

2015 also ushered in the second year of CR's Community Advisory Board, who committed to a two-year term with CR. We are honored to work with a group of people, both inside and outside of prison walls, that represents such a breadth and depth of movement experience and knowledge. CR's advisors were:

<b>Kai Lumumba Barrow</b> Ellen Barry Legal Services for Prisoners with Children	<b>Ruthie Gilmore</b> City University of New York	<b>Laura Pulido</b> University of Southern California
<b>Dolores Canales</b> California Families to Abolish Solitary Confinement	<b>Avery Gordon</b> University of California, Santa Barbara	<b>Beth Richie</b> University of Illinois at Chicago
<b>Melanie Cervantes</b> Dignidad Rebelde	<b>Bonnie Kerness</b> American Friends Service Committee	<b>Phil Scraton</b> Queens College, Belfast
<b>Linda Evans</b> All of Us or None	<b>Lara Kiswani</b> Arab Resource and Organizing Center	<b>Walt Senterfitt</b>
<b>Craig Gilmore</b> California Prison Moratorium Project	<b>Claude Marks</b> Freedom Archives	<b>Jaime Veve</b>
		<b>Eddy Zheng</b> Asian Prisoner Support Committee

*\*Note: There are also imprisoned people on our Advisory Board, but they are not named to prevent retaliation from prison regimes.*

## CR IN TRANSITION

2015 was a year of exciting transitions at Critical Resistance! In March, beloved co-founder, long-time member, and staffer Rachel Herzing left her position as Campaign Director. Rachel took great care in leaving the organization, passing on memories, skills, and relationships to current staffers and members, and has remained a solid ally and resource for us to call on. In her parting message, she wrote,

“I am so incredibly proud of what we have built as an organization and a movement. I’m also excited for what’s ahead in the struggle to abolish the prison industrial complex. The landscape for fighting the genocidal impacts of imprisonment, policing, sentencing, surveillance, and political repression has changed in no small part because of our collective efforts to lay bare the PIC’s death-dealing violence, but maybe even more because of our bold visions of a world free of the prison industrial complex.”

In this political moment, we couldn’t have articulated this more clearly, and we are proud, humbled and inspired to continue to

grow CR with no small thanks to Rachel’s 15 years of dedication and fierce spirit. Thank you, Rachel!

In August we warmly welcomed our new Campaign Director, Lily Fahsi-Haskell. Lily came to us as a longtime CR fellow traveler, with strong anti-imperialist politics and a dedication to organization and movement-building. While Director of the Arab Resource and Organizing Center in San Francisco, CA (2007-12), Lily partnered on coalitional work with CR through the Bay Area Committee to Stop Political Repression (BACSPR), developing educational and know your rights trainings about State surveillance and intimidation of our movements. Lily’s previous work for migrant rights, racial justice, and efforts to curb local law enforcement collaborations have made her an excellent addition to the CR team. Within a few short months, Lily feels very much integral to CR, working frequently with all our members and helping advance our four chapters’ campaigns. We’re honored to have Lily on board.

## GROWTH

We’re excited to bolster our membership, our infrastructure, and our effectiveness—CR is ready to grow in order to meet the demands of our communities! Over the past six years, CR has transitioned from being primarily funded by foundations to grassroots donations becoming our primary source of income. We’ve carried out a successful strategy to build a grassroots donor base and last year we exceeded our fundraising goals by raising 140% of our budget! We also attracted new foundation money, but this did not outpace our grassroots strategy: 65% of our funding continues to come from individual donors.

In this moment of heightened public consciousness around policing and imprisonment, Critical Resistance is relying on our 15+ years of steady organizing to erode the power of the PIC and shift the balance of power into the hands of people on the ground. We’re increasingly recognized as a pillar in this movement, and the demands for our work, our strategy, and our analysis are growing. Our chapters are digging deep in their work, our coalitions are making strides, and CR is sharing its analysis far and wide. In addition to our local campaigns and programming, we’ve traveled to non-chapter cities including Austin, TX, Atlanta, GA and Miami, FL to support exciting abolitionist events that strengthen our movement. In total in 2015, CR has made over 150 presentations this year and hosted over 50 workshops and events! In 2016, we’re aiming to improve our communications and information sharing infrastructure for members and staff, to gather our membership for a national retreat, to support the growth of *The Abolitionist* newspaper, and to increase our travel to support chapters and do collaborative abolitionist programming with members and allies in non-chapter cities. Thank you so much for your support and investment in our organization!