Stopping the Virus or Expanding the Prison Industrial Complex?:

COVID-19, Contact Tracing, Policing, and the Carceral Logics of Disease Control

By Sarah T Hamid

When the coronavirus outbreak first captured the attention of the US state and local officials were in a panic mode, trying to control the spread as quickly as possible. What experts knew about COVID-19 was rapidly changing, and social media feeds were filled with horrific scenes of people from Lombardy, Italy dying in hallways because hospitals were overwhelmed. Unable to contend with the uncertainty, lockdowns and stay-at-home orders were implemented to try to “flatten” the infection rate.

The effects of the public quarantine orders were not evenly felt. People imprisoned across the US faced the most repressive version of this maneuver, as entire dormitories were immobilized for weeks on end and solitary confinement was leveraged as a “public health” measure. Those in the houseless community were left to fend for themselves: public facilities they’d come to rely on, like restaurants and public libraries, were shuttered. Very quickly, police were brought in to mediate and enforce lockdown guidelines, increasing police contact with already-heavy-policed primarily Black, Brown, and poor neighborhoods. Millions faced unemployment and food scarcity. Communities living on Native reservations were denied state relief, and many of our undocumented neighbors were afraid to seek medical care or file unemployment benefits because of information sharing between hospitals, employment resources, and immigration enforcement. The COVID-19 lockdowns brought the country to a halt, exposing the classed and raced fault lines between those whose survival is or is not ensured by a punitive state built on white supremacy and racial capitalism.

In Minneapolis, Minnesota, where the uprisings were first kindled, Department of Public Safety Commissioner John Harrington held a press conference on May 30, 2020 in panic over how to control the protests. During the conference, Harrington claimed that Minnesota police were using “contact tracing” to identify and disrupt organized actions: “Who are they associated with? What platforms are they advocating for? Is this organized crime? [...] We are in the process right now of building that information network.”

“The COVID-19 lockdowns brought the country to a halt, exposing the classed and raced fault lines between those whose survival is or is not ensured by a punitive state built on white supremacy and racial capitalism.”

Harrington’s words set off alarm bells exposing the classed and raced suppression of a deadly disease, it takes very little for theories of human transmission to be crushed—criminalization, and the concomitant between public health, which needs community trust to work effectively,” one expert commented.

In an era of “smart data,” “smart predictions,” and “smart solutions,” contact tracing is being heralded as a silver bullet through both COVID-19 and the economic aftershocks of shelter-in-place orders. Public health experts are committed to applying whatever techniques and technologies we can to trace the origins and spread of the disease, and Harrington’s words threatened public trust in these methods for disease control.

Harrington’s words do more than threaten the legitimacy of contact tracing, however. They reveal the deep entanglement between public health and policing, and how the prison industrial complex (PIC) is responding to the COVID-19 crisis.

The origins of contact tracing date back to the UK, where public health officials, who felt that invoking the phrase “contact tracing” in the context of policing, and do not so amid a nationwide uprising against American policing, was a huge mistake—one with dire consequences for the fight against COVID-19. “To see the two linked jeopardizes the credibility of public health, which needs community trust to work effectively,” one expert commented.

“Contact tracing” is a public health technique that dates to the sixteenth century. A physician named Andrea Gratian used an interview and network mapping method to trace the origins of a bubonic plague outbreak in north- ern Italy. At the time, developments in the study of syphilis had changed how Western physicians understood the role of human carriers in disease transmission. Of course, it didn’t take long for theories of human transmission to overlap with practices of punishment—and, inevitably, racism and racialized violence. Once you can render a human being responsible for the spread of a deadly disease, it takes very little imagination for the state to react by policing and punishing those bodies.

The origins of most approaches to disease containment are closely tied to the criminalization of certain actions as punishable “crimes” in some 34 states today. It is made illegal and a punishable “crime” in some 34 states to potentially expose someone to HIV through sexual activity. Including activities that pose little or no risk of transmission. In California, Black and Latino people make up half of those infected with HIV, but are two-thirds of the defendants in HIV-criminalization cases.

It’s not just that disease has been criminalized—criminalization, and the concept of “crime” as a method of social, economic, and political control, has been medicalized. In everything from the architecture of the prison wards to the justifications for imprisonment, you can see evidence of cross-pollination between how so-called experts in Western societies have responded to medical crises and how the PIC has used the categorization of certain actions as “criminal” to control and punish certain populations. Disease control and social control are two domains of science and social control are two domains of science and social control.

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Letter from HRW

Letter from HRW

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Welcome to issue 33 of The Abolitionist! Critical Resistance (CR) has worked hard to restructure and revitalize this project as a necessary inside-outside organizing tool for prison industrial complex (PIC) reform. With this issue, we shared our work as a newspaper in a hybrid of columns and features, and we continue our section for returning columns that provide critical yet timely updates on our readers on CR’s current project advances and our platform. At this juncture, our communities are simultaneously experiencing the pandemic, including strategies to defund policing, eliminate militarized police presence in the colonized communities, and free our loved ones from cages. Self-determined communities like Cherán in Michoacán, Mexico, are shapers of how the global anti-capitalist and anti- abolitionist world could look like. Our interview with Yunes Torres gives a sense of how essential self-determination and defense are to an effective pandemic response.

As many anti-capitalist theorists like Klein and others contend, crisis is an opportunity for radical change. In crisis, ideas that once seemed too radical to see the light of day can be born. 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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Abolition Requires Disability Justice

By Katie Tastrom

Abled activists often forget about bodies. Or rather, they make assumptions about how they work, the speed and whether they march, how they take in information, how long they can be in meetings, how they communicate, etc. This is ironic, especially for abolitionists, because a huge function of the carceral state is to punish and non-conforming bodies.

Carceral control of bodies takes many forms beyond prison, including forced medication, barriers to gender-confirming surgery, institutions, locked psychiatric wards, and coerced “weight loss surgery.” The state claims to disable bodies in so many ways. Disability justice understands this, and abolitionists need to understand this as well if we truly want to attack the carceral state in all of its forms.

Solidarity Across Congregate Settings

As I write this, 985,000 people have died from COVID-19 worldwide, 203,060 of whom died in the US this year. COVID-19 especially kills those with underlying conditions, which means disabled people. It also spreads quickly in congregate settings, whether jails or nursing homes or group homes. It doesn’t care whether you are locked up for punishment or “treatment.” COVID-19 shows how society sees disabled people as disposable, as those of us in congregate settings are left to get sick and die.

Further, since the medical care in most in kinds of institutions is so bad, it’s also likely those underlying conditions are not adequately treated (if at all). If someone gets sick in an institution, they are at higher risk of death. The correlation between disability and imprisonment means that lots of people are caged in prisons and jails due to their disabilities. As a personal example, many of us in congregate settings are left to get sick and die. If I’m a sex worker after being too disabled to work traditional jobs, so I am at frequent risk of arrest because I’m forced into a criminalizing economy.

Disability justice is a complementary theory to abolition. It is a set of principles that came out of the collective Solidarity, articulated by co-founder Patty Berne. One of the tenets of disability justice is intersectionality. Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to initially describe the way black women experience racism and sexism in ways that are more than just the sum of their parts. This has been expanded to include other multiply marginalized people. In the context of disability justice, intersectionality reemphasizes the need of us the importance of reading disability into an analysis that includes race, gender, etc., rather than focusing on sexuality as a general concept (which inherently means centering whiteness).

People who are in institutions aren’t in there by choice—it’s disproportionately those of us marginalized by other identities as well. These are all risks because you can’t talk about abolition and disability justice without also talking about race, specifically the way Black and Indigenous people are both imprisoned and disabled at much higher rates than non-Black and Indigenous people are both imprisoned and disabled at much higher rates than non-Black and Indigenous people. These are all related, focusing on just disability as a general concept (which an analysis that includes race, gender, etc., rather than diversity) reminds us of the importance of reading disability into the context of disability justice, intersectionality reemphasizes the need of us the importance of reading disability into an analysis that includes race, gender, etc., rather than focusing on sexuality as a general concept (which inherently means centering whiteness).

Disability justice is leadership by the most impacted. It is a set of principles that came out of the collective Solidarity, articulated by co-founder Patty Berne. One of the tenets of disability justice is intersectionality. Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to initially describe the way Black women experience racism and sexism in ways that are more than just the sum of their parts. This has been expanded to include other multiply marginalized people. In the context of disability justice, intersectionality reemphasizes the need of us the importance of reading disability into an analysis that includes race, gender, etc., rather than focusing on sexuality as a general concept (which inherently means centering whiteness).

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Leadership of the Most Impacted

At the time of writing, it also seems that COVID-19 may make more people disabled as reports on long-term symptoms come in. COVID-19 is also making many disabled people more disabled and a lot more disabled people (especially those living in congregate settings) end up dead. Even if our bodies make it, we won’t. And we can’t forget why they are letting us die, which I mean in both an activist way, especially leadership activism, is inaccessible to most disabled people. For example, many organizations require and are based on in-person meetings that may not be in places that are wheelchair accessible, and even if the venue is wheelchair accessible, is the stage? Will members listen with an open mind to someone who is showing signs of mental health disabilities? Accessibility goes far beyond this, but these are just a couple examples. When you don’t have disabled people involved in and leading the movement, we get ignored. Of course disabled people need abolition, but the abolition movement needs disabled people even more.

Shared Vulnerability and Solidarity

COVID-19 has been a really interesting time for disabled people. In one sense, it lays bare our shared vulnerable-ness with non-disabled people, but specifically for those of us at greater risk of death from COVID-19 due to disability and/or some kind of intersectionalized vulnerability. Disability justice can turn this shared trauma into solidarity, like disabled people do all the time—so often without even realizing it.

Disabled folks, including especially those who are also disabled at much higher rates than non-Black and Indigenous people are both imprisoned and disabled at much higher rates than non-Black and Indigenous people are both imprisoned and disabled at much higher rates than non-Black and non-Indigenous people. These are all related, focusing on just disability as a general concept (which an analysis that includes race, gender, etc., rather than focusing on sexuality as a general concept (which inherently means centering whiteness).

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Inside-Outside Organizing to Resist a Virus: LESSONS FROM THE AIDS CRISIS FOR OUR FIGHT DURING COVID-19

By Emily K. Hobson with Bryant Elliott

How can we build together inside prisons despite—and against—COVID-19? In the early years of the HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) epidemic, imprisoned people and supporters created peer education programs, pushed for treatment, and fought stigma with solidarity. To learn from this history of how we can turn to inside and outside organizing to resist COVID-19 we need to look at the situation that existed when the stigmatization of AIDS was at its peak.

Bryant Elliott (she/her), a member of Critical Resistance Portland and The Abolitionist Editorial Collective worked with Emily Hobson (she/her), associate professor at the University of Nevada, Reno, and an activist and historian of radicalism, queer politics, and HIV/AIDS in the US, to interview three grassroots experts.

Kathy Boudin (she/her), former political prisoner, current co-founding co-director of the Center for Justice at Columbia University, and a member of Release Aging Physicians in Prison (RAP), in New York. Linda Evans (she/her), former political prisoner and long-time freedom fighter, currently active with California Coalition for Women Prisoners and the Immigrant Defense Task Force of the North Bay Organizing Project; and Crystal Mason (she/her), a leukemic prisoner who previously worked with AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) San Francisco and the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, organizing prisoner solidarity and connecting women to HIV/AIDS services.

What led you to organize inside, or in solidarity from outside, during the early years of the HIV/AIDS crisis?

Linda: I was locked up in the DC jail in 1985. Many of the women there were HIV-positive, but there was no AIDS education going on. We were getting people who were tested and thinking they were immediately going to die. There was a lot of fear about how HIV was transmitted. If you had AIDS you were HIV-posi-
tive, your life would be really miserable. When I got to the federal prison in Dublin, California, it was similar. People were freaking out everywhere, and the stigma was incredible. That was where we got started.

Kathy: I was at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York in the early 1980s. My boyfriend, a political prisoner and co-plaintiff David Gilbert, and I, at the end of 1986 our co-defendant Kwasi Balagoon died of AIDS. In response, David and two other people at the Auburn, New York, prison, Mujahid Farriq and Angel “Papo” Nieves, started the first AIDS peer education program in prisons. They were shut down, but it gave us the idea. Also, ACT UP was very active in New York City, and that had an influence on us. At Bedford, the stigma was enormous, and the death rate was growing. By 1989, random tests showed that one in five women, who came into the prison was HIV-positive.

Crystal: ACT UP San Francisco had a prison commit-	ee for many years. I worked for the women’s program of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, and I met Judy Greenspan (then of the American Civil Liberties Union Prison Project), who talked about the situation in prisons, and people out here fighting to see what was happening in prisons right now. We were able to get the AIDS Memorial Quilt Relocated and Reassembled, played, which was a transformative experience in help-
ing us recognize the depth of the crisis happening in our communities and for people for who were incarcerated—every single one of us was affected by HIV. We knew people, we loved people, we had to act.

Kathy: We also did wakathons, and, despite being locked up like animals and degraded in everybody’s view, we were able to give. We gave people ourcompulsory, and that helped everyone to feel part of a community that included the outside.

What are lessons we can draw from your history to organizing in the face of COVID-19?

Linda: The biggest accomplishment was creating community. We made a quilt also—two large quilt panels, one for orphaned kids and the other for women who had died of AIDS in the federal system—and we were able to get the AIDS Memorial Quilt Relocated and Reassembled played, which was a transformative experience in help-
ing us organize and resist a virus.

What do you want to say to people inside who are currently organizing?

Linda: Stay safe. Take care of each other. We’re work-
ing really hard to get people out. Here in California we have been demonstrating every weekend, in-
cluding at the Governor’s house, the California De-
partment of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) headquarters, and the head of the CDCR’s house. We are continuing to fight to get people released because we know that’s the way to make it safe.

Kathy: We do what we can as inside, to stay safe. It’s very hard to do, but support each other on that. If you’re getting people out, but the other important thing is to continue to fight about conditions inside. Both things are needed.

Crystal: The biggest fascination of coming out of the pandemic is that the culture from one of stigma into one of caring for those who are sick. We learned that the level of stigma was enormous. Next, we wrote a protocol for a feedback form that was organized in white, Latinx, and Black people. We had four goals: to get educated, to take care of people who were sick, to work on the stigma, and people going home for safe reentry in how they handled drugs and sex.

The superintendent agreed to our plan, so we invited him to the meeting and had 35 people. We went around the room and everyone said what they wanted to say, and each said why we were there. I talked about stigma. Someone said, “my sister had AIDS.” Somebody else said, “I used to have AIDS but I’m afraid of getting it again.” The maybe the fifth person said, “well, I have AIDS.” There was a dead silence in the room. It took a lot of cour-
ge for her to say it. A few more people spoke, and then another person said, “I just tested HIV-positive and I want to learn.” By the end of that meeting, we had cre-
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We started to take AIDS from a secret to a public con-
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What do you see as the most important action we can take?

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or political differences proved to be irrelevant. What everybody had in common, and people’s religious beliefs, were an important source of unity. It became apparent that everyone of the community began to gather, creating a very open community-based system of government, or ronda comunitaria, comprised of a rotating group of community members. These people from our town are appointed to ensure this kind of safety.

At first, when we began hearing about the pandemic in Cherán, people were scared of facing something that we had not experienced or been used to. Even in previous years when there had been similar viruses such as the flu, the elderly explained it as if it was an attack from the birds or the sky. In the last years, as community members, we have come to realize that this was the first time that we were all frightened, and the first time that we felt vulnerable.

The organization Colectivo Emancipaciones provided us with legal assistance and support in demanding recognition as an Indigenous community capable of self-organizing and deciding on our own methods of governance. This was extremely helpful in making the Cherán uprising more than just a social movement involving indigenous communities. We were able to make our demands at the national level within Mexico. It was also a legal fight for recognition of Cherán as a self-organized community, because when our local government was switched to a system based on political parties, we were never asked for our opinion as a community. Instead, the decision has been imposed on us.

As a result of all of this, from that moment onward, there have been no more political parties. There are no more police. The municipal government from those days is completely gone. From 2011 onward, new kinds of representation have come into existence that use an open assembly system. This has created a community-based system of government, or ronda comunitaria, comprised of a rotating group of community members. These people from our town are appointed through an open election where we decide which people concern our community and who is responsible for safety.

This is a change that has come about from the uprising and is how Cherán has attempted to face challenges at a local level. It is an experiment.

How can you briefly explain the Cherán uprising process to us?

Yunuén: At first, when we began hearing about the pandemic in Cherán, people were scared of facing something that we had not experienced or been used to. Even in previous years when there had been similar viruses such as the flu, the elderly explained it as if it was an attack from the birds or the sky. In the last years, as community members, we have come to realize that this was the first time that we were all frightened, and the first time that we felt vulnerable.

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Yunuén: At first, when we began hearing about the pandemic in Cherán, people were scared of facing something that we had not experienced or been used to. Even in previous years when there had been similar viruses such as the flu, the elderly explained it as if it was an attack from the birds or the sky. In the last years, as community members, we have come to realize that this was the first time that we were all frightened, and the first time that we felt vulnerable.

The organization Colectivo Emancipaciones provided us with legal assistance and support in demanding recognition as an Indigenous community capable of self-organizing and deciding on our own methods of governance. This was extremely helpful in making the Cherán uprising more than just a social movement involving indigenous communities. We were able to make our demands at the national level within Mexico. It was also a legal fight for recognition of Cherán as a self-organized community, because when our local government was switched to a system based on political parties, we were never asked for our opinion as a community. Instead, the decision has been imposed on us.

As a result of all of this, from that moment onward, there have been no more political parties. There are no more police. The municipal government from those days is completely gone. From 2011 onward, new kinds of representation have come into existence that use an open assembly system. This has created a community-based system of government, or ronda comunitaria, comprised of a rotating group of community members. These people from our town are appointed through an open election where we decide which people concern our community and who is responsible for safety.

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Some germs and viruses boost your immune system.

Stop Viruses from Spreading
1. Wash your hands whenever possible. Handwashing is one of the most important things you can do to keep from getting and spreading viruses.
2. Avoid touching your face. Try not to rub your eyes, nose, or mouth.
3. Cover your cough. Some germs and viruses spread through the air. Cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow. Do not touch a virus. If you cough into your hands, wash them as soon as you can.
4. Keep your space as clean as possible. Keep surfaces free of germs and viruses that may not be cleaned often. Viruses can live outside the body for a long period of time.
5. Don’t touch other people’s food and don’t let them touch yours. It’s a bummer, but sharing uncooked food is very dangerous. A package food with each other right now is not advisable.

Nutritional Tips to Strengthen Your Immune System and Defense

LEMON JUICE: A vitamin C powerhouse. There is a lot of vitamin C, which is good for immune systems. At a high enough blood concentration, vitamin C appears to combat certain viruses. Daily consumption of the body’s sup- plies of vitamin C are rapidly depleted as the immune system’s white blood cells absorb and quickly use it. The vitamin C in phytonutrient rich fruit and vegetables, which contains red peppers and lime juice, are available through Access Securepak.

BANANAS: Contain prebiotic fiber that selectively feeds the good bacteria in your gut. Gastrointestinal tract against harmful pathogens. These “good” bacteria are beneficial in protecting the body from a wide variety of illnesses.

CANNED JUICES: Handmade with fruit and vegetables. It’s also loaded with antioxidants.

SAFFRON: It’s important to use saffron at this time. It’s not only a digestive aid, helping with nausea, flatulence, and diarrhea, but it also increases warmth and circulatory system as a cold and flu treatment. In one year, 200 doses of saffron were purchased. The Abolitionist Collective has access to, but canteen items vary by prison and state.

CINNAMON POWDER: Increases warmth and circula- tion in the body. It is an age-old remedy if you’re com- down with a cough, sore throat, or cold. It helps move congestion in your sore. It can be used as a di- aetic aid, properties of sugar, fat, and fiber, and can be used to add a nice flavor. Daytime use increases warmth and night time use increases colds as well. Cinnamon is available through Access Securepak.

COCONUT OIL: jack-lauded with a parallel to a natural antiviral, antifungal, and antiviral. Boosts weak- ened immune systems by improving white blood cell count and helping the body fight viruses (Available from Walkenhorst).

HONEY: Antibiotic and antioxidant properties aid the digestive system and boost immunity. Contains an- tioxidants, vitamins, minerals, iron, and zinc, which are very effective for the removal of free radicals from the body. Anti-inflammatory and a soothing remedy for coughs. Add honey to tea or eat by the spoonful.

ITALIAN SEASONING & HERBS: Examples include basil, marjoram, oregano, rosemary, sage, and thyme. Give meals more flavor and contain potent antiviral and anti- inflammatory properties. Great for roasting meats, spicy, and savory dishes. A salt solution can be a mouthwash and gargle. A salt solution can be a mouthwash and gargle.

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Prisoner-Made Face Mask Instructions

By Shaylanna Luvme

A global pandemic out of nowhere It struck us all at once At first it was thought to be the flu But what we didn’t realize was a death toll like we’re in war zones

New York State wanting money on social distance drones China swept the truth with a political broom Now society has to use Zoom* That’s something we don’t recognize

Donald Trump spitting out lies The nation on shutdown People at home cloaking around Concerts from the living room Scoffing at the sick heroes out on the frontlines getting the job done So, have some respect, go have fun This is our lives, we’re responsible
So please be safe and wear a mask Go listen to all the singers of bands So please be safe and wear a mask

*Editors’ Note: For extra protection and to resist moisture from sweat or humidity, a strip of bedsheet or shirt can also make a great material for a mask, and you can wash it for reuse. If using fabric, fold it over twice or more to make a pocket before making the side holes with string, as Shaylanna instructed. Place some folded toilet paper into the “pocket” to serve as a disposable filter.

On COVID-19 in a Texas Prison

By Juan Javier Ornelas

In the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), hundreds of prisoners and officers have tested positive for the coronavirus (COVID-19). Medical staff have also tested positive. Thousands of prisoners have not been tested at random. Random testing is being done on the old and/or sick prisoners.

Many prisoners on the Estelle Medical Unit who tested positive, showed symptoms, or were exposed to the virus were sent to the Estelle High Security Unit (“Super Seg,” “Estelle,” or “HS Unit”), which confines prisoners isolation chambers like most of these prisoners who were sent to HS due to the virus have since been isolated to the maximum security hospital ward (see further information from TDC). Both Estelle Units have been on lockdown for almost a month.

Prisoners in the HS Unit normally go on lockdown after 90 days for their safety. Due to the high rate of cells for search, so they are used to being on lockdown, but it is different due to the virus. Everyone, including prisoners, officers, and medical staff, is anxious and frustrated. All problems escalate quickly. Commissaries and c&oms have shut down, leaving prisoners hungry and angry. Prisoners are sick of eating the same cold meal out of a paper tray three to four times a day. Prisoners are being denied visits, phone calls, recreation, commissary, programs, religious services, and any medical services considered “non-emergency.”

There are ten wings at the HS Unit and two of those wings are being used for prisoners who have tested positive. Non-infected prisoners fear for their lives because of the risk of contamination. Prisoners, officers, and medical staff who work with and/or around infected prisoners are being used for cleaning and care. But these prisoners are being used for prisoners who have tested positive for the virus.

All HS Unit prisoners are being forced out of their cell every 12 hours for cell inspection. During these inspections, officers who have not been tested are touching everything and everyone with potentially contaminat-ed gloves, hands and handcuffs. The prison employees are responsible for spreading the virus at the Estelle Units.

TDCJ is not telling the whole truth about what is going on in their prisons. People call to check on prisoners, but prison officials refuse to share any information. The prison’s unit law library does not have an approved policy document regarding the virus. When prisoners ask officers questions, they say, “All the rules are out the window now!” and this is so much confusion in TDCJ that everyone is scared.

This is cruel and unusual punishment. People on the outside may not care about this now, but they will when people working on the inside start getting them sick. Respectfully,

Juan Javier Ornelas

Submission About Effects of COVID-19 at Attica Correctional Facility

By Tonye Vickers

There have been hospitalizations and deaths due to COVID-19 at Attica. Here at Attica Correctional Facility, there are some precautionary measures being taken against the spread of COVID-19. Unfortunately, these measures also offer an opportunity to start denying prisoners their full rights.

For instance, all New York State facilities have suspended all visits, yet officers and “essential” personnel are still coming and going. Also, the administration has distributed a Facility Operation Manual, which gives imprisoned individuals the use of phones and kiosks every day, yet the oppressors do not always allow that use. The alarm goes off regularly, making all activities run late, or sometimes not at all, even if no one has been out of the cells.

Not being able to see family and loved ones was already stressful, and now not being able to even call or email them makes the situation even worse. I just found out that three of my family members contracted coronavi-rus and that my sister and other family members have been calling the facility to make sure I am safe. None of these messages were ever returned. My sister wor-ries about me because I have Congenital HIV and she knows that if I get coronavirus, it could be worse than my HIV.

I am scheduled to go home on June 8, 2020, and I am scared! I have been beaten many ailments over the course of my 36 years. I am a two-time cancer survivor, I have had pneumonia numerous times and I have been pre-viously diagnosed with Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) and HPV-2. I have also had bacterial meningitis twice and survived, by the grace of God!

But this scares me. There is no medication or vaccine for coronavirus. And I fear there is no beating it – not in my condition.

I have been denied Interstate Parole Transfer to Virginia due to COVID-19, so I am forced to go to “Ground Floor” TDCJ in Huntsville, Texas. I am also out of my cell for the first time in a month. I have never imagined I would see something like this in my life. It feels like something I’ve read about in books and seen in movies and have joked about, but it is no laughing matter. IT IS REAL.

Every day it seems like there is something new. So much death and sickness. I don’t watch television because it is so depressing to see the death toll rising and thousands of new cases daily. I am scared to go out there for fear of catching the virus. And I have been disappoint-ed in our elected officials who could have done something about this. No one from either political party is doing anything! All I do is pray.

May God protect my B&P family and all those out there and inside.

God Bless you all,

Tonye Vickers

*Editors’ Note: Tonye Vickers has since been released from Attica as anticipated.

Who is the “Virus”?*

By William D Hamby Jr #153564

The coronavirus penetrates prison fence wires while we, captive, still hold crowns as Our Sires Bless the lifers who can’t free themselves And those locked in literal hells Unable to escape the virus

Nowhere to hide from the liars Who keep lies as our injustice upon us

And I wonder, what is the real “virus” or us? Is it the disease of affliction, or is it also the builders of the prisons The lack of honor and wisdom The loss of so many ambitions It’s odd to think that we have also had spiritual visit When karma delivers kisses upon wishes So glad I got conviction and bliss Even as I sit in a virus-infested pit and I don’t just mean the virus of corona but also the virus of dishonesty from those claim to call themselves “honor” and to all who kneel to the drama And to all who kneel to it
By Ezzial Williams

Greetings comrades,

Despite America opening back up slowly but surely, I’m almost certain you’re not getting out as much as we’d like. As we speak, this virus spread is far from over and my canteen staff has no shortage of skittish outside, it makes wonder... What types of jokes are allowable to me and guessed, “INSIDE JOKES,” then let’s high-

lowing in for keeping our sense of humor during these unprecedented circumstances, since no official vaccine or cure right now, laughter may just be the thing we need for those of us inside (Ni-

punt intended on that one).

Back in February, when I first became aware of the coronavirus, I joked that I wouldn’t take it seriously un-

til my friends started wearing hazmat suits. Ironically, since then, I’ve witnessed hundreds of my friends and family myself trying to fend off infection while being impris-
ned in a place where contagion has spread wide-

like wildfire. Thus, we are dealing with tremendous damage in prisons and nursing homes due to the virus, in addition to community institutions,

and entire networks of people who your friends and family could have been in contact with, who your friends
talk about—these are all the antecedents of proximate

network mapping (a technique adopted by experts trace viruses, police use social

networking to track who you’ve been in contact with—all in the hopes of curtailing the virus at a more reasonable pace than a virus that I could possibly fail victim to the virulent menace too. Here at Cross City C.I., it’s pretty much contained. But I’ve heard that outside, police’s tactics doesn’t come close to describing how it feels to come in such close proximity to death. We only can only do it the fear one has after he or she found out they had been intimate with someone who recently tested positive for COVID-19, in the midst of COVID-19. When I try to talk with other prisoners here about stay-
ing safe, some of them think that I’m losing my grip on reality. However, I tell me not to worry. But that’s easy for them to say con-

sidering that nearly everyone I talk to is quarantining alone or with few other people. It’s a different story when you’re trying to fuck a felony while locked up in a unit with 200 people. Unfortunately, these are the circumstances we find ourselves facing as prison.

Unfortunately, there are no solutions to buying bleach and wiping under the table from medi-
tal needs, so don’t expect anyone to have a support system out there. Thankfully, I have friends and family, so I can possibly have some mail, but even with that I’ve had to sacrifice both canteen and stamps just so that I can keep myself and others inside safe. When I’m scared? And hearing about prisoners being bailed out in body bags only heightens my anxiety.

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and still has no shortage of skittish. Thus, we are dealing with tremendous damage in prisons and nursing homes due to the virus, in addition to community institutions, and entire networks of people who your friends and family could have been in contact with, who your friends talk about—these are all the antecedents of proximate network mapping (a technique adopted by experts trace viruses, police use social networking to track who you’ve been in contact with—all in the hopes of curtailing the virus at a more reasonable pace than a virus that I could possibly fail victim to the virulent menace too. Here at Cross City C.I., it’s pretty much contained. But I’ve heard that outside, police’s tactics doesn’t come close to describing how it feels to come in such close proximity to death. We only can only do it the fear one has after he or she found out they had been intimate with someone who recently tested positive for COVID-19, in the midst of COVID-19. When I try to talk with other prisoners here about stay-
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...
Toward Healthy Communities Now and Beyond COVID-19:
An Abolitionist Platform by Critical Resistance

In March and April 2020, Critical Resistance (CR) created this platform for COVID-19 emergency response as a roadmap to support freedom, health, and collective care, and actively resist the prison industrial complex (PIC) in all its forms during the pandemic and beyond.

The abolition of the PIC is about dismantling cages and oppressive structures while building up the resources, practices, and institutions that support healthy and self-determined communities. It requires all of us. As Ruthie Gilmore noted during Los Angeles for Abolition: Dismantling Jails and Building Liberation (Sept. 2019), “abolition is a practical program of radical change cobbled together from the work that people do in disparate struggles every day.”

Here, we uplift calls for life-saving measures to address the needs of prisoners and loved ones, people facing housing and food insecurity – long term or with the loss of work now, and people who are targeted for arrest and detention. These are real, clear, and concrete steps for stemming the pandemic now among millions of the most vulnerable and changing the social and political structures that guarantee that vulnerability.

“How we address this crisis will determine what our society looks like after it passes. We are committed to seeding a more abolitionist future”

Organizations who have endorsed our platform:

- Black and Pink
- Black Visions Collective
- California Coalition for Women Prisoners
- Californians United for a Responsible Budget
- Chicago Community Bond Fund
- Community Justice Exchange
- Dignity Not Detention Coalition
- East Tennessee Harm Reduction
- LGBT Books to Prisoners
- National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls
- National Lawyers Guild
- Philadelphia Bail Fund
- Reclaim the Block
- Release Aging People in Prison
- Southerners on New Ground
- Survived & Punished
- The Red Nation

The illustration of our platform points is by Jeremiah Durian-Williams, created for Issue 33 of The Abolitionist.

DEMAND FREEDOM FOR ALL IMPRISONED & DETAINED PEOPLE

Prisons, jails, detention centers, and psychiatric facilities are sites in which the COVID-19 virus is spreading at exponential rates. As such, carceral settings are fundamentally unable to hold people healthily and safely. We must prioritize the release of imprisoned people now, and access to safety measures for those still inside. We must free them all.

DEMAND PEOPLE’S ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTHCARE NOW & INTO THE FUTURE

This pandemic has revealed our sorely under-resourced health infrastructure and reaffirmed the ways that it is tied to systems of criminalization and control. Decades of building up the prison industrial complex while neglecting investment in healthcare is what got us here. We must quickly move to a health care system that is accessible, robust, collective – and not intertwined with policing and surveillance. Health care workers must be well resourced and given what is needed to care for communities.

ENSURE PEOPLE’S ACCESS TO HOUSING, FOOD, & ECONOMIC SECURITY

This crisis has underscored the need for all people to have access to stable housing needs such as food and water, and economic security immediately. These are necessary for survival, yet the prison industrial complex feeds off of and perpetuates people’s inability to have access to these basic resources. Given the heightened precarity of so many already vulnerable people that leave them without basic needs while they are criminalized for their efforts to survive, the only solution is to meet the needs of communities to ensure the health and safety of everyone.

SUPPORT INTERNATIONALISM / END US IMPERIALISM & MILITARISM

This pandemic is not bound by borders. As such, our solidarity and response must be international. Moments of crisis and disaster have long been used as justification for restricting people’s access to movement and care. All borders and sanctions that restrict people’s movement to access care or restrict the exchange of food and medical supplies across nations and territories must be lifted.

www.criticalresistance.org
From the cement and steel, real thoughts of resistance manifest, born and bred in the minds of those who have been inflicted by the lies and addictions that we see around us. Inmates understand that they can never break our will. The experience of our trials and circumstances is what will define our character. We can either allow those lies to harden our hearts or allow our circumstances to make us stronger. We train to make our bodies sharp like cutters and our minds sharp like boxers. We strive to make our bodies hard as the steel that contains us. We strive to make our bodies chain but also the link, making very sure that the things we say are the things that make the most sense. We train to make our bodies strong. We strive to make our...
A New Column on Abolitionist Study & Struggle with Stephen Wilson

Dedicated to the study of struggle and strategy for prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition, 9971 is a new column written by Stephen Wilson. Stevie is a Black and queer abolitionist, writer, student, and (dis)organizer within the PIC, currently imprisoned in Pennsylvania. For over two decades, he was active in the ballroom community and worked as an HIV prevention specialist. His work and practice inherit teachings from prison abolition, transformative and racial justice, Black feminist theory, and gender and queer liberation.

Critical Resistance hopes 9971 will be a space for regular reflection and political interventions on the importance and role of study in our struggle for PIC abolition. 9971 is written by, and for, prisoners, and introduces important ideas into the study of the prison industrial complex. We recognize the need to share renewed opportunities to sharpen shared political analysis inside and outside of prisons so that our work together for collective liberation becomes more effective.

To introduce this column and preview some of the themes, topics, and discussions it might explore, we offer an excerpt from a webinar on September 1, 2020 with the Center for Political Education (CPE) on “Building a Prison Abolitionist Analysis and Deconstructing Racial Capitalism,” the event featured and moderated by Garrett Felber, the publisher of 9971. It was organized and moderated by Garrett Felber, a human rights lawyer, writer, organizer, and co-chair of the legal committee of the Mississippi Prison Reform Coalition.

What does study mean to you? What role has study played in your journey with abolition?

Rukia: Study was key in my journey as a lawyer. I was able to figure out what was happening in my world, what happened to me, and now how to change things for the better. This continues for you on—it’s not a one-time or place thing. We study with a purpose so that we can transform ourselves, our environment, our relationships with other people. Study for us doesn’t occur inside a classroom, but happens collectively. You can’t study by yourself. Study must be an act that involves engaging with other people or other texts.

Study will not take place inside of prisons if we don’t do it, because the Department of Corrections (DOC) does not want us to do it. The DOC does not want us to get better. If we want to do and be better, we have to study.

We must study history. We learn a lot from what people have already done, but not without access to these materials or information. With the help of people outside of the system, we’re able to learn about the past and keep ourselves well-informed about the present. This knowledge empowers us to take on new, past and present situations where people have been locked up, what they’ve done, and how they failed, and how we can act ourselves to further this work.

Study is a major activity for us inside. It is our main vehicle for personal change. If we are not doing things to help from beyond these walls, because the DOC does not want us to study. Please stay connected to get us out there and experiment.

RacheL: I agree with Stevie—study is very important, not only to deal with our own conditions, but as a tool to build collective power and use that power to bring about change. When we start understanding what the central role plays in PIC abolition. Studying alone is not going to get us to a place where we know how good we are at it. We need study to organize well.

Our best education is put in service of making intentional change. This may be a change in our own conditions such as getting a GED to get a job or developing reading skills to fill out a tax return. It may be an educational or learning experience that helps us see the world differently. When we’re talking about study for PIC abolition, our study needs to be in service of fundamentally transforming the conditions that sustain surveillance, policing, sentencing, and incapacitation. Our study has to be put to work, I say study for abolition so that we never lose track of the fact that our struggles are at it. We need study to organize well.

By the time, I was a part of a student movement with people who had politics further left than my own back then. We figured we were smart enough, nice enough. We were kind and curious enough, and our demands were the right ones. Right! Harvard University, to hire a diversity, access, and inclusion officer. Why would they do it? They fired me, didn’t they? I went to South Africa where students who were organizing had to get themselves together. I then went to South Africa, having plenaries discussing Fanon’s theories, and making real-time decisions based on what they were reading that I saw study and struggle as part of the same space.

When we returned, we threw our demands away and started reading. It wasn’t enough to be good or nice, to be kind or have ideas that made sense—we needed political analysis. We needed to call into question the role that Harvard was playing in society, and our relation to the institution as Black, queer, poor, and exploited students.

Our analysis shifted to implementing our own critical race theory program where we invited critical race theorists and created the only space on campus where people could gather and talk about the role that Harvard was playing in society, and our relation to the institution as Black, queer, poor, and exploited students.

For me, the purpose of study has become the purpose of everything for our work there. It was a way that we were able to challenge with others: How do we lay the foundation for transformative systems we want to see, for our view of what an institution as a whole should look like, if we don’t jump out there and experiment?

How do you get into the study group? How were you in? What was the purpose of the group, how was it structured?

Stevie: Our study group is called 9971—a reference to abolish the PIC, because the prisoner’s office, a longtime PIC abolitionist, co-founder of the Mississippi Prison Reform Coalition.

We also had Bold Type Books, which ten prisoners were involved in. Nation Books would also send a book for each prisoner to read.
they could. Ultimately, the MCDC broke the action by buying food at the commissary to sustain themselves. His comrades decided they had had enough. They began to talk about things like what abolition entails. I appreciate Stevie raising this.

I agree with Rukia that experimentation is very important. It is a process of studying and then applying, our practice and our analysis gets better. Moving back and forth and understanding that what we learn is only as useful as what we do with it, and what we do must be informed by an understanding of what people who are behind the walls are going through. Developing a hypothesis about conditions where we are living and understanding where we want to go.

At the CPE, we study in a bunch of different ways. We do formal study groups, like read and discuss. We do classes with curriculum on core concepts. We also study, and bring together organizations to be in strategic conversation. These conversations are where political education happens, because we’re having to articulate what we think and hopefully engage in principle struggle that makes us fight smarter—what to, to whom, and how to. We are taking the ideas and understanding that we gain from the CPE and applying them to our work. Having these conversations with people whom you are already, or would like to be, politically engaged with goes a long way.

A lot of our study of Parchman came from inside guidance. Young folks primarily were imprisoned in Parchman Prison. In the 1990s and early 2000s, they suffered similar abuses to folks currently inside Parchman and other Mississippi prisons, such as not being allowed to shower, not being provided with clean drinking water, sewage existing inside their cell, denial of medical treatment, under staffing, and other kinds of mistreatment. Folks are currently being retaliated against for sharing these kinds of abuses with CF, and transplanted. Parchman was turned into a workhouse and prison, and has remained a prison since. The first political education conversation was around demands for PPE, awareness of jail conditions in the city grew, and the solidarity efforts of multiple groups on the inside, coalesced into a vital network for action going forward.

Dear Allies: Letter from Freddie

To my allies who are actively supporting the movement, as well as my personal struggles, I want to say thank you. Thank you for not being silent. Thank you for being open to get out of your comfort zone, for the demand that you heard. Thank you for having love and empathy as well as compassion for us who are being flat out rationalized by the system.

As I wake up in the morning and go through my day, I carry a deep sense of gratitude that I’d love to express to my living allies. It’s important for me to share my thoughts as I do artwork, day in and day out. I fill my days with this art as well as doing and studying law. I study law because, as you may know, we are so misrepresented and misunderstood by both of decent people. One by very persons (court-appointed attorneys) who are supposed to be our friends, and also the court. If I don’t educate myself and others on different aspects of the law, I will have absolutely no chance at all.

May God keep standing by your side. If he is for you, then we can’t lose. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Become a member of Critical Resistance today for just $10

Thank you & God bless Mr. Freddie A.

Inside-outside Collaboration: Reflections from Freddie and CF

What is something that has surprised you about your organizing relationship since you met? Freddie: One thing that surprised me was how well we and CF got along and how we kind of took to one another. CF: It can be hard to get to know someone at first when you’ve only been talking about writing and what they do. It is so slow! I’m really glad that Freddie asked for my number so we could talk on the phone. It turns out we have a lot in common. We’re both woodworkers, hard core Portland Trail blazers fans, and, most importantly, we’re both organizers. I think it is really important to get to know the person you’re working to, learn about their life and their story, and to be willing to share your own. You’re talking to a person who has the experience of living under conditions, in order to take risks and organize together. Really understand who you are working with is really important. It is really important to make sure people to be matched up, we would get along so well. I’m lucky to have Freddie as my friend and comrade because we are a solid flag side because both of our lives are better for it.

What are some of the biggest challenges of inside/outside organizing for each of you? Freddie: Some of the biggest challenges in inside organizing or inside organizing is that we have to be very strong and to have very strong opinions and have not learned to let someone lead them, or just to listen. A lot of ego comes into play in this environment. Outside, I think the challenge is just being consistent for long periods of time. When I was on strike, I was in an instant gratification society.

CF: Without a doubt — at least on my end — it would be the mail system at the jail here in Portland. When we were first trying to get word of the strike out to the...
press, I met a reporter interested in doing a story about it, but of course she needed to hear from sources firsthand. The first two times I sent Freddie letters with her contact information, they were flagged as “mail violations” because the jail claimed that the letters were contaminated with an unspecified substance. I don’t think either one was ever sent back to me. Now before I write to him, I take pictures of the letters in case they don’t get through so that at least I can remember or have a record of what I wrote. On the third attempt we finally managed to get Freddie and the reporter in touch, but the whole process of doing so took nearly a year.

What are some of the biggest successes of inside-outside organizing for you?

CF: Again, I feel so lucky that Freddie and I were paired up by the CR letter writing program because I have made a lot of connections over the years organizing in the city and was somewhat uniquely positioned to be able to help him and his comrades. With the ongoing organizing against the prison industrial complex (PIC), what do people in the US need to know about what’s happening in Portland and what’s happening at MCCDC?

Freddie: I want them to know that it’s not hyperbole when we say the food is sometimes literally inedible. I think a lot of people have a lot of respect (they have) the same complex as the police, that sending someone to the hole for nothing, shutting off a phone call, taking away legal rights, they have a lot of respect for a whole other “full” story within itself, ‘I’m just sayin’.

CF: I think the number one thing that people need to realize that this is just still a ton of people in long-term pretrial detention here who have been locked up since before COVID even hit! Freddie has been in since February 2020. Not only on October 1st, according to a ‘crime’ necessarily means you are in fact guilty, let alone that along with the inhumane conditions of a jail, there is a constant threat of their release. The PIC is still in full operation and there are no medical conditions, and they have regularly helped put money on Freddie’s commissary account (and now the accounts of whenever someone else needs it), while still suffering is not the same as relief.

Freddie: It’s an absolutely travesty. COVID is no excuse. Every day he is at risk of being infected by corrections officers. The community here in Portland has been very active. I was able to connect with one of the bail funds here, and they have really helped put money on Freddie’s commissary account (and now the accounts of whenever someone else needs it), while still suffering is not the same as relief.

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CRITICAL RESISTANCE (CR) Updates and Movement Highlights

How do we sharpen our efforts toward prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition without knowing what advances our movement is making? This column is meant to keep our movement partners and readers updated on current abolitionist campaigns and CR news between issues of The Abolitionist. As 2020 has been a year of ongoing crisis, movement organizations have hustled to meet this moment and advance our campaigns and programs toward material, concrete gains against the PIC. Our recent successes are due to decades of struggle and tireless organizing.

NATIONAL AND CHAPTER UPDATES ON CR’S WORK

Critical Resistance Portland (CRPDX):

On September 8th, in response to the massive Santiam fires sweeping across Oregon, the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) transferred approximately 1,450 imprisoned people from Oregon State Correctional Institution, Santiam Correctional Institution and Mill Creek Correctional Facility to the Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP) in Salem. This move nearly doubled the already overcrowded OSP and threatened to expose every imprisoned individual to COVID-19. In- side and outside organizers anticipate a massive out- break because Black/POC's actions. In response, a net- work of organizers across Oregon and Washington, including Critical Resistance Portland (CRPDX) and the you Project, published a phone tap targeting Governor Kate Brown and ODOC beads Collette Peters and Jason Leiken, whose demands were released. In that- ear demands have been moving through Oregon state prisons and around the nation. Coffee Creek Correctional Facility evacuated to Deer Ridge.

On July 13, CRPDX launched the #WriteThemAll project, which organizes volunteers to write all 14,000+ people in Oregon state prisons. #WriteThemAll is a project that helps to build community, strengthen the aboli- tionist movement, and disrupt the isolation and vio- lence of imprisonment. Since launching, 1,779 people have signed up, and we’ve sent 1,011 volunteers the contact information for 8,994 people imprisoned across Oregon. As of September 25, nearly 5,000 let- ters have been sent. We have received over 300 re- response letters with more and more coming every week. The #WriteThemAll project also coordinated hundreds of outside volunteers to help send applica- tion forms for prisoners to receive stimulus checks to all people inside Oregon prisons in addition to all of our inside contacts totaling over 20,000 letters in just a couple of days.

Critical Resistance Oakland:

CR Oakland’s work continues to focus on anti-policing and anti-imprisonment work in the Bay Area. Working alongside the Black Organizing Project this summer, the chapter celebrated a long-fought victory of securing a unanimous vote from the Oakland school board to pass the Resolution for Black Resilience in the Oakland School Police Department. The chapter has also been actively monitoring and documenting violations on defending the Oakland Police Department.

Since 2013 CR Oakland has been a lead member of the No New SF Jail Coalition, fighting jail and crimi- nalization in San Francisco, CA. After a multi-year fight of organizing and direct action against the city to permanently close the notorious County Jail 4 at 850 Bryant Street downtown, the coalition won its second victory in seven years. As of September 2020, there are no people imprisoned at 850 Bryant Street, CR Oak- land and the No New SF Jail Coalition remain commit- ted to monitoring this closure until “closed,” means “closed,” as the sheriff has made several attempts to continue using the jail in different capacities. The chapter is now assessing its next moves in fighting im- prisonment in the Bay Area.

The chapter has also been adapting during the CO- VID-19 pandemic, reimagining the prisoner mail correspondence program so that chapter members can work remotely. The chapter has also continued the facility evaluations and the development of a per- manent community space in North Oakland, home of the first fight against the fight that the chapter worked on and won several years ago. The space will be a move- ment-building hub for abolitionist work in the Bay Area. In 2020, the chapter also implemented a new project that has supported mutual aid efforts in the neighborhood, in partnership with Cafe Town, FAIR Oakland-based network that provides free food fridges, the chapter now has a fridge outside of our build- ing with thousands of meals for people with experienced discrimination and abuse during the pandemic.

We will include updates from our other two chapters in Los Angeles and New York City in our next issue.

CR National:

Across the US, CR has worked to connect abolitionist efforts from coast to coast and across different issues and communities. At the end of March, after US cit- ies entered varying levels of quarantine to flatten the curve of COVID-19, CR hosted a webinar with thou- sands of international attendees called “Organizing Against Toxic Imprisonment in the Face of COVID-19.” Organizers from California to New York discussed their work on different local campaigns to fight against imprisonment. Such work has been done in direct soli- darity with our loved ones and comrades locked up in jails, prisons and detention centers around the world. After this webinar, CR released the “Abolitionist Pla- form,” Toward Healthy Communities Now & Beyond COVID-19,” through which we call for the intersec- tional efforts of anti-imprisonment, anti-policing and anti-imperialist struggles to coalesce concretely as a response to the COVID-crisis. In the summer, CR na- tional members started a national anti-policing work- group focused on generating organizing resources and tools for abolishing policing across the US. We hosted another webinar with over 8,000 attendees in July focused on these issues.

CR’s Abolitionist Training School (ATS), which was started in 2019 as a multi-phase process of building skills and also drawn up a new organizing framework for the next phase of its work with the launch of the Abolition NOW network. Through the Abolition NOW network, we are forming from imprisonment and policing, and investing in community health. Despite a major setback when the Alameda County Board of Supervisors voted to in- crease the sheriff’s office budget by 40% (our 2020 budget is $205 million/year) in May, the coalition continues to build collective pow- er with people within and beyond jail walls.

Prisoner Support

Oakland Abolition and Solidarity (OAS) has organized several projects for solidarity with prisoners. WE ARE THEIR VOICES, a group of family members (mostly wives) of prisoners, are organizing rallies outside of eve- ry CDCR prison throughout September and October. Folks can connect with them on Instagram (@wears_ heirovices). September events included actions at both men’s and women’s facilities in Chino actions at the capital in October, and many others in between.

OAS is also a part of the fight to decarcerate Alam- eda County by organizing against Santa Rita, the local county jail where people face ongoing abuse and ne- glect from staff. Weekly updates on these actions can be found at https://tirpsolidarity.org/ by or inquiring with OAS for one of their Santa Rita jail bulletins. OAS is also organizing material support nights to provide food, drinks, smokers, and sometimes rides to anyone getting released. These nights have grown to several per week with regular trainings following effective CDCR safety protocol. OAS also writes to hun- dreds of prisoners across California, sharing political education and building relationships. We are commit- ted to building power with all of their inside con- tacts detailing several acts of collective resistance that have taken place with people both inside and outside jail.

If you’re interested in learning more, write to OAS at: Oakland Abolition and Solidarity PO Box 15954 Oakland, CA 94640

West Coast

California:

Prisoner Resistance & Outside Solidarity

San Quentin State Prison has experienced its first wide- spread outbreak of COVID-19, following the transfer of 131 prisoners from San Bernardino County’s California Institution for Men (CIM), a known “hot spot” with over 500 active cases and 15 COVID-related deaths. Prior to the transfer, San Quentin had no confirmed COVID-19 cases; now reportedly there are over 1,600 cases and climbing. Immediately after the outbreak, prisoners released a set of demands that outside orga- nizations are amplifying and directing toward the Cal- ifornia Department of Corrections and the state Gover- nor. Solidarity organizing has included actions outside of the prison since June 23, as well as larger prisoner actions and mobilizations to both the state capitol and outside Governor Newsom’s home in Sacramento, CA.

Decarceration & Prisoner Release

Decarcerate Alameda County—a coalition led by the Anti Police-Terror Project, Causa Justa — just launched the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Human Im- pact Project, and CR’s #FreeThemAll campaign, an advocate for freeing people from Santa Rita Jail, divest-
SOUTHWEST  
ARIZONA:  
Borders = Genocide, No Wall on O’Dohm Land
In Quixotique Springs, Arizona, O’Dohm Anti Border Collective and Defend O’Dohm Jewed have taken direct action multiple times in an attempt to halt construction of the border wall threatening A’al Vap (Quixotique Springs) in Hia Cede O’Dohm Jewed (O’Dohm Lands) near Ajo, Arizona. The springs, one of the only desert water sources, are located on the US and Mexican Border in the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. Indigenous activists continue to organize and lead direct actions to stop the construction, while facing attacks from white supremacists and border patrol.

THE SOUTH
LOUISIANA AND TEXAS  
Hurricane Relief
In August, as Category 4 Hurricane Laura reached land in Louisiana and Southeast Texas, imprisoned people experienced power outages, water shortages, and other impacts of the hurricane combined with institutional abuse and neglect. Information has been slow to get out. The Fight Toxic Prisons Campaign organized phone spas and other advocacy tactics, including a relief fund for prisoners in response to the hurricane. If you have been impacted by the hurricane, please get in touch with Fight Toxic Prisons:

at fighttoxicprisons@gmail.com

Mailing address:  
Abolitionist Law Center  
Attn: FTF  
368 E. 64th St.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15212

TENNESSEE:  
Defund Policing
Nashville People’s Budget Coalition pointed out that while the Metro Council failed to defund their police department organizing efforts have still produced victories, and the coalition committed to the fight. Hundreds of people showed up to council meetings to voice their support for defunding the police. This strong showing moved several council members to support the amendments.

MIDWEST  
ILLINOIS:  
Defund Jailing and Community Bail Funds
Chicago Community Bail Fund (CCBF) is working with other local organizations to push the Cook County Board to defund Cook County Jail and invest in Black communities. CCBF and partners have mobilized Chicago communities to testify to the board, organized an action outside the jail attended by hundreds of people, and received positive press coverage (even from a right-leaning paper!) that helps shift public understanding of how real community safety is created. Because the department expects revenue shortfalls due to COVID-19, the anti-imprisonment fight in Chicago may be battling to prevent cuts to services rather than winning new investments, but CCBF remains committed to ensuring austerity hits the jail rather than community programs.

As of the end of September 2020, CCBF has paid a total of $20,712,200 in bonds to free 26,216 people incarcerated in Cook County Jail or on house arrest with electronic monitoring. They have paid an additional $428,745 in bonds to free 48 people from other counties across the state. CCBF was also proud to work with partners to pay $400,000 to free trafficking survivor Chryystal Kifer from jail in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Finally, CCBF continues to have the resources to free everyone arrested in conjunction with the Black Lives Matter movement in Illinois.

MINNESOTA:  
Dismantle Policing
Reclaim the Block is working to force the city’s Charter Commission to remove the Minneapolis Police Department from the city’s charter, effectively paving the way for defunding and disbanding the force.

EAST COAST  
NEW YORK:  
Prisoner Releases & Advocacy
Release Aging People in Prisons (RAPP) in New York continues to target Governor Cuomo to “Let Him Go” and “Free them All” by granting clemency to aging prisoners most vulnerable to COVID-19.

PENNSYLVANIA:  
Homes for All / Housing = Health
After organizing unhoused residents and fighting against displacement, Philadelphia Housing Action appears to have reached a tentative deal with the city that will provide protest camp residents with 50 van homes to be placed in a community land trust. The land trust will designate these properties for use as low-income housing, defined as $25,000 and below, and they will be controlled by local committees.

INTERNATIONALLY  
PALESTINE:  
Prisoner Resistance
Southeast of occupied Ramallah, three Palestinian prisoners facing attacks from white supremacists and border patrol and lead direct actions to stop the construction while facing attacks from white supremacists and border patrol.

Resist Policing
Iyad al-Halal, a 32-year-old autistic Palestinian was killed by Israeli police sparking protests in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank. Chants of “Palestinian Lives Matter” were shouted in a way to show solidarity to the Black Lives Matter movement in the US.

"We are asking you to please consider donating to Critical Resistance as we continue to fight against the state violence that holds us in place. These donations are especially important during a global pandemic that is highlighting the inextricable link between mass incarceration and public health. Donations support our work to disrupt mass incarceration, support prisoners and their families, and raise awareness of the human rights violations committed in US prisons, jails, and detention centers. It is thanks to your support that Critical Resistance has been able to maintain our online presence and provide important resources during this time. Thank you for your continued support and solidarity."
Call for Content

Help shape the content of The Abolitionist

Make your voice heard in our paper!

Throughout the Spring and Summer of 2020, The Abolitionist received a number of letters to our Oakland office and our Project Coordinator will notthe original ideas in your submission.

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

What is The Abolitionist’s new structure?

Our Features section is a compilation of pieces that mirror different aspects of praxis—the cyclical process of change through theory, action, and reflection. Features also all share a focus for each issue, but that focus does not serve as a complete theme of the entire issue, other columns do not have to share that same focus. For example, in Issue 33, Features focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and included a theoretical or analytical piece (pg 1), a set of reflective pieces (pg 7), and a few examples of organizing or grassroots resources related to the pandemic (pg 6). The columns (9971 Study and Struggle for Abolition with Stephen Wilson, Abby Throwback Inside-Outside Fishing Line, Kites to Editors, Critical Resistance Updates, Movement Highlights; and “Until All Are Free” Political Prisoner Updates) do not all center the COVID-19 pandemic.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:

Send us your writing and artwork!

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

Ideas for Articles and Artwork

• Examples of current 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 you think the conversation will cover.
• Alternatives to policing, punishment, imprisonment, and surveillance
• Experiences of life after imprisonment (or before?!) without the paper
• Implementing, liberties, 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, etc.)
• Empowering, liberatory artwork that shows 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.
• 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 your ideas are worth the struggle. Try reading your piece out loud to yourself or sharing

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SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:

Send us your writing and artwork!

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

Ideas for Articles and Artwork

• Examples of current 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 you think the conversation will cover.
• Alternatives to policing, punishment, imprisonment, and surveillance
• Experiences of life after imprisonment (or before?!) without the paper
• Implementing, liberties, 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, etc.)
• Empowering, liberatory artwork that shows 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.
• 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 your ideas are worth the struggle. Try reading your piece out loud to yourself or sharing