...POWER COMES FROM LYING... LYING BIG AND THE WHOLE DAMN WORLD PLAYING ALONG WITH YOU. ONCE YOU GOT EVERYBODY AGREEING TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES AND HATING OUR OWN PEOPLE. THOSE IN POWER PURSUE THEIR INTERESTS THROUGH A TACTICS AND STRATEGY THAT ACCOUNT FOR LOCAL ECONOMIC HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES TO DRAW EXPERIMENTING, ASSESSING SUCCESSES AND FAILURES, BLUEPRINT FOR THIS; IT HAS A LOT TO DO WITH CONTINUOUSLY OBLITERATING INTERPERSONAL, INSTITUTIONAL, ECONOMIC, AND STATE VIOLENCE CULTURE, KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM, SOLIDARITY, AND FREEDOM. ABOLISHING INSTITUTIONAL, INTERPERSONAL, ECONOMIC, AND STATE VIOLENCE TOGETHER IS INTEGRAL TO RECLAIMING OUR HUMANITY AND CREATING COMMUNITIES THAT FLOURISH (SEE CRITICAL RESISTANCE - INICIATE STATEMENT). OUR TASK AS ABOLITIONISTS IS TO DESTROY THE CULTURE OF IMPRISONMENT THAT HAS BECOME SO COMMON SENSE IN OUR SOCIETY BY CREATING AND SUSTAINING EVERYDAY INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY PRACTICES THAT BUILD OUR CAPACITY FOR SELF-DETERMINATION. THERE IS NO EXACT BLUEPRINT FOR THIS; IT HAS A LOT TO DO WITH CONTINUOUSLY EXPERIMENTING, ASSESSING SUCCESSES AND FAILURES, TAKING RISKS, AND MOVING FORWARD. THERE ARE MANY HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES TO DRAW LESSONS AND INSPIRATION FROM IN THIS Eversee Heroes Grown on Trees and Resource List. We should study them with an eye on developing tactics and strategy that account for local economic conditions and political formations. To take up this struggle and not play along is to fall into the proverbial camp of the “evildoers” with its attendant dangers. U.S. political leaders make it crystal clear that: “you’re either with us or against us.” At the recent Attica to Abu Ghraib Conference, Robert King Wilkeron, of the Angola 3, summed up the situation as such: “the media has got us loving our enemies and hating our own people.” Those in power pursue their interests through a sophisticated system of ideology and force (See Why We Focus on the Right). The ruling class knows that it’s good business to first try and convince the public that they’re working in society’s best interests. The most effective way to do this is to play upon people’s fears. For example, the State persuaded the public that the PATRIOT ACT was a necessary compromise between democratic ideals and national security because of the imminent threat of terrorism. We see this again and again in the supposed wars on crime, drugs, and terror. With society’s consent, police and prisons safeguard the extreme disparities of society’s class structure by disappearing those who pose a threat to state and corporate power (See Bonnie Kerness and Masui Essay Interview). The social construction of “crime” has been useful for convincing people that the U.S. power structure is protecting them, while relieving guilt around class and race privilege, and further reproducing the property relationships and citizenship privileges of white democracy. We all know the bureaucracy that passes as law and order in this country. Yet we shouldn’t gloss over the fact that alternatives are often nothing more than the kinder and gentler maintenance of a fundamentally oppressive social order (See Jerry Miller Interviews). Moreover, when politically and economically useful, the State has done its best to appropriate alternative justice models into its auspices. Community policing and neighborhood watches are seemingly innocuous ways in which the state normalizes social pathologies, mimics empowerment and community control, and restores the capitalist pecking order (See Making Police Obsolete). The question of alternatives brings up basic questions about the appropriate relationship between the individual and the community, and the process of accountability and transformation. In any endeavor to resolve harm and prevent it in the future, there has to be a commitment to safety, healing, and prevention (See Generation Five Article). This means building the capacity of individuals and communities to address the violence that takes place in our families and communities, and transforming the social conditions that permit it in the first place. Prisons negate this possibility and ensure the cyclical nature of violence. When faced with the terror and injustice of prison, it’s not surprising that people refuse to take responsibility for the harm they commit. Mass imprisonment has not made our communities any safer or healthier (See Community-Based Interventions to Violence). There are societal incentives for this double bind. It secures a steady supply of bodies for the prison industrial complex, sows fear and distrust of our own families and friends, and alienates people from uniting for common cause against oppression. The conservative discourse that reduces the complexity of an individual into the notionality of the “criminal” has found a foothold in our own minds. This was the other side of Prop 66. We too are quick to divide people into two camps: the deserving and the undeserving, the rehabilitated and incorrigible. If we don’t believe that we can change and become whole, we cannot call ourselves abolitionists. We too have to move beyond our punitive impulses. OUR SYSTEM IS ONE OF DETACHMENT: TO KEEP SILENCED PEOPLE FROM ASKING QUESTIONS, TO KEEP THE JUDGED FROM JUDGING, TO KEEP SOLIDARY PEOPLE FROM JOINING TOGETHER, AND THE SOUL FROM PUTTING TOGETHER ITS PIECES.” — Eduardo Galeano “Divorces” This edition attempts to connect some of the dots between state and interpersonal violence, to move beyond platitudes and look at some of the alternatives that are being put into practice. Many people in our communities are frustrated and feel like there aren’t viable options accessible to them except for the police and legal system. Our difficulty in creating viable options that deal with murder and forms of sexual violence legitimizes repressive forces, creates wedges in the community, and sacrifices long-term solutions for immediate intervention. We must also acknowledge that there are no easy answers or quick-fix alternatives, that difficulties abound, and that we must continue dreaming, building, and striving. Our opposition is formidable and our communities are struggling just to survive. And yet the articles herein attest to the possibility of joining together. We hope that this edition of The Abolitionist inspires readers to better conceptualize a world without the PIC and to continue building the political alliances necessary for liberation.
used to think that by setting up alternatives in the community to reinforce these 200-year-old ideologies brought surveillance into the community as well as within the mentality is creeping into society across the board. Support from the public as a whole. This kind of law enforcement technology to reinforce these 200-year-old ideologies brought surveillance into the community as well as within. All of these issues haunt us today. We’re now talking about electronic surveillance devices to track sex offenders. We’re brought surveillance into the community as well as within institutions. We’re stuck with a 17th century attitude toward those who are marginalized in our society, but now we have 21st century technology to reinforce these 200-year-old ideologies—and that’s very, very dangerous. If you look back to earlier studies of the law enforcement and correctional system in Germany in the late 1930s, you find a society certainly more pluralistic. Sentencing was tougher, yet harsher. Minimal programs in prisons were slashed even before these sorts of punishments were directed toward Jews as part of a German-wide campaign. They were used on so-called “criminals” and, unfortunately, I believe this is where the Germany’s ethnic cleansing campaign. They were used on so-harder. Minimal programs in prisons were slashed even before society entirely engulfed in punishment. Sentences became very, very dangerous.

When I was the Commissioner of Youth Services in Massachusetts during the early ’70s. I originally hoped to reform those places. Over time I found them unformable. We did shape a number of them up, and studies done at the Center for Criminal Justice at Harvard Law School have suggested that our programs were quite helpful. But you’re always swimming upriver when reforming institutions. The minute you let up or leave prisons revert to the negative dystopian models from which they were originally designed.

We decided to try and eliminate them altogether and set up alternatives—spending the same amount of money that it costs to keep a kid in an institution. At that time, the cost was around 40% of the money. These days, it approaches 70% a year in most states—a fantastic amount of money spent to destroy a kid. And in prisons, it now costs around 35% per year to incarcerate a person.

What kind of options would you consider for your own kid if you were given $70,000 and were told to keep him or her out of trouble for a year? Well, my gosh, you could come up with just fantastic options. There are some marvelous programs such as Outreach Board to help keep kids out of the criminal-justice system. And of course there are many more options. We’re often spending double that amount to destroy kids from poor families. It’s phenomenal what we will spend to hurt and destroy others. Everyone knows in their hearts the kinds of things we routinely do matters worse.

The new San Francisco-based Institute deals primarily with sex offenders and violent offenders. I saw a recent series of comments by Dan Abrams, who does the legal thing for MSNBC, in which he said, “of course we all know that sex offenders repeat,” said, “We all know they repeat.” Well the guy said, “They repeat at this fantastic rate. All of that is nonsense.” I think they’re almost conscious fears about sex offenders, it’s almost impossible to beat misperceptions any longer. I think they’re almost conscious fears about sex offenders, it’s almost impossible to beat misperceptions any longer. I think they’re almost conscious fears about sex offenders, it’s almost impossible to beat misperceptions any longer. I think they’re almost conscious fears about sex offenders, it’s almost impossible to beat misperceptions any longer.

Institute deals primarily with sex offenders and violent offenders. To switch gears for a moment, the work we do at Augustus Hill is extraordinary. We’re often used to think that by setting up alternatives in the community to reinforce these 200-year-old ideologies brought surveillance into the community as well as within.

We define harm both as something one person does to hurt another—from yelling at your partner to killing another person—and as the effect of oppression or violence carried out by the state. Imperialist, racist, and colonialist systems of oppression are at the heart of this definition. Race, class, and gender shape who commits harm and who is harmed. Harm can often be linked to the harm the state and economies, institutions do in communities of color, poor communities, and other oppressed communities. We define harm this broadly to recognize that current ideas of crime are limited to ways that specifically target the communities that are also the targets of harm from the state. We also do it to challenge the idea that the best ways to address harm in our communities is through punishment and imprisonment. The term prisoner, on the other hand, means someone kept in a cage against their will by some powerful force (like the state), whether that power is just or not. Talk of crime and criminals usually happens without the critical thinking needed to properly understand the conditions in which many acts of harm take place. How can we understand murder, theft, sexual abuse, police brutality, and the many other acts of harm as symptoms of economic conditions within and without our communities? We have to be able to talk about and respond to harm in a way that doesn’t minimize violent acts, yet holds out the possibility of healing and transformation for all parties involved.

The words harm, accountability and self-determination are used throughout this edition. What follows are working definitions that CR uses to inform our organizing:

HARM
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ACCOUNTABILITY
The idea that if someone does something wrong, they should be accountable is often a driving force behind popular support for the PIC. We use the term differently. True accountability means making sure that responsibilities between people or groups of people are met. It also means that each side’s needs get met. Within the PIC, punishment is commonly thought of as a tool used by the state to maintain the social order and the current legal system. The term, on the other hand, means someone kept in a cage against their will by some powerful force (like the state), whether that power is just or not. Talk of crime and criminals usually happens without the critical thinking needed to properly understand the conditions in which many acts of harm take place. How can we understand murder, theft, sexual abuse, police brutality, and the many other acts of harm as symptoms of economic conditions within and without our communities? We have to be able to talk about and respond to harm in a way that doesn’t minimize violent acts, yet holds out the possibility of healing and transformation for all parties involved.

Self-determination is the idea that communities should be able to determine their own dealings without being controlled or restrained by outside or government forces. Community affairs could include economic practices, systems for dealing with harm, housing and education values and policies, political structures, geographic boundaries, and relations with other communities. To exercise self-determination means that members of a community are accountable to each other and have a way to make sure power is shared fairly. Self-determination as a principle was made a cornerstone of the legal organizing of the 1970s and 1980s for communities of color, poor communities, and other oppressed communities. Self-determination is the idea that communities should be able to determine their own dealings without being controlled or restrained by outside or government forces.

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(words from the CR Alternatives Organizing Toolkit)
The term “ideology” refers to a set of ideas and principles that various groups consciously adopt (or accept as natural), hold, and seek to propagate, much as people do religious beliefs. Ideologies usually influence our perceptions and our actions. Ideologies determine how power should be allocated, and they provide the rationale for maintaining “social order” through a system. Oppressive ideologies and systems such as authoritarianism, patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, heterosexism, White supremacy, racism, capitalist exploitation, and imperialism are embedded in society. These ideologies and systems are maintained by various institutions such as schools, banks, churches, governments, courts, media, etc.—as well as individuals must be enlisted in order for this top-heavy system of economic inequity to maintain itself. The Pyramid, we begin to understand the major connection between sexism and racism because those groups at the bottom of the pyramid are women and people of color. When we begin to understand why there is such a fervent effort to keep those oppressive systems (racism and sexism and all the ways they are manifested) in place to maintain the unpaid and low-paid labor.

The intersectionality of different oppressive ideologies and systems occurs not only because the groups being oppressed by each are connected, such as women and people of color but also because, as Pharr observes, “in order for this top-heavy system of economic inequity to maintain itself, the 90 percent on the bottom must keep supplying cheap labor. A very complex, intricate system of institutions and structures that keep the status quo so that the vast majority will not demand its fair share of wealth and resources and bring down the system. Every institution—schools, banks, churches, governments, courts, media, etc.—as well as individuals must be enlisted in order for this top-heavy system of economic inequity to maintain itself.” This is true within an individual country as well as between countries, as is reflected in the unequal power relations between economically advanced countries and those in what is called the Third World. It is important for progressives to understand, as Pharr points out, that “there is no hierarchy of oppressions. Each is a defined norm, a standard of rightness and often righteousness wherein all others are judged in relation to it.” This norm must be backed up with institutional power, economic power, and both institutional and individual violence. It is the combination of these three elements that makes complete power and control possible. In the United States, that norm is male, white, heterosexual, Christian, temporarily able-bodied, youthful, and has access to wealth and resources.”

Institutional power, i.e., the power over, and control of society’s institutions, and economic power, which enables control of those institutions, Pharr reason, “requires the use of violence and the threat of violence. Institutional violence is sanctioned through the criminal justice system and the threat of the military—for quelling individual or group uprisings.” The criminal justice system is characterized by the desire to maintain total physical, emotional and psychological control over the people under its system’s control. A major ideology that supports this approach to criminal justice is generally known as authoritarianism; and looking at authoritarianism in the context of the criminal justice system enables us to see how an abstract theory plays out in reality. Authoritarianism is an oppressive system that uses force, violence, or the threat of violence, so that those in power are able to maintain social order and control. An authoritarian approach believes that through violence and repression an individual can be forced to conform to a set of behaviors—or face punishment. This is evident in the way our society punishes those who deviate from what the State and society deem as appropriate or moral. These ideologies of oppression that are based on how power should be allocated, and they provide the rationale for maintaining “social order” through a system. The pyramid, we begin to understand the major connection between sexism and racism because those groups at the bottom of the pyramid are women and people of color. When we begin to understand why there is such a fervent effort to keep those oppressive systems (racism and sexism and all the ways they are manifested) in place to maintain the unpaid and low-paid labor.

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* ibid., 55-56.
* ibid., 53.

ENDNOTES


2 Ibid., 10-11.

3 Ibid., 10-11.

4 ibid., 55-56.


RACIAL SEGREGATION IN CALIFORNIA PRISONS

By Viet M. Ngo

The United States Supreme Court’s decision on February 23, 2005 held that the burden is on the CDC to prove their unwritten policy of racially segregating new prisoners is not unconstitutional. This decision stems from Johnson v. California, et al., case # 543 US (2005). Johnson claims he was continuously celled with black prisoners while in a reception center—Johnson’s race is listed as black.

The Court’s decision sets the initial parameters of what is legal or illegal racial segregation within prisons and the standard of review courts must use in resolving similar cases, like my own. Ngo v. Woodford, et al., case # 04 5070 (PR) RS JF.

I allege San Quentin State Prison (SQ) assigns prisoners to double-cells and restricts prisoners to their cells during lockdowns based solely on their race. I believe these policies are used to keep the prison population divided and thus, more easily controlled. Although my case only challenges the racial segregation policies at SQ, its findings may implicate the same practices throughout California’s thirty-three prisons.

If the courts find my claims (as well as Johnson’s) to be true, SQ and CDC will have to make drastic changes to their policies, which will affect the racial dynamics within California state prisons.

It is my hope that these changes, and the dialogues these changes will stir, raise awareness as to who benefits when prisoners, as a class of people, are divided or united. History shows that class unity is a precursor to political agency. This is significant when California is home to over 160,000 prisoners—one of the largest penal systems in the world.

While the California prison system is currently reeling from allegations of corruption and cover-ups, even labeled as dysfunctional by state politicians, a finding by the courts that its policies are racist could be the blow that brings this behemoth to its knees.

For more information contact: Charles Carbone, Esq., P.O. Box 123, 1230 3rd Street, San Francisco, CA 94103.

THE FIRST OF THE CIVIL WAR AMENDMENTS, THE THIRTEENTH AMENDMENT, ABOLISHED SLAVERY EXCEPT FOR CONVICTED PRISONERS. NOWHOOPLER IS BEING EXPLOITED TO NOT ONLY PROVIDE A SLAVE LABOR FORCE WORKING FOR FREE OR A PITTANCE, BUT ALSO TO TRANSFER BILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF TAX REVENUE TO PROFITEERS OPERATING UNDER THE CUSE OF LAW AND ORDER AND THE POLITICAL SHIBBOLETH OF BEING TOUGH ON CRIME. —Vin, Arizona Prisoner

Racial segregation is not an isolated problem in California prisons. In Massachusetts, many of the reforms I helped implement have been undone in the last 5 to 7 years. Although they haven’t reopened the state reform schools, they have reclassified the kids and have him and has left the children of the institutionalized kids locked up under mental health auspices. Our institutions for the so-called criminally insane have historically been much more brutal than state penitentiaries. So, there’s no refuge in going to medical professionals.

If I were to re-do my experience in Massachusetts, I would scatter as much money as possible across the state to fund alternatives to incarceration. That ensures some viability and sustainability for the alternative programs that could be brought here. There’s no program here, and I’m basing this on my own experience, is to, under a rubric of smoother management, give a lot of money to big organizations, even non-profits which then claim to offer a wide variety of services. Forget it. They will claim to do that, but as time goes by they will become re-makes of our institutional prison situation.

The secret is to get as many programs going as possible under as many different auspices as possible: halfway houses, group homes, monitors, advocates, with people assigned to individual kids. There’s no reason much of this couldn’t be done in the adult system as well. We could have many small programs that are run by highly motivated, exciting people who will do good things.

These programs have to be open to examination by a responsible group (whatever that is these days), and the people in those programs have to be able to communicate with their families and others, so that we always know what is happening. It is a bad situation when secrecy comes together with the ability to misuse power in a captive-keeper relationship, and that’s why these institutions have historically been unformable. The captive/keeper relationship, on the one hand, is extremely exploitative, and all adult justice systems, uses violence and the threat of violence to maintain order. That is a sick sort of relationship to have in a democratic society.

I always refer to the kids as kids. That sends people in the juvenile justice system up the wall. Oh, “they’re delinquents. They are little things.” You don’t do that. And you don’t refer to them as “charges.” You have to be willing to risk some system imbalance in the pursuit of an individual’s care. And we stopped using isolation as a method of punishment. If that’s what the holding institution together—the threat of being beaten up or stripped naked and thrown in a place with no toilet and a sewer in the floor—then we ought to close it down.

I’ve generally found that if you treat people decently and above all with respect, you will get respect back from most. And the same holds true in adult prisons. But it’s very hard to get that across these days, because we tend to think in black and white terms, not only racially, which we also tend to do, but also culturally and socially. We have so demonized people that we are in many ways using the criminal justice model across the board in our society.

You would hope that we’d find other means besides policing solutions to do what we face socially—problems which are far more social than criminal problems. We need to get to the community more involved, and I know that’s an old saw, but, it is in fact helpful. We need to communicate with people and let them find that have become professionalized, be it law enforcement, criminal justice, social work, or counseling. This is very threatening to those who provide these services. As our counseling community becomes more professionalized, it increasingly ties itself to the law enforcement model, simply because that is the source of their funding and existence. And that’s very dangerous.

We’ve kind of ignored this, certainly in terms of funding and providing the kinds of authentic options for most of the folks who are caught in this system. I know that in the Black community in DC there are lots of resources that are untapped, because they’re not recognized as such, but as a program working in such places for church and parts of the inner city there is church ladies, young men, and others who are doing their best to work with troubled folks in many ways, from many different auspices as possible: halfway houses, group homes, monitors, advocates, with people assigned to individual kids.
Could you say something about yourself?

Okay. My name is Robert King Wilkerson. I’m the only free member of the Angola Three. I live here in New Orleans, Louisiana awaiting my next trip.

At the Africa to Asia G8 Wash conference you stated that through the Panthers you helped from being a conscious rebel without a cause to a rebel with a consciousness. Could you talk about the kind of process that you undertook? I can tell you it was the Panther Party that articulated it for me. So as I grew into consciousness I felt the need to act on this consciousness and the things I felt. When I was eventually sent to prison, I tried my best to work out that ideology in my own personal life and my prison life. And I think it worked for me.

Well, keeping it in the context of what I said at the time, I was a rebel. I think always felt the discrepancies taking place in my life, but wasn’t conscious of it. I couldn’t articulate it. It was the Panther Party that articulated it for me. So as I grew into consciousness I felt the need to act on this consciousness and the things I felt. When I was eventually sent to prison, I tried my best to work out that ideology in my own personal life and my prison life. And I think it worked for me.

Can you say a little bit about what’s the relationship between personal practice and also doing it in solidarity with others? Were there ways that you studied together? Which were some of the processes of you coming to that?

Well, as this consciousness emerged, so did the desire to validate the things we really felt. So we get ourselves into getting books and swapping them. We began our own political education classes amongst ourselves and taught other people around us who wanted to learn the principles and ideology of the party.

As part of the Angola Panthers organizing efforts to build prisoner unity you attempted to transform the social order of prisoners by protecting new prisoners against rape and sexual slavery, and also to mend the divisions between black and white prisoners that made it easier for the administration to control the general prison population. Could you draw out some important lessons you learned that would help folks trying to continue in this tradition?

In order to organize against the type of separation and racism that the prison generates and perpetuates I think that prisoners have to acknowledge and focus on their shared status. It doesn’t make a difference these days if you are a white, black, red, or yellow prisoner. You are a prisoner of the state. There is a need for a collective focus on prisoners as a new type of slavery. If we are going to abolish a new form of slavery then I imagine we are going to have to go beyond reform.

Can you elaborate on this?

If we believe that prison itself is a form of slavery and we are really going to deal with it like we did chattel slavery then I think the approach of reform might not be the ultimate answer. I think some reform could take place within the laws that hold people in prison and it might free some people. If prison is a form of physical slavery, and it’s written into the constitution, then we have to find a way to un-write it.

Could you talk a little bit about the 13th amendment for the folks that might not know the history?

In part, the 13th amendment states that slavery shouldn’t be inside the shores of America unless one has been duly convicted of a crime. It tells me in one breath that slavery shouldn’t exist, and in the next breath it says that it can if you are duly convicted of a crime. When the constitution states someone must be duly convicted of a crime, it means legally convicted, but it doesn’t make it morally right. There is no morality in legality, not when you look at the way it is written in the constitution. The 13th amendment allows slavery to continue if you have been convicted of a crime.

We can’t really talk about organizing in prison without talking about repression. You faced the reproval of about 30 years in solitary confinement for your political commitments. Could you talk about the role of solidarity between prisoners and folks on the outside? What works? What are the shortcomings to building a movement across prison walls?

Well I think that prisoners need to reach out and let people on the outside know exactly what they want. I think that if we reach out, there are a lot of concerned people throughout society who will give a hand and try to implement some of the things they ask for. I think one thing that is needed is consistent solidarity. People need to learn about individuals and groups in prison who are trying to advocate for change. People need to look at the laws that are always being sneaked in under the table that implicate themselves and their loved ones in prison. It’s something that we don’t want our tax money go to get then we should vote it down. I think prisoners should unite around a cause that supports their best interests. In order to do that, they need to reach outside.

So in saying that, could you talk specifically about what worked in building solidarity for your particular case?

I think we were lucky in that the Angola 3 case was ripe for discussion. It came to public light at exactly the right time. We also had members of the Black Panther Party that were still active in the community come back to get the few who they had forgotten, to use their quote. It has expanded because people have brought other people in. Albert Woodfox, and Herman Wallace keep up a good dialogue. When I was there I kept up a good dialogue with people who reached out and touched me, who wanted to write and see how we were doing. I think if we do things from a collective mindset we will see that there are some common ideologies centered around prisons. It’s, unless someone has become totally institutionalized and sees prison as a way of life. But for those who are really concerned, want change in their lives, and want to bring about some sanity in an otherwise insane situation, they have to unify, they have to get together and see that they have a common goal. I can’t put enough emphasis on that. Prisoners have to realize that they have a common interest to be free of prisons. They are still human beings and they need to operate from that mindset.

Please talk a little bit about what’s going on with Herman and Albert’s case and the role of international solidarity in keeping pressure on the courts? And where you hope it’s going.

Herman and Albert’s criminal cases are still in the courts. They’re going for the second time around and our lawyers are filing briefs on their behalf. Unlike a lot of prisoners in Louisiana who are “legally dead,” Herman and Albert are not. “Legally dead” means there is no door open for you to ever get back into either state or federal courts because of procedural laws that have been erected in the last decade or so. Herman and Albert have new evidence that they’re actually innocent. Hopefully we can get a judge who is sympathetic and interested in seeing justice prevail this time based on the fact that they were found guilty on insufficient evidence. With regards to our civil case the ACLU filed on our behalf, it has gone all the way to the United States Supreme Court. The fact that we were kept in solitary confinement for 30 years constitutes cruel and unusual punishment under the eighth amendment and the court also adopted the magistrate’s report. The case is pending. We’ve in round two of state appeals and trying to get back to the federal courts. Once that happens it’ll be set for trial on whether or not the state violated our 8th amendment rights against cruel and unusual punishment. This case could impact a lot of other prisoners by deciding whether or not the state can keep a prisoner indefinitely confined in a cell 23 or 24 hours a day. It would get precedent for people around the country. They would have to curtail isolating prisoners away from society forever.

That’s huge. Can you talk about some of the solidarity that you all have been able to build to free the Angola 3?

We have people who are interested in places like Amsterdam, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, South Africa, Singapore, and all over America. There are places that I’ve spoken at to support the drive to free Herman and Albert and all political prisoners. There are people in all of these places that have also heard the solidarity calls. I think that we have an interest in how the growing prison industrial complex in America could impact their own country.

What are some of the stories that you’ve heard on your travels about the fear of their countries importing a model like the US uses right now?

South Africa is one country that rejected it. Private prison was tried over there. In parts of England, they are concerned that the same types of problems that exist in America eventually existing in England. To some degree it does as a direct result of the same type of relationship between the American and British governments. You know, it seems like it’s one big world, but it’s really small in a sense because so many people can connect in so short a period of time.

Is there anything else you’d like to add before we wrap up?

Again, as I said before, this is going inside to about three to four hundred prisoners and also to community members who are trying to organize to end the prison industrial complex and create communities that are safe and just, and where people have the things they need to be what they could be rather than what certain people say they should be.

Like I said, I would tell a prisoner to get connected with people on the outside in some form or fashion. They can make their voices heard from the inside to bring about the changes. The way things are, especially for older prisoners like my two comrades Herman and Albert, we got to think in terms of getting them out with the reform with a long-range strategy of abolishing the need for any prisons for any period.

DIFFICULTIES IN CHANGE: The task of bringing our consciousness to conformity with the radical changes in the world and achieving new ways of political thinking is highly complicated and often painful. It demands not only great political courage but also certain emotional readiness. It is a task made difficult by many of our traditions and norms. Difficulties arise not only from the fact that there are “visible” political and ideological obstacles, but also “invisible” psychological and emotional barriers. Traditional thinking naturally attempts to exclude painful and traumatizing new information. Psychological defenses permit one to operate with familiar and habitual concepts. They provide protection from rigorous intellectual engagement with the outstanding reality of the nuclear age: MUTUAL VULNERABILITY. —Steve Williams
The Anti-Violence Movement has been critically important in breaking the silence around violence against women and providing much-needed services to survivors. However, the mainstream anti-violence movement largely focuses on self-defense and acting in conflict rather than in collaboration with these movements. The result is that women of color, who suffer disproportionately from both state and interpersonal violence, have been marginalized within these movements. It is critical that we develop strategies to gender violence that do not depend on a sexist, racist, classist, and homophobic criminal justice system. It is also important that we develop strategies that challenge the criminal justice system and that also provide safety for survivors of sexual and domestic violence. To live violence-free lives, we must develop holistic strategies for addressing violence that speak to the intersection of all forms of oppression.

In recent years, the mainstream anti-prison movement has called important attention to the negative impact of criminalization and the build-up of the prison industrial complex. Because activists who seek to reverse the tide of mass incarceration and criminalization of poor communities and communities of color have not always centered gender and sexuality in their analysis or organizing, we have not always responded adequately to the needs of survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

1. Police and prison accountability activists have generally organized around and conceptualized men as the primary victims of state violence. Women prisoners and victims of police brutality have been made invisible by a focus on the perpetrator. Women have failed to consider how women are affected as severely by state violence as men. The plight of women who are raped by INS officers or prison guards, for instance, has not received sufficient attention. In addition, women carry the burden of caring for extended family when family and community members are criminalized and warehoused. Several organizations have been established to advocate for women prisoners; however, these groups have been frequently marginalized within the mainstream anti-prison movement.

2. The anti-prison movement has not addressed strategies for addressing the rampant forms of violence women face in their everyday lives, including street harassment, sexual harassment at work, rape, and intimate partner abuse. Until these strategies are developed, many women will feel shortchanged by the movement. In addition, by not seeking alliances with the anti-violence movement, the anti-prison movement has sent the message that it is possible to liberate communities without seeking the well-being and safety of women.

3. The anti-prison movement has failed to sufficiently organize around the forms of state violence faced by LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, and Intersex) communities. LGBTI communities have developed an analysis and strategies to end violence that do not rely on the criminal justice system and which create a society based on survival and care of all peoples.

We call for strategies that support these organizations. Develop collective fundraising and organizing strategies for anti-prison and anti-violence organizations. Develop strategies and analysis that specifically target state forms of sexual violence.

4. Develop an analysis and strategies to end violence that do not isolate individual acts of violence (either committed by the state or individuals) from their larger context. These strategies must address how entire communities of all genders are affected in multiple ways by both state violence and interpersonal gender violence. Battered women prisoners represent an intersection of state and interpersonal violence and as such provide and opportunity for both movements to build coalitions and joint struggles.

5. Put poor/working class women of color in the center of their analysis, organizing practices, and leadership development. Reject strategies that aim to improve the “safety” of poor women of color, such as the “tough law and order” agenda, welfare “reform,” and attacks on women workers’ rights in increasing women’s vulnerability to all forms of violence and locate anti-violence and anti-prison activism alongside efforts to transform the capitalist economic system.

6. Center stories of state violence committed against women of color in our organizing efforts.

7. Oppose legislative change that promotes prison expansion, criminalization of poor communities and communities of color and thus state violence against women of color, even if these changes also incorporate measure to support victims of interpersonal gender violence.

8. Promote holistic political education at the everyday level within our communities, specifically how sexual violence helps reproduce the colonial, racist, capitalist, heterosexist, and patriarchal society we live in as well as how state violence produces interpersonal violence within communities.

9. Develop strategies for mobilizing against sexism and homophobia within our communities in order to keep women safe.

10. Challenge men of color and all men in social justice movements to take particular responsibility to address and organize around gender violence in their communities as a primary strategy for addressing violence and colonialism. We challenge men to address how their own histories of victimization have hindered their ability to establish gender justice in their communities.

11. Link struggles for personal transformation and healing with struggles for social justice.

The reliance on the criminal justice system has taken our focus from developing ways communities can collectively respond to violence. The reliance on the criminal justice system has taken our focus from developing ways communities can collectively respond to violence. The reliance on the criminal justice system has taken our focus from developing ways communities can collectively respond to violence. The reliance on the criminal justice system has taken our focus from developing ways communities can collectively respond to violence. The reliance on the criminal justice system has taken our focus from developing ways communities can collectively respond to violence. The reliance on the criminal justice system has taken our focus from developing ways communities can collectively respond to violence.
The guards union—the CCPOA—a labor union no less, is influencing social dynamics in California, which if not restrained or turned back altogether, will continue to advance a further separation of class. This cannot be allowed. It’s simple: contractually there is one prison guard for every six prisoners, six new prisoners, one more additional guard. The more prisoners, the more backroom legislation that secures prisoners for longer sentences and the more guards, money, and power of influence for their union. And with over a twenty-year history of “keeping” legislators, Sacramento is now stale with career politicians who are of two minds; the obsequiously grateful for the union’s lavish campaign contributions or those who are perturbed at even the thought of any of the discomfort associated with opposition. It’s as simple as that. Yet for some unknown reason, instead of addressing the problem, “we” bicker about our own personal circumstances: the food, the clothing, and the length of our parole. But all the while knowing what is at the root of the problem, we fail to put our personal problems (being only important to ourselves, really) and allow the CCPOA to forge ahead unabated. A labor union? Allowed to freely dictate the way we as a freethinking and allegedly progressive society governs ourselves? California is allowing the CCPOA to legislate, and to do so for its own economic advantage. As a society we are permitting this labor union to further the already gross separation of classes, which will soon enough have far more disastrous impacts on the next generation. If an individual doesn’t head directly for the Peace Officer’s Academy straight out of high school, it’s for certain he or she will head for the most recently opened prison. And, unfortunately, if we continue to focus solely on our own dilemmas, then we (and the generation that follows) will remain serfs, nothing more than fodder for a state labor union, which disguises itself as Peace Officers, and the PIC they cling to for life. Be brave and heed Virgil’s words to Dante, “Here must you put by all division of spirit and gather your soul against all cowardice.” Dante gave away the security of the familiar and known, and tried something new. Yes, by all means, continue to challenge the Board of Prison Terms, and everything else along the way, but take someone else’s problems up with yours. Give “yourself” away and you’ll achieve more than you can imagine! —T. Ralbovsky, CSP

Over time, the PIC has interwoven itself into the communities of the US by establishing itself as a needed entity. As a result, and even in the smaller and more tightly knit lower class communities, people who otherwise would be inherently distrustful of government and/or law enforcement are quick to dial 911 on their next door neighbor...Politics, and the separation of class designs therein, have turned this from the exception into the norm. The effect on the community—that is the fabric of the US—is devastating. It vitiates any reconciliatory thought processes or the progression thereof. Ironically, the effect on the community (of now being distrustful and disbelieving of one another, while simultaneously finding truth in force-fed “Public Safety” rhetoric and the once distrusted public servant prostituting this rhetoric to their desired ends) is that it aids and abets in expanding governmental control, incarceration of its own daughters and sons, and of the PIC.

I’ve worked in the anti-violence movement for over 15 years and witnessed the evolution of its position in relation to the criminal justice system change from one of challenge to one of acceptance. The reasons are many. As the movement begins to make successful attacking and “getting inside” the system, advocates have been invited to write legislation, give trainings, and “ride along” during domestic violence arrests. In 1994, the Violence Against Women Act, the first federal legislation regarding domestic violence, was passed as a part of the Crime Bill. This symbolized the movement’s willingness to embrace criminalization as a pragmatic strategy, for some, and a natural partnership, for others. Since that time, federal money has increased for domestic violence programs—often specifically requiring that these programs create formal partnerships with criminal justice institutions or engage in “pro-arrest policies.” I refer to this as the anti-violence movement’s “embeddedness” within criminal justice institutions across the country.

While many anti-violence advocates have resisted the pressure to succumb to wholesale cooptation by the state and the criminal justice system, many have stopped short of challenging criminalization of violent offenses, especially against women and children. Some believe that people, usually men, who violate women and children are too easily excused by the community, and that an end to violence can only come about through the criminal justice system, a system which would similarly excuse violence without the pressure of anti-violence advocates. Others understand the ineffectiveness and discrimination of the system, but believe that despite these imperfections their concern for the safety of women and children can be served best through state force. The bottom line is that many of us cannot even imagine that community members could bring about an effective end to violence. Alternatives are desirable in concept but impossible in the real world.

The fact is that those of us looking for alternatives with respect to domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual assault, or child abuse have found few examples of alternatives. Those of us creating our own alternatives have realized how difficult sustainable solutions to violence can be. What is needed is a collective, coordinated strategy towards solutions to violence that do not recreate oppressive conditions and do not rely upon victims/survivors of violence to just putting up with it.

The joint Critical Resistance-Incite! Statement offered an historic coming together of two often adversarial movements—the anti-violence movement and the anti-PIC or abolitionist movement. It’s no surprise that Incite! as a woman of color-led organization prioritized this alliance as one which could challenge state violence and interpersonal violence as a unified movement—one which needs to support the struggle against all of these forms of violence without sacrificing one to the other.

The next step is what many of us are now undertaking—creating concrete institutional support for the creation of alternative interventions to violence. Without concrete alternatives, women will continue calling the police—even if they feel that it is ineffective or offensive—because they find no other options. Otherwise, women and children will continue to be beaten, harassed, abused, raped, and killed because as a community we have failed to create realistic solutions.

Creative Interventions is one of the organizations committed to advancing our movement towards the creation of alternative options and the widespread distribution of these options to communities. The National Story Collecting Project is currently collecting successful stories of community-based interventions to interpersonal forms of violence. The Project is currently piloting with Ray Avena interviewers and is set for a national launch this summer. Generation FIV and Data Center are collaborative partners. Other organizations such as Justice Now, Free Battered Women, Asian Women’s Shelter, and Shimbuth (Korean Domestic Violence Program) are all participating organizations, training staff and members as interviewers, and collecting stories among members of their communities.

Personally, I had been searching for these stories. The handful that I’ve heard, make me certain that alternatives are possible. By putting these stories together we’ll have powerful information to help us understand what folks have done on-the-ground in real situations of violence that makes interventions successful at not, and giving all of us concrete evidence that these alternatives are possible. These stories will feed our efforts to create alternative options and institutions to support them. Making interventions to violence an everyday practice accessible to everyday people will take the power away from the state. It will convince those who care about the safety of women and children that communities have the capacity and the courage to prioritize and provide this safety.

If you’re interested in becoming a participant or being involved in the Project, please contact Creative Interventions at stories@creative-interventions.org, write to 1904 Franklin St., Suite 200, Oakland, CA 94612, or call 510-593-5330.
The sensationalizing of those who have sexually abused children has fueled public fear and public policy that violates human and civil rights. Evoking public imaginations of “men who sodomize children,” the criminal legal system has passed policies, like DNA testing, that are eventually broadly applied. In New York City, I’ve witnessed discussions on extending DNA testing to those arrested for drug use and even jumping subway tunnels with claims that these populations are a pool in which sex offenders might be found. Combined with other attempts to criminalize poor communities and communities of color, policies around CSA have opened the door for increased public surveillance, invasiveness, repression and incarceration.

We strongly align with the abolitionist movement in seeking community-based justice alternatives to incarceration and challenging the exploitation and racism of the prison industrial complex (PIC) and the criminal legal and public systems that feed it. We are against the violation of rights experienced by those who perpetrate CSA in prisons and their communities, and understanding that incarceration and rehabilitation are feared around CSA that fuels the PIC does not make our communities safer.

However, g5 also struggles with two specific challenges in organizing alternative justice approaches to CSA. The first is the contradiction between people’s political commitments and their emotional responses to CSA ("I want to abolish prisons but I'll castrate anyone who violates my child"). During a presentation to a committed abolitionist organization on CSA and alternative justice, several activists approached me at a break, one shared that if someone ever violated her little sister that she would want them killed. Another shared that she would think about calling the police or finding Christian services. These are reasonable and common responses when faced with the horrifying possibility of someone sexually violating a child that you love. Nonetheless, it is a weakness in our goals and movements that our only options seem to be vigilantism or relying on the systems of policing and imprisonment that we know only continue the cycle of violence.

The second challenge is an unintentional minimalization of CSA for the political goal of not demonizing those who perpetrate it. In conversations with our comrades in the PIC abolitionist movement we have been challenged to build effective forms of accountability for people who have sexually abused children. There is sometimes an avoidance of the nature of the violation involved in CSA in an attempt to humanize those who perpetrate CSA. Instead, g5 holds out the possibility of facing the reality of who committed the abuse while maintaining the humanity of those who sexually abused children.

Some of the more progressive programs within the domestic and sexual violence movements, particularly those led by women of color in culturally diverse communities, are designed to empower survivors by shifting power back to them in the process of stopping the violence. Although there is an intention to shift broader community power inequity and abuses that this violence reflects, it does not often translate into concrete programs, campaigns and organizing. Rather than challenging systemic state and economic violence and exploitation, even the most progressive of sexual and domestic violence programs remain in relationship with public systems to varying degrees, most notably through funding.

Against this backdrop, g5 is seeking to create community justice alternatives that respond to and prevent CSA. G5’s vision is to end CSA over the next five generations. We understand CSA as a form of violence that intersects with multiple forms of family, community, economic and state oppression. Our principles and organizing practices reflect this reality.

Because most CSA happens in our family and community networks, we see this movement as necessarily being grounded in local communities. At a local level, g5 organizes towards building building individual and community capacity to respond to and prevent CSA, without relying on the criminal justice and child protective systems. This is a simple but crucial health issue. We seek partnerships with activists, community organizers, organizations and institutions committed to finding alternatives to the current legal responses to CSA. In particular, we are building with movements that integrate anti-violence work within broader liberation struggles to end racism, poverty, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, economic exploitation and other forms of oppression.

G5 seeks to further these goals through a transformative justice framework that secures individual justice in cases of CSA while transforming the social conditions that perpetuate CSA. This community-based, transformative justice model promotes the safety and healing of survivors, accountability and transformation for those who have sexually abused children, and safety and responsibility for bystanders and the community.

G5 is building frameworks, developing community dialogue tools, training organizers and partnering with other movements and organizations to creatively experiment with alternative forms of community-based justice that consciously seek to dismantle power inequities and transform both interpersonal and state violence. Through our Community Response Project, we have trained over 120 community activists and organizers in building movements to prevent and respond to CSA without relying on public systems.

Transformative justice (TJ) is a long-term project in response to this need. We are struggling to balance the urgent need for us to experiment with alternative justice approaches in partnership with our trained organizers and the responsibility to be truly prepared to support our organizers in developing sustainable and effective TJ responses that do not reinforce existing power inequalities and abuses or create new ones.

For us, the process of creating alternative justice that challenges other forms of domination and oppression that affect our communities is a long-term project that we hope to begin the work of in this generation. We need to have activists and organizers that are prepared to build alternative forms of accountability and transformative justice in their communities and the larger social justice movement. Without this commitment to collective accountability and addressing the root cause of violence, we will surely reinforce the power inequities that perpetuate CSA. This means organizing liberation struggles that understand the connections between interpersonal, state, and corporate violence.

We look forward to working in solidarity with you.
The major problem facing us, as a collective entity, has to do with an embracing of limited knowledge. It is this propensity which spawns the wrong thinking characterizing the multitude of social ills plaguing our homeland. And, as we are all victims of the conditioning put in place by the gray men (what all people are doomed to become when losing the compassion, gratitude and oneness humans thrive on), it may be wise to look outside the norm, when pursuing avenues leading to healing the hearts, minds and spirits of the disenfranchised.

In the spirit of sharing, here are a few words concerning an alternative to institutionalization: I learned of this concept from my great grandmother, as a child in the ’70s. She was in her late 80s at the time and given to infrequent periods of speech. I guess old folks spend a lot of time looking back over the years upon which their lives now rest. As she was the product of Indian people fleeing relocation of Andrew Jackson’s Indian policy of the 1830s. She grew up in the secluded bayou country of South Louisiana where the urban squallor surrounding her at my house must have been very difficult.

At any rate, she told me of the way our relations used to deal with those having committed offenses against the People. She told me that in the past, before Jackson’s time, there was no need for jails or mental hospitals. This was due to the concept of sanctity. It was based on sacred principles aimed at maintaining harmony, individually and collectively. Though this way of thinking was common amongst all the People, the duty of maintaining the relevant teachings fell to our holy women and men. These caretakers lived in what were known as White or Peace Villages. And it is from this limited knowledge the gray men coined the term Peace Chief: relative to the indigenous peoples of the Southeast.

Any time someone broke the peace, the family and friends would come together and give that person their help. This support generally led to a stay in the Peace Village. This thing here is all actions are a result of the thoughts we carry around: negative patterns of thought give way to actions resulting in conflict. So, it was the business of these sanctuaries to remove the illusion of wrong thinking and to restore clarity of mind.

This was done via diet, movement (physical exercise), meditation, purification rituals (what is incorrectly called sweating or the sweat lodge), community celebrations and other means designed to cultivate right relationship with others. This generally took about 1 year and then the person was successfully reintegrated into his/her community. By the way, this was extended to other races, if the need was great enough.

I was also taught that we are all twigs, leaves, branches and roots of the same tree: the Tree of Life. That we begin deep in the Earth and progress upwards. At some point, each of us realizes a completion, a connection to all living things, don’t cha know. And in this realization, we become champions of the people... heroes, you might say. So, you see, heroes do grow on trees. But the gray men would have us think otherwise, eh?

All my Relations,
Chula (The Fox), Solated
interview with BONNIE KERNES & Masai Ehehosi

The Abolitionist interviewed Bonnie Kerness and Masai Ehehosi of the American Friends Service Committee’s Prison Watch Program about successes and pitfalls in creating alternatives to the prison industrial complex (PIC).

Masai Ehehosi is a former prisoner and member of the Black Liberation Army, who has been involved in struggles around independence of the New African Nation for the last 30 years. He works with the International Committee in support of Imam Jamil Al-Amin, and is on the National Organizing Body for Critical Resistance.

Bonnie Kerness has been a community organizer and an advocate working on human rights issues since the 1960s. She came out of the southern Civil Rights Movement after working with the NAACP and the Highlander Institute. Since the 1970s she has been working on behalf of prisoners and their families.

IN THE ’60S AND ’70S, WHEN THERE WERE FEW PRISONERS IN CAGES IN THIS COUNTRY, PEOPLE TRIED TO PUT ALTERNATIVES IN PLACE. IF YOU THINK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED OF THOSE ALTERNATIVE MODELS WORKED, OR DIDN’T WORK, AND IF YOU THINK THERE’S SOME WAY OF REPLACING PARTS OF THEM TODAY.

Well, I think that the current criminal justice system works exactly as it’s designed to work. They don’t want any alternatives. This is custody and control and keeps as many people incapacitated for purposes of social control as possible. There are many alternatives that work. A huge number of people are in prison are mentally ill. Well, there are incredibly obvious alternatives to treating the mentally ill than prisons.

A huge amount of those in prison are youngsters. There’s better schooling, stronger communities—these are alternatives. Jobs for young people are alternatives. I think our education system is a feeder system for juveniles and we need to begin taking a look at different kinds of educational systems.

Decriminalization was an alternative that worked very well. Halfway houses were alternatives that worked very well. There were many things available in the ’60s and ’70s prior to this politicization of prisons. I also think politicians realized that to keep people in prison made money. Those bodies are a money maker just like it was in chattel slavery. This is what we’ve done with what the government considers an extraneous population. The 15-year-old who I might have to provide extra education for or extra community resources for can make money. Once put in the criminal justice system, that child generates $30,000 a year. The guard gets paid, the administrator gets paid, the food company gets paid, and the medical company gets paid. So I think that the state of the mind of the department of corrections that takes over would have to very much be changed for those alternatives to be able to emerge. Drug courts are an alternative. Training the police is an alternative. The police determine who gets arrested and who doesn’t get arrested. Most of the arrests that take place should not. There are other ways to handle troublesome people.

I also have a problem with a lot of folks now over relying on the legal system. I think that’s where the human rights thing comes in. In fact we have a human right, we struggle for that. If in fact the law catches up, that’s cool, but it doesn’t mean we stop struggling then. It’s ridiculous for me, for us, to sit there and watch people starving to death in the streets. To see people starving, to see people without decent medical care, and then to be talking about how we going to wait for 90 years for the legal system to work. No. We do what we have to do. Again, if they want to face safety, they change the legal system.

When I think about some of the models of the ’60s and ’70s, I think about the breakfast program, I think about the housing I worked in. I also think about the response of the state and the fact that we weren’t really that prepared. To follow those models now, I think we really, really need to learn that it’s a war. We’ve said that before, but then it was like we started being real careful, so we’re not passing on what people passed on in real wars. It doesn’t mean we all walked around armed all day but without that mentality, I think we’re going to keep repeating the same thing, you know?

And I think organizers and activists really have a responsibility to study much more than some do. You know, if we’re going to talk about organizing now, there’s no reason in the world why folks aren’t really into something like COINTELPRO. Not just something that they heard about or they read a few things and went by. They really need to look at it so we don’t repeat it. Older folks is going to remember some of those eras and they’re not going to get involved in certain things like they didn’t before. It’s hard to do, but it’s not that they’re not interested, but they don’t see the bigger picture is to do something crazy.

When I first got out of the military and I was looking for something to be involved in. I was in Brooklyn and I was working with this Third World group, and they suggested I go to a place called Ocean Hill Brownsville Tenants Association. We took over a building and it was supposed to go to a community group, but the community group was violating their standards.

So we took over the building, we brought in a revolutionary electrician, some of us borrowed power from outside sources, which we didn’t have, but a lesson I learned from that was that when people struggle for something, and they really thought it was theirs, they wasn’t giving it back. But it was actually the people working together that I think developed more unity and a positive political atmosphere as opposed to the slogans. When you came in the building it was clear which way people went. You know, you’d see Che, Malcolm, or whatever, but it wasn’t a lot of slogan kerning. It was like small people could work towards...
There are countless examples from the slavery period to the present that illustrate the way law enforcement has made poor people and people of color’s lives as disorganized and unstable as possible. From the Black Codes and Chinese Exclusion Act to the Gang Violence and Juvenile Crime Prevention Act (Prop 21) and Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIIRIRA), policing has been successful in stifling community empowerment through surveillance, infiltration, intimidation, threats, physical violence, and murder.

The recent trend toward different types of community policing is another way that policing targets the communities it hopes to repress. In the early 1970s, the National Sheriffs’ Association began the National Neighborhood Watch Program, based directly on racist sociological studies that talked about communities of color and poor communities as unstable and pathological. Using white, suburban neighborhoods as the ideal model, neighborhood watch programs make neighbors an extension of the local police force by encouraging them to report any suspicious activities to the police. Black and brown people, poor people, homeless people, and unsupervised young people are most often those reported as being suspect. In exchange for this information, the city gives the neighborhood funds to do “community improvement” projects.

The neighborhood watch model co-opts programs that were originally set up by the Black Panther Party, the Puerto Rican Nationalist Movement, and the Women’s Rights Movement to deal with problems within the community as part of their struggle for self-determination. Taken out of this context, neighborhood watch models further infuse already powerful communities (white suburbanites) with additional enticement and suspicion, reaffirming the knowledge that policing works in their service. This model of neighborhood watching plays different communities against each other while reinforcing the state’s common sense about who and what is criminal.

On the other hand, communities that are most commonly targeted by policing are offered a different kind of community policing. Residents are offered additional beat cops and are lured into policing their own communities with a promise of financial stability and an opportunity to “do better” for their neighborhoods. The very nature of policing, however, leads to pressure to act even more brutally toward one’s own communities to prove loyalty to the police force of which they have become part.

However, the social control exercised through policing has always been met with resistance. The greater the level of self-determination within a community, the better situated the community is to make police obsolete. Community organizers and freedom fighters have a dual task when it comes to policing: to create practices that deal with harm and conflict in the community and to actively resist the repressive methods police use to economically and politically disempower poor communities and communities of color. Examples of these efforts include: neighborhood police monitors organized by political and street organizations, concerned mothers, or neighbors tired of the repressive presence of police forces on their blocks, independent community councils that mediate conflicts between neighbors, networks of neighbors and community safe houses that intervene in instances of intimate violence, and homeless advocates who reclaim unused housing. The recent trend toward different types of community policing is another way that policing targets its communities. This is another concern, and it deserves to be taken seriously. The fact is, the police do provide an important community service—offering protection against crime. They do not do this job well, or fairly, and it is not their chief function, but they do it, and this brings them legitimacy. Even people who dislike and fear them often feel that they need the cops. Maybe we can do without omnipresent surveillance, racial profiling, and institutionalized violence, but most people have been willing to accept these features of policing, if somewhat grudgingly, because they have been packaged together with things we cannot do without—crime control, security, and public safety. It is not enough, then, to relate to police power only in terms of repression; we must also remember the promise of protection, since this legitimizes the institution.

Because the state uses this protective function to justify its own violence, the replacement of the police institution is not only a goal of social change, but also a means of achieving it. The challenge is to create another system that can protect us from crime, and can do so better, more justly, with the respect for human rights, and with a minimum of bullying. What is really needed, in short, is a shift in the responsibility for public safety, away from the state and toward the community.

COMMUNITY DEFENSE

Luckily, history does not leave us without guidance. The obvious place to look for community defense models is in the places where distrust of the police, and active resistance to police power, has been most acute. There is a close connection between resistance to police power and the need to develop alternative means of securing public safety.

In the United States, the police have faced resistance mainly from two sources: workers and people of color, especially African Americans. This is unsurprising given the class-control and racist functions that cops have fulfilled since their beginning. The job of controlling poor people and people of color has brought the cops into continual conflict with these parts of society. It has bred resistance, sometimes in form of outright combat—riots, shoot-outs, sniper attacks. At other times resistance has led to political efforts to curtail police power, or direct attempts to replace policing with other means of preserving order.

The role of the police in breaking strikes did not escape the attention of workers on the picketline. In the early twentieth century, labor unions worked strenuously to oppose the creation of the state police and to dissolve them where they existed. These efforts led, for a time, to restrictions on the use of state cops against strikers, but this victory has been practically forgotten today. More
The next edition of the ABOLITIONIST will explore the relationship between labor, globalization and the PIC.

SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE:
Have you ever worked for a prison industry? What was your experience? What do you think about how prisons make and spend their money? What do you think about the relationship between prison industries and industries in free world settings? How do maquiladoras resemble prison industries? How are they different? What do you think about private prisons run for profit and corporations whose products and services are made more profitable by exploiting prisoner labor (e.g. telemarketing, apparel, and computers)? What lessons should we learn from prisoners’ past attempts to unionize? What economic factors do you think lead to imprisonment and immigrant detention? What do think about the US exporting its prison system internationally?

Note that we WILL edit your piece for content, length and clarity unless you tell us not to. If you do not want your piece edited, write a note on your submission indicating that. All submissions will be reviewed by the editorial collective. We will not be able to respond to or publish your submission unless you have it remain anonymous. Unfortunately, we will not be able to respond to or publish every submission we receive and will be unable to return them unless prior arrangements are made. What we can promise is that we will read everything that comes in and use it to inform our overall work.

Deadline for the next issue is: September 7, 2005

Submission Guidelines for the ABOLITIONIST:
- Reproducible artwork (desperately needed!)
- Letters (250 words)
- Short Articles (250-750 words)
- Questions you have about abolition
- Strategies for coming home (jailhouse lawyering or other)
- Useful resources with contact information and description
- Important legal and administrative news
- International, national, and local organizing efforts and prison news

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Please let us know if you would like to be involved in producing the paper, OR if you would like to see your name in print with an article or notice, just your initials or city or to simply have it remain anonymous. Unfortunately, we will not be able to respond to or publish every submission we receive and will be unable to return them unless prior arrangements are made. What we can promise is that we will read everything that comes in and use it to inform our overall work.

Once again, the DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS: SEPTEMBER 7, 2005. Please let us know if you would like to be involved in producing the paper, OR if you have questions about what to write for the paper. Also, please forward family members and friends’ mailing and email (this option is cheaper for us) addresses who you want us to print your full name and address, just your initials and city, or to simply have it remain anonymous. Unfortunately, we will not be able to respond to or publish every submission we receive and will be unable to return them unless prior arrangements are made. What we can promise is that we will read everything that comes in and use it to inform our overall work.

In solidarity, The Abolitionist Editorial Collective

Currently CR does not have the capacity to provide legal services, job placement, or housing placement.

The BIG PICTURE

Modest demands can be the seeds of major upheaval.

The demands for human rights, community control, for an end to harassment and brutality—the basic requirements of justice—ultimately pit us against the ideology, structure, interests, and ambitions of the police. The modern police institution is as its base racist, elitist, undemocratic, authoritarian, and violent. These are the institution’s major features, and it did not acquire them by mistake.

The order that the police preserve is the order of the state, the order of capitalism, the order of White supremacy. These are the forces that require police protection. These are the forces that created the police. These forces support them, sustain them, and guide them. These are the ends the police serve. They are among the most powerful influences in American society, and some of the most deeply rooted.

In this sense, our society cannot exist without police. But this needn’t be the end of the story. A different society is possible.