An Open Letter
to Fellow Abolitionists

Dear friends,

When a prisoner suggested we edit this quarterly newspaper The Abolitionist, we couldn't help but revel in its title's historical significance. The original Abolitionist was a monthly journal of the New England Anti-Slavery Society that agitated for the immediate abolition of slavery back in 1835. Not only does this name connect the enduring notion of slavery to the prison industrial complex; it demonstrates how a newspaper can act as a vehicle of liberation.

We consider this newspaper not only further exposing and criticizing the prison industrial complex - this modern form of slavery and social control - but also collectively organizing and positively asserting our will to live in a just, free world. Like our predecessors, our task is to abolish an institution that has been deemed "unchangeable" by many.

Critical Resistance Oakland's editorial collective is excited to present this first issue of The Abolitionist and is grateful to all of you who filled out surveys, submitted pieces, and corresponded with us. Each member of the editorial collective read every submission, and while we do not have the space or resources to print every voice, each of you has informed our first attempt at compiling The Abolitionist. Your energy and spirit of resistance moves this paper, and us, onward. We look forward to deepening such relationships, and connecting with those of you who we don't yet know. All are encouraged to write in with submissions, questions, critique, issues you struggle with, and love.

Launching this newspaper has been challenging. We continue to grapple with questions like: Is a paper the best way to spark ideas, debate, and increase organizing around abolition? How large should we start? How much editing changes the content of a submission or an author's voice? What else can we do to create connections with and eradicating such systems of violence. Critical Resistance is a national, grassroots, member-based organization that has 10 chapters across the country. Every chapter works on a local level to end the PIC by challenging the belief that ceasing and controlling people makes our society safer. We believe that basic necessities such as food, shelter, and self-determination are what make our communities secure.

CR members come from a wide variety of backgrounds - former prisoners, family members of prisoners, teachers, students, activists, and community members - and we welcome new members. If you, your family or friends are interested in becoming a CR member or are interested in helping to produce The Abolitionist, please get in touch with us.

Next Issue

Abolition means making concrete commitments and taking practical steps in our struggle against the PIC. Suggestions for the next issue should focus on ideas, strategies, and models to build toward the goal of abolition.

Some possible article topics are:
- How can society deal with someone you know who has harmed another person - without relying on cages?
- How can people in a neighborhood stay safe without relying on police? What would it look like politically, socially, and economically in our communities to create "police free" or "harm free" zones?
- Historically, what do you think were the social, economic, and political factors that led to such widespread use of prisoners?
- Whose interests are served by the PIC today?
- Considering the political capital and the powerful institutions underpinning "tough on crime" policies, how can we as communities begin to change these trends?
- What can a society, a neighborhood, or an individual do to prevent harm even within our society and government institutions?
- How can we work on alternatives to the PIC while inside prison? How can our daily practice reflect the change we are trying to create?
- What questions do you have about alternatives and about abolition?

We welcome your thoughts on themes for future issues, ideas for getting more involved, and the paper's direction. Most of all, we look forward to beginning this dialogue with you.

In solidarity and struggle,

The Abolitionist Editorial Collective

The Abolitionist
1904 Franklin St, Ste. 504
Oakland, CA 94612

The Abolitionist - spring 2005
Real Playaz
Empowering individuals and uniting communities

"The biggest battlefield is dealing with the minds of youth."

A former drug dealer, a recovering addict, and an ex-felon who's been on both sides of the gun, Rudy Corpuz works with a youth violence prevention program called the United Playaz Youth Program. Rudy was interviewed by The Abolitionist.

United Playaz is not talking about the type of players that have a lot of females or jewels and long fancy coasts — we're talking about players who are doing positive and productive things for their communities. That's a real player. We unite people to do something in this vicious world.

Our program originated back in 1994 at Balboa High School during a racial riot. Myself and some other adults asked two of the groups fighting if they wanted to sit down and talk. Both of the groups were tired of seeing people get killed. When we sat them down there was a lot of animosity. But then we heard why — it was deeper than just somebody threw something at somebody or people bumped into each other. It was the frustration, the stress that these youngsters had. You got 1,500 people in that school and at lunchtime you can't go nowhere or do nothing... everybody just looks at each other. Eventually somebody's going to jump off. Fighting was the activity!

A lot of what causes youth violence is poverty. A lot of youngsters don't have jobs, are suffering, and come to school hungry. How the hell are kids going to learn when they can't concentrate? How are you going to learn in school when you just saw someone get smoked in your neighborhood — you have to jump over bodies that are bleeding — blood is going down the drain and thirty minutes later you're at school thinking about Math or English?

People talk at youngsters — but they don't really listen. Once we really paid attention to what these kids wanted, they responded and reciprocated by participating and sparking the minds of other youngsters. They started working together and it stopped a whole lot of violence. Now not everything stopped! But a lot of the kids who had been involved before could stand away from it now. And that saved some lives. When youngsters saw how much influence they could have, we started getting involved in a lot of activist stuff. Proposition 21, Martin Luther King Jr. marches, the AIDS walk. We called, got involved in food banks, cleaning and feeding our own communities, grassroots fundraising.

A young lady named Billie Williams was part of our program ten years ago; today she runs her own youth program. She still comes back and takes kids on college tours. We have a brother in our program who was off the hook. Now he's a preacher. But then there are a lot of people who fall through the cracks too. Some chose to go back into that lifestyle — and the ultimate consequence for that is death.

I didn't use to know any of this. I was walking around with blindfolds on in the dark — not knowing why we are in this condition. Why are we starving? Why are those people lying out on the streets when the White House has got hella empty rooms? This system is designed for us to fail. A lot of kids don't know their real histories. And now that I know, it's my responsibility as a man to serve these kids the truth.

I work in a couple of programs up at San Quentin. One is called The Trust. Lifts train guys who are going to be in the pen for one to five years. They teach them everything they never learned about how to be a man, a father, how to raise kids, how to talk to kids, how to respect women, how to deal with anger. Then after five years when they get released and come out of the gates, they're being bridged back to the community where there are programs like ours who will take them and help brothers out. We also put on shows in the joints. In between the musical acts we say that this is what we do and if you're coming home this is what you need to do because we need brothers on the inside to help in this war. Teachers, ministers, counselors are trying to work with these kids and a lot of them are not figuring it out. In order for you to save a drug you have to have been a thing. We need the guys inside — sleeping giants — to come home so they can work with youngsters.

The school systems, the media, the prisons are all part of the same team. The judge, public defender, District Attorney — they're all part of the 'Fuck you crew'. We live in a hard time, and it's going to get rougher. We can't depend on the local government or the State — we have to depend on our communities and ourselves. When the gun is turned off, the electricity is turned off and the water shut off, the first person you're going to see when you walk outside your house is your neighbor. So you need to make sure that you have some type of relationship with your neighbors.

We've been waiting too long and asking for people to give us shit. We need to start helping our selves. We've been knocking on that door for way too long. We just need to kick that shit down; we need to get on the other side of that door where there's enough food and money. The paradox is that our people act like they own shit, representing this turf while they don't own a board or brick on that neighborhood block but are willing to die for it. What we need is something to live for — now.
Prison Gang Politics

by Tracye B. Washington

"I use to think that not to gangbang was a sign of weakness, but now I know better. Making a positive transition in your life is a sign of strength, never weakness..."

—Big Tuttle, Co-Founder of the Crips

If there is a progressive prisoners rights movement within the California Department of Corrections (CDC) today, one has to make an exceptional search to locate its body.

All current and future CDC prisoners benefit from our predecessors, who suffered, fought, and died to establish a Prisoner’s Bill of Rights (1976), determinate sentencing (1977), and good-time/work-time credits (1983). This struggle for rights was among the most glorious moments in California prison history. It was a time when the conscience woke. Prisoners recognized we were in the same boat, suffering from the same problems at the hands of the same oppressors, and that unity — whether in mass or in small numbers — was a force to be reckoned with. Spurred by these factors, we were able to submerge our differences, unite and push for change. But, ironically, when our battles were finally won and conditions began to improve these very liberties created other problems that soon escalated into a crisis.

During the mid-1970s, the laws regarding how prisoners could challenge the conditions of confinement changed. If prisoners incurred a wrongdoing committed by prison authorities, they could seek redress through a writ of habeas corpus or by filing civil suit. It was now possible for prisoners to individually challenge the conditions of confinement without needing to organize or unite. And the organizational skills learned during the struggle for better prison conditions, racial equity in staffing and prisoner job assignments found a new purpose: prison gang politics.

Some say that prison gangs were forged out of a need to defend against ethnic and racial aggressions. Some argue that they formed for the very purpose of attempting to maintain an orderly prison environment, and still others say that they were created exclusively as a profit-oriented enterprise. Whatever their conceptual intent, the ideologies that have eventually been adopted and promoted have ignited a divisive flame that supersedes control.

In the years since prison gangs have been established within the California Department of Corrections, many ethnic, racial, social, and political tensions have surfaced. Most disturbing have been the proven allegations that prison guards themselves were complicit in fanning the flames of racism and social division. Charges against them include using their positions of authority to smuggle in lethal weapons and illicit drugs to certain prisoners and helping prisoners bypass security and escape to attack targeted victims. While some prison guards participated in these acts for the simple sadistic and perverse pleasure of watching men maim and kill each other, some aligned themselves with certain groups based on race and ideology.

For the prison administration, the unbridled violence provided ample ammunition to lobby the legislature and the office of the governor for tighter restrictions on prisoners rights and privileges won during the 1970s, as well as for more funding for prison construction. And they succeeded. Every year since 1983, another prisoner right or privilege has been revoked. The courts sanctioned these by citing patterns of political, social, racial, and predatory violence. But the gang violence cited by prison authorities was fraught with prison guard complicity.

As we have seen during the last ten years, from Corcoran to Pelican Bay to Solano Valley State Prison, guards instigate, agitate, promote, and sponsor prison gang wars, street gangs, and their own gangs. They perpetuate violence within the prison environment for the same reasons as their prison guard predecessors did during the 60s, 70s, and early 80s.

Prisoners must accept the blame for gang violence — because we allowed ourselves to be played like puppets on strings. While we suffered, they celebrated, twisting our own ideologies against us. They studied and learned the prison codes and exploited them to their own advantage. They know that certain political, ethnic, racial and social groups on the prison yard follow a set of policies and guidelines and exploit those rules to force us into violent conflicts. We should be held accountable by our own infrangible rules if they now serve as a detriment to us all — these rules now advance no realistic cause.

Today there are almost no conjugal visits allowed for prisoners to maintain healthy family connections. There are no more weight checks for cellmates who care for us. There are no more college programs or vocational trade programs. We cannot receive packages from friends and family. Allowable personal property has been severely restricted, and in some prisons there are complaints of meal portions being cut.

The prison yards have been dissected into small enclaves that serve as mini-battlefields for those who care to venture out on "Gladiator Day," where guards ultimately decide the victory or defeat of the combatants. On the prison yard, we are accustomed to using words and actions to distinguish ourselves and ideologies, but we have yet to prosper from the added upward mobility and leadership roles that the additional income, comfort and security that our presence would have brought them. We broken them with our plans for financial support and we worry and shame them with our ignorance, lack of insight and growth — all because we are afraid to change.

In order to retrieve all that we have lost, we must unite and form a progressive movement for change. I invite everyone who reads this to join in this movement.

Tracye Washington
T-81075 4A-4C-106-C
C CI
PO Box 1031
Trichelap, CA 93581

Submission Guidelines for The Abolitionist

DEADLINE FOR SECOND ISSUE IS: APRIL 15, 2005

The Abolitionist accepts:

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

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 no changes should be made. In this case, however, it might not be used.

Also clearly note if 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.

Once again, the DEADLINE FOR SECOND ISSUE IS: APRIL 15, 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 e-mail (this is cheaper for us) addresses who you want to receive the newspaper or who might want to get already involved in working on it. We are still in the process of securing funding for this project. If you would like to contribute to the project please send money to:

CRITICAL RESISTANCE/CEELPS/CPR 1904 FRANKLIN STREET, SUITE 504/ OAKLAND, CA 94612.

In solidarity,

The Abolitionist

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

The Abolitionist - spring 2005
Garrison Johnson’s lawsuit challenging the California Department of Corrections’ practice of segregating reception center prisoners by race raises critical questions on the role of the color line and institutionalized violence in prison. While the outcome itself may not be known until June, many court observers believe that Johnson -- a CDC prisoner who has served for nearly two decades and faces at least two more -- will win. We should begin thinking about how to direct this decision towards our abolitionist goals. This article will also briefly discuss the continuation of the prison media ban in the context of this watershed case.

The case was argued in the U.S. Supreme Court last November, ten years after Johnson first filed in pro per. (See Johnson v. California, 521 F.3d 791 (9th Cir. 2008) and Johnson v. California, 336 F.3d 1117 (9th Cir. 2003), Fergusson, J. dissenting from the denial of en banc review.) Johnson contends that the CDC practice of double-celling prisoners of the same race in reception centers violates the Fourteenth Amendment’s "strict scrutiny" standard for race-based classification. The CDC has hotly defended its methods, which have been in existence close to 25 years, and favors the Thornhill v. Saferly (462 U.S. 78 (1987)) standard, which permits impingements if there is a "valid, rational connection" between the prison regulation and the governmental interest put forward to justify it. If Johnson wins, the CDC will either have to come up with much better reasons for its current practice, or will have to cease segregating solely on the basis of race.

What this case is really about is how the CDC uses race and racism inside prisons to control prisoners. To defend its position on segregation, the CDC has taken a hardline position on the relationship between race and violence. For instance, the Senior Assistant Attorney General Frances Grandjean argued before the Supreme Court, "California is ground zero for race-based prison and street gangs." Likewise, Warden Schubert of CSP Lancaster insisted, "You cannot house a Japanese inmate with a Chinese inmate. They will kill each other. They won't even tell you about it. They will just do it."

Although the CDC's race rhetoric focuses on conflict between races, some of the more striking examples are intra-racial episodes (e.g., a white supremacist attack on an gay white inmate in Pelican Bay, a Crip vs. Bloods fracas) and are not provocable by racial segregation. Moreover, the CDC insists throughout the Johnson case record that, with the exception of the reception center policy, the CDC is completely integrated. It's unfortunate that during the hearing no one played the announcement from the California prison information hotline (which enumerated the separate days that white, Hispanic, and Black prisoners could be visited) or presented the racial breakdown of the SHU compared to the general population, or contrasted the racial make-up of Level IV against Level II facilities in response to this astonishing, false assertion.

Johnson himself completely agrees that racial violence is pervasive in the system; no one asserts anything to the contrary. What is really at issue is why, Johnson has argued that segregation exacerbates tensions by preventing prisoners from reaching out across racial lines to form safe and necessary alliances. Importantly, existing research supports integration. The Tulson study, which assessed segregation in Texas prison, found that "over ten years, the rate of violence between inmates segregated by race in double-cells surpassed the rate among those racially integrated." Seeing the CDC defend itself and its methods in the face of such evidence, Johnson's own experiences, and common sense begs the question: What purpose does segregation

What would it mean to stop relying on race in making the first, fundamental decisions about arriving prisoners?
EIGHT SIMPLE RULES
DRAFTING A HABEAS CORPUS PETITION

By Kent Russell

The purpose of this column is to provide "habeas hints" for prisoners handling habeas petitions as their own attorneys ("in pro per") under AEDPA — the 1996 habeas law that now governs this practice throughout the U.S. What follows are eight rules to simplify a daunting task and improve the quality of your habeas petition.

1. Obtain and obey the local rules.

Before drafting a habeas petition, order the local rules from the court by mail or have a family member obtain them online and give them to you. Important rules for filing the petition are to use the court-approved form (which varies from court to court), serve a copy of the petition on your opponent, payment of all required fees (85 for a federal petition), and keeping under the 25-page limit.

2. Don't be late.

No matter how persuasive a habeas petition might be, if it's made after the statute of limitations runs out, it's probably going to be the habeas graveyard. If you're filing a federal petition you need to make sure you give it to the prison staff in time for them to mail it before the statute of limitations runs out. If you're filing a state petition, leave enough time to file in a federal court in case your petition is denied by the state's highest court.

3. Start out with the supporting facts.

The main purpose of a habeas petition is to tell the judge why your case is one of the very few that should be granted relief from a conviction and sentence that have already been upheld by the state courts. Most prisoner petitions are loaded with case citations but short on specific persuasive facts that would convince a reader that the petitioner has been wrongfully convicted.

In drafting a petition, start with a solid list of facts before doing any extensive legal research. Use the final arguments and appellate briefs to make a list of the "bad facts" the prosecution used to get you convicted. Then make a list of the "good facts" you can prove to refute some of the prosecution's "bad ones." Your supporting exhibits need to back up these "good facts.

4. Take your best shot(s).

Most judges have little patience for habeas, and the windier and more convoluted a petition is, the more likely that patience will run out. Furthermore, no petitioner ever wins more than one habeas claim at a time. Hence, prisoners who think the best habeas petition is the one with the most claims are overly misguided. Quality counts way more than quantity, and choosing the two or three strongest claims allows the court to give the focused attention they deserve.

5. Keep your eye on the (Supreme Court) ball when citing Supporting Cases.

All habeas petitions need to cite case law supporting each claim. However, you don't need to cite more than one example of a favorable U.S. Supreme Court decision (USSC) for every claim in the petition. For example, once you have your "good" facts lined up and determine why you were wrongfully convicted, then cite the USSC case that supports your claim. Here are some common examples: If facts weren't presented during your trial, then you can probably claim "ineffective assistance of counsel" by citing Wiggins v. Smith, 123 S.Ct. 2527 (2003). If your attorney tried to present facts the judge wouldn't allow, cite Chambers v. Mississippi, 410 U.S. 284 (1973). And if you discover that facts relevant to your case were concealed by the State during the discovery phase, cite Brady v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83 (1963).

You can cite other cases besides USSC authority, but finding a USSC case to support your claim is straightforward, and there's no need to delay or clutter up the draft petition with citations to cases from other jurisdictions. Keep in mind that the petition merely points the court to the key cases on which your habeas claims are based. You will have an opportunity to cite additional authorities in state court if the court orders informal briefing, or in federal court when your file your Traverse.

6. Back up all Ineffective Assistance of Counsel claims by showing of "prejudice."

The successful IAC claim shows not only "deficient performance" by the trial lawyer, but also "prejudice." Be sure to show how the lawyer's performance affected the outcome of the trial. Judges quickly grow tired of IAC claims that degenerate into a laundry list of every criticism in the lawyer's performance. The best way to show prejudice on an IAC claim is to use the Exhibits to provide a "cure" for every alleged "aliment" in the attorney's performance. For example, if the prisoner claims the lawyer failed to call a witness for the defense, the Exhibits should contain a sworn statement by that witness that summarizes the testimony they would have given. If the IAC claims the lawyer failed to call an expert to contradict the prosecution's forensic evidence, the Exhibits should include a declaration from a newly retained expert demonstrating that the prosecution's evidence was flawed.

7. Federalizing the direct appeal.

A competent appellate lawyer will research and present the best legal arguments you have on your direct (first) appeal. Most legal claims can be framed, not only as state law arguments, but also in terms of the denial of a federal constitutional right, which is required for habeas claims. Stating a legal claim as one based on the federal Constitution is called "federalizing" the claim. Most good appellate lawyers will do this on the direct appeal by making sure that the strongest claims are federalized and presented to the state's highest court. (In California, this is done in the Petition for Review, which must be filed within 40 days of the date the appeal is denied.) The process of most important things to do in drafting your habeas petition is to focus on the Petition for Review for similar document in other cases) and see whether the claim(s) which you consider most persuasive were also federalized. You must file federal rights violation claims in the state petition (properly supported by USSC authority), because you cannot raise a federal claim later if not first filed at a state court.

8. Use Exhibits wisely.

Exhibits are essential to a successful habeas petition and should be chosen with care and well presented in a way that will make the greatest impact. The most important exhibits are declarations by witnesses and or experts that add important factual information to the court record. Avoid bulky excerpts from the trial transcript that duplicate the pre-existing court record. When presenting Exhibits, lead off with expert witness declarations, test results, and documents that were not presented at trial, then present declarations from new sources with transcript excerpts. Reproduce only the most important pages of transcript and highlight the most critical portions. Begin with the index page and number all pages consecutively. The index should be arranged in columns showing document titles, page number(s), and the habeas claim(s) which the Exhibits pertain.

Kent Russell is the author of the California Habeas Handbook (Ed 404, rev. Dec 2004), which can be purchased by sending a check or money order for $29.99 to the Leno Officers of Russell and Russell, 2229 Sunset Street, San Francisco, CA 94115.
What is the Prison-Industrial Complex?

The prison industrial complex (PIC) is a complicated system situated at the intersection of governmental and private interests that uses prisoners as a solution to social, political, and economic problems. The PIC depends upon the oppressive systems of racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia. It includes human rights violations, the death penalty, industry and labor issues, policing, courts, media, community empowerment, the imprisonment of political prisoners, and the elimination of dissent.

How the PIC Works

To fully describe the PIC, we have to look at the big picture of how it functions. For example, the prison construction boom can be linked to, among other factors, the large increase in the number of people sentenced to prison terms with the onset of the war on drugs, the repression of radical movements led by people of color for self-determination, and the anti-imperialist struggles of the 20th century. The "war on drugs" and the national and local efforts to destroy radical political movements led to increasing police presence in communities of color and poor communities, higher arrest rates, and longer prison sentences.

This boom is also fueled by racist and sexist reporting about "crime," "delinquency," and "rebellion," creating a culture of fear in which it continues to be acceptable and desirable to many people to lock people (primarily people of color, youth, and poor people) in cages for longer and longer in the interest of "public safety." The way the many parts of the PIC interact exactly what makes it so powerful and destractive. In order to fight this system, we have to see it for all that it is and recognize what drives and shapes it.

Fighting the PIC

Fighting the PIC means fighting the mainstream ideas of public safety and challenging the idea that police, prisons, and the court system make people who are not in power safer. At the same time, we must create alternative ideas of security based on the safety of the people most affected by the PIC.

The United States currently imprisons over 2 million people. About 6.9 million people are presently under some form of supervision within the criminal justice system. Women represent the fastest rising prison population. Since 1980, the number of women imprisoned in the U.S. has risen by almost 400 percent. Racism continues to be a major factor in the United States, illustrated by policies and programs that sustain white supremacy. Racism, as it is used through criminal laws that target people of color, is essential to the PIC, not accidental.

Prisons Are Not an Answer to Crime

The wrongheads we call crime do not exist in the same ways everywhere and are not "human nature." What is considered a crime is determined by the societies we live in. Because we have seen over and over again that locking more people in cages does not reduce crime, we must understand the power relationships that lead society to lock up only certain people. Since prisons do not stop problems like poverty, racism, or drug addiction, we cannot expect them to stop crime. We need to understand that we have no option but to fight and continue to fight until all of the different parts of the PIC that continue to put our survival in danger are eliminated.

The Movement Against the PIC

The movement against the PIC runs the risk of being shaped by easy victories or simplified struggles that do not recognize and fight the whole system. We must go beyond false separations, such as "non-violent" versus "violent" that place prisoners in opposition to each other. We cannot allow ourselves to do short-term work that undermines our long-term visions and goals, or rely on the same systems of oppression and domination that sustain and drive the PIC to influence voters and decision makers. In order to do this work, we must continue to create spaces for people with different points of view to have honest discussions and disagreements about directions the movement against the PIC should take.

What We Are For

Since we are so frequently asked what we are "for" rather than "against," the struggle against prisons, police, repression, punishment, and the criminalization of entire communities must display a clear vision of what a world without the PIC is possible. One way to define and shape what we are for is through creating a culture of resistance, or a culture and society that fill all the different parts of our lives with alternatives to the culture of imprisonment. A new culture must emerge and sustain our struggle and provide space for political education, conversation and debate about what we are doing and what we need to do in the future.

In order to figure out why people get locked up and under what circumstances, we need to look at what are sometimes called "root causes."

This strategy requires looking at the competing priorities of the systems in which we live and understanding why they work well for some and horribly for others. The systems of race, class, gender, and sexuality, for instance, are commonly understood as privileging some people's needs and ideals over others. By exploring why and how these systems work for some and not for others, we can begin to develop a better understanding of how to include concrete steps in our work that deal with the negative effects of these systems on the people who are most often put in cages.

To oppose the PIC, activists must work on both theoretical and practical levels. We cannot only engage in single-issue struggles, because all the issues interconnect. How can we best create social change in an era of globalization? The voices of today's radical activists, particularly activists of color, must be at the forefront of the fight against the PIC. Those who are most affected by the system must be the ones planning its end.

Organizing against the PIC is as much about building something as it is about fighting what is destroying our communities. Our organizing is an ongoing effort to create alternatives, not only to imprisonment, but to the culture of punishment we've become so used to.