Ripping Out the Roots of Imprisonment
Through a Southern Organizing Approach

By Stephanie Guilloud, Rehana Lerandcule, and Woods Ervin

When we think of the historical roots of the present PIC, and the pathways to freedom used by organizers for centuries, we must begin in the US South. This region can be thought of not only as an epicenter of our opponent—where white supremacist violence has been tested, implemented, and outsourced across the globe since the early 1600s—but also as a stronghold of strategies and tactics for getting—and keeping—people out of cages. The history of the US South can be understood and leveraged by our movements today to adopt a long-haul view of the ebb and flow of our wins and opposition, so we can more effectively fight and win.

In our current context of Southern organizing, we can see that the prison industrial complex (PIC) is incredibly efficient, tactical, and highly interconnected across the 34-state Southern region, where the roots of oppression run deep. In the same region where we once saw chattel slavery, the Black Codes, and Jim Crow, we are now faced with the current manifestation of the PIC: The sheer numbers of people in cages, the laws and policies that lock people up for long amounts of time, and the efforts to crush resistance movements across the region.

From a pure numbers perspective, Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, Arkansas, and Alabama have imprisonment rates among the top 10 globally, according to the Prison Policy Initiative. The South also has the highest rates of felony disenfranchisement in the country, as reported by the Sentencing Project. It also has a concentration of punitive policies and laws, like Alabama’s Habitual Offender Act. Florida passed the anti-protest law (HB1) this year, a direct counterattack to the uprisings in the summer of 2020, commissioning cops to charge protesters with a third-degree felony at their discretion, and making tearing down a confederate flag a crime punishable by up to 15 years in prison. The South’s concentration of high-functioning systems of criminalization, arrest, and caging means that the Southern organizing response must be more effective than the gears of the PIC in order to win.

So how has the PIC been able to establish such a stronghold on the South when it comes to caging our people, and how does Southern organizing respond and fight to establish pathways to freedom? To answer this, we must look at our current context through the framework of the past. Southern organizing is anchored in understanding the 500-year-old root of the modern manifestation of the PIC that we fight today. It seeks to rip out that root, along with its sinister tendrils that replicate throughout history and into our futures.

"Southern organizing is anchored in understanding the 500-year-old root of the modern manifestation of the PIC that we fight today. It seeks to rip out that root, along with its sinister tendrils that replicate throughout history and into our futures." These are only a few examples of hundreds in the story of the South that we can leverage to establish pathways toward freedom. Movements rise and fall; they gain steam and traction, but face a constant counterattack from our opposition. If we don’t recognize the Southern movement as it rises—and the counter-movement as it attempts to crush—we’re missing important lessons for radical organizing against imprisonment across the country.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS IS CRITICAL TO ORGANIZING STRATEGY

The historical analysis that Southern strategy calls is one that leverages multifaceted tactics from the front porch to the courtroom and determines what moves to make by looking at broad swaths of time. One example born out of Alabama-based organizing was the attack on racist sentencing laws that influenced the large-scale imprisonment rates we see in the South today. Pastor Kenneth Glasgow, a formerly imprisoned organizer with T.O.P.S., began the work of organizing folks in his hometown of Dothan, Alabama by asking the question, “Why are so many people in my state being locked up for so long?” The answer lies in the laws of moral turpitude enacted in 1901 and their origins in Jim Crow. During the post-slavery Reconstruction era of the 1870s, new “moral turpitude” statutes across Southern states became a vehicle for former confederate state constitutions to ensure the legal continuation of the disenfran...
Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

Welcome to Issue 36 of The Abolitionist, the third and final issue of 2021. Issue 36 features articles on “Pathways toward Freedom,” uplifting a set of strategies for getting people out of cages, from prison closure campaigns in California to participatory defense efforts in Pennsylvania, cash bail and pre-trial reform efforts across the US, campaigns for mass releases both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in both Iran and the US, and advocacy work for political prisoners in the US and Palestine. The issue features a collaboration between Project South and Critical Resistance (CR), exploring how the US South may hold many of the keys for pathways toward freedom in its legacies of abolitionist organizing. We also include a metaphorical and personal reflection on “pathways toward freedom” by Ricardo Vela Jr, who made his debut as an imprisoned contributor to The Abolitionist in the Kites to the Editor feature in Issue 35.

This issue also includes two feature resources, an excerpt from a toolkit, called “On the Road to Freedom,” that CR published with Community Justice Exchange in the summer of 2021, providing an abolitionist assessment of cash bail and pre-trial reforms, and a set of questions provided by UnCommon Law that prisoners can use to prepare for parole. Mohamed Sheik’s article on the prison closure campaign that CR and Californians United for a Responsible Budget are fighting to close 30 prisons in the next few years includes a survey that we hope you will look over. Please consider sharing your responses with us, whether you are incarcerated in California or another state. In addition to welcoming the return of all of The Abolitionist’s columns, we include Stevie Wilson’s column “9971,” which includes 21 questions for people inside to consider and reflect on. Share your responses to those questions with us as well, and we will make sure Stevie gets them. As usual, see the Call for Content and submission guidelines on page 22 to submit content for future issues.

While we can’t guarantee a response to all the mail we receive, unfortunately, we would love to hear from you, and to expand the number of contributions to each issue by people currently locked up.

Next year, The Abolitionist Editorial Collective will be scaling down the frequency of the paper to produce two issues per year instead of three. We will be printing Issue 37 on housing in the late Spring of 2022, and Issue 38 on labor in late fall of 2022. We hope that producing two instead of three issues per year will create more room for our editorial collective to struggle more deeply with one another and our readers, work more closely with people inside to generate content, and focus more intently on expanding our distribution and use of the paper inside and outside of cages. If the collective is able to generate more capacity to scale back up to three issues per year in the future, we will consider doing so. Our commitment is to improving our accountability to you, our readers, and to making sure that we deliver strong, rigorous, vibrant, and rich abolitionist analysis, action tips, and reflections in each issue that we produce.

We are sending each and every one of you radical love, strength, and resilience. We hope this issue ignites your passion for freedom and will fight for a better world and thrive.

In struggle,
Critical Resistance & The Abolitionist Editorial Collective

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Announcements & Reminders:

Two Issues Per Year Starting 2022!

In 2022, The Abolitionist Editorial Collective is changing the frequency of the newspaper to only two issues in the year instead of three.

Look out for a late Spring 2022 issue (#37), and a late fall issue (#38).

Critical Resistance National Office has moved!

In the summer of 2021, we had to move our national office of over a decade from downtown Oakland due to rising rent. Make sure you have our new mailing address:

CRITICAL RESISTANCE
Attn: The Abolitionist
PO Box 27280
Oakland CA 94609-2301

WRITE TO US AT:
Critical Resistance
OR CALL US AT:
510-444-0484
chisement of Black people. “Black codes” and “crimes” of vagrancy enabled the continued oppression of Black people in the US through the constant threat of being funneled into cages, and the process of criminalizing Black life as “immoral” forced Black people into a subclass which was profit-driven and sustained with economic security. This significantly pre-
dates the rise of the PIC and the reemerging domination of the state and conservative interests of global economic management in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The laws sought to en-
sure the continuation of white supremacy and social control for well over a century. By the time of the Keynesian management period of capital-
ism after the Great Depression and on into our current context.

If we know our history, we can build a strategy that would be a good source of local jobs, Ada Smith was successful in shutting down the plans for the most expensive prison in the country. USP Letcher, was being sited on a former strip mine; and concerns related to building on an old strip mine; and a range of tactics: Raising environmental con-
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The historical legacy of white supremacy playing-
out in Alabama and the successful fight against it is just one example of why it is so crucial for our movements to strategize and em-
ploy a broad range of tactics in each state's understanding the landscape of jails, prisons, detention centers, and parole/probation across the region.

One year ago, Project South and its Georgia-
centered organizing, which has the potential to be both a tool in unifying the abolitionist movement across the US as well as a playbook for state-by-state con-
texts. The platform encourages us to: 1) Break the Cycle; 2) Close the Cages; 3) Free the People; 4) Tell the Truth; 5) Repair the Harm. By doing so for decades to form a cross-movement organi-
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The Appeal to the future we want

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The fight against USP Letcher exposed an insid-
erable and state agencies opened up new pathways, similar to our comrades in Kentucky, to think through what forms of sustainability we will need for economically depressed and largely Black communities in Georgia, whose residents have been working at these prisons, once the buildings are gone.

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By Ricardo Vela Jr.

My pathway toward freedom has not been easy. Few things worth having in life come easy, and whatever progress I’ve made has taken great effort on my part, but at key points along the way I’ve had real help to “see the light.” Like Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, the light can be blinding, and I still struggle to remove the scales from my eyes, still looking for that “street called straight.”

Although the struggle is in many respects a universal one, our experiences are all unique and essentially serve as filters through which we receive the universe, informing our core beliefs, attitudes, and approaches to life. This is important because, as Professor Angela Y. Davis points out, “People struggle to understand the basic process of acquiring knowledge because it is subordinate to future earning potential, the capacity to make money in the future, material riches rather than the true riches of living the examined life.” So, as I’m learning through my study of *The Abolitionist* newspaper and other material sent to me by Critical Resistance, “abolishing the prison industrial complex means changing the way we think and relate to each other.” It’s essential to gain a clear understanding of how, “the PIC has infiltrated every aspect of our lives: the way we learn, the way we communicate, what we believe and how we process information.” It’s that serious. The stakes are really high.

The real irony in all this is that I took my first steps on the pathway to freedom when George W. Bush’s neo-fascist political regime, which controlled the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), threw me into a 6 x 10 ft sensory deprivation chamber in the infamous “32 Building” at what’s now called Polunsky Unit in Livingston, Texas – the same “32 Building” which currently houses Texas’s Death Row.

In the mid-1990s, the burgeoning prison industrial complex (PIC) and all of the groups who support and profit from it were actively engaged in building walls to keep us divided and cages to keep us isolated. They will never willingly learn that my life is a testament to this fact, reflected in the choices I’ve made, the good and the bad. It’s empowering to know that nothing is ever predetermined, and nobody’s fate is ever sealed. I’m not travelling through life along a channel carved into a rock through which I am forced to flow!

On the other hand, I do believe, as the good Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously articulated, that there is a definite “moral arc” to the universe, a real and dynamic positive force working on the planet to move us toward a better place. “People struggle to understand the basic process of acquiring knowledge because it is subordinate to future earning potential, the capacity to make money in the future, material riches rather than the true riches of living the examined life.”

I stepped out into the so-called free world on September 13, 2002, convinced that it was never their aim to “reform criminals”; – if that were the case, they should look in the mirror and reform themselves and finally put a stop to hundreds of years of butchery, enslavement, genocide, financial high crimes, illegal land grabs, occupations, and colonialism. Their true aim was to force compliance, to strip me of my humanity and dignity, to snuff out any thoughts of self-determination or independence.

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Author Bio & Editors’ Note: Ricardo Vela Jr. is imprisoned in Texas. A new subscriber and writer of *The Abolitionist*, Ricardo submitted his first piece as a Kite to the Editors published in Issue 35. “Pathways to Freedom Not Always Straight” is his second submission to the newspaper. We loved Ricardo’s take on the “pathways to freedom” being a personal reflection of his struggle and vision of abolition so much that we wanted to print this piece as a feature reflection for the issue. Thanks, Ricardo! Keep up the good work.

W rite to Ricardo at: Ricardo Vela Jr. #2164340 1300 FM 655 Rosharon, TX 77583
The irony is that the regime’s blood-soaked policy on drugs and capital punishment has been bankrolled by the United Nations. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has given Iran more than $15 million since 1998 in order to fight the ‘war on drugs.’ Most of this money comes from Western nations, despite their own opposition to the death penalty.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the horrific nature of Iran’s penal system. The regime’s response to the COVID-19 outbreak is a case study in cruelty and hypocrisy.

At the outset of the pandemic, the regime announced its plans to conduct mass releases, and this announcement was coupled with additional questionable claims, including that prisoners would be taking “precautionary measures” to combat the virus, and that “security-related prisoners,” otherwise known as political prisoners, would be included in the releases only if their sentences were for less than five years. Activists have noted that many who were eligible for release, or furloughs, as they are often termed in Iran, did not have the financial means to pay for the high bail amounts given. Well-welcoming the news of the release, Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, issued a statement on 29 March 2020, stating that the regime had not provided for additional releases and noting concerns that some categories of prisoners were disproportionately affected by the viral pandemic. Protests by prisoners, critics, lawyers, and human rights defenders.

As the virus spread throughout the country, many who remained in prison continued to voice concern over the dismal conditions they faced. Some of those who were released to escape attempts to save their lives. Local media reported that a major prison break occurred on March 27 in the Sarpol-e-Zahab prison in western Iran. Reportedly, as many as 74 prisoners escaping conditions at the prison’s medical center.

By the summer of 2020, Iran had increased the number of releases to nearly 300,000. However, these releases did little to improve the cruel reality for those still trapped inside Iran’s prisons. By July of 2020, France 24 reported that Iran had seen riots in at least 32 prisons over a two-week period, with those inside calling for basic hygiene supplies like soap and water. In July of 2020, Amnesty International published leaked documents allegedly obtained from a senior official responsible for prison management, request- ing additional resources to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 among prisoners. The disclosures included a Khorasan province legal letter and four follow-up letters requesting protective gear and disinfectant products, with subsequent letters repeating requests and noting the absence of any government response. In the latest letter obtained by Amnesty International, dated July 5, 2020, a senior official at the Prisons Organization states that they had received no response from the Ministry of Health and asked for an urgent meeting.

Repression and resistance

The situation had not improved by early 2021. In April, Amnesty International reported that thousands of prisoners had staged protests over fears of contracting COVID-19, resulting in a deadly crackdown by security forces, including members of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard and paramilitary Basij force. This included the use of tear gas and live ammunition, killing at least 21 prisoners, with some reports placing the number as high as 36. On March 30 and 31, 2021, security forces, including members of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards and paramilitary Basij force. This included the use of tear gas and live ammunition, killing at least 21 prisoners, with some reports placing the number as high as 36. On March 30 and 31, security forces, including members of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards and paramilitary Basij force. This included the use of tear gas and live ammunition, killing at least 21 prisoners, with some reports placing the number as high as 36.

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Continued on next page
By Rory Elliott

As COVID-19 caused a pandemic, prison authorities in Iran found themselves in a difficult position. The regime was forced to acknowledge the urgent need for change, and prison conditions began to improve. However, the speed of change was slow, and many prisoners were still left behind.

By Rory Elliott

The Abolitionist: When and why did your group take up the call to Free Them All? Oloth - Free Them All Washington: I am an organizer with Free Them All WA (FTA WA), which is a community collective of incarcerated community members and families advocating the abolition of all systems that harm Black and Indigenous, and people of Color (BIPOC) communities. Just for a little bit of context, I’ve always been about “free them all” and abolitionist work because I was formerly incarcerated. I just got out like a couple years ago after spending most of my life in prison. In prison, when I was organized with our collectives we never thought about changing the system. We thought about just getting rid of this shit because that’s the only way a lot of us would get free. A lot of my comrades that are still left behind are doing life sentences or sentences with ridiculous amounts of years. So we didn’t think a “change” in the system would actually get those folks out. No, abolition of the system would get folks out.

In regards to community work, since being on the outside and with Free Them All WA more specifically, folks were concerned about their family members, community members, and the treatment that the Washington Department of Corrections (WDOC) was providing for folks inside. As COVID hit, it just got scarier for the families of incarcerated folks and community members that we’re in a relationship with. So we just thought that if not now, when? When is a better time to free them all?

The footage not only included direct recordings from the prison’s own surveillance system showing guards beating prisoners and individuals kept in solitary confinement; it also showed the moment when hackers revealed to authorities that they had breached their system. The hackers sent a direct message to prison authorities on their own internal monitors, including flashing the message “General protest until the freedom of political prisoners” on their screens.

While COVID-19 spreads through the country, the prison system has also faced the outrage of hypocrisy and brutality in Iran’s penal system. This reality requires a deeper analysis than simply contrasting Iran’s policies with those of the US, as a heralding of the grassroots resistance and heroic actions of those fighting for their freedom and their lives.

Such an analysis does not require some high level of cultural literacy to understand, but it does require us to listen to the universal acts of defiance and hope that we should recognize and support in every person in the world. Following the hacking of Evin prison’s computers, the activists behind the operation shared the following message to the world: “We want the world to know our voices, our political prisoners.” It is time that we listen.

Author Bio: Hamid Yazdan Panah is an Iranian American human rights activist and anti-death row lawyer from New York City. He is the Advocacy Director for Immigrant Defense Advocates, a California-based project focused on immigration detention.
Underpinning all of this was trying to deepen conversations around what is danger, and what is safety, and challenging the logics of the prison industrial complex (PIC).

The Abolitionist: How have you resisted the persistent categorization of “deserving” vs. “undeserving” prisoners in your organizing?

Lucy: Most of our inside contacts are serving life sentences. As far as resistance inside, people with life sentences are the people that kind of lead the charge inside in Florida. These folks are fighting for their freedom as people deemed undeserving, and we fight alongside them.

Mon: Because so much is operating on the logic of the carceral state, inevitably there’s going to be this deserving/undeserving binary, and I think we had to take a zero-sum approach. We had to make it clear that we believe in freeing them all and we couldn’t be operating on the terrain of the state where we were agreeing to these useless and arbitrary categorizations of who should be released, and we needed to seize the opportunity provided right then. We had to struggle around things like technical violations so that we could actually get people out now, rather than litigating how we could have the most maximum strategy because we were running the risk of not getting anyone out at all.

That’s why we came up with these broad demands. W wanted to be able to say, these are all strategies that move us towards getting everyone out and to shrink the PIC, but no, they do not get everybody out all at once.

Olof: In regards to calling for releases, the dynamic of deserving undeserving is cooked into the sentencing guidelines and all possibilities for release. In W ashington state there’s no parole or no form of parole. So with sentencing guidelines for what are categorized as “violent crimes,” you can only get a tenth off your sentence for good behavior. For adults not tried as youth, the only avenues for release are whether you get to your release date or whether you are able to go in front of the pardons or clemency board. Our call was that — because a lot of Black folks, a lot of Indigenous folks, a lot of folks from communities of color were the “violent offenders,” or the folks that had more time — we must free all our community members, not just the ones that have nonviolent charges or have a short amount of time left.

If we are about abolition, if we are grounded in the idea of this being a racialized system that disproportionately impacts one population over another, we need a system that accurs privileges for certain populations through the mass criminalization and oppression of others — we simply cannot distinguish between who is undeserving or deserving.

“We must free all our community members, not just the ones that have nonviolent charges or have a short amount of time left.”

The Abolitionist: What key elements of power were you trying to shift? What avenues did you take?

Olof: W ashington state claims to be progressive and to have progressive politics, but it’s bullshit. So a lot of times, legislators, policy makers, or prison brokers will allow us or people in proximity to us in the room. They say all the right things, but of course end up doing shit that’s not conducive to freeing them all. So our thing is to push these “progressive” policymakers.

Lucy: We were advocating for releases because parole hasn’t existed in Florida since 1983. There’s still like 5,000 prisoners eligible for parole that have been waiting since ’83 to get out. Parole is next to impossible. So for a campaign for clemency, we needed the reformists to do that sort of statewide call based on the climate in the state.

In Florida we’re in a helicopter. The governor here was adamantly saying he didn’t give a fuck about prisoners or releasing anybody. Prisoners were being held in conditions that we would consider to be a sort of necessary health care, including vaccines.

We challenged the governor’s power primarily by utilizing direct actions, phone zaps, and those typical tactics. April 15, 2020 was the first uncovered report of two deaths from COVID in Florida prisons at a GEO Group-run private facility. The Florida Department of Corrections (FDOC) tried to cover them up. On April 17, we showed up to the state capitol and did a barrel action outside of the governor’s mansion.

We also had a public funeral for all the people that had died up to that point last August. We built up 90 body bags and brought them to Flor ida’s capitol building in Tallahassee. We then carried them over to the FDOC headquarters and had family members of people inside speak.

Mon: There were a lot of different power mates that we were trying to influence. One was the relationship between public health inside and outside. Making it clear to various communities inside New York City that they need to care about what happened inside jails because it was happening to their friends and family.

We tried to show that there is an ecosystem of punishment and negligence happening between detention centers, city jails, state prisons, and other kinds of carceral sites.

Lucy: That struggle was constantly disconnecting us from our bail programs, people’s family or friends would contact us for help getting their loved ones out after they got arrested at a protest. So many people not only did not understand the connection of these struggles, but they also didn’t understand that an arrest comes with court. You don’t just get out of jail. You face sentencing; you need a lawyer; you need legal defense. It’s not just this one time experience — it’s an ongoing fight, an ongoing struggle to get rid of this shit.

Mon: At times the uprisings and the protests happening around police violence and different kinds of state violence were not fully incorporating prisons and jails and detention centers into the picture. It was really important for us to create solidarity between all of these protesters who were being incarcerated for one or two days or even a week, and people who are incarcerated for longer terms. In New York there were hundreds of thousands of protests related arrests, so one way we tried to tackle this contradiction was through jail support. Not everybody who was getting arrested for protest testing and being held for one or two days was politicized towards the conditions and experiences of those facing this kind of circumstance inside indefinitely. There were a lot of efforts and not only to make sure that there was political education around incarceration happening through jail support and other actions.

Closing Cages: The People’s Plan for Prison Closure in California

By Mohamed Shekh

Between 1982 and 2005, California embarked on what two state analysts called “the largest prison building program in the history of the world.” W ithin those 23 years, the state averaged one new prison per year, building a total of 23 state prisons. This unprecedented and massive expansion of the state’s capacity to cage human beings drove a 500% increase of the state’s prison population. The prison con- struction boom has been a central pillar of the rise of the prison industrial complex (PIC), and has resulted in immeasurable devastation and violence on the bodies of all groups, but particularly for Black, Indigenous, immigrant, and working-class groups.

Yet as long as there have been plans to build pris ons, there have been communities organizing in resistance. This legacy continues today, stronger than ever. However, with no new prison construction plans on the horizon, communities are now ready to assert: We are working to close prisons to get people free.

Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB) is a statewide coalition of anti-capitalist, anti-war, and progressive organizations working collaboratively to end mass incarceration in California, and to build communities characterized by transformative justice. CURB is the birthplace of the campaign to close state prisons in California, which has been supported by hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals. W e believe that the only sustainable way to end mass incarceration is to build a movement that will close 30 state prisons in California by 2025. So far, two state prisons have already been slated for closure — Deuel Vocational Institute is already emptied
Prison Economics in Rural America

In rural communities in New York, Ryan King, mining 25 years of economic data on rural communities having a prison in their town. For instance, examining 25 years of data on rural counties, the state must continue to work to dramatically increase prison releases – not transfers – and change "tough on crime" laws and policies that drive the incarceration crisis.

Over the past decade, Californians have been working diligently at righting the wrongs of the past by changing public safety policies on the ballot and in the legislature, resulting in reduced prison populations with the goal of shifting public safety to center care, not cages. In order to meet the people's goal of cutting wasteful spending on corrections, the state continues to work to dramatically increase prison releases – not transfers – and change "tough on crime" laws and policies that drive the incarceration crisis.

In addition to closing and tearing down the cages themselves, this campaign is focused on changing and passing policies to reduce sentencing, expanding existing pathways for people to get out early, building pre-release programs that will make it harder for the state to criminalize people and lock them up. These are all strategies to get people free, and taken together, we believe they can most quickly and cost-effectively reduce California's prison population while creating a safer, healthier society for all of us.

One of the common hurdles that we consistently face is the claim that prisons are "good for their local economies." Pro-prison politicians and institutional partners to collect testimonials, statements and input from currently imprisoned people across the state of California and beyond. We will use these statements as quotes for media purposes (i.e., articles, press releases, and social media) and when talking to legislators (i.e., during public comments for upcoming hearings in Sacramento in 2022). Whether you are imprisoned in CA or your state, you can write your responses to the following five survey questions using your name or anonymously, and return it to:

Critical Resistance
Attn: CURB Campaign
P.O. Box 22780
Oakland, CA 94609

Please note how you would like your statement to be shared:
- Anonymously
- With my location
- Using this name
- Without my location

1. Have you experienced a prison or yard closure in California or elsewhere? What has the experience been like and can you share any specific, impactful it had on you and your loved ones following the announcement or after the closure?

2. Have you experienced a transfer before (out of state or in-state)? As we are fighting to close prisons in California, we want to make sure the state doesn't respond by increasing out-of-state or in-state transfers, and instead releases imprisoned people. Why do you think California should make sure not to transfer prisoners (out of state or to other in-state prisons that remain open)?

3. Why is it important that California permanently close and de-carcerate its prisons?

4. California spends billions of dollars operating its prisons each year. What do you think the state should do instead, and in effect, what do you think California should consider investing in to improve the quality of life for everyone?

5. Any other experience you want to share that could be used in media or talking to legislators?
FEATURES
ACTION

Bringing the Community Together: Participatory Defense and the Philly Youth Hub

Interview with My Le of Philly Participatory Defense Youth Hub by Critical Resistance’s Susana Draper

Susana Draper, from The Abolitionist Editorial Collective, interviewed My Le to learn about the work of the Philly Youth Hub. My Le is a youth organizer with the Youth Art and Self-Empowerment Project (YASP) and acts as facilitator for the Philly Youth Hub and the Healing Futures Restorative Justice Diversion Program. When she was charged at 17 and sent to an adult jail, My Le got connected with YASP and joined the organization as a staff member after her release. She is currently editing an anthology of poetry and art by YASP members.

Run by young people who have gone through the system, the Philly Youth Hub is the first participatory defense hub in the country that focuses on young people. It gives the youth tools to navigate their cases, learn about the impact of the school-to-prison pipeline, and transform the landscape of power in the court system. Another unique aspect of the Philly Youth Hub is that their work to end incarceration does not stop once someone is released from prison. Many times, young people who have been released have no homes or jobs to return to, so YASP provides training to help navigate the process of applying for jobs, resources for housing assistance, employment, and even some fellowships for part-time jobs.

Can you tell us about the history of the Philly Youth Hub?

My Le: We launched the Philly Youth Hub in 2019, which is a hub where young people and their families can come get support with their cases through housing assistance, employment, and even some fellowships for part-time jobs.

What do you think that someone who is currently recruiting to join this in prison need to know about using participatory defense and make it most effective to win their freedom?

My Le: When I was locked up, the Youth Hub wasn’t around, and I didn’t get that much help. But now, there are resources or help, and it is hard because we usually work with public defenders. YASP works with people in the community. So, when a young person comes to us and they have a public defender, it’s easy to communicate with the office. But when you have a private lawyer, sometimes they tend to not talk to other people outside of the client, and the communication is hard. But most of the time we always try to overcome the challenges.

Are there particular learnings from working with youth, which is the focus of the specific work you are all doing?

My Le: YASP had already done work around young people in different ways and fighting for them to come home and not be incarcerated. That’s how we got connected in opening and launching a youth hub; we were kind of already doing the work. But we didn’t have a center or hub added something for us to empower our work. For us, it is important to help youth stay out of the system and to inform them about the process, to make them see how imprisonment impacts and targets youth. Also, most of the time, we hire young people who have been incarcerated before. If they were a part of the Philly Youth Hub, we hired young people, and we have a program called “Youth Fellowship,” where young people can start working with us and can also work their way toward other positions once they receive training. But we also try to help young people in any kind of support they want. If they want to do other jobs in other areas, we try to find resources for them. We have a really strong family to support young people, and if they want to grow and sprout in other ways, we’re here to help. We’re here to plant that seed, so they can grow.

Does the work you do every week in the hub have an impact on the community? Has it helped to create another sense of community related to ending incarceration?

My Le: Yeah, I feel like it brings the community together. A lot of family members that came to us, they needed help with their young person, with their case, because a lot of times they don’t know what’s going on with their kids’ cases, so they always try to come get support with us. We can’t promise the outcome, but we make sure they get the answer and resources to anything they need. We’re there to support the community. We always try to make sure that they understand everything that’s going on with their court process, to make sure they know that there’s other options besides what the District Attorney said. The Hub brings everybody together, because in the Hub, we’re all like a family; we all know each other. When new people come in, we welcome them and make sure like they are family, make them feel they’re comfortable in this space so they can always come back. We want everyone to feel like: “this is the place I want to go to get the support I need for my family.”

You know, literally, a few people that were getting help with their kid’s cases, after their kid’s cases were already done with, they continued coming and volunteering and supporting every single Tuesday, day after day. They volunteered to give out to the community, to let the people know we’re here for them, and that’s how we bring the community together.

The Philly Youth Hub (YASP) meets every Tuesday from 12-3:30pm, virtually and in-person at 324 Cherry Street 5th Floor, Philadelphia, PA.

Contact Email: info@yaspproject.com

Write to Critical Resistance if you would like to get a list of Participatory Defense Hubs across the country.
Ealier this year, Illinois passed a bill that will abolish money bail and ensure more people are released instead of being held in jail. We advocated for the bill with our joint policy proposals and our local movement partners, CCBF members deepened our coalition analysis and commitment to end money bail and eliminate the need for cash bail. The Illinois coalition was successful in its mission to end money bail to cage people, prosecutors and courts would have less power to jail people outright. When, then, forced to make transparent, reviewable detention decisions, judges would not be able to justify detaining most of the people they currently jail through unaffordable money bail. Prosecutors would have less power to coerce pleas and force people to give up their rights. Ultimately, the state would be deprived of power, and some of that power would be restored to accused people.

At the first, the Coalition to End Money Bond tried to enforce existing protections against unaffordable money bail by joining with civil rights lawyers to sue several judges in 2016. In the process, we learned how much of policymaking is about power rather than textual changes to the law. We hired the lawsuit was pending in 2017, Cook County announced a local court rule that cut the use of money bail in half. The number of people in the jail per day decreased by 1,500 within three months and has stayed at almost 2,000 fewer people for four years. This dramatic transformation in bail-setting practices was achieved entirely through movement building and shifting political pressure toward pretrial release. We also learned the limits of this sort of soft enforcement power; lawmakers were not set to unaffordable money bonds and thousands of people remained in Cook County Jail solely due to inability to pay their warrants. We needed stronger leverage and binding, statewide policy. Over the following several years, the coalition attempted to create a statewide version of the local court rule, which could achieve the same function as the local court rule but with the force of law. We required judges to set money bail in amounts people could afford to pay, the rule would greatly limit the court’s detention power. After a successful legislative process, which included a broad coalition with historically timid allied legislators and aggressive opponents, an Illinois Supreme Court ruling made process could take away the state’s power without opening up the possibility for negative additions. Simply put, we knew in 2017 that we didn’t yet have the power needed to pass a decarceral bill at the state capitol, where there would be immense pressure to “balance” the bill by increasing penalties in some other area or for some subset of people.

At this time, CCBF was consistently receiving inquiries from organizers and impacted families living in many different communities in Illinois. We redirected people from merely starting bail funds as charity projects into joining the movement to end money bail, and eliminate the need for bail funds. With our coalition partners, we launched a new statewide effort in 2019: the Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice. We continued to target the Illinois Supreme Court and the commission it had formed to recommend pretrial reforms with our new partners. After years of lobbying and advocacy, the Illinois Supreme Court released its recommendations in April 2020 and proved unwilling to endorse abolishing money bail or even our proposed statewide rule on affordable bail. That marked the end of our suprême court rule strategy, but it allowed us to return to the possibility of passing legislation with newly increased power for statewide mobilization and pressure.
Now committed to passing a decarerral bill that completely ended money bail, the Coalition to End Money Bond and the Network for Re-Entry Justice revised our earlier legislation and named it the Pretrial Fairness Act. We were hoping to pass the bill in 2020, but then the pandemic shut down the legislature indefinitely. That spring, we pivoted to respond to the COVID-19 crisis inside jails, ensuring that we acted to protect people immediately while also highlighting the ways the virus magnified the ever-present dangers of incarceration and reinforced the need for pretrial freedom. Impressed people and their loved ones risked their safety and wellbeing to communicate with organizers and media on the outside, sharing information about conditions inside and generating national focus on Cook County Jail as the New York Times declared it the "Top U.S. Hotspot" for COVID-19 in April 2020.

The next month, Minneapolis police murdered George Floyd, and people around the world rebelled, rejecting state violence against Black people and calling for justice for Mr. Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many others.

As a result of the political pressure created by the uprisings, the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus began working on a package of criminal legal system reforms. By then, our local and national movements had made ending money bail a common "popular" proposal on the table and the issue lawmakers were hearing about most frequently from constituents. As a result, the Pretrial Fairness Act was included as a central component of the Criminal Justice Fairness Act, which was passed on January 13, 2021 and signed into law the next month. When it goes into full effect in January 2024, the Act will make Illinois the first state to completely eliminate money bail.

Beyond ending money bail, the Pretrial Fairness Act completely changes the way decisions about pretrial freedom are made. It reduces people's contact with the system and time in custody by mandating citations in lieu of arrest for ordinance violations and requires release directly from police custody for most misdemeanors. It takes power away from judges by making the majority of people arrested every year, those who are charged with misdemeanors and lower-level felonies, ineligible for pretrial detention. It raises the standard of proof and factual findings required before someone can be ordered jailed outright (preventionally detained) and reforms the process for handling violations. With the new law, people have the power to pass a bill banning electronic monitoring or risk assessment tools, but we restricted some of their worst uses and ensured better treatment for people subject to them.

The Pretrial Fairness Act is stronger than we ever imagined it could be due to the transformative possibilities created by grassroots social movements. When the Coalition to End Money Bond launched in 2015, the goal of actually ending money bail was considered unrealistic by every policymaker we approached. We were told to consider alternative or partial approaches based on what felt achievable, and we declined. Instead, we worked to make our goal achievable by building power and shifting public consciousness as a part of a national movement. And even with the hard-won progress made by our campaign, it was ultimately the street protests and policy destruction of last summer that enabled our bill to pass in such a complete and transformative form.

Our success in Illinois demonstrates the radical potential of principled grassroots struggle combined with organized campaigns and of abolitionists working with reformers around shared goals. Instead of limiting reform proposals to fit current political realities, policy advocates must work with organizers to change what's possible. We hope that campaigns to end money bail across the country, anchored now in many places by over local bail and bond funds, can continue to build on our momentum and win even bigger victories. The policy changes won in Illinois can serve as a new baseline in our movement for expanding pathways to pretrial freedom and everywhere we will expand our reach in communities in instead of cages.

Author Bio: Sharlyn Greer is a founding member of Chicago Community Bond Fund and served as its first executive director. She has provided legal and organizing support for grassroots abolitionist campaigns in Chicago since 2013.

**What's the Call? FREE THEM ALL: Organizing to Liberate Political Prisoners**

While the use of imprisonment as a form of punishment and social control is inherently political, the imprisonment of revolutionaries, movement makers, and political dissidents is a long-standing struggle that has greatly informed the foundations of both Critical Resistance as an abolitionist organization and the larger prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition movement as a whole. W hen envisioning issue 36’s feature focus “pathways toward freedom,” The Abolitionist Editorial Collective wanted to spend some time digging more deeply into the work to free political prisoners and to consider efforts to free political prisoners and the “prisoners of war” in the US and globally as a central strategy for PIC abolition. We see this as a clear pathway toward freedom not only for freedom fighters but for our collective liberation. To this end, The Abolitionist’s Ian Baran interviewed three long-time organizers with Release Aging People in Prison (RAP), Jericho Movement, and Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association.

Lifting up the importance of prisoner support movements, especially as they work within broader movement work, this interview considers the modes of political prisoner support, how the movement has gotten people free, the ebbs and flows of political prisoner support, how political prisoner advocates view their work within a larger abolitionist framing, and what the future of political prisoner support looks like or should look like.

Can you tell us a little bit about you and your organization?

Jalil Muntagim: Jericho came into existence in 1998. Before that, there was an organization called the Republic of New Afrika, Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika (PG-RNA) that used to do marches around the White House, what they call Jericho marches. When they stopped doing them in ’96, I, 1 thought, well, why? And I thought that they need to continue as we’re trying to build a great support for political prisoners across the country. By virtue of that I put out a proposal and in 1996 my comrades Safiya Bukhari and Baba Herman Ferguson came to visit me when I was in Eastern Correctional Facility and they said, “Yes, we will do this, but we will take a couple of years to organize it.” In 1998, we organized a march in W ashington, D.C. 6,000 activists from across the country joined in, and, because of that march we decided we will continue this movement and we built Jericho, a national movement, an amnesty movement.

Jose Saldana: RAPP was founded by a collective of formerly incarcerated people. One was a Black man by the name of M ujahid Farid, and two [were] white women; one was the leftist movement of the ’60s and early ’70s Laura W hitehorn and Kathy Boudin. They had the vision of ending mass incarceration beginning with a practical approach to release aging people and those serving long prison sentences, initial first steps to end mass incarceration. Because at the time, and still prevalent today, you have elder people, in their sixties and seventies and even eighties who have languished in prison for decades. This was the quest, the monumental task they took on that M ujahid Farid dedicated seven years of his life to before he passed away two years ago.

At the time when RAPP was developing, I was fighting the New York parole board. RAPP used actual jail hearing minutes and court documents to expose [the racism in the New York State parole decision making process] and presented the evidence to Governor Cuomo’s Office. One of the few things he did that impacted our communities and people of color that languish in prison is not reappoint punitive-minded commission members. Instead, he appointed six new commissioners from a diversified background. W e were always saying that parole commissioners from a law enforcement background did not even want us to have a fair hearing because they won’t ignore their ideology and training after dedicating their entire lives to creating and contributing to this racism. When it comes to parole board in November 2017, the lead commissioner with a social service background asked me one question about my background in 1979, which is normal, and I’m thinking “Here we go again...” but then, she paused for a second or so and said, “Let’s talk about what you’ve been doing with your life the last 38 years.” So RAPP was directly responsible for my freedom. I was released and, you know, I left men behind who were worthy of freedom just as I was and had every incentive to even be but to knock on RAPP’s door and report for duty.

Sahar Francis: Addameer was founded at the end of 1991 during the first Intifada as a response to the need for mass legal aid for Palestinian political prisoners. Our association and Defence for Children International Palestine, which was also established in the same period, were the first such organizations offering free legal support to Palestinian political prisoners.

Continued on next page
and detainees, including child prisoners and their families. We were founded by a group of law and incarceration rights activists who saw the need for a strategic response to the mass campaign of arrests by Israel at the time. After the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, we also began to provide legal support to political prisoners arrested by the PA. Today, we offer free legal aid to hundreds of Palestinian people held in Israeli and PA prisons every year, while monitoring and documenting detention conditions and human rights violations as well as advocating for their rights both locally and internationally.

I became involved with Addameer in 1996 as a volunteer, where I mostly focused on organizing, interrogation and conducted prison visits. In 1997, I was employed part-time and began to represent prisoners and detainees in the military courts. In 1998, I was hired fully, and worked with the organization’s Legal Unit until November 2005 when I was appointed to replace Khaldia Jarrar, who had decided to run for Parliament, as director.

Why focus on political prisoners? Why focus on elderly folks in prison?

Jalil: They belong to part of a movement, a dynamic movement of social and economic change for peoples’ liberation and independence. Their political consciousness is a result of their relationship with the State is more critical, especially as an oppositional force. We also know that they often find themselves in dire conditions and are repressed more than anyone else against the legal system. They are often put in solitary confinement, beaten up, lose their visits, or other cruelties that we see in prison that much more difficult because they believe in the need for fighting against the system. So why would we not support political prisoners? Especially since the United States denies that it has political prisoners or the existence of political prisoners. If we allow the U.S. to do that, then not only are we making an error in regards to our relationship with the prisoners who are fighting with the ultimate potential of our being killed or sent to prison and not being supported? The political prisoner movement is part of the revolutionary movement, and it has to be part of a revolutionary movement. The freedom of political prisoners is an extension of the revolutionary movement and any building of a dynamic of liberation and independence.

Sahar: The prisoners’ cause has always been of central importance to the Palestinian people, but the level of activism on behalf of prisoners has ebbed and flowed as part of a wider reality. Those that are incarcerated for political reasons, or by the political cause, they were preoccupied with everything happening around them – from the targeted killings and home demolitions, to the bombing of the apartheid wall and the Israeli siege on Arafat in his Ramallah compound. At the same time, the war on Terror was feeding into Israël’s racialized campaign of painting Palestinian political prisoners as terrorists, which also affected international solidarity. The success of prisoners’ campaigns is very closely tied to the movement. After he can show up for them outside prison.

Jose: The two founders [of RAPP] were directly connected with political prisoners, who were also elderly and likely to die in prison. I was released at 66; statistically my recidivism rate if anybody can get out with this, it is those who have the evidence that they not only will not stop. We have to keep these people and push the system until this system no longer exists. That is how it has to be.

What are any initiatives that your organization is involved in the current moment?

Jalil: Let’s start with the Spirit of Mandela. In 2018, I put a proposal to bring back the International Jurors and put it under the title of “In the Spirit of Nelson Mandela” because he was resolute—his resistance, and how he survived some of the worst prisons. So in the Spirit of Mandela, that kind of resistance and resilience is important. Why 2021? Because 70 years ago, on December 15, 1951, the great Paul Robeson and William Patterson brought the first We Charge Genocide, to the United Nations. After the Tribunal, we’re taking the charges and decision and going to file a civil rights complaint in Federal court to force the court to respond. W are not necessarily sure if they will do so, but at least we’re presenting how the government must respond. That will continue to build support for educating the public and support civil rights complaints; we’re building social and political consciousness and increasing our capacity to challenge the system on other levels.

Jose: W e do teachings, forums, panel discussions in district meetings with [representatives]. W e stay connected to these leaders by inviting them to our events, press conferences, and by introducing them to incarcerated people who have returned so they can see them for who they are today, not who they were judged as for the years and decades while incarcerated. These can be a point where some of our electives would say we’re different, but we’re not different. W e can all be out here serving our communities as credible messengers and social activists capable of bettering our community and enhancing safety.

W e take advantage of every opportunity we get. The ones who support us now are with us, it took a while for some of them to sign on to become co-sponsors, but we have champions who at every opportunity advocate for real transformative changes.

Sahar: Addameer recently launched a campaign against the Israeli military court system, which focuses on how the Israeli military judicial system plays a key role in maintaining Israel’s apartheid apparatus. As a system inherently bound up with the ill treatment and torture of Palestinians, seeking fair trial standards in Israeli military courts is redundant. W e will continue to represent prisoners in front of military courts and exhaust all possible methods to defend their rights, but the importance of this campaign is that when we are advocating for the rights of political prisoners, we also push for change that targets the roots of the system.

Can you talk about the movement ebbs and flows from your organizing?

Jose: The movement is generational. One thing I tell young people today in the struggle, it’s not a race, it’s not a sprint. It’s a marathon. We have to be prepared to pass on the baton from one generation to the next. That’s because of the issues we have engage in [the struggle with the system itself and how the system represents the struggle. And when we understand that, each contribution we make today is a contribution for those who will come after us. This is why we need to be willing and able to put in the sacrifice and work to ensure that we are engaging and contributing on one level or another. At one point, there are times that we can only be doing fight in the underground movement. I’m not negating that or saying that is not necessary; it is necessary, but we also have to build mass power. W e gotta build a political movement, a mass movement, what I call a popular mass movement, and when we build it then we can sustain to bring to the next generation has the history and the tools to continue the momentum of the struggle. I want to say that it is about being revolutionary, but take the blindfold off and see the system. This means that we go from one state of social condition to another. Therefore, as an evolutionary, you have to evolutionary, evolve the social order to power to the people.

Jose: I think we can sustain the movement and even grow. W hen I first came home, one thing that was really awesome and unexpected, was that I spoke to the mayor of the city, I spoke to students, and they all claim to be abolitionists. That was unheard of before I went to prison. This is a bright spot; people are seeing that this system is not sustainable. We are not just talking about reforming racism; we can’t reform racism, and we understand that you can’t reform slavery - you cannot reform a system that is racist and colonial. It’s got to be transformed. It’s a great thing that people are realizing but, as you know, we can’t do it overnight. It takes time to have these discussions with community members, especially those impacted not only by racism and mass incarceration but also by inter-personal harm. W e have to have open and honest conversations with each other, to get a glimpse of a vision that they could hold on to.

Sahar: As the prisoners’ justice movement grows internationally, prisoners’ movements here in Palestine are also empowered and unifying, as it helps to create a model of abolition that is not commonly used here, the case of Palestine is by its nature an abolitionist one because we know that a series of reforms will not lead to justice for the people. We are not interested in the unholy system of mass incarceration and solidarity must be challenged and transformed. The power of resistance is fundamentally rooted in a struggle for self-determination against Israel’s capitalist-colonial expansion and ethnic cleansing. It is essential that we see our movements become transnationally connected and tied to one another. An international perspective on prisoners’ support and justice work can only make our local community stronger. We understand that it is the same logic that allows mass imprisonment from the United States to Colombia. Freedom should be understood as an international venture.

What do you see as the kind of prisoner support to develop tactics and grow a larger movement? How do you educate the masses and build out institutions? It’s also easy to write about these things, and we need to do it sometimes and it’s about how to bring them all together, right, to connect them.

Jose: There’s not one specific tactical initiative that speaks directly to the issues of political prisoners; there’s multiple challenges. We have to have a system that this system has to be dismantled entirely. But it is not a race; it is a marathon. W e have to be prepared to pass on the baton from the next generation to the next. That’s because of the issues we have engage in [the struggle with the system itself and how the system represents the struggle. And when we understand that, each contribution we make today is a contribution for those who will come after us. This is why we need to be willing and able to put in the sacrifice and work to ensure that we are engaging and contributing on one level or another. At one point, there are times that we can only be doing fight in the underground movement. I’m not negating that or saying that is not necessary; it is necessary, but we also have to build mass power. W e gotta build a political movement, a mass movement, what I call a popular mass movement, and when we build it then we can sustain to bring to the next generation has the history and the tools to continue the momentum of the struggle. I want to say that it is about being revolutionary, but take the blindfold off and see the system. This means that we go from one state of social condition to another. Therefore, as an evolutionary, you have to evolutionary, evolve the social order to power to the people.

Jose: I think we can sustain the movement and even grow. When I first came home, one thing that was really awesome and unexpected, was that I spoke to the mayor of the city, I spoke to students, and they all claim to be abolitionists. That was unheard of before I went to prison. This is a bright spot; people are seeing that this system is not sustainable. We are not just talking about reforming racism; we can’t reform racism, and we understand that you can’t reform slavery - you cannot reform a system that is racist and colonial. It’s got to be transformed. It’s a great thing that people are realizing but, as you know, we can’t do it overnight. It takes time to have these discussions with community members, especially those impacted not only by racism and mass incarceration but also by inter-personal harm. We have to have open and honest conversations with each other, to get a glimpse of a vision that they could hold on to.
raised and built upon. Political prisoners are a part of a struggle that we need to build. We need to build out the base from which that movement evolves. If you do so, you build out the basic support of political prisoners as part of that. Stokely Carmichael once said that the one thing that activities paid for by an organization, organize, organize. So therefore, if political prisoners need funds for their legal initiatives and defenses, then we need to raise funds. We need to ensure that they are safe, we need to be able to put forth demonstrations and mobilizations to call out prison administrators and force the state to acknowledge the conditions of those political prisoners.

If a political prisoner needs health care, we need to help, to organize, to go inside the prisons to do an assessment of our political prisoners and make sure that they are healthy and getting the medical attention that they deserve. They need to be visited; let them know that they are still loved and not isolated. All of those things cumulatively are part of a movement. Ultimately, what we need to do is abolish prisons. We also need to broaden that perspective because we know that the prison system is based upon the ideas of white supremacy. For us, we need to build an ideology or a political mantra that says abolitionists need to abolish everything that is anti-Black, anti-Brown, anti-Indigenous people. We need to build a national liberation front and a national united front, because both are necessary for coalition building and cadre development across the country.

Jose: We’re grassroots, we actually believe in what we’re fighting for. Just because everyone is now impacted in one form or another, so we try to galvanize our communities to use that power. As it stands now, we are marginalized people, and if we’re trying to get our communities to believe that they can determine their own destiny and define what justice should look like in New York State. Incarceration, no matter how long a period, does not equate to public safety. So, if it doesn’t, then why are we relying on it? Public safety has to be defined another way - we have to look at the school system and who controls which communities to start defining safety by the structure of our community. We’re trying to fix this system, legislatively, and pass bills that will give people a better opportunity to return to their families. One thing that we’ve done very recently is that we have galvanized families with incarcerated loved ones and shown them how to use their voice, because they are the most powerful voice that we have. We have community organizers in key areas of the state, as well as community leaders, who are trying to get people to the membership of incarcerated loved ones, so when a family member sees one of our community leaders in a room with them and start having little teach-ins in their homes, they come to us and see the support, attend legislative hearings, and speak to legislators for the very first time in their lives. They see the power of their voice and it spreads.

We’ve also developed a coalition of 60 grassroots organizations to pass two parole bills. We support immigration rights, and anybody that is struggling for liberation from this capitalist system of punishment and marginalization, and have come together as a coalition to pass these bills. We believe that this is going to be the year, this people’s power that we’ve developed and all the base building that we’ve been doing, that our work is going to come to fruition.

Sahar: Addameer has not shifted in focus over the past three decades, but we have expanded our services and developed our work to be more effective. We do that through a series of publications, to offer four key programs: The Legal Aid Unit, the Documentation and Research Unit, the Advocacy and Lobbying Unit, and Addameer’s Training and Awareness Unit. Addameer is deeply involved and embedded in Palestinian civil society and plays a significant role in shaping our responses to human rights violations. The strength of this network is especially important in the face of the constant harassment, defamation, and threats faced by Palestinian civil society organizations, in particular those working for human rights. The arbitrary criminalization of human rights defenders and the attacks on human rights organizations range from the arrests of their staff to travel bans, residency revocations, and military raids.

Author Bio:
José Hamza Saldana is Director of Release Ag.ing People in Prison Campaign (RAPP). RAPP is a grassroots community organizing and advocacy campaign, co-founded by a collective of formerly incarcerated people. RAPP works to end mass incarceration and promote racial justice through the release of older people in prison and those serving long term prison sentences. This is done as a means of uprooting greater forces of injustice that uphold legacies of racism, revenge, perpetual punishment, and violence. Through community organizing and other communities of color. https://rappcampaign.com/

Since 2006, Sahar Francis has been the General Di-rector of Ramallah-based Addameer Prisoner Sup-port and Human Rights Association, a Palestinian NGO providing legal and advocacy support to Pal-estinian political prisoners in Israeli and Palestin-ian prisons. An attorney by training, she joined the association in 1999, first as a human rights lawyer, then as head of the Legal Unit. With over twenty years of human rights experience, including human rights counseling and representation, Ms. Francis also was on the Board of Defence for Children In-ternational – Palestine Section for 4 years, and on the Board of the Union of Agricultural Work Com-mitees. Sahar did her practice on Human Rights in the Society of Saint YeVES in Jerusalem, on issues of land confiscations, house demolitions, labor rights and freedom of movement. In 1997 she worked in the Radil Refugee Rights Center on its legal unit. She also was on the Board of Defence for Children International in Ramallah, and in 2021 held the Spirit of Mandela Interna-tional Tribunal. For more information on ways to get involved after the tribunal go to https://thejericho- movement.com/ and https://spiritofmandela.org/
Parole as a “Pathway Toward Freedom,” and How to Prepare for Parole

Excerpted Writing from Jorge Renaud and UnCommon Law

Editors’ Note: In Issue 36 of The Abolitionist, we wanted to include a piece on parole. We worked with Jorge Renaud of Latino Justice in Texas, a former prisoner and, former Senior Policy Analyst on Parole Reform Initiative. Due to some unforeseen health issues that arose, we weren’t able to finish the piece with Jorge in time for this issue, unfortunately. The following content comes from a topic from the issue, where we’re printing a part of Jorge’s draft that includes some context for background for understanding parole in the US.

We couple this information with a set of questions from UnCommon Law, a California-based non-profit law-firm that is developing a trauma-informed advocacy approach to get people locked up for life sentences out of prison. These questions are recommended for imprisoned people to reflect on and prepare for parole hearings. Keep in mind that, as Jorge Renaud explains, there is no standard process or universal regulation for parole in the US, and so every state goes about parole or release differently.

Additionally, Critical Resistance does not use the word “crime” without complicating or interrogating it, and at the same time we understand parole as a pathway toward freedom, it is an abolitionist and does not give credence to incarceration, not reporting on time, failing a urinalysis, or anything which the incarcerated individual is also a very good chance that this material will be completed in prison. Some of those states still claim to have parole, as individuals who allegedly committed “crimes” after the parole was abolished must complete a minimum of their sentence before they become eligible for parole. Some states require that “good-time credits” be applied to be used in the UnCommon Law resource.

Many organizations and legal groups have created狱-based prisoner and, former Senior Policy Analyst on Parole Reform Initiative. Write to us at our national office if you’d like us to send you more parole resources.

INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITION OF PAROLE

By Jorge Renaud

What is parole?

It is disconcerting to speak about parole when one is an abolitionist and does not give credence to incarceration, as the word is often used to represent a variety of punitive and ignorant use of parole.

Parole is granted, or denied, by a group of individuals (the parole board) who are almost always appointed by a state’s governor and serve at the governor’s whim. Few states have any requirements that those individuals have any expertise in substance abuse or mental health or related areas, and the conditions they must follow are rarely explained to inmates in a clear and concise way.

Individuals being considered for parole have no right to legal representation. They rarely are allowed to see what documents the parole board uses to grant or deny parole.

Parole boards will review an individual’s case at their discretion, and the board’s decision is not always based on the individual’s record or circumstances.

Below are some specific areas that should be explored when approaching a parole hearing. Family members and friends can help explore these areas.

1. What factors in your childhood and upbringing contributed to your “crime”? Do you believe your upbringing contributed to your “crime”?
2. Is there any evidence that your upbringing contributed to your delinquency?
3. Did you grow up in a healthy family environment?
4. Was there any evidence that your upbringing contributed to your delinquency?
5. Have any of those same character traits contributed to misconduct in prison (including things you were never caught for)? If so, how?
6. What do you understand about the impact on the person’s relationships and on their ability to show the board just how much they have learned and changed while incarcerated? There is also a very good chance that this material will uncover issues that the person only feels comfortable discussing with a person with whom they have a trusted relationship with the attorney who is to represent them in their hearing. If a person’s attorney is unwilling to explore these areas, they may not have any other choice but to talk about these issues with an attorney who is willing to help them get ready for their parole hearing.

Below are some questions that one should be ready and willing to answer in the hearing. These topics are not intended to be tackled all in one sitting, however. One should take time to consider each topic separately and prepare for it; conduct (both good and bad) in prison; recentups; and factors that have shaped their life.

1. How have you addressed the childhood and upbringing factors that have contributed to your “crime”?
2. What factors in your childhood and upbringing contributed to your “crime”? Do you believe your upbringing contributed to your delinquency?
3. Did you grow up in a healthy family environment?
4. Was there any evidence that your upbringing contributed to your delinquency?
5. Have any of those same character traits contributed to misconduct in prison (including things you were never caught for)? If so, how?
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How can the person eligible for parole prepare for the hearing?

Below are some questions that one should be ready and able to answer in the hearing. These topics are not intended to be tackled all in one sitting, however. One should take time to consider each topic separately and prepare for it; conduct (both good and bad) in prison; recent

HOW TO PREPARE FOR PAROLE

From “Parole Process & Preparation Overview” by UnCommon Law - Fall 2019

What will the person eligible for parole be asked about?

The main topics discussed at parole hearings are the following: the person’s life prior to the “crime”; any prior juvenile or adult [conviction] history; the “crime” and the circumstances surrounding it; conduct (both good and bad) in prison; recent

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**What is Political Education?**

*By Stephen Wilson*

When we are asked what 9971—a prisoner-reformist political study initiative inside Pennsylvania state prisons—does, we often reply: political education and mutual aid for the purpose of building stronger and safer communities. Until recently, this summation was sufficient. But a few weeks ago, a new member of 9971 said he thought that political education meant we would be studying civics or how the government is structured. Electoral politics, which is about the rotation of power and not societal transformation, isn’t what 9971 studies. We know, as Rachel Herzog said, “Political education isn’t just about politics.” Because we use the phrase “political education” often and we know that co were a mix of organizers and impacted people, abolitionists and not, anarchists and progressives, community requires a shared language, we felt it necessary to define exactly what we mean when we use the phrase.

We know, through lived experience, that education is never neutral; it is either pushing us toward freedom or pulling us toward the status quo. Robert Schuller writes in the foreword of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

> Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes “the practice of freedom,” the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

We believe political education is a practice of freedom. But how so? To answer this question and help us create our own working definition, we reached out to other abolitionists and asked how they define political education.

- Scholar and organizer Dan Berger replied: “I would say it is learning about how the world works and why, done in a volunteer context attached to some kind of transformative project.”
- Artist and organizer Noname said: “Teaching and learning about the systems that were created to keep working class and colonized people oppressed.”
- Scholar and organizer Charlotte Rosen responded: “I think of political education as collective learning in community for the purpose of using knowledge gained and interpreted to actively transform the present political, social, and economic conditions.”
- Organizer M J Williams said: “Political education can give people a greater understanding about the conditions of oppression that frame our current lives, and also about ways in which to confront and oppose the forces of oppression.”

After reviewing these and other responses, we felt any working definition had to address two points: 1) Why we engage in political education and 2) How we engage in it. __J__ __J__ wrote: “The oppressive state has molded the people through a ‘what to think’ program, and the task of the people is to learn a ‘how to think’ program. To question. To imagine that things can be different and that the people themselves—that you—can make necessary changes.” 9971 envisioned political education as the people’s “how to think” program.

We engage in political education because it enables us to look critically at our social situation, the structures and forces that shape our lives, and provides the tools and skills needed to transform society. For us, education became political when we began studying why things are the way they are and not just how things are or used to be. Political education widens our lens. It helps us to understand where we are, how we got here, and how we can transform our conditions. Political education pulls many of us out of our silos, our own boxes of pain, and helped us to connect our struggle to others. Through political education we realized that everyday experiences even behind the walls, can serve as sites and sources of political struggle.

We feel, as many of the respondents do, that political education should happen collectively and in community. For many members of 9971, studying wasn’t new but studying in community was. M aria Kaba writes: “Being intentionally in relation to one another, a part of a collective, helps to not only imagine new worlds but also to imagine ourselves differently.” It is in community that many of us learn to step outside our books and see the world from a learning perspective. It is in community that we learn new tactics and strategies that help us survive and thrive, especially behind these walls. We know, just as Audre Lorde said: “Without community, there is certainly no liberation.” In a nutshell, we feel that political education is learning, in community, about the world for the purpose of transforming it. As Rachel Herzog says: “Political education should make our politics stronger.” We would like to hear your definition of political education or any critique of ours.

Send us your definition and share your why and how of political education. This is how we learn. Always, Stevie 9971

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**21 Questions**

9971 columnist Stevie W Ilson created the below survey for budding abolitionists. Share your thoughts with us and send us your responses, and we will pass them along to Stevie and 9971.

1. Introduce yourself and share a little about the projects in which you are currently involved.
2. What was the impetus for your politicalization? Were it an event or person that propelled you into this work? Was it a process?
3. Which historical figures have been most influential in shaping your worldview?
4. Regarding prisons and policing, what would you say is the critical distinction between reformists and abolitionists?
5. How did you move from recognition of oppression, to analysis, to activity?
6. Are you currently connected to imprisoned folks? How did you establish this connection? What has been the most difficult part of maintaining this connection?
7. How do you define community?
8. How do you define safety?
9. How do you define solidarity?
10. In your opinion, what are the major obstacles regarding effective political education behind the walls?
11. Understandably, obtaining release is the major concern of prisoners, but how do we broaden their understanding of the carceral continuum?
12. Do you discern a difference between the priorities of outside activists and imprisoned folks?
13. What are some ways the fight against the prison industrial complex (PIC) has been shaped by imprisoned activists/or organizers?
14. How do we connect the struggle against imprisonment to other forms of state violence?
15. What is the role of theory in this struggle? How can imprisoned folks contribute?
16. Which populations behind the walls are unheard? What other slippages and blind spots do you see regarding marginalized populations?
17. How do we create visibility for marginalized imprisoned folks?
18. How do we counter the deserving/unde-serving dichotomy that is often created by reformist proposals?
19. What role do cultural productions play in this struggle?
20. How do we explain the ethical obligations of abolitionists? How extensive are these obligations?
21. What is incompatible with abolition?
With Wayland “X” Coleman & Christine Mitchell

With Wayland “X” Coleman & Christine Mitchell.

The court. In many instances, the introduction to the oppressive aspect of imprisonment is an experience of institutional repression is broken into concomplacency, and because they are compliant they are reluctant to be uprooted from the comfort (and I am cringing using that word) of their cells. When we get into trouble, we lose our stuff. The prison model uses every part of our existence as leverage to control our behavior. T.V.s and parole eligibility are the biggest carrots. Because the institutional strategies of repression work so well in Massachusetts, I fear that the future of internal organizing inside Massachusetts prisons is in jeopardy.

Christine: How do you think we can overcome this? What is the role of inside organizers? How can we work together?

Wayland: I do believe that when imprisoned people organize and protest inside the prisons, it strengthens the actions that can be taken by activists outside of the prisons, so the internal struggle is highly relevant.

Christine: How has working with imprisoned activists improved your own sense of activism and prison abolition?

Christine: Working with imprisoned organizers, I have learned the importance of organizing, building trust, and keeping commitments with people inside, who have often had their trust broken again and again. I have learned how to navigate the prison system to be able to organize with people inside, to follow their leadership, and co-create and build together in partnership. I’m very much still learning from imprisoned friends—about abolition, about organizing, about the conditions that lead to imprisonment—and I expect I will always be learning.

Continued on next page
Kenneth West is an imprisoned author Tashunka Raven (also known as McAr...
On June 2, 1863, Harriet Tubman, called “the Moses of her people,” led a successful movement to be abandoned completely in order for us to be free, because our freedom requires the deconstruction of all the systems of oppression.” On the 150th anniversary of the Combahee River uprising, Black feminists affirmed that our dreams and our tangible and intangible victories, our practices and our political statements, we frame our organizing and the ways we use our power and resources and we fight for liberation. Remember that Harriet Tubman was not only to challenge the most powerful people on the planet, but to act boldly in the world that we deserve, which is intentionally obscured by popular historical accounts and films like Lincoln. May we not for a second forget that the people currently locked in prison in the United States are among the most powerful people on the planet, that they have the insight and potential to make prison impossible and to enact a society where we are all free. How can this reality transform solidarity work with prisoners by people outside of prison? How could Harriet Tubman’s work as a fugitive slave with a reward on her head change the ways we think about the roles of former prisoners on parole and of former political prisoners in exile? What has Harriet Tubman’s infiltration work with scouts who found out the location of Confederate Torpedo boats say about relationships with prison guards and other workers inside prisons within our abolitionist work?

LEADERSHIP FROM THE INSIDE

One of the most important lessons of the Combahee River uprising for the contemporary prison abolitionist movement is that leadership must come from those most impacted by the prison industrial complexes, policing, and surveillance systems. Without the leadership of the Combahee River Uprising, it is very possible that the Union would have lost the Civil War, and the Confederate States would have continued to practice slavery as the core of their labor system. Let me say this as clearly as possible: The leadership of enslaved people and escaped slaves was crucial in ending slavery in the United States. Without the bravery and action of enslaved Africans, slavery could not have been destroyed. Harriet Tubman herself was an escaped slave and her family and friends had a bounty on her head when she planned this uprising. The majority of the soldiers whom she led through the Confederate-held Combahee River were new soldiers who had taken advantage of a recent shift in policy that allowed enslaved people who escaped and made their way to the Union Army base to become soldiers and continue to fight to end slavery. So they were also former slaves and they went to war in order to gain their own freedom and to fight for the freedom of others. And the vast majority of the people who have continued to practice slavery of all genders who flooded the rice fields, burned over 30 plantation buildings down, and brought themselves and their children to freedom by escaping into the rice fields. The obvious point here is that the leadership of people who are currently in prison and former prisoners is key to any movement to end a prison state. The leadership of those who are most watched, harassed, and persecuted by the police is key to any movement to end a prison state. All of us who are outside prison walls and who are inside prison walls must remember that fact (which is intentionally obscured by popular historical accounts and films like Lincoln). May we not for a second forget that the people currently locked in prison in the United States are among the most powerful people on the planet, that they have the insight and potential to make prison impossible and to enact a society where we are all free. How can this reality transform solidarity work with prisoners by people outside of prison? How could Harriet Tubman’s work as a fugitive slave with a reward on her head change the ways we think about the roles of former prisoners on parole and of former political prisoners in exile? What has Harriet Tubman’s infiltration work with scouts who found out the location of Confederate Torpedo boats say about relationships with prison guards and other workers inside prisons within our abolitionist work?

Harriet Tubman - Celebrate People’s History Poster by Darrell Gane-McCalla, Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative.

In 1977, inspired by Harriet Tubman and the Combahee River Uprising, the Combahee River Collective made the provocative statement that, “If Black women were free all people would have to be free, because we have so much pain and so much to lose. If Black women were free all people would have to be free, because we have so much pain and so much to lose.

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The obvious point here is that the leadership of people who are currently in prison and former prisoners is key to any movement to end a prison state. The leadership of those who are most watched, harassed, and persecuted by the police is key to any movement to end a prison state. All of us who are outside prison walls and who are inside prison walls must remember that fact (which is intentionally obscured by popular historical accounts and films like Lincoln). May we not for a second forget that the people currently locked in prison in the United States are among the most powerful people on the planet, that they have the insight and potential to make prison impossible and to enact a society where we are all free. How can this reality transform solidarity work with prisoners by people outside of prison? How could Harriet Tubman’s work as a fugitive slave with a reward on her head change the ways we think about the roles of former prisoners on parole and of former political prisoners in exile? What has Harriet Tubman’s infiltration work with scouts who found out the location of Confederate Torpedo boats say about relationships with prison guards and other workers inside prisons within our abolitionist work?

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Welcome home David Gilbert! - Outgoing New York State Governor, Andrew Cuomo, granted clemency to Weather Underground activist David Gilbert, who was subsequently granted parole on October 26. After 40 years behind bars and years of supporters organizing on his behalf, David is finally free. For up-to-date news, articles to read, and ways to support go to friendsofdavidgilbert.org

Rest in Power Rita “Bo” Brown - Former political prisoner Rita “Bo” Brown passed away this week after a long, horrible battle with Lewy Body Dementia. Bo was a 74-year-old white working-class butch dyke lesbian, anti-authoritarian, anti-imperialist who was locked up for nine years in federal prison. The first year was as a social prisoner in 1973 and the other eight as a political prisoner in the 1980s for several bank robberies in Oregon claimed by the George Jackson Brigade, an independent underground cell operating out of Seattle, WA. 

Jaan Laaman is now released! - On May 15, longtime political prisoner Jaan Laaman was released from prison. Jaan served 37 years for his involvement in the United Freedom Front.

Sundiata Acoli - Sundiata Acoli has been imprisoned for 48 years and must be brought home now! Please get involved in the fight to free Sundiata by checking out the Bring Sundiata Acoli Home Alliance at sundiataacolfreedom.com for up-to-date information, petitions to sign, and other ways to get involved.

Rest in Power Chuck Africa - Chuck Africa joined the ancestors on September 20th after a struggle with cancer that started in prison four years ago. From Philly Anarchist Black Cross (ABC): “He’ll forever be remembered as one who loved with all his might & we’ll keep fighting in his honor. #RestInPower.” Check out the “On A Move” podcast by M like Africa Jr. on September 23 for a tribute to his Uncle Chuck Africa.

Critical Resistance (CR) Updates and Movement Highlights

Critical Resistance (CR) Updates
Both California-based chapters of Critical Resistance (CR), LA & Oakland, have been working with Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CUB)’s campaign to push state officials, and specifically Governor Newsom, to shut down multiple, and eventually all, prisons in California. Recently, the Prison Closure campaign connected with families and communities of Tracy and Susanville. The closure of Deuel Correctional Center (CCC) is teaching the campaign many ways to ensure communities, prisoners, and families are centered in the closure process of prisons. The campaign has worked to bring prison closure material to every yard in California.

Critical Resistance Portland (CRPDX) has continued their strong mail program and has been starting to engage in a new coalition in the area.

CR New York (CRNYC) has celebrated victories in working to free ICE in New Jersey and has worked in coalition to bring people home from detention facilities, including successful bringing M arvin Reyes Ventura home to his community in New Jersey from ICE detention and possible deportation. Welcome home Marvin!

Next is the time to let your congressional representatives know the strength of public support for Leonard by urging them to sign on to the letter to the Biden administration. Contact your local House Representative by phone, email, or letter mail. Request that they support freedom for Leonard Petteri, stand with Rep. R. Grijalva and former Rep. De Haalden, and sign on to Rep. Grijalva’s new letter in effort to gain Leonard’s release.

Xinachtli - Get involved in fighting for the freedom of Xinachtli (Nahuatl, meaning “seed”) by going to https://freexinachtli.net. Xinachtli is a political prisoner in Texas, an anarchist communist community organizer and Chicano movement revolutionary. He needs our support now! Write to Xinachtli at this address:

Alvaro Luna Hernandez
#255735 M Connell Unit
3001Emily Drive
Beesville, TX 78002

Dr. Mutulu Shakur - Join the struggle to free Dr. Mutulu Shakur in his ongoing campaign for freedom. Dr. Shakur’s health has continued to deteriorate during his more than 35 years of incarceration. Find out more at mutulushakur.com or write to him at the following address:

Dr. Mutulu Shakur
#83205-U22
FM #1
Columbia, PA
17510

Oso Blanco - Oso Blanco has a new website: freesoblanco.org. Blanco’s artwork raises funds for Zapatistas and native kids. The funds go to the Children’s Art Project (CAP). Please support the “Zapatista supply warrior” in his mission, and share the link within your networks!

Dan Baker - Dan Baker, a social justice activist, was recently sentenced to 44 months in prison and three years of supervised release. Dan was arrested on January 15, 2021, after the FBI compiled social media posts related to Trump supporters’ actions on Inauguration Day to build a criminal case against him. He was charged with two counts of transmitting a communication in interstate commerce containing a threat to kidnap or injure.

Mark Colville (Kings Bay Plowshares) - As of September 10th, Mark Colville is out! Colville is one of seven Catholic W orker plowshare activists who broke into Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base in Georgia in April 2018 as an action to protest the construction and use of nuclear weapons. The seven activists, all elderly, were convicted in federal court for a charge of “assaulting” a Bureau of Prisons agent in 2018, a charge that could carry 20 years. King says he was the one who was assaulted that day by a prison guard. Go to supportericzrnciek.com for more ways to advocate on her behalf.

Leonard Peltier - “A petition has been filed with the US Department of Justice seeking clemency for Leonard Peltier, as required procedurally for the case to come to the attention of President Biden. Currently, a congressional ‘Dear Colleague’ letter in support of Leonard’s release is circulating in the House of Representatives, generated by Rep. Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ), who co-authored the letter sent by then-Congresswoman and now Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland to the Trump administration in April 2020.”

Patrick O’Neill (Kings Bay Plowshares) - Another one of the seven anti-nuclear activists has been in federal prison since January and has been released to a halfway house in Raleigh, NC, close to his home of Garner, NC. He is scheduled to be there until November 30. He’s been denied permission to attend Holy Mass on Sundays.

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Continued on next page
Critical Resistance and Education for Liberation Network published a new toolkit with AK Press, Lessons in Liberation: An Abolitionist Toolkit for Educators, along with a six-part virtual event series this past fall. Lessons in Liberation creates bridges between abolition and education, and highlights existing organizing efforts. The collection, including the accompanying forthcoming website and discussion guide, offers educators, parents, and young people entry points to build critical and intentional connections to the growing movement for the abolition of the prison industrial complex, particularly in PreK-12 learning contexts.

“Write Them All” By CR PDX

CR PDX has been hosting monthly prison letter-writing nights for over six years. Last year, because of the critical educational, resource connection, and genuine support to thousands of imprisoned people in the Pacific Northwest.

The W rite Them All (W TA) campaign was launched in July of 2020, while global uprisings against police violence brought awareness to many that policing needs to be abolished. The WTA campaign raised over one thousand outside participants across Oregon and the US to send personalized, handwritten letters to everyone locked up in Oregon state prisons. This correspondence also included a printed bilingual (Spanish and English) letter with information about Critical Resistance, The Abolitionist newspaper, Beyond These Walls, Librarianship, Black and Pink PDX, and All Rise magazine.

CR PDX undertook this campaign knowing the power of letter writing. We see writing letters as a simple, direct, and deeply meaningful way to support people inside and challenge the PRC. CR PDX is proud to say that we accomplished this monumental task—success fully writing more than 34,500 people imprisoned across the state of Oregon. Following our framework of dismantle, change, build, writing to people inside, we challenged the PRC to a) disrupt the isolation of imprisonment, b) challenge the logics of containment and control, and c) build community and strength in the abolitionist movement.

The W rite Them All campaign allowed CR PDX to send over 34,000 stomps of political imprisonment, and mob our PDX to Oregon state prisoners as well as thousands of prisoners CR corresponds with nationally in both October 2020 and April 2021. W ithout the infrastructure and volunteer base of W rite Them All, the stimulus mailing would not have been possible. This effort reflects the Oregon Department of Corrections’ (ODC) attempt to limit prisoners' ability to receive their stimulus money, fueling the power of people to act in solidarity across prison walls against state violence.

MOVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Since the release of our previous issue #35 in the summer of 2021, our movements have been hard at work advancing our struggles against climate disaster and resource extraction, legacies of genocide, imprisonment, and more. Here are some points of movement news that caught The Abolitionist Editorial Collective’s attention.

NATIONALLY

Indigenous People’s Day was held on Monday, October 11, 2021, and was marked as a national holiday. In the San Francisco Bay Area, the sunrise ceremony honoring the history of the Occupation of Alcatraz was held, while in W ashington, D.C., cops used a long-range acoustic device (LRAD) on Indigenous elders, water protectors, and allies. W hat does state acknowledgement of Indigenous People’s Day really mean when treaties are still being broken, murdered and missing Indigenous women are still having their stories ignored, and water protectors are continuing to be met with violent police and mercenaries throughout the world?

The neoliberal agenda of W ashington continues to ignore the systemic and chronic issues BIPOC and poor white communities face, while the far-right wages a war on women and trans, immigrant, and BIPOC communities. As the right wing and moderates prepare for the next election cycle, they continue to pass increasingly restrictive voting laws to ensure their ability to maintain power. W e continue to be vigilant and hold the line of abolition as we work to break down all systems of oppression perpetuated and maintained by the prison industrial complex.

WASHINGTON

Week of Indigenous Resistance

On the morning of Indigenous People’s Day, radical graffiti was left on the statue of Andrew Jackson in front of the white house that read “EXP ECT US” in red paint. This declaration marked a week of action at the capital that was the largest Indigenous uprising since the 1970’s. There were more than 500 arrests made over the week of action of W ater Protectors and allies that mobilized for the “People vs Fossil Fuels” week of direct actions. A sit-in was held at a bureau of Indian Affairs that resulted in the arrest of 55 Indigenous people.

NEW YORK

US Found “Guilty” of Genocide

The International Tribunal on Human Rights Abuses against Black, Brown and Indigenous Peoples was held from Oct 12-15 and culminated in the International Panel of Jurists finding the US government and its subdivisions “guilty” of genocide and gross Human Rights violations. This moment was the results of multi-year and multi-generational organizing by the Spirit of Mandela Coalition and Jalil Muntaqim who had the idea of returning to the UN on the 50th anniversary of the 1973 delivery of the We Charge Genocide petition to the UN by Paul Robeson and W illiam Patterson.

“Shut ‘Em Down” Solidarity

Organizers from DC incarcerated W orkers Or- ganizing Committee (IWOC) and others held a noise demo and rally outside the DC Jail. Folks inside the jail called in to the rally to speak on the importance of abolition. There was also a rally at the National M all to demand freedom for political prisoners.

NEW YORK

Organizers marched through the Bronx to the Vernon C. Bain Center, aka “The Boat”, and held a rally outside. Elsewhere in New York City, organizers held a rally outside the offices of archi- tects constructing new cages. A solidarity statement from JLS was played aloud during the event. And in Attica, NY, the Prisoner Solidarity Committee held a protest outside the Attica prison that included eyewitnesses of the uprising 50 years ago.

MIDWEST

Minnesota

Stop Line 3

Since the fight to stop Line 3 over 900 water protectors have been arrested as they fight the international company Enbridge’s oil pipeline. M innesota police were forced to have been paid $24 million by Enbridge T o stop the cost related to the surveillance and arresting of water protectors.

Green Bay, WI

Organizers from ABOLISHmke held a march and rally to “confront and expose the routine atrocities staff [of Green Bay Correctional Institution] commit with the tacit support of law Enforce.”

Continued on next page

Shut ‘Em Down 2021

Earlier this year, jailhouse Lawyers Speak (JLS) national membership called for mass outside demonstrations as part of the National Shut ‘Em Down Demonstrations to be held in the spirit of abolition on the historical dates of August 21 and September 9, 2021.

JLS asked organizers to highlight prisoners’ historical struggles and the current political struggles to dismantle the prison industrial complex (PIC). People on the outside held a multitude of events in response to this call for abolition by holding political education events, rallies at jails, prisons and detention centers, banner drops, radical graffiti events, and more all across the country.

As part of our movement highlights, The Abolitionist has compiled a list of just some of the solidarity events that were held in response to the call to #ShutEmDown21. Another part of the call for 2022 was JLS announced that reads, “Jailhouse Lawyers Speak members around the nation are making a direct appeal for people locked up to disrupt the normal prison operations of america. These demonstrations will be known as National Shut ‘Em Down Demonstrations. Scheduled to take place August 21 – September 9th 2022. This announce- ment comes only to give community families, comrades and supporters on the outside enough time to get the word out outside jail, prison, and ICE facility by any means.

Solidarity across walls and borders forever! ONWARD TO FREEDOM!
cal and state authorities.” They also held a large banner drop over I-43 that read, “W 1 PRISONS ARE A CRISIS!!”

Chicago, IL
Black Alliance for Peace and Party for Socialism and Liberation of Chicago held a speak-out and noise demo outside the Cook County Jail.

THE SOUTH
Texas
Criminalising Abortion
In Texas, a fight over abortion rights turned grim when the Supreme Court allowed a state law to go into effect that gives private citizens the right to sue anyone giving, receiving, or helping someone get an abortion. Immediately mutual aid projects working to help people access abortions or contraceptives were set up to counter the Texas law. Hackers also attacked the state reporting website that was set up in order for private citizens to report abortion seekers and providers. Some anti-choice and anti-abortion formations are now calling themselves the “abolitionists,” reminding prison industrial complex abolitionists to be more precise in our poli-

“Shut ’Em Down” Solidarity

Gainesville, FL
Around 100 protesters took over the street in front of the Alachua County Jail when deputies wouldn’t allow them to get closer to the jail.

Reidsville, FL
Organizers and family members of those inside held a rally outside the Georgia State Prison.

WEST COAST
California
California Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP) Celebrates 25 years!

Our beloved comrades at CCWP celebrated 25 years of struggle for PIC abolition. We congratulate them on this magnificent milestone. Onward to freedom!

“The Warm Shutdown” of Deuel Vocational Institute

In Tracy, CA, DVI was finally moved into a “warm shutdown” and will continue to run and be staffed as a way to upkeep the prison. Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB) is calling on Governor Newsom to completely shut down DVI so it can never again be used to lock up communities. $22 million a year will be spent to keep DVI in warm shutdown mode, while communities are struggling to get jobs and fund resources that truly keep us safe.

The RISE Act Becomes Law

After community advocacy and organizing, CA SB 483-Allen, a key the RISE Act, was signed into law by Governor Newsom. The RISE (Repeal Ineffective Sentence Enhancements) Act will retroactively apply the elimination of the three-year enhancement for prior drug convictions repealed in 2017 with SB 380 and the one-year enhancement for prior felonies repealed in 2019 with SB 136. This historic win also paves the way to close more CA prisons!

“Shut ’Em Down” Solidarity

Organizers held rallies, solidarity events, and noise demos across California. In Sacramento, IWOC held a noise demonstration outside of the Sacramento County Jail. A demonstration was held outside of an ICE office in Santa Maria. In LA, a rally was held outside Men’s Central Jail. Outside of Solano County Jail in Fairfield, a noise demo with ongoing jail release aid was held by Voices of Vacaville.

In Soledad, organizers held a rally in front of Correctional Training Facility (CTF) to bring attention to violent raids that happened in 2020, resulting in the targeting of inside prison organizers along with a COVID-19 outbreak. Word from behind the wall was that the raid was in response to the uprising sweeping across the nation outside after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others, as part of the Black Lives Matter movement.

In the SF Bay Area, around 40 organizers marched to San Quentin and held a rally at the prison gates. Local Bay Area raper M (Starr) F.A.B. attended, joining the call for abolition. Organizers also held a banner drop on the Bay Bridge that read “Prison Abolition.”

Tacoma, WA
Rallies were held at Northwest Detention Center (NW DC) on multiple days. The organization La Resistencia, which hosted the noise demos and rally, has been organizing for the closure of NW DC since its opening in 2005. NW DC has also been the site of both hunger and work strikes by those imprisoned inside.

Portland, OR
Critical Resistance PDX was part of the Shut ’Em Down Demonstration coalition that held an online event to “rally around JLS nationals members’ call to highlight prisoners’ historic and current struggles” in the fight to end the PIC.

INTERNATIONAL

Six Palestinian Prisoners Escape Israeli Prison

In early September at the Israeli prison called Galouba, six Palestinian prisoners escaped capture through a tunnel they had dug for years with spoons. The escape was celebrated throughout Palestine and the world as a sign of the determination and will of Palestinians resistance to the apartheid state. Eventually the liberated Palestinian prisoners were caught, and widespread reports of violence inside jails and prisons by Israeli forces were seen as evidence that the state was trying to beat down the will of the Palestinians. Global solidarity marches and actions took place to celebrate the escape and to bring attention to the settler colonial state’s use of violence within prisons, just as in the US, to repress dissent and liberation.

“Jailhouse Lawyers Speak members around the nation are making a direct appeal for people locked up to disrupt the normal prison operations of america. These demonstrations will be known as National Shut ’Em Down Demonstrations. Scheduled to take place August 21 - September 9th 2022. This announcement comes early to give our friends, families, comrades and supporters on the outside enough time to get the word inside to every jail, prison, and ICE facility by any means.”
2. Submit content for one of our columns

1. Write a piece for our Features
   • Pieces in Features can be different functions of writing—including theoretical, to reflective or action-oriented—and they will all share a common focus, theme, or topic of consideration. Check the Feature focus for issues 37 and 38!

2. Submit content for one of our columns
   • Send a Kite to the Editors
     › Reflect on your personal “pathway toward freedom” like Ricardo did in Issue 36’s Reflection Feature and share with us for a future Kite
   • Share your survey responses to Issue 36’s Prison Closure survey (pg 8) or Stevie’s 21 Questions (pg 15)
   • Request to be an author of an Inside-Outside Fishing Line
   • Contribute a report or an update on organizing inside for our Movement Highights column
   • Write a poem or song lyrics that relate to the features or any other topic of your choice
   • Make visual art to complement the Features section or one of our columns
   • Create a political cartoon for our Features focus for either Issue 37 or 38, or work with us to become a regular political cartoonist for the paper

   • Reflect on how you use The Abby in your study and share that reflection for our 9971 column, or submit questions on study that you want Stevie to address in future columns

   Some approaches to writing Kites to the Editors:
   • Elaborate on something that you agreed with in an article and explain why you agreed with it.
   • Elaborate on something that you disagreed with in an article and explain why you disagreed with it.
   • Relate an article to other things you have read, watched, heard, or experienced.
   • Write a note to the editors sharing questions that you believe are timely and necessary in this political moment and that you would like answered by Critical Resistance.

   Send submissions to the Kites to the Editors section to:
   The Abolitionist Paper
   Attn: Kites to the Editors
   PO. Box. 22780
   Oakland, CA 94609-2391

   Please make sure you read our Submission Guidelines before working on a submission to ensure your piece aligns with how we decide what to print.

   Send your submission to:
   Critical Resistance
   Attn: The Abolitionist
   PO. Box. 22780
   Oakland, CA 94609-2391

   Notes on Editing: We edit all pieces for both content and grammar. We will send you a copy of the piece before printing it. As an abolitionist publication, we do not print material we find in some way perpetuates oppression or legitimizes the prison industrial complex. Given that institutional mail can be slow and purposefully delayed at times (or even disappeared), please make note in your submission of phrases or sections you would like the editorial collective to print unedited if there are any.

   Notes on Addressing: We accept articles, letters, creative writing, poetry, interviews, and artwork in English or Spanish.

   Ideas for Articles and Artwork
   • Examples of prisoner organizing
   • Practical steps toward prison industrial complex abolition
   • WAYS to help keep yourself and others physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually healthy while imprisoned
   • Updates on what’s happening at the prison you’re in (for example: working conditions, health concerns, lockdowns)
   • Legal strategies and important cases that impact prisoners
   • Alternatives to policing, punishment, imprisonment, and surveillance
   • Experiences of life after or before imprisonment
   • Creative or reflective writing with an abolitionist message
   • Freedom dreams and imaginative pieces with radical vision
   • Your opinion about a piece published in a recent issue
   • Reflections on how you’ve used the paper (in your conversations, work, study groups)
   • Empowering, liberatory art of resistance and community power (and that will print well)

   Length
   • Articles should not be more than 1500 words (about five handwritten pages)
   • Letters should not be more than 250 words

   How to Submit
   • If you want your name and address printed with your article, please include it as you would like it printed. If you do not wish to have your name or address included, please let us know that when you submit your piece. Instead of your name, you can choose an alias, publish your piece anonymously, or use your initials.
   • If possible, send a copy of your submission and not the original

   Writing Suggestions
   • Even if writing is difficult for you, your ideas are worth the struggle. Try reading your piece out loud to yourself or sharing it with someone else. Doing this might help you clarify the ideas in your submission.

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