

THE ABOLITIONIST

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FREE TO PEOPLE IN PRISONS, JAILS, AND DETENTION CENTERS • ESPAÑOL AL DORSO

ISSUE 39: Reproductive Justice

FEATURES ANALYSIS

WHY & HOW Reproductive Justice Is a Vital Field of Struggle for Prison Industrial Complex Abolition

By Ash Williams & Maria Thomas

On June 24, 2022, the US Supreme Court eliminated the right to abortion. This effectively gave states the ability to criminalize accessing or aiding abortion, widening the dragnet of the prison industrial complex (PIC). The *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision did not emerge from nowhere. It is a manifestation of laws and systems targeting the people most marginalized by our society, taking aim at our bodily autonomy. It is just **one of many snares in a web of criminalization** which continue to threaten people and communities across the US.

This move came as a surprise to some people in states where post-Roe realities had not materialized. For people in states with mandatory waiting periods and other barriers to accessing abortion care, this legal shift meant that everyone would soon be more familiar with what many people already knew. Black, Indigenous, migrant, disabled, young, queer and trans people, pregnant people, and people surviving economic violence, who have experienced and will experience the harshest impacts of abortion bans, are also targeted by the hostile, racist nexus of the carceral state. These strategies for social control and oppression encompass many parts of the PIC, including the family policing system and carceral medical care systems that surveil and police our bodies, our choices, our relationships, and our communities.

This moment in which reproductive rights and self-determination are under attack allows us to examine why and how reproductive justice is a critical front in the struggle for PIC abolition. By looking at how gender and reproductive oppression expand the PIC, how the PIC infiltrates healthcare systems, why reproductive justice threatens white supremacy, and why, finally, a robust, anti-racist, trans-inclusive reproductive justice framework is essential to our survival globally, this article situates abortion decriminalization and the struggle for reproductive justice within the larger struggle for PIC abolition, which at its core is about community self-determination and collective autonomy.

REPRODUCTIVE OPPRESSION EXPANDS AND FORTIFIES THE PIC

Reproductive oppression is a cornerstone of the PIC, expanding its reach and impact on our lives and community self-determination, and entangling us further in systems of imprisonment, policing, and surveillance. **Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice** and **SisterSong** define reproductive oppression as *"the controlling and exploiting of women, girls, and individuals through their bodies, sexuality, labor, and reproduction (both biological and social) by families, communities, institutions, and society."* In other words, reproductive oppression uses gender-based violence to eliminate a group's power to grow, care for one another, or even to simply live. **Reproductive oppression impacts people of all genders**; however, as it is enacted by the PIC, it **also maintains existing structures of race, class, gender, disability, and other violently enforced hierarchies**. Given this aspect of reproductive oppression, this article considers how queer, transgender, non-binary communities and women—especially those of color—are all targeted by the PIC in distinct and coordinated ways. The function of reproductive oppression within the PIC becomes clearer when we examine how reproductive oppression operates in sites of imprisonment, carries on a counter-insurgency strategy, and replicates racial capitalism.

Reproductive Oppression Behind Bars

With so many imprisoned women, pregnant people, mothers, parents, caregivers, and the numbers within each of these categories rising, the abolition of prisons, jails, detention centers,



"Plucked or Protected II" arte de Maya Lewis @sourxmaya

"Plucked or Protected II" by Maya Lewis, courtesy of Movement for Family Power.

and other carceral facilities is a matter of reproductive justice. Not only is the threat of the PIC used to discipline pregnant people and to police decisions they make about their bodies, but also once incarcerated, pregnant people are subjected to practices that amount to torture. These include forced inductions, shackled labor and delivery, painful postpartum strip searches, and immediate, violent separation from their newborns.

An egregious example of the control, exploitation, and violation of bodies and wombs of people who are able to become pregnant within prisons and detention centers is the case of Mahindra Amin, who subjected more than 40 women in the Irwin Detention Center in Georgia to gynecological violence, performing non-consensual surgeries to remove their uteruses. Women subjected to this abuse came from over 25 different countries, and some were as young as 20 years old.

The mainstream "reproductive rights" movement focuses on achieving cisgender women's

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“right to choose” through reliance on a flimsy legal system that has never recognized the rights, needs, or humanity of Black, Indigenous, queer, or trans people of color. This has been harmful to our communities and has erased the reproductive oppression transgender people face. As **Gabriel Arkles** writes about the reproductive oppression of transgender people by the PIC:

They prevent trans people from making intimate decisions about their own bodies and accessing healthcare that they need, which also sometimes leads to sterilizing self-treatment; they lock up trans people in large numbers during years when they could be having children; they keep trans people segregated from people they might be able to have children with even when that exposes them to extreme violence and/or isolation; they condition any recognition of a trans person’s gender identity on their having undergone sterilizing surgery; they increase barriers to trans people being able to care for their children; and they cut trans people’s lives short.

An anti-racist, trans-inclusive reproductive justice framework allows us to understand and fight back against how prison systems exercise reproductive oppression against trans people, particularly trans people of color.

Reproductive Oppression as Counterinsurgency

By “controlling and exploiting women, girls, and individuals through their bodies, sexuality, labor, and reproduction,” the carceral state wields reproductive oppression to thwart abolitionist world-making. When we make demands for self-determination, the reorganization of power in the US, and for more investments in life-affirming resources, those who benefit from the violent status quo use reproductive oppression as counterinsurgency strategy to quell rebellion. Their tactics can take the form of starving the communities mostly likely to produce intransigent fighters, criminalizing our sexual, reproductive, and bodily autonomy, or kidnapping Black and Indigenous children.

“By ‘controlling and exploiting women, girls, and individuals through their bodies, sexuality, labor, and reproduction,’ the carceral state wields reproductive oppression to thwart abolitionist world-making.”

Reproductive oppression is foundational to the US nation state. To maintain a white supremacist, capitalist, and imperialist state, the US in its current form relies on racialized, anti-queer, and anti-trans violence through criminalization and punishment. **Over 50 percent of Black families**, for example, have been **investigated by the family policing system** compared to 28 percent of white families. **Indigenous children, meanwhile, are 60 percent** more likely than white children to be **permanently separated from their parents**—despite the fact that there is no evidence that Black or Indigenous families are more abusive or neglectful. These statistics expose the racist discrimination, hyper-surveillance and preemptive criminalization encoded into a “child welfare” system that deliberately targets Black and Indigenous parents and conflates poverty with neglect.

Transgender people within the family policing system too often lack access to basic necessities like hormone replacement therapy and clean water, and face employment discrimination. As **Lisa Sangoi**, one of the co-founders and codirectors of the **Movement for Family Power**, puts it, “*carceral, misogynist, and eugenicist logics are threaded through the family regulation system, leading to the punishment and separation of families for being poor.*” Abortion restriction laws, family policing, and the criminal legal system overlap so that in times of vulnerability and need people are punished instead of supported. This must be understood as counterinsurgent by design.



Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

Destabilizing our communities through reproductive oppression makes for harsher, more fearful, and more precarious organizing conditions. When we struggle for freedom from reproductive oppression, we create the space and steady ground from which to mount the “sustained and creative aggression” that **Ruth Wilson Gilmore** calls for.

Reproductive Oppression Replicates Racial Capitalism

Feminist **social reproduction theory** – such as the work of **Selma James, Mariarosa Della Costa, Tithi Bhattacharya, Silvia Federici, Maria Mies, Lise Vogel, Martha Gimenez, Johanna Brenner, Susan Ferguson**, and others – is helpful for understanding how reproductive oppression reinforces racial capitalism. Put simply, social reproduction focuses on **the labor through which society reproduces itself**. Much of this labor is unpaid and done predominantly by women. It includes childbirth but also all activities outside the formal economy that replenish the worker (feeding, clothing, and care work), allowing the labor force to return to the production process and sustain the “*ongoing maintenance and reproduction of an overall capitalist social formation.*”

Tithi Bhattacharya writes, “*an understanding of capitalism as an integrated system, where production is scaffolded by social reproduction, can help fighters understand the significance of political struggles in either sphere and the necessity of uniting them.*” Therefore “*it is in the interests of capitalism as a system to prevent any broad changes in gender relations, because real changes to gender will ultimately affect profits.*”

Feminist social reproduction theory, then, challenges how hetero-patriarchy under capitalism enables gender-based oppression and renders the labor of women, queer, gender-non-conforming, and transgender people invisible. It also shows us how all practices of caging human beings across the gender spectrum do reproductive violence not only to the prisoner, but also to their family, community, and society. Revolutionary feminist Marxists understand that the end of reproductive oppression requires fighting for the end of racial capitalism itself. The reproductive justice framework for safe and sustainable communities is essential because racial capitalism attacks public services, shifts the burden of care onto families, and slashes the social safety net in order to make workers more vulnerable and less able to fight back.

HEALTHCARE AS A KEY SITE OF STRUGGLE FOR PIC ABOLITION

In their “**Healing Histories Project**,” **Cara Page, Susan Raffo**, and **Anjali Taneja** describe how the healthcare system became “the medical industrial complex,” working as an extension of policing and state violence. The medical industrial complex expanded with the emergence of internal and external European colonization, class warfare, and the management of people perceived as deviant (disabled people, queers, people who use drugs, and others who refuse the existing social order). At times medicine has been upheld as a more benevolent alternative to the violent force of the state, yet, as members of our **Beyond Do No Harm Network** point out, **this obscures how the underlying logics are the same**—policing and pathologization, incarceration and institutionalization, corrections **and cure**.

By deploying the PIC’s tools of policing, imprisonment, and surveillance, the medical industrial complex plays a significant role in controlling reproductive decisions, curtailing bodily autonomy, and also restricting access to healthcare. The medical industrial complex decides which communities are “deserving” of access to care, and what life to value under racial capitalism. Medical providers have historically collaborated with police to target, arrest, criminalize, civilly commit, and at times murder disabled people, people with unmet mental health and/or housing needs, people who use drugs, and migrants. For many groups who are marginalized, the places we go seeking care instead function as routine sites of surveillance, policing, criminalization, punishment, control, and premature death. For instance, medicalized violence and transphobia facilitate trans death and suicide, making those matters of reproductive oppression, too. Many health care policies and practices that create pipelines from hospitals and clinics to prisons—mandated reporting, unconsented drug and alcohol testing, supporting the prosecution of overdoses, cops employed by medical facilities to racially profile and harass patients, outstanding warrant searches and arrests of people who are just trying to access health care—predate abortion criminalization.

We see this quite clearly in **the criminalization of pregnancy**, or the penalizing of individuals for actions that are interpreted as harmful to their own pregnancies, including the enforcement of laws that punish actions during pregnancy that would not otherwise be punishable. Pregnancy criminalization happens through policies that outlaw so-called “fetal assault” and, like the war on drugs, primarily target people who use drugs or people who are deemed to be experiencing “substance abuse disorder” during pregnancy. Pregnancy criminalization impacts people who are pregnant who refuse care or treatment. People are subject to harassment based on these laws and further surveilled, limiting their reproductive choices even more. These harmful laws undermine the notion that pregnant people should determine the conditions under which they give birth or terminate gestation.

Unsurprisingly, Black and Brown communities are disproportionately impacted by pregnancy criminalization. Queer and trans people and families are even more impacted. Queer and trans people often encounter hostility, flat-out discrimination, and an overall lack of good information about their own healthcare when they interact with providers, insurance companies, and some healthcare workers.

Abolitionist organizers must fight against the criminalization of bodily autonomy, self-determination, and access to essential health care (including abortions, pregnancy, and gender-affirming care), because this criminalization will be used to widen the existing carceral pipelines. If you believe that everyone deserves access to health care and the ability to live a full life, then you have to recognize that criminalizing those providing and seeking health care is tantamount to criminalizing survival.

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REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE THREATENS THE WHITE NATIONALIST AND US-IMPERIALIST PROJECT

Lethal border regimes, mass criminalization, and the organized violence of hospitals, prisons, detention centers, and policing can all be understood as attempts by the ruling class to maintain power within a changing demographic reality. The attacks on trans youth and on abortion access represent coordinated assaults on bodily autonomy and self-determination.

It is striking that the people who harass abortion-seekers and providers outside clinics are the same people who fund campaigns against critical race theory and who perpetuate rhetoric used to criminalize queer and trans people. Reproductive justice advocates are increasingly concerned about the scapegoating of children in rhetoric used to promote anti-abortion policies, critical race theory bans, and narratives that suggest that LGBTQ people and gender-inclusive ideals are inherently harmful to American values. Criminalization—which functions, in **Mariame Kaba** and **Andrea Ritchie**'s words, "in the service of maintaining and reinforcing existing relations of power"—is a tool to maintain existing race, class, gender, economic, and other hierarchies. Viewed through this lens, abortion criminalization is of a piece with mass sterilization and eugenics movements, which seek to remove and/or control those the state considers threats. It is consistent with laws that criminalize migrants, including those Indigenous to this land, and those fleeing US bombs, wars, economic policies, ravenous land and resource extraction policies, and sanctions. As legislative and legal actions that limit queer and trans people's ability to access healthcare continue to occur in this so-called democratic state, we will need to rely on and return to a reproductive justice framework more than ever before.

FEATURES REFLECTION

Reproductive Justice for Collective Liberation

By Zoán Tanis Dávila Roldán, *Feminist Collective under Construction*

Editors' Note: La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción is a political organization in Puerto Rico, stemming from the legacy of Black and decolonial feminism, founded in 2014. They organize from **Black feminism**, because the forms of oppression we experience, such as racism, gender-based violence, classism, xenophobia, and homophobia, are intertwined manifestations of a system that generates inequality. As a strategy, they denounce the ways the state sustains these systems of oppression. They do this through political education, agitation and denunciations, mobilization and direct action, the articulation of strategic alliances, the building of alternatives to public policy or self-managed efforts, and the creation of a **culture of resistance**.

About a year ago, the Supreme Court of the US repealed *Roe v. Wade*, eliminating the rule stating that the right to abortion was an ensured constitutional protection and, therefore, states could not prohibit it, although they could regulate it. This news had huge repercussions both within the US and abroad, as it opened the floodgates to a "new reality" in which women's autonomy and the right to privacy would be criminalized by the state. *The repeal has worrying implications over reproductive decision-making, state intervention and the criminalization of reproduction and sexuality that have always been a reality for Black, poor women and pregnant people, both in the United States and Puerto Rico, as well as in the majority of Latin American countries.*

Just a few months ago, Karen, a woman from El Salvador, was sentenced to 30 years in prison af-

IN BLACK, QUEER AND TRANS FEMINIST TRADITIONS, REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE AND PIC ABOLITION ENVISION THE RESTRUCTURED SOCIETY WE NEED.

Reproductive justice does not start or end with medical care facilities, just as it does not only affect or involve cis or white women—two common misconceptions. Reproductive justice attempts to alleviate the domination that orders many of our experiences within and beyond healthcare and prisons. Thus, it is pertinent that abolition is at the center of our demands for a world without reproductive and gender-based oppression, white supremacy, prisons, policing, or other mechanisms of social control.

SisterSong defines reproductive justice as "the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities." This definition reminds us that where we live profoundly shapes our ability to experience reproductive justice. Similarly, **Dr. Dorothy Roberts** writes in *Killing the Black Body*, "True reproductive freedom requires a living wage, universal healthcare, and the abolition of prisons." These demands are part of an abolitionist politics that echoes **Ruth Wilson Gilmore**'s vision of an abolition that is **red, green** and **international**. Our communities are **safe** when we have what we need (and so are red); our communities are **sustainable** when we take livable futures, environmental racism and degradation, and climate catastrophe seriously (and so are green); and these communities are **international**, extending across borders just as oppression does. Reproductive justice requires PIC abolition, and conversely PIC abolition includes reproductive justice.

Queer and trans liberation are also core reproductive justice issues, as queer and trans people must have the social, political, and economic power and resources to make healthy decisions

about their gender, bodies, sexuality, and families for themselves and their communities in order for reproductive justice to be achieved.

For centuries, the state has encroached upon bodily autonomy, particularly Black queer and trans people's bodily autonomy. Queer and trans communities resist the paradigms of violence perpetuated by the state, the various practices of caging and control, the medical industrial complex, and criminalization. As reproductive justice organizers navigate legal attacks that for many feel unprecedented, we can learn from the resistance tactics and networks that Black trans abolitionists have been building all along.

CONCLUSION

As attacks on bodily autonomy take the form of abortion bans and state-facilitated trans harm and death, our resistance to these forms of violence must be coordinated in thought and action. Again, reproductive justice *requires* PIC abolition. Organizing toward freedom from reproductive oppression—which also means fighting for clean water, air, food, and other material resources needed to thrive, including art, and struggling for Black, Indigenous, gender, and queer liberation—will get us closer to abolitionist horizons. ♦

About the Authors: Maria Thomas is a multiply displaced South Asian artist, poet, and abolitionist organizer. As the **Beyond Do No Harm Fellow at Interrupting Criminalization**, she organizes against policing and criminalization in medical care and public health spaces.

Ash Williams is a Black transgender abortion doula and abolitionist organizer from Fayetteville, North Carolina. As an abortion doula, Williams provides informational, emotional, physical, and financial assistance before, during, and after the termination of a pregnancy. He has worked with numerous organizations including **Project NIA** as a decriminalizing abortion resident. Currently, Ash works with the **Mountain Area Abortion Doula Collective (MAADCo)**, a western North Carolina grassroots organization that supports people seeking abortion care and trains abortion doulas using a reproductive justice lens.

ter experiencing a miscarriage. In the Dominican Republic, legislators amended the constitution in 2010 to establish the right to life from conception, thus prohibiting abortion even in cases where a woman's life is threatened if she is unable to access the procedure. In Puerto Rico, abortion was a right protected by *Roe v. Wade* because of our colonial constitution, and even so, on multiple occasions over recent decades, conservative legislators have attempted to criminalize it, proposing sentences of up to 90 years in prison to those providing abortions and to those assisting them. Ironically, these laws criminalizing the termination of pregnancy have been proposed under the pretext of protecting life, in particular the life of the unborn. However, the concrete effect of these laws is to truncate women's and pregnant people's lives to protect and advance other interests, stripping away their freedom, regardless of their vulnerable condition.

THE BODY AS THE FIRST TERRITORY

For us, reproductive oppression is not only caused by patriarchal values operating across all realms in our society. In order to sustain itself, the capitalist and imperialist system needs to control and capture the bodies of the subjects it seeks to exploit, just as it needs to control the geographic territories it seeks to exploit. This exercise in power and control, driven through colonization in our territories, uses race and gender as devices to generate inequality, earmarking bodies and peoples for capture, exploitation, violation, forced labor, extraction, impoverishment, and death; that is, the bodies and peoples open to their dehumanization. It is from these processes that the prison industrial complex (PIC), the public debt over countries that have aspired to implement decolonial projects,



Photo by Equilatera Puerto Rico.

and reproductive oppression came to be developed as capture technologies that maintain and reinforce the capitalist and colonial order. **Therefore, for us, the body is the first disputed territory against the system and from where our struggles for the liberation of our territories are framed and kickstarted.**

REPRODUCTIVE OPPRESSION AS A CAPTURE DEVICE

Throughout history, the reproductive capacity of women and pregnant people—in particular, those who are Black and racialized—has been used, curtailed, and oppressed through public policies promoted by the state. For example, during colonization, it was essential for colonizing empires to control Black and Indigenous populations' fertility. In the case of Black populations, promoting their reproduction was only a means of accessing cheap labor for plantation work and of selling that labor in the slave market. This

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is why Black women were not recognized for their capacity to be mothers, and their children were seen as products at the behest of the system. These women were separated from their children after giving birth. In the case of Indigenous populations, colonial settlers established mechanisms to prevent reproduction in these communities to be able to take over their lands. When the formal slave regime was abolished, the reproduction of Black people no longer operated to the benefit of white slave masters; as a result, the state passed legislation that promoted the massive sterilization of Black, poor women. Likewise, governments in more recent times have gradually enacted laws that define what an apt mother is, while they increase their power of intervention over those so-called unfit mothers, even though circumstances in which that label is enforced are mediated by race, class, and gender stigmas. Laws that attempt to control women's and pregnant people's sexual capacity as individuals have left a negative impact on entire communities.

“For us, reproductive oppression is not only caused by patriarchal values operating across all realms in our society. In order to sustain itself, the capitalist and imperialist system needs to control and capture the bodies of the subjects it seeks to exploit, just as it needs to control the geographic territories it seeks to exploit.”

Puerto Rico reflects the reproductive control policies motivated by the US's imperialist and capitalist interests in implementing a project of colonial modernization and retaining control over the island at all costs. In the 1930s, forced sterilization and experimentation with contraceptive methods began in Puerto Rico. On the one hand, forced sterilization was introduced through legislation and eugenics laws as a means to monitor “overpopulation” and thus allegedly improve the quality of life on the island. These policies were a subterfuge to conceal the true motivation of the US government, who feared losing political and economic control over the territory. Since the mid-1960s, Puerto Rico has had one of the highest national rates of sterilizations in the world. By 1968, 35 percent of women who had been married or cohabitated had been sterilized, and by 1982, 39 percent of these women had been sterilized. Many of these sterilizations were forcibly performed or carried out without these persons' full understanding of the procedure and its ef-



Image by Denise Oliver-Velez, courtesy of The Activist History Review

fects. Forced sterilization was directed at Black, poor women, in a campaign that included visits to their communities by health care workers.

On the other hand, Puerto Rican women were used as guinea pigs to experiment with abortion pills. Beginning in 1955—although there are records of earlier practices—biologist Gregory Pincus and obstetrician John Rock conducted clinical trials on impoverished communities across the island. The women who took part in the experiments with these contraceptives were unaware that they were participating in a clinical trial and that the pill—of which they received a much higher dose than currently recommended—was at an experimental stage. As a result, 17 percent of the participants registered negative side effects, including strong pains, nausea, vomiting, and infertility. Three of them died. It is important to underscore two aspects: (1) not all Puerto Rican women suffered under these policies; rather, these policies were expressly directed toward Black, poor women; and (2) these population control policies were implemented by the government, making use of laws and governmental projects, as well as federal funds.

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE AS A DECOLONIZING DEMAND

We believe the framework of reproductive justice allows us to further study and call the attention to the ways in which white supremacy, under a capitalist and imperialist system, has historically influenced and shaped the present. This does not only raise the question of the defense of the right to abortion but also denounces how violence by a racialized state is reproduced across all aspects of life for the most oppressed

women and pregnant people, in particular those who are Black and racialized.

Lack of proper health care services, sex education without a gender perspective and an anti-racist approach, disinformation, and the criminalization of sexuality continue to shape conditions for women and pregnant people and their communities. This is why reproductive justice emerges as a radical demand to put a stop to all forms of oppression—not only reproductive oppression—so that girls, women and pregnant people can have **true determination** to exert control over their bodies and access to a wide array of reproductive options available that allow them mental, physical, and spiritual wellbeing. It is from these principles that we conclude that reproductive justice does not only include the possibility of a person having all the tools to prevent and terminate a pregnancy, but also encompasses resistance to other forms of reproductive oppression, such as forced sterilization, removal of minors by the government, gender-based violence against women, and many other issues.

Reproductive justice seeks the complete physical, mental, spiritual, social, political, and economic wellbeing of women and girls, which will only be attained when we have the resources and the political, social, and economic power to make healthy and informed decisions about our bodies, sexuality, and reproduction—both for ourselves, and for our families and communities. This complete wellbeing can only be achieved through the dismantling of the systems of oppression that keep us under a constant state of vulnerability, oppressed in our communities through surveillance, the criminalization of poverty, environmental racism, lack of safe housing, and the deficiency of and lack of access to health care services. *This is the reason why we assert, as the Black feminists that precede us, that the struggle for reproductive justice is inherently linked with the struggle for abolition of the prison industrial complex. Defending the life, autonomy, and wellbeing of those of us who are dehumanized by the system requires destroying all institutions that have reinforced and sustained that very dehumanization. In the end, when we speak of decolonization, the core demand is the defense of life, freedom, and humanity of those of us who have been disposable subjects at the service of the capitalist system.* ♦

About the Author: Zoán Tanís Dávila Roldán is a Black feminist activist and lawyer from Puerto Rico, member and spokesperson of La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción (Feminist Collective under Construction). Zoán has represented protesters affected by state and police repression, impoverished communities at risk of displacement, and advocacy initiatives defending civil rights.

FEATURES REFLECTION

Coming Earthside

By Rehana Lerandean and Dylan Brown

We were drawn in
By earthside visions dancing like the light
that our baby dances in
Dancing in the freedom she still knows even
though she arrived punished
She fled earthside because apartheid told her
she could not exist
And the doctors said cutting his parent open
was safer than earthside
Safer than his grandmother's bed
Safer than a birth worker's hands – soft and
strong and worn from eternity
We answered a call
We answered a need that has always been
and always will be
And they offered us sterile linoleum and
screamed at us to push
When we knew it wasn't time

They took away our water, our partners, our
doulas
Sometimes they even took away earthside...
Esme would still be here.
We'll call it all Esme, all the avoidable
death.
When the rage comes for me in the morning, it
comes for us at night
Why can't you hear us? Who is allowed to feel
pain?
They punish us if we don't comply – their “no”
has no meaning
Their “no” exists only to block out the light
To stop our baby from dancing, to make them-
selves “right”
The cold, numb hands and the compassion-
less voices
Suck care out of the room, makes it all rotten
They watch while we cry
We have to find a way
We are the ones who stood, who grieved, who
ran in search of freedom
The ones whose ancestors touched the bot-
tom of the sea
We are still here – holding safe passage in
our working hands

I hear her now; we've always found a way out
of no way
And still, our baby is coming earthside where
we'll take our first breath together
We'll dance in the light and jump on the bed
Not tired, body unbroken, here, present, earth-
side
Becoming anew
We'll escape the maze
We'll follow our babies out
Following their bodies that are safe, bodies
that are theirs
Our babies will teach us how to be and remind
us of our needs
We'll scream with pure, unbounded delight
We'll see the first smile in our fathers'
eyes
We'll hear our bodies and know that
they're right
We'll hear the whispers of the world we know
we'll win
And let it resound
Into the peace of our grandmother's bed
We'll lay swaddled with love
And our babies will dance
In the light ♦

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About the Poets: Rehana Lerandean and Dylan Brown are members of *Critical Resistance* and editors with *The Abolitionist Editorial Collective*. **To envision what birth work, childcare, and parenting could look like in a world once the prison industrial complex is abolished** they spoke to: **Sophia Gumbs**, a radical abolitionist doula; **Amanda Joy**, an abolitionist childcare and cultural worker; and **Mallory Sankofa**, an abolitionist educator and parent. They asked these women where they experienced joy and rage, where or how they experienced the carceral system, what draws them to their work, and what collective vision they have for the future. With these offerings, as well as the authors' own lived experiences, they have crafted this poem.

In Black Unison: For Harriet Tubman

By Raymond White

For over 100 years you have been the under armor for Black humanity as the shield of power and courage, and the eyes staring out into gleaming heights of freedom where the stars are in space. Since the day of June 2, 1863, the year when

the cold night escaped into the entering of sunrise the opening to a freedom we had never experienced your force plundering through the lost caved plantations burned away by the swiftness of your bloody ambitious feet, we hoped for the new streaming rivers to cure their plague and flow currents of destiny and redemption. A new age weighs faith around us. Eight hundred enslaved revolutionary ancestors fought for a way to bring existence to a true meaning without the bitter harsh reality of hatred. When we dreamed of affirmational foot grounds we treaded light with each footstep through the lifeless oxygen from our striving and desperate lungs, we still stood tall with each painful footstep that led us into a golden sky, where the essence of tranquility has sprouted flowers among your bold and beautiful face, pondering into the edge of the ancient river in Black unison was a celebration into a next step to freedom



By Meredith Stern, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

you were "THE MOSES FOR OUR PEOPLE" you broke the heaviest barriers that stood ignorant and evil before you, now, you can stare down from the sky of happy stars, which the power labor of your hands worked to achieve. ♦

About the Author: Raymond White is imprisoned in California. Write to him at: Raymond White BJ5926 CA State Prison - Corcoran Corcoran, CA 93212

FEATURES ACTION

Fulfilling the Promise of Reproductive Justice: Abolition and the Family Regulation System

by Erin Miles Cloud and Lisa Sangoi of Movement for Family Power

We are mothers, daughters, amateur artists, lawyers, and activists. For the last five years, and during a time of political upheaval, we have been working together to grow a movement to abolish the family regulation system. We are connected by a vision of safety beyond family policing and grounded by political framings taught to us by our sisters, mentors, and comrades. **We believe the child welfare system, or more appropriately, family policing or the family regulation system (FRS), erodes reproductive freedom in the literal sense: its primary purpose is the surveillance, control, punishment, and destruction of Black caretakers and families.** It also erodes reproductive freedom in the political sense when it engages in community surveillance, family separation, and family destruction. It does this for the same reason that the criminal legal system engages in policing, imprisonment, and the death penalty: *to blame and punish those who suffer the most from structural harms for those harms.* It fails to nurture freedom, but rather reproduces the harms of racial capitalism and neoliberalism.

Family policing is also politically under-interrogated. As abolitionists and radical nurturers, we know we must build a world that protects, not punishes. However, we can sometimes utilize "social services" or "social work" as proxy for systems of care when the radical roots of these practices have been stripped and replaced with carceral logics. The FRS punishes Black mamas (and in keeping with Black feminists we use the term mamas to encompass trans mamas, non-binary mamas, political mamas, and so forth) for living in poverty and for being Black. Its judgments, rooted in racism, classism, misogyny, ableism, and the logic of racial capitalism, attach little to no value to the work of caretaking and parenthood, blaming poor people for their poverty. The system tells parents they are responsible for the unacceptable living conditions that centuries of racial capitalism have created, taking their children away as punishment.

The FRS, a part of the prison industrial complex (PIC), was not designed to prevent harm and is unable to adequately address harm when it occurs. Like the rest of the PIC, family policing has built a financial empire regulating the bodies of marginalized people. Part of a \$30 billion-a-year industry with the vast majority of its funding used for family separation, the FRS violently removes children from their families and forcibly places

them with strangers. Only a small portion of the FRS budget is reserved for what we recognize as services to families, such as childcare vouchers or transit vouchers. Most of the budget goes towards classes that claim to "fix" perceived parental defects, i.e., parenting or anger management classes. Further, the whole service budget is tied to "mandated reporting", turning even the possibility of helpful services into threatening traps.

The FRS is a troubling extension of the US's long history of systematically removing children from the arms of their parents under the guise of charity and beneficence while actually exploiting marginalized people for wealth building and power maintenance. From the brutal practice of buying and selling children away from their parents during enslavement, to the orphan trains that called immigrants the "dangerous classes" and shipped them to white families, to the forced removal of tens of thousands Indigenous children to institutions to become "civilized", those in power have always wielded control over those without through command over their children and reproduction. However, so long as family policing has existed, there have been nurturers sowing freedom, political mothers, mamas, and grandmamas who bore the brunt of family separation and were and are fighting both for their own families and our futures.

"Family policing is also politically under-interrogated. As abolitionists and radical nurturers, we know we must build a world that protects, not punishes. However, we can sometimes utilize "social services" or "social work" as proxy for systems of care when the radical roots of these practices have been stripped and replaced with carceral logics."

We take, for example, the Native families who fought settler colonialism and child "welfare" assimilation projects. As early as the 1870s, white Protestant men sought to intern Native children in "boarding schools" that erased Native culture. Stories are told of families that camped outside these internment camps, hoping to be reunited with their children. Eventually, the government deemed these boarding schools too costly, and the work of stealing Native kids was officially

transferred to the Child Welfare League of America, where caseworkers were instructed to take Native children and put them up for adoption as a more "cost-effective" assimilation strategy. By the 1970s, the family policing system was responsible for removing approximately one-third of Native children from their families.

In response to this devastation, Native grandmamas and mamas organized themselves, their community, and allies to end these practices. This groundswell of activism led to the passage of the federal **Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)**, a monumental legislative victory, which acknowledged the political sovereignty of Native nations and heightened legal protections for Native American families targeted by FRS agents. Unfortunately, these efforts are currently under attack by a powerful group of conservative forces, including the oil and natural gas lobby, the gambling lobby, state's rights organizations, and white adoptive parents. In a landmark case, *Brackeen v. Haaland*, these groups are attacking Native sovereignty by attacking ICWA. However, Native activists are resisting and nurturing a different future. They have launched a robust campaign of defense, and are asking allies to use their public education tools to raise awareness of and support for ICWA.

Another group of radical mothers were the mamas of the **Welfare Rights movement**—self-named welfare mothers. They eschewed the mainstream white feminist movement's demand for entry into a workforce they were largely locked out of anyways, and to us, their movement seems to be a **forerunner to the modern reproductive justice movement, centering the role of mothering and caretaking as a central politic and demanding the state's unequivocal support for this.** In the 1960s, these mamas demanded cash for caretaking, attacking racial capitalism's invisibilization of care work. They received harassment, welfare raids, and their mothering was used as political fodder for segregationists. Specifically, as Black leaders started to chip away at political barriers to state resources, segregationists used racist tactics to divert resources away from Black caretakers by implementing "suitable home laws." These laws argued that unwed mothers and "immoral" (i.e., non-white and non-Protestant) mothers should be excluded from public benefits. Mamas like Johnnie Tillmon and Annie Chambers organized and fought back against the denials, pointing to the enormous harm on their children.

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As Black, poor, and Native mamas resisted, states started to enlist child welfare workers to conduct “suitability assessments.” This resulted in surveillance and child removals—not support. Legislators finally began to take notice (a huge feat by activists) and made small but significant concessions, including increasing legal protections for people who received welfare. However, they did not meet the overarching demands of Black mamas, and instead reinforced family policing. The compromise permitted states to withhold funds from “unfit” mamas, while providing “services” to “fix” the parents’ “defects”, or rather, symptoms of structural poverty, racism, sexism, heteronormativity and ableism. In the interim, the funds would flow to the child, monitored by the FRS. Over time, this grew to be a multi-billion-dollar federal funding stream for family policing, the only open-ended entitlement program that requires the separation of families.

Fortunately, a future where caretaking is visibilized and respected is being nurtured. **Every Mother is a Working Mother Network**, including **DHS Give Us Back Our Children** and **DCFS Give Us Back Our Children**, are organizations that have arisen from the welfare mothers movement. They are explicitly anti-capitalist and tie their anti-poverty work to ending family policing. So too do comrades in networks like **Mother’s Outreach in DC**. These radical mamas are building politics of universal income and caretaking that exist outside of the FRS and are explicitly working to break down the multi-billion-dollar entitlement program that upholds family separation in the US.

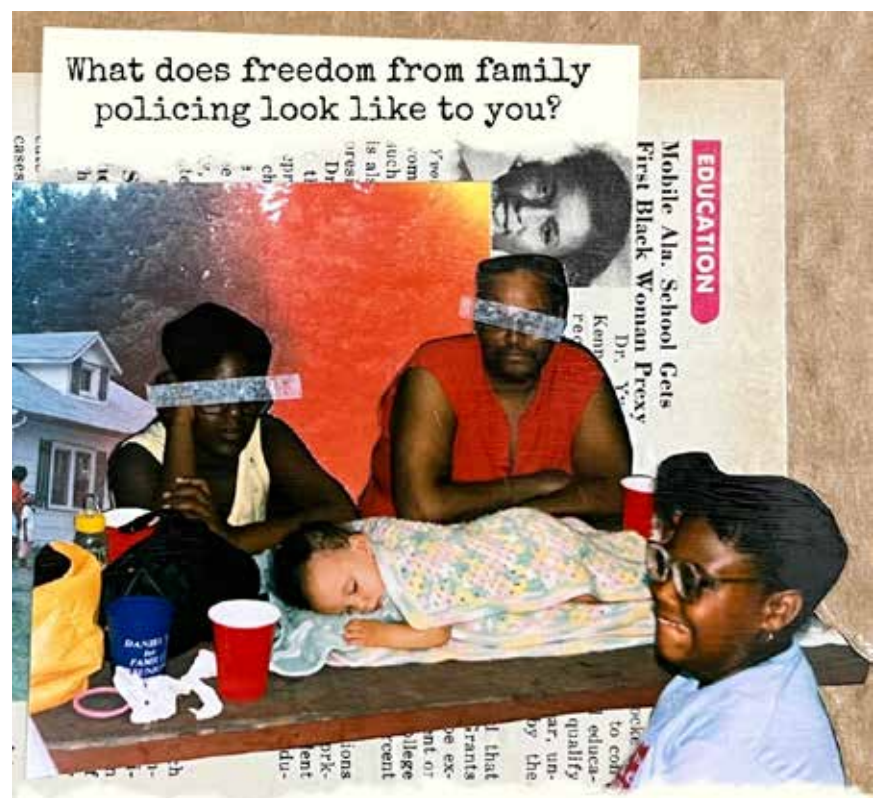
We know of these histories because of the Black and Brown feminist historians who have worked so hard to record and tell them but are otherwise largely left out of mainstream history books. Like any movement history, FRS resistance ebbs and flows, with peaks and valleys. It seems to us and many of our comrades that we are currently in a period of movement growth. We anticipate that much of the activism we and others are building now will need to be challenged and refined; however, we cannot overstate the thrill of being in this phase of movement building.

Movement for Family Power has had the enormous honor of being in community with, building with, and supporting the folks and organizations we mention below. Our goal here is to offer our insights into trends of work we are seeing and places readers can plug in to support. This list is not comprehensive.

- **Participatory Defense and Outside Pressure to Family Police:** Activists are putting a substantial amount of time and energy toward supporting parents in navigating FRS agencies and family courts and politicizing them to get involved in future organizing. **Operation STOP CPS, Family Reunification Equity and Empowerment, Family Justice Tribe, and Criminal Injustice Reform Network** are four initiatives led by Black mamas who have been directly impacted by family policing. Resisting the FRS, they are getting kids home, putting the system on blast, and politicizing impacted parents and bringing them into the movement.
- **Miranda Rights for Families:** The **Parent Legislative Action Network** is demanding the NY State Legislature pass a bill that requires family policing agents to read parents a Miranda-style warning when they want to begin investigating a family, and **Family Matters Boston** is working with **Harvard Legal Aid** to do know-your-rights trainings for parents. Scholar-activists like **Julia Hernandez** and **Tarek Ismail** are working to deepen thoughtful analysis around the possibilities and limitations of building out early defense and fourth amendment strategies.
- **Ending Mandated Reporting:** An array of activists and organizations across the country are putting substantial energy into fighting family policing from the moment it comes into contact with families—contesting mandated reporting and empowering families right when FRS agents begin an investigation. Social workers such as **Kamaria Excell**, **Jas-**

mine Wali (both of **Just Making a Change for Families**), and **Nikita Rahman** created a training for social work schools to turn mandated reporting into mandated supporting. **Just Beginnings Collaborative** and **Shannon Perez-Darby** are working to end child sexual violence by building safe spaces for young people to talk that are not mired by mandated reporting. We are also inspired by mandated reporters against mandated reporting, who are working vigorously to organize licensed social workers to lobby against mandated reporting requirements and troubleshoot alternative ways to address harm. Meanwhile, the **REPEAL CAPTA campaign** is working to dismantle the entire federal legal apparatus that incentivizes states to pass mandated reporting laws and increase funding to their family regulation systems.

- **End the Womb to Foster System Pipeline and Drug War:** Movement for Family Power worked with **Just Making a Change for Families**, **Bronx Defenders**, and **Drug Policy Alliance** to start a campaign to challenge hospital drug testing of pregnant and birthing patients and reporting to family policing agencies. This campaign contains a legislative ask that medical care providers at least ask someone for their consent before they or their baby is drug tested, given the enormous risk for family separation. The bill itself is not abolitionist; however, the group worked to build political power and challenge the many misconceptions around pregnant people who use drugs. Similar campaigns are being led by **Reimagine Child Safety Coalition** and advocates in Maryland. These coalitions owe great respect and honor to the tremendous work of **Narco-Feminism** and **Urban Survivor Union**, radical drug-using mamas who have been organizing against family policing for decades.
- **Reclaiming the Narrative:** For generations, the FRS has exerted an extraordinary amount of control over the public narrative, convincing society it is a system of support, not surveillance and control. Family courts are largely closed to the public, and families can face criminal sanction for speaking out against the injustices they experience. People impacted by family separation are nonetheless courageously challenging this public narrative through journalism, visual art, theater, and more. Mamas like **Elizabeth Brico**, **Michelle Chan**, and **Latagia Copeland** have written extensively to educate the public and expose the family regulation system. *You Are Holding This Zine* is a zine for and about fostered, adopted and trafficked people whose guiding principle is abolition. **Liz Artistry** has created infographic illustrations about the injustices of the FRS and how they intersect with different movements. **Movement for Family Power** has itself put significant effort into political and public education, and we invite readers to visit our social media.
- **Ending the Family Death Penalty:** Mothers, in particular those impacted by imprisonment, are at the forefront of fighting a federal law called the **Adoption and Safe Families Act**, which forces state child “welfare” agencies to permanently dissolve families if children are in the foster system for 15 of the last 22 months. This law has had a devastating impact on many groups of people, including imprisoned parents, and it has made the US a global leader in killing off families. **A New Way of Life** and the **Repeal ASFA Campaign** (started by Movement for Family Power and the **National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls**)



close up of "Who all gon be there? Who's missing?" art by Maya Lewis IG:@sourxmaya
"Who all gon be there? Who's missing?" by Maya Lewis, courtesy of Movement for Family Power.

are two efforts with formerly imprisoned people in leadership who have a vision of ending the family death penalty.

We have learned from movement teachers at **AYNI institute** that movements have different needs depending on the season. For *at least* the past five years, we have been building in the winter of our movement. There was deep isolation between activists, low public awareness or outrage about injustice, and very few resources for the fight against family policing. We believe we are seeing signs of spring. Activists are less isolated and in community with each other. Public awareness of family regulation system injustices is increasing rapidly. More resources are available to organizing efforts. AYNi Institute teaches us that as our movement moves through spring, we need to focus on bringing new people in, creating infrastructure for large movement coordination, and training each other. **We also cannot confuse the spring of movement with the summer—a time for big political asks with a significant political base to hold those changes accountable.**

While we are gaining momentum, we still have work to do. We need to continue building outside pressure and political analysis so that our policy goals can meet their radical potential. We need to be wary of legislative deals that do not have enough power to be upheld. This does not mean we should not work to build policy, but we need to harness the *symbolic* power of our wins in service of a broader *strategic* vision of a more radical policy agenda that we can achieve in the next twenty years. This means we need to work with people who both have the short-term energy and long-term vision to create a multifaceted strategy to win.

We must also be kind to each other. As we break isolation and move into Spring, we can see each other’s flaws and strengths more clearly. We must build the strength to support conflict, as well as the endurance to keep our political visions intact. We are all connected by our commitment to the struggle for political freedom and the promise of a world free of policing. This means we cannot abandon our inner work or our political struggle. This also means that we should be using our knowledge of each other to build healthy coalitions and coordinated infrastructures. Often, we focus on the healing and interpersonal aspect of relational conflict, and while that is important, we can also use this information to help us build strategic coordination. We need *everyone* in our movement to find a healthy place to participate, and then we need to coordinate that participation in the direction of abolition. We will abolish family policing, and it will be with an effort, ethic, and ethos of radical caretaking and nurturing of each other, our families, our communities and our land. This is the promise of reproductive justice and the future we must build.

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About the Authors: *Erin Miles Cloud* is the co-director and co-founder of **Movement for Family Power**, an organization that works to end the policing and punishment of families by the foster system. She is a former family defense public defender. Baltimore born and Bronx living, she is Nora and Charlie's mama. *Lisa Sangoi* is a co-founder and co-director of **Movement for Family Power**. She is also Kavya's mama.

Reimagining Child Safety

By *Tauheeda Shakur*, Youth Justice Coalition

I'm in a police station. My dad is all over the news. His picture, my little brother's picture, and the words "kidnapping" flash on the screen. I later find out what that word means after my brother is safely returned. The dictionary defines kidnapping as "the action of abducting someone and holding them captive." My little brother was kidnapped by my dad, but I experienced a kidnapping of my own. My brother, two sisters, and I were kidnapped by the system. They call it child protective services (CPS) or the child welfare system. In Los Angeles (LA), it's called the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). A family policing system, it swooped in amidst all the trauma to produce more trauma.

The day we got taken from my mom is the day we learned that the abuse we endured from my dad is nothing compared to the abuse of court systems and legal systems. They told my mom we got taken because she failed in protecting us, so it was a "failure to protect". But no one was there to protect me from the physical, mental, and sexual abuse I experienced in the foster care system from six-and-a-half to nine years old. We needed PFTS (Protection From The System).

My kidnapping is not unique at all. Sadly, the system has been kidnapping Black and Indigenous kids since the 1600s. Today, **58% of Black kids in LA County have run-ins with DCFS before they turn 18**. Being in foster care also makes kids more susceptible to police involvement. When a child in foster care gets into a fight, has a temper tantrum, or does anything that a regular child does, the cops will be called. I remember seeing cops at one of my foster homes when a girl got upset. I remember her being handcuffed and taken out of the house. I learned that if you breathe too loud, the cops will get you. *Do they make special handcuffs for six-year-olds?*

After getting out of the foster care system at 9 years old and being back home where I belong with my mom, I didn't experience any more abuse where I lay my head, like I did in foster care. But the school system for poor Black kids is one full of policing and criminalization. If it wasn't foster care, it was random school searches. CPS comes into your home and your school. Police are in your community and your school. School teachers and doctors, who have to report to CPS, become part of this family policing system. There is nowhere you can really go to escape the system. I have always been policed.

At 13, I started developing my voice. I started pushing back against the policing that was hap-

pening at my school. I met E.Z four years later when I was 17. He was, and still is, an organizer with the **Youth Justice Coalition (YJC)**. He is also my chosen brother (shout out!). At YJC was the first time I heard the term abolition. It is one of the sweetest words to ever grace my ears. When I joined YJC, we were fighting to divest from law enforcement and to invest in the community. It was the first time I heard of the 1% campaign, to move 1% of LA County's law enforcement budget into community centers and free transit cards for young people from kindergarten to college. Later, we would demand 5% of the budget be moved. These campaigns eventually grew into the **LAYUP coalition, or Los Angeles Youth Uprising Coalition**. A central goal of the LAYUP coalition is to reimagine youth justice, moving youth out of the jurisdiction of the LA County Probation Department and into a care-based youth development system. Everyone said it couldn't be done, but in July 2022, Los Angeles got its first Department of Youth Development.

YJC, which led the fight to end youth probation, inspired another group called Reimagine Child Safety (RCS), which is now fighting to end family policing. The coalition includes youth justice organizations, civil rights organizations, organizations that represent parents, and other allies, fighting to break the relationship between law enforcement and DCFS. As with YJC's fight to end youth probation, **Reimagine Child Safety** does not want to make the system better. You cannot fix a system that isn't broken by doing the very exact thing it was created to do.

We envision a world in which all communities and families have the resources and support that they need to thrive, a world in which the safety of children is not determined by the economic status of their families, and parents are not deemed "unsafe" or "unfit" based on the color of their skin. As the Director of Organizing at YJC, I am proud to be a part of Reimagine Child Safety and to use my voice and personal story to bring about the abolition of the family policing system. Together, we are creating the world I wish I had when I was a kid, the world my dad should have had, a world everyone should have had.

OUR DEMANDS:

1. **End law enforcement "partnerships" with social workers.** Law enforcement must halt the practice of referring children to DCFS because their parent or guardian has experienced domestic violence.
2. **A moratorium on detentions** related to general neglect as defined by DCFS, children or parents who test positive for drugs during pregnancy or at birth.



"Nothing Can Stop Our Love" by Melanie Cervantes, Dignidad Rebelde & Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

3. **Provide counsel to parents** at the beginning of any DCFS investigation.
4. **Grant parents the right to record all interviews and conversations** to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the information gathered and presented in their cases.
5. **Mandate that social workers advise parents of these rights** at first interaction with DCFS. Evidence taken in violation of these rights may not be used in court.
6. **Identify all available services**, inform and connect all parents, including veterans, incarcerated parents, and others, to these services. DCFS must pay for all court-ordered services.
7. **Prioritize relative/kinship foster care placements** and remove any and all barriers for family members who want to care for children who have been removed from their parents.
8. **Eliminate drug testing** by DCFS and by hospital staff for pregnant, laboring, and postnatal people and infants in hospitals.
9. **Establish an independent civilian oversight committee led by parents/people with lived experience.** The oversight committee shall have authority to allocate funding to community-based and run family preservation-oriented programs that support parents' ability to best care for their families and avoid involvement in the system.
10. **Uphold the rights of imprisoned parents and their children in foster care by ensuring consistent communication and visitation**, providing education and resources to parents on their rights, and addressing issues faced by imprisoned parents who miss key deadlines when they are transferred to new facilities.
11. **Guaranteed basic income for all families.** ♦

About the Author: *Tauheeda Shakur* is Director of Organizing at the Youth Justice Coalition (YJC), Los Angeles. In this piece she reflects on her own experiences of harm within the family policing system, how that led her to the YJC and abolition, and how the Reimagine Child Safety (RCS) campaign is fighting to get cops out of Child Protective Services and end family policing.

FEATURES ACTION

Defending Autonomy: Trans Resistance in Arkansas

By *Rumba Yambú, Tien Estell, Maximiliano Calabotta*

Editors' Note: *The authors of this article are three staff members from **Intransitive**, a grassroots organization based in Arkansas that works to advance the liberation of transgender people and communities through art, education, advocacy, organizing, and culture in order to create effective systemic change and on-the-ground impacts. The authors have chosen to capitalize "Transgender" and "Trans" as an intentional, political statement.*

The prison industrial complex (PIC) has far-reaching consequences in the lives of Transgender people in the South, especially in Arkansas. Here, legislators are using their power to criminalize gender-affirming care; ban affirming written materials; ban gender-affirming bathrooms in schools; ban the discussion of reproductive health, gender identity, and sexual orientation until fifth grade; and gravely limit access to the aforementioned gender-affirming measures. Arkansas recently introduced a bill that would make it illegal to require people to use gender-affirming pronouns in K-12 schools

and higher education institutions receiving state funding, and would criminalize youth for attempting to access basic needs such as housing and food.

Arkansas has a history of targeting Transgender folks, yet the most recent legislative attacks began in 2017 with SB774 and SB346 (co-sponsored by State Senator Gary Stubblefield), both bathroom bills that were struck down before becoming laws. Arkansas legislators introduced HB1570 in 2021 which was passed into law and became Act 626. It was, at the time, the harshest

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anti-Trans bill to become law in US history. Currently blocked by the Eighth Circuit US Court of Appeals, the law would prohibit healthcare workers from providing gender-affirming care to minors or from referring minors to someone who would provide them that care. It would also prohibit the use of any public funds for minors seeking gender-affirming care, such that state insurance programs including Medicaid would not be allowed for coverage. Placing an undue burden on Transgender youth and their families, this law forces Trans folks to cease seeking treatment at all, seek care outside of the state, or move somewhere else. It is an overreach of government meant to entirely stop Transgender youth from accessing life-saving medical care that can allow them to live full, happy lives. Transgender youth already face barriers to healthcare in our state. There are a select few competent and affirming providers available to choose from, and many Transgender youth cannot access affirming healthcare because they do not have affirming families or guardians.

In response, families in Arkansas worked with the **American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)** to make a legal case against Act 626, which ultimately led to its being blocked by the court. While it was being litigated, Intransitive kept our communities up to date with information on our social media platforms and helped to bolster support from all over the world. With direct support from the ACLU and prior to opening our community center, **Intransitive** met with Trans youth and their families to hold them in community as they were gearing up to take on this unconstitutional law. We partnered with the national ACLU and the ACLU of Arkansas to host a gathering in October 2022 celebrating Trans youth and their families for taking on Act 626.

Since 2017, every legislative session has brought more harmful anti-Trans legislation. The same legislators (Mary Bentley, Robin Lundstrum, Gary Stubblefield and more), and some newly elected ones, have been repurposing language from bills that did not pass between 2017 and 2021 and re-submitting them during this session. This year, we had an idea of what to expect, and we came prepared. In December of 2022, **we formed a coalition with organizations from around the state** that work across movements, including but not limited to queer justice, racial justice, gender justice, disability justice, and reproductive justice issues. We knew that all of our struggles hinge on the same concept of bodily autonomy; thus, the **#DefendAutonomy campaign** was born, focusing on mobilizing people across the state of Arkansas and organizations across movements to create a unified front in defense of bodily autonomy. Our campaign focuses on uniting the few resources organizations have across sectors in order to collectively build the infrastructure needed to fight these attacks.

In earlier years we witnessed legislators attacking Trans youth's access to healthcare and equitable participation in sports, as well as the restriction of Trans folks from public accommodations like bathrooms. We knew these bills would be resurrected and spent time last year preparing to fight against them. One of the most important things we learned in 2021 was that we can't do the work alone. Taking on the state legislature requires many hands, lots of good food, continuous words of encouragement, and boots-on-the-ground people power. Last session taught us that folks will show up when called upon, and this time we got organized before the session hit. We also learned that we can open our arms to accept folks wherever they are in their journey. Cultivating community takes grace and compassion, and our goal is to strengthen our relationships with one another, such that the state could never break the ties that bind us together.

For the last three decades, Arkansas has been a stronghold for the forces of colonial cis-heteropatriarchy. We know that our ideals are antithetical to white supremacy and right-wing ideology and that we have to band together to take on the institutions that seek to destroy us. This history and the current Republican supermajor-

ity in both the Arkansas House and Senate almost guarantee that these restrictive transphobic bills will pass and become law. Arkansas has also elected Trump's former press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, as governor. In her inaugural speech on January 10, 2023, Sanders declared "culture wars" as one of her main focuses as governor, signifying that whatever bills come to her desk that codify right-wing ideologies will be signed into law. Her first order of business was to issue an executive order banning the use of the word "Latinx" in any state documents. This ban erases Transgender Latinx folks and makes it such that Latinx people cannot be recognized on a state level in census data or represented in government. This includes documents in all state agencies, as well as in colleges and universities receiving state funding. The consequences of this executive order are far-reaching. Even though the largest group of Transgender people in Arkansas are Latinx people, Sanders frames the ban as "respect" for the Latinx community. In reality, this move has the intentional consequences of erasing Transgender Latinx people and galvanizing prejudice against Transgender people in Arkansas.

As of March 2, 2023, Arkansas legislators have introduced seven bills that directly target Transgender Arkansans and call for our erasure from public existence. This session, SB43 was introduced, which likens gender nonconformity to "perversion" while attempting to restrict and re-classify drag performances as adult businesses. The original definitions provided for a drag performance used language that would effectively ban being Transgender in public, and would have harkened back to dress codes of the 1950s, when folks could be stopped by police for something as simple as singing karaoke or performing in a school talent show because they were wearing clothing or accessories of the "opposite" gender. Bills like this serve to widen the net of criminalization and violence by legitimizing and legalizing the already existing harassment of a group of people simply because of how they look. These words have since been removed due in large part to creative acts of resistance like our **Flash Mobs Against SB43**, banner displays by local artists, and pressure put on legislators by our communities.

While SB43 has been gutted, another bill aims to ban inclusive literature, especially in libraries, and creates criminal charges for anyone who "knowingly" provides "obscene" literature to minors. It also limits the free speech of Transgender artists whose work may be considered obscene or "appealing to the prurient interest". Further, Governor Sanders signed into law legislation that increases the medical malpractice statute of limitations from 2 years to 30 years after the minor receiving care turns 18, creating an over-30-year time limit for providers to be sued for providing gender-affirming care to minors. It also bans disabled Transgender youth from accessing gender-affirming healthcare.

SB270, "an act to amend the criminal offense of sexual indecency with a child," bans Transgender individuals from using public bathrooms that match their gender identity if a minor is present. If signed into law, SB270 would impact the daily navigation of our lives and threaten us with being charged as sexual predators. Another set of anti-Trans bills introduced in Arkansas recently are specific to schooling. SB294 bans discussion of reproductive health, sexual orientation, and gender identity until the fifth grade. HB1156 bans Transgender youth from using gender-affirming bathrooms and changing rooms in schools, and HB1468 would make it illegal to require folks to use gender-affirming



Photo of Intransitive organizers, courtesy of Intransitive.

pronouns in K-12 schools and state funded colleges and universities if pronouns do not match one's sex assigned at birth. **Each of these bills aims to criminalize Transgender folks for simply being ourselves.**

However, criminalization of Transgender folks starts before government involvement. For Transgender youth especially, parents, peers, and school staff surveil social media profiles and out youth or limit their access to affirming media and friends. Most of the transphobic bills that have been introduced during this legislative session exist to limit the autonomy of Transgender youth and their families. Because of the criminalization of healthcare workers and even families, parents and guardians may start to wonder if transitioning is the right choice for their children. These legislators are preying on the fact that parents want to protect their children, and they are purposefully making Arkansas an unsafe place to raise their Transgender children so that they will either leave or stop seeking treatment. This ultimately hurts Transgender Arkansas children.

Throughout Arkansas there have also been cases of Trans-affirming businesses being surveilled by Arkansans who are violent towards Transgender people and our allies. After testifying against one of the bills, one of our Transgender community members began receiving online harassment from violent transphobes. Transgender people have been stalked, targeted, and doxxed for speaking out against transphobia in Arkansas or simply living their lives. Moreover, Transgender people who do movement work are frequently harassed by law enforcement. We held a rally at the capitol in Little Rock on Transgender Day of Visibility on March 31, 2019, and transphobic protesters showed up, having found out about it by monitoring our social media. They harassed our group and physically harmed people in the crowd. Given the nature and function of policing, it was perhaps no surprise when the police showed up and physically assaulted Transgender participants who were defending themselves. The cops were even laughing with the transphobic protesters.

Transgender Arkansans are not alone. **Legislators all over the South are actively creating environments where Transgender people, and especially Transgender youth, are silenced—socially and politically. Many other states, including Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, Texas, Tennessee, and Oklahoma, have introduced and passed bills that take away rights from Trans youth and their families.** Similar to Arkansas, many state governments in the South have been infiltrated by a conservative majority. However, this is not reason to condemn the South as a backwards region of the country. In fact, studies have shown that the South has the largest population of Transgender, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer+ (TLGBQ+) folks, and especially Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) TLGBQ+ folks. We have always been here, and it is due to right-wing and racial gerrymandering that we are being systematically targeted and facing state repression.

Historically, the South—and especially Arkansas—has been under-resourced and ignored

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Photo of Intransitive organizers, courtesy of Intransitive.

by seemingly progressive groups and funders. There is the perception that Arkansas and the South as a whole are backwards, and therefore undeserving of attention, care, and support. This is simply not true. The South has been and continues to be home to historical movements for change. **From uprisings during slavery to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, to queer and black feminist struggles in the 1970s, and through today's contemporary BI-POC TLGBQ+ led movements, Southern folks have been resisting oppressive systems for hundreds of years.** Wins that were achieved in our region have spilled over into other states, and even into federal laws and decisions that would protect marginalized people around the country.

It is imperative to allocate resources for folks doing movement work in the South because we know what we need, we know what it takes to win, and we need resources to be able to organize our communities. Because Arkansas has been historically neglected by funders, we have been left alone to combat powerful forces in local and state governments that want to eradicate us, and we are paying the price for their ignorance. Additionally, due to socio-economic factors, we are less likely to have stable incomes, access to healthcare and housing, and other basic necessities to life. It is difficult to take care of ourselves in the day-to-day and also do the work. We do it anyway because we know that if you put the most marginalized people at the center, then you ensure that everyone else is being served. We believe that placing states that have been the most under-resourced for so long at the forefront will inevitably support other states. Fighting back against the PIC in southern states like Arkansas is imperative to the movement. We have some of the highest rates of imprisonment and criminalization, poverty, health issues, and unemployment in the country. The folks that are suffering are here are our families and our neighbors. We care for each other and keep each other safe. We also know that there is a pattern. Where hate thrives, it spreads. And it will spread to the rest of the country, as white supremacist, colonial cis-hetero-patriarchy is apt to do.

FEATURES ACTION

Forced Sterilizations in CA Prisons & Winning Reparations

An Interview with Diana Block & Moonlight Pulido by Molly Porzig

In 2021, **California Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP)** and movement partners won a historic victory, breaking new ground for anti-prison organizing and reproductive justice. This paved the way for reparations for imprisoned people and placed California (CA) third in the US for providing monetary compensation to survivors forcibly sterilized under state eugenics laws. To learn more, **The Abolitionist** attended **CCWP's forced sterilization speak out** in February of 2023 and conducted research on CA's legacy of eugenics and forced sterilizations. We interviewed two members from **CCWP: Diana Block**, a CCWP founding member and reparations organizer, and **Moonlight Pulido**, a survivor of forced sterilization and reparations winner.

Here in the South, it requires fewer resources on the part of right-wing legislators to test legislation out and provide templates for other state legislatures. **Arkansas is a battleground state, a testing site for bills so that they can figure out what works and what people are willing to accept, and how they can spread that ideology and the power of the state to target vulnerable communities.** We have seen a domino effect all over the country during this legislative session, as transphobic bills have even been introduced in blue states like Oregon. Right-wingers in Arkansas started their white supremacist war on Transgender people a long time ago, and they were able to pass many bills with a Republican governor who was willing to veto HB1570 / Act 626. It makes us ask the question: *What is the next step?* Arkansas is key terrain for resistance, because once they make one spot a sanctuary for white supremacists, it will embolden white supremacists everywhere else.

“Legislators all over the South are actively creating environments where Transgender people, and especially Transgender youth, are silenced—socially and politically. Many other states, including Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, Texas, Tennessee, and Oklahoma, have introduced and passed bills that take away rights from Trans youth and their families.”

We have a history of creative resistance that spans years. We have made informational zines during the last two legislative sessions to spread knowledge and skill folks up regarding the bills that are being introduced and what their rights are during protests and direct actions. We have made TikToks and changed the lyrics to famous songs to spread awareness about bills, and we have cultivated a social media presence that helps connect folks to resources and information. We hold rallies that incorporate performances of poetry and song, chants, and passionate speeches. We find ways for our community to showcase their talents and express their minds in whatever ways they need. We made a gargantuan letter out of 3 tri-fold poster boards, had almost a hundred people sign it at a rally, and delivered it to legislators on the steps of the Arkansas state capitol. We go to the committee hearings almost every single day of this legislative session and the last. We testify, we craft our stories, and we speak the truth. We have taken inspiration from Translash Media's The Anti-Trans Hate Machine and Puente's campaign against Joe Ar-

paio. We have developed the #DefendAutonomy campaign and had a convening with groups from across Arkansas. We meet with groups across the country. We network, we strategize, we think things through, and we carry on the work. But the biggest part is that we don't do it alone. We do it with and for our community.

Anti-Trans legislation is a consequence of colonialist white supremacist patriarchy. This oppressive system exists to annihilate people who “don't belong.” The legislation would codify prejudice and oppression in order to further marginalize Trans and gender non-conforming (TGNC) folks, who are the primary targets in contemporary fights for bodily autonomy because our very existence challenges the validity of colonial white supremacist patriarchy. TGNC folks are primed to lead the charge against the restriction of bodily autonomy, because our bodies are literally on the line in health care, bathroom bans, free speech laws, criminalization, employment and housing protections, and more. We have come together with groups across the country to tackle these issues, because we know that while TGNC folks are primary targets right now, what happens to us has been happening and will continue happening to folks who do not fit the mold of white supremacy. We work together because connection is the most important part of our work. Communities save lives, and with community we will demolish the carceral state, one brick at a time. ♦

About the Authors: Rumba Yambú (they/them/elle) is the **Executive Director and Co-founder** of **Intransitive**. They are an Afro-Salvadoran Trans migrant, neurodivergent queer living as an uninvited guest in Osage and Caddo land, currently known as Arkansas. On weekends you can find them catching Pokemons, cooking food of their home land, singing along to a variety of genres and dreaming of the day where living at the intersections of multiple identities is celebrated as a blessing.

Tien Estell (they/them/elle) is the **Advocacy Coordinator for Intransitive**. Tien is a TQ activist, organizer, and performance artist navigating their life on occupied Osage and Quapaw lands (Central and SW Arkansas). They are a neurodivergent abolitionist who loves plant magic, horror movies, and writing poetry. Tien dances their resistance on the daily in defiance of those seeking to steal our joy.

Maximiliano Calabotta (they/them/elle) is the **Development Coordinator for Intransitive**. They are a queer, fat, neuroqueer, & disabled TGNC organizer, artist, and educator living, making and learning in occupied Caddo, Quapaw, and Osage lands (Northwest Arkansas). They spend their time working in community, going on adventures with their loving husband, cuddling with their two fat cats, making art, completing puzzles, watching Star Trek, playing games with friends, and dreaming of & working toward a liberated world.

gram in the country, which sterilized more than 20,000 people from the early-to-mid 1900s. The majority of sterilizations happened in state institutions, particularly hospitals and psychiatric facilities, but also state-run youth institutions.

While adults and youth of all races and genders have been coercively sterilized, CA's eugenic program disproportionately targeted Latinx people — especially Latina women, who had a 59 percent higher risk of forced sterilization than women of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, according to the National Library of Medicine. From 1968 to 1974, more than 200 women were sterilized against their will or knowledge in Los Angeles (LA) County hospitals. Survivors came forward and sued in 1978, and **the CA Eugenics law was finally repealed in 1979**, marking an official end to the state's “eugenics era.” However, the LA county case was not recognized as part of the CA Eugenic Program or era because it occurred in county, rather than state institutions. This set the precedent for similar exceptions to excuse the state from being held accountable for forced sterilizations for decades to come.

While the rate of sterilization dropped in the 1960s and 1970s, **coerced sterilizations never stopped, but rather shifted in the institutions through which they happen.** Many of the

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hospitals, psychiatric facilities, and other institutions of the “eugenics era” have since been shuttered; however, **there’s been a sharp rise in sterilizations in prisons since the 1980s.**

In 2003, CA Governor Davis apologized for the state’s forced sterilization history for the first time. Around the same time, the use of federal funds to forcibly sterilize detained people became illegal. Yet, between 2006-2012, **nearly 800 people had sterilization procedures without consent.** In 2008, **Justice Now**, an Oakland-based abolitionist organization working with imprisoned women, learned about **tubal ligations** being performed inside CA prisons and started to file public records requests. **The Center for Investigative Reporting** published an article in 2014 revealing that **148 women inside CA’s prisons received tubal ligations**, many without informed consent. In the same year, Justice Now effectively led a coalition effort to pass **CA Senate Bill 1135, prohibiting tubal ligations in CA prisons**, a struggle shown in the documentary **The Belly of the Beast** by **Ericka Cohn**. Still, tubal ligations are only one of many reproductive harms the CA Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCr) has administered on imprisoned women over the years; reports of forced sterilizations through a variety of methods continue to leak through prison walls. **The 1920s-eugenics era rhetoric continued**, arguing that it is more “cost effective” to sterilize poor women and women of color than to have more “unwanted children” born into welfare.

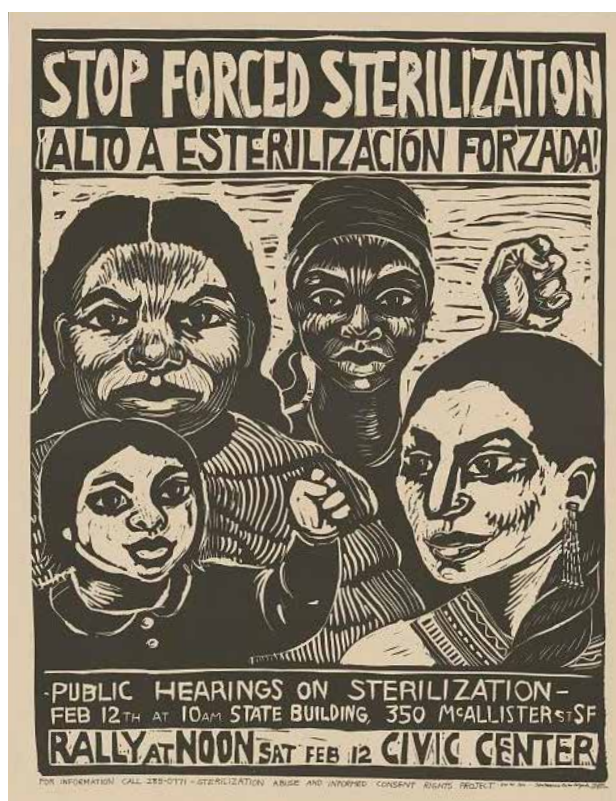
A 2014 state audit **revealed that at least 144 people**, the majority of whom identify as Black and Latinx, were **illegally sterilized during labor and delivery while in custody** in women’s prisons. A coalition including **CCWP, Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, Back to Basics**, and **CA Latinas for Reproductive Justice** was formed in 2018 to carry on the fight, and began a four-year-long legislative campaign advocating for **CA Assembly Bill 1007**. The **Compensation Bill to Survivors of Forced and Coercive Sterilizations** allocates **\$7.5 million for reparations** to survivors of state-sponsored sterilization between 1909 and 1979 and survivors of involuntary sterilizations in CA women’s prisons after 1979. **This legislation allows people who were forcibly sterilized or sterilized for birth control inside CA prisons to apply for compensation from the state as of January 1, 2022.**

Currently, CA is the first US state to provide notification of coerced sterilization and reparations to survivors who were sterilized while incarcerated in/after 1979. With \$4.5 million set aside to compensate survivors through the **CA Forced or Involuntary Sterilization Compensation Program**—along with a few million more to administer the program through the Victims Compensation Board (VCB)—**organizations outside of prisons for women are working to connect imprisoned and formerly imprisoned survivors of post-1979 forced sterilizations to reparations**, and assisting survivors of the CA Eugenic Program in applying for compensation. CA is prepared to pay about \$25,000 each to an estimated 600 survivors of coerced sterilization. In the past year, **427 people have applied** to the VCB for compensation, yet **only 91 people have been approved** (230 have been denied and the remainder are still being processed).

CCWP continuing organizing, supporting contemporary, post-1979 survivors. CCWP assists imprisoned sterilization survivors in obtaining their medical records, writing personal statements, filing applications for compensation with the VCB, and appealing denials, and also pushes the VCB on specific circumstances and supports family members during the processes.

The Abolitionist: How have imprisoned people been harmed through forced sterilization while imprisoned in CA or other states?

Moonlight: I was forcibly sterilized when receiving a routine Pap smear, which CDCr does for every woman incarcerated every year. I went to the doctor for what I believed to be a routine check-up. Once I was called back, I was told two growths with the potential to turn into cancer needed to



Poster for a 1971 rally against forced sterilization in San Francisco, CA designed by Rachael Romero (Courtesy of Library of Congress).

be removed. I thought I was signing up for a life-saving procedure. I was never offered a biopsy or a second opinion. Assuming the doctor was an upstanding citizen working for the state, I didn’t feel the need to question his motives. I signed the paperwork the day of the surgery, not questioning what I was signing up for. Lo and behold I ended up with a full hysterectomy.

“The 1920s-eugenics era rhetoric continued, arguing that it is more ‘cost effective’ to sterilize poor women and women of color than to have more “unwanted children” born into welfare.”

Immediately, I knew something was wrong. My body didn’t feel right which made me question: *why am I sweating like this, in puddles of sweat? This seems like menopause; I’m only in my thirties... Wait a minute...* I went to see the nurse for my dressing change. I asked, “Excuse me, what was done to me?” She looked over her shoulder, looked at the paperwork, then glanced back and said, “Oh, you had a full hysterectomy.” I was like, “Excuse me?! You’ve got to be mistaken.” She rechecked the paperwork, verified my name and then restated, “No, you had a full hysterectomy.” My mouth hit the floor. I couldn’t say nothing to her ‘cause she wasn’t the one who did it to me. Angry, I bit my tongue. “So when do I see the doctor again?” She said a couple days.

I got my pass, went to see the doctor, and sat up on the examination table. On his little rolling chair, he scooted over, staying arms distance away from me. Looking at him, I demanded: “What did you do to me?!” Before opening his mouth, he walked over to close the door. Re-sitting on his stool, he said: “Look, I’m tired of you pretty Mexican, Native and Black girls—you come in here, get all ‘hot ass,’ and then you go home and do the wild thing, get pregnant, then come back to prison and lose your children. Then us taxpayers are forced to take care of your children.” I felt like somebody clipped my tongue; I couldn’t even say anything. I was trying to comprehend what this man said to me. Looking back now, I wish I had said something, but I’m still speechless. Every day I still hear what he told me. He abused me again telling me that. I tried finding an attorney for a year when I got out, because there were no consequences for him.

I didn’t learn this was happening to other people until I got out; it happened in 2005 and I got out in 2020. I didn’t speak about it to anybody, and nobody else was talking about it, ‘cause I guess everybody was too shocked. Maybe they thought they were the only ones. I was embarrassed, sad, angry, devastated. I felt robbed, cheated, victimized. Because I am a Native American woman, a life-giver grounded to Mother Earth, this doctor stole a gift bestowed upon me by Creator to be

able to give life. I felt less than a woman. Empty. Hollow. Mistaking myself as the only one, I felt so alone. I carried it with me secretly for years until I was reached out to by CCWP. Once I found out that I was a part of so many, my heart broke even more. I felt like these are my sisters now; we all experienced the same hurt. *How can so many can be forced into sterilization and not know?*

Diana: Moonlight provides the firsthand experience of that horrific practice of reproductive harm inside. CCWP doesn’t have information about how this has played out in other states. It would be an important project to do a more global look at how forced sterilization occurs to imprisoned people.

At CCWP, **we consider the whole incarceration system a form of eugenics, because people of child-bearing age, young people, people of color, are being taken out of their communities at the height of their child bearing capacity.** Besides all the ways that incarceration divides and fractures communities, the reproductive aspect is very important to note, in addition to forced sterilization being one reproductive harm of many that the prison system in particular uses to disempower people.

How did you / CCWP get involved in the fight challenging forced sterilizations?

Diana: In the early 2000s, while Justice Now took the lead against tubal ligations co-sponsoring SB 1135, CCWP’s focus was around survivors of domestic violence and healthcare in the women’s prisons. CCWP endorsed the bill and went to actions to speak in support. While we weren’t the lead on the reproductive aspect, we were always fighting against terrible healthcare inside. Unfortunately, Justice Now dissolved as an organization, so it was even more important for CCWP to provide leadership.

In 2018, we started working on legislation initiated by people trying to get reparations for survivors of CA’s eugenics era—sterilized in mental health facilities primarily, prior to 1979 when the law permitting and even encouraging forced sterilizations was repealed. CCWP got involved in this coalition and expanded its focus to people who were imprisoned in prisons for women, also known as post-1979 survivors.

Moonlight: Erica from CCWP sent me an email talking about *The Belly of the Beast* film. At the time, the fight was still in the process of a class action lawsuit. When I got out, CCWP asked me if I wanted to file for reparations and sent me an application. I went through the process and became a member of CCWP to tell my story. Before I joined CCWP, I was reaching out to people I knew behind the walls, trying to find more people to let them know about the compensation program. I told them to spread the word, share the address, request an application. If denied, appeal it. If the appeal is denied, file another application.

I feel for those who can’t get their medical records or who are disqualified from compensation for various reasons. For those who are still behind the walls, who can’t speak up for themselves, I want to be their voice. They need their stories told. They need to know that somebody cares, which is one of the reasons I joined CCWP without a second guess. I was silenced my whole life through so much abuse as a child. Once I got sentenced to life in prison I promised myself every time I’m feeling abused to speak up.

How was AB1007—the Compensation Bill to Survivors of Forced and Coercive Sterilizations—won? What organizing did it entail? What core lessons did you learn?

Diana: We organized for three years before passing the legislation finally. **The Belly of the Beast film project** incredibly documented what went on and was an important factor for us in winning the legislation. We also did a series of surveys with people inside and submitted that testimony as public comment for legislative hearings. A transgender man, **Kanoa Harris**, wrote an amazing piece about what it meant to be transgender having been sterilized; we distributed excerpts from it. Fortunately, he has

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been compensated. By bringing our relationships with people inside to legislators, we were able to help make a compelling argument.

There were so many pieces to the coalition's organizing—public events, speak outs, webinars, lobbying, and more. Since we won during the second year of COVID, a lot of the organizing took place online. Some people in the coalition were expert lobbyists, which is unfortunately necessary given how difficult it is to deal with the legislative process – even with lots of examples and support, we had to figure out how to get the legislation through. In the final analysis, we got it through as a budget measure, which is a workaround to get legislation done more quickly if the votes are secured. We connected with people at Irwin Detention Center in Georgia after a **whistle blower exposed many immigrant women in detention were sterilized forcibly by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE)**. Exposure of that case created much more recognition that this was happening in carceral settings and contributed to CCWP's ability to win the CA legislation.

Coalition building, connecting struggles, and solidarity across geographies are critical, plus strong relationships with people inside. The organizing relationships we've built with imprisoned people through years of care and advocacy helped us to find more people who were involuntarily sterilized, and now we are supporting them to apply for compensation.

When SB 1135 was passed, a consolidated list of people who were forcibly sterilized by CDCr was compiled through the 2014 state audit; however, it was not made available to the public. When we began organizing for reparations a few years later, the total compilation of all the people the state had forcibly sterilized was no longer in one place. No one had been contacted or told of their eligibility for reparations. While some records remain on individual files, the records were largely dispersed. Most of the people once on the list are out of prison now, further dispersing or even disappearing records. So, it is important to make sure that a state agency makes a body of documented state violence or systemic harm inside accessible or keeps a permanent record so that you're not totally starting from scratch. We still have no way of recovering that list, in part also, due to the statute of limitations, since medical records are not kept after seven years (or that's the excuse given to us).

“We consider the whole incarceration system a form of eugenics, because people of child-bearing age young people, people of color, are being taken out of their communities at the height of their child bearing capacity.”

Moonlight: Always read the paperwork. When in doubt, ask questions. I'm so grateful to be a part of CCWP now. I have never found more caring individuals than these ladies. I can't go back and undo what was done, but I keep my ears and eyes open, I pay attention, and I hope the work we're doing now will help the people left behind the wall and those who are newly imprisoned to hear the stories of people this has happened to, to be aware. I never thought I would be victimized like that. But, ya know, *who does?* They say we're survivors; I feel like a warrior. I walked through something very ugly, something very painful, but at the end of it I survived, and I'm here to tell it.

Why reparations as a strategy to fight sterilizations? What are some strengths of fighting for reparations – as a demand and method for systemic change and accountability – and what have been some challenges?

Diana: Reparations in the US are rooted in repairing harm relating to slavery, one of the original harms this country conducted. In the context of our campaign, reparations came up because most of the people, but not all, who had been sterilized in prison and during the eugenics era were

Black, Indigenous, and Latinx. Reparations in this case isn't just about the specific issue of forced sterilization, but also connected to needing to undo this country's whole white supremacist structure that oppresses people of color, different nationalities, and other ethnic groups—this is an important part of using reparations as a concept to address forced sterilizations.

Secondly, situating reparations in relationship to people who are caged in prison, a group of people seen by the greater society as less than human and deserving punishment, upholds that people in prison do have human rights. One of the main challenges with a reparations campaign is deciding who to give the reparations to. With the US's structure, there's always criteria for eligibility—and I'm not necessarily objecting to the exact criteria, but more so the way criteria are weaponized, to give to some people and to exclude the majority of people. In the context of the compensation program, many people who were involuntarily sterilized are being denied reparations, and so many people do not even know they have been sterilized or that they could qualify for reparations.

Moonlight: I totally feel what Diana is saying. *How do you pick and choose who gets it and who doesn't?* I'm glad I'm not the one who has to decide who gets it and who doesn't. I don't fully understand how it's decided. Some people aren't qualified for compensation because minimal stuff was done, but they're still sterilized.

For those that have received it like myself, after doing as long as I did, I stepped out to nothing. I'm appreciative of what I received. It's actually given me a step up back into life outside of prison. You can't put an amount on that harm. My fertility was a blessing; there's no price tag on it. The compensation is appreciated, and I don't squander it. I use it very sparingly. I had to teach myself before I got out: You have wants and you have needs, and I use the compensation funds strictly for my needs, so that when it is gone, I'll have spent it wisely. There are a lot of my friends still who have lengthy sentences and not much possibility of coming home, or don't have a loved one outside supporting them. Reparations like this would help them sustain themselves for a little while behind the walls.

What does “justice” or accountability look like in the case of CDCr forcibly sterilizing countless of imprisoned people? What would it take to stop the state of CA from forcibly sterilizing imprisoned people?

Moonlight: When I got my check, I looked at it and cried. This was the most money I had ever made legally. Look what it took to get it. For two days I kept holding the check; I couldn't believe it was real. I'd like to hear an “I'm sorry” from the man, but I know I never will. I will never get back what he stole from me. I'm grateful that people went on to fight for all of us; we didn't know how to fight. When we're lost in the system, we have no voice. I'm so grateful to everyone who continues to stand up for us. It's still hard to live and deal with. I'm grateful for the opportunities to share my experience, because I know my story reaching more people means maybe more people will realize what was done to them and fight to be compensated as well.

Diana: I think it is possible to stop the state of CA from forcibly sterilizing people. I think the way the state operates is to move their targets to be able to be more undercover or underhanded. That's why we stress the ways in which incarceration is a form of eugenics, or stopping people's reproductive capacity. Usually, in this country as a whole, if the public is made aware of abuses, and there's enough people power to challenge those abuses, then change gets made. Still, in most cases, the government finds a way to work around people power and penalize people, or to keep people disempowered. Sterilization is a form of disempowerment, from your body and your autonomy.

We haven't heard of forced sterilizations in the recent period. Some people want sterilization – which is a person's choice – and they aren't able to get it now. Some have complained to us that



Collage portrait of Moonlight Pulido by NBC, courtesy of CCWP.

the rules are too strict, one of those ironic outcomes, where a law that's supposed to empower people's autonomy can be used in a prison setting against them. That is not the purpose of the legislation we worked to pass. **The key is not the sterilization itself, but the coercion and the issue of body autonomy.** People should have the right to control their own bodies, which is under fire in society as a whole right now.

What do you advise folks still inside, given your experience and knowledge with forced sterilization and the medical system inside prisons?

Moonlight: Try to pay attention to your body and what it's feeling. Ask for a second opinion. If they do tell you like they told me, “You got two growths,” ask for a biopsy. “Show me!” Don't just take the doctor's word as solid. Ask someone to show you the proof. Ask for a second opinion and know your body and follow your gut instinct. Be more aware of the medical staff, and ask for proof. I wish I had asked for some proof.

Diana: One project I hope CCWP figures out once we're finished with the reparations process is developing a Know Your Reproductive Rights in prison pamphlet guided by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. Being informed and becoming an active advocate around your own health care is critical. I think it is very important for people to access verifiable information, which is very hard in prison, making standing and speaking up, like Moonlight has been repeating, essential.

If imprisoned readers of *The Abolitionist* have other experiences of sterilization, they can write to CCWP or CR, too, and we'll do our best to connect and support. ♦

About the Authors: **Moonlight Pulido** is a 58 years old Native American woman, who was recently paroled from CA Institution for Women and a survivor of forced involuntary sterilization. Since getting released, she has joined CCWP.

Diana Block is a founding and active long-term member of the CA Coalition for Women Prisoners. A social justice activist since the 1970s, Diana has been organizing around forced sterilization in CA women's prisons for the past four years.

REPARATIONS FOR REPRODUCTIVE HARM

If you think you were sterilized without your knowledge, under pressure, or without sufficient information and time to give an informed consent, you have until December 31, 2023 to submit an application for compensation. Please ask prison staff for an application or write to request one from CCWP.

If you received a letter from the Victims' Compensation Board denying your application, you have sixty (60) days to appeal the decision. If you miss the 60-day deadline you can submit a reapplication up until December 31, 2023.

CCWP recommends anyone in a women's prison who has received an abdominal surgery or procedure submit an application.

CCWP can support you with applications, appeals, and reapplications.

Write to:

CA Coalition for Women Prisoners
Attn: Compensation Program
4400 Market St.
Oakland, CA 94608

Or you can send an email via GTL to info@womenprisoners.org or to the CCWP or Critical Resistance member you correspond with and ask them to put you in touch with a CCWP rep who can support you.

What the Women-and-Youth Led Uprising in Iran Reveals about Reproductive Justice, Abolition, and Revolutionary Struggle for Liberation

By Azadeh Zohrabi and Targol Mesbah

In February 2023, **Independent Trade Union and Civil Organizations of Iran**, a coalition of 20 independent labor unions, feminist, student, and civic organizations issued **The Charter of Minimum Demands to the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI)** in the context of social and economic crises facing the country and the state's brutal response to recent uprisings. On the list of demands is the **immediate release of all political prisoners** and the **abolition of the death penalty**. The charter also demands the "immediate and full equality of rights between women and men in all political, economic, social, cultural and family spheres, unconditional abolition of discriminatory laws against sexual and gender relations and tendencies, recognition of the rainbow society LGBTQIA+, decriminalization of all gender relations and tendencies, unconditional adherence to all women's rights over their bodies and destiny, and preventing patriarchal control."

The coalition's charter, fundamentally radical and aligned with prison industrial complex (PIC) abolitionist and feminist agendas, is a clear indication that revolution is brewing in Iran. Protests across the country have continued since September 2022 despite vicious crackdowns, resulting in the imprisonment of tens of thousands of dissenters and widespread torture, deaths, and executions. This is not the first notable uprising in Iran since the IRI came into power after the 1979 revolution that ended the dictatorship of the Pahlavi Dynasty, nor the first wave of major protests in the country in recent years. However, this most recent uprising distinguishes itself from previous waves of protests in that it is led by women and youth and includes different economic classes, trade unions, and minority populations across the country.

The situation unfolding in Iran with the ongoing women- and youth-led uprising, and the promising potential of the coalition's broad-based organizing and radical charter, point to a clear and necessary example of the interconnected struggles between reproductive justice, gender liberation, and PIC abolition. As Iranian-born women living in the US, our decades of activism working and learning alongside Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities informs our abolitionist perspective. By examining the most recent uprisings in Iran, along with excavating its causes from the conditions, beliefs, and triggers for the current wave of resistance to catch fire, we can see how a framework aligned with PIC abolition can advance revolutionary change, all the while holding calls for reproductive justice forever at the heart of true revolution.

THE SPARK TO MONTHS-LONG UPRISING: A FLAME FOR LIBERATION

The ongoing Iranian uprising was initially sparked by the state's murder of 22-year-old Kurdish Iranian woman **Jina Amini** on September 16, 2022, more commonly known in international press by her legal or colonial first name Mahsa. Visiting the capital city of Tehran from the province of Kurdistan, Jina Amini was arrested by the morality police on September 13 for "improper head covering" based on the state's definition of the Islamic code of dress and behavior for women. She died in custody three days later from severe blows to the head, though police originally claimed she died of a heart attack. Within hours of her death, women and youth flooded the streets, shouting Amini's name, removing their hijabs, cutting their hair in mourning, and dancing in defiance.

This was not the first time resistance to mandatory hijabs ignited protests in Iran. Within weeks of coming into power, on March 7, 1979, the IRI initiated the first phase of mandatory head cover-

ing for women and the planned celebration of International Women's Day on March 8 turned instead into a massive protest in Tehran against this mandate. For many, this was one of the first signs of an authoritarian state betraying a revolution led by a coalition of leftist movements, students, and Islamists, signaling a long road ahead for liberation. More recently, women in Tehran protested compulsory hijabs again in 2017 with the White Wednesday movement, when Iranian women removed their hijabs in public as a direct action protest and as part of the wider Iranian democracy movement, which ignited intermittent protests leading up to Amini's murder five years later. Punishment of protesting young girls and women, later known as the "Girls of Enghelab (Revolution) Street," ranged in severity. For instance, in August 2019, Iranian civil rights activist Saba Kord Afshari was sentenced to 24 years behind bars, including 15 years for taking off her hijab in public, which Iranian authorities say promoted "corruption and prostitution." She was acquitted in April 2022.

In the protests after Amini's death, the chant *Jin, Jian, Azadi* in Kurdish and *Zan, Zendegi, Azadi* in Farsi, the official language of Iran, spread throughout the country and diaspora, anchoring the protests against gender oppression and state fascism more generally. The slogan, *Woman, Life, Freedom* traces back to the Kurdish freedom movement and its focus on women's autonomy in the building of a democratic society. Women's autonomy is one of the central pillars of the Kurdish freedom movement's paradigm of democratic confederalism, as elaborated by the political prisoner Abdullah Öcalan. Imprisoned since February 1999 on the Turkish prison island Imrali, and in complete isolation since 2015, Öcalan was the founding member of the **Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)** and has written several books as part of his defense case in order to present the historical and structural context of the Kurdish freedom movement. According to Öcalan, patriarchy is the organizing foundation for all systems of domination and exploitation, including the nation-state, capitalism, and colonialism.

In this context, the Kurdish freedom movement's paradigm of democratic confederalism and its emphasis on women's autonomy provides an insightful framework for understanding the connections between gender oppression and state fascism, as well as the broader struggle for reproductive justice. The struggle for reproductive justice and bodily autonomy is multi-dimensional and intersectional with various movements interconnected through their shared goal of challenging systems of domination and exploitation. Framed through the lens of reproductive justice, bodily autonomy over the conditions of reproducing life extends to all social reproduction, not only the reproduction of life through birth but also the ability to reproduce the conditions needed for sustaining a dignified life which includes collective access to nourishing food, clean water, shelter, health care, and an environment free of toxic pollution.

Immediately after her death through the subsequent protests in her name, Amini became an international symbol, not only for the bravery and strength of youth, of women, of the Kurdish people and the marginalized, but also for freedom around the globe—freedom to decide for ourselves how we choose to live, freedom to determine what we do with our own bodies. Amini's death re-exposed the IRI's authoritarian agenda to the world while situating policing and terror as central tools in the reinforcement of patriarchal and reproductive control. The uprising of the Iranian people in response to Amini's murder in police custody reignited a passion for freedom with what we see as a need for abolition emerging at its core.



Iranians protesting in the street. Image provided by article authors.

OVER 40 YEARS OF SUPPRESSION

In Iran, reproductive control is merely one of many areas through which the state intervenes, politicizes, and treats the bodies of women and gender-nonconforming people as their property.

To more fully understand the landscape of how the PIC, gender, and reproductive oppression function together in Iran, as well as the political significance of Jina Amini, we must first understand that the current 40-year-long authoritarian regime of the IRI has maintained its power through a highly repressive, carceral, and patriarchal project for decades. Similarly to the US, police and prisons in Iran are used to strip away bodily autonomy and reproductive rights, particularly in relation to the rights of women, transgender, and non-binary people. The IRI, a government with a "supreme leader" appointed for life, is infamous for enacting serious state violence on women, children, LGBTQIA+, leftists, and marginalized ethnic groups through brutal policing, surveillance, and imprisonment strategies. The regime also manipulates its court, legal, and governance systems to sanction mass beatings, tortures, rape, and executions.

While Iran as a country is known to have struggled for over a century for democracy, some headway has been made to curtail patriarchal violence and gender inequality before. Prior to the creation of the IRI, for instance, the Family Protection Laws of 1967 and 1975 had raised the age of marriage for women to 18, gave women the right to file for divorce, allowed them to keep custody of their children after divorce, and limited the power of men to engage in polygyny. The law also created family courts to decide family issues and women could serve as judges in the courts. However, when the IRI came into power, these rights were quickly rescinded under the direction of Iran's new "supreme leader", Ruhollah Khomeini. The IRI reduced the legal age of marriage to 9 years old for girls (raised to 13 in 2002), repealed the Family Protection Law, prevented women from serving as judges, reduced their access to work in the legal field, and imposed mandatory hijab laws.

Additional laws set by the IRI as recently as 2021 criminalize bodily autonomy and reproductive rights, including the criminalization of abortion, barring public healthcare providers from offering free contraception, and banning voluntary sterilization – violations that are now punishable by death. The changes in reproductive laws in Iran have shifted according to the political motivations of the IRI. After the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) when many families were left without a male head of household, having more than one or two children was discouraged and contraception was made available. Today, as Iran grows increasingly militaristic and carceral, the government is encouraging all families to have multiple children and eliminating access to contraception. Women are viewed, by the IRI, as nothing more than reproductive machines producing bodies to fuel their wars.

Further violations of bodily autonomy under the IRI arrived in the form of laws preventing married women from traveling without permission from their husbands or taking any job that the husband

Continues on next page

believes would interfere with the family interest. Today, prohibited from dancing or singing in public, attending sporting events, riding bicycles, or eating in co-ed cafeterias at their universities, women in Iran have no legal protection against domestic violence, sexual harassment, or discrimination. Same-sex relationships are punishable by flogging and, for men, the death penalty.

Enforced by extrajudicial physical violence and state violence, these strict laws against bodily autonomy and reproductive rights create a dangerous misogynistic climate that facilitates and endorses violence against women, trans, and non-binary people. In addition to vigilante violence, many of these laws are punishable by prison time, corporal punishment, and execution. In the case of mandatory hijab, the morality police were created to enforce the requirement that women dress according to the IRI's interpretation of Islamic law. Similar to the "stop and frisk" practice in US policing, each year, millions of Iranian women are stopped, warned, arrested, detained, beaten, and imprisoned for not being in strict compliance with the law. Jina Amini was one of these women.

In addition to sweeping criminalization and severe punishment, the IRI has imposed surveillance infrastructure nationally to police women's autonomy. Surveillance cameras with facial recognition in public transportation, streets, universities, and government buildings broadcast women's faces to cops who then arrest them in their homes and places of employment for wearing their hijabs improperly. Popular surveillance through social media also results in women routinely imprisoned for posting pictures or videos of themselves dancing, singing, or without hijab. The "**Rejuvenation of the Population and Support of the Family**" bill, passed in 2021, extended surveillance to women's health and reproduction, requiring the Health Ministry to work with police to create a database to track anyone visiting a health center for fertility treatment, pregnancy, labor, or abortion.

The laws and policies of the IRI have been shaped by a repressive and patriarchal project that has been in place for four decades. Women and gender-nonconforming people have not only been particularly impacted by the regime's use of police and prisons to strip away their bodily autonomy and reproductive rights, they are also now leading the revolution to create a different future.

REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE

At the time of this writing during the current women- and youth-led uprising, an estimated 22,000 protestors have been imprisoned. Just as the IRI is well-known for its authoritarianism, the prison system is notorious for its ruthlessness. **Iran's prison population was around 10,000 in 1980 and is estimated at over 200,000 in 2023**, over a 2000% increase while this regime has been in power, rising significantly during periods of protest and political unrest.

In the capital, Evin prison, the main political prison built in 1972 by the Pahlavi regime, has been significantly expanded with deteriorating conditions due to overpopulation, more severe repression, and greater state impunity. During a five-month period in 1988, the IRI extrajudicially executed up to 30,000 leftist political prisoners by the decree of the "supreme leader," Ayatollah Khomeini. The current president of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi, was the Deputy Prosecutor General at the time, one of the four members of the "Death Committees" that administered the executions. His assumption of the presidency in August of 2021 signaled the coming intensification of the IRI's already brutal repression tactics.

Not unlike the US, a vicious prison system is only one instrument in the IRI's reign of terror. Rural provinces with concentrations of Kurdish and Baluchi ethnic minorities have been the harshest sites of state repression, murder, imprisonment, and military occupations. Home to a diverse population of Kurds, Balochis, and other marginalized groups, the provinces of Kurdistan, Sistan, and Baluchestan have long been subjected to economic exploitation by the Iranian government. Despite their rich natural resources, these remain the poorest provinces in Iran. Denying basic infrastructure such as roads, schools, and hospitals, the government has granted extractive industry licenses like mining to national and foreign companies, leading to the exploitation



A Muslim woman writing "woman, life, freedom" on the wall." Image provided by article authors.

of the region's natural resources without adequate compensation to local communities. Consequentially, these regions have remained strongholds of resistance, including a major site for organized labor. Yet the IRI's control and capture of bodily and collective autonomy extends beyond women's bodies to include any form of dissent in the context of a devastated economy due to corruption, militarization, and neoliberal-style consolidation of capital and power.

Additionally, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC, also known as *Sepah*) which holds extraordinary political and economic control, is charged with the protection of the Islamic Republic as well as its regional and international interests, functioning as both the militarized domestic police force as well as an international one. Specific examples include well-documented cases of Iranian dissidents being captured or assassinated outside the country and IRGC's support of the Assad regime in Syria. Within the country, the IRGC is the most powerful entity in Iran, not only in terms of political and economic influence but also in being much more heavily armed than the army. The use of the term "revolutionary" within the name of a most repressive state institution seems absurd and part of the IRI's capture of even the term "revolutionary." Since the 1979 revolution, the current women- and youth-led uprising is the first time the term *revolution* has been rightfully reclaimed, even as the IRI continues to call leftists counter-revolutionaries.

Within these existing complexities of domination and resistance, the bravery of young women protesting with and without their hijab, calling for revolution—and the impressive resilience and fortitude in sustaining protests for over six months as they have spread across the country from city to town, inside and outside of prisons—presents such a great threat that thousands of young girls have been attacked by chemical poison released in nearly 100 girls' schools in 20 different cities. The persistent protest and direct actions by women, youth, and ethnic minorities in the face of the IRI's legacy and layered practice of state terror help shape the revolutionary potency of this moment. The current uprising could very well become a full-fledged revolutionary movement challenging a central anchor of the IRI's control of bodily autonomy that extends to the population at large.

WOMAN, LIFE, FREEDOM NECESSITATES ABOLITION NOW FOR ALL

Using PIC abolition as a framework to examine the budding revolution in Iran exposes both the violence created by interlocking systems of oppression, and openings for where and how to dismantle these systems in favor of life-affirming, community care-centered approaches to addressing harm. Moreover, applying a PIC abolitionist lens rooted in the Kurdish Freedom movement's centering of women's autonomy necessitates disrupting the binaries, dichotomies, and contradictions that reinforce the PIC. This lens offers an alternative vision of justice, equality, and liberation with women and youth at the center and in leadership.

In Iran, the state's regulation of reproductive choices is intertwined with its enforcement of gender and sexual norms, which are rooted in patriarchal and heteronormative values. This intersectional view makes visible the need to abolish the IRI and its carceral infrastructure while also eliminating the cultural and familial practices and beliefs that uphold patriarchal and heteronormative values as essential. Abolition brings attention to these intersections and pushes for a holistic ap-

proach to reproductive justice in order to address multiple forms of oppression.

Additionally, abolitionist analysis enables us to understand that **resistance against patriarchy and reproductive oppression benefits people of all genders and advances freedom for all our communities**, a truth clearly demonstrated in this revolution-making moment in Iran today. Gender roles and expectations in Iran are determined by the state and they create a binary system where women are seen by the law as inferior and subservient to men. The IRI also violates the bodily autonomy of men through compulsory military service, dress codes, restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, and a ban on voluntary sterilization. Men who do not conform to traditional notions of masculinity or who engage in same-sex relationships often face imprisonment, corporal punishment, and even death. The fact that millions of Iranian men in Iran and the diaspora are supporting this revolution and its explicitly feminist goals and slogans reflect this understanding.

Using abolition as a framework to disrupt the patriarchal ideology weaponized by the state apparatus of the IRI also, then, challenges the ways in which the state uses violence to maintain its power overall. Abolitionist analysis argues that the PIC relies on the logic of punishment, containment, and exclusion to maintain its power and that these strategies are ultimately ineffective and harmful. Rather than relying on punishment and exclusion, as abolitionists, we advocate for a society that prioritizes freedom, life, accountability, healing, restoration of the earth, movement building, bodily autonomy, and collective self-determination. We not only fight for this to become our everyday reality in our own communities but around the world at large, moving always in solidarity with all struggles against oppression, domination, powerlessness, and inequality internationally.

Perhaps this is the first time in the history of Iran that populations across different social and economic strata are seeing their struggles connected to each other.

Imprisoned public figures such as musicians, intellectuals, actors, athletes, human rights lawyers, and filmmakers have captured international headlines for their courageous acts of defiance and protest in the face of state brutality against the general population. Many have been active for decades, some have gone into exile, and some decided to stay risking recurring arrests as political dissidents. What remains underreported are the arrests, torture, and murder of minorities including Kurds and Baluchis especially—and also the targeting of other religious and ethnolinguistic populations, the poor, women, LGBTQ+, environmentalists, healthcare workers, intellectuals, cultural workers and any form of dissidents—during the current revolutionary uprising.

The Charter of Minimum Demands of the Coalition includes a list of 12 demands beginning with the call to release all political prisoners and continues to address all the conditions needed to create a life-affirming society, bodily autonomy for all, and collective self-determination including noninterference of the state in local councils. The struggle for bodily autonomy in Iran is deeply interdependent with the struggle for abolition. People's bodies are not the property of the state to control and imprison. Ultimately, everyone has a stake in the fight for reproductive justice, and everyone benefits from an abolitionist society. It is essential that we work together to sharpen our understanding of these frameworks and explore possibilities for application in our approach to liberation. ♦

About the Authors: *Azadeh Zohrabi* is an Iranian born refugee, activist, educator, and lawyer. She currently serves as the Executive Director of *Underground Scholars* at UC Berkeley and is a co-founder of *Iranians for Abolition*.

Targol Mesbah teaches in the Anthropology and Social Change department at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. She was born in Iran, lives in Oakland and is a co-founder of *Iranians for Abolition*.

Instagram: @IraniansforAbolition
Twitter: @iran4abolition

9971: Reproductive Justice Is a Men's Issue Too

By Stephen Wilson

Imprisoned people pay attention to the courts, much more than people in free society. We know a ruling, especially from the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS), can open or shut doors, knocking down or creating barriers to freedom for us. Imprisoned people regularly discuss the impact and implications of court rulings. So when SCOTUS overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, I was perplexed that imprisoned people weren't discussing its impact. Where I was incarcerated, there was no sense of outrage. It was a nonissue. Imprisoned people, overwhelmingly **cis-het** (meaning people who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth and who are heterosexual, or sexually attracted to the opposite sex), felt it didn't concern them. I was disturbed by this disregard.

When I was told issue 39 of *The Abolitionist* would focus on reproductive justice, I saw an opportunity to engage imprisoned cis-het men and address a failure to connect issues. I asked 9971 members: **Why should reproductive justice be important to imprisoned cis-het men?** I also invited outside allies to chime in. The responses, from inside and outside the walls, fell into three general categories.

1. If you are against oppression, reproductive justice should be a concern.

Respondents felt there should be no picks when it comes to fighting oppression. If you are about freedom, you fight oppression wherever and whenever you encounter it. Garrett Felber wrote: "I always find it strange when people ask why they should care about oppression that seems to primarily affect a group they are not a part of. If you are not directly experiencing it, you're likely implicated in its perpetuation. There are only two sides of oppression: those experiencing it and those perpetuating it. By that, I mean, if you're fighting it, you are experiencing it. If you are not fighting it, you are maintaining it."

Dr. Felber's comment made us think about how our silence made us complicit in this particular oppression. We had to ask ourselves: **Who benefits from our silence? Why do we need to be directly impacted to care?**

Marquis Bey's response brilliantly answered the question: "Because what one finds important or worthy of caring about often isn't, and maybe shouldn't be, about oneself. If I cared only about things that directly related to me, I'd care about very little, in fact (and I'd be kind of an asshole). Often times, the things we care about affect those we care about, those with whom we are in relation and solidarity."

This response led to 9971 members listing all the people we are in relation with directly impacted by reproductive justice. We began to see why reproductive justice should matter to us: It matters to people we love. But Marquis Bey pushed us further, saying: "We need to think: *Why do I have to be close to someone for whom reproductive justice is pertinent in order to care about it? Am I not a part of a world that is interdependent, where there are people who aren't close to me but who also matter?*"

2. Reproductive justice is about bodily autonomy.

The issue of **bodily autonomy** resonated with members most. This was the point that connected people to the struggle for reproductive justice. When framed as a bodily autonomy issue, imprisoned people understood what was at stake. Safear, a recently released person and 9971 member, wrote: "At its core, reproductive issues are issues of autonomy. It is a question asking:

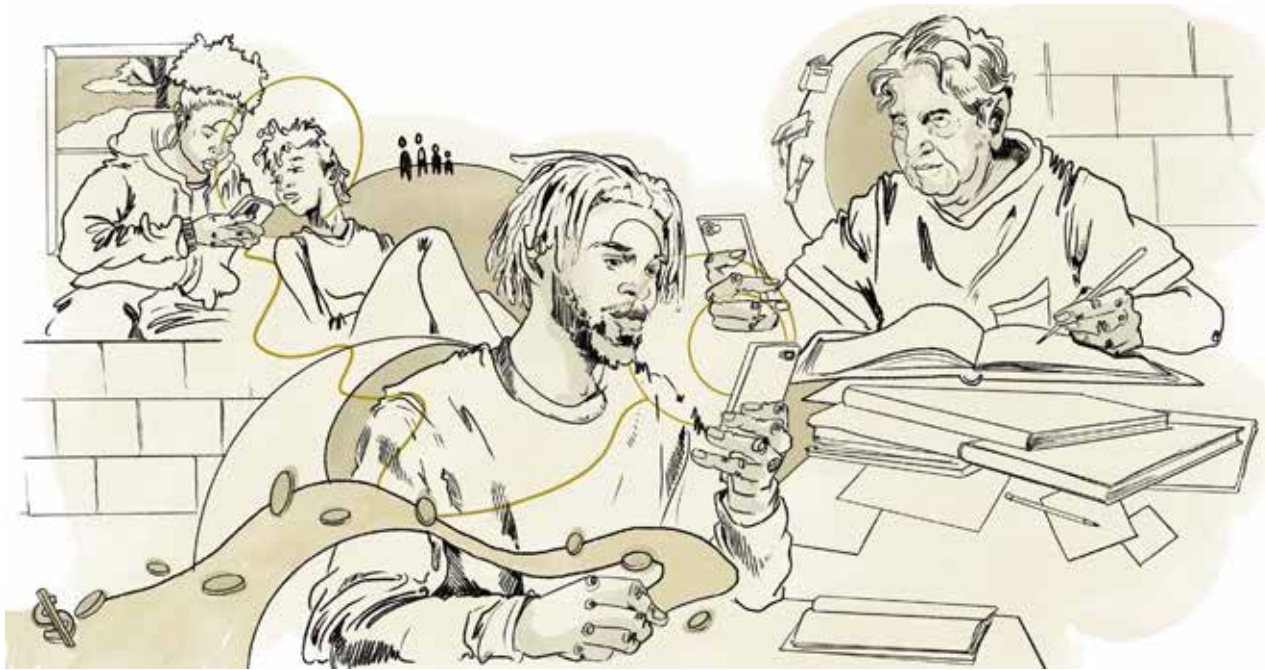


Illustration by Kayla Salisbury for The Marshall Project.

How much right does one have over their own body? By following a framework of restricting women from the right to deal with their bodies on their terms, we end up at the prisoner's body. Are you allowed to grow your beard? Shave your head? Get a tattoo? Is it a contradiction to say that a woman shouldn't be allowed to choose what to do with her body, but you should?" Similarly, Eric Stanley stated: "I think reproductive justice should matter to cis men, because it represents the state drive to control bodies, which is also to say people. I think of the struggle against prisons, for reproductive justice and gender affirming healthcare as all bound up, in that they are all about bodily autonomy."

"At its core, reproductive issues are issues of autonomy. It is a question asking: How much right does one have over their own body? By following a framework of restricting women from the right to deal with their bodies on their terms, we end up at the prisoner's body. Are you allowed to grow your beard? Shave your head? Get a tattoo? Is it a contradiction to say that a woman shouldn't be allowed to choose what to do with her body, but you should?"

Imprisoned folks experience bodily violations and restrictions daily. We are touched without our consent or permission. We are told what we can and cannot do with our bodies and threatened with physical violence for moving, using, or presenting our bodies in unauthorized ways. Imprisoned people's bodies are continually monitored and controlled by the state. Exercising bodily autonomy places one under constant threat of punishment. I believe this is why framing reproductive justice as a bodily autonomy issue strongly resonates with imprisoned cis-het men. Eae Benioff wrote that the logic of criminalizing abortion "emanates out of a vision of patriarchal state repression in which people's bodily autonomy is violated constantly as the due course of social life. In that framing, I hope cis men begin to see the daily violence they experience inside as connected to and, in fact, a product of the same patriarchal structures." Members definitely made this connection.

3. Reproductive justice is about the right to parent.

Only one outside comrade alluded to this point. Danielle Squillante wrote: "It is about having autonomy and self-determination not just over our bodies but also over our families – the ability to decide whether we have children, how many

we have, and be able to raise them in a safe environment without state intrusion." Once it was shared with them, imprisoned folks felt strongly about this point, as well.

Many people behind bars are parents. The state works to sever the parent-child relationship. The federal government has incentivized the state to terminate imprisoned people's parental rights. We are told we must have in-person visits with our children a certain number of times per year or our rights will be terminated. Then, the state moves us hundreds of miles across the state, away from our families, and offers no assistance to effectuate these visits. Imprisoned people are told we are bad people who don't deserve to be parents. Moreover, imprisonment precludes one from reproducing. Not only are we told we are too bad to parent. **We are restricted from reproduction. Is this not a reproductive justice issue?** Reproductive justice is about more than access to abortion; it entails the right to be a parent too. In the mainstream media, the issue often gets shrunk down to abortion access, and that may be the issue for some people. But for imprisoned people, men, women, and gender-nonconforming or nonbinary people, the issue is much larger. Our very right to have children, to be in our children's lives, is what is at stake.

9971 members shared their own struggles with the courts to maintain custody of their children while imprisoned and to have visits with their children while imprisoned. They related how the family welfare system forces the mothers of their children to sue them for child support while they are imprisoned in order to receive state assistance, straining their relationships with their children's mothers and exacerbating their already shaky financial condition. With these connections made clear, members clearly saw their right to parent as a reproductive justice issue.

This exchange of responses and the discussions they prompted helped cis-het members of 9971 see reproductive justice as a broad issue that encompasses matters that directly impact them and their loved ones.

I would like to hear from other imprisoned people and learn what people think about reproductive justice and why it should be important to us. Also, **what are we doing to connect this issue to our larger fight for freedom?**

Always,

Stevie ♦

About the Author: *Stephen Wilson* is a Black, queer abolitionist writing, (dis)organizing, and building study groups and community behind the wall in Pennsylvania. A subscriber of *The Abolitionist* for a few years now, Stevie became a columnist of our newspaper in 2020. "9971" is his column focused on radical study for abolition, and also refers to an inside study group.

INSIDE-OUTSIDE FISHING LINE:

“Everything that exists, we are its keepers”

By Mapuche Political Prisoners on Reclaiming Land, Culture and Resisting Repression with Débora Vera

Editors' Note: On October 4, 2022, as part of an ongoing attack on the Mapuche struggle to defend their territory which encompasses parts of what is currently the states of Chile and Argentina, there was a raid by a “unified command” made up of four federal forces—the Federal Police, National Gendarmerie, Naval Prefecture, and the Airport Security Police—to destroy and evict the Mapuche people from their land, the Relmu Lafken, currently named Mascardi Village by the Argentinean state. Seven Mapuche women were arrested along with their children. For this issue's *Inside-Outside Fishing Line*, CR's The Abolitionist Editorial Collective contacted **Débora Vera**, one of the Mapuche women arrested to learn more about their struggle to reclaim their land and culture and how they are resisting repression. Weeks after being released, Débora became the spokesperson for the four Mapuche political prisoners who are still under house arrest in the city of Bariloche. Since police burned down and destroyed their homes during the raid, they are now imprisoned at a borrowed and overcrowded Mapuche center. We hope this interview can spread awareness and enhance solidarity with the Mapuche struggle.

Comrades, lamuen (the word for “sisters” in apudungún, Mapuche language), we thank you for reaching out to us in such a difficult moment. We offer our solidarity with the struggle for your freedom and the reclaiming and demilitarization of your territory and the Mapuche identity. We know very little here about your struggle, and we would like you to tell us about it and the current situation.

We are Mapuche political prisoners. According to the justice system in Argentina, the fabricated charges of trespassing used to make a case against us does not require time served in prison. A person may be placed under detention for a day at most, but we are still here, just for being Mapuche. We want to reclaim our own being as Mapuche people, our identity, our culture, reclaim our ancestral knowledge, our language, our territory. All this involves putting up a fight, to reclaim everything that the establishment of the Argentine state sought to strip away, murder, and disappear. This is the struggle we are engaged in and the banners we are fighting under: freedom to the lamuen and the twelve children, the return of the rewe to the Machi and the community, a halt to persecution, because there are people with arrest warrants, in clandestinity, who have experienced the same just because they are Mapuches. We are also fighting for the dissolution of the Unified Commando, a provincial and national task force set up by the state to clamp down and militarize the territory.

We were part of a community, and in that community our Machi used to live. The Machi is the ancient spiritual authority of the Mapuche people on this side of **Puel Mapu**; that is, on the Argentine side of the territory. She is the first Machi that has risen to authority in more than a hundred years. In other words, before the infamous “Conquest of the Desert”—when the Argentine state carried out a genocide against the our people through a military campaign led by the infamous General Roca to decimate the Indigenous population across the Patagonian Desert, establishing dominance and control over the territory—there used to be many Machis and many spiritual authorities. This is why it is so important for our people that the Machi be in her *rewe*, a ceremonial space that exists in this community, in the territories. That *rewe* is with



Photo of Mapuche women political prisoners provided by Débora Vera.

her and she is with that *rewe*. Being far away from that *rewe*, she becomes ill, her health deteriorates to the extent that she may die. It is the same with children, who are also part of the community and very sensitive when away from their territory, also becoming ill. Here in the South, in Argentina's Patagonia, there are many communities that have also recovered their territory. We say *recovered* because these are territories that historically belonged to the Mapuche since ancient times, which private actors have sought to take away from us and do business in. Even the National Parks agency, which is part of the state, which allegedly preserves these places, is open to real estate brokers. We, as Mapuche people, preserve not only the place, but also its biodiversity, our *ixofill mongen*, as we say in our **Mapudungún**, our language: everything that has life within it—lakes, rivers, animals.

Everything that exists, we are its keepers. Each territory has a community, and that community is the guardian of those places—we are with the place. We are with our *mapu*; we are with our land and so she is with us. There are people who go against that—businessmen in collusion with the state—because, no matter who is in office, they are always against us. They dub this biodiversity “natural resources” and want to do real estate business, mine, and extract from the land. This is why it is so hard; **the struggle of reclaiming our territory, of our identity, is one hundred years old.**

On October 4, 2022 there was an eviction attempt—and we call it an eviction *attempt* because, a group of *wenchu*, of men, resisted and are still resisting across the territory, while the Unified Commando is after them day in and day out. After being detained the following day, the pregnant lamuen was forcibly taken to a hospital. Four of us were transported to Buenos Aires—some 900 miles away—on a Prefecture plane, (the same Prefecture that murdered Rafael Nahuel in 2017, a *weichafe*, a warrior, who was also part of that community). We were separated and taken to three different places: Buenos Aires, the hospital, and two of us were left at an outpost at the airport in Bariloche. We were completely unable to communicate with our babies for three days, and those of us transferred to Buenos Aires remained “disappeared.”

What are the challenges of house arrest? Sometimes people speak of house arrest as if it were a sort of “softer” punishment, but it's actually a way of extending a system of control and surveillance that is seldom spoken about.

House arrest is nothing but control and surveillance. Custody was supposedly imposed to not obstruct the investigation, but the investigation ended a month and a half after our arrest. Soon after, the space for a dialogue between state officials and a delegation of Mapuche authorities who represented the community started. The judge, and even the president of Argentina, says that continuing house arrest is an act of arbi-

trariness. And so, the only reason we are still here is because we are Mapuches.

House arrest is more similar to being in jail than a house. Whose house, anyway? We used to live in the territories, and the houses and belongings were destroyed by the commando. This space, which is a Mapuche community center in the city of Bariloche, was given to us so that house arrest could be implemented close to our children. In actuality this is not being at home, and the conditions are very poor. When you are in house arrest, you can't go out to work and there is no income. We used to sustain ourselves with our animals and the farm, not with money. Here, in the city where we are under house arrest, we cannot survive without money. In solidarity with our struggle, other Mapuche and non-Mapuche people created a community fund for us to sustain our daily life. It's not even like a prison, where you get some food or clothes; under house arrest, nothing is provided to you and the children. All in all, it's a difficult situation.

We would like to know more about the effects of house arrest on children, mostly considering the repercussions that the long and sustained colonial violence may have on upbringing, both for childrearing and for communicating and keeping the history of the Mapuche alive for future generations.

In regard to children, it is a very difficult situation because they are very sensitive, and they get ill being far away from the territories. This is reflected in “winka illnesses,” as we call Western illnesses, and which are also spiritual illnesses. They cannot understand why they are unable to reach back home, back to their territory where they used to walk around and be free. They have grown up in the countryside with a Mapuche worldview (*cosmovisión*), so they are not used to being in the city. Let's just say there's another upbringing down here. Everything's so violent. We have experienced many violent scenes since our detention, but the truth is that this violence continues and you see that reflected among children. Those most affected by this are children, and the Machi, in this particular case.

It is also difficult to keep and communicate Mapuche history when we are in an overcrowded setting. Very difficult. We must share spaces a lot. Around this time, the school period begins. Some individuals related to education have come to us, wanting to lend a helping hand, but it's tough to be constant. Children used to go to class and, even though they couldn't attend every week because of work in the countryside and so on, they did go, and now their school term has been disrupted.

They used to go to a school about two miles away, and it took a lot for our kids to adapt to school and for the school to adapt to them because they were discriminated against by their own peers, and not all teachers treated them well either. They experienced a lot of discrimination and persecution for being Mapuches. State officials have come to request children be schooled here in the city, but if they used to be discriminated against out there in the countryside at a rural school, just imagine what it'd be like for them here in the city. Cycles and spaces that were being developed with children in the countryside have also been disrupted a lot, along with the ways of attempting to communicate history, which is so important to protect as a part of the continuation of our people. Children represent all that: the continuation of our people. There are twelve imprisoned kids, among them three babies, one whom was born with their mother in custody. If these children were not Mapuches, the story would be different—they'd perhaps be free with their mommas—but discrimination is so huge, and society naturalizes it so much that they are still locked away.

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The arrest of women and, among you, the Machi, is a direct attack against those who sustain the community, life, the wisdom of the people. What daily forms of resistance give you the strength to keep fighting?

Our strength comes from our ceremonies, from our *feientum*, our beliefs, our faith, from the *newen* that we have as Mapuches, as people in connection with earth, in connection with the *nien*, with biodiversity. Also, communication among us and with other Mapuches who come seeking advice keeps us strong. It becomes difficult, of course, but determination is still on our side. We, Mapuche women, will never give up on what we are. That's what they want to silence, what they want to disappear. We will never renounce what we are. We've never done it when we were under arrest, forcibly transferred, or tortured; neither have the mothers, who have been separated from their children. We have never been broken, never kneeled down; we have always remained steadfast, so we won't back down now. We are still strong, still have our convictions, our conviction of keeping our culture alive, of being the guardians of biodiversity. We are still strong with our *feientum*, our beliefs.

“Our strength comes from our ceremonies, from our *feientum*, our beliefs, our faith, from the *newen* that we have as Mapuches, as people in connection with earth, in connection with the *nien*, with biodiversity. Also, communication among us and with other Mapuches who come seeking advice keeps us strong. It becomes difficult, of course, but determination is still on our side. We, Mapuche women, will never give up on what we are.”

We appreciate this space a lot—we hope something is understood about our struggle. We know it's hard and we hope those who read this are also resilient, have the conviction of what is, and understand that this was not just an attack against a Mapuche community alone or against the Mapuche people; it is also an attack against

all peoples who preserve the water, the earth, and the life we look after. It is an attack on the resistance against the assault of extractive businesses, the real estate businesses, and the mega mining companies. This is a breakthrough for these companies, for these scheming businesses, and an advance for the right-wing. All conscious society must also understand that winning this fight also may set a precedent for the preservation of biodiversity, of the water we all drink, and for these scheming businesses to stop, for the only thing they want is to destroy it all. Strength to everyone all the same. **Newen tuleymun**, as we used to say.

At the moment, we feel the state has abandoned the dialogue roundtable, and we still have the will to establish a dialogue despite the different kinds of violence we have gone through, and still hope the state is willing as well, that National Parks is also willing, *that they stop prioritizing profit and political and economic interests over our lives*. We shall remain steadfast. If the dialogue roundtable does not move forward, the state and its accomplices will have to bear responsibility for whatever may happen if the community takes another turn or if the Machi's health deteriorates further, or that of the children or any of the **lamuen**. We will remain determined in our identity, in our culture, and in reclaiming the territories. ♦

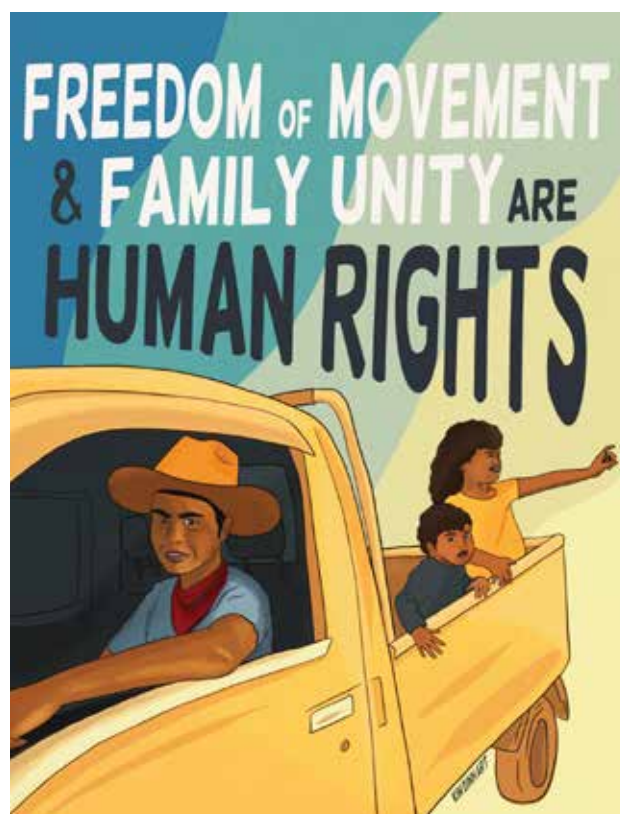
ABBY THROWBACK: Criminalizing Existence: Migrants and the PIC by Harsha Walia

Editors' Note: *The following selection for this issue's Abby Throwback is from Harsha Walia, originally printed in Issue 20 of The Abolitionist in the summer of 2013. Ten years ago now, some of the statistics and data have surely changed, yet the overall points of analysis and connection Walia draws out between immigration, criminalization, and the prison industrial complex (PIC) remain timely and relevant. We offer this piece again this time in an issue focusing on reproductive justice to remind our readers of the myriad ways the PIC separates families and restricts or denies people's rights to self-determination, to bodily autonomy, and to parenting not only through imprisonment in prison and jail systems, but also through detention and other separation practices like deportation. Therefore, migrant justice, or the intersections between immigration systems and the PIC also known as "crimmigration," pose essential considerations for reproductive justice struggles.*

Migrant detention regimes are a key component of Western state-building through the racist assertion of border controls and the growing detention industrial complex. According to research conducted by the Global Detention Project, *“migration-related detention is the practice of detaining—typically on administrative (as opposed to criminal) grounds—asylum seekers and irregular immigrants... Migration detainees often face legal uncertainties, including lack of access to the outside world, limited possibilities of challenging detention through the courts, and/or absence of limitations on the duration of detention.”*

Migrants, particularly undocumented migrants or asylum seekers arriving irregularly, are punished, locked up, and deported for the very act of migration. Deportations under President Barack Obama skyrocketed to a total of 1.4 million people. Detention and deportation are most severely deployed by Western regimes that create mass displacement and against communities of color whose very recourse to migration results from the ravages of Western capital and military occupations. **Less than five percent of the world's migrants and refugees come to North America**, and when they do, they face armed border guards, indefinite detention in prisons, dangerous and low-wage working conditions, minimal access to social services, discrimination and dehumanization, and the constant threat of deportation.

In order to justify the imprisonment and deportation of these migrants, the state has to allege some kind of criminal or illegal act. Within common discourses, the victim of this criminal act is the state and the alleged assault is upon its borders. The state becomes a tangible entity, with its own personhood and boundaries that



By Kim Dinh, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

must not be violated. Queer feminist philosopher **Judith Butler** describes the policing of the state and its national subject as a “relentlessly aggressive” and “masculinist” project. Within this concept of sexualized nationhood, borders are engendered as needing protection, or as cultural theorist **Katrina Schlunke** puts it, “vulnerable shores that must be kept intact and secured against the threat of un-negotiated penetration by strangers.” By invoking the state itself as a victim, migrants themselves are cast as “illegals” and “criminals” who are committing an act of assault upon the state.

Migrants become prisoners of passage; their unauthorized migration is considered a trespass and their very existence is criminalized. In a telling representation, one of the principal detention centers in Canada is formally known as the “Canadian Immigration Prevention Center Laval.” Migrants are not seen for their actual humanity, but as a problem to be prevented, deterred, managed, and contained. They become stereotyped by politicians, media, and within popular consciousness as floods of people from “over there” who are “disease-ridden,” “fraudulent,” or “security threats.” These narratives buttress moral panics about “keeping borders safe and secure” from poor and racialized migrants.

“Migrants become prisoners of passage; their unauthorized migration is considered a trespass and their very existence is criminalized.”

The words of **Nader**, an Iranian asylum seeker held in a Canadian detention center for six years, shed light on such structures of subjugation: “The length of my detention has not been predicated on any evidence that I am a ‘threat to national security’ or that my release poses any ‘risk to the public safety.’ Yet I have endured the psychological trauma of confinement and the emotional suffering and anxiety of being separated from my son, who has since been granted asylum in Canada.”

EXPANDING PRISON SYSTEM

Migrant detention centers are part of the expanding prison system. In the US, undocumented migrants comprise one of the fastest growing prison populations with over 200 detention facilities, representing an 85 percent increase in detention spaces, and approximately 3 million detentions since 2003. Detained migrant women in the US report routine abuse by male guards including shackling of pregnant detainees. Canada detains approximately 9,000-15,000 migrants every year, more than one-third of whom are held in provincial prisons. A new Canadian law has introduced mandatory detention for many refugees including children over the age of 16. Migrant women in detention in Canada report being denied some of the basic services, such as access to translation services, that male detainees are provided.

Canada even has its own Guantanamo North, a \$3.5 million immigration detention center

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opened especially for security certificate detainees, run by the Canadian Border Services Agency. Under the 2002 Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, a security certificate can be issued to a permanent resident or foreign national who is deemed “inadmissible on grounds of security” and on this basis “shall be detained without the issue of a warrant.” Detainees may be held and imprisoned indefinitely without any charges ever being laid against them and face possible deportation to torture, all on the basis of secret evidence that is never revealed to them. Even though security certificates were deemed unconstitutional in 2007, the Canadian government reintroduced them a year later, and they continue to be used.

State practices of migrant detention create huge corporate profits. Within weeks of 9/11, Steve Logan, a chief executive of the former prison company Cornell Corporations now owned by GEO Group told stock analysts, “It’s clear that since September 11 there’s a heightened focus on detention, both on the borders and in the US...What we are seeing is an increased scrutiny of tightening up the borders...[M]ore people are going to get caught. So I would say that’s positive.” US corporations that run private prisons and detention centers made over \$5 billion in combined annual profits over the past decade. According to Detention Watch Network, five prison corporations that hold contracts with US Immigration have poured \$20 million into lobbying efforts. Arizona’s controversial SB1070, which legalizes racial profiling based on “suspicion of being an illegal immigrant,” was drafted during a meeting between state legislators and the Corrections Corporation of America, the largest private prison corporation in the US. The state and capitalism are in mutual alliance: state criminalization of migrants directly feeds capitalist profits in ever-expanding security markets.

The “tough on illegals” narrative that justifies increased border patrol, armed border guards, migrant detention, immigration enforcement raids in homes and workplaces, and vigilante programs like the Minutemen in the US or deportation tip lines in Canada is not new or unique. These narratives and material practices

are linked to that which predates it, including the “tough on crime” narrative deployed in the 1980s, and the more recent “tough on terror” rhetoric. These discourses have justified the surveillance and incarceration of Indigenous people, Black people, sex workers, homeless people, Muslims, and migrants of color.

CARCERAL NETWORK

Though informed by different logics, the incarceration of these “undesirables” is interrelated. Migrant detention centers, prisons, secret torture facilities, juvenile detention centers, and interrogation facilities are all part of the growing PIC. Foucault explains the expansion of prisons as the self-perpetuation of power: The constant creation of prisoners in order for the state to keep exercising disciplinary power. He describes this as the carceral network, an inescapable and increasingly internalized network of “discourses and architectures, coercive regulations and scientific propositions, real social effects and invincible utopias, programs for correcting delinquents and mechanisms that reinforce delinquency.”

The construction of “illegals” is part of a broader logic that constructs deviants in order to maintain the state’s coercive power, capitalist profiteering, and social hierarchies. Within mainstream narratives, “criminals” are never imagined as politicians, bankers, corporate criminals, or war criminals, but as a class of people who are racialized and living in poverty. “Criminal” becomes synonymous with dehumanizing stereotypes of ghettos, welfare recipients, drug users, sex workers, and young gang members. Similarly, “illegals” are imagined as comprising poor migrants of color, even though many white tourists often illegally overstay their visas. In North America, we can look to the countless police killings of Indigenous and Black men such as Dudley George and Oscar Grant since the enduring violence of genocide and slavery, and also the more recent illegal detentions of over 800 Muslim men and boys in Guantanamo Bay to understand that these bodies are disciplined by being cast as suspicious even before any so-called criminal act has been committed.

“The construction of ‘illegals’ is part of a broader logic that constructs deviants in order to maintain the state’s coercive power, capitalist profiteering, and social hierarchies. Within mainstream narratives, ‘criminals’ are never imagined as politicians, bankers, corporate criminals, or war criminals, but as a class of people who are racialized and living in poverty.”

Therefore, the social control and criminalization that delineates the carceral network and disappears undesirables is the often invisible yet entrenched racist colonial belief that incarceration is a legitimate response to communities who are constructed and characterized innately as being illegals, deviants, criminals, terrorists, or threats. In light of this, it is imperative that we position ourselves in solidarity with communities subjugated to these ritualized forms of violence and incarceration. We have to commit ourselves to over-growing the logic of the state itself by exercising our sovereignties differently, thinking of our identities as a place of connection rather than exclusion, and reconfiguring our kinships based on the shared visions of freedom, liberation, and self-determination. ♦

*Harsha Walia is a South Asian activist, writer, and popular educator trained in the law. She has been active in anti-racist, feminist, anti-war, and social justice issues for over a decade. Based in Vancouver, Canada she is a co-founder of **No One Is Illegal, Radical Desis, and the Northwest Anti-Authoritarian People of Colour Network**. She is the author of the book **Undoing Border Imperialism** (2013), and **Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism** (2021).*

KITES TO THE EDITORS

Dear Critical Resistance,

Greetings. Hopefully this letter reaches you uplifted and dynamic in all your endeavors. These are the times when heroes arise. Let us be assured that positive change is on the horizon.

This letter is an attempt to communicate and organize by the strength of your dialogue with Stevie Wilson, issue 38 of *The Abolitionist*, and the motivation of several individuals here at the Hughes Unit in Gatesville, Texas. A study group has formed called Stomp Down Studies (SDS). The phrase “stomp down” is prison slang for “stiff” or “real”. When you are “stomp down” you are “about that life”. Some of us are experienced, while others are ready to apply action from principle and give teeth to our voice. Much of CR’s *The Abolitionist* #38, related to labor and good time/work time in Texas, has been the basis of our initial analysis. This has had a positive effect on our lives by way of growth, education, and development, as well as the empowerment of our force of movement. Help us channel this momentum into an effective tool. Most of us have huge aggravated sentences and want release.

Material conditions are becoming worse (or ripening), and if this is an inevitable trend—the starving of the PIC’s resources, as per CR’s strategy—we can expect this trend to continue. Due to this fact, we must shift our focus to release. This makes sense and begins to generate a more accurate and realistic understanding of the circumstances we face. Nonetheless, conditions including decreased quality of life, staffing shortages, food shortages, denial of primary re-



“Change Our Worlds” by Shyama Kuver, People’s Paper Co-Op & Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative.

ligious services, under-trained officers, fraudulent grievance systems, increased time in cells, denied access to dayroom/rec/activities (due to security issues related to staffing shortages), increased mailroom censorship, etc.—which are hard to bear—have all been going on for years. The struggle against these conditions has given us the courage and motivation to mobilize.

Some of the internal challenges we face as a collective in SDS are conditioning, miseducation, and a lack of clear understanding of the system and its overarching design and mechanisms. Also, reliable information and actual facts are hard to come by on any given issue. This makes lines hard to identify and analyze. For example, the legislation is considering HB1064, which, I am told, deals specifically with the before mentioned good time/work time credit issue. Yet, none of us in SDS have read or seen the bill. Essentially, our only recourse is speculation. This is something we need support and solidarity from outside organizations to address.

The challenges we face in Texas are sinister and nuanced. While the dialogue between Stevie Wilson and Molly Porzig on prison labor shows a firm grasp on many of the labor issues surrounding the PIC on both state and federal levels, there are some clarifying points to make about Texas:

1. Time earned (instead of labor payment) is considered for parole “eligibility”, not actual release.
2. Above applies to non-aggravated sentences (including “3g” convictions); these cases show accrual of time earned but that time does not apply evenly toward “eligibility”. A flat half is still required.
3. This earned time must be “signed away”, or relinquished moments before release.

And another lesser-known fact regards parole/street time credit, which ubiquitously spills over. Street time accrued, while on parole supervision, is “snatched” away and not counted toward the overall length of any type of violation. Even if your parole supervision is for an entirely different conviction. Moving forward as a collectively ignited ember we would appreciate any insights,

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hard earned experience, or direct support you have to share.

Currently, SDS members participated in “The Work and Us Survey” printed in issue 38. It is an effective organizing catalyst, a tool of empowerment, and—more simply—a way to organize our own thoughts about a prevailing yet cloudy aspect of prison life. Thank you.

A symbol of our resistance in Texas is an airplane ready to take flight with the words “Don’t Mess with Texas” written on its wings—a meme and a mantra—a banner to mobilize under. As these paper airplanes begin to fly about the unit, system, and minds of the captured, may their trajectory reflect a determined resistance and their flight plan be followed by subsequent generations. A “Don’t Mess with Texas” paper airplane, constructed from the very lies that oppress us, may become a symbol of liberation, and in time take flight over the fences as a source of hope and inspiration.

In solidarity,
Stomp Down Studies



Dear Critical Resistance,

I thought CR’s line of analysis on the 13th amendment in issue 38 of *The Abolitionist* quite timely. For some reason much momentum is behind it right now, so I’m glad you tackled it.

You are blessed to know Masai. However, we contend we are not African Americans; we are all New Afrikans, i.e. citizens of the nation (Republic of New Afrika). Additionally, we’re not separatists (not that you implied as much). We are socialists (the real kind) and anti-imperialists. We want a scientific socialist New Afrikan Republic. We contend as stated that we’re already a nation—all that’s left is “consciousness” and sovereignty. The New Afrikan independence movement is real and always evolving. We have much in common with abolitionists and need more calls to starve the beast that is the prison industrial complex (PIC). I’m always trying to educate on mindless violence—only self-defense is acceptable. We can use our non-violence as a tool to show the outrageousness of such a system that’s only here to keep us idle and excluded from society.

We also see this as a great test for internationalism and revolutionary feminism, both crucial elements of not only starving the legal death and incapacitation of the PIC, but also starving the colonial, misogynist mentality and ideology by building revolutionary consciousness and national solidarity globally, both of which will help the Global South as much as us here in a weakening empire. First world workers need to challenge calls for more money that can become pro-imperialist, and if we’re not careful can become a false path for collective liberation, as first world workers can become dependent on the exploitation of the Global South. If comrades in Colombia can’t have it, we shouldn’t want it! I also loved the article from Vilma Rocio Almendra Quiguanas in Colombia and her comrades. I love how CR and *The Abolitionist* keep the struggles of the Global South front and center in the newspaper.

In struggle,
Roderick Lear
Imprisoned in CA



Greeting of Honor & Respect,

I’m a lifer, sentenced to 33 years for sexual battery and great bodily injury in 2003. I’m not in a protective custody prison or on a SNY (sensitive needs yard). I’m on the mainline. I’m an intelligent, politically minded, organization-oriented “Poor Righteous Teacher” who was zealously overcharged, tried and convicted. I was caught up firsthand in the “tough on crime” crackdown. I’m forced to register as a “sex offender” for the

rest of my life. If I am ever released for parole (or found “suitable” for parole), I will carry with me forever the stigma of being a sex offender and automatically be looked at as a pedophile, rapist, or sexual predator.

The system works in the way it was designed to work. From the police, to the prosecutors, to the judges, to the wardens, the prison industrial complex (PIC) just churns along, snatching up the best and brightest and putting us on the shelf. We are the working-age population. But the system has found a way to make more money off of us by having us warehoused in prisons instead of being “working-class” members of society.

The past issue of *The Abolitionist* (#38) really had a lot of good information in it that prompted me to write. I feel very strongly about being able to work once I get out, and if/when I get out, trying to free as many people as I can and keep as many people from falling victim to the PIC as I did. To that end, I’m currently allied with the organization Initiate Justice as an inside organizer trainee. We’re working to mobilize organized resistance and legislate change. If I’m paroled to Sacramento, CA when I go to the board in 2026, I’m going to continue the fight and be able to fight harder, until all injustice, ignorance, etc. is turned into righteousness, equality, freedom, and enlightenment.

I’m a real person. My name is Adonis Keon Rose. I’m from Sacramento, CA, and I’ve been incarcerated since I was 22 years old. I’ve been labeled as a “sex offender” and will have to live with that label for the rest of my life. I work while incarcerated to alleviate the burden on my loved ones of having to send money to my books. Despite what I’ve been labeled, I still fight. I still strive and I walk and I stand upright. If they did this to me, I know they can do it to any of us. I want us all to be free and equal, to not have to fear the PIC.

Thank you.
As-salamu alaykum
wa rahmat allah
wa barakatuh
Peace be with you, the blessings of Allah and all happiness
-Adonis Rose

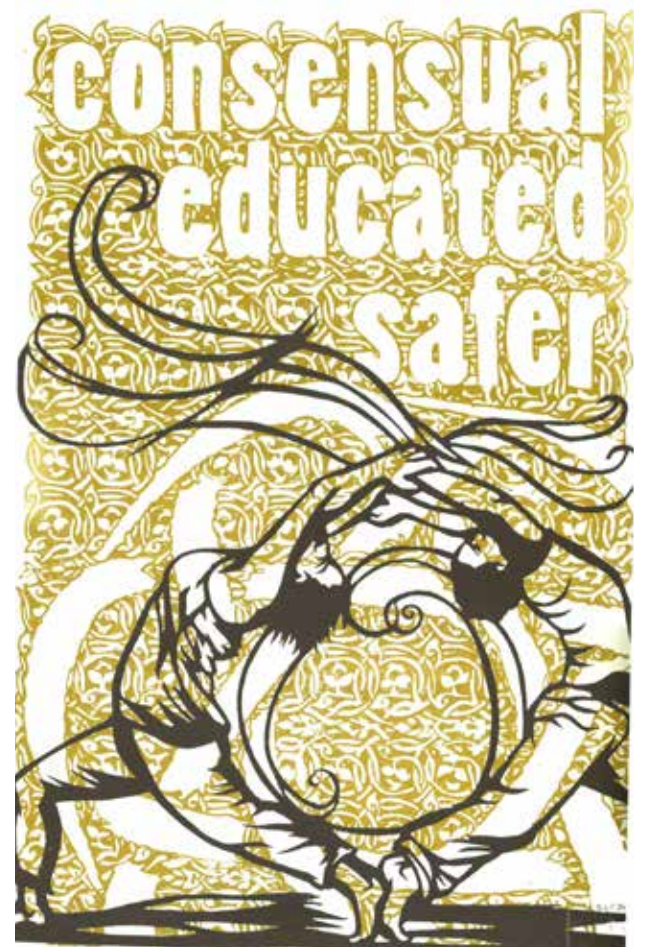


A Kite to the Editors,

Thank you so much for the latest issue of *The Abolitionist*. Very well thought out and assembled with many great articles and factual knowledge that many of us locked in these cages needed to hear and learn. Not many people understand what abolition is and to what depth it transforms society. There are many avenues and multi-tiered approaches to abolition and how to dismantle the prison industrial complex (PIC).

For many years I’ve been advocating for changes in the process of re-entry services for those who are in the process of returning to their communities after imprisonment. For so many years, there were no resources or very few opportunities for those individuals. Many of us returned to our communities broke, with slim to no support, with arrest, conviction and imprisonment records that would bar us from obtaining meaningful employment, and so many demands and rules placed upon us by probation and parole that the chances of success in staying out of a cage seem far-fetched.

After reading the feature section of issue 38 on labor struggles and PIC abolition, I began reflecting on a very important and at times neglected topic when discussing abolition or anti-prison organizing: labor unions. We need to advocate more for a change in who labor unions accept and employ. Due to some successful “Ban the Box” efforts, many states have removed conviction history boxes on many job applications. Now, one would think those convicted of



By Bec Young, Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative.

felonies should be able to apply to local unions once out of prison. As Isaac Ontiveros mentioned, the support for unions is high, but the number of unionized workers is low right now, so the demand for new members of local unions must also be high. Many of us while imprisoned have earned trade certificates or received college credits and degrees inside, making us apt for union work once released. I strongly believe that local leaders, representatives, anti-prison advocates, and re-entry service providers should sit down with local union leaders to discuss and evaluate union criteria and policies that could enable more former prisoners to apply for union jobs of their choice. With unions needing more members, they should consider lifting barriers for formerly imprisoned people to join unions. The chances of being sent back to prison are much lower when we have meaningful employment when we’re released. A good job can balance the rest of our lives.

As we continue into 2023, we are seeing many organizations building more re-entry services and community programs that give those of us returning to our communities meaningful employment, housing assistance, food and clothing vouchers, and now in Virginia a chance to obtain a driver’s license, which previously was another barrier. Successful re-entry and survival once out of prison is one way that we can work to dismantle the PIC. Successful re-entry can empty cages, and prisons and jails would have no choice but to shutter. We chip away at the PIC one cog at a time by unifying together and standing together in solidarity, helping one another gain employment and housing. Together we can create more meaningful and powerful change.

Thank you, CR, for your insights in issue 38. A big shout out, too, to David Annarelli and Pochantas Correctional here in Virginia. It’s good to know I have like-minded comrades-in-arms near and far. Also, many thoughts and prayers to fellow brother Kevin “Rashid” Johnson as he battles cancer. We stand united with you in solidarity and look highly upon you for your strong voice and leadership. We fight together! Keep your head up, stay strong!

In solidarity,
Devin Mergenthaler

Write to Devin at:
Devin Mergenthaler #1201286
Keen Mountain Correctional Center
PO Box 860
Oakwood, VA 24631 ♦

CRITICAL RESISTANCE (CR) UPDATES AND MOVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

CRITICAL RESISTANCE (CR) UPDATES

2023 MARKS 25 YEARS OF CRITICAL RESISTANCE

On May 5 2023, CR celebrated its 25 years of strategy and struggle since our 1998 inaugural conference, which brought thousands of people together to challenge what we now call the “prison industrial complex” (PIC). **Toward Abolitionist Horizons: 25 Years of Critical Resistance** was a large event at San Francisco State University with **Angela Davis, Andrea Ritchie, Ny Nourn, Mohamed Shehk, Kamau Walton, and Stevie Wilson** discussing CR’s legacy, gains made against the PIC in the past 25 years, and envisioning next 25 years as we navigate the tough organizing terrain of converging crises of late-stage capitalism, climate catastrophe, the pandemic and subsequent healthcare collapse, and far right escalating fascism. **Dancing Through Prison Walls**—a California-based dance and performance project whose mission is to dance with, choreography with and tell stories within embodied carceral landscapes and beyond, amplifying voices of incarcerated people, and addressing imprisonment—performed their pieces *DATA and Undanced Dances Through Prison Walls During a Pandemic*, highlighting the deadly impact of COVID-19 on imprisoned people. Leading up to the event, current CR members and volunteers compiled short interviews with imprisoned comrades and CR co-founders and elders reflecting on CR’s impact. We were joined by about 350 people in person, about 350 watching remotely via livestream, and raised \$40,000 for our organization, projects, and campaigns.

If you would like to read a transcript of the event, please write to *The Abolitionist* at CR’s national office and request a CR25 transcript.

CLOSING PRISONS, BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITIES IN CALIFORNIA

CR’s LA and Oakland chapters have been tirelessly working on a California statewide campaign for prison closures and making significant gains. The Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB) coalition has an ambitious and visionary goal of shutting down 10 state prisons by 2025, and CR members are supporting this goal by advancing and leading legislative advocacy, media and communications, in-reach to people in prisons, and community outreach for the campaign. Over the last year, we have:

- **Supported the closure of two state prisons:** Deuel Vocational Institute in Tracy has closed, and CA Correctional Center in Susanville is being vacated and will close no later than June 2023.
- **Confirmed two more prisons for closure:** We received word in December 2022 that



Photo of Dancing through Prison Walls performance at CR’s May 5 event by Brooke Anderson.

Chuckawalla Valley State Prison in Blythe will close next and that the state of California will move to end its contract with the privately owned California City Correctional Facility.

- **Moved the Legislative Analyst Office (LAO)** – a state-level nonpartisan government agency that makes budgetary and policy recommendations to the state legislature – **to recommend our demand of 10 prisons to be closed in the next few years!**
- Successfully launched a statewide roadmap for prison closure!

If we stay on this track with this CA prison closure roadmap, we will shrink California’s prison system by nearly one-third in only five years. Step by step, and year by year, we are dismantling the state’s ability and capacity to cage, disappear, and harm our communities.

ABOLISH ICE & DIGNITY NOT DETENTION IN NEW YORK

As a member of the **Abolish ICE New York New Jersey coalition**, CR’s **New York City chapter (CRNYC)** has been diligently organizing to pass Dignity Not Detention (DND) legislation at the state level. If passed, DND legislation will break all collaboration between local and state entities in New York and federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to cage immigrant New Yorkers. Over the last year, CR members and coalitional partners have:

- Organized a statewide lobby day to get legislators in Albany to support DND.
- Provided participatory defense for migrant New Yorkers detained as repression for their activism inside or outside.
- Distributed and published press releases and media pieces to advance the campaign to free people from immigrant detention and deportation.

For the last two years, immigrants imprisoned in Orange County Correctional Facility (OCCF) have been speaking out and resisting the inhumane conditions of immigrant detention. Several detainees and formerly imprisoned people have experienced retaliation. One activist was

Ms. Q, a longtime NY resident, who fled violence in Ecuador as a child and was detained in OCCF a year ago but was released due to community pressure. Ms. Q was re-detained after continuing to speak against the horrible conditions in ICE detention. Through phone zaps, press conferences, and court support, CRNYC and the Abolish ICE NY NJ coalition were able to win stoppage of Ms. Q’s deportation and recently won her release from Orange County Jail in the spring.

In early April, the coalition worked with legal partners to file a lawsuit against ICE and NY officials for their retaliation against immigrants detained at OCCF. In May, CRNYC and the Abolish ICE NY NJ coalition mobilized dozens of people to Albany, New York for a statewide lobby day demanding New York legislators pass the Dignity Not Detention Act.

OTHER CR CHANGES:

CR is excited to announce that **Alexander Camacho**, a CR Oakland Chapter member, is now on staff as Building Project Manager. Alex brings a wealth of expertise in project management and relationship building in the North Oakland community through helping run CR’s Freedom Fridays programming.

CR would also like to acknowledge an outgoing member, **Marcelena**. Marcelena has been CR’s national Office Administrative Assistant since 2021. Marcelena managed in-office systems for CR’s prisoner mail nationally and supported CROakland’s inside-outside workgroup shift mail and phone correspondence to remote coordination during COVID-19 pandemic. CR wishes Marcelena the best and appreciates their labor for the organization. **Note:** *If you write to Marcelena, please note that they are no longer reachable through CR.*

We also welcome **Anastasia Franco** to a full-time fellowship with CR for 2023. Anastasia joined CR in 2022 as a part-time intern helping CR organize our prisoner correspondence programs. Given Anastasia’s expertise as a formerly imprisoned organizer building digital infrastructure, we’ve brought her on full time. In **Continues on next page**

SUBMIT ART FOR CR’S ANNUAL HOLIDAY POSTCARD: CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF CRITICAL RESISTANCE

Critical Resistance (CR) sends a solidarity postcard to all of our imprisoned comrades for the end-of-year holidays, sharing that we are thinking of everyone inside as we continue struggling for prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition. Since 2023 marks 25 years of CR, we’d like to do a **theme of celebrating 25 years of PIC abolition** through this year’s holiday

card. If you are **interested in submitting artwork to be the cover of 2023’s postcard**, please follow the below submission guidelines and **send to the below address by October 1, 2023.**

In general, CR looks for visuals that are reflective of our political vision. To CR, this means imagery, language, and artwork that is liberating, illustrating people’s collective power to resist, to dream together and to create freedom.

Other guidelines:

- No bars unless they are being broken, no chains unless people are breaking free.

- CR is a non-sectarian and non-denominational organization — “happy holidays” or “season’s greetings” is more inclusive than “Merry Christmas.”
- To illustrate this year’s theme of “25 Years of Critical Resistance to the Prison Industrial Complex” reflect on the gains we’ve made as a movement these past 25 years

Send your 2023 postcard submission to:

Critical Resistance
ATTN: Postcard
PO Box 22780
Oakland, CA 94609

addition to supporting infrastructure for CR's inside-outside correspondence and organizing, Anastasia is spearheading stronger communication systems for CR's mail programs and subscriptions to *The Abolitionist* newspaper, as well as mass mailings of other movement resources to people inside. Write to Anastasia at our national office:

Critical Resistance
Attn: Anastasia Franco
PO Box 22780
Oakland, CA 94609-2301

MOVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

The following movement highlights were compiled from various news sources, including movement partners' email and announcement listservs and mainstream and independent press, such as *Democracy Now*, *Truthout*, *Al Jazeera*, *People's Dispatch*, and more.

WEST COAST California

People Get Ready 4

The Center for Political Education (CPE) in the Bay Area held its fourth annual People Get Ready Conference at UC Berkeley in March. The conference drew about 300 organizers and included cultural performances from the Oakland youth group Young Gifted and Black and SF poet laureate Tongo Eisen-Martin, as well as live screen printing from Dignidad Rebelde. The keynotes and breakout session topics included labor power, greater movement assessment, abolition, confronting the right wing, environmental struggles, Indigenous sovereignty and land back, internationalism and solidarity, and reproductive justice. The event was livestreamed and recorded—see Haymarket or CPE's YouTube pages for videos.

San Francisco Moves Forward with Reparations

In San Francisco, the city's Board of Supervisors accepted recommendations for a reparations plan that could include offering \$5 million to each eligible African American resident, eliminating personal debt and tax burdens, and other measures. The final report is due this summer. This was just one of many steps toward making reparations a reality for Black San Franciscans but offers new hope for the movement, which regained traction following the 2020 uprising for racial justice.

Hunger Strikes at Central Valley ICE Jails

Beginning on February 17 2023, 84 immigrants held at the Mesa Vedre and Golden State Annex started a hunger strike. The action comes out of a 10-month-long labor strike in protest over \$1-per-day pay for the janitorial work done by prisoners. Strikers are also protesting poor conditions such as black mold, spoiled food, abuse and retaliation by ICE. They also have a demand to be released from the jails overall. As of March, protestors in the Golden Gate Annex were still on hunger strike.

The Dublin Prison Solidarity Coalition calls for an End to Sexual Abuse at FCI Dublin

The Dublin Prison Solidarity Coalition is working to stop rampant sexual abuse and gender-based violence against imprisoned people

at FCI Dublin, a federal prison for women. The coalition includes California Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP), Centro Legal de la Raza, Rights Behind Bars (RBB), ACLU Northern California, Dolores Street Community Services, and the California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice and Survivors of FCI Dublin Abuse. The coalition is in contact with over 140 survivors at Dublin who experienced sexual abuse and harassment over the past five years. They have reported rape and molestation by guards; manipulation and sexual coercion, including guards forcing individuals to undress in order to be released from cells or for exchange of goods; rampant degrading sexual comments on an everyday basis; voyeurism and taking and sharing explicit photos; drugging, groping, and other forms of abuse during medical exams; and targeted abuse towards undocumented individuals because of the threat of deportation. Guards, supervisors, even the ex-Warden and the prison chaplain participated in the abuse, and ensured that it continued. Federal investigations, congressional inquiries, and national media finally revealed the abuse.

Five of the guards involved in this abuse have been prosecuted and convicted, including the former Warden and prison chaplain who were each sentenced to 7 years in prison. But there have been no meaningful efforts to remedy the systemic causes that led to these terrible abuses, and without doubt they are continuing. At the same time, many survivors have been retaliated against, transferred to ICE detention facilities around the country, and deported. The Dublin Prison Solidarity Coalition organized an online townhall in late March to bring more attention to the issue, and build solidarity for inside survivors and support for release of the people who have suffered abuse.

From Crisis to Care: New Report to End the Health Harm of Women's Prisons

Human Impact Partners, CURB, CCWP, and Transgender, Gender-Variant, and Intersex Justice Project (TGIJP) released a groundbreaking people's report that exposes the catastrophic health harms of incarceration in women's prisons and provides evidence in support of investments in health-promoting social determinants of health instead of incarceration. Informed by public health research alongside interviews and survey responses from people currently and formerly incarcerated, *From Crisis to Care* outlines how incarceration worsens health via multiple pathways.

The report was created as a tool to pressure the state to seize the opportunity to invest that money in health-promoting support systems that people can access in their own communities instead of the state of CA continuing to invest \$405 million a year in its women's prisons. The report includes public health evidence for investment in infrastructure for formerly incarcerated people, ranging from safe affordable housing and health care to non-carceral and non-punitive forms of accountability.

In Honor of Bayard Rustin: Clemency for Transgender, Gender-Variant and Intersex (TGI) Prisoners

A coalition of Bay Area and national transgender rights organizations including TGIJP, Flying Over Prison Walls, Transgender Law Center (TLC), TransLatin@ Coalition, Transgender Advo-



Photo of panel at CR's May 5 event by Brooke Anderson. From left to right: Andrea Ritchie, Ny Nour, Angela Davis, and Kamau Walton.

cacy Group (TAG), Survived & Punished, Equality California, and CCWP, organized a "twitter storm" on March 17 in honor of the late Bayard Rustin to demand Governor Newsom grant TGI prisoners clemency from CA prisons.

In 2020, California Governor Newsom launched an initiative recognizing historic discrimination against and criminalization of LGBTQ people. Inspired by advocacy to posthumously pardon civil rights leader Bayard Rustin, Governor Newsom announced a new process for LGBTQ pardons. Despite an epidemic of violence against imprisoned TGI people, only one other pardon was granted in the three years since this initiative began, and only one transgender person has been granted clemency by Governor Newsom. The March 17 Twitter storm on Rustin's birthday called on Governor Newsom to expand the initiative by granting clemency to our TGI community members in California prisons. From now through California's Pride celebrations, the group pledged to engage in a series of calls for action.

Proposed State Senate Bill Would Reopen News Media Access to California Prisons

In early February, new legislation was introduced in CA that would reopen access to the state's correctional facilities for news media, state legislators, and other state officials involved in policy-making. Senator Nancy Skinner (D-Berkeley), who introduced the bill, told *Davis Vanguard* that "California prisons have been among the least transparent in the nation." Advocates of the bill insist it will ensure necessary access to inform communities about what their tax dollars are being used for. In 2023, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCr) allotted \$14 billion for the corrections budget, but how this money is used remains unclear.

THE PLAINS & MIDWEST Idaho

Idaho Passed US's First "Abortion Trafficking" Legislation

Idaho Republican Governor Brad Little has signed a bill criminalizing the act of helping someone under the age of 18 obtain an abortion in another state without parental consent. It's the first so-called abortion trafficking law passed in the U.S. and carries penalties of two to five years in prison.

Continues on next page

ABBY 2023 SURVEY:

Back in 2020, CR made some significant changes to *The Abolitionist* newspaper – as well as to the overall coordination of the editorial collective – to improve accountability to the organization, our readers, and the broader movement CR is working to build. We would love to hear your feedback as we continue to strengthen this project.

Please reflect on the following survey questions and share your responses to these questions in a letter to the editorial collective:

1. What do you think about the past six issues of *The Abolitionist* since 2020 (Issues 33 – 39)? What have been some highlights for you in the content of these issues?
2. Do you find *The Abolitionist* useful? Why or why not? What do you think

would make it more useful for people to resist given the different contexts each of our readers are in?

3. If you could change one thing about the newspaper, what would it be and why?

Send your responses to:

Critical Resistance
ATTN: Abby Survey
PO Box 22780
Oakland, CA 94609

Ohio

Ohio Train Derailment Exposes System-wide Failure

On February 3, 50 derailed train cars caused a massive explosion and led to the release of toxic fumes in East Palestine, Ohio, including levels of dioxin hundreds of times higher than what's considered safe. Immediately following the disaster, workers declared corporate cost-cutting was the culprit. Meanwhile, CNN reports seven U.S. government investigators briefly fell ill in early March while studying the possible health impacts of the disaster. The Department of Justice has filed a civil lawsuit against Norfolk Southern, accusing the U.S. railroad giant of violations of the Clean Water Act.

Phone Zap for Ohio Penitentiary Hunger Strikers

People incarcerated at the Ohio State Penitentiary began a protest in mid-March, and Ohio prison activists outside the prison offered support coordinating “phone zaps” raising the prisoners’ demands. The demands included an immediate end to the practice of retaliation, for independent representatives from Columbus to be present for security reviews, an increase in the size of food portions, for commissary spending limits to be raised to \$80 or for commissary prices to be lowered, to allow full access to tablets—as is standard in other Ohio institutions, to reinstate arts and crafts classes, and to make hot pots available in the commissary—as they are in other Ohio institutions.

US SOUTH

Texas

Texas Prisoners Stand Against Solitary Confinement Practices

300 prisoners across at least five Texas prisons began to refuse food in early January to call attention to the state’s inhumane practice of solitary confinement. Prisoners hoped their action, similar to joint struggles in California years before, would force state officials to reexamine Texas’ policy of torturing people in solitary solely because they have been criminalized as gang affiliated. If you participated or would like to share how people in Texas are resisting solitary, **please contact The Abolitionist!** We would love to work with you on a submission for Issue 40 on control units, printing December 2023.

Tennessee

In Tennessee, Republicans expelled two Black Democratic lawmakers, Nashville’s Justin Jones and Memphis’s Justin Pearson, for supporting student-led gun control protests at the state Capitol after a recent tragic shooting at an elementary school that killed 3 adult staff and 3 students. Jones and Pearson have been clear in describing the Republican opposition supporting the National Rifles Association (NRA) as part of a much wider threat of the rise of fascism and the curtailing of democracy and Black leadership and resistance in issues like gun violence and gun control, in addition to many other pressing issues.

Tyre Nichols Murdered by Memphis Police

In Memphis Tennessee, Tyre Nichols, a 29-year-old Black man who loved skateboarding, was murdered by the police. Video footage release showed the brutal beating by a group of mostly Black cops in the Street Crimes Operation to Restore Peace in Our Neighborhoods, or SCORPION, unit. Born from a tough-on-crime policy in Memphis, the SCORPION unit was immediately disbanded after the officers who murdered Tyre were arrested, a result of pressure from the Nichols’s family and years of local organizing by Memphis residents and organizations. Nichols’s death and the widespread protests that followed brought more abolitionist demands to the fore, including to disband specific police units and remove cops from traffic stops. Nichols’s case also reemphasizes the need to question the effectiveness of more training or diversifying police forces.



“A Letter from Weelaunee Forest” by Michelle Sayles, Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative.

Farmworkers Demand Wendy’s & Grocery Stores Stop Enabling Labor Abuses

In Florida, hundreds of farmworkers and supporters completed a five-day, 50-mile march to demand humane working conditions and better protections. Calling on food retailers to join the Fair Food Program, an initiative launched by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in 2011 to improve conditions for farmworkers and end modern-day slavery, the march began outside a labor camp in the agricultural community of Pahokee, where hundreds of farmworkers were forced into brutal conditions under threats of violence, deportation, and insurmountable debts. The owner of the labor camp was sentenced to nearly a decade in prison in 2022 for leading a federal racketeering and forced labor conspiracy across at least five states.

Stop Cop City: Save the Atlanta Forest!

In Atlanta, protesters are resisting the destruction of the Weelaunee forest in the face of plans to construct the world’s largest police militarization facility, “Cop City”. State and federal police have continued to escalate violence toward forest defenders, activists, and organizations through raids of the forest encampments. A forest defender named Tortuguita was murdered by police during a raid in January. At least 42 protesters have been targeted with domestic terrorism charges, which are defined by a 2017 Georgia. Critics say the law’s language is overly “vague and broad”, and being leveraged to fit almost any activity—including misdemeanor trespass and association with an abolition group—to fit in the definition of domestic terrorism. Arrestees could face up to 35 years in prison.

The impact of Cop City on communities across the US would be catastrophic in our efforts to stop state violence and move resources away from institutions of punishment and policing. Cops across the US and even Israeli police could be sent to this 381-acre training center to bring back additional tactics of terror and harm to cause violence in our communities. Support throughout and beyond Atlanta continues to grow to save the forest and to stop Cop City.

EAST COAST

Pennsylvania

A Victory for Abolitionists: ICE-Run Immigration Prison Shuts Down

Advocates across the US are celebrating the end of the ICE contract with Berks County in Pennsylvania, marking the long-fought closure of the embattled Berks County Residential Center, becoming the fifth immigration prison contract to end under the Biden administration. The **Shut Down Berks Coalition** worked tirelessly for years to expose egregious patterns of abuse and neglect, to free immigrant family members,

friends, coworkers and neighbors, and to get the facility closed permanently.

Berks began incarcerating immigrants in 2001 as a “family detention center” and went on to have well-documented history of negligence and abuse, including inadequate medical and mental health care, children losing weight, and inappropriate disciplinary tactics. The Shut Down Berks Coalition began documenting the history of abuse in 2015, and Berks finally closed once and for all at the end of January.

New York

New York organizers Increase Pressure on New York City to Close Rikers

Responding to new data revealing that 2021 and 2022 were the deadliest years in New York City jailing for the past 25 years, New Yorkers renewed calls to close Rikers Island by 2027. In 2022, 19 people died in custody while on Rikers or shortly after being released. Six years ago, then-Mayor Bill de Blasio announced a plan to close the jails on Rikers Island and replace them with smaller ones across the city, a struggle CR New York engaged in through the No New Jails NYC coalition in 2018. Despite the city’s existing commitment to reduce the jail population in order to close Rikers by 2027, the jail population has actually grown by 9.7 percent since the start of 2022, with 86 percent of those in custody caged pretrial.

NATIONALLY (US-BASED)

Federal Proposal Would Reward Cities That Take Cops Out of Traffic Stops

A new bill in Congress in response to Tyre Nichols’ death tries one federal approach to making traffic enforcement less violent. The proposal, introduced in the House of Representatives by Congressman Ritchie Torres of New York, is gaining traction and would create a \$100 million annual grant program to reward cities that transfer traffic enforcement responsibilities to unarmed civilians, or that rely on technology like speed cameras to ticket drivers.

Starbucks under Fire for Union Busting

The National Labor Relations Board accused Former Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz of engaging in “egregious and widespread misconduct” against its employees, exposing the company’s union-busting record. Since 2021, nearly 300 Starbucks locations have voted to unionize, but the company response has been to fire many organizers and shutter unionized stores, among other tactics. Schultz is worth over \$3 billion and has led Starbucks for much of its history. He stepped down on March 20.

Biden Administration under Fire for Conceding to Anti-transgender Discrimination

The Biden administration proposed new regulations under Title IX to make it illegal for schools to impose blanket bans on transgender students playing on sports teams that align with their gender identity. Schools could, however, still bar transgender students from participating in competitive high school and college sports, if deemed necessary to maintain so-called “fairness in competition”. Anti-trans advocates claim trans women athletes in particular have a physical advantage over cisgender women, despite science refuting the claim. A report published in 2017 in the journal Sports Medicine finds there’s “no direct or consistent research” showing trans athletes have an advantage. 20 states currently have blanket bans on trans student athletes.

INTERNATIONAL

US-Mexico Border

Dozens of migrant men were killed in a fire that broke out at a Mexican immigration detention center in late March, just hours after the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees urged the Biden administration not to adopt an anti-asylum rule that would turn more refugees away at the border.

Continues on next page

Mexico's Top Court Decriminalizes Abortion in 'Watershed Moment'

Mexico's Supreme Court unanimously ruled that penalizing abortion is unconstitutional, a major victory for advocates of women's health and human rights, just as parts of the United States enact tougher laws against the practice.

Palestinian Political Prisoners Begin Mass Civil Disobedience in Israeli Jails

Palestinian political prisoners in jails across Israel began a series of mass civil disobedience actions in February to protest against punitive measures imposed by the country's new far-right government. First launched in the infamous Nafha prison and then joined by Palestinian political prisoners in the jails of Rimon, Ofer, Megiddo, Gilboa and Negev, the disobedience culminated in a hunger strike at the start of Ra-

madan in late March. "Our only demand is freedom," the Supreme Emergency Committee for Prisoners said in a statement reported in *Middle East Eye*. "Everyone must get our message and hear our voice, for we can no longer tolerate the violations being committed against us day and night."

US Out of the Philippines!

Activists are speaking out against the growing US military presence in the Philippines, including the current joint war games involving about 18,000 troops using the islands as a staging ground. The increased presence comes as political tensions rise between the governments of the US and China. On top of US expansion of military bases across Asia from Taiwan and the South China Sea to the southeast, activists in the Philippines told Democracy Now that the US is clearly trying to provoke China. In the event

the US triggers an arms race with China, Philippine activists are worried their country will be caught in the middle, further threatening Philippine sovereignty and independence.

Human & Immigrants Rights Groups Condemn United Kingdom's plan to imprison migrants on Barge

Rights groups are condemning the UK's latest anti-migrant move after it rented a massive barge where it says 500 asylum seekers can be housed while they wait for their cases to proceed. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said it was "all part of our plan to stop the boats," referring to people who cross the English Channel to claim asylum. The Conservative government has also struck a deal to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda, though that plan is currently held up in court.♦

UNTIL ALL ARE FREE: POLITICAL PRISONER UPDATES

In this issue's political prisoner updates, we highlight **Fall 2022-early Spring 2023 news regarding a few political prisoner cases**. This column is in no way a complete list of all political prisoner cases. As a prison industrial complex abolitionist organization, **Critical Resistance fights for the release and freedom of all prisoners, whether recognized as political prisoners or not**. We resist the use of imprisonment as a tool for political repression and control across our communities. Free them all!

ATLANTA "COP CITY" FOREST DEFENDERS

During the South River Music Festival – a massive direct action where hundreds stormed the main police security outpost within the Weelaunee Forest – nearly two dozen forest defenders were arrested on March 5, 2023. The direct action took place at the proposed 'Cop City' construction site, a \$90 million police training facility to be built in the Weelaunee Forest, south of Atlanta. The group was charged with domestic terrorism by Dekalb County Judge Gregory A. Adams on March 5, and on March 23, 15 forest defenders were released on bond.

Throughout March and into April, at least 42 protestors face domestic terrorism charges. These charges are defined by a 2017 Georgia Statute as "unlawful acts which are interrelated by distinguishing characteristics." Critics, legal experts and protestors resisting Cop City on the ground in Atlanta say the law's language is overly vague and broad and is being leveraged to describe almost any activity – including misdemeanor trespass and association with an abolition group – to fit into the definition of "domestic terrorism." If indicted and convicted, arrestees could face up to 35 years in prison. Forest defenders still detained at Dekalb County Jail are reporting inhumane conditions including broken toilets, freezing temperatures, flooded cells, and no access to drinking water. **Free all forest defenders and Stop Cop City!**

LONG LIVE MARSHALL "EDDIE" CONWAY

Former Baltimore Panther & former internationally-recognized political prisoner, Eddie Conway, passed away on February 13, 2023. While imprisoned, Eddie founded a chapter of the Black Panther Party for prisoners, and went on to organize the United Prisoners Labor Union and the Maryland Penitentiary Intercommunal Survival Collective. Described by loved ones and comrades as "calm, yet strong" and as someone who "couldn't be deterred," Eddie was released from prison in 2014 and remained a persistent prisoner rights organizer until his passing. **Eddie Conway, presente!**

REST IN POWER, KHADER ADNAN!

On May 2, 2023, Palestinian political prisoner and resistance fighter, Khader Adnan, was killed

by the negligence and violence of the Israeli prison regime after 87 days of hunger strike in protest of his detention without trial. Adnan had been arrested 12 times by Israel, imprisoned under administrative detention (detention without charges or a trial), for a cumulative eight years of his life, and had waged five hunger strikes since 2004. During the California hunger strikes against solitary confinement in the 2010s, Khader was himself also on a hunger strike, and wrote a power letter expressing his solidarity with prisoners fighting against solitary confinement in the US. May his memory and sacrifice fuel global resistance to **Free Palestine!**

LEONARD PELTIER

2023 marks the 48th year Leonard Peltier has been imprisoned. At the beginning of this year, a former FBI agent close to Peltier's case accused the FBI of harboring a vendetta against Peltier, and called for his release and a presidential pardon. This follows UN experts in 2022 calling for Peltier's immediate release. Their conclusion, which was predicated on a case by the Lowenstein Clinic for International Human Rights at Yale Law School in 2020, found that his prolonged imprisonment amounted to arbitrary detention. After the unprecedented confession from a former FBI agent, Peltier contacted *The Guardian* to do an exclusive in February 2023. Peltier explained to *The Guardian*

"Being free to me means being able to breathe freely, away from the many dangers I live under in maximum custody prison. Being free would mean I could walk over a mile straight. It would mean being able to hug my grandchildren and great-grandchildren. [...] If I was free, I would build me a home on my tribal land, help build the economy of our nations and give a home to our homeless children."

The status of Peltier's current clemency application remains unclear.



By Josh MacPhee, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

Free Mumia: On March 31, 2023, the movement to free **Mumia Abu-Jamal** was dealt a devastat-

ing blow by Philadelphia Common Pleas Judge Lucretia Clemons when she denied Mumia's request for a new trial. This comes after a December 16, 2022 ruling that his lawyers had the right to examine at least 200 boxes of previously-hidden, critical case evidence that could have proven that there was a conspiracy to permanently silence Mumia due to his revolutionary political work. Imprisoned in Pennsylvania for 43 years, he has worked with his legal team and exhausted nearly all options for release. At 68 years old, Mumia is suffering from cardiac disease, has had a double bypass, and nearly died from lack of treatment for acute Hepatitis C. Mumia was falsely accused of killing a white police officer in Philadelphia in December 1981 and following a sham trial, was convicted of first-degree murder on July 3, 1982. **Brick by brick, wall by wall, we gotta free Mumia Abu Jamal!**

RUCHELL "CINQUE" MAGEE

The longest-held political prisoner in the US, is now in his 60th year behind bars. A co-defendant of Angela Davis and victim of COINTELPRO tactics against Black revolutionaries, Magee was sentenced in 1970 and has repeatedly been denied parole throughout his time behind bars. At the age of 83, Magee remains locked up today, enduring the brutality of California's prison camps as his health declines. Please help bring Ruchell home and end the decades of cruelty and captivity! **Free Cinque Magee, free 'em all!**♦

TAKE ACTION TO FREE RUCHELL MAGEE!

SIGN THE PETITION: bit.ly/freeruchell

SEND A DIGITAL LETTER TO CA GOV NEWSOM: bit.ly/write4ruchell

CALL CA GOV NEWSOM at (916) 445-2841. Press 1 for English or 2 for Spanish, press 6 to speak with a representative and wait for someone to answer (Mon. - Fri., 9 AM - 5 PM PST / 12PM - 8PM EST). Use this script:

"Hello, my name is _____ and I'm calling to encourage Governor Gavin Newsom to commute the sentence of prisoner Ruchell Magee (#A92051 #T 115) who has served 59 long years in prison. Ruchell is 83 years old, and as an elderly prisoner he faces health risks every single day from being incarcerated for so long. In the interests of justice, I am joining the global call for Ruchell's release due to the length of his confinement, and I urge Governor Newsom to take immediate action to commute Ruchell Magee's sentence."

WRITE A ONE-PAGE LETTER TO CA GOV NEWSOM about your support for Ruchell and why he deserves a commutation of his sentence due to his length of confinement (over 59 years), his age (83), and the health risks of an elderly person staying in California's prisons.

YOUR US MAIL LETTER can be sent to:
Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, California 95814

CALL FOR CONTENT

Help shape the content of *The Abolitionist*

Make your voice heard in our paper!

Write a piece for either our Features section OR one of our columns!

The Features of Issue 40 will focus on **control units**; it's our second and final issue of 2023 and will be released by December. Issue 41's Features will focus on **environmental justice**, and will be released in early summer 2024.

Send us an essay, article, research, a poem, a story, a play, a comic, art, personal reflection, and any questions on these topics for our upcoming Features sections!

- **Issue 40 Submission Deadline: Friday, September 8, 2023.**
- **Issue 41 Submission Deadline: Friday, March 1, 2024.**

There are many ways for you to shape the content of the paper by either submitting a piece to our Features section or supporting one of our columns. Check out all of the ways you can submit content for *The Abolitionist*:

1. Write a piece for our Features

- Pieces can be in many different forms of writing — from the theoretical, to the reflective, and action-oriented — but they will all share a common focus, theme, or topic of consideration. **Check the box above for issue 40 and 41's feature focus!**

2. Submit content for one of our columns

- Send a **Kite to the Editors**.
- Request to be an author of an **Inside-Outside Fishing Line**.
- Contribute a report or an update on organizing inside for our **Movement Highlights** column.
- **Write a poem or song lyrics**. It can relate to the features or any 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 40 or 41, 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 to address in future columns.

Some approaches to writing Kites to the Editors:

- Elaborate on something you agreed with in an article and explain why you agreed.
- Elaborate on something you disagreed with in an article and explain why you disagreed.
- 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 needed in this political moment and which you would like Critical Resistance to answer.

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 - Submission
PO Box 22780
Oakland, CA 94609-2391

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:

SEND US YOUR WRITING AND ARTWORK!

We accept articles, letters, creative writing, poetry, interviews, and art 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 imprisonment (or before!)
- 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 (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.

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.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE ABOLITIONIST!

Free to people in prisons, jails and detention centers;
Paid subscriptions help us send the paper to thousands of prisoners for free.

ARE YOU LOCKED UP?

Sign up for a free subscription!

Name: _____

Prisoner Number: _____

Mailing Address: _____

*Make sure to let us know if you are transferred or released

*Return your slip to:
Critical Resistance
Attn: Abby subscription
PO Box 22780
Oakland, CA 94609

ARE YOU NOT LOCKED UP, BUT WANT TO SUPPORT?

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➡ Paid Subscription Options:

\$10 for 2 issues / year, supports 3 readers (you + two prisoners)

\$15-\$50 for 2 issues / year, support multiple readers (you + 3-15 prisoners)

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criticalresistance.org/the-abolitionist

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