

# THE ABOLITIONIST

FALL 2020

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

ISSUE 33: COVID-19

FEATURES ANALYSIS

## Stopping the Virus or Expanding the Prison Industrial Complex?:

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

By Sarah T. Hamid

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

The effects of the public quarantine orders were not evenly felt. People imprisoned across the US faced the most repressive version of this maneuver, as entire dormitories were immobilized for weeks on end and solitary confinement was leveraged as a “public health” measure.

Those in the houseless community were left to fend for themselves: public facilities they’d come to rely on, like restrooms and public libraries, were shuttered. Very quickly, police were brought in to mediate and enforce lockdown guidelines, increasing police contact with already-heavily-policed primarily Black, Brown, and poor neighborhoods.

Millions faced unemployment and food scarcity. Communities living on Native reservations were denied state relief, and many of our undocumented neighbors were afraid to seek medical care or file for unemployment benefits because of information sharing between hospitals, employment resources, and immigration enforcement. The COVID-19 lockdowns brought the country to a halt, exposing the classed and raced fault lines between those whose survival is or is not ensured by a punitive state built on white supremacy and racial capitalism.

Amidst all this, uprisings after *yet another* brutal murder at the hands of police swept the country—even the world—in the spring and summer. Americans quickly faced three crises as a result of a tiny, airborne virus: the disease itself, the economic crisis borne from trying to contain it, and the inevitable swell of carceral violence once state governors leveraged police power to enforce distancing and shelter-in-place orders.

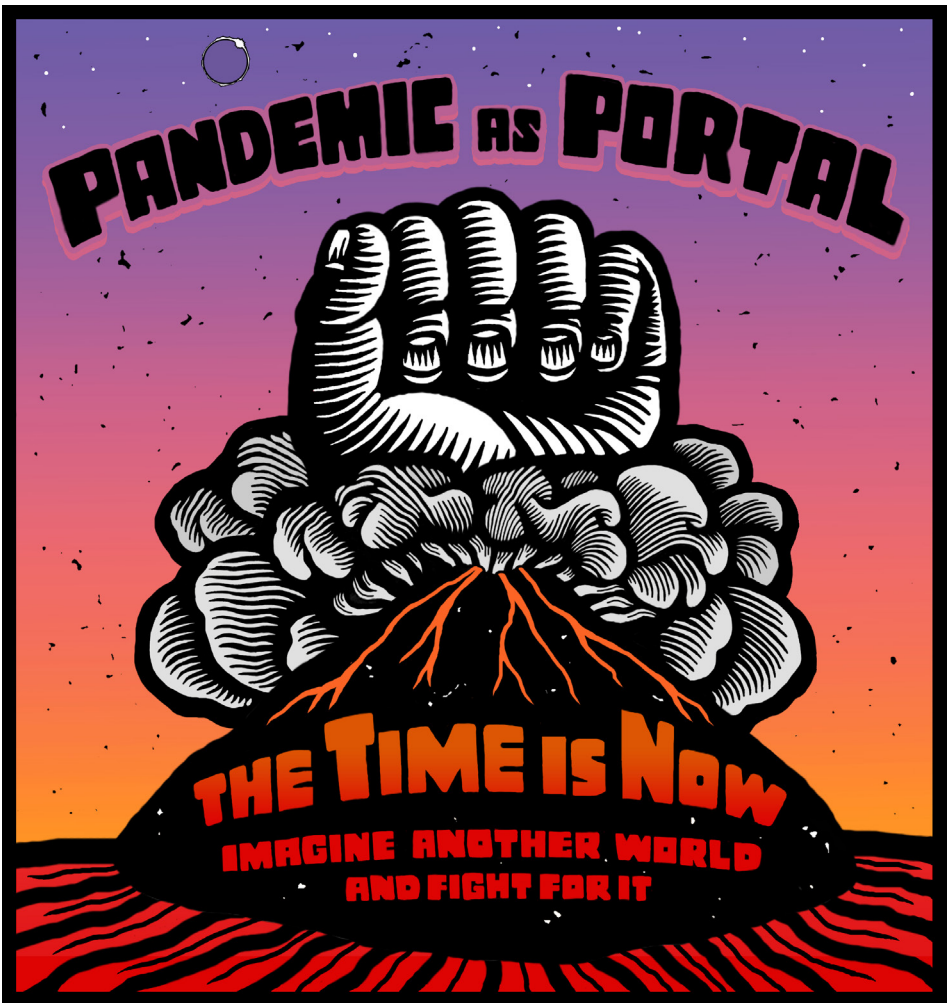
In Minneapolis, Minnesota, where the uprisings were first kindled, Department of Public Safety Commissioner John Harrington held a press conference on May 30, 2020 in panic over how to control the protests. During the conference, Harrington claimed that Minnesota police were using “**contact tracing**”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

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

Harrington’s words set off alarm bells for public health officials, who felt that invoking the phrase “contact tracing” in the context of policing, and doing so amid a nationwide uprising against American policing, was a huge mistake—one with dire consequences for the fight against COVID-19. “To see the two linked jeopardizes the credibility of public health, which needs community trust to work effectively,” one expert bemoaned.

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

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



Kill Joy, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative

### THE ORIGINS OF CONTACT TRACING AND ENTANGLEMENTS WITH CRIMINALIZATION AND MEDICALIZATION

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

The origins of most approaches to disease containment are closely tied to practices of criminalization and systems of oppression, and public health plays a long-standing role in the growth and evolution of the PIC. Quarantines, for example, are a disease containment strategy and method of surveillance that follows the racist logic of policing. In fact, the first plague epidemic in the conti-

mental US, an outbreak of bubonic plague in 1900, culminated in a public health campaign depicting Chinese Americans as vectors for the disease. City officials enacted discriminatory regulations that allowed European Americans to freely leave affected areas, but Chinese and Japanese Americans required health certification. Today, it is made illegal and a punishable “crime” in some 34 states to potentially expose someone to HIV through sexual activity, including activities that pose little or no risk of transmission. In California, Black and Latinx people make up half of those infected with HIV, but are two-thirds of the defendants in HIV-criminalization cases.

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

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# Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

Welcome to Issue 33 of *The Abolitionist*! Critical Resistance (CR) has worked hard to restructure and revitalize this project as a necessary inside-outside organizing tool for prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition. We’ve revised our theme-based newspaper structure into a hybrid of columns and features. Each issue includes a Features section with several pieces of a shared focus as well as a separate section for returning columns that provide critical yet timely analysis, reflection, inspiration and resources for our collective strategy and struggle. You can read more about what this structure entails in our **Call for Content** on page 16.

2020 has been a year of global crisis and upheaval. In early March, the World Health Organization named COVID-19 a pandemic with cases reported in over 188 countries. In **Sarah T. Hamid’s** piece, **“Stopping the Virus or Expanding the PIC?: COVID-19, Contact Tracing, Policing, and the Carceral Logics of Disease Control,”** she offers analysis on the technology used to track the spread of the virus, examining how contact tracing is used to monitor the spread of the coronavirus as a shared tool between disease control and policing.

Political theorist Naomi Klein identifies the US’s response to COVID-19 as a **“pandemic shock doctrine”** — exploiting the public’s disorientation amid economic collapse to push through radical “free-market” policies that enrich the wealthy at the expense of the poor and middle class, privatize social security and healthcare, lock down borders, cage even more people, suspend democracy and threaten to cancel elections. Led by Trump and the Republican Party, this doctrine began with no-strings attached corporate bailouts to airline companies and cruise ships. Immediately after the US declared a state of emergency, the government pumped \$1.5 trillion into the financial markets and enacted Title 42 pandemic law: Trump’s emergency declaration that allows for expanded use of police in collaboration with increased immigration enforcement and border patrol that are equipped with tanks, riot gear, tear gas and flash bang grenades to attack protesters. Meanwhile, healthcare workers and hospitals beg for personal protective equipment and ventilators for sick and dying patients. The disconnect is not coincidental but part of a calculated response to this crisis.

Simultaneously, the pandemic exacerbates the gross inequities and structural oppression of capitalism that make communities of color more vulnerable. Considering Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s definition of racism as “the state sanctioned and/or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death, in distinct yet densely interconnected political geographies,” we see how COVID-19 underscores the experience of racism as a set of political and economic conditions that compromise quality and longevity of life. In the US, Black people are dying from COVID-19 at a rate 2.3 times greater than white people, and Indigenous communities experience a rate of infection 3.5 times higher than white people (APM Research Lab and MedPage Today).

Systemic disinvestment and the active use of racism as a tool in creating policies in the public and private sector have made it infinitely more difficult for people of color to access quality health care, find stable jobs with livable wages, access healthy food and obtain safe, affordable housing. This inequity is further explored in **Katie Tastrom’s “Abolition Requires Disability Justice”**, calling for urgently applying disability justice principles to our movement. This piece intentionally highlights the disproportionate and devastating impact COVID-19 has had on people with disabilities and communities deemed most disposable by capitalism and the PIC.

As both health and legal experts have noted - prisons, jails and detention centers are known incubators of infectious diseases. The Health Affairs Journal notes that US prisons are “reservoirs of infectious diseases” pushing people into “the paths of epidemics”, as demonstrated by the negligent approach the US has taken to tuberculosis, HIV and the ongoing hepatitis C epidemic. To examine lessons from the HIV/AIDS pandemic to COVID-19, we **interviewed Linda Evans, Kathy Boudin and Crystal Mason with Emily Hobson** for Issue 33 on providing inside peer support and prisoner advocacy during the HIV/AIDS crisis.

As of October, 138,105 people in prison have tested positive for COVID-19 (The Marshall Project). New cases among prisoners reached an all-time high in early August with spikes in positive cases in Florida and California as well as outbreaks in Arkansas, Hawaii and Oklahoma. In this issue, we also include **submissions from prisoners** to both ABO Comix and *The Abolitionist* reporting on conditions inside with

COVID-19, expressing layered emotions in several poems in a **Prisoner Speak-Out**.

As many anti-capitalist theorists like Klein and others contend, crisis is an opportunity for radical change. In crisis, ideas that once seemed too radical now seem reasonable. As the state prioritizes greed and only those deemed worthy to survive, we also see who rises to truly save lives—the people. Everyday people have created mutual aid efforts worldwide to distribute supplies and resources in service of preserving life.

Our Features section presents many offerings from **Shaylanna Luvme’s instructions for creating self-made masks** while imprisoned to herbal medicines and immune-defense rooted in Indigenous traditions. Mutual aid projects have been the lifeline for so many of our communities ensuring access to food and hot meals, water, and tents for shelter – ultimately providing the life-affirming infrastructure the state fails to provide. An example of these resources is the **Holistic Care Guide for prisoners to protect themselves against COVID-19**, reprinted in our Features Section of Issue 33, written by a group of health workers in California. Mutual aid is foundational to the collective care that will get us out of this crisis and prevent future ones.

Anti-capitalist analysis of this crisis shows us that, in crisis, we either get swindled by elites and pay the price for decades, or we resist and win progressive victories that previously seemed impossible. Also included in our Features, we include **CR’s five-point platform**, which we created at the beginning of the pandemic as a roadmap for **how to build truly healthy communities during COVID-19 and beyond**. Since May 2020, international uprisings have set-off a range of calls to remedy state violence and racial capitalism, highlighting many of the points of our platform. At this juncture, our communities are mounting strong demands for structural change, including strategies to defund policing, eliminate entire police programs, resist colonial conditions, and free our loved ones from cages. Self-determined communities like Cherán in Michoacan, Mexico are a glimmer of hope and shining example of what an abolitionist world could look like. **Our interview with Yunuén Torres gives a sense of how essential self-determination and community defense are to an effective pandemic response.**

Issue 33 also introduces new columns alongside **Kites to the Editors** and the **Until All Are Free** political prisoner updates. In efforts to maintain dedicated space within the paper for imprisoned voices to provide leadership and lessons on the struggle inside, Stephen Wilson, currently imprisoned in Pennsylvania, will write a column on abolitionist study called **1971**. Similarly, our **Inside-Outside Fishing Line** is a new column inspired by the fishing lines in solitary confinement in California that ignited the courageous resistance of tens of thousands of prisoners in 2011 and 2013. We’re also including regular columns like the **Abby Throwback** to dive into the archive of past issues of *The Abolitionist*, as well as a column to update our readers on CR’s current project advancements with **Movement Highlights** from liberation partners that we find most inspiring and timely.

Through the pandemic, we see that abolition is the only way forward. Decades of organizing to end the PIC have prepared liberation movements to respond to the COVID-19 emergency by focusing on putting people’s immediate well-being first, tapping into communities’ knowledge on building structures for support and mutual aid, and moving forward with long-term visions. As a severe and widespread public health crisis, the pandemic necessitates abolitionist demands and practices to ensure health and safety efforts that directly support people’s ability to live. This is immediately present in the massive movements to share resources, look out for each other, and build networks for care across prison and border walls, cities and towns, as well as neighborhoods and virtual communities.

In the words of Laura Whitehorn, former political prisoner, long-time freedom fighter and current organizer with Release Aging People in Prisons (RAPP) in New York: *“We need to fight like hell... In a moment like this where there is tremendous disaster, either the ruling class [...] get stronger; or there’s room for—dare I say—revolutionary justice. So—release them all.”*

We hope this issue inspires some critical analysis for you along with reflection and ideas for care, strength, survival, wellness and resistance in this trying moment.

**In solidarity and struggle,  
Critical Resistance and The Abolitionist Editorial Collective ♦**



Shannon Knox, Just Seeds Collective

## THE ABOLITIONIST

FALL 2020 • ISSUE 33

Critical Resistance seeks to build an international movement to end the prison industrial complex (PIC) by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe. We believe that basic necessities such as food, shelter, and freedom are what really make our communities secure. As such, our work is part of global struggles against inequality and powerlessness. The success of the movement requires that it reflect communities most affected by the PIC. Because we seek to abolish the PIC, we cannot support any work that extends its life or scope.

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# Abolition Requires Disability Justice

By Katie Tastrom

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

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

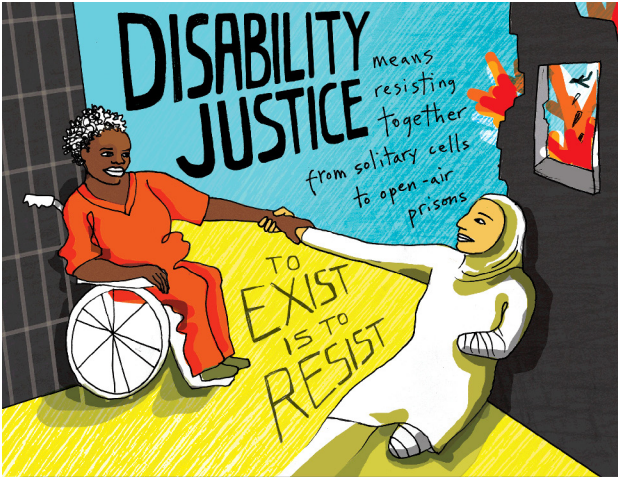
## Solidarity Across Congregate Settings

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

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

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

People who are in institutions aren’t in there by chance—it’s disproportionately those of us marginalized by other identities as well. These are all related, since you can’t talk about abolition and disability justice without also talking about race, specifically the way Black and Indigenous people are both imprisoned and disabled at much higher rates than non-Black and non-Indigenous people. It’s not enough to just ac-



Micah Bazant, Sins Invalid

knowledge intersectionality; one way we embody it is through leadership by the most impacted.

## Leadership of the Most Impacted

At the time of writing, it also seems that COVID-19 may make more people disabled as reports on long-term symptoms come in. COVID-19 is also making many disabled people more disabled and a lot more disabled people (especially those living in congregate settings) end up dead. Even if our bodies make it, we won’t. And we can’t forget how they are letting us die, which I mean in both an activist way and a trauma way. While COVID-19 has (re)radicalized and (re)energized us, it has also traumatized us and broken us and proved for certain that they see our bodies as disposable.

This is why it’s so important for movements to be led by those most impacted, which sounds a lot easier than it is because abolitionists have not always been great at this. To begin with, so much of the abolition movement is inaccessible. I have two graduate degrees, and I sometimes have a hard time not feeling alienated by a lot of the language we use. This is not to mention the ways activism itself, especially leadership activism, is inaccessible to most disabled people. For example, many organizations require and are based on in-person meetings that may not be in places that are wheelchair accessible, and even if the venue is wheelchair accessible, is the stage? Will members listen with an open mind to someone who is showing signs of mental health disabilities? Accessibility goes far beyond this, but these are just a couple examples. When you don’t have disabled people involved in and leading the movement, we get ignored. **Of course disabled people need abolition. But the abolition movement needs disabled people even more.**

## Shared Vulnerability and Solidarity

COVID-19 has been a really interesting time for disabled people. In one sense, it lays bare our shared vulnerabilities, both generally as people in bodies, but specifically for those of us at greater risk of death from COVID-19 due to disability and/or some kind of institutionalization.

Disability justice can turn this shared trauma into solidarity, like disabled people do all the time—so often without even realizing it.

**Disabled folks, including/especially those who are or have been locked up, have a unique insight into how we fight the state and win, or at least how we try to survive.** Abled abolitionists need to start listening to disabled people and understand that we have been doing abolition work for a long time—though sometimes it’s called deinstitutionalization or sitting with our friends at the doctor’s office to help them resist pressure for weight loss surgery. We know about vulnerable bodies, and we know how to make that a strength. Disability justice understands this as an opportunity for solidarity. It’s never been more important to fully understand the connections between the different places disabled people are imprisoned, and to focus on the way the carceral systems impact all bodies and minds, disabled or not.

**“Disabled folks, including/especially those who are or have been locked up, have a unique insight into how we fight the state and win, or at least how we try to survive”**

This is exactly why one of the principles of disability justice is leadership by the most impacted. Like the fairy tale *Rumpelstiltskin*, disabled people take the straw of trauma and turn it into gold. And right now we are drowning in straw. Now we need the rest of the abolition movement to see it and understand that the dismissal of disabled people and disabled experience is a manifestation of the carceral state.

## Resources

- Decarcerating Disability: Deinstitutionalization and Prison Abolition by Liat Ben-Moshe (University of Minnesota Press)
- Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with cure by Eli Clare (Duke University Press)
- Beyond Survival: Strategies and stories from the transformative justice movement edited by Ejeris Dixon & Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (AK Press; 30% discount when shipped to correctional facilities)
- Prison by Any Other Name: The harmful consequences of popular reforms by Maya Schenwar & Victoria Law (The New Press)
- Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of Movement is our People: A disability justice primer by Sins Invalid (Sins Invalid)

**Katie Tastrom** is a writer, sex worker, and artist. Her work focuses on the intersection of disability justice and abolition; and she is working on a book. She used to be a lawyer until she found a less shameful profession and until recently was the co-chair of the National Lawyers Guild Disability Justice Committee. She’s based in her bed in Syracuse, NY. ♦



Top left, Stacy speaks into a mic at a rally. A sign behind her reads “Power to the People: PG&E is killing us for profit”. Top right and bottom photos, Over 150 cars caravanned around Lake Merritt in Oakland on May 23, 2020 to honor Stacey Park Milbern, The Disability Justice Culture Club organized the caravan. Photo: Brooke Anderson

## Remembering Stacey Park Milbern:

Stacey Park, a fierce movement maker and disability justice leader, joined the ancestors on her 33rd birthday, May 19, 2020. Stacey was one of two impact producers for the Netflix documentary Crip Camp, while she was organizing mutual aid networks for people with disabilities who were impacted by utility shutoffs and wildfires in the Bay Area, demanding a disability justice analysis in the way we think about climate catastrophe. For years, Stacey profoundly shaped each movement space she was in, inspiring us to create more intersectional organizing praxis, consistently questioning the ways we create truly accessible and just movements and liberatory culture. We honor her and her legacy with these photos and share her own words on ancestorship:

*“I do not know a lot about spirituality or what happens when we die, but my crip queer Korean life makes me believe that our earthly bodyminds is but a fraction, and not considering our ancestors is electing only to see a glimpse of who we are. People sometimes assume ancestorship is reserved for those of biological relation, but a queered or crippled understanding of ancestorship holds that, such as in flesh, our deepest relationships are with people we choose to be connected to and honor day after day.*

*Ancestorship, like love, is expansive and breaks manmade boundaries cast upon it, like the nuclear family model or artificial nation state borders. My ancestors are disabled people who lived looking out of institution windows wanting so much more for themselves. It’s because of them that I know that, in reflecting on what is a “good” life, an opportunity to contribute is as important as receiving supports one needs. My ancestors are people torn apart from loves by war and displacement. It’s because of them I know the power of building home with whatever you have, wherever you are, whoever you are with. My ancestors are queers who lived in the American South. It’s because of them I understand the importance of relationships, place and living life big, even if it is dangerous. All of my ancestors know longing. Longing is often our connecting place.”*

Thank you for teaching and leading us, Stacey. Stacey Park, presente!



# Inside-Outside Organizing to Resist a Virus:

## LESSONS FROM THE AIDS CRISIS FOR OUR FIGHT DURING COVID-19

By Emily K Hobson with Rory Elliott

*How can we build together inside prisons despite—and against—COVID-19? In the early years of the HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) epidemic, imprisoned people and supporters created peer education programs, pushed for treatment, and fought stigma with solidarity. To learn from this history of how we can turn to each other for survival and resilience in the face of mass death, we gathered movement elders who led HIV/AIDS activism inside and outside in the 1980s and 1990s.*

**Rory Elliott (she/her)**, a member of Critical Resistance Portland and The Abolitionist Editorial Collective worked with **Emily Hobson (she/her)**, associate professor at the University of Nevada, Reno, and an activist and historian of radicalism, queer politics, and HIV/AIDS in the US, to interview three grassroots experts: **Kathy Boudin (she/her)**, former political prisoner, current co-founding co-director of the Center for Justice at Columbia University, and a member of Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP) in New York; **Linda Evans (she/her)**, former political prisoner and long-time freedom fighter, currently active with California Coalition for Women Prisoners and the Immigrant Defense Task Force of the North Bay Organizing Project; and **Crystal Mason (they/them)**, co-director of QueerRebels, who previously worked with AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) San Francisco and the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, organizing prisoner solidarity and connecting women to HIV/AIDS services.



Photo of Crystal Mason from Acting Up for Prisoners. Courtesy of Mic Sweeney.

**What led you to organize inside, or in solidarity from outside, during the early years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic? What were conditions like inside for people with HIV/AIDS?**

**Linda:** I was locked up in the DC jail in 1985. Many of the women there were HIV-positive, but there was no AIDS education in the jail, so people were getting sick or tested and thinking they were immediately going to die. There was a lot of fear about how HIV was transmitted, and if someone found out you were HIV-positive, your life would be really miserable. When I got to the federal prison in Dublin, California, it was similar. People were basing everything on fear, and the stigma was incredible. That was where we got started.

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

**Crystal:** ACT UP San Francisco had a prison committee, mostly looking at men’s prisons. I worked for the women’s program of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, and I met Judy Greenspan (then of the American Civil Liberties Union Prison Project), who talked about how women were getting sick inside and getting out without treatment or housing. I decided to reach out to women in California prisons. I kept sending packets until they started getting through. The prisons wouldn’t let me in for visits, but when people were being released we hooked them up with services. AIDS diagnosis and disability support was a lot harder to get for women at that time.

**People in multiple prisons created peer education to fight HIV/AIDS. Kathy helped create AIDS Counseling and Education (ACE), and Linda helped create Pleasanton AIDS**

**Counseling and Education (PLACE). How did people organize this work?**

**Kathy:** First we wrote a letter to the superintendent, and she met with us and gave us permission to visit people in the infirmary. Then she brought in HIV/AIDS experts to speak, but the questions being asked showed that the level of stigma was enormous. Next, we wrote a proposal for a peer program. We organized as a mix of white, Latinx, and Black people. We had four goals: to get educated, to take care of people who were sick, to challenge stigma, and to work with people going home for safe reentry in how they handled drugs and sex.

The superintendent agreed to our plan, so we invited others and had a meeting of 35 people. We went around and each said why we were there. I talked about stigma. Someone said, “my sister had AIDS.” Somebody else said, “I used drugs and I’m really afraid of it,” and maybe the fifth person said, “well, I have AIDS.” There was this dead silence in the room. It took a lot of courage for her to say it. A few more people spoke, and then another person said, “I just tested HIV-positive and I want to learn.” By the end of that meeting, we had created a prototype of what we hoped to build inside the prison, which was to have trust replace the stigma and cruelty.

We started to take AIDS from a secret to a public conversation. We worked on a version of the AIDS quilt, had memorials for anyone who died of AIDS in the prison and contributed money to their families, and held walkathons around the yard that raised money for a children’s AIDS hospital. We got training from nurses and doctors from Montefiore Hospital. Then suddenly the superintendent closed us down. We kept meeting in small groups with a belief we would be reopened, and, about 3 months, later we were. The superintendent said that it had been a problem to have educated prisoners pressuring the medical department, but when she put in a new medical director we reopened.

After this we got a staff advisor, an office, and we created an eight-week curriculum. We put together role-plays that included one person saying out loud, “I have HIV/AIDS.” We performed it in each building and concluded by singing “Sister,” a song by Cris Williamson about caring for each other. People hugged, cried, and wanted to talk. This was the real coming out of ACE—the name stood for AIDS Counseling and Education, or an “ace in your pocket.” Pretty soon 50 to 80 people signed up for sessions, and we had lots of people trained, plus counseling and support groups. We wrote a book, *Breaking the Walls of Silence: AIDS and Women in a New York State Maximum-Security Prison*, which was distributed to prisons around the country.

Ultimately, it was the people who said, “I have HIV/AIDS,” who played the critical role. They became the leading force for change because their being open changed people.

**Linda:** In the federal prison in Dublin, a small group, including a couple of the Puerto Rican political prisoners, got information sent in to distribute and got a staff sponsor. At that point in the federal system it was possible to have clubs. We produced a flyer adapting the lesbian cartoonist Alison Bechdel’s cartoons to be about AIDS education in English and Spanish. We put it under everybody’s door. That announced that we existed, had information, and wanted to work on the stigma. HIV-positive people started to come forward. We got permission to accompany people when they got tested. These were just a few things.

**Crystal:** At the San Francisco AIDS Foundation and ACT UP San Francisco, we mostly focused on the prison in Chowchilla, California. We had a couple of contacts to whom we could send information. I sent a card for people to get in touch with me, especially if they were being released in San Francisco. But the prisoners themselves were responsible for disbursing the information, and they started peer-led groups. The doctor at Chowchilla was horrible and unqualified to treat women with AIDS, so a big issue was to try and get that doctor removed.

**What did the work against HIV/AIDS in prisons achieve? What were your best moments and victories?**

**Crystal:** Once the women started getting information about what was available to them and to other people outside, they felt empowered to organize. To me that was a big victory. It’s about information getting into the prison, but also about getting information out, so that prisoners can advocate for themselves. Everybody in prison has family members and people outside who love and care for them, so it’s also about making that visible to the outside world.

**Kathy:** Peer education became a training ground for people going home to be able to get jobs, including as HIV/AIDS counselors. Our other big victory was changing the culture from one of stigma into one of caring for each other. That was the basis for everything we did.



Oakland Tribune, 1993. Linda Evans in center.

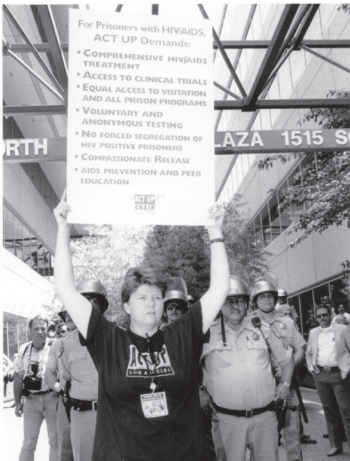
**Linda:** The biggest accomplishment was creating community. We made a quilt also—two large quilt panels, one for orphaned kids and the other for women who had died of AIDS in the federal system—and we were able to get the AIDS Memorial Quilt brought in and displayed, which was a transformative experience in helping us recognize the depth of the crisis happening in our communities and for people we knew. *We learned that every single one of us was affected by HIV. We knew people, we loved people, we ourselves were HIV-positive.* We also did walkathons, and, despite being locked up like animals and degraded in everybody’s view, we were able to give. We gave of our energy, we gave of our pitiful salaries, and that helped everyone to feel part of a community that included the outside.

Another important connection outside was to ACT UP. Partly because we were lesbian political prisoners, there was outreach to me, Laura Whitehorn, and Susan Rosenberg from the gay and lesbian community. We were asked to do solidarity statements for demonstrations, and that enabled us to talk about what it meant for people to have HIV in prison and why there needed to be solidarity from the outside.

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

**Linda:** I’m actually struck by a lot of the differences between then and now. Everyone’s locked down, there’s no visiting or programming, and access to communications is extremely limited. That means that you’re cut off from anything but what the administration feeds you. California Coalition for Women Prisoners has been sending in stamps, putting money on people’s tablets, and sending commissaries to people. But our visiting teams have been lost. It’s more difficult to build community right now. Additionally, starting in the 1990s, the federal system prohibits clubs. I think the prisons now are even more repressive than when I was locked up.

**Crystal:** At this moment our work is to shed some light and get information out about what’s happening in prisons right now with COVID-19. I know that some prisoners are being punished for getting information out. The way COVID-19 is transmitted may make it more difficult to organize person to person, but we know that connection is paramount to organizing.



Sacramento Demo ACT-UP. Courtesy of Mic Sweeney.

**Kathy:** A peer process would help the work inside against COVID-19. This summer the New York Department of Corrections put out a visiting plan, but the people inside have not been consulted about how to do it. Among women inside, they both want a visit and they’re terrified of it. A lot of men are saying, “Just give me a visit! I want to be able to touch my wife; I want to have my child sit on

my lap.” But there’s been no education or mobilization so that people can have discussions and take responsibility for what makes a safe visit. It’s been a rough situation. I think a peer process would make it a lot safer.

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

**Linda:** Stay safe. Take care of each other. We’re working really hard to get people out. Here in California there have been demonstrations every weekend, including at the Governor’s house, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) headquarters, and the head of the CDCR’s house. We are continuing to fight to get people released because we know that’s the way to make people safe.

**Kathy:** Work together, as much as you can inside, to stay safe. It’s very hard to do it, but support each other on that. The most important thing is to get people out, but the other important thing is to continue to fight about conditions inside. Both things are needed.

**Crystal:** There are people who care about what’s happening in prisons, and people out here fighting to see the situation changed. To the people inside, you are not forgotten. We care about what’s happening in prisons, and we’re down for that fight. ♦



# Land and Freedom: Organizing for Self-Determination during the COVID-19 pandemic in Cherán, Michoacán, Mexico (Part I)

By Yunuén Torres with Susana Draper

*In 2011, in the state of Michoacán in Mexico, a group of local, Indigenous women in the small town of Cherán rose up to defend their forest and land from armed loggers controlled by cartels. Together, they kicked out police and politicians while simultaneously resisting cartel violence. Since fighting for and winning their sovereignty, the women of Cherán continue to organize and defend their community's autonomy during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

**Yunuén Torres**, a P'urhépecha woman and member of the first youth council created after the Cherán uprising for self-determination, was interviewed by **Susana Draper**, from The Abolitionist Editorial Collective. In the interview, Yunuén explains the history behind the uprising, the ways in which the community has organized itself throughout the pandemic and how this collective removed police and government agents from the area in the struggle for self-determination and autonomy. Below is the first half of the interview, focusing on how the uprising has continued through the COVID-19 pandemic. The remainder of the interview will be shared in our next issue, #34, on Defunding Policing. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

## Can you briefly explain the Cherán uprising process to us?

**Yunuén:** Cherán is an Indigenous community located in the northern-most area of the state of Michoacán in Mexico and populated by the P'urhépecha people. Our community has a population of over 20,000 people and has traditionally been organized in four neighborhoods. Starting in 2011, a lot of safety-related problems began to arise within our community and throughout the country. We used to think of these problems as foreign and had never heard about them happening in our community before, but suddenly they started to affect us in our home. We began to experience kidnappings, extortion and street harassment aimed not only at women, but also at men. These problems were propagated by the loggers who, working with cartels, had come to unlawfully cut down our trees and deforest our land without having our community's authorization to do so.

By that point, the issue had turned into a very visible kind of assault on our land, touching on our sacred areas. It had become a very evident problem to all of us, since the hills and mountains can be seen from our town and, after a while, they were completely bare with open pathways and without trees. The destruction of the forests within our territory was reaching a dire state.

This was one of the painful consequences faced by our community, which was also dealing with an internal political divide. Due to strong partisan politics, conflicts were even arising among family members who had stopped talking to one another because of their association with a particular political party. It was a difficult situation for Cherán. And with the safety problems of kidnappings, extortion and harassment, we, as a community, no longer felt safe enough walking around our own streets. It was thought that, if anything happened while walking on the street at certain times, it was your fault and your responsibility.

This extremely painful situation was resolved thanks to the brave actions of a group of women in our community on April 15, 2011. They decided to stop a truck of loggers and prevent it from passing, even with the knowledge that the loggers were armed.

Throughout the day that these events took place, people continued to receive updates regarding what was going on and what they could do to help. From that first day onward, we began feeling an impulse throughout the community to act. Since all of us believed that our lives were threatened, there was nothing that we could do besides put our hearts and souls into defending our community, despite our fear of being attacked since the loggers were controlled by cartels.

We struggled during the first days and months, and even throughout all of 2011. Yet people began to take to the streets with a symbol present in all homes within the P'urhépecha community—the bonfire, which involves not only the tradition of making a fire, but also the conversations that are had around the fire. We took that symbol out of the home and onto the streets, and almost every street corner had a bonfire. Members of the community began to gather, creating a very important source of unity. It became apparent that everybody had common concerns, and people's religious or political differences proved to be irrelevant. What everybody was concerned about was defending the community during a time when it was of utmost importance to do so. People of all ages participated in this community-based organizing, which has achieved so much and which, throughout the years, has not only involved itself in a social movement but in a legal battle as well.



Estefanía Rivera for AgitArte, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative



Gráfica de Lucha & Justseeds Artists' Cooperative

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

As a result of all of this, from that moment onward, there have been no more political parties. There are no more police. The municipal government from those days is completely gone. From 2011 onward, new kinds of representation have come into existence that use an open assembly system. This has created a community-based system of government, or *ronda comunitaria*, comprised of a rotating group of community members. These people from our town are appointed through an open election where we decide which people govern our community and manage safety issues. This is a change that has come about from the uprising and is how Cherán has attempted to face challenges that have arisen since 2011.

## Now could you tell us about how you organized within the community during COVID-19, how your experience has been and how you have dealt with the situation?

**Yunuén:** At first, when we began hearing about the pandemic in Cherán, people were scared of facing something that we had not experienced or been used to before. Even while speaking about times when there had been similar viruses such as the flu, the elderly explained it as if it were something that had affected other areas but did not reach Cherán. That has changed, because we now feel it very close to home. Cases began showing up in neighboring communities. It is a pleasure for me to say that community organizing is still thriving during the pandemic. The first actions that we began to implement here were proposed by the community members of Cherán. We did not wait for the community government to respond; instead the people acted and took the initiative to implement their own solutions.

Many people from our neighborhoods began making food for those living on the outskirts of town. Others gathered food pantries, or *despensas*, for people who used to make a living by selling food in schools and depended on activities that were suspended. From there, everyone became incentivized and started to participate. Even schoolteachers organized a food bank to collect pantry items to give out. Those are the kinds of initiatives that began from within the Cherán community. Then, of course, with our community government's collaboration, we have a health commission that took any necessary measures and kept us updated regarding which streets were sanitized, travel limitations and other issues. There has been a lot of emphasis placed on ensuring this kind of safety.

Inevitably, we could not keep our community from having any COVID-19 cases, but we continue to work to contain the virus and to keep it from escalating here. The people themselves have voluntarily gathered at the entrances of Cherán to participate in health protocols. I think that this helps us cope with things, but again it is with the participation of the same people, from a place of being aware ourselves, with many people avoiding going out. The assemblies that we were hosting have been suspended. This year was the ninth anniversary of the April 15 uprising and we had planned to celebrate the week after the anniversary with one of the largest festivals in our community. During our last assembly, however, the community discussed all of the

work involved in setting up the festival and decided to suspend any festivities where people gathered. Everyone respected this because it was a decision from the people themselves. There have been cases of COVID-19 that arose due to particular situations, such as a community member who returned with the virus, leading it to spread from there. There are still some cases, but we have not yet reached as many as nearby towns.

## How have your community's traditions helped you in terms of health-related knowledge during the pandemic?

**Yunuén:** In fact, the meaning of Cherán comes from the P'urhépecha word *ch'erani*, which means "to startle", and it is related to magical rituals with two types of shamans, either female or male. First, the *sikuami* is a shaman who works with energy, the soul, the connection to nature and similar issues. On the other hand, the *xurhijki* is a shaman who has knowledge of the herbal remedies from our land, knows how to use them and ensures that all of their knowledge is shared among the community. This way, all of us get used to having medicinal plants at home that can be used to treat any problem that we may experience.

**"From that moment onward, there have been no more political parties. There are no more police. The municipal government from those days is completely gone. From 2011 onward, new kinds of representation have come into existence that use an open assembly system. This has created a community-based system of government, or *ronda comunitaria*, comprised of a rotating group of community members"**

This continues to be a very present tradition here. When you are not feeling well, you know that you can find a solution to your pain in your home garden before looking elsewhere. It is something that is so normal that even if you ask the children here what they take when their stomach hurts, they will tell you which plant to use and how. In other words, it is knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation, you know? Everyone is used to it. Before going to a doctor, you use remedies from your garden. Now it is seen as even more relevant. The women and elders have put a lot of effort into teaching community members what to take for respiratory problems. All herbal remedies have been shared. This is also something that has been helpful for us.

## How have your community's methods of communication worked during the pandemic? What has been the role of the community radio station, Fogata (The Bonfire)?

**Yunuén:** Our community members broadcast by themselves from radio booths. That has been helpful because they are able to share what is going on, and that is a relief because it helps us see that this is something we are all going through together. We have also put together a number of special programs regarding how all of us are dealing with this situation, including other people's experiences and testimonials from other parts of Mexico. We are about to face a lot of challenges.

On one of the shows, people from Oaxaca, Mexico City and other parts of Michoacán were discussing how the pandemic is also affecting communities that are seeking to become autonomous. Suddenly, the central government is issuing urgent programs and plans that need to be implemented immediately, even though it knows that it is impossible to do so, and that the communities who are already carrying out their right to self-determination always need to have a community consultation in the assembly. Then, suddenly, the central government starts enforcing time limits to resolve these issues. This has been happening to people in other communities too. They have also been dealing with the question of how to react in such a situation. The central government takes advantage of its place of power to put pressure on our communities. Given this, besides the debate regarding whether or not we should approve the central government's decisions, we are also faced with the need to analyze, as communities, whether the way in which they are doing this is okay for us or not. We are not going to ignore the need to think about this, even during the pandemic.

**\*Editors' Note:** The second part of this interview will be published in the features section of the next issue, #34. ♦



# COVID-19 in Prison Holistic Self Care & Protection

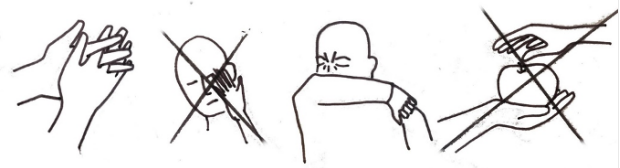
By Danica Rose, Betania Ridenour, et al

**Authors’ & Editors’ Note:** This guide was created in the spring of 2020 by a Bay Area-based group of artists, activists, healers, body workers, formerly imprisoned folks and an attorney in CA in order to support imprisoned people take care of and protect themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic. While there has been a lot of guidance from the Center for Disease Control, what is outlined here is rooted in **holistic resistance** and prisoner solidarity.

The authors of this guide are not licensed medical professionals and do not diagnose or prescribe. The information shared is not meant to cure or treat COVID-19, but to empower prisoners to feel more confident in what to do to support and protect themselves in this uncertain time. The info compiled is based on what the authors know people in CA prisons may at times have access to, but canteen items vary by prison and state. *The Abolitionist* Editorial Collective has removed some items from the canteen section to shorten the length of this piece.

One tenet of holistic resistance and health is that **every body is different. We all have different needs and ways that our bodies respond to stress, illness and different treatments. We urge you to listen to your own body and trust your own experience. Nobody can take self-care away from you.**

## Simple Steps to Protect Yourself and Help



### Stop Viruses from Spreading

- Wash your hands whenever possible.** Hand-washing is one of the most important things you can do to keep from getting and spreading viruses
- Avoid touching your face.** Try not to rub your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Cover your cough.** Some germs and viruses spread through the air. Cough or sneeze into a tissue or your sleeve to trap the virus. If you cough into your hands, wash them as soon as you can.
- Keep your space as clean as possible.** Keep surfaces clean and avoid touching surfaces that may not be cleaned often. Viruses can live outside the body for a long period of time.
- Don’t touch other people’s food and don’t let them touch yours.** It’s a bummer, but sharing unpackaged food with each other right now is not advised—it could spread the virus.

## Nutritional Tips to Strengthen Your Immune System and Resilience while Inside

Here are some notes on strengthening your immune system through nutrition. Prison canteens and commissary are limited and vary widely. These notes were put together by Nicole Rose with prisoners in CA prisons. Notes on which package companies provide some items are included.



**Apple Cider Vinegar:** Boosts your immune system. Fermented; it contains beneficial bacteria and probiotics that can have a positive impact on immune system health. Also has antibacterial properties that fight off pathogens wreaking havoc in your body (Available from Walkenhorst).

**Bananas:** Contain prebiotic fiber that selectively feeds the protective bacteria in your gut. Guard the intestinal tract against harmful pathogens. These “good” bacteria stimulate immune cell production. Also, a good source of several vitamins and minerals, especially potassium, vitamin B6, and vitamin C.

**Canned Sardines, Mackerel & Oysters:** Packed full of vitamin D and omega-3 fatty acids, all linked to a significant reduction in depression and anxiety. Vitamin D is called the “sunshine vitamin,” because it is produced in your skin as a response to sunlight and plays an important role in mood regulation.

**Cayenne Powder:** Immune-boosting! Activates the circulatory system as a cold and flu treatment. In one tablespoon (five grams) of cayenne pepper, there is 44

percent of the recommended daily intake of vitamin A. An excellent source of beta carotene (a powerful antioxidant), vitamin E, vitamin C, vitamin B6, vitamin K, and manganese (Available from Access Securepak & Walkenhorst).

**“We all have different needs and ways that our bodies respond to stress, illness and different treatments. We urge you to listen to your own body and trust your own experience. Nobody can take self-care away from you”**

**Cinnamon Powder:** Increases warmth and circulation in the body. It is an age-old remedy if you’re coming down with a cough, sore throat, or cold. It helps move congestion in your chest. It can be used as a digestive aid, helping with nausea, flatulence, and diarrhea. Add cinnamon to food, tea, and honey (Available through Access Securepak).

**Coconut Oil:** Jam-packed with lauric acid, a natural antibacterial, anti-fungal, and antiviral. Boosts weakened immune systems by improving white blood cell counts and helping the body fight viruses (Available from Walkenhorst).

**Garlic Powder:** Contains powerful antimicrobial compounds to help fight bacteria, parasites and viruses. One of the best preventions and treatments for respiratory infections (Garlic powder & garlic softgel supplements are available thru Access Securepak).

**Ginger:** Helps with colds, flu and coughs. Relieves nausea and sore throats. Increases circulation, gets rid of mucus congestion, settles upset stomach, dispels gas, relieves aches and pains and reduces inflammation. Sprinkle the powder on food or add a teaspoon to hot water and drink (Available from Walkenhorst).

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

**Italian Seasoning & Herbs:** Examples include basil, marjoram, oregano, rosemary, sage, and thyme. Give meals more flavor and contain potent antiviral and antimicrobial properties. Great aromatic lung supportive! Add a few teaspoons to hot water and drink as tea or add to food. Rosemary and oregano are especially helpful antivirals (Italian mix, rosemary & oregano available from Access Securepak).

**Lemon Juice:** All citrus fruits have lots of vitamin C, which is good for immune systems. At a high enough blood concentration, vitamin C appears to combat certain viruses. During a viral infection, the body’s supplies of vitamin C are rapidly depleted as the immune system’s white blood cells absorb and quickly use up all the vitamin C available (Lemon juice and tatin, which contains red peppers and lime juice, are available through Access Securepak).

**Oats:** Restorative to the nervous system. Rich in fiber and high-quality protein, as well as many vitamins and minerals. Especially good to eat in high-stress environments like a prison. Oats are moistening, so they are really helpful for dry cough (Available thru Access Securepak).

**Pepper (Black):** Generally available on the wing. Helps digestion by stimulating digestive juices, making it easier to eat. Add it to warm water to help fight colds and infections. It’s especially good for clearing damp, ‘mucousy’ coughs.

**Salt:** A salt solution can be a mouthwash and gargle. Use two teaspoons of salt dissolved in X amount of water. Gargle with salt water twice a day. It makes the mucus at the back of your mouth less hospitable to viruses (Available thru Access Securepak).

**Thyme:** An amazing medicinal herb. Use in hot water as an antibacterial tea to remedy sore throats. Its antispasmodic action can help with hacking coughs and acute bronchitis, as well as digestive complaints like cramps or bloating. Research has shown a positive effect on mood. One compound, carvacrol, increases dopamine and serotonin levels (Available from Walkenhorst).

**Tea:** Great warming, calming, and nutritive way to take in plant medicine. Even warm water is a way to calm your body. Two good tea herbs are peppermint and chamomile. The menthol in **peppermint** works as a decongestant, shrinking swollen membranes in the

nose (making it easier to breathe), and helps loosen mucous collected in the lungs. Peppermint can help relieve digestive symptoms like gas, bloating and indigestion, tension headaches, and migraines. It can also help improve energy, fight bacterial infections and prevent illness, and improve sleep. **Chamomile** not only reduces stress and anxiety but is also a sleep aid. It’s also loaded with antioxidants. **Both peppermint and chamomile** relax muscles and reduce irritability (Access Securepak has Chamomile/Mint tea).



## Somatic Techniques for Coping with Stress

As the mind and body are one and the same, our thoughts and emotions have incredible effects on our physical health.

### Self-Massage:

- Your own hands have tremendous healing potential. Place them at the heart center. Try to imagine beautiful light and energy flowing from your hands to your heart.
- Start taking deep, steady breaths. Keep breathing and allow yourself to sigh or make audible expressions.
- Thank yourself for all that you do. Hold a moment of gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion for yourself. Say it aloud to fully express and release.
- With clean hands, use lotion or oil and massage in the from hands toward the heart center, as gently or firmly as you wish. Stopping at the chest, apply firm pressure with fingertips along the sternum for a few minutes. Continue to breathe deeply and allow yourself to release any stuck emotions that make you feel anxious, sad, or angry.
- Visualize these emotions and energies as a color. Crying is sometimes a response to this practice and remember that is okay; your tears are cleansing.
- Now moving on to the legs, massage towards the feet and then back up the inner legs. Spend time making circles over the knees and ankles. Move to the belly and neck, then spend a fair amount of time massaging the scalp and ears. Our ears are a complex system related to our whole body and play a key role in our survival.

**“As the mind and body are one and the same, our thoughts and emotions have incredible effects on our physical health”**

## Breathwork and Meditation Exercises

Breathwork can strengthen our respiratory system, cardiovascular system, balances blood pressure, and is a highly effective tool for anxiety and coping with stress.

- Find time to yourself and sit comfortably and tall, or you can do this while standing. You do not have to be still and may do this while moving around. There are no rules.
- Visualize a warm glowing light pouring over your head and encapsulating you in protection. Breathe slowly and deeply, in through your nose and out your mouth.
- As you breathe in, allow your belly to fill, stretching the ribs and abdomen. As you breathe out, compress the belly inward and gently squeeze the air out. Pay attention to the sensations in your body, the temperature of the air going in, how some muscles may be tight, and some may be relaxed. Move if you need to.
- Take a moment to internally or even audibly express gratitude and love for your body as you breathe in and out. Place your hands or tap on different places on the body, like the chest, top of the head, the throat, liver and kidneys. Use this time for self-affirmations, mantra or prayer.

**Self-Affirmations:** “I am worthy of self-love,” “I am healing,” “I am more than my trauma,” “I have so much to offer,” “I am strong,” “I am enough”.



Jin Shin Jyutsu (JSJ) is an ancient healing practice from Japan that supports physical, emotional, and spiritual health. You can practice JSJ on yourself as frequently as you like without any time limit. Because it heals by moving stuck energy to places that need it, the more it is used, the more beneficial it will be.



This JSJ hand gesture helps lungs and relieves coughing. Hold for at least three minutes. Count 36 exhales while holding.

This mudra helps all organs in the body as well as all emotions including, but not limited to stress, anxiety, and fear. Hold each finger for at least two minutes or until you feel a pulse, then switch hands. Count 36 exhales while holding. You may find one hand more relieving than the other. Experiment and observe. It’s best to do both hands when time allows. ♦



# Confined Before COVID-19 and Prisoner Speak-Out

These pieces are a combination of excerpted reprints from our comrades at ABO Comix and a sampling of submissions to *The Abolitionist* that our readers sent Critical Resistance directly. The first four pieces are from ABO Comix’ compilation of LGBTQ prisoner expressions related to the pandemic—*Confined Before COVID19: A Pandemic Anthology by LGBTQ Prisoners*—and were compiled in the month of April 2020. The remaining submissions were written by different imprisoned readers of our newspaper and selected by Critical Resistance in September 2020.

We offer them here in the Features section of Issue 33 to amplify our inside readers’ voices reporting on the conditions of the pandemic and im-

prisonment, and to show all of our readers inside that you are not alone. Collectively, we are a resource for each other’s protection, resilience and survival.

To be in touch with ABO Comix, write to:

ABO Comix  
PO Box 11484  
Oakland, CA 94611

**To submit a piece to a future issue of *The Abolitionist*, read our Call for Content and Submission Guidelines on page 16.**

## Prisoner-Made Face Mask Instructions

By Shaylanna Luvme

It’s super easy to make this face mask. You already have the materials that you will need in your cell. I got my idea from Dr. Oz. He said that you could make a face mask out of anything, from a bandana to toilet paper, so that’s what I did – I made a face mask out of toilet paper!

1. Take three (3) squares of toilet tissue (the length of an envelope) and overlap four (4) strips of toilet tissue of the same size.
2. Use a pen, pencil, or anything that you can use to poke a hole in the toilet paper. Poke four (4) holes in the sides of the mask and use any type of string (I used thread from my sewing kit) to thread the string through the holes. Tie them so you will be able to loop them behind your ears.

**Keep yourself protected and healthy!** Wash your hands for twenty (20) seconds with hot water throughout the day.

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

...

## The Fight Against COVID-19

By Shaylanna Luvme

A global pandemic out of nowhere  
It struck us through the air  
At first it was thought to be the flu  
But who would’ve knew?  
A death toll like we’re in war zones  
New York State wasting money on social distance drones  
China swept the truth with a political broom  
Now society has to use Zoom\*  
This is something we don’t recognize  
Donald Trump spitting out lies  
The nation on shutdown  
People at home clowning around  
Concerts from the living room  
Social media’s at an all-high boom  
Heroes out on the frontlines getting the job done  
So, have some respect, go have safe fun  
This is already a difficult task  
So please be safe and wear a mask  
Go listen to all the singers of bands  
But remember you can never get  
Enough of washing your hands!



Kill Joy, Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative



**\*Editors’ Note:** These lines contain a few references for which we want to provide some context. The reference to China in the third line of this stanza alludes to the way the Chinese government initially downplayed the numbers of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the early days of the virus. The United States, however, has now engaged in just as much if not significantly more fudging of the numbers and spread of dangerous misinformation about the virus. The reference in the fourth line to “Zoom” is to the online video meeting platform called Zoom that is now in very wide use as people shelter in place and work from home due to the pandemic.

## On COVID-19 in a Texas Prison

By Juan Javier Ornelas

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

Many prisoners on the Estelle Medical Unit who tested positive, showed symptoms, or were exposed to the virus were sent to the Estelle High Security Unit (“Super Seg,” “Estelle,” or “HS Unit”), which confines prisoners in isolation chambers. But most of these prisoners who were sent to HS due to the virus have since been sent back to the main building with no further information from TDCJ. Both Estelle Units have been on lockdown for almost a month.

Prisoners in the HS Unit normally go on lockdown every 90 days for two weeks for cell searches, so they are used to being on lockdown, but it is different due to the virus. Everyone, including prisoners, officers and medical staff, is anxious and frustrated. All problems escalate quickly. Commissary and eComms have shut down, leaving prisoners hungry and angry. Prisoners are sick of eating the same cold meal out of a paper sack three times a day. Prisoners are being denied visits, phone calls, recreation, commissary, programs, religious services, and any medical services considered “non-emergency.”

There are 10 wings at the HS Unit and two of those wings are being used for prisoners who have tested positive for COVID-19. Non-infected prisoners fear for their lives because of the risk of contamination. Prisoners, officers, and medical staff who work with and/or around infected prisoners do not always properly use and change out their personal protective equipment and they are not being tested before returning to work with and/or around non-infected prisoners.

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

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

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

Respectfully,  
Juan Javier Ornelas

...

## Submission About Effects of COVID-19 at Attica Correctional Facility

By Tonye Vickers

There have been hospitalizations and deaths due to COVID-19 “behind the walls.”

Here at Attica Correctional Facility, there are some precautionary measures being taken against the spread of COVID-19. Unfortunately, these measures also give officers an opportunity to start denying prisoners their full rights.

For instance, all New York State facilities have suspended all visitations, yet officers and “essential” personnel are still coming and going. Also, the administration has distributed a Facility Operation Manual, which gives imprisoned individuals the use of phones and kiosks every day, yet the oppressors do not always

allow that use. The alarm goes off regularly, making all activities run late, or sometimes not at all, even if no one has been out of the cells.

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

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

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

I have been denied Interstate Parole Transfer to Virginia due to COVID-19, so I am forced to go to “Ground Zero” (NYC). I am so desperate that I have even contemplated doing something to catch a new charge to stay in jail longer, but now I hear county jails are not even safe.

I never imagined I would see something like this in my life. It feels like something I’ve read about in books and seen in movies and have joked about, but it is no laughing matter. IT IS REAL.

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

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

God Bless you all,  
Tonye Vickers

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

...

## Who is the “Virus”?

By William D Hamby Jr #135146

The coronavirus penetrates prison fence wires while we, captive, still hold crowns as Osiris  
Bless the lifers who can’t free themselves  
And those locked in literal hells  
Unable to escape the virus  
Nowhere to hide from the liars  
Who keep lies and injustice upon us

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

I call for you all to stand up to the horror  
and rise up against the virus, the monster,  
Injustice is as bad a disease that harms us  
So if they try to bring me death because my truth would never die  
Let them hate me for the truth instead of love me for a lie ♦



Prisoners’ Lives Matter Too!

By Ezzial Williams

Greetings comrades,

Despite America opening back up slowly but surely, I’m almost certain you’re not getting out as much these days. As we all try to adjust to this serious threat outside, it makes me wonder... What types of jokes are allowed during this quarantine? Aha! If you’re corny like me and guessed, “INSIDE JOKES,” then let’s high-five in spirit for keeping our sense of humor during these unprecedented times. After all, since there’s no official vaccine or cure right now, laughter may just be the best medicine, especially for those of us inside (No pun intended on that one).

Back in February, when I first became aware of the coronavirus, I joked that I wouldn’t take it seriously until I started seeing folks drop dead from it and people started wearing hazmat suits. Ironically, since then, I’ve witnessed through the news both things and now find myself trying to fend off infection while being imprisoned in a place where contagion has spread like wildfire. Experts predicted early on that the virus would do tremendous damage in prisons and nursing homes due to the fact that, in these types of institutions it’s impossible to socially distance. As it turns out they were right.

Officials have lazily tried to implement a rule that everyone should stay six feet away from each other when going to the chow hall. They even made us some flimsy face masks to wear. Apart from that, we are still mingling in groups on the rec yard, the canteen line, and definitely in the dorms. Here in Florida and across the country, there have been numerous cases of multiple deaths occurring within these institutions because of the highly contagious nature of the pathogen. The



Kill Joy, Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative

close living quarters creates the perfect scenario for the virus to spread. Statewide, almost 1,000 prisoners and staff have contracted the virus, with some ultimately dying as a result of complications. I can’t even keep up with the latest nursing home statistics here, but to see the damage in such close proximity to us makes me more nervous than a postman at a dog show that I could possibly fall victim to the virulent menace too. Here at Cross City C.I., it’s pretty much contained. But to say that I’m creeped out by what’s transpiring doesn’t come close to describing how it feels to come in such close proximity to death. I can only compare it to the fear one might have after he or she found out they had been intimate with someone who recently died of AIDS in the early years of that crisis.

When I try to talk with other prisoners here about staying safe, some of them think that I’m losing my grip on reality or that I’m being overly concerned. Even guards tell me not to worry. But that’s easy for them to say considering that nearly everyone I talk to is quarantining

alone or with few other people. It’s a different story when you’re trying to duck a fatal illness while locked up in a unit with 200 people. Unfortunately, these are the circumstances we find ourselves facing as prisoners. We are forced to protect ourselves as best we can inside buildings that are designed for us to lose this struggle. The administration won’t give us any extra cleaning supplies to sanitize surfaces, so we are forced to buy bleach and wipes under the table from medical orderlies, given you have canteen, because not everyone has a support system out there. Thankfully, I have a small but great support network of like-minded friends, but even with that I’ve had to sacrifice both canteen and stamps just so that I can keep myself and my cell clean. What would you do in my situation? I’m scared! And hearing about prisoners being hauled off in body bags only heightens my anxiety.

The most frustrating part is that, in spite of the crisis and rising death toll, the leadership within the Bureau of Prisons and the Department of Corrections are reluctant to address the issue by allowing prisoners early release because they say they are concerned someone dangerous may slip through the cracks. [...] What I hope decision-makers realize is that **no solution will be perfect, but this shouldn’t stop them from using everything at their disposal to save the lives of thousands.** Lives are in the balance and time is of the essence. Something must give.

*Ezzial Williams is currently imprisoned in Florida. You can write to him at:*

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Cross City, FL 32628 ♦

Continued from page 1

statecraft that share vocabularies, theories, techniques, and technologies.

Contact tracing has become a staple in epidemiology (the study of health epidemics) to track and stem contagious diseases, fortifying and normalizing practices of surveillance. The process involves interviewing people who’ve been infected to ascertain where they’ve been and who they’ve had contact with—all in the hopes of identifying infected people before they infect others. For a disease like coronavirus, the project takes on an even greater urgency. The symptoms of coronavirus can take days to manifest, and those who are asymptomatic can spread the disease without any awareness they’ve been exposed. Contact tracing can only be accomplished through deeply invasive interviews and collection of personal information as “data”, so tracers are able not only to track who you’ve been in contact with, but where you have been, what the nature and duration of your encounters were, and the environmental conditions under which they took place. Commissioner Harrington’s statement, though criticized for its political implications, was revealing: tracing is integral to policing.

Harrington’s announcement brings into focus a recent trend in US policing: treating what is called “crime” like a public health crisis, and doing so with the help of computer analytics.

Police departments have operationalized contact tracing. Just like public health experts trace viruses, police use social network mapping (a technique adopted from public health) to track who you’ve been in contact with, who your friends and family are, and even what your social preferences and habits are. Sometimes, they get this information from your phone or social media activity (the National Security Agency calls this “contact chaining”), and entire networks of people are criminalized by virtue of who they know and are. The police treat events like gun violence as though they’re viral—and human beings as though they are vectors for criminality.

THE POLITICAL MOTIVATIONS OF TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

To track and contain even a small outbreak requires an immense amount of labor on the part of human tracers. It involves parsing through the fragments of a person’s memory to reverse engineer their contacts for anywhere from a couple of days to a couple of weeks. Some experts estimate that to track a highly infectious and rapidly spreading disease like COVID-19, most states need to meet a baseline requirement of 15 contact tracers per 100,000 people. The prospect of contact-tracing our way out of this pandemic has quickly devolved into a logistical nightmare.

Amid **disaster capitalism**, however, the state regards disasters as an opportunity to entrench and intensify capitalism through timely and aggressive economic and legal maneuvers. And technologists are ready at hand with highly profitable public-private partnerships to “solve” the disaster, exploiting the very real problems society faces during that crisis for financial gain. In April, just three weeks after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, Apple and Google announced a joint venture to develop a tool for “proxy tracing”, a method that uses your phone to track who you’ve been in physical proximity to.

Instead of employing thousands of human tracers, and overcoming knotty problems like trust and language barriers, Silicon Valley’s technique uses our phones as “proximity sensors”. The theory is that our phones, which are always with us, are constantly leaking data and information. That’s how advertisement companies—and police departments—are able to use them for surveillance and entrapment. This data is being used to trace COVID-19. If someone reports testing positive for COVID-19, the system is then able to scroll through their recent “contacts” and notify those folks that they’ve been “exposed”.

Even from the measures and standpoint of policing and a punitive state, proxy tracing is not perfect surveillance. Your phone has no way of distinguishing between contact with the barista who handed you coffee from behind a plexiglass screen or the dog-walker you pass by outside while jogging. But the logic is it’s just close *enough*, just “proximate” enough, that we can “flatten the curve” and stem the rate of infection. The cost of being wrong isn’t all that consequential—or so the argument goes. Capitalism and the PIC insist that data-intensive solutions are always politically expedient because the consequences of being wrong are unevenly distributed.

Silicon Valley was primed to offer proximate tracing solutions for COVID-19. Industry behemoths not only had the research and development capacity to take it on, they’d already been experimenting with “proximate tracing” technologies for decades, just in a different domain—policing. It’s no accident that, early on, countries like Pakistan simply re-purposed “anti-terror” analytic systems for contact tracing. Tracing associations and drawing proximate conclusions from data has epitomized innovation in policing technology for the past 10 years. Predictive policing, risk assessment technologies, and social network mapping: these are all the antecedents of proximate mapping technologies.

This liaison between technology companies and policing has found new possibilities with COVID-19. In early Sep-

tember 2020, the mayor of Los Angeles announced that the city’s coronavirus tracing program is being done in partnership with a company called spOn, Inc., a company most commonly known for the “Citizen” application. Citizen is a “crime tracking” application that aggregates 9-1-1 calls and user-reported illegal activity on their platform. spOn’s Citizen app even allows users to upload streaming video.

Like similar automated snitching systems that normalize community policing and surveillance, Citizen has been mired in controversy for years. The data it collates is extremely biased given who decides to use the app, and what they document as a potential “crime”. Yet, spOn has led a four-year media campaign trying to convince people that their app is a force for empowerment, even encouraging people to go out and actively document “crimes in progress”.

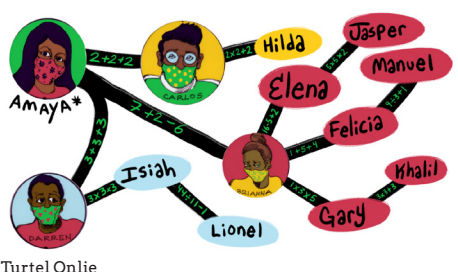
In March, the company pivoted from “citizen policing” and began to partner with municipal governments’ contact tracing efforts. When their proximate tracing service was pitched to New York City, organizers found that the COVID-19 tracing app collected an immense amount of personal data: location data, copies of state-issued identification, and undefined “health information”.

The app isn’t designed to protect people; it’s designed to induce fear, paranoia, and snitching-culture, going as far as to show users maps with “sick” people. Apps like these are **carceral technologies**, expanding the logic and practice of criminalization into public health. And, just as with computational policing, the consequences of being wrong will not be evenly distributed.

PROXIMATE TRACING BUILT ON PROXIMITY POLICING

In 2019, after years of protest, community organizers successfully dismantled the Los Angeles Police Department’s (LAPD) Los Angeles Strategic Extraction and Restoration (LASER) program. Ultimately deemed “ineffective” by police administrators because of rampant inaccuracies and data bias, the program has terrorized LA’s overpoliced communities for almost a half-decade.

In July 2016, a 31-year-old Black man named Keith Bursey was murdered by LAPD Gang Enforcement Division agent Kumlander. Kumlander shot Keith once in the chest and twice in the back after a traffic stop in one of LA’s LASER zones. The LAPD used data analytics to map out these LASER zones. They justified their targeting, tracking, and surveillance practices by claiming to be able to predict who was most likely to commit a criminalized act, and designating the neighborhoods these individuals frequented as posing an “escalated risk” to police. Keith Bursey



Turtel Onlie

wasn’t the only one who lost his life in a LASER Zone. A few months later, in October, LAPD chased down 18-year-old Black youth Carnell Snell Jr., shooting him in the back. In December 2016, LAPD Metro agent Ruiz was patrolling a “known gang-area” (as designated by police surveillance) and initiated a stop that ended with Ruiz shooting Ryan Joseph, a 20-year-old Black man, twice in the middle of his back. Joseph died.

It’s not just the lives that have been lost to LASER zones we have to consider, it’s those in our communities who are now on the inside facing enhanced charges, separated from their loved ones for decades on end—all because a computer “approximated” that theirs was a dangerous neighborhood. This computational experiment in approximating police “intelligence” had real and severe consequences for already heavily policed communities in LA. And that is the precise technique and system that public health officials advocate we replicate to fight COVID-19. These aggressive, data-driven approaches to disease management will make real, consequential mistakes—and the effects of those mistakes will be burdened by communities already made vulnerable.

Public health experts are wrong. It’s not that Harrington was misguidedly equating policing with public health practice. It’s that contact tracing technologies for disease surveillance are an instrument of the PIC. They are built to resemble and model policing practices, bringing with them the long-standing problems of criminalization and dehumanization in a country with a white supremacist inheritance.

History is remarkably consistent; medical models for disease management and criminalization share a twin core. Distinguishing one from the other isn’t just unsound, it’s negligent. Techniques—and technologies—in one domain inform the other. PIC abolitionist discernment requires confronting this entanglement just as much as it requires dismantling the other tools of the PIC.

*Sarah T. Hamid is an abolitionist and organizer from California. She leads the policing technology campaign at the Carceral Tech Resistance Network, and co-founded the inside/outside research collaboration, the Prison Tech Research Group. ♦*



# Toward Healthy Communities Now and Beyond COVID-19:

## An Abolitionist Platform by Critical Resistance

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

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

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

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

Organizations who have endorsed our platform:

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

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



Ashley Lukashevsky, People's Paper Co-Op



### DEMAND FREEDOM FOR ALL IMPRISONED & DETAINED PEOPLE

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

### RESIST SURVEILLANCE, POLICING & MILITARIZED RESPONSES TO COVID-19

Instances of crisis and disaster have historically been used as justification for escalating the resources and power of policing and military responses. Once the crisis has passed, the escalated capacities and response become the new norm. We must not yield to any calls for surveillance, police, or military as a means of managing people under COVID-19. During this time, it is imperative to cease police contact and utilize community based and collective solidarity to support each other.

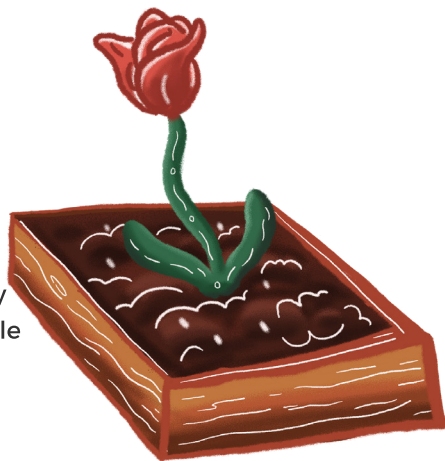


### DEMAND PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTHCARE NOW & INTO THE FUTURE

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

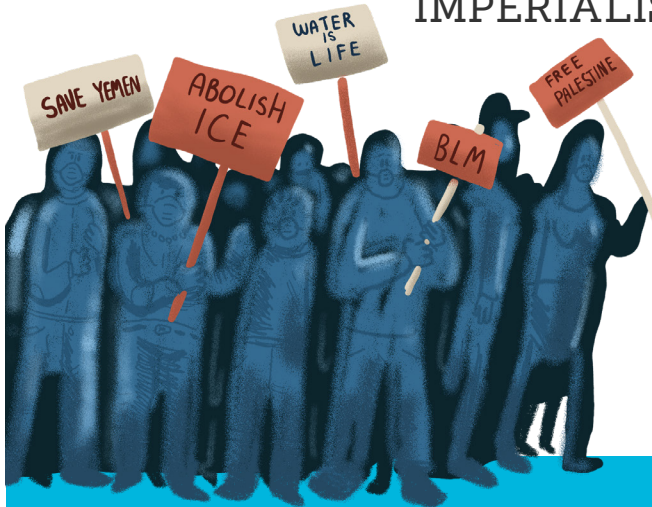
### ENSURE PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO HOUSING, FOOD, & ECONOMIC SECURITY

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



### SUPPORT INTERNATIONALISM / END US IMPERIALISM & MILITARISM

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



Illustrations by Jeremiah Durian-Williams

[www.criticalresistance.org](http://www.criticalresistance.org)







for example, a drug company called Lederle funded a pain tolerance test using an enzyme injected into prisoners’ muscles, causing fever, chills, and extreme pain. The use of unapproved drugs, incorrect dosage of approved medications, and the administration of psychotropic drugs as punishment or control by non-medical corrections personnel have particularly been problems at CMF, the California Institute for Women, and Lompoc Federal Prison. Trials like these have not been permitted for about 40 years in California. According to Rachel Kagan, a spokeswoman from the federal receiver’s office, regardless of the Institute of Medicine’s current recommendations, prisoners in California state prisons won’t be participating in medical experiments until California can guarantee prisoners basic healthcare, which she estimates will take 5 to 10 years.

Access to basic healthcare is not one of the Institute of Medicine’s requirements for including prisoners in future drug trials. The Institute of Medicine identifies people currently imprisoned, on parole, and on probation as “prisoners” and is confident that the reg-

ulations they would set up would prevent them from being taken advantage of or hurt in drug trials—but previous regulations were ignored in favor of funding.

The Institute of Medicine claims that they want to include prisoners in trials due to the high incidence of infectious diseases among prisoners (up to 10 times greater than people not imprisoned); they also claim that experimentation will benefit participants who suffer from chronic or infectious illnesses and is even essential to improving their care. Are they recommending drug trials to improve people’s health instead of ensuring quality healthcare? Even if there were short-term positive benefits for people involved in trials, would participants and their families have access to developed medications? Without insurance or access to healthcare, medications are nearly impossible to get.

One of the main tenets of the Nuremberg Code requires that participants volunteer and be informed, yet prisoners live in a coercive environment. How can consent be possible? If drug researchers enter a prison promising health benefits where there is inadequate

healthcare, what would we do? If you were offered \$100 to participate in a study when you made eight cents an hour for breakfast duty, what would you choose? If you were offered a private cell when you lived in an overcrowded cellblock, would you move?

What the doctors charged in the Nuremberg trials, Tuskegee, Holmesburg, San Quentin, Vacaville, and now the Institute of Medicine have in common is that they all believe experiments on prisoners will benefit the public. Implicit in this idea is that prisoners are somehow not part of the public. They are expendable losses for public gain, a separate group with less humanity and fewer rights. This is the exact attitude and perspective that allows and empowers abuses to happen in the past, present, and future. Before the Institute of Medicine even thinks about opening a drug trial, maybe they should guarantee people quality healthcare.

As part of a movement to access healthcare, prisoners have advocated and educated themselves and each other about their health for decades. ♦

# 9971: A New Column on Abolitionist Study & Struggle with Stephen Wilson

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

Critical Resistance hopes 9971 will be a space for regular reflection and political interventions on the importance and role of study in our struggle for PIC abolition. We aim to consistently support Stevie in offering readers useful tips, tools, and lessons for studying inside, as well as opportunities to sharpen shared political analysis inside and outside of prisons so that our work together for collective liberation becomes more effective.

*To introduce this column and preview some of the themes, topics, and discussions it might explore, we offer an excerpt from a webinar on September 1, 2020 with the group Study and Struggle. Titled Abolition as Study and Deconstructing Racial Capitalism, the event featured Stevie as a panelist and was hosted by Haymarket Books. It was organized and moderated by Garrett Felber, Assistant Professor of African-American history at the University of Mississippi and organizer with Study and Struggle. At the time of the event, Stevie was retaliated against with 30 days of solitary confinement and was unable to attend via phone. With help from an outside comrade and Rust Belt Abolition Radio, the event featured panelists responding to prerecorded clips of Stevie and the moderator’s questions.*

*Stevie’s perspective on study was joined by three leading outside abolitionist organizers and educators: Rachel Herzing, a longtime PIC abolitionist, co-founder of Critical Resistance, and current executive director of the Center for Political Education (CPE); Derecka Purnell, a human rights lawyer, writer, organizer, and deputy director of the Spirit of Justice Center; and Rukia Lumumba, executive director of the People’s Advocacy Institute, co-lead of the Electoral Justice Project of the Movement for Black Lives, and a steering committee member and co-chair of the legal committee of the Mississippi Prison Reform Coalition.*

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

**Stevie:** Study changed my life. It began as a way for me to figure out what was happening in my world, what happened to my community, and now how to change things for the better. This continues for us inside prison—it’s not a one-time or place thing. We study with a purpose so that we can transform ourselves, our environment, our relationships with other people. Study for us doesn’t occur inside a classroom, but happens collectively. You can’t study by yourself. Study must be a collective act that involves engaging with other people or other texts.

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

We must study history. We can learn a lot from what people have already done, but not without access to these materials or information. With the help of people outside, we’ve been able to learn about the past and remain informed about the present. This knowledge empowers us. We’re able to learn from past movements, situations where people have been locked up, what they’ve done, accomplished, where they failed, and how we can attach ourselves to furthering this work.

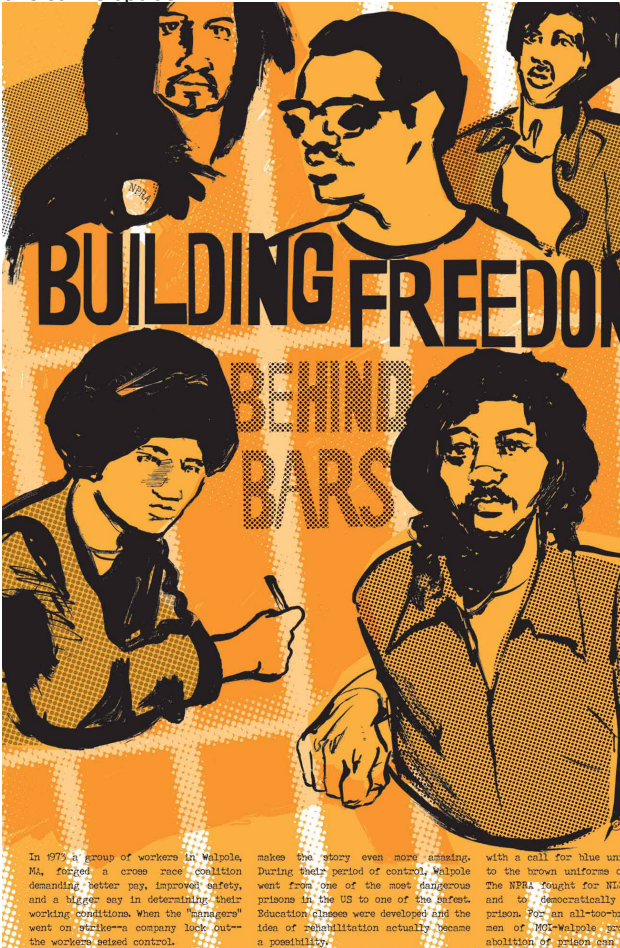
Study is a major activity for us inside. It is our main vehicle of transformation. *It cannot be done without help from people beyond these walls*, because the DOC does not want us to study. Please stay connected to people and help us study.

**Rachel:** I agree with Stevie—study is very important, not only to deal with our own conditions, but as a tool to build community. At CPE, we work with organizations and movements to use study as a tool for strengthening their work. Our approach acknowledges the central role study plays in PIC abolition. Studying alone is not going to abolish the PIC, no matter how good we are at it. We need study to organize well.

Our best education is put in service of making intentional change. This may be a change in our own conditions such as getting a GED to get a job or developing reading skills to fill out a housing application. **When we’re talking about study for PIC abolition, our study needs to be in service of fundamentally transforming the conditions that sustain surveillance, policing, sentencing, imprisonment, and execution. Our study has to be put to work.** I say study for abolition so that we never lose track of the fact that change is our ultimate goal.

**Derecka:** In law school, I started to become politicized around political education from Robin D.G. Kelley. I asked him, “What’s the political education starter kit? What do I need to read?” Robin said, “I can’t tell you what to read. You have to get with some people and decide what political education makes sense for your struggle.” I was like, “First you tell me political education exists, but you’re not gonna tell me what to do with it?”

At the time, I was part of a student movement with people who had politics further left than my own back then. We figured we were smart enough, nice enough. We were kind and curious enough, and our demands were the right thing to do. Why *wouldn’t* Harvard want to hire a diversity, access, and inclusion officer? Why *wouldn’t* they hire more Black staff? It wasn’t until I went to South Africa where students who were organizing to decolonize their university were reading Fanon, having plenaries discussing Fanon’s theories, and making real-time decisions based on what they were reading that I saw study and struggle as part of the same space.



Alexander Dwinell & Sanya Hyland, Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative

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

Our analysis shifted to implementing our own critical race theory program where we invited critical race theorists and created the only space on campus where anyone could teach. It didn’t matter if you were part of the dining services team, a custodial worker, or a student. We created the environment we thought we could convince Harvard to become.

Now when I talk to law students, I say: Yes, it’s important you learn constitutional law. Most importantly, find your people and cultivate a political analysis. What you think may be good, you’ve been socialized to believe. You must do the deep work of critically rethinking collectively.

**Rukia:** My biggest concern is our ability to study, to recognize the struggle, and then to act. Oftentimes, it’s realizing the circular process of experimenting and continually studying at the same time that I’m pushing myself to consistently do. I often talk about this challenge with others: How do we lay the foundation for transformative systems we want to see, for our view of what abolition may look like, if we don’t jump out there and experiment?

For me, the purpose of study has become the purpose of experimenting. This conversation is really rich for me. It’s challenging that notion and allowing me to engage deeper in study with a recommitment to our Jackson community to explore ways of studying that make the information accessible to everybody. How do we use film screenings to make books that we’re reading accessible for folks who aren’t going to read a 400-page book in a month? Many people are tired after getting off work. Or a myriad of other reasons, like literacy—illiteracy in Mississippi is super high. The study piece is about sharing that process with community, making it more accessible and experimenting.

**How have you structured study groups? How were you in community? What were ways that you got to these issues of access, of building community through study?**

**Stevie:** Our study group is called 9971—a reference to Attica—and it’s a general abolitionist study group. We started reading things like Are Prisons Obsolete by Angela Davis. We read and then come together for discussion. We focus on definitions because this is the first time many people are hearing about abolition. When we say “a world without prisons,” they think we’re crazy. People immediately ask: What are you going to do about murderers and rapists? We had to really talk about basic definitions of safety and community, too. 9971 was a larger and more generalized group.

We also had Circle Up, a group of about 23 men, most under the age of 25. It focused on transformative justice and how we apply it inside prison, with our families and communities. Sass was the queer abolitionist group we started because it was sometimes hard to talk about those issues in 9971. We would talk about *Captive Genders and Queer (In)justice* and other works from an abolitionist perspective.

We also had Bold Type Books, which ten prisoners were involved in. Nation Books would also send a book

**Continue on next page**



each month with discussion questions, like a book club. Now Haymarket Books will be providing books. We’re happy to have this program continue.

My task in these study groups, a lot of times, is translating the work for people. That’s one of the areas we struggle with. Stuff that’s being published isn’t accessible to a lot of people behind the walls.

**Rachel:** Much of what Stevie shared are things I’ve experienced in organizations doing political education, [like Critical Resistance], but also at the CPE. Developing shared language is *really* crucial, in service of shared understanding. The language we use has power and can do certain kinds of work. For example: PIC abolitionists should stop using the word “officer” in reference to correctional officers and cops. Call them what they are—guards and cops. They do not deserve deference. Understand the political nature of language when it comes to abolition; there are very specific kinds of politics that abolition entails. I appreciate Stevie raising this.

I agree with Rukia that experimentation is very important. If we are developing a practice of studying then applying, our practice and our analysis gets better. Moving back and forth and understanding that what we learn is only as useful as what we do with it, and what we do must be informed by an understanding of what’s possible. I don’t mean what the state tells us is possible, but developing a hypothesis about conditions we’re living under and where we want to go.

At the CPE, we study in a bunch of different ways. We do formal study groups, like read and discuss. We do classes with curriculum on core concepts. We also show films and bring together organizations to be in strategic conversation. These conversations are where political education happens, because we’re having to articulate what we think and hopefully engage in principled struggle that makes us fight smarter—which, to my mind, is the goal. I want everybody to get more of what we want and need, and we need to fight as smart as possible to do that.

There is also the collaborative study that I’ve done with people inside. Some of this has included reading something together and discussing how we are thinking about it through our correspondence. Having conversations with people whom you are already, or would like to be, politically engaged with goes a long way.

**Derecka:** In my hometown of St. Louis, I worked with organizers through Action St. Louis and the Ferguson Collaborative to close a jail. Political education was among our first steps. As we built the campaign, the primary question was: *Where is our political commitment? Where are our principles? What is our shared vocabulary?*

The first political education conversation was around abolition. The first session was: What about the murderers and rapists? We put scenarios up and walked through them. To get to the heart of what people are afraid of, I also asked, “Why do people kill people?” We then came up with this grand list of why people kill people and talked about prevention and response.

The campaign started with people who were half skeptical, half curious about the project of abolition and evolved into each of them being on the fully-fledged abolition campaign that ultimately closed the jail. This felt like one of the most exciting things to have ever happened to me. There was a lot of debate and confusion initially, a lot of concern about safety and whether this was possible. Now that jail is closed because of political education, experimentation, the actions of those formerly imprisoned, as well as outside comrades committed to its destruction.

**Rukia:** This is reminiscent of what we’re doing to close Parchman Prison with Mississippi Prison Reform Coalition. The demand for Parchman to close came from a similar process of folks inside and outside studying the history of Parchman, understanding its existence as a place of torture and abuse for Black people since its inception as an 18,000-acre plantation. Following Reconstruction, Parchman was turned into a workhouse and prison, and has remained a prison since.

A lot of our study of Parchman came from inside guidance. Young folks primarily were imprisoned in Parchman because of protests in the 1960s and 1970s. They suffered similar abuses to folks currently inside Parchman and other Mississippi prisons, such as not being allowed to shower, not being provided food or drinkable water, sewage existing inside their cell, denial of medical treatment, understaffing, and unqualified staff. Folks are currently being retaliated against for speaking up about these same conditions happening at Parchman—similar to our brother Stevie who has been retaliated against for speaking out now. Get-

ting into the weeds of studying these experiences, our experiences, is very important.

Study also needs to center people who are directly impacted by the harm we’re trying to cure. Throughout my time in Mississippi, I learned that oftentimes as advocates we think we know the answer, because we know where we want to go. But when we stop and listen to what people are saying they want, we begin to realize a more complete vision. The way to our North Star is not always the same as we envisioned because people may not be right where we are.

For example, when talking about community-led governance in Jackson—which is directly tied to abolition—we talk about potholes. My father was the late mayor of Jackson, a revolutionary human rights attorney, and an amazing human being that dedicated his life to the work that we’re doing now. When creating his platform, he had a people’s assembly. Folks were like, “Yeah, you keep talking about this liberation, this freedom, this self-determination. To be honest, I’m just concerned about my ability to get to work, because every time I ride down the road, I hit a pothole. When I hit that pothole, it breaks my rim. Then I gotta get it all fixed and I’m late for work. Some folks are unemployed because they didn’t get to work.” We began to realize that we cannot move rapidly past the existing complexities causing problems in the first place. We need to study deeply our own experiences and how to use them to chart our course toward abolition and freedom.

For questions or suggestions, such as topics on study for abolition you would like to see 9971 cover, write to Stephen Wilson or *The Abolitionist* Editorial Collective.

Have thoughts or questions about this piece you want to share? Share your response by writing the editors a Kite! See details for Kites to Editors on page:

Smart Communications/PADOC  
Stephen Wilson, LB8480  
SC1 Fayette  
PO Box 33028  
Petersburg FL 33733

*The Abolitionist*  
Attn: 9971 Column  
1904 Franklin St, Suite 504  
Oakland CA 94612. ♦

# INSIDE-OUTSIDE FISHING LINE: Forging Relationships Across Walls

The Inside-Outside Fishing Line is a new column aimed specifically at bridging communication, strategy, and analysis between abolitionists inside and outside of prisons, jails, and detention centers. For each issue, the editorial collective will facilitate a “fishing line” by partnering two organizers — one inside prison and one outside — and assigning them a political topic to discuss through correspondence. We then will print excerpts of that correspondence — or fishing lines — for the column. In each issue, the organizers and topics discussed will change.

After learning that people caged at Multnomah County Detention Center (MCDC), a county jail in Portland, Oregon, were working together to pressure jail administration to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) against the coronavirus and to challenge jail conditions, Critical Resistance partnered two organizers to discuss developments at MCDC and the importance of outside solidarity for the struggle inside, for our first Fishing Line. Freddie Abraham is currently imprisoned inside MCDC in Portland, while “CF” is an outside organizer on the support team for folks inside MCDC. Freddie and CF were paired through Critical Resistance Portland’s prison correspondence program, in which outside organizers correspond with people inside prisons, jails, and detention centers in the Pacific Northwest to support political education, provide reading materials, and help with resource connection. This Fishing Line between Freddie and CF gives us some background on what has been happening in Portland and MCDC, and includes a letter from Freddie to outside allies and reflections from both Freddie and CF on inside-outside collaboration.

## COVID in Portland’s MCDC and the Struggle Inside

In Portland, the ongoing push for justice has taken many forms. More than a dozen people locked up at MCDC, which is located in downtown Portland, where nightly protests have continued for more than 90 days now, organized a jail-provided food strike to leverage their collective power in the face of the increased oppression and brutality on part of county corrections. As of early July, they had been given no PPE, they weren’t allowed to watch the news or look out the windows, and they were kept on lockdown 22 hours a day. Freddie Abraham has been held in long-term pretrial detention in MCDC since February 2020, and he and his comrades decided they had had enough. They began to hold a food strike, refusing jail food and instead buying food at the commissary to sustain themselves for the duration of the action, sharing resources as they could. Ultimately, the MCDC broke the action by sending in a Specialized Emergency Response Team to rendition and disperse the majority of prisoners to a different facility. However, the action was successful in several ways: country corrections officials met the

demands for PPE, awareness of jail conditions in the city grew, and the solidarity efforts of multiple groups on the outside coalesced into a vital network for action going forward.

## Dear Allies: Letter from Freddie

To my allies who are actively supporting the movement, as well as my personal struggles,

I want to say thank you. Thank you for not being silent. Thank you for having the courage to get out there and demand that you be heard. Thank you for having love and empathy as well as compassion for us who are being flat out railroaded by the system.

As I wake up in the morning and go through my day, I carry a deep sense of gratitude that I’d love to express to you all, but I can’t due to the circumstances. These are my thoughts as I do artwork, day in and day out. I fill my days with this art as well as doing and studying law.

I study law because, as you may know, we are so misrepresented and led down the path of deceit by the very persons (court-appointed attorneys) who are supposed to be fighting for us. And if I don’t educate myself and others on different aspects of the law, I will have absolutely no chance at all.

May God keep standing by your side. If he is for you, then who can be against you?

Thank you & God bless  
Mr. Freddie A.

## Inside-Outside Collaboration: Reflections from Freddie and CF

**What is something that has surprised you about your organizing relationship since you met?**

**Freddie:** One thing that surprised me was how well me and CF got along and how we kind of took to one other.

**CF:** It can be hard to get to know someone at first when your only means of communication is writing letters. It is so slow! I’m really glad that Freddie asked for my number so we could talk on the phone. It turns out we have a lot in common. We’re both woodworkers, hardcore Portland Trail blazers fans, and, most importantly,



Aaron Hughes, Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative

we’re both organizers. I think it is really important to get to know the person you’re writing to, to learn about their life and their story, and to be willing to share yourself. You have to have that trust going both ways in order to take risks and organize together. Really what surprised me most about it was that of all the random people to be matched up, we would get along so well. I’m lucky to have Freddie as my friend and comrade all organizing aside because both of our lives are better for it.

## What are some of the biggest challenges of inside/outside organizing for each of you?

**Freddie:** Some of the biggest challenges in inside organizing in my opinion are (1) solidarity = they move us around so much that you never get to really establish that base; (2) inside here there are some men who have very strong opinions and have not learned to let someone lead them, or just to listen. A lot of egos come into play in this environment. Outside, I think the challenge is just being consistent for long periods of time, there is no instant gratification in this fight and we live in an instant gratification society.

**CF:** Without a doubt — at least on my end — it would be the mail system at the jail here in Portland. When we were first trying to get word of the strike out to the

*Continued on next page*





Melanie Cervantes, Dignidad Rebelde & Justseeds Artists' Cooperative

press, I met a reporter interested in doing a story about it, but of course she needed to hear from sources firsthand. The first two times I sent Freddie letters with her contact information, they were flagged as “mail violations” because the jail claimed that the letters were contaminated with an unspecified substance. I don’t think either one was ever sent back to me. Now before I write to him, I take pictures of the letters in case they don’t get through so that at least I can remember or have a record of what I wrote. On the third attempt, we finally managed to get Freddie and the reporter in touch, but the whole process of doing so took nearly four weeks.

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

**CF:** Again, I feel so lucky that Freddie and I were paired up by the CR letter writing program\* because I have made a lot of connections over the years organizing in the city and was somewhat uniquely positioned to be able to help him and his comrades. With the ongoing organizing against the prison industrial complex (PIC),

the community here in Portland has been very active. I was able to connect with one of the bail funds here, and they have regularly helped put money on Freddie’s commissary account (and now the accounts of his comrades as well) so he could distribute resources, food, and creature comforts as a means of organizing within the jail. At one point I remember Freddie telling me he was making “welcome packs” for new folks who were being transferred there as a way of making them comfortable and connecting with them about what was going on in the jail. Because of the strikers’ ability to organize effectively within the MCDC, they were ultimately able to win one of their principal demands — masks!

In addition to the prison-provided food action, Freddie and his fellow strikers are planning a class-action lawsuit against the county for violations of their Sixth Amendment right to due process under the law. To fundraise for their legal expenses, I reached out to Critical Resistance Portland (CRPDx) and a number of other community groups working to abolish policing and the PIC. Freddie sent me some of the art pieces he had been making, and we framed them and held a raffle for the pieces. Via social media and word of mouth, we sold 348 raffle tickets at ten dollars a pop — \$3480! This was totally above and beyond what had been our highest of hopes, and it was so incredible to see the city step up like that. While I realize fundraising for a civil suit is maybe not organizing per se, I think it is pretty incredible nonetheless.

**What do people in the US need to know about what’s happening in Portland and what’s happening at MCDC?**

**Freddie:** I want them to know that it’s not hyperbole when we say the food is sometimes literally inedible. There’s a lot of one-sided disrespect (they have the same complex as the police, that sending someone to the hole for nothing, shutting off a paid phone call with no warning, etc., etc.). The actual legal system is a whole other “full” story within itself, ‘I’m just sayin’.

**CF:** I think the number one thing that people need to realize is that there are still a ton of people in long-term pretrial detention here who have been locked up since before COVID even hit! Freddie has been in since February 19, 2020. Not that being convicted of a “crime” necessarily means you are in fact guilty, let alone that you belong in the inhumane conditions of a jail or prison, but these are folks who have not had a chance at their day in court. Freddie has been in six months and has yet to so much as meet his court-appointed attorney. It’s an absolute travesty. COVID is no excuse. Every day he is at risk of being infected by corrections offi-

cers who have repeatedly demonstrated they couldn’t care less about the safety of the people locked up at the MCDC, regularly refusing to wear masks or follow proper cleaning protocols. I am sure this dynamic is not unique to Portland. Elected officials have the power to release him and so many others tomorrow if they want to, and yet they refuse.

**In this moment of pitched political action, what do you feel abolitionists need to remember?**

**Freddie:** I feel it’s important for abolitionists to remember that it’s a marathon on top of a marathon where you will, at the end of your stage, pass the baton. But while you’re in the long fight, you’re needed, you matter, and your ideas and opinions as well as insights matter.

**CF:** That building this movement requires personal connection and trust, and you cannot force that to happen overnight. Patience, an open heart, and an eye on the long game are all crucial. Capitalism conditions us to want instant gratification and to think in transactional terms, but we can subvert that paradigm by building solidarity. Without that personal connection, I feel like it can be easy for efforts at solidarity to backslide into mere charity. Charity is vertical (unilaterally deciding what someone else needs), while solidarity is horizontal (needs are identified and addressed in dialog with one another). When we don’t have the trust and communication to be able to figure out what that solidarity needs to look like for it to be useful and impactful, abolitionists — especially white ones with class privilege — can find themselves hamstrung by the internal logic of capitalism without even realizing it. My advice to any abolitionist writing to people who are locked up would be to listen, to ask questions, and to be honest. It might sound simple or trite, but this is what I believe.

**Editor’s Note:** After CF and Freddie wrote their reflections, Freddie and other inside organizers were transferred to Multnomah County Inverness Jail and placed in separate dormitories the same night they moved to file a class action lawsuit.

What do you think about this new column? Have ideas for political topics you would like to see discussed in a Fishing Line? Suggested authors inside or outside? Would you like to participate in an upcoming Fishing Line in *The Abolitionist*? Write to us and share your suggestions:

Critical Resistance & *The Abolitionist*  
Attn: Fishing Line  
1904 Franklin St, Suite 504  
Oakland CA 94612 ♦

**UNTIL ALL ARE FREE:  
Political Prisoner  
Updates**

- **Black August 2020 – August 21, 2020**, marks 49 years since George Jackson’s assassination. We celebrate Black August, commemorating the anniversary of George’s death while understanding his life as revolutionary in a long and unbroken line of resistance and sacrifice of Black people throughout history. Critical Resistance follows our ally and **San Quentin Six veteran Sundiata Tate’s** description of Black August as a time to “*embrace the principles of unity, self-sacrifice, political education, physical training and resistance.*”
- On September 6, 2020, Anarchist Black Cross held its annual Running Down the Walls event in support of political prisoners. This year’s event was held in honor of **Sekou Kambui** and directly supports the Warchest program, which sends money to political prisoners inside. Go to [abcf.net](http://abcf.net) to read statements from inside.
- **Red Fawn is Free!** Indigenous Political Prisoner and Standing Rock Water Protector Red Fawn was released from prison on September 9th, 2020. To support her go to: [standwithredfawn.com](http://standwithredfawn.com)
- **Jalil Muntaqim** was freed and is already facing threats of re-imprisonment. We were thrilled to announce earlier in October that after nearly 50 years in prison and after appearing before the parole board over a dozen times, the former Black Panther Party member and movement elder was finally released on October 7. Jalil tested positive for COVID-19 in May, and the district attorney still fought to prevent his release. For the month of October, Jalil was finally home with his family. However, on October 30, Monroe County district attorney issued a warrant for his arrest due to alleged “voter fraud,” charges for which no one in the state of New York has ever been arrested or indicted before. This is a deliberate attack and attempt of continued political repression of a beloved movement elder and leader. Hundreds of activists and community members continue to act in Jalil’s defense. Defend Jalil!
- Despite testing positive for COVID-19, **Marius Mason** was denied compassionate release in June

2020. Marius is over 50 years old, has underlying medical conditions, and has served the majority of his sentence. Support Marius; visit [supportmarius-mason.org](http://supportmarius-mason.org).

- **Hanif Shabazz Bey** of the Virgin Island 3 has a new piece titled “Fake News” at [thejerichomovement.com](http://thejerichomovement.com): “It is all just a sign that the purpose of all the mainstream media is to protect the interests of the ruling class, and keeping the masses divided along ethnic lines.”
- On May 28, **Ramsey Orta** was released after serving four years in New York state prisons.
- Anarchist prisoner **Eric King** is in need of support as he is facing new charges while inside and held in segregation. Visit [supportericking.org](http://supportericking.org) for further ways to support.
- Check out **Jeremy Hammond’s** piece, “A Prisoner’s Experience Behind Bars During COVID-19,” at [freejeremy.net](http://freejeremy.net).
- Help in the effort to free **Dr. Mutulu Shakur**! His release is more urgent than ever. We continue to actively push for his compassionate release. Go to [mutulushakur.com](http://mutulushakur.com) for more ways to support Dr. Shakur.
- On June 16, 2020, **Kamau Sadiki** was sent to an outside hospital to undergo vascular surgery to address a severe and ongoing infection. Please keep Kamau in your thoughts and write to him: Kamau Sadiki\* #0001150688 (\*Address envelope to Freddie Hilton)
  - › Augusta State Medical Prison  
3001 Gordon Highway  
Grovetown, GA 30813
- **Chuck Africa** was released on February 7, 2020. After more than 40 years inside, he was the final member of the MOVE 9 to come home. For more information or ways to support, visit [onamove.com](http://onamove.com).
- **Delbert Africa**, MOVE’s minister of defense, joined the ancestors. MOVE 9 political prisoner Africa, who was released in January 2020 after 42 years of imprisonment, died on June 15, 2020, at age 74. Read the MOVE statement at [onamove.com](http://onamove.com).
- Former political prisoner **Sekou Odinga** was on the Millennials Are Killing Capitalism podcast. Odinga shared lessons on the struggle and the need to support and bring home political prisoners. Listen at [millennialsarekillingcapitalism.libsyn.com](http://millennialsarekillingcapitalism.libsyn.com).
- Civil rights groups are calling to reopen **Imam Jamil Al-Amin’s** case. There is enough evidence to grant a new trial, and we must continue to push for Jamil’s freedom.



Leonard Peltier (left) and Russell “Maroon” Shoatz (right), Bec Young, Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative

- Check out the new podcast *LEONARD: Political Prisoner* about this important American Indian Movement prisoner, **Leonard Peltier**. We must free Leonard now! Listen at [leonard.buzzsprout.com](http://leonard.buzzsprout.com).
- Supporters are asking folks to send **Russell “Maroon” Shoatz** some well wishes as he has been going through health troubles recently. Send mail to:
  - › Smart Communications/PA DOC  
Russell “Maroon” Shoatz #AF3855  
SCI Fayette Post Office Box 33028  
St. Petersburg, FL 33733
- Over one year has passed since the death of **Tom Manning**, and we remember his fight for a world free of colonialism and domination until the end.
- Supporters of **Ed Poindexter** continue to push for his release. Poindexter, who is 75 years old and suffers from diabetes, among other health problems, is seeking compassionate release. With the release of a recent book about the 1970 Omaha Two case, Poindexter has come back into the spotlight. Prosecutor Don Kleine has refused to reopen the 1970 Omaha Two case after recent calls to reexamine it, and has denied Poindexter permission to speak to the media. A recent ban on recording equipment and a specified required visitation list of friends and family were cited as reasons for the denial. It is now an urgent moment to free Ed.
- There is a fundraiser to free political prisoner **Sundiata Acoli**, 83 years old, from 47 years in prison after the New Jersey appellate court denied him parole. Go to [sundiataacoli.org](http://sundiataacoli.org) and [jerichony.org](http://jerichony.org) for more information.
- Free **David Gilbert**! Free ‘em all! ♦



# CRITICAL RESISTANCE (CR)

## Updates and Movement Highlights

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

### NATIONAL AND CHAPTER UPDATES ON CR’S WORK

#### Critical Resistance Portland (CRPDX):

On September 8th, in response to the massive Santiam fires sweeping across Oregon, the Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC) transferred approximately 1,450 imprisoned people from Oregon State Correctional Institution, Santiam Correctional Institution and Mill Creek Correctional Facility to the Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP) in Salem. This move nearly doubled the already overcrowded OSP and threatened to expose every imprisoned individual to COVID-19. Inside and outside organizers anticipate a massive outbreak because of ODOC’s actions. In response, a network of organizers across Oregon and Washington, including CRPDX, Lane County Mutual Aid, and Siskiyou Abolition Project, published a phone zap targeting Governor Kate Brown and ODOC heads Colette Peters and Jessica Freeburn demanding mass release. Similar demands have been moving through Oregon state prisons and have also drawn support. Coffee Creek Correctional Facility evacuated to Deer Ridge.

On July 13, CRPDX launched the #WriteThemAll project, which organizes volunteers to write all 14,000+ people in Oregon state prisons. #WriteThemAll intends to help build community, strengthen the abolitionist movement, and disrupt the isolation and violence of imprisonment. Since launching, 1,779 people have signed up, and we’ve sent 1,011 volunteers the contact information for 8,564 people imprisoned across Oregon. As of September 25, nearly 5,000 letters have been sent. We have received over 300 response letters with more and more coming every week. The #WriteThemAll project also coordinated hundreds of outside volunteers to help send application forms for prisoners to receive stimulus checks to all people inside Oregon prisons in addition to all of our inside Abby readers, totaling over 20,000 letters in just a couple of days.

#### Critical Resistance Oakland:

CR Oakland’s work continues to focus on anti-policing and anti-imprisonment work in the Bay Area. Working alongside the Black Organizing Project this summer, the chapter celebrated a long-fought victory of securing a unanimous vote from the Oakland school board to pass the “George Floyd Resolution to Eliminate the Oakland School Police Department.” The chapter has also joined a number of conversations on defunding the Oakland Police Department.

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

The chapter has also been adapting during the COVID-19 pandemic, reconfiguring the prisoner mail correspondence program so that chapter members can work remotely. The chapter has also continued the 4400 Telegraph building project to develop a permanent community space in North Oakland, home of the first gang injunction fight the chapter worked on and won several years ago. The space will be a movement-building hub for abolitionist work in the Bay Area. While the building is still under construction,, the chapter has supported mutual aid efforts in the neighborhood. In partnership with Town Fridge, an Oakland-based network that provides free food fridges, the chapter now has a fridge outside of our building to share free food with street-based and unhoused neighbors during the pandemic.

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

#### CR National:

Across the US, CR has worked to connect abolitionist efforts from coast to coast and across different issues

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

CR’s Abolitionist Training School (ATS), which was started in 2019 as a multi-phase process of building a national PIC abolitionist network, has entered the next phase of its work with the launch of the Abolition NOW network. Through the Abolition NOW network,



Graphic: Eddy Hernandez, No New SF Jail Coalition

CR works closely with the Red Nation, BYP100, SONG, Black Visions Collective, Reclaim the Block, DRUM, Survived & Punished and All of Us or None / LSPC toward making abolition more common sense and clearly distinct from the more moderate national culture of reforms to the PIC.

### MOVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Some developments in the movement to abolish the PIC that caught our attention and we wanted to make sure you know about are listed below by region:

#### WEST COAST

##### CALIFORNIA:

##### Prisoner Resistance & Outside Solidarity

San Quentin State Prison has experienced its first widespread outbreak of COVID-19, following the transfer of 121 prisoners from San Bernardino County’s California Institution for Men (CIM), a known “hot spot” with over 500 active cases and 15 COVID-related deaths. Prior to the transfer, San Quentin had no confirmed COVID-19 cases; now reportedly there are over 1,600 cases and climbing. Immediately after the outbreak, prisoners released a set of demands that outside organizations are amplifying and directing toward the California Department of Corrections and the state Governor. Solidarity organizing has included actions outside of the prison since June 28, as well as larger caravan actions and mobilizations to both the state capitol and outside Governor Newsom’s home in Sacramento, CA.

##### Decarceration & Prisoner Release

Decarcerate Alameda County— a coalition led by the Anti Police-Terror Project, Causa Justa :: Just Cause, the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Human Impact Partners , and Restore Oakland— continues to advocate for freeing people from Santa Rita Jail, divest-



On July 27th, 2020 in Fair Oaks, California at Gov. Newsom’s mansion, a dozen protesters locked themselves down to the front gate of the governor’s home calling on him to Free Them All and to Stop ICE Transfers in order to stop the spread of COVID-19 in detention facilities throughout California. Photo: Brooke Anderson

ing from imprisonment and policing, and investing in community health. Despite a major setback when the Alameda County Board of Supervisors voted to increase the sheriff’s office budget by \$106 million/year in May, the coalition continues to build collective power with people within and beyond jail walls.

##### Prisoner Support

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

OAS is also a part of the fight to decarcerate Alameda County by organizing against Santa Rita, the local county jail where people face ongoing abuse and neglect from staff. Weekly updates on these actions can be found at <https://srjsolidarity.org/> or by inquiring with OAS for one of their Santa Rita Jail Bulletins. OAS is also organizing material support nights to provide food, drinks, smokes, and sometimes rides to anyone getting released. These nights have grown to several per week with regular trainings following effective COVID-19 safety protocols. OAS also writes to hundreds of prisoners across California, sharing political education and building relationships. We are committed to growing lines of solidarity and care. Currently, OAS is producing a mailer for all of their inside contacts detailing several acts of collective resistance that have taken place over the course of the summer.

If you’re interested in learning more, write to OAS at:

Oakland Abolition and Solidarity  
PO Box 12594  
Oakland, CA 94604



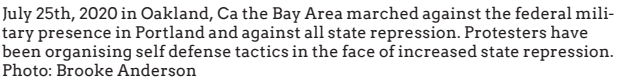
Cherry.



Thanks to the No New SF Jail Coalition ([nonewsfjail.org](http://nonewsfjail.org)), San Francisco has closed its jail located at 850 Bryant Street. After years of organizing, the No New SF Jail Coalition was successful in getting legislation to finally close the seismically unsafe jail. As the Sheriff tries to continue to use the facility's kitchen, the Coalition continues to push back for a full closure. **CLOSED MEANS CLOSED.**

San Francisco County will no longer be collecting revenue from prison phone calls. "San Francisco County is the first in the country to permanently stop generating revenue from incarcerated people and their families through phone calls, commissary markups or other services. In providing free phone calls, the Sheriff's Office negotiated a first-in-the-nation fixed rate contract with GTL, a jail phone service contractor, to ensure the lowest possible cost to the City and taxpayers," said the office of the mayor.

The California Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP) launched a clemency campaign calling for early release of elderly and medically vulnerable prisoners. With online actions and calls to Governor Newsom's office they have also organized two calls to action. The #LeadWithMercy call to action consisted of four online actions in June to raise awareness about victims of state violence behind bars, highlighting people in California state prisons and ICE detention centers. The #NoMoreDeaths call to action is a collective effort between the CCWP and families of those locked in cages to call on Governor Newsom to grant clemencies and IMMEDIATELY release Patricia Wright, Maria Adredondo, and Lucia Bravo — elders who are at extremely high risk of death and fighting for their lives. Patricia Wright was released on July 21, 2020. CCWP continues to organize around their call to #DropLWOP (life without parole), and has also taken up a fight to lobby for legislation that will ensure reparations for survivors of California's history of forced sterilizations.

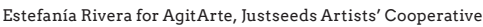


Noting the decline of CA's prison population since 2007 and the pandemic's economic crisis, the CDCR has decided to close the sixth oldest prison in the state, Deuel Vocational Institution (DVI) in Tracy, CA. As announced at the end of September 2020, the prison is set to be fully deactivated by September 2021. This announcement follows Governor Newsom's spring 2020 announcement to close the CA's youth prison system, formerly known as the CA Youth Authority. These closures would not have been possible without the relentless grassroots organizing of the anti-prison movement over the past several decades.

In Quitobaquito Springs, Arizona, O'odham Anti Border Collective and Defend O'odham Jewed have taken direct action multiple times in an attempt to halt construction of the border wall threatening A'al Vappia/Quitobaquito Springs in Hia-Ced O'odham jewed (O'odham Lands) near Ajo, Arizona. The springs, one of the only desert water sources, are located on the US and Mexican Border in the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument.. Indigenous activists continue to organize and lead direct actions to stop the construction while facing attacks from white supremacists and border patrol.

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

As of the end of September 2020, CCBF has paid a total of \$1,071,220 in bonds to free 218 people incarcerated in Cook County Jail or on house arrest with electronic monitoring. They have paid an additional \$428,745 in bonds to free 48 people from other counties across the state. CCBF was also proud to work with partners to pay



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

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

## 15



# Call for Content

Help shape the content of *The Abolitionist*

Make your voice heard in our paper!

Throughout the Spring and Summer of 2020, *The Abolitionist* Editorial Collective has worked hard to restructure our newspaper and editorial process; we hope to more consistently produce a strong paper three times per year and to generate content that includes more voices and perspectives of prisoners. Help us make sure that our next 2021 issues, 34 and 35, are more influenced by our readers.

The new structure of the paper will combine a Features section—a selection of different pieces that all share one focus—with another section for regular columns. This will allow us to publish a paper that both informs readers on current developments in abolition and includes deep analysis and reflection on abolitionist work inside and outside of prisons. In order to really make this project a true inside-outside tool for PIC abolition, we need the help of folks imprisoned.

Submit content by writing a piece for either our Features section or one of our columns!

The Features section in Issue 34, to be released in April 2021, will focus on Fascism and the 2020 Election. Issue 35's Features will focus on Defunding Policing and will be released in August 2021.

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

There are many ways for you to shape the content of the paper, either by submitting a piece to our Features section or supporting one of our columns. Check out all of the ways you can write a piece for our next two issues:

### 1. Write a piece for Features

- In each issue, our Features mirror the different aspects of praxis—theory, reflection, and action. Pieces can be in each of these 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. The focus of Issue 33, for example, is the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Features section, we aim for a balance: one theory piece that centers political analysis, one reflective piece that can focus more on cultural or artistic expression, and a handful of grassroots examples or resources. You could submit:
  - › A theoretical piece on either fascism and the 2020 US election or defunding policing
  - › A reflective piece or sample of cultural expression on fascism and the 2020 US election or defunding policing
  - › A piece about an example of organizing (past or present) or a resource related to resisting fascism or defunding policing

### 2. Send a Kite to the Editors

Want to share your thoughts on this issue of *The Abolitionist*, and have your thoughts printed in the next issue of the paper and posted on our website? Kites to the Editors are *direct responses* to content (articles and art) from previous issues of *The Abolitionist*. These are meant to be short notes (fewer than 500 words) from our readers expressing their opinions, reactions, disagreements, or thoughts on content in the paper. See **PAGE 10** for examples of Kites to the Editors in Issue 33.

Some approaches to writing Kites to the Editors:

- Elaborate on something that you agreed with in an article and explain why you agreed with it.
- Elaborate on something that you disagreed with in an article and explain why you disagreed with it.
- Relate an article to other things you have read, watched, heard, or experienced.
- Write a note to the editors sharing questions that you believe are timely and 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  
1904 Franklin #504  
Oakland, CA 94612

### 3. Apply to be an author of an Inside-Outside Fishing Line

- The Inside-Outside Fishing Line is one of our new columns. We partner an imprisoned author with an outside organizer to exchange ideas on a political topic or question through written or phone correspondence. We will then either print your correspondence or edit it to make a collaborative piece between the two authors. You can check out this issue's Inside-Outside Fishing Line on page 12 for an example.
- If you're interested in being an author inside for this column, write to us to pitch what your fishing line exchange would be about and whether you have an organizer outside of prison in mind as someone with whom you'd like to exchange ideas. Name a specific topic you'd like to discuss with another author or a set of guiding questions you think the conversation will cover.

Send submissions to the Fishing Line column to:

The Abolitionist Paper  
Attn: Fishing Line  
1904 Franklin #504  
Oakland, CA 94612

### 4. Contribute a report or an update on organizing inside for our Movement Highlights column

- Do you have an update on resistance inside that you think our readers should know about? Submit an organizing update to Movement Highlights!
- In this section, we have short reports on current actions that are working toward the abolition of the PIC. Submissions to Movement Highlights may include campaigns, protests, work strikes, direct actions, civil disobedience, hunger strikes, lawsuits, emerging demands, community bail funds, mutual aid, or other actions.
- In general, we will **not** consider actions that are related to individual cases and will prioritize collective action. See PAGE 14 for examples of Movement Highlights.

**5. Write a poem or song lyrics:** It can relate to the features or any other topic of your choice!

**6. Make visual art:** To complement the Features section or one of our columns

**7. Create a political cartoon:** For our Features focus (Fascism and the 2020 Election for Issue 34 or Defunding Policing for Issue 35) or work with us to become a regular political cartoonist for the paper!

**8. Reflect:** On how you use *The Abby* in your study and **share that reflection for our 9971 column**—or submit questions on study that you want Stevie to address in future columns

**9. Share what *The Abby* means to you by writing for our “Prisoner Speak Out” page on our website [criticalresistance.org](http://criticalresistance.org):** We are building out a page called “Prisoner Speak Out,” where folks inside can share statements and perspectives on the movement to abolish the prison industrial complex. Statements can be short snippets, quotes, or longer letters.

While we cannot guarantee that all submissions we receive will be printed in an issue, we are committed to reviewing all submissions and considering them for potential publication. **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.** As an abolitionist editorial collective, we edit all pieces for content and writing and make decisions based on consensus. If your submission is accepted, we will work with you to edit the piece before printing it.

Please keep in mind, if you are not comfortable publishing your name, you can always choose an alias, publish your piece anonymously, or use your initials. Please specify how you would like to be referred to as an author of your submission.

If your submission is related to one of our upcoming Feature Focuses, please send us your submissions by the following deadlines in order to be considered for our next issues:

- For Issue 34 (to be released in April 2021), submit a first draft of your piece for acceptance by Friday, December 4, 2020.
- For Issue 35 (to be released in August 2021), submit a first draft of your piece for acceptance by Monday, March 28, 2021.

If you're not sure how to address your submission to best fit within the paper, write your submission to our Oakland office and our Project Coordinator will make sure the editorial team gets back to you.

Send your submission to:

Critical Resistance  
Attn: The Abolitionist  
1904 Franklin St, Suite 504  
Oakland, CA 94612

## What is *The Abolitionist's* new structure?

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

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:

### Send us your writing and artwork!

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

### Ideas for Articles and Artwork

- Examples of current prisoner organizing
- Practical steps toward prison industrial complex abolition
- Ways to help keep yourself and others physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually healthy while imprisoned
- Updates on what's happening at the prison you're in (for example: working conditions, health concerns, lockdowns)
- Legal strategies and important cases that 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, etc.)
- Empowering, liberatory artwork that shows resistance and community power (and that will print well!)

### Length

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

### How to Submit

- If you want your name and address printed with your article, please include it as you would like it printed. If you do not wish to have your name or address included, please let us know that when you submit your piece.
- If possible, send a copy of your submission, not the original

### Writing Suggestions

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