



INITIATE
JUSTICE

THINKING ABOUT OUR MOVEMENT

INSTITUTE OF IMPACTED LEADERS
INITIATE JUSTICE
2020

A
POLITICAL
EDUCATION
RESOURCE
GUIDE FOR
IMPACTED
LEADERS



WELCOME TO A NEW MOMENT

It's a new decade, and there's so much we're ready to do differently. It's time our community values dictated the way things work in our country. It's time to WIN in our campaigns, relationships and strategies for a true democracy.

Fact: Our communities deserve the safety, respect and care we're asking for. The resources in this handbook may be applied to your organizing life and personal life to harness the power of self-awareness, political framing and inclusion towards creating empowered and free communities.



Use this handbook to support you in leading courageous conversations and community education. Unfold and explore the issues that you care about and want to know more about, so you can start initiating justice wherever you are.

This is not an exhaustive list of topics and resources that we need to strategize for freedom, but a starting point for those who'd like to advocate and organize on a more intentional level. We want your organizing to be based on knowledge and research, your relationships based on respect and compassion and your vision to be revolutionary, inclusive, and unchained.

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Friendly Question: What are some topics that you know you don't know much about? Take notes and write down your questions on those sections as you explore this handbook.



INITIATE JUSTICE

WE FIGHT FOR US!



We're ending mass incarceration by activating the power of the people it directly impacts.

We organize our members, inside and outside of prisons, to advocate for their freedom and change criminal justice policy in California.

We are more than **25,000 incarcerated members**, **169 Inside Organizers**, and hundreds more outside members and organizers statewide.

We are 100% led by people directly impacted by incarceration.

www.initiatejustice.org



We are a vehicle of change & community support for those ready to shrink the system's harm on our lives & on the lives of our loved ones.

GET INVOLVED



We hold **inside and outside trainings**, and work with inside organizers to develop policies that protect and free those who face incarceration.

Member Meetings and mail nights happen regularly in **LA and Oakland**.

We've co-sponsored laws to shorten sentences like **reforming the felony murder rule (SB 1437)** and **increasing parole opportunities for people sentenced as youth (AB 965)**, and helped **eliminate medical co-pays for people who are incarcerated and seeking care (AB 45)**.

We find strength in our stories, and push forward for freedom with unapologetic grace.

- Become a member
- Join a Mail Night in Northern or Southern California
- Apply for our Institute of Impacted Leaders
- Volunteer at an event
- Be an advocate for policy change
- Become an Inside Organizer



Learn how at initiatejustice.org

THE WARM-UP



"Anyone committed to collective liberation must acknowledge ignorance and take up the work of comprehensive political education. For example, I have been out of my depth on disability justice and climate change, to name two topics, and so I follow the lead of people who are more knowledgeable. But this doesn't let me off the hook: **I still need to seek out knowledge on my own about these issues.**"

— Charlene Carruthers, *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements*

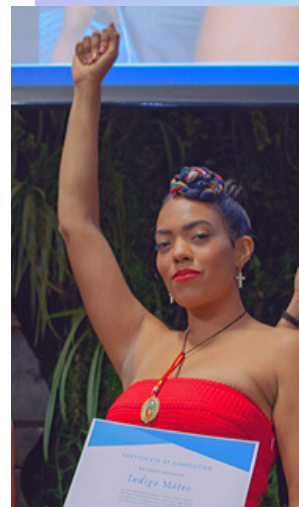
"The binary that makes a person either good or bad is a dangerously false one for the widest majority of people. I am beginning to see that **more than a single truth can live at the same time and in the same person.**"

— Patrisse Cullors, *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*

"Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people-- they manipulate them. **They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress.**

— Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Composed by
Outside
Organizer,
Indigo Mateo



THE WARM-UP



Intersectionality (n): the idea that social identities and positionalities such as class, race, and gender are compounded when applied to an individual or group. This overlapping creates an interconnected, heightened experience of discrimination or oppression.



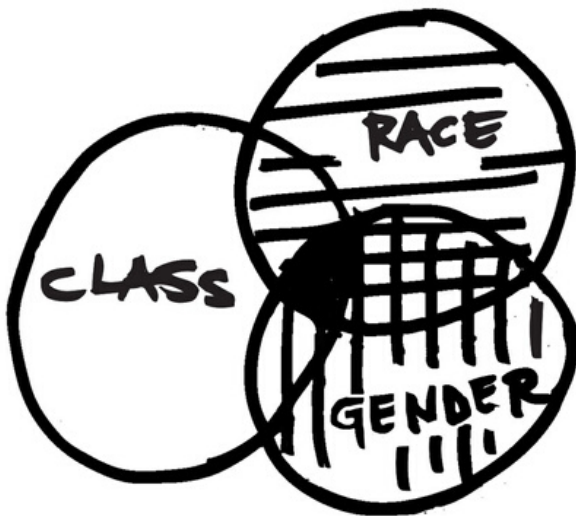
The term 'Intersectional', coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, is used to talk about how multiple oppressions can exist in one person at one time, creating a new complex experience.

For example, the experience of being Black looks different when also lived by someone who identifies as a woman, and is further layered if that woman is queer, and further still if she is incarcerated.

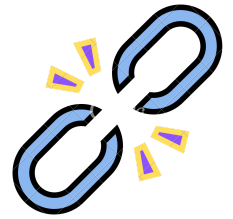
Acknowledging intersectionality is the most inclusive mindset we can have when serving our communities, who struggle and exist in unique, and complex ways.

“There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because **we do not live single-issue lives.**”

— Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider



MASS INCARCERATION



Mass incarceration (n) : The imprisonment, disenfranchisement, and detainment of a critical population through a system of laws, cultural values and militant enforcement.



Mass caging is a \$182 billion dollar industry, that claims over 600,000 humans as property every year. That's **objectification** on a gross level.

It's estimated that 10.6 million people go to jail yearly, while over 60,000 immigrants are locked up in about 200 immigrant prisons nationwide. **The United States has the most incarcerated people per capita in the world** and California is home to a whopping 35 prisons, with many of its natives incarcerated out of state. Unfortunately, **our country has adopted the belief that incarceration is an integral part of what it means to be safe.**

How did we get to an age of mass incarceration and how do we find our way out? We'll use two frameworks to think about U.S prisons and the culture they thrive in:



Frame 1: Mass incarceration was born out of the mass enslavement and oppression of black, brown and poor people.



Frame 2: Mass incarceration thrives on and is prolonged by a culture of domination and punishment.



A GLANCE AT OUR HISTORY



1619- American slavery roughly begins

1830- Abolition movement gains traction

1831- Nat Turner's Rebellion takes place

1865- Juneteenth, enslaved people in America hear of emancipation

1877- Jim Crow Laws are enforced in the South

1889- Ida B Wells owns newspaper *Free Speech and Headlight* against segregation, lynching and sexual violence

1896- Plessy vs Ferguson rules "separate but equal" segregation into law

1934- Redlining, a racist geopolitical practice, is made legal with the National Housing Act

1964- The Civil Rights act is signed by Lyndon B Johnson, banning discrimination on race, religion, color or sex

1970- Black Panthers start community programs like free breakfast and health clinics

1982- President Reagan announced his administration's War on Drugs

1991- Rodney King's violent beating by the police is captured on national television

1994- California enacts Three Strikes Law

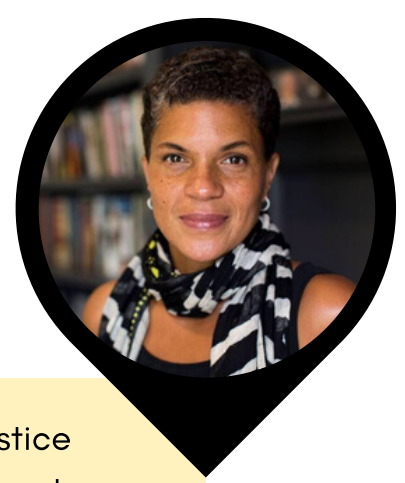
2002- Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is formed

2014- Mike Brown, 18, shot dead by police officer, Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, inciting organizing and protests across the nation



Friendly Question: What events from history, or your personal history could you add to this timeline? What are the impacts today? Write in your history and your knowledge. We are the writers in this struggle for change!

INCARCERATION'S WEB



"The term mass incarceration refers not only to the criminal justice system but also to the larger web of laws, rules, policies, and customs that control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison. . . ."

—**Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow***



Alexander draws from the historical context of the **Jim Crow Laws of the south which enforced segregation both locally and statewide** from 1877 all the way to the mid 1960's.

These laws segregated people by race head-on, barring people of color from things like education, everyday facilities like bathrooms, food stores and water fountains, and property ownership.

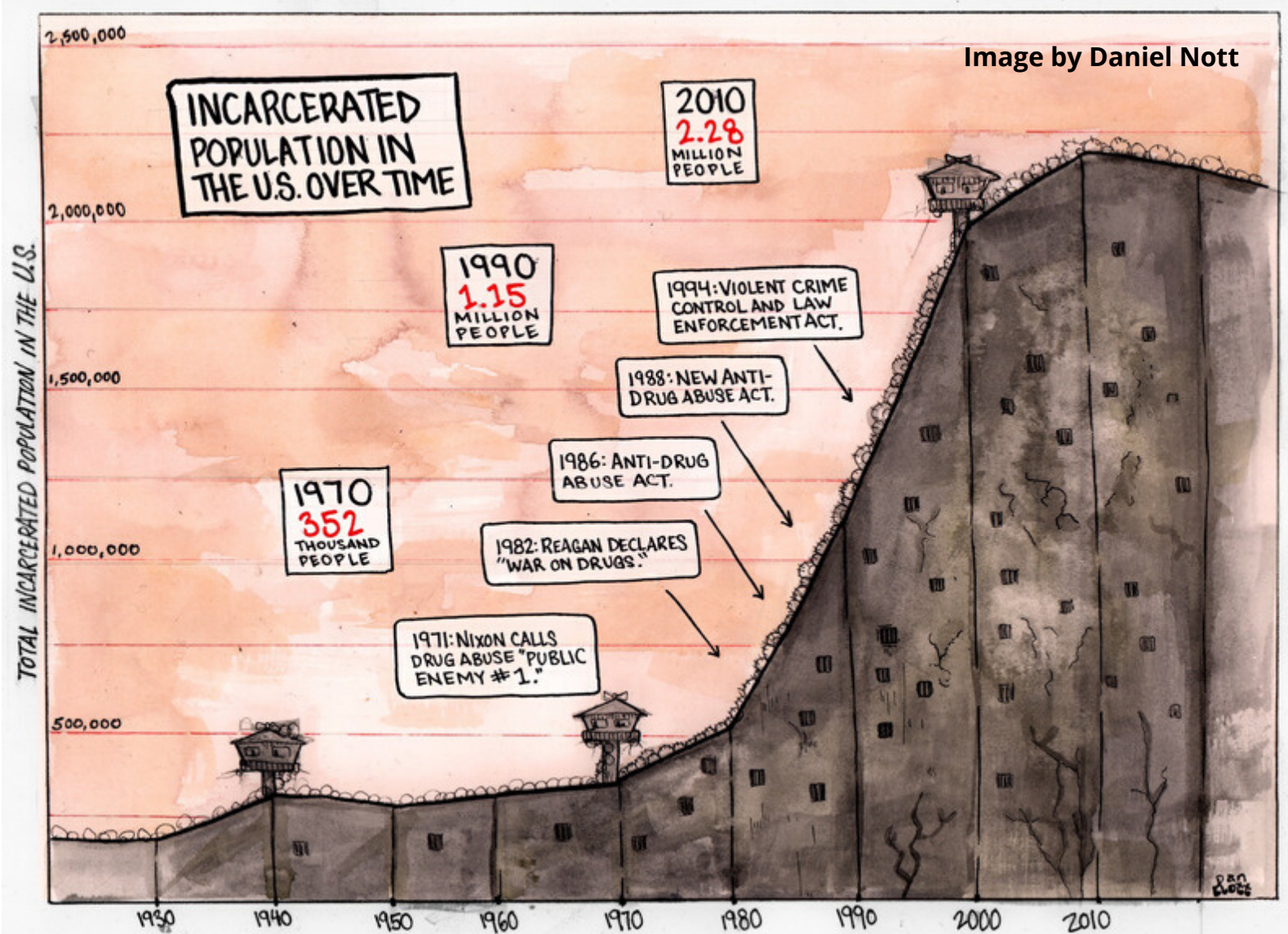
Alexander explains that the more covert 'web of laws' surrounding mass incarceration simply recreates the impact of Jim Crow, building a modern day categorization of the deserving vs the undeserving.

We can look at our society and see the multiple ways that poverty, addiction and mental health struggles are criminalized, creating a higher demand for prisons and policing. Let's take a look at how addiction has been treated as a crime instead of as a public health issue and how that has impacted our communities.

A WAR ON COMMUNITIES

"From the outset, the drug war could have been waged primarily in overwhelmingly white suburbs or on college campuses. . . Suburban homemakers could have been placed under surveillance and subjected to undercover operations designed to catch them violating laws regulating the use and sale of prescription 'uppers.' All of this could have happened as a matter of routine in white communities, but it did not. Instead, when police go looking for drugs, they look in the 'hood.'"

—Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*



The narrative that Black and Brown drug users are undeserving of help out of addiction, and instead deserve punishment is a belief that keeps prisons full. The 'War on Drugs' justified a continued war on our communities in America in which the U.S. profited off of generations of poverty, violence and addiction. **By making addiction a crime, the system has a premise for locking us away for decades, and branding us 'criminal' for even longer.**

ACCESSES DENIED

"It is the badge of inferiority—the felony record—that relegates people for their entire lives, to second-class status. For drug felons, there is little hope of escape. Barred from public housing by law, discriminated against by private landlords, ineligible for food stamps, forced to 'check the box' indicating a felony conviction on employment applications for nearly every job, and denied licenses for a wide range of professions, people whose only crime is drug addiction or possession of a small amount of drugs for recreational use find themselves locked out of the mainstream society and economy—permanently. . . ."

—Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*

Mass incarceration's many arms keep people in cycles of oppression and shared trauma. The 'web of criminalization' particularly targets the Black community and deters **upward mobility**, or the ability for one to move up in society through education and career.

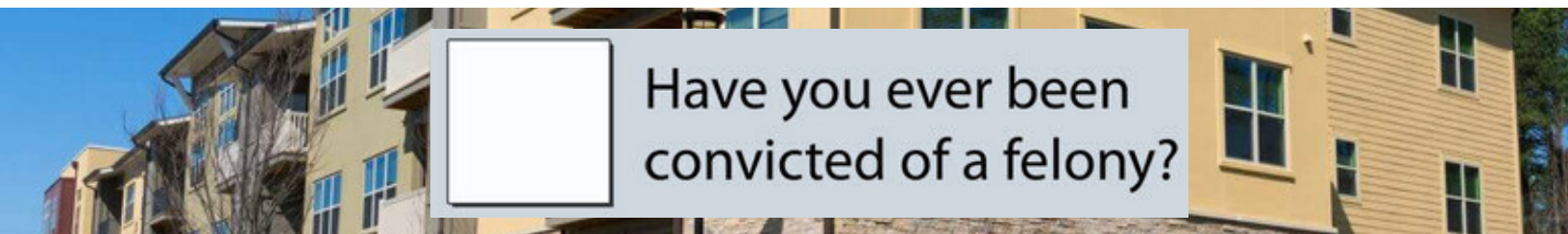
Pictured is Elizabeth Eckford, who was denied entry to Little Rock Central High School, Alabama, in 1957 due to the white supremacy of the state. Elizabeth's only "crime" is being Black. Notice how **criminality is attached to race and identity, resulting in denial of access and rights**. Investigate further the subjectivity of crime and what or who connotes a crime against society.



The system disenfranchises those who are convicted as well as those labeled by the system as 'criminals' or 'gang members'. For example, **incarcerated people as well as those on parole in California currently don't have the right to vote**. However, an amendment to CA law, ACA 6, would change that.

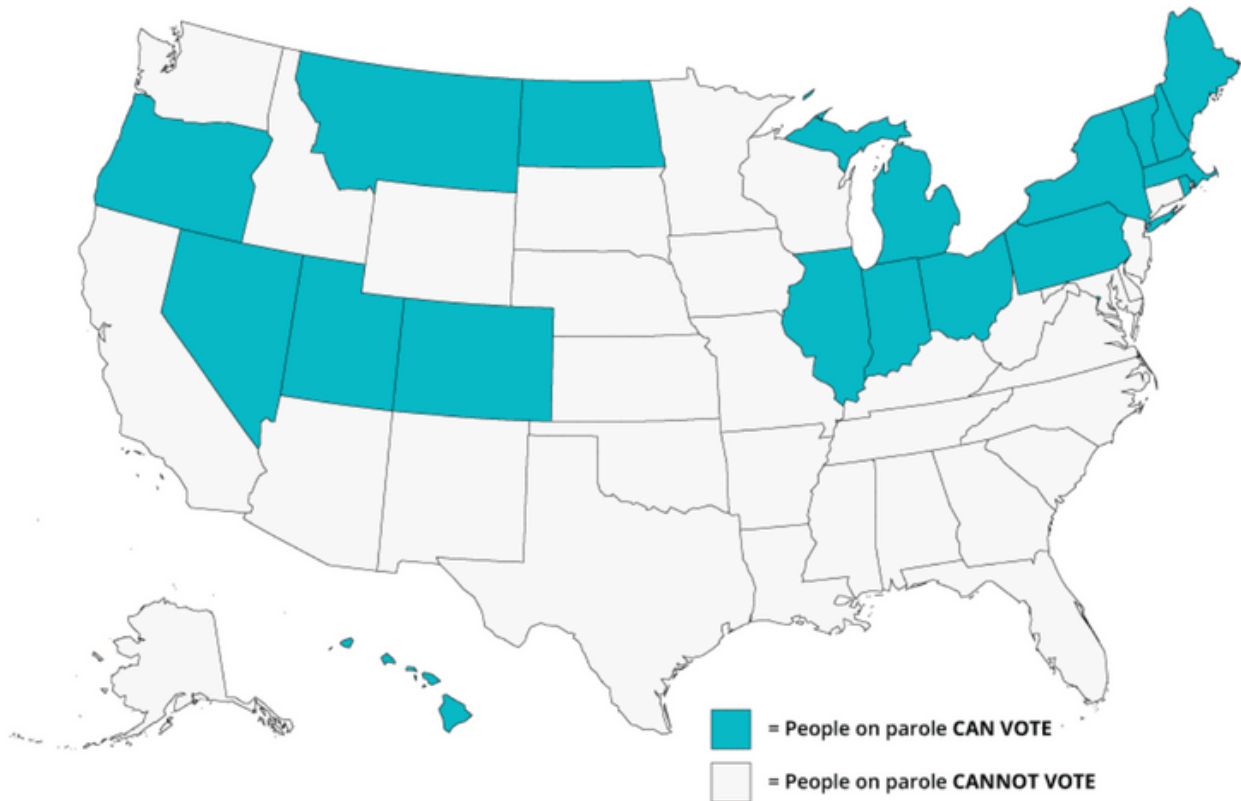


Have you ever been
convicted of a felony?



Disenfranchising those who are systems involved, discounts huge numbers of votes. Currently about 50,000 people on parole in our state alone are not able to vote. If we add that number to those who are incarcerated, it leaves **over 160,000 people without the right to civically engage in California democracy.**

There are states that have reinstated the right to vote for people who have served their time, but California is not currently one of them.



Laws like the death penalty, Life Without the Possibility of Parole (LWOP) and Three Strikes Law send the message that people who are convicted of certain crimes are irreconcilable, not useful and disposable.

These laws force labels onto our people, changing how they are viewed by society. If someone with LWOP is considered to deserve to die in prison, we're less likely to look into the details of their case and character. **When incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people are excluded from the voting process for life, it negates the ability to transform, civically engage and be a contribution to government.**



FROM THE CRADLE TO PRISON

Systemic criminalization and disenfranchisement rest upon the norms of racism and classism in this country. Let's explore deeper how the culture of racist and classist punishment impacts our communities at early stages of life.

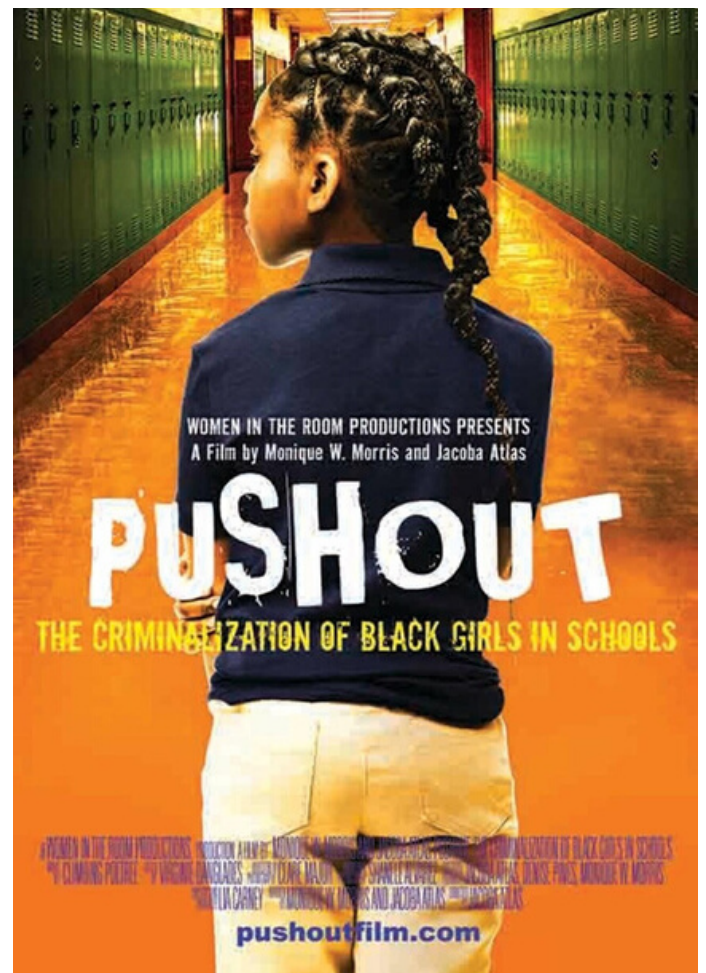
In 2019, Orlando Police arrested 6-year-old Kaia Rolle for throwing a tantrum in her first grade class at a charter school. Kaia, who suffered from sleep apnea, lashed out at school and was later handcuffed, taken to juvenile hall in a police car, fingerprinted and forced to take a mugshot before charges against her were dropped.

Black, brown and poor people are targeted for imprisonment even before they come in contact with the justice system at all. This is highlighted by young people's experiences with child welfare systems and schools. Before they are arrested or stopped by police, youth, predominantly black and brown, are deemed threats and harshly disciplined.

In the book "Pushout: the criminalization of black girls in schools," the author, Monique W. Morris, sits down with a 15 year old black girl by the name of Faith who describes her experience of being impacted by the **school to prison pipeline**:

"Faith felt that the institutions with which she was most familiar—schools, juvenile detention centers, group homes, and social service agencies—were, individually and collectively, intentionally disruptive to her ability to establish self-worth and to her ability to challenge those whose actions she felt were oppressive."

—Monique W. Morris, Pushout



". . . 'Like jail, if it's an argument with me and staff, I feel like, I'm going to lose, period. 'Cause I damn near don't have rights no more 'cause I'm in jail. . . in school, if you get in an argument with a teacher, you damn near lost, 'cause that's her job. You know? My auntie and my god-mama said, if you don't get it, or you don't understand, you ask a question. . . I always question. And then sometimes, teachers get mad off of that. . . I don't understand how you get frustrated off of a question if I'm not being disrespectful . . . why you get mad?'. . .

'They say I'm disrespectful. That's my label, disrespectful, 'cause I always got something to say'. . ."

—Pushout

Sadly Faith's experience is not a unique case. **Youth of color are criminalized at young ages due to racism and a demand to fill prisons.** Where their white counterparts are seen as attention-seeking or inquisitive, black and brown youth are more likely to be labeled a problem and punished for things like acting out or simply asking questions.

Policies like jailing kids for **truancy** and '**zero tolerance**' codes in school make it easy for 'problem kids' to be turned into property of the state.

Art By Mike Lroy



Child development tells us that the brain is not fully developed until about age 26, and yet, many youth as young as 15 are often tried as adults based on the severity of harm, gang affiliation and race. **We know that adolescents are biologically more likely to take risks and be less in tune with the repercussions of their actions when compared to adults.** Especially for children and teens who find themselves in life threatening situations, violence can happen out of self defense and perceived self preservation.

Cyntoia Brown was a minor when she shot a man she believed was going to kill her while a victim of teen sex trafficking. **Sex trafficking is a type of human trafficking which forces one into selling themselves for commercial sex. CSEC or the commercial sexual exploitation of children pertains to minors who are in this situation of enslavement.** Cyntoia was sentenced to life and it wasn't until she did 15 years that she was granted clemency. So many more like her are still locked away without their stories told.



Mass incarceration benefits off the belief that youth of color should pay for their actions as if they were adults, with no regard for adverse childhood experiences lack of decision making skills, support systems, situation or maturity. **The adultification of youth**, or labeling black youth in particular as threats and disposable is one reason we are so familiar with black youth murders like those of Emmett Till, Trayvon Martin, Renisha McBride, Tamir Rice, Aiyana Jones and countless others.



Ally Protip: Dissect the ways that you might see young people of color being treated and held responsible as if they were adults. Work in your community to break down stereotypes that black and brown youth don't deserve the support, resources and care that all young people need.

THERE'S A BETTER WAY

By criminalizing entire racial and class groups, we miss opportunities to repair harm and prevent violence, poverty and addiction. **U.S prisons separate the convicted from support, under-deliver rehabilitative services, and keep working wages under 60 cents per hour on average. In this setup, victims of crime seldom get true healing. Neither harm nor relationships are repaired. Instead, harm is maximized through cruel and unusual punishment.**

We know how unhelpful the cultural ideals of dominance and revenge are for our social welfare. What then, is the better way? Initiate Justice co-founder, Richie Reseda visited Finland and Norway in 2019 and penned some differences he noticed between our prison systems:

"As a person who has spent over 14 years involved with the United States criminal legal system. . . it was emotional for me to visit and study the public safety systems of Finland and Norway. More than once, I cried. I was overwhelmed by the ache that accompanied discovering how most of the pain my loved ones and I have suffered was completely avoidable. . .

Finland:

The mission of the Finnish Criminal Sanctions Agency is to "support people to live lives free of crime." Finland discovered that prisons are the least helpful mechanism to keep society safe, and that the best way to keep people safe is to meet people's basic needs. They learned that:

Free and accessible rehab is the most effective way to diminish drug crime. Universal basic income is the most effective way to diminish property crime. Undercutting social marginalization is the most effective way to diminish violent crime.

Prison is used as a "last resort" for only the most serious crimes. . . prisons are designed to safely transform behavior, rather than to punish.

The Finnish system looks to enforce the law with "as open conditions as possible." In over 50% of cases, prisons are not used. They instead use what they call "community sanctions," which include community service and conditional release (staying out of prison, but following a required, strict rehabilitation plan). . . As they achieve the goals on their plan, they earn more freedom and more responsibility over their lives. . ."

—Richie Reseda

"Notable Policies:

- There are only 4 children incarcerated in the whole country. Children who break the law work with the child welfare system rather than the criminal sanctions system. . .
- Drug use is decriminalized. Drug addiction is treated as a health problem. However, selling and smuggling drugs are crimes.
- The maximum amount of time a person can spend in prison is 20 years. A "life sentence" in Finland is 20 years. All lifers are available for parole after 12 years. . .
- Half of all sentences are served in the community. Of the people who do go to prison, half are out within 6 months. Everyone gets family visits. After serving half of one's time, a person can apply for "furloughs" to leave prison and visit home."

—Richie Reseda



"Norway

The Norwegian Correctional Service operates from one guiding question: What kind of neighbor do you want? They transitioned to this model 21 years ago. Back in 1998, Norway's prisons were plagued with gangs, assaults, high recidivism rates and high suicide rates, for people both incarcerated and employed in prisons. . .

After much research, they moved to a system based on four principles:



Friendly Question: How does an American prison cell differ from the Norwegian one pictured above? Analyze the psychological impacts of living spaces and its impact on incarcerated people in the U.S.

1. Normality: Incarcerating people only when absolutely necessary, in the most normal conditions possible, so as to not institutionalize (harm) them.
2. Humanity: Treat people humanely.
3. Dynamic Security: Keep prisons safe by taking care of people, giving them no reason to act violently.
4. Reintegration: Prepare people to leave safely from the moment of their arrest. They found that most people are in prison because of poverty, childhood trauma, lack of employment skills, and substance abuse.

Their system is designed to help people address these issues and get them out. They believe they should only restrict liberty to the extent necessary to make this happen. These changes led them to go from a 70% recidivism rate to a 25% 5-year recidivism rate."

—Richie Reseda

In the U.S, we constantly hear about humanity losing against rules and regulations in the name of "safety." Prison visits and opportunities for family and community connection are highly policed and often terminated. The use of the internet is banned. Some facilities deny visits and programs due to lack of space and staffing. If all these measures are taken in the name of caution and protocol...why aren't we safe yet?

Simple. **Mass incarceration was never meant to create safety, but to create a profit margin and preserve slavery in our nation's governance.** Our prison culture lies on a widely believed cornerstone (The 13th amendment of the Constitution) that is our responsibility to crack:

People who are convicted of crimes that are determined by white supremacy should be denied their humanity and citizenship as punishment.

"Walking down the cobblestone streets of Finland and Norway, I felt the sense of ease and safety people had. These people saw each other as community, and trusted their government because it took care of that community. . . I didn't see many unhoused people, I didn't see many police, and I didn't see people with that desperate look in their eye that accompanies poverty and suffering. The systems of these countries serve people first, which minimizes desperation, and therefore, crime. The best thing we can do in the U.S. is to start building our systems to do the same."

—Richie Reseda

Sources

Pedagogy Of the Oppressed. Paulo Freire. Myra Ramos. 1970.

Pushout: the Criminalization Of Black Girls in Schools. Monique Morris. Mankaprr Conteh. Melissa Harris-Perry. 2018.

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness. Michelle Alexander. 2010.

Unapologetic: a Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate For Our Movement. Charlene Carruthers. 2018.

When They Call You a Terrorist: a Black Lives Matter Memoir. Patrisse Khan-Cullors. Asha Bandele. 2017.

"Where Prisons Are a Last Resort." Richie Reseda. Medium.com. web. Nov 2019.



Recommended Reading/Viewing:

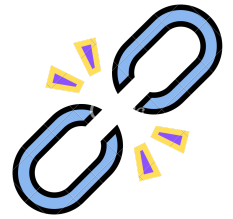
Books:

- **Between the World and Me** by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015)
- **Lost Children Archive** by Valeria Luiselli (2019)
- **Just Mercy** by Bryan Stevenson (2014)
- **No Human Is Illegal** by J. J. Mulligan Sepulveda (2019)
- **Writing My Wrongs: Life, Death, and Redemption in an American Prison** by Shaka Senghor (2013)

Films:

- **I Am Not Your Negro** directed by Raoul Peck (2016) [Netflix]
- **13th** directed by Ava DuVernay (2016) [Netflix]
- **Just Mercy** directed by Destin Daniel Cretton (2019)
- **Rikers** directed by Mark Benjamin, Marc Levin (2016) [PBS, Youtube]
- **Which Way Home** directed by Rebecca Cammisa (2009) [HBO, hulu]

PRISON ABOLITION



Prison Abolition (n) : the coordinated, systemic and cultural efforts to shrink and eliminate the use of prisons and jails in order to replace systems of punishment and caging with rehabilitation and community-driven solutions.



"The prison is considered so 'natural' that it is extremely hard to imagine life without it."

—Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

We might hear or even ask, "what about people who commit atrocious crimes?" How can we be safe when they are not in prison?" **It's common for us to feel powerless when it comes to creating safety in our own communities.** We've been taught that in crisis, the best solution is to call the authorities and let them handle it. It's quite contradictory for people of color and others impacted by state violence when the very departments that are called upon to respond to emergencies are often the actors of assassinations, sexual assault, wrongful arrests, and legal entrapment.

We can argue that the lack of accountability starting with the systems that should be protecting and serving, undermines safety. We're going to use this framework to continue learning about abolition:



Frame: As mass incarceration needs norms like revenge and individual punishment to thrive, abolition needs norms like community responsibility and accountability to thrive.

**THIS IS A CALL
TO END SLAVERY
IN AMERICA**



ARE PRISONS WORKING?

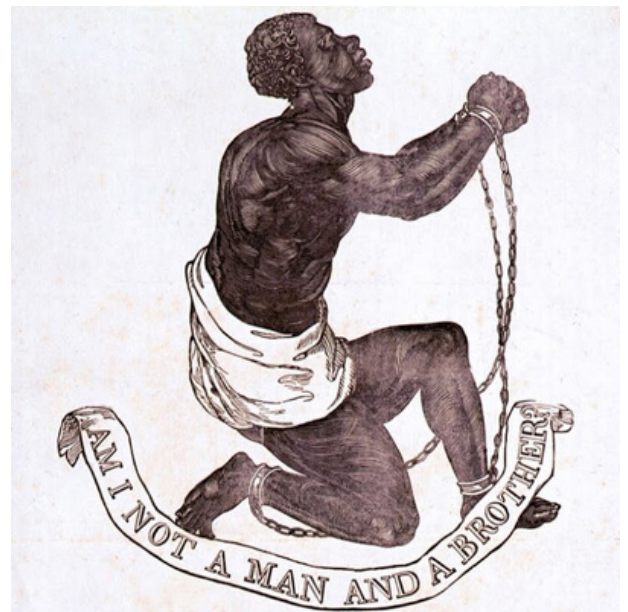
"...how it is that so many people could end up in prison without major debates regarding the efficacy of incarceration. When the drive to produce more prisons and incarcerate ever larger numbers of people occurred in the 1980s during what is known as the Reagan era, politicians argued that "tough on crime" stances—including certain imprisonment and longer sentences—would keep communities free of crime. However, the of mass incarceration during that period had little or no effect on official crime rates. In fact, the most obvious pattern was that larger prison populations led not to safer communities, but, rather, to even larger prison populations.

—Angela Davis, Are Prisons Obsolete?

Historically and today, abolition means to reject the notion of slavery. Not only does an abolitionist debunk prisons as a strategy for safety, but they also assert how abolition can create space for infrastructure to empower local communities.

Abolitionists believe we can mitigate violence in our communities and problem solve for the benefit of the whole to achieve outcomes that outperform prisons and policing.

Abolitionist organization, Critical Resistance, leads conversations clarifying what the reality of abolishing prisons will entail:



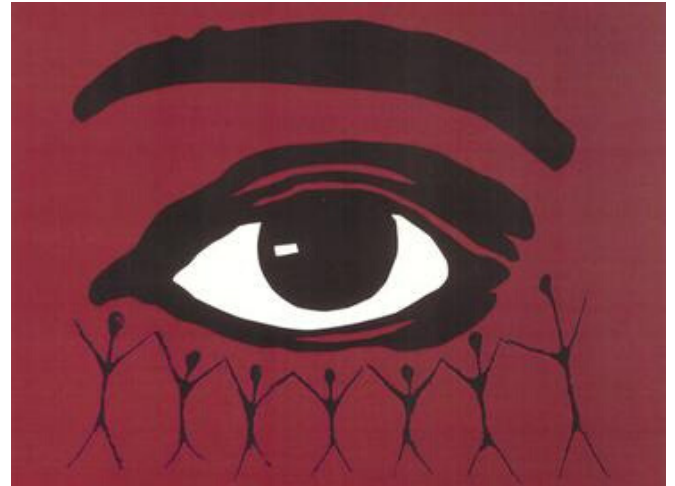
"We take seriously the harms that happen between people. We believe that in order to reduce harm we must change the social and economic conditions in which those harms take place.

—Critical Resistance, "What is abolition?"

WHERE DO WE START?

We know prisons and police are not the end-all be-all when it comes to managing crises and mitigating harm in our communities.

If we believe this, we're responsible to take the abolitionist steps that will make a world without prisons more tangible and widely imaginable.



Abolitionist steps are about gaining ground in the constant effort to radically transform society. They are about chipping away at oppressive institutions rather than helping them live longer. They are about pushing critical consciousness, gaining more resources, building larger coalitions and developing more skills for future campaigns. They are about making the ultimate goal of abolition more possible.

—Critical Resistance, “Abolitionist Steps”

We can start building towards abolition by ensuring the work being led isn't limited to reforming the current system, but that it's truly focused on creating a new system that addresses the root concerns surrounding societal harm: access to education, financial stability, mental health, housing and job security.

The blueprints within indigenous history assure us that a needs-based approach to governing actually works and is worth building towards. When our needs are met, even the most upsetting situations can be assessed with solutions that minimize further harm.

People who identify themselves as abolitionists are growing a critical mass around ending prisons. They have always gone against the grain of society in this country. Often their plight seemed too ambitious for reality, and still today abolition is widely viewed as a utopian thought. If we study abolition more closely, we can uncover the ways abolitionist steps have a practical place in society.



Friendly Question: Do you consider yourself an abolitionist or pro-abolition? Why or why not?

THE AMERICAN ABOLITIONIST

Patrisse Cullors, artist and co-founder Black Lives Matter provides an abolitionist vision and examples of it in practice in her Harvard Law Review article entitled, "Abolition And Reparations: Histories of Resistance, Transformative Justice, And Accountability":

"For our political strategies and struggles against racism, patriarchy, and capitalism to be effective, we must deeply ground ourselves in an abolitionist vision and praxis . . . We organizers and freedom fighters believe that an abolitionist framework and strategy is necessary to challenge the conditions faced by Black communities in this country, and that only through an abolitionist struggle will we repair our communities and undermine the systems of oppression we know have facilitated devastation, from the transatlantic slave trade through the prison industrial complex."

—Patrisse Cullors



"The United States, the world's largest jailer, is also the world's greatest perpetrator of war and the most extensive purveyor of human rights atrocities at home and abroad, laying claim to over 800 military bases around the world. It is no surprise that tear gas was sprayed both on Black women and children demanding justice in the wake of the fatal officer shooting of young Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and on the streets of Buenaventura, Colombia, contaminating the lungs of Afro-Colombians fighting for reparations and for an end to U.S.-backed, state-sanctioned violence. Military training, equipment, and strategies used by militarized police forces in the United States have been found for decades in countries around the world. Therefore, whatever political change we advocate for, it must address and settle this dilemma of global U.S. state violence, injustice, and devastation.

We define abolition as a praxis that roots itself in the following principles: people's power; love, healing, and transformative justice; Black liberation; internationalism; anti-imperialism; dismantling structures; and practice, practice, practice."

—Patrisse Cullors

REPARATIONS

Cullors discusses the role of **reparations**, or payment, financial or otherwise to a person or group of people who have been wronged.



"Abolition calls on us not only to destabilize, deconstruct, and demolish oppressive systems, institutions, and practices, but also to repair histories of harm across the board. Our task is not only to abolish prisons, policing, and militarization, which are wielded in the name of "public safety" and "national security." We must also demand reparations and incorporate reparative justice into our vision for society. . .

Reparations campaigns encompass a wide array of demands. Most commonly, reparations in our contemporary movements are justified by the historical pains and damage caused by European settler colonialism and are proposed in the form of demands for financial restitution, land redistribution, political self-determination, culturally relevant education programs, language recuperation, and the right to return (or repatriation). Reparations have a long history in the United States and in other nations for both Black and Indigenous peoples. . . reparations should include restoring a balance from within our communities and carrying our autonomous healing and reparatory work through the arts, culture, language, and emotional and mental health services. Reparations must also include pressure on state accountability as well as community-driven and -centered responses. . ."

—**Patrisse Cullors**

 Friendly Question: What would you imagine reparations looking like for your community?

ABOLITION IN OUR LIVES



"As cofounder of Black Lives Matter and long-time organizer against U.S. state-sanctioned violence, I am reminding folks in a series of personal vignettes what abolition is and which principles we should reference in our own abolitionist work. My abolitionist journey embodies the following twelve principles:

1. have courageous conversations;
2. commit to response versus reaction;
3. experiment: nothing is fixed;
4. say yes to one's imagination;
5. forgive actively versus passively;
6. allow oneself to feel;
7. commit to not harming or abusing others;
8. practice accountability for harm caused;
9. embrace non-reformist reforms;
10. build community;
11. value interpersonal relationships;
12. fight the U.S. state and do not make it stronger. "

—Patrisse Cullors



Friendly Question: Which of these values are you currently incorporating into your practice? Which could you work on?

"Abolition must be a cultural intervention. It must produce a new way of being even in the most challenging and difficult moments. We have not collectively practiced abolition so it's hard for us to understand its significance. But, if we implement a new practice that is centered in care and dignity, we might find a practice that challenges our instinct to "cancel" each other. Abolition is about how we treat each other. It is about how we show up in relationships. Abolition is about how we respond to harm caused and how we respond when we cause harm. It is differentiating between large-scale systems that have been built to perpetuate our harm, and individual harm caused against one another. I don't believe abolition is about bullying, but I do believe abolition is about standing up for yourself. We need to be committed to building a culture that is rooted in care, dignity, and accountability."

—Patrisse Cullors

Abolition happens within ourselves and our relationships. We take responsibility of our political views by incorporating them into our everyday routines. **We hold community agreements, we hold space for communication and healing, we take people's physical, mental, economic and educational needs seriously.** We honor our own boundaries, and make our needs known. When we are wronged, we go about solutions that address harm, and make space for preventing further harm.

Some of us are ready and currently practicing these views. Some of us are still preparing our hearts and minds. Carruthers of BYP-100 asks:

"Are we really ready to win? Are we really ready to live in this world where we're all able to live in our full dignity; where we govern ourselves? And if we're not ready for that, what are we doing to get there?"

—Charlene Carruthers, Unapologetic



UNAPOLOGETIC

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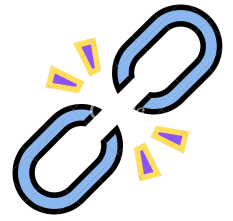
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PEOPLE CENTERED LANGUAGE



People-centered language (n): A way of describing people without dehumanizing them despite identifiers given to them within society.

"Words alone can't save us. But our language does shape what we can imagine, and by using new words and old words differently, we can imagine new things."

—**Critical Resistance, Words Matter: Thoughts on language and abolition**

This section relies heavily on our ability to see each other as humans. The act of dehumanization, or the removal of human qualities and sentiments, can occur physically, mentally and emotionally. The use of labels and slurs is one way subordination takes place in American prisons. People-centered language clears the terrain we wish to traverse as policy makers and organizers fighting for human freedoms. It's easier to create laws about human rights if we're all acknowledging that we're making laws regarding humans, mothers, fathers, and guardians, as opposed to convicts, criminals and felons.

Take the terms 'slave' versus 'enslaved person'. One characterizes the subject as one with their state, while the other describes the state in which the subject, a human, is forced into. Here's how we'll view language in the fight to end slavery and all oppression:

 **Frame:** Language that centers personhood allows for dignity and agency while language that dehumanizes allows identifiers and codes to dictate how we describe, characterize and therefore justify the abuse, isolation and oppression of others.



OUR WORDS, NOT THEIRS



Those targeted by the system are often labeled “criminals” and “threats” while those incarcerated are labeled “inmates” and “felons.” All of these terms allow us to deny humanity to those in the system. When we deny humanity, we team up with the system to discount the space of transformation that is available to every human. **Person-centered language can be used in every part of liberation, as seen in the list below.**

Check out these people-centered terms you can use in multiple areas of struggle:

- Formerly incarcerated people
- Person convicted of X
- Currently incarcerated person
- Incarcerated youth/young person
- Person without U.S documentation
- Person who has migrated/ immigrated
- Person with a developmental disability
- Individual with mental health needs
- Person experiencing homelessness
- Unsheltered person
- Transgender person
- Queer person

Now that we have some useful words to incorporate into our language, let's dissect some common phrases and beliefs that are working against our struggle for freedom:

Example 1: Policing and policy ideals like “*tough on crime*” have spread the notion that more revenge against individuals and more dominance over communities will stop people from doing crime.

Example 2: “*Do the crime, do the time*” and “*they should have thought about that before they did X.*” This “*eye for an eye*” mentality is a bloodthirsty and harm-maximizing way of looking at justice.

Example 3: “*The system is broken*” assumes that mass incarceration was created to protect us, and somehow along the way became dilapidated. Through our own research of our nation’s past, we know the system was never designed to protect or serve us.

Words are a game changer in reframing this fight. Person-centered words show just how high the stakes are, and how often our value and rights as humans are violated.

Another thing to notice in our language is how polarizing certain words and phrases can be for our struggle. Critical resistance analyzes how word coupling can be detrimental to our unity:

"The idea that you are either innocent or guilty is a natural assumption and it's what immediately comes to mind for most people. So saying that innocent people shouldn't be in prison (which most of us can agree is true), also says that guilty people should be. It suggests that most people who are locked up deserve to be there because they "did something." If we want to say that people are being picked up, harassed, or held without charges; there are ways to say it without suggesting that people in other circumstances are worse, or have done bad things, or deserve to be in cages."

—Critical Resistance

We're reminded not to play into the "good citizen vs bad citizen" or "good immigrant vs bad immigrant" narrative because of its dehumanizing nature. We also reject the idea that "victims" and "harm doers" are mutually exclusive groups. In truth, each of us have complex lives, and many people who harm have deep histories of their own trauma. No one's future is stagnant, so labeling a person for the rest of their life based on an action is very limiting.

Often times we go hard on individuals and go too easy on the system. Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB) and Hood Digest teamed up to help folks use clearer words to end this era of mass incarceration by calling a spade a spade when it comes to prisons:

"CORRECT: La Pinta, La Jaula, Prison, Jail, Cage, Immigrant Prison.

INCORRECT: Correctional Facility, Rehabilitative Corrections Center, Detention Center. . .

First off, there are prisons and jails across the U.S. that are notorious for their inhumane and torturous conditions! Second, the system plays down the violence and harm that people experience in prison by not calling it a prison at all!

Instead, they call it a "detention center", "camp", "eco-facility", "treatment facility" or "leadership academy." Let's call them what they are - HUMAN CAGES! . . . Most human cages are only 6 ft x 8 ft - with limited lighting. In California, they also have a limited water supply. The smell, the noise, and the exposure to illness from these cramped, inhumane conditions add to the physical, mental and emotional abuse. . ."

-CURB, Hood Digest



Friendly Question: What comes to mind when you hear "juvenile hall" vs "youth prison?"
What comes to mind when you hear "detention center" vs "immigrant prison?"

SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE

Eddie Ellis shared with the Prison Studies Project his open letter on using humanizing language when referring to people coming home from lock up. He uses his direct experience to make a call to action:



"When we are not called mad dogs, animals, predators, offenders and other derogatory terms, we are referred to as inmates, convicts, prisoners and felons. All terms devoid of humanness which identify us as "things" rather than as people. . . they are no longer acceptable for us and we are asking people to stop using them.

In an effort to assist our transition from prison to our communities as responsible citizens and to create a more positive human image of ourselves, we are asking everyone to stop using these negative terms and to simply refer to us as PEOPLE.

People currently or formerly incarcerated, PEOPLE on parole, PEOPLE recently released from prison, PEOPLE in prison, PEOPLE with criminal convictions, but PEOPLE. . . The worst part of repeatedly hearing your negative definition of me, is that I begin to believe it myself "for as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." It follows then, that calling me inmate, convict, prisoner, felon, or offender indicates a lack of understanding of who I am, but more importantly what I can be. I can be and am much more than an "ex-con," or an "ex-offender," or an "ex-felon."

—Eddie Ellis



Ally Protip: We all make mistakes. You might have a learning curve around using harmful words that you've been hearing and saying for a long time. Be mindful of these moments by correcting yourself when you can. Be open to being corrected. Most importantly, make this a practice in every room and forum you're in, regardless if the people in it are directly impacted by your statements or not. The ripple effect is real!

STARTING RIGHT HERE AND NOW



4 Easy Steps to Follow:

1. Be conscious of the language you use. Remember that each time you speak, you convey powerful word picture images.
2. Stop using the terms offender, felon, prisoner, inmate and convict.
3. Substitute the word PEOPLE... for these other negative terms.
4. Encourage your friends, family and colleagues to use positive language in their speech, writing, publications and electronic communications

—Eddie Ellis

 Friendly Question: Where can you start integrating person centered language in your everyday organizing? In what ways have labels and codes impacted you in your life?

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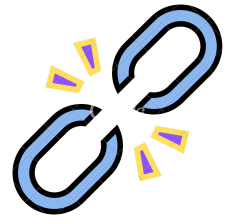
FFilms:

Central Park Five directed by Ken Burns, Sarah Burns, David McMahon (2012)

Web Resources:

- Curb's person centered language in Spanish
 - <http://www.curbprisonspending.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CURB-Glosario-de-Terminologia.pdf>

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING



Community Organizing (n): The coordination of people powered efforts in achieving collective demands or goals by carrying out tactics within a strategy.

Oppression (n): Mistreatment of a group of people by a political or social system.

Liberation (n): The state of being where people who were formerly oppressed are no longer oppressed.



Whether in a prison or on the outs, an organizer's top tools are relationships, awareness, agitation, inspiration and strategy. Great organizers get to know their communities by having conversations about particular community issues. Research and power mapping build common awareness around the issue, while agitation and inspiration will get people moving and acting towards a winning strategy.

Initiate Justice's Inside Organizers are building power and changing laws that directly impact them using the organizing model. To organize, it takes both personal power and people power. We'll move through this section using this frame:



Frame: People who are most impacted know the issues we live through and are best prepared to create solutions, campaigns and systems to better our lived experiences.



IMPACT(ED) LEADERSHIP

People who are familiar with the issues should decide on the goals and strategies of campaigns. Allies and advocates who want to help causes that are not within their experience are encouraged to pour into the existing work led by those who have lived experience.



“Well, if one really wishes to know how justice is administered in a country, one does not question the policemen, the lawyers, the judges, or the protected members of the middle class. One goes to the unprotected — those, precisely, who need the law's protection most! — and listens to their testimony. Ask any Mexican, any Puerto Rican, any black man, any poor person — ask the wretched how they fare in the halls of justice, and then you will know, not whether or not the country is just, but whether or not it has any love for justice, or any concept of it. It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have.”

—James Baldwin, No Name in the Street

Thinking back to what we know about intersectionality, we see the value of having impacted people at decision making tables. **It's with the wisdom and layered experiences you bring that shape our laws, systems and structures to be thorough and inclusive to everyone they affect.**

Planning a campaign is a lot of work, especially as someone who is impacted by the structure we're looking to change. This is the situation to work smart, not just hard. Remember there is an abundance of support and people power waiting to be tapped.

On the next page, check out some terms that will help you plan for a successful campaign in your community.



Ally Protip: Just because someone is impacted more than you doesn't mean they become your glossary for all the details you don't know. Before 'picking someone's brain,' ask for consent and see if the person has space to educate you. If they say no, look up your questions on the internet or a library!

WORKING TOWARDS A GOAL

Demand: The goal your community is asking for that can be accomplished. Demands are specific and measurable.

Target: The person or body of people who have the power to meet the demand.

Leverage: A compelling point of research or favorable relationship that proves advantageous for your campaign and may expose weakness in your opposition.

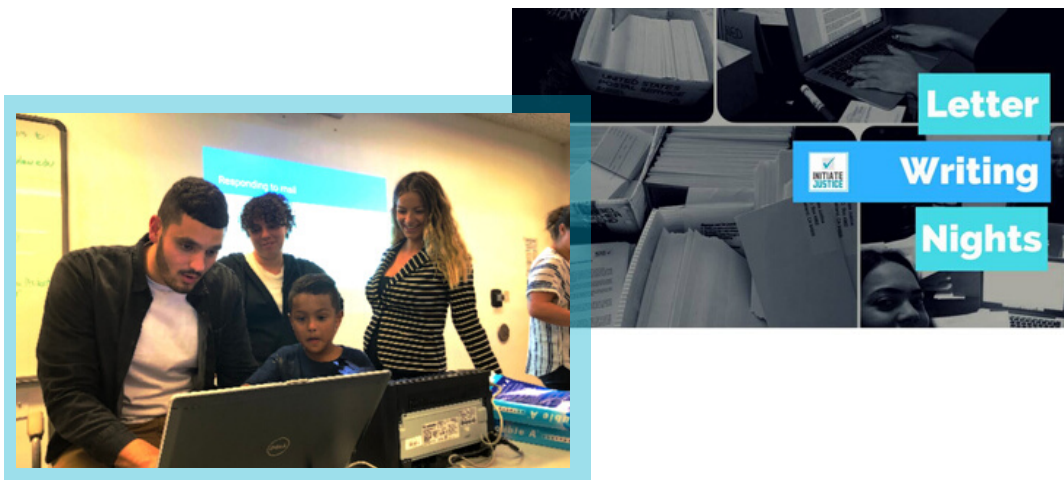
Constituency: A group of people whose interests are served by your campaign goals. A constituency can also mean the body of people with the power to appoint or elect. For example each state representative is responsible for meeting the interests of their region's resident voters or constituency.

Opposition: The groups, organizations and individuals who are threatened by or against your community meeting its demands. **Allies:** The groups, organizations and individuals who are in favor of your community meetings its demands who might also provide additional resources and points of leverage.

Strategy: A well thought out plan that escalates towards the demands or goals of a campaign and provides direction for actions and tactics.

Tactic: A specific activity, usually part of a set of activities which move the group within the strategy.

Action: A group activity that directly or indirectly confronts the target of the campaign.



Friendly Question: What resources are available to you in your campaign? What are things you still need? Make a list of research/resources to obtain.

MEDIA MESSAGING

Account for the cultural beliefs that might be blocking you from winning campaigns. Send messages about your campaign and make sure you know your specific audience. If you try to reach everyone, you may end up reaching no one!

Media strategy promotes messages that verify your campaign's stance and encourage others to act based on new or reinforced beliefs on your issue.

For example, if we want people to vote YES on ACA 6, we need people to know that incarcerated people want to vote and that civic engagement is an essential part of re-entering community. Once this belief is instilled or reinforced, people are more likely to help us pass ACA 6 and free the vote!



Friendly Question: What are some of the existing beliefs that are working against your goal? What are some values that you can message with?



Community organizers bring people together to create solutions to shared oppression. We share common experiences or goals with community and work collaboratively to do something about it. It's fundamental for us to have good relationship building and communication skills with others, but what about the internal conversation with ourselves?

It's easy to get swept up in freedom work, and not set aside time to really grow or ground our vision. Build a foundation of personal power within struggle. **If we're in this fight for the long haul, we need a solid sense of self to win sustainably.** Amy Goodman interviews Charlene Carruthers on her book, "Unapologetic," which gives readers 5 questions to ask as we organize and create.

ORGANIZER'S REFLECTIONS

"And so, the five questions begin with the question of "Who am I?" because if you don't know who you are, what your self-interest is and what your best position to do, you can't be as effective of an organizer as you could be.

The second question is Ella Baker's question. Prolific organizer, Ella Baker would ask people the question, when she met them, "Who are your people?" And the answer to that question has so much to do with the work that you do, why you do it and why you show up.

The third is "What do we want?" We have to be clear about what we're actually fighting for. Are we fighting for healthcare reform, or are we fighting for universal access to healthcare? And I believe that we have to actually make transformational demands, right? . . . I want to live in a world where people actually have, and communities have, self-determination over their lives.

The fourth question is "What are we building?" Are we building a 40-year strategy? Which we need. Are we building a year-long strategy? Are we engaged in electoral politics? Are we doing not—are we doing direct action, civil disobedience? All those things are necessary, but are we clear about what we're building towards.

And the last question is "Are we ready to win?" And that question, to me, is one of the toughest ones, because what happens when we live in a world, which I believe is possible, without prisons and police, where safety goes beyond prisons and policing, and it's in the hands, the hearts and the work of everyday people? Are we ready to win that? Are we doing the work that when we actually are able to govern ourselves and our communities, to provide healthcare, mental healthcare, deliver basic needs like food? And so, when I think about the work that we need to do—and I talk about it in the book—I'm really interested in how are we getting down on a 40-, 50-, 75-year strategy, and what are the things that we're going to do along the way."

—Charlene Carruthers

UNAPOLOGETIC

Sources

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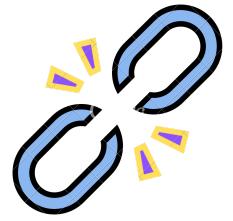
- Rules for Radicals by Saul Alinsky (1971)
- Stir It Up: Lessons in Community Organizing and Advocacy by Rinku Sen (2003)
- De Colores Means All of Us by Elizabeth Martínez (1998)
- Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds by Adrienne Maree Brown (2017)

Films:

- Selma directed by Ava DuVernay (2014)
- RESIST directed by Tani Ikeda, Natalie Johns, Mobolaji Olambiwonnu (2018)



FEMINISM + ENDING PATRIARCHY



Feminism (n): the advocacy and cultural, social and socioeconomic efforts for equal rights of the sexes.

Patriarchy (n): the male-dominated political social structure that encourages male violence and abuse in order to maintain dominance over women and others deemed weaker than men.



"Mostly they think feminism is a bunch of angry women who want to be like men. They do not even think about feminism as being about rights – about women gaining equal rights. When I talk about the feminism I know – up close and personal – they willingly listen, although when our conversations end, they are quick to tell me I am different, not like the “real” feminists who hate men, who are angry. I assure them I am as real and as radical a feminist as one can be, and if they dare to come closer to feminism they will see it is not how they have imagined it."

—bell hooks, Feminism is for Everybody



bell hooks describes the difficulty many have uncoupling the word “feminism” from an idea of hostility or the “white feminism” we experience that lacks a racial analysis for gender equality. **As we learn more about the feminist movement and patriarchy, let's build towards an intersectional understanding of equal rights for all women.**



Frame 1: Feminism honors feminine value, agency and power while Patriarchy denies the experience and value of womxn and femme-identified people



Frame 2: Patriarchy oppresses the community as a whole, including men

DOUBLE STANDARDS



"Even though women commit murder far less often than men, they tend to get longer sentences for self-defense and killing their [partners], than men who kill their female partners. Nearly 90% of the women who are locked up for violent crimes are there for killing the men who physically and/or sexually abused them.

While these women average 15-year sentences, men's sentences are between two and six years. Still, the vast majority of women in prison are there for non-violent or low-level drug crimes. A lot of them are there 'cause they were accomplices to crimes committed by their partners."

—Hood Digest + CURB

Men are charged an astonishingly lower rate for killing their partners than women who kill their partners. This suggests that women are less likely than men to be believed when acting out of self defense if they do commit a murder. Men are beneficiaries of patriarchy, which favor men even within sites of oppression such as mass incarceration.

"Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. When my older brother and I were born with a year separating us in age, patriarchy determined how we would each be regarded by our parents. Both our parents believed in patriarchy; they had been taught patriarchal thinking through religion."

—bell hooks, The Will to Change



Ally Pro-tip: Don't act like you know the struggle of an experience you've never lived. Avoid over explaining an issue to someone who has experienced it. From sexual assault to policies that deny agency, women need to be heard and acknowledged.

UNDOING PATRIARCHY

hooks goes on to tell a story about playing marbles with her brother. Her brother was gifted a tin box of marbles from older men in their family. As they played, it became clear that she was more ambitious than him, to her father's disapproval.

One day her brother told her that marbles was a boys game and she couldn't play. When she ignored this, her father stepped in to reinforce the patriarchal rule. When she ignored it once more, her father brutally beat her, and she was left to sit in her room in the dark. When her mother came to console her, she reminded hooks that she had been warned to stop doing things that only boys could do.

Here we observe a vocal and oppressive set of rules at play. "Girls should be seen and not heard," "Boys don't cry," "You're not man enough," "Act like a lady." The list goes on and on...

Patriarchy results in violence and silence for women. It also puts limitations on men's complex identities and emotional selves while diminishing their ability to work collaboratively. hooks explains how patriarchy is as important to dismantle for men as it is for women:

"Patriarchy is the single most life-threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation. Yet most men do not use the word "patriarchy" in everyday life. Most men never think about patriarchy-what it means, how it is created and sustained. . . Men who have heard and know the word usually associate it with women's liberation, with feminism, and therefore dismiss it as irrelevant to their own experiences. I have been standing at podiums talking about patriarchy for more than thirty years. It is a word I use daily, and men who hear me use it often ask me what I mean by it."

—bell hooks, The Will to Change

It takes both social and self awareness for men to investigate both how they have benefitted from patriarchy, and how patriarchy has ultimately devalued others in their lives, as well as themselves.

According to formerly and currently incarcerated men who run a group called "Success Stories" out of multiple prisons in California, patriarchy has played a huge part in the choices of violence and disconnection that were made leading up to their incarcerations.



Friendly Question: What are some patriarchal rules you can observe at play in your everyday life? What would life look like if those rules didn't exist?

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The Documentary, "The Feminist on Cell Block-Y" shows how these men took transformation from patriarchy into their own hands:



MEDIA MOMENT:
Watch "The Feminist on CellBlock-Y"
directed by Contessa Gayles on
CNN.com



"Antimale activists were no more eager than their sexist male counterparts to emphasize the system of patriarchy and the way it works. For to do so would have automatically exposed the notion that men were all-powerful and women powerless, that all men were oppressive and women always and only victims. By placing the blame for the perpetuation of sexism solely on men, these women could maintain their own allegiance to patriarchy, their own lust for power. They masked their longing to be dominators by taking on the mantle of victimhood."

—bell hooks, *The Will to Change*

bell hooks excavates a notion that we must take seriously: **women and non-male identified folks who reinforce patriarchy for their own benefit have a responsibility to stop.**

hooks explains that patriarchy must be fought by us all, since men are not the only ones who are keeping it alive in the culture. Women must also forgo the habit of competing and tearing each other down for the male gaze. Women are called to end stereotypes about what "a real man" is and stop putting limitations on people around them, especially children.

"To end patriarchy (another way of naming the institutionalized sexism) we need to be clear that we are all participants in perpetuating sexism until we change our minds and hearts, until we let go of sexist thought and action and replace it with feminist thought and action."

—bell hooks, *Feminism is for everyone*

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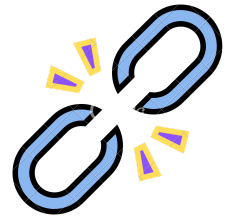
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- Redefining Realness- Janet Mock
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Films:

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Miss Representation (2011)
War Zone (1998)

LGBTQIA LIBERATION



Gender Spectrum (n): The range of personal identities that exist between and outside of masculine and feminine.

Let's start here: You're not able to tell someone's gender, sexuality or even sex just by looking at them on the street. Sure you can get a feeling or a sense, but that's personal information you would have to ask for, experience or be told.

When we look at someone and assume "what they are" or "who they like" it's harmful because we're assuming we know the personal truths of their life and we undermine both their agency and identity.

We are more than the bodies we're born into. Let's move forward using two lenses to look through for this conversation.



Framework 1: People who identify as LGBTQIA or lesbian, gay, bi, transgender, queer, questioning intersex, asexual or gender nonconfirming are not a monolith. They are individuals with unique identities deserving of equal rights regardless of presentation or self identification.



Framework 2: Gender, sexuality and sex are three different things. Instead of being fixed or within a binary, they exist on a spectrum of identities and experiences.



LIFE OUTSIDE THE BINARY

While we're working towards freedom, it's important that we uphold the value of self determination, especially regarding a topic as personal as gender and sexuality.

The terms below will clarify some questions you may have:



Gender (n): a complex and deeply personal internal sense of self existing on a spectrum where feminine, masculine, a combination and more exist. A gender expression is the public facing expression of this sense of self. Some people choose to not identify as having a gender.

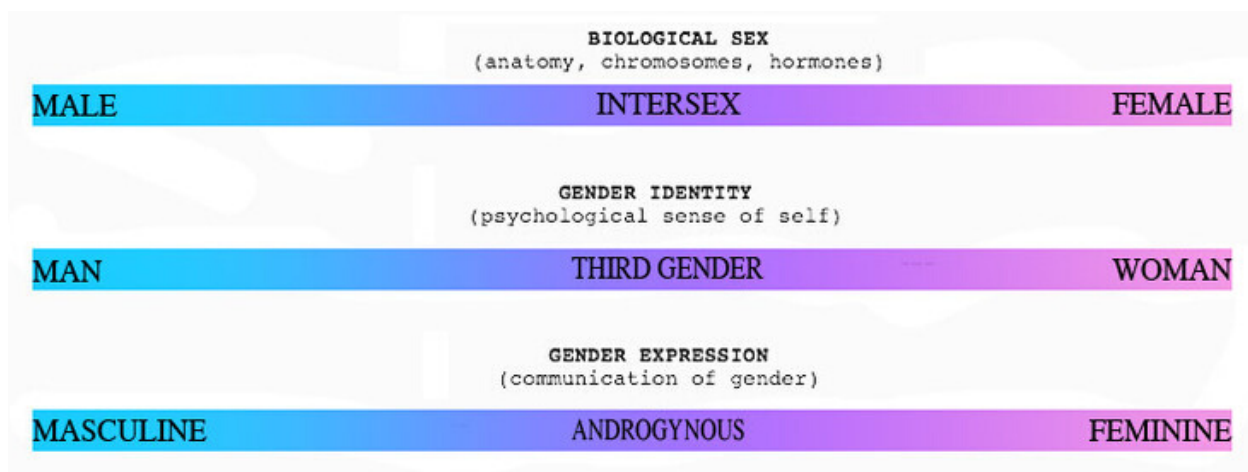
Sex (n): a trait assigned at birth based on an individual's genitalia. Sexes include female, male and intersex.

Sexuality (n): An identity based on the interpersonal attraction one feels to others. Sexuality can be fluid or free-form throughout one's life.

Transgender (adj): describing a person whose gender identity does not correlate with their sex at birth. Trans people may or may not choose to use hormones and surgery for purposes tied to identity and their bodies.

Cisgender (adj): describing a person our society privileges whose personal gender identity correlates with their sex at birth. An example is a person who identifies their gender as female and was born with female genitalia.

Nonbinary (adj): A person who does not identify their gender as being definitively masculine or feminine but instead, exist fluidly within the spectrum of gender, expressing themselves without labels.



Friendly Question: Have you ever thought about gender, sex and sexuality as fluid rather than rigid? What examples can you think of that support that?

WE'VE BEEN HERE



Many people mistakenly think that the LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual) people are part of a new phenomenon. Because of this misconception, people who identify as something other than heterosexual and cisgender are more likely to be erased, criminalized, distrusted and critiqued.

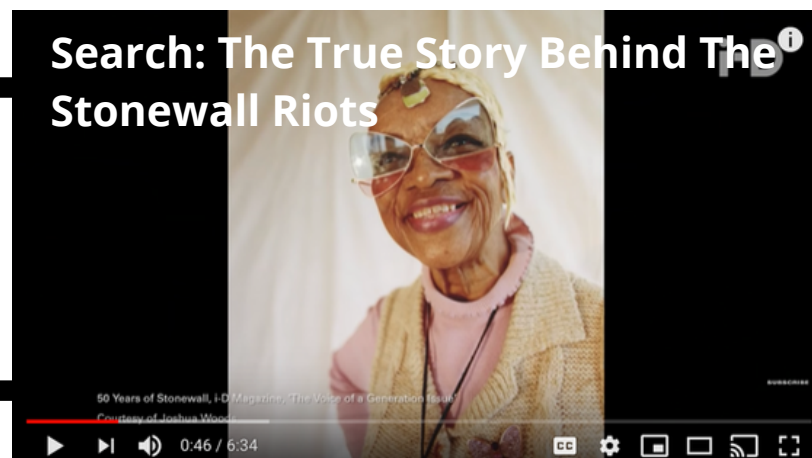
If we look at history, we find that queer people, transgender people, two spirit people, intersex people, have existed throughout legacies of family, government and community in the natural world. In many cases, these people are not accredited for their accomplishments due to their work being invisibilized and identities excluded.



MEDIA MOMENT:

"a watershed moment in the LGBTQIA movement for equal rights, as told by elderly people who lived it."

Search: The True Story Behind Theⁱ Stonewall Riots



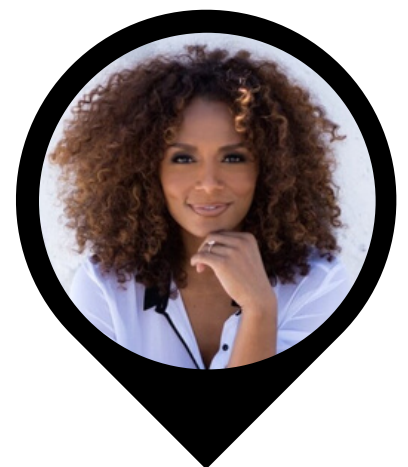
RESPECTING IDENTITY

In our heteronormative society, cisgender and heterosexual people have the most privilege. As a result, nonbinary, trans and queer communities are otherized and looked down upon as not “normal” and therefore, not deserving of full rights, leadership, safety or respect.

One way to be more inclusive is to let people know your **gender pronouns**, or the words you feel comfortable being referred to as in the third person. Saying something like “I go by he” allows space for others to affirm their gender as well, which might be expressed through pronouns “they, she, he” and more. When pronouns are taken seriously, we create safety for identities that exist outside of the status quo.



For example, often, transgender women's pronouns are not honored and they are not seen as “real women” despite their experiences, truth and identity. These sentiments result in so much violence, that it was recorded that 26 transwomen died from hate crimes in 2019 alone.



“Frankly, I'm not responsible for other people's perceptions and what they consider real or fake. We must abolish the entitlement that deludes us into believing that we have the right to make assumptions about people's identities and project those assumptions onto their genders and bodies.”

—Janet Mock, Redefining Realness



Ally Protip: It can be a massive amount of work for a person to constantly be explaining, defending and legitimizing their identity. Personal details about someone's life are things that you may earn over a period of time and trust. Be mindful and respectful when asking questions. Pronouns are a good start!

MAJOR LESSONS

Jessica Stern of TGI Justice provides a compelling piece where a LGBTQIA movement legend is interviewed, Miss Major:

“Now the executive director of the Transgender, Gender Variant, Intersex Justice Project (TGI Justice Project), Miss Major began her work decades ago. Assigned male at birth in Chicago in the 1940s, she was propelled by stigma, violence, and discrimination to become the recognized leader for transgender rights, economic justice, and prison abolition that she is today. She has been a sex worker, a welfare recipient, incarcerated, and homeless: realities that made her grasp early on that activism was essential to her own survival. . .

There is a reason Miss Major’s organizing is linked so heavily to the prison system: transgender people are overrepresented among the general population of people who have been incarcerated over the course of their lives. . . . Miss Major put it this way:

“If the world doesn’t approve of you, you’re not going to make it. Not everyone can live on the edge of society and be okay. Few people can survive and not go to jail.”

-Jessica Stern, Miss Major



Friendly Question: What are some of the privileges or challenges that come with your sex, sexuality or gender?

BEING TRANS IN PRISON



"The range and scale of the abuse endured by transgender people in prison is hard to fathom. Reports suggest that transphobic healthcare, including denial of hormones and discrimination in even routine medical attention, as well as excessive punishment and overuse of segregation, mean that the problems for transgender people in prison affect virtually every level of penal life.[9] Many of the problems start, however, with the fact that transgender people are housed in men's or women's prisons based on their genitalia. . . When asked about the impact of placing a transwoman in a men's prison, Miss Major simply said, "It's devastating."

Physical and sexual abuse against transgender people in prison is rampant. . . while 4 percent of people in men's prisons in California reported experiencing sexual assault, 59 percent of transgender women in prison reported experiencing sexual assault. . .

Miss Major is unequivocal that corrections officers are active participants in the human rights violations that transgender women experience. She believes correction officers are routinely physically and sexually violent with transgender women and that even when they are not the perpetrators, their inaction sanctions abuse: 'The girls usually keep physical violence [by correction officers] to themselves. They might say something if they can tell us directly, but they don't write about it as much. The fact that people don't talk about it doesn't mean it doesn't happen. It means that people are scared'. . . "

—Miss Major, Jessica Stern

VIOLENCE AGAINST TRANS WOMEN

"Along with systematic oppression, low self-esteem is one of the most significant themes running through Miss Major's analysis of transgender people's relationship to poverty and incarceration. . . people are rejected by their families, physically and sexually abused, and denied jobs and education because of who they are. . . She has been on the receiving end of violence at the hands of the state, her family, intimate partners, and strangers. Her family hit her for being transgender. During the Stonewall riots, a police officer knocked her unconscious with a blow to the head. A corrections officer broke her jaw when she was in prison. Intimate partners have beaten her. . ."

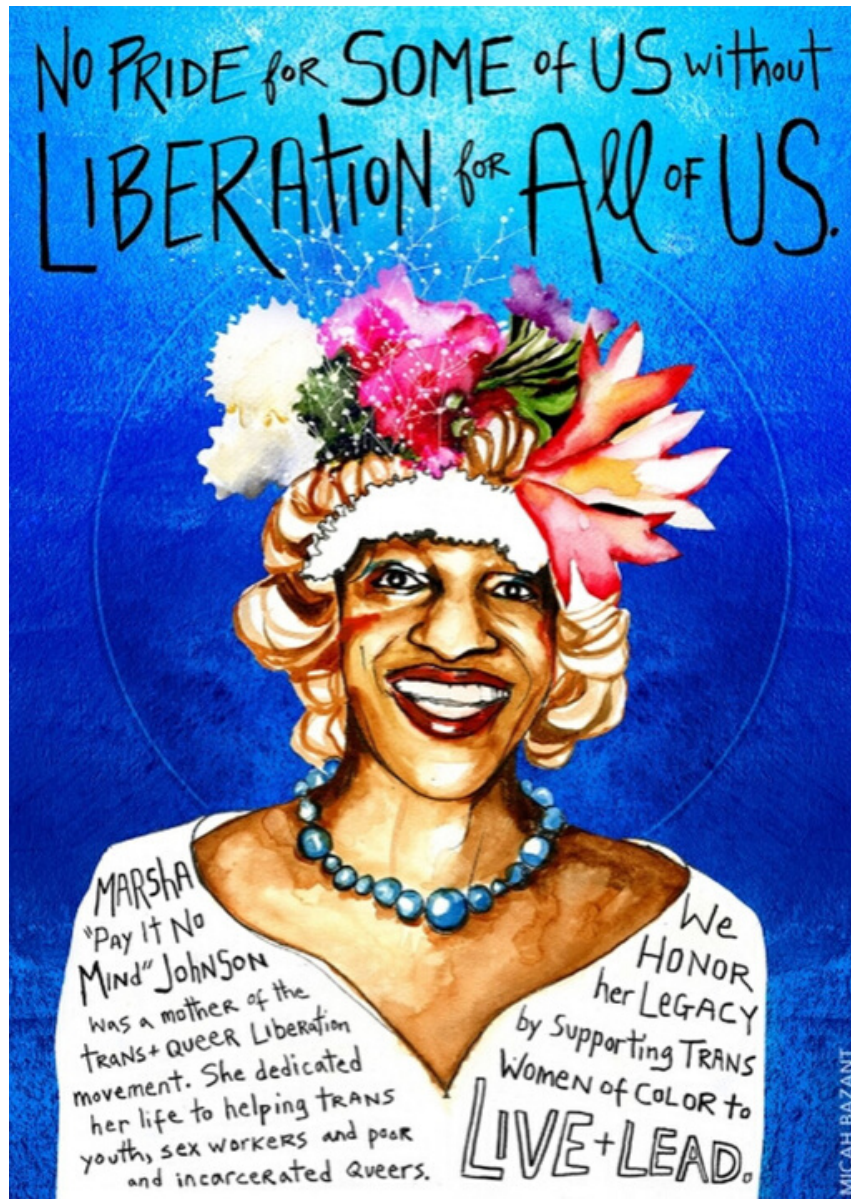
—Jessica Stern



"I've had my ass kicked by strangers. I've also been chased but not caught. You learn how to run in heels. But even if they don't catch you, the fear is with you. It doesn't leave. I've been waiting for a bus and had guys drive by and throw beer bottles at me. And I've felt the shards of glass rain down on my skin. It's not always physical contact—there's mental, spiritual, and emotional abuse, too. The physical abuse you can get over, but if you say something to me, I will think about that every time I look in the mirror or see someone who looks like you. It's a cloud that follows you, and let me tell you, it rains."

—Miss Major

LIBERATION FOR ALL



Art by Micha Bazant

Identity is a delicate and valuable part of our lives. Our differences make our communities whole, if we let them coexist without stifling them.

If it's liberation we seek, we must radically break the binaries, barriers and walls that keep some of us from the basic needs of resources and respect.

If it's liberation we're creating, it must be created with all representation at the table. Nothing about us without us!

Sources

Redefining Realness: My Path To Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More. Janet Mock. 2014

"This is What Pride Looks Like: Miss Major and the Violence, Poverty, and Incarceration of Low-Income Transgender Women. Jessica Stern. Miss Major." Tgijp.org. web.

"Understanding Gender" genderspectrum.org. web.



Books:

- I Must Resist: Bayard Rustin's Life in Letters by Bayard Rustin and Michael G. Long (2012)
- Zami: A New Spelling of My Name by Audre Lorde (1982)
- We Are Everywhere: Protest, Power, and Pride in the History of Queer Liberation by Matthew Reimer (2019)

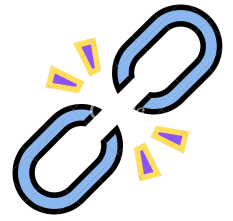
Films:

- Major! (2015)
- The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson directed by David France (2017) [Netflix]
- Moonlight directed by Barry Jenkins (2016) [Netflix]

**Recommended
Reading/Viewing:**



TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE



Transformative Justice (n): a decriminalized social and interpersonal strategy for responding to violence and conflict in community.

Transformative justice does not zoom in on shaming the person who has caused harm, or seeking revenge on them. Instead, it seeks to find points of shifting power and choice in a person who has caused harm, while addressing needs and reparations for those who have been harmed.

Sounds a lot like **restorative justice**, right? The difference in transformative justice is that it also looks at the larger structures at play and seeks to transform those as well as the behaviors and experiences of the people involved in the conflict.



Framework: Transformative justice looks at conflict with a wide lens. In order to come up with a sustainable solution, it looks at the choices that come before an act of harm as well as what actions need to happen after. It also acknowledges systems, people, values and needs surrounding the issue as pathways to solutions.

A NEW VIEW OF JUSTICE



We have all witnessed or heard about some type of harm done in our community. **Person X harms person Y, and often, person X gets locked up in a system of trauma and isolation, while person Y receives little to no support around healing from the incident.** The person who was harmed might relive their harm during the process of conviction. They are supposed to feel like the punishment of their wrongdoer should give them peace and justice.

The person who created the harm is not given the opportunity to be accountable with dignity, or to be seen for the circumstances surrounding their actions. In the process of being punished by the state, there is a smaller chance that they will be able to sustainably change their behavior that caused harm and repair the harm they caused.

Both restorative and transformative justice operate on the idea that accountability is more powerful than punishment. We ask the question, what needs to be done for this harm to be addressed and reconciled? It asks a lot of our imaginations and capacity as humans, especially in the face of violent crimes and death. In order to hold someone accountable for harm they have committed, often community support is brought in, and a conversation centered around the harm that was done takes place.

The conversation leads to action items that the victim/survivor and community point people deem safe, forward looking and substantial enough to provide closure. These actions can be done over a span of time, and include an agreement of separation from one another. Healing circles can be used to provide support to both parties. Transformative justice would then ask, what social systems are in place that enabled the harm that was done? How can those structures be changed?

Generation Five is an organization that has taken on child sexual abuse using a transformative justice framework. They provide more context for the strategy of transformative justice:



Friendly Question: Using a transformative justice lens, what are some things survivors of harm might need to get justice?

GOALS AND VALUES OF TJ

The goals of Transformative Justice are:

- Safety, healing, and agency for survivors
- Accountability and transformation for people who harm
- Community action, healing, and accountability
- Transformation of the social conditions that perpetuate violence – systems of oppression and exploitation, domination, and state violence

The principles of a Transformative Justice approach to addressing all forms of violence include:

Liberation, Shifting Power, Safety, Accountability, Collective Action, Respecting Cultural Differences/Guarding Against Cultural Relativism and Sustainability

—Generationfive.org

When engaging in transformative and restorative practices such as conflict management circles, healing circles, talking circles, and accountability circles, it's key that we are seeing the issue as an issue of the community.

Within these modalities is a shared responsibility to make the community safe. These practices take a huge amount of patience, understanding and willingness to actively listen and compassionately respond.

For generations, indigenous communities and black and brown leaders have been keen to how effective RJ and TJ can be. When the community encircles a situation of harm, instead of isolates it within a cold bureaucratic system, there are many more options for healing and repair.

We can reclaim these practices as a way to fight mass incarceration. We can use tools like talking circles, accountability conversations and retributive action steps in order to manage the conflict and mitigate the harm in our communities.



Friendly Question: Using a transformative justice lens, what are some things survivors of harm might need to get justice?

TRANSFORMING PAIN

Co-founder of Black Lives Matter, Patrisse Cullors has experienced transformative justice. In the section of her Harvard Law Review article entitled "Successful Transformative Practice in Personal Relationships" **she describes a situation in which she, over time, was harmed and received healing:**

This one is hard. A few years ago, I started seeing someone, Jordan. One weekend they came over and we became sexually intimate. This person crossed my boundaries. I felt uncomfortable, weird, and vulnerable while it happened. But, I couldn't name it. I didn't stop it while it was happening. I set boundaries and said "no." I repeated that two-letter word. This other person did not respect my "no."

After that weekend, they went home. Once they left, I slowly came to realize what happened and that things weren't right. I called friends and processed with them what took place. Eventually, I asked one of my friends to accompany me as I confronted the person whom I had shared intimate space with — who had harmed me. Both the person in question and my friend were masculine of center. I thought this would make holding them accountable easier to do. They knew each other, and my friend had experience in transformative justice facilitation and support. I confided in my friend and detailed exactly what I needed, what I wanted:

1. Tell Jordan that I was harmed.
2. Tell Jordan that I wanted space from them.
3. Help Jordan secure help and realize where they caused harm.

After the meeting, Jordan became defensive. Again, they refused to respect my boundaries. And they began to spiral. They left me constant voicemails, text messages, and letters. I asked my friend to remind Jordan that I needed space. They stopped sending letters and making calls. I had room to feel, to sit with my grief, and to come to terms with what happened to me.

The following year, I contacted Jordan. I asked if they were open to meeting with me. Jordan agreed. We processed what happened over dinner. It was challenging, heart-wrenching, and awkward. But most of all, our meeting was healing. Incredibly healing.

—Patrisse Cullors

A SACRED PROCESS

What made this experience so hard was that the harm and healing took place within the Black queer community. This incident forced me to practice what I preach by embracing accountability and abolition fully. It pushed me to clarify my needs, give myself permission to take the space and time I needed, and process healing as an individual and as a member of a community. I am grateful to my friend who lent their support, and who from that initial moment and throughout that year provided me with the tools I needed to repair the damage. . .

—Patrisse Cullors



“There are different kinds of justice. Retributive justice is largely Western. The African understanding is far more restorative – not so much to punish as to redress or restore a balance that has been knocked askew”

—Desmond Tutu

A SACRED PROCESS

Transformative Justice invites us to ask:

How do we build our personal and collective capacity to respond to trauma and support accountability in a transformative way?

How do we shift power towards collective liberation?

How do we build effective and sustainable movements that are grounded in resilience and life-affirming power?

—Generationfive.org



"I have sat in, facilitated, and participated in many healing circles with people I've harmed and who have harmed me. Defensiveness, anger, self-righteousness, self-realization, serenity, and other emotions have come over me and through me in those moments. I am grateful for the opportunities I have had to apologize and learn from my mistakes. I am appreciative of the times I have forgiven and moved beyond the harm, toward transformation. I am forever indebted to the community of friends, family, and loved ones I have created over the years to hold one another and call ourselves into our own collective humanity. I value this community, the people that I call my team."

—Patrisse Cullors

Sources

"Abolition And Reparations: Histories of Resistance, Transformative Justice, And Accountability Developments in the Law." Patrisse Cullors, Harvard Law Review. 2019.

"Transformative justice." www.generationfive.org. web

"Recovering from Apartheid," Desmond Tutu, The New Yorker. 1996.



Books:

- Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Ejeris Dixon (2020)
- The Little Book of Circle Processes by Kay Pranis (2005)

Films:

- Circles directed by Cassidy Friedman (2018)

Glossary

Objectification (n): The act of likening a person or living thing to that of an inanimate object often to the benefit of the objectifier.

School to prison pipeline (n): The disproportionate amount of minors, and young adults who lack race and class privilege who become systems involved, because of the presence of police and harsh policies in schools and institutions.

Disenfranchisement (n): The deprivation of one's full rights or participation in government, often resulting in fragmentation of civic involvement and freedom

Upward mobility (n): The ability to advance within society as it relates to career, finances, education, and social standing.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) (n): The negative experiences one has as a child that may result in sustained trauma, influencing behavior and development early in life.

LWOP (n): An archaic concept compared to the death penalty, life without the possibility of parole, which condemns a person to die in prison.

Three Strikes Law (n): a law which requires a person convicted of any new felony, having one prior conviction of a serious felony to be sentenced for twice the term of the newest offense. This law was created in 1994 and excludes "Third Strikers" from many pathways to freedom.

Adultification (n): The act of likening a child to an adult in ways that places unfair responsibility and consequences.

Dehumanization (n): The act of denying one's humanity through physical, verbal, emotional or systemic means.

Noncarceral (adj): A way to describe a method or solution which does not lean on caging as a form of punishment.

Reparations (n): payment, financial or otherwise to a person or group of people who have been wronged, in most instances, systemically.

THINKING ABOUT OUR MOVEMENT



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