

# RESOURCE GUIDE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOLITION

## INTRODUCTION

The global surge of protests, rebellions, and grassroots organizing of 2020 have catalyzed widespread debate over the challenges and possibilities of abolition in the 21st century. This resource guide frames this moment as part of the long history of abolitionist movements. It offers a framework for analyzing the structures of domination that constitute the carceral state and give rise to the prison industrial complex (PIC). It also provides a tool to deepen collective efforts to organize movements and build communities that will sustain people.

The guide is structured by six key questions: “How did we get here?” “How does the prison industrial complex work?” “What is its purpose?” “Who is impacted?” “What do abolitionists want?” and “How do abolitionists struggle?” These questions aim to: mobilize collective reflection on the political and social histories that have created the current condition; engage the art, knowledge, and theories of action created and honed through grassroots organizing and social movements; and contribute to a better understanding of the problems of policing, incarceration, surveillance, and borders. These questions compel us to challenge incomplete or simplistic explanations of complex problems while pushing us toward critical engagement with a spectrum of abolitionist thought and practice.

This is a dynamic resource. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list of abolitionist texts. As teachers, scholars, organizers, caretakers, artists, and cultural workers, we are not interested in prescribing a static abolitionist canon or blueprint. Rather, we offer this guide in the spirit of collective teaching, learning, and dialogue, all of which are central to broader struggles for abolition.

**THE GUIDE IS STRUCTURED BY SIX KEY QUESTIONS: “HOW DID WE GET HERE?” “HOW DOES THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX WORK?” “WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?” “WHO IS IMPACTED?” “WHAT DO ABOLITIONISTS WANT?” AND “HOW DO ABOLITIONISTS STRUGGLE?”**

# WHY ANOTHER RESOURCE LIST?

In support of massive rebellions against antiblack police violence, dozens of recommended reading lists have circulated to help address the issues of policing, incarceration, and racism. Such lists often highlight popular texts such as Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* and Ava DuVernay's documentary, *13th*. These and other widely circulated materials have contributed to public awareness regarding histories of race and imprisonment, but have also reproduced flawed frameworks. For example, what does the phrase "mass incarceration" actually mean and what solutions does it imply? What is the difference between "mass incarceration" and "non-mass" incarceration? Is there an acceptable threshold? The canonization of "mass incarceration" reproduces reformist solutions that pivot on questions like, "How can we fix this broken/dysfunctional system?" or "How can we make the criminal justice system 'less racist'?"

Abolitionist framings of the problem lead to different questions that challenge the foundations of the PIC and frame deeper analysis and action. For example, is the antiblack violence of policing and incarceration a "fixable" flaw in the system or one of its endemic features? Are there models from oppressed peoples for organizing collective safety that don't rely on policing and incarceration?

This guide encourages analyses that illuminate rather than flatten ways of understanding of how and why the US has come to rely on policing, criminalization, and incarceration as the conditions of "peace" and social order. While there are limitations to our US-based focus, the political influence and normalized violence of the US state is global in reach. We attempt to account for long histories of abolitionist organizing, often grounded in Black feminist, queer, and diasporic scholarship and activism, to build new spaces, relationships, and worlds. Abolitionist praxis includes redistributive forms of food and housing support, community gardens, mutual aid, transformative justice practices, access to free and affirming medical and mental health support, community-led emergency care, and other protective and creative measures.

This project flows in the tradition of abolitionist, Black radical, liberation movement-building reading/study groups, especially those led and organized by incarcerated people. This is an effort to break the divide often imagined between university-based learning and the many other spaces in which people gather to study, debate, and generate knowledge and action.

Our goal is to make this list useful for building a syllabus, a study group, or facilitating a point of entry for anyone interested in abolition. Toward that end, we focus on gathering and annotating specific chapters of books, articles, videos, audio, and visual art. The annotations suggest how the resource contributes to each question. When available, the image to the left of each resource links to a site where people can access it for free. Many texts and resources are freely available at [zlibrary](#) and [LibGen.rs](#), among other sites.

# A NOTE ON LANGUAGE



We use the terms carceral state and prison industrial complex (PIC) to describe the problems abolition seeks to address. While “carceral state” and “PIC” are sometimes used interchangeably, they are related but distinct concepts. We use “PIC” to foreground the symbiotic relationships between people, entities, and systems fueling the reliance on policing, incarceration, surveillance, borders, and the criminal justice apparatus. We use “carceral state” to emphasize the many ways criminalization, punishment, and different methods of social control form a core function of the state.

## ► Prison Industrial Complex

While the PIC concept has always sought to highlight relationships between the state and corporations, it has often been reduced - both in academic writing and organizing contexts - to a concern with private prisons and/or prisoner labor. In contrast, CR uses the term prison industrial complex ([PIC](#)) to describe the overlapping interests of government and industry that normalize surveillance, policing, and incarceration as solutions to economic, social and political problems. Popularized in the late 1990s through CR’s founding conference in Berkeley, CA, the term PIC draws attention to the range of public and private organizations, institutions, and individuals with vested economic, social, and political interests in the expansion of systems of control and confinement.

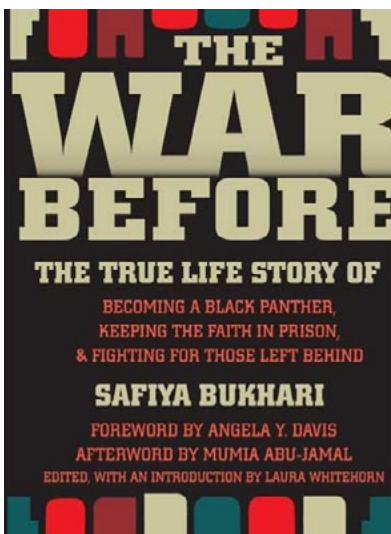
## ► Carceral State

The “carceral state” describes the governing and legal institutions, as well as the policies and practices that organize and enact capture, punishment, and policing. The carceral state normalizes gendered antiblackness and racial-colonial violence while simultaneously maintaining these as the foundational conditions required for social order and racial capitalism. The contemporary carceral state shapes dominant notions of peace and safety through “law and order” rhetoric and policy. This makes things like the weaponization of the law, the asymmetrical violence of policing, and cultures of gendered racial criminalization not exceptions, but fundamental functions of the state. The carceral state maintains order by isolating and immobilizing targeted people and communities. This “carceral” incapacitation includes but is not limited to: jails, prisons, detention centers, psychiatric facilities, parole, probation, electronic monitoring, public registries, and databases. The contemporary carceral state is deeply historical; it inherits, updates, and deploys the carceral structures of the slave ship, plantation, frontier, and apartheid order as part of its current approaches to captivity.

Throughout the guide, we frequently mark the overlapping ideologies or “isms” that underlie the PIC and justify its targeted harms. The lists we use to do this are not exhaustive. We struggle over naming and language, and recognize that different communities and intellectual traditions engage different terms. In the text that follows, we aim to be as intentional as possible, as language is political.

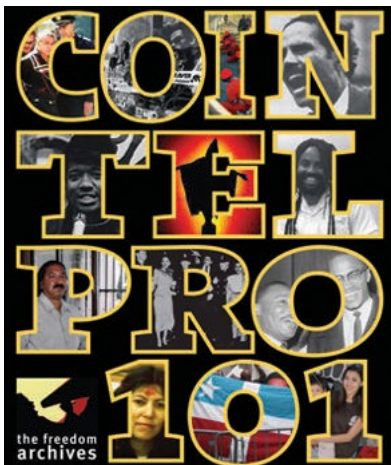
# 1 HOW DID WE GET HERE?

This section considers the complex histories and political, social, and economic relations that compose the rise of the Prison Industrial Complex and the US carceral state. Recent critical narratives of “mass incarceration” have sometimes relied on overly simplistic notions of prisons as slavery or slave labor. This section of the guide attempts to account for the complex roles of antiblackness and chattel slavery, racial capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and settler-colonialism in shaping the development of the modern PIC and carceral state. The resources we suggest in this section catalyze deeper analysis of how criminalization and incarceration reflect and reproduce antiblackness as well as white supremacist racial hierarchies; unevenly distribute life-sustaining resources like housing, education, and health care; produce, regulate, and punish dissent; and reinforce oppressive economic relations.



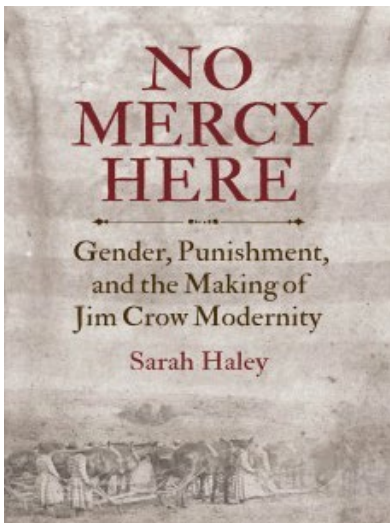
## ► *Safiya Bukhari, 2010. The War Before*

This book addresses a series of moments in the emergence of the US policing and carceral state through the autobiographical voice of a respected Black revolutionary woman who was part of the Black Panther Party, Black Liberation Army, and the Jericho Movement, among other groups. Bukhari offers clarity on why we must analyze policing and incarceration as facets of racial and antiblack domestic war rather than as criminal justice or criminological structures.



## ► *COINTELPRO 101, 2010. Freedom Archives*

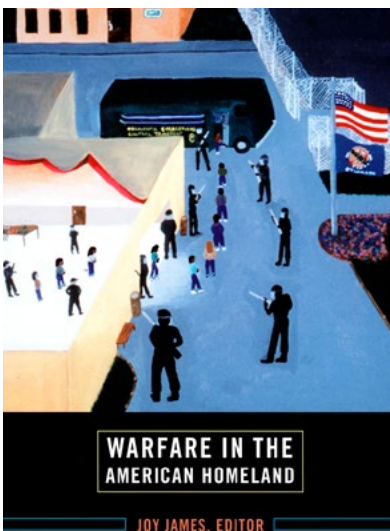
This film exposes illegal surveillance, disruption, and outright murder committed by the US government in the 1950s, '60s and '70s. “COINTELPRO” refers to the official FBI Counter Intelligence Program carried out to surveil, imprison, and eliminate leaders of social justice movements and to disrupt, divide, and destroy the movements. Many of the government’s crimes are still unknown. Through interviews with activists who experienced these abuses firsthand and with rare historical footage, the film provides an educational introduction to a period of intense repression and draws relevant lessons for present and future movements.



► **Sarah Haley, 2016. *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity***

- **Chapter 1** Carceral Constructions of Black Female Deviance
- **Chapter 5** Sabotage and Black Radical Feminist Refusal

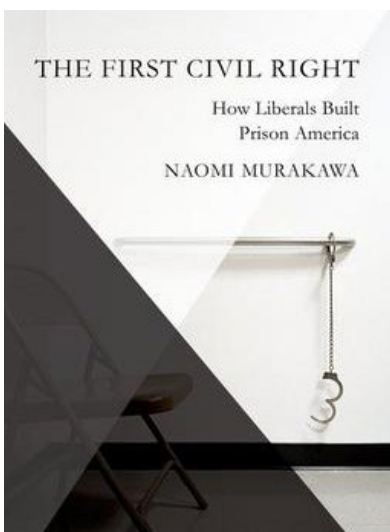
*No Mercy Here* provides an historical analysis of Black women's criminalization, incarceration, and experiences with convict labor in Jim Crow Era Georgia. Chapter 1 details the processes by which Black women's criminality was constructed through highly gendered forms of antiblackness. Chapter 5 explores Black women's resistance to carceral structures through both sabotage and cultural production, offering a window into abolitionist feminist visions of the time.



► **Joy James (ed.), 2007. *Warfare in the American Homeland***

- **Chapter 5** Domestic Warfare: A Dialogue (Marshall Eddie Conway)
- **Chapter 8** A Century of Colonialism: One Hundred Years of Puerto Rican Resistance (Oscar López Rivera)

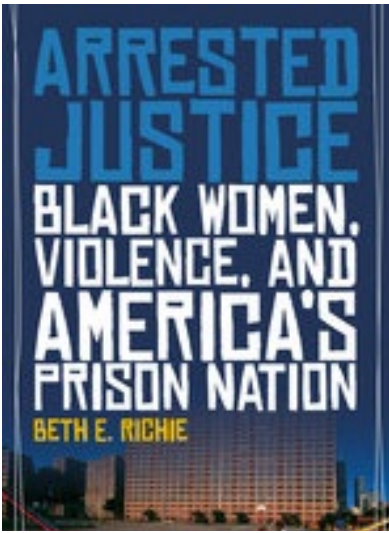
Longtime US political prisoners Marshall Eddie Conway and Oscar López Rivera build an analysis of domestic warfare as a colonial, antiblack, and racial capitalist structure of state power. They foreground the ongoing violence of colonial conquest and state repression of Black and Puerto Rican liberation movements as foundations of the prison industrial complex.



► **Naomi Murakawa, 2014. *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America.***

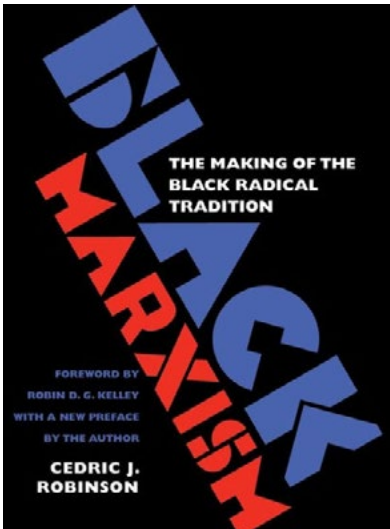
- **Introduction** The First Civil Right
- **Chapter 3** Policing the Great Society: Modernizing Law Enforcement and Rehabilitating Criminal Sentencing

This book challenges the commonly held wisdom that the call for law and order began with Nixon as a response to Black lawlessness. Rather than a crime problem that became racialized, argues Murakawa, there was a race problem that was “solved” through criminalization. Focusing on processes through which legislators and others produced specific policies and focus-points like the drug war, the death penalty, and sentencing practices, Murakawa demonstrates how liberal calls to recognize and stop antiblack violence and discrimination became part of the groundwork for the PIC.



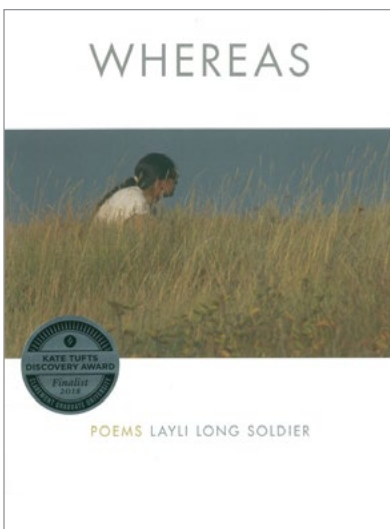
- ▶ **Beth Richie, 2012. *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation***
- ▶ **Chapter 4** Black Women, Male Violence, and the Buildup of a Prison Nation

Richie illustrates the role mainstream anti-violence organizations played - and continue to operationalize - to ensure that the state recognizes select forms of violence against specific women. But in so doing, these organizations amplify policing and punishment while doing little to eradicate gender and sexual violence. This analysis reminds readers of the complicity of some streams of feminism in building the “prison nation” while also chronicling the long trajectory of women of color and/or queer feminist organizing in resistance to the carceral state.



- ▶ **Cedric Robinson, 1983/2000. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition***
- ▶ **Chapter 1** Racial Capitalism: The Nonobjective Character of Capitalist Development

Robinson’s introductory chapter establishes a framework for understanding how capitalism is produced through a series of “wars, material crises, and social conflicts” that originate in European feudalism and can be traced through the rise of global colonial conquest, the transatlantic slave trade, and the making of the modern U.S. nation-state.



- ▶ **Layli Long Soldier, 2017. *Whereas***
- ▶ **Audio of “38,” read by the author**

This poem is about the arrest and execution of 38 Dakota people by the US federal government in December 1862 in the wake of an uprising against their starvation resulting from a series of treaties which reduced the land on which they lived and hunted to an area too small to sustain them. Simultaneously, they were denied the ability to purchase food and other goods from settlers and traders.

# 2 HOW DOES THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX WORK?

Interlocking ideological, economic, and spatial mechanisms reproduce and uphold the PIC. While the criminal legal system - prisons, policing, courts - is a central mechanism, a wide assortment of policies, practices, and relationships surveil, criminalize, isolate, punish, expel, and kill. These include the systems and institutions of family regulation, migrant incarceration, civil commitment, criminal records regulation, and more. These are upheld by white supremacy, racial capitalism, heteropatriarchy, colonialism, and ableism and are reinforced by popular culture and media. This section challenges the belief that the PIC is a necessary and inevitable feature of the social world by highlighting how punishment becomes a normalized, common sense feature of everyday life.



## ► The Afterlives of Conviction Project, Melissa Burch

This anthropology-based web resource documents the human impact of criminal conviction through the lens of employment. The project aims to support efforts to challenge the discriminatory use of criminal records in the United States and to make scholarly data and concepts available in useful ways to organizers, educators, and policymakers. For example, lived experiences are presented in graphic booklets and a research digest provides short summaries of relevant academic publications.

## ► PIC Bullseye Exercise, Critical Resistance/Melissa Burch

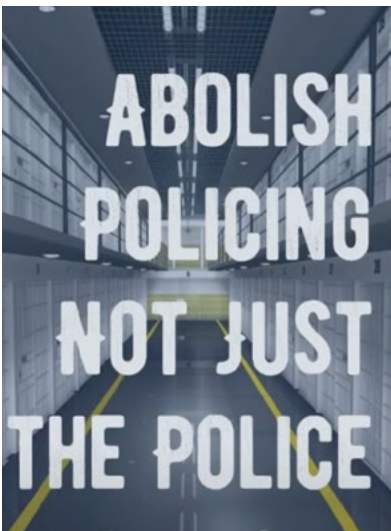
This popular education exercise was designed in the early 2000s to get communities talking about the PIC and PIC abolition. It can be used to guide a group toward the development of a collective understanding of the prison industrial complex. It helps participants think about the layers of the PIC and how all of its parts are interrelated. Through seven core prompts, a facilitator leads a brainstorm and conversation about the concept of the PIC as an interlocking system of state and private interests that designates prisons, policing, and surveillance as responses to social, political and economic problems. See CR's [Abolitionist Toolkit](#) for more exercises.





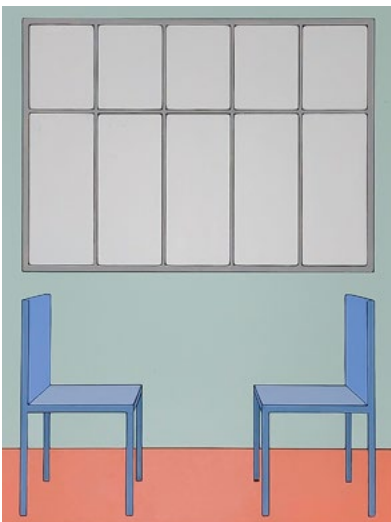
► ***I Won't Drown on that Levee and You Ain't Gonna Break My Back, 2006. Ashley Hunt***

This documentary engages with the multiple impacts of Hurricane Katrina on people who were imprisoned in New Orleans, Louisiana. It examines how threats of arrest, jailing, and armed military response were leveraged as necessary for rebuilding. The film tells the story through local organizing by a broad coalition of organizations and families.



► ***"Abolish Policing, Not Just Police," July 2, 2020. Mariame Kaba, Victoria Law, Maya Schenwar***

This webinar addresses "community-based" forms of policing, including neighborhood watch programs and the expansion of the child welfare system's mandated reporting, that replicate many of the same oppressive dynamics as traditional policing. Drug courts, mandatory psychiatric treatment, and sex worker "rescue" programs might seem like better alternatives to our current system but they still disproportionately target Black, Brown, and marginalized people, keeping them under coercive systems. While vital to a flourishing society, when social workers, teachers and medical professionals are called upon to "replace" police, they are often drafted into roles of surveillance and punishment.



► ***Judith Levine and Erica Meiners, 2020. "Uncivil Commitment: A Gulag of Prisons Posing as Hospitals"***

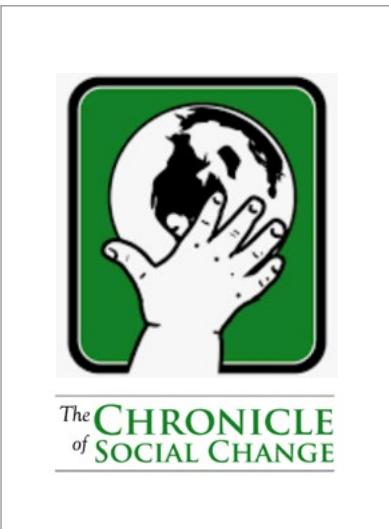
This short article explores the continued imprisonment of people with convictions for sex offenses, after they have served their sentences, and the complicity of the medical system in punishment, surveillance and detention. This article - an excerpt from their wider book project, *The Feminist and The Sex Offender* - also details how civil commitment laws do nothing to deter or end gender and sexual violence.





► **Radiolab, 2018. Border Trilogy**

Based on Jason De Leon’s book *Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*, this three-part audio series documents the human impact of US immigration policy. Episode 2 tells the story of how Border Patrol Chief Silvestre Reyes developed the border policing strategy that came to be known as “prevention through deterrence,” which concentrates enforcement directly on the border, forcing migrants to cross ever more lethal parts of the desert.



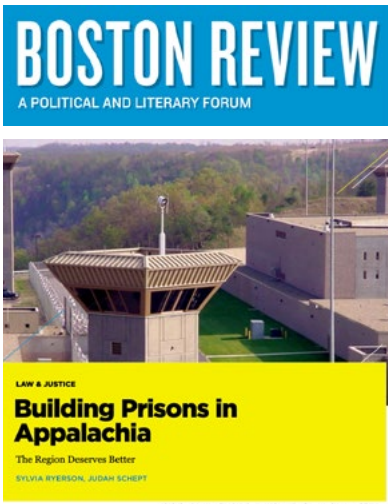
► **Dorothy Roberts, 2020. “Abolishing Policing Also Means Abolishing Family Regulation”**

This short article locates child protective services as part of the carceral state and challenges the incompleteness of the demand to defund the police and simply reinvest that money in traditional forms of social service that often also function as highly punitive systems. Roberts argues we must include ending the state’s “family regulation” systems within abolitionist movements.



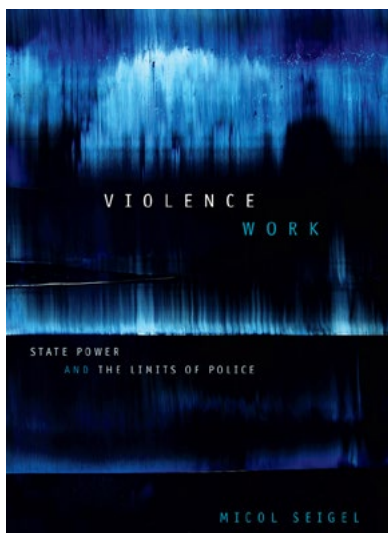
► **Dylan Rodriguez, “It’s Not Police Brutality,” 2017. By Rachel Herzing and Isaac Ontiveros.**

In this short video, Dylan Rodriguez breaks down the violence inherent to police practice. “It’s not police brutality if the state sanctions the violence. At that point, you move from calling it police brutality to calling it policing.” Rodriguez explains how “brutality” represents a pushing of the boundary of what the state will sanction and holding individual officers legally accountable, an exception that does not necessarily disrupt the rule.



► **Sylvia Ryerson and Judah Schept, 2018. "Building Prisons in Appalachia"**

This article illustrates how rural prison-building emerges from the US's willful misrecognition of the complexities of these regions. In rural communities like Appalachia, prisons purport to offer a response to de-industrialization yet only through forms of capture that disproportionately target Black people. Far from offering flourishing economic futures, these prisons continue to disempower rural communities.



► **Micol Seigel, 2018. "Violence Work: Policing and Power"**

This article details how myths about policing - as a domestic (not global), civilian (not military) and public (not private) - uphold it as an institution, leading to perpetual investment in reforms aimed at restoring policing to this mythical ideal. But police reform can't work because the rock-bottom function of police is to do the work of the state, and the work of the state is violence. This argument is deepened in Seigel's book, *Violence Work*, where she develops the global framework for this work.



► **Damien Sojoyner, 2013. "Black Radicals Make for Bad Citizens: Undoing the Myth of the School to Prison Pipeline"**

Prisons are but one institution of racial containment. In this article, Sojoyner shows how the simple binary suggested by the school-to-prison-pipeline analytic (i.e. prisons bad; schools good), obscures the many ways that for Black students, schools themselves serve as institutions that limit life chances, whether or not they are formally arrested, expelled, or suspended. Far from benign, Sojoyner argues that public education has served a key ideological mechanism for the rise of the prison regime.

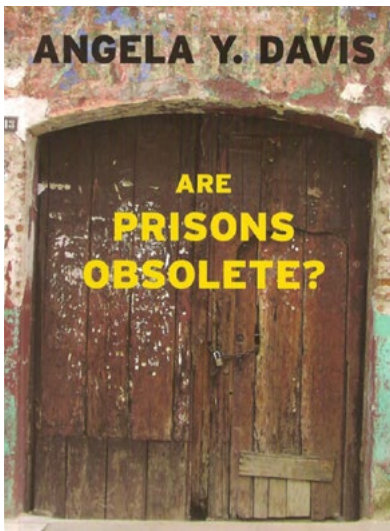


► **Mabel O. Wilson, 2016. “Carceral Architectures: Design of the Self and the Racial Other”**

Through a close reading of architectural plans by Thomas Jefferson for a prison to be built near his Monticello plantation, Wilson argues that contemporary prison and jail design and building should be understood in relation to “architecture’s own genealogy in racialized modern discourses of history and science.” This article challenges the historical and current presumption in architecture that designing and building spaces of confinement is neutral or apolitical work.

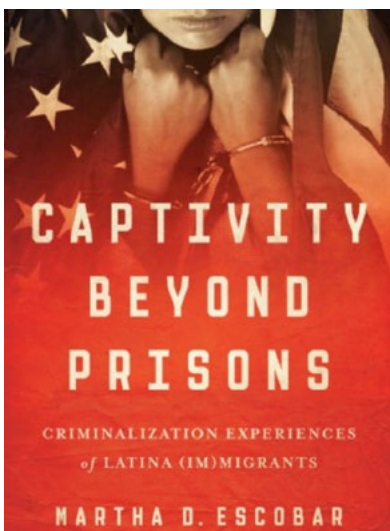
## **3 WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX?**

Toward what end do governments surveil, detain, and imprison? The PIC is an embedded and naturalized facet of our economic and political systems that serves many purposes while it disappears, denigrates, and represses the people it ensnares. The PIC is often misunderstood as a necessary response to “crime,” or taken as the simple expression of racial animus and discrimination. Similarly, the scope of the PIC is sometimes reduced to the realm of “private prisons” or the exploitation of prisoner labor. The resources in this section illuminate how racial capitalism, antiblackness, racism, settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy, xenophobia, and ableism entwine to sustain and propel surveillance, policing, and incarceration. Analyzing these multiple and overlapping forms of state and state-sanctioned violence can help forge stronger tools for understanding and fighting the PIC and carceral state.



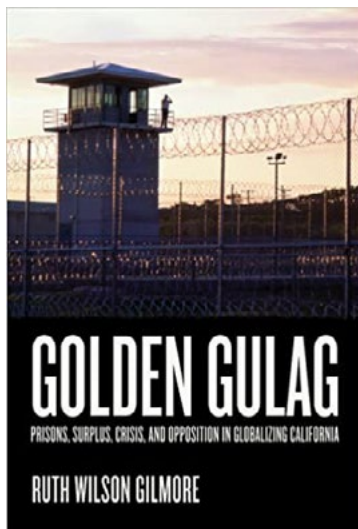
- ▶ **Angela Y. Davis, 2003. *Are Prisons Obsolete?***
- ▶ **Chapter 4** How Gender Structures the Prison System

In this chapter, Angela Davis makes the argument that gender is one of the structuring logics of the PIC. Drawing on examples ranging from the incarceration of people with disabilities to the pervasive sexual violence in prisons, Davis describes how heteropatriarchal forms of power have animated the development of the prison system and shows how one purpose of the prison system is to reproduce and exacerbate sexual and gender violence.



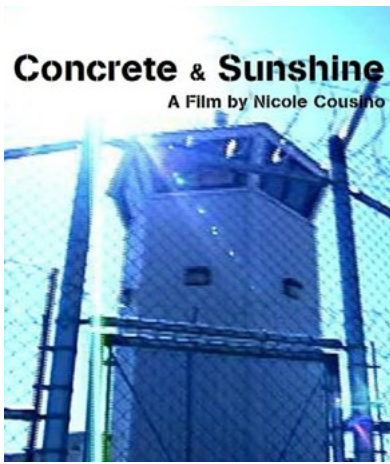
- ▶ **Martha Escobar, 2016. *Captive Beyond Prisons: Criminalization Experiences of Latina (Im)migrants***
- ▶ **Introduction** Shifting the Conversation from (Im)migrant Rights to Abolition

With a focus on the criminalization and imprisonment of Latina women, this chapter brings into direct and explicit conversation (im)migrant women's rights and abolitionist politics. Escobar connects detention, deportation, and family separation to the logics of the PIC, offering an important abolitionist critique of many mainstream immigrant rights discourses which reinscribe dominant notions of criminality and antiblackness.



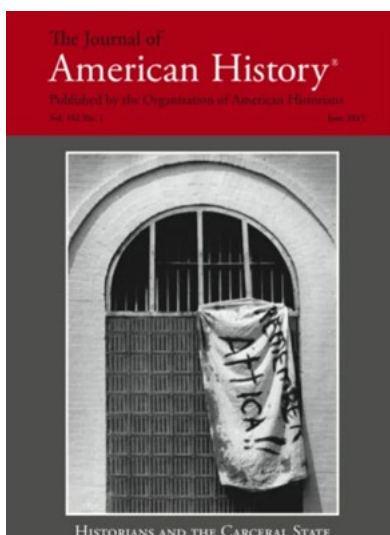
- ▶ **Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 2007. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California***
- ▶ **Introduction**
- ▶ **Chapter 3** The Prison Fix

This book outlines how and why prisons became the catch-all solution to social problems in CA between 1980 and 2000. Far from a simple story of privatization and exploitation, Gilmore explains how prisons come to fill a number of voids to make the economy work in places where it otherwise would have likely collapsed. The Introduction debunks common explanations of 'mass incarceration' (rising crime; new slavery; prisons as economic growth for rural areas). Chapter 3 details how prisons become a response to the crises of capitalism and a state in search of legitimacy.



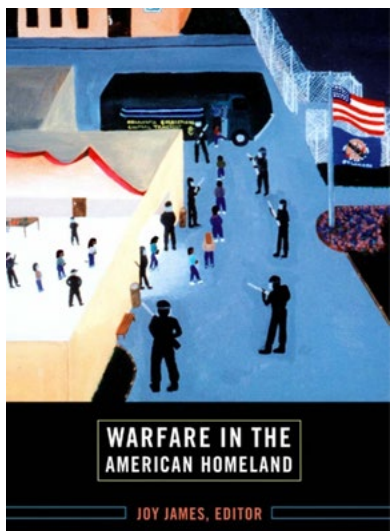
► **Concrete and Sunshine, 2002. Nicole Cousino**

This film is helpful to watch alongside *Golden Gulag*. It documents the expansion of California's prison system as the largest prison building project in history. This film features Ruth Wilson Gilmore who discusses this expansion in relation to changes in political economy, military spending, de-industrialization, and land use. Cousino intercuts testimony from men in solitary confinement in Pelican Bay's Special Housing Units (SHU) who share their analyses of the prison system and long term isolation as forms of torture with commentary from community members who describe the economic impact of the prison industry on their livelihoods.



► **Elizabeth Hinton, 2015. "A War within Our Own Boundaries': Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and the Rise of the Carceral State"**

Hinton revises the story of the punitive turn often held dear - the riots of the early 60s caused white backlash and a rise in conservatism. Hinton argues that the punitive turn was not just a response to rising public fear of crime, or a matter of politicians trying to take advantage of that fear in order to get elected. Rather, it was a deliberate political decision to squash Black rebellion.



► **Joy James (ed.), 2007. Warfare in the American Homeland**

- **Chapter 4** War Within: A Prison Interview (Dhoruba Bin Wahad)
- **Chapter 11** The Effects of Repression on Women in Prison (Marilyn Buck)

US political prisoners Bin Wahad and Buck provide sharp historical analysis to frame their experiences with freedom movements, political repression, and long-term political incarceration. They help construct an understanding of how the PIC is structured to intimidate and criminalize the actual and potential liberation struggles of people subjected to the normalized violence of the US state and racial capitalism.



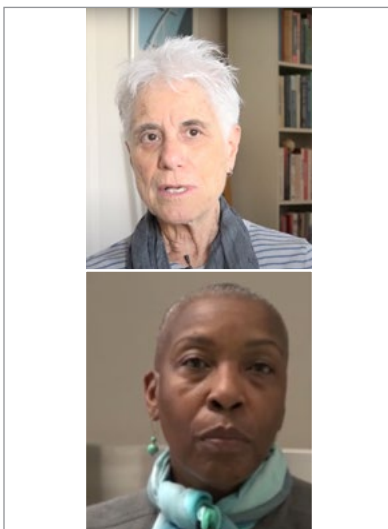
► **Liat Ben-Moshe, 2013. "Disabling Incarceration: Connecting Disability to Divergent Confinements in the USA"**

This article argues that incarceration should be seen as a continuum that includes institutionalization in a wide variety of settings. Ben-Moshe makes connections between the political economy of prison expansion to the simultaneous growth in nursing homes, private psychiatric facilities, and other forms of institutionalization and elaborates the role that ableism plays in sustaining neoliberal capitalism. The article also highlights the intimate connections between imprisonment and psychiatric institutionalization by analyzing the treatment of trans prisoners. Ben-Moshe argues for a deeper engagement with the experiences of people with disabilities in the PIC.



► **Robert Nichols, 2014. "The Colonialism of Incarceration"**

This article brings the analytic of settler colonialism to an understanding of the carceral state. It argues that carceral power operates as an "armature of territorialized colonial sovereignty," enforcing ongoing dispossession while undermining Indigenous self-government by severing their relations to land. Nichols also emphasizes the continued sovereign presence of Indigenous peoples in North America that is rooted in alternative political, economic, ecological, and spiritual systems.

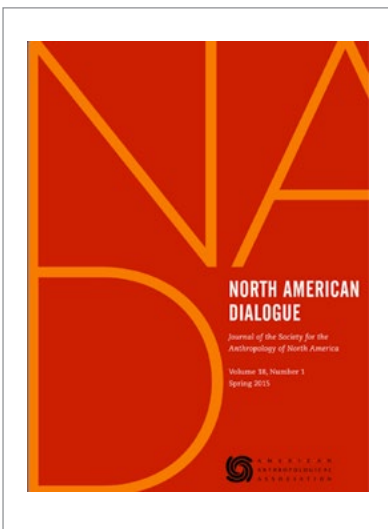


► **Laura Whitehorn, "The Prison Industrial Complex," 2017 and Soffiyah Elijah, "State Sanctioned Repression," 2017.**  
**By Rachel Herzing and Isaac Ontiveros**

These two short videos emphasize the role the PIC plays in the repression of social movements. Whitehorn points to the ways that repression sustains capitalism and imperialism by squashing dissent, and Elijah provides a historical context for understanding how the criminal justice system has been used to repress Indigenous and Black life and liberation movements.

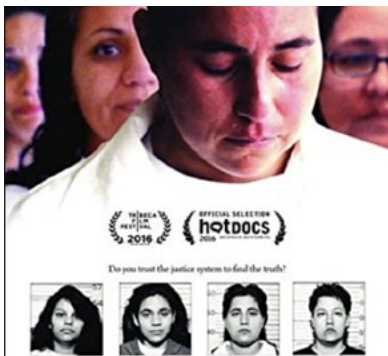
# 4 WHO IS IMPACTED BY THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX?

Representations of who is impacted by the PIC are often incomplete. The resources in this section make visible the racial and gendered dimensions of the PIC that violently impact Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people, queer and trans people, and other criminalized communities. Further, these works show how the prison industrial complex does not only harm policed and incarcerated people, but also inflicts lasting suffering and trauma on their loved ones and wider communities. As policing and criminalization increasingly infiltrate institutions like schools and social welfare, the carceral state has become a pervasive part of people's lives, including those with no direct connection to the criminal legal system.



## ► Orisanmi Burton, 2015. "To Protect and Serve Whiteness"

Racialized police violence does not only cause momentary physical harm. Through one young Black boy's experience of police harassment, this article considers the long-lasting harm, suffering and trauma created by daily aggressions of police surveillance, stops, and questioning.



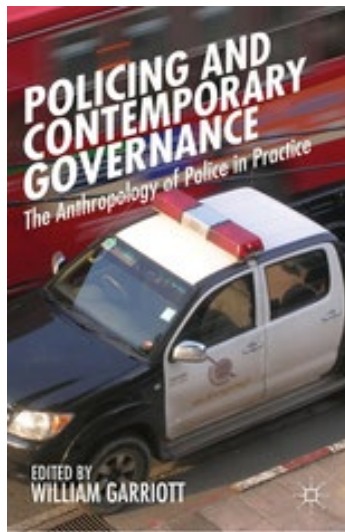
## ► *Southwest of Salem: The Story of the San Antonio Four*, 2018. Deborah S. Esquenazi

By documenting the struggle of four Latina lesbians convicted of a sex crime, this film explores the intersections of homophobia, misogyny, racism, and poverty and brings needed attention to people convicted of sex offenses who are often excluded from abolitionist campaigns for freedom.



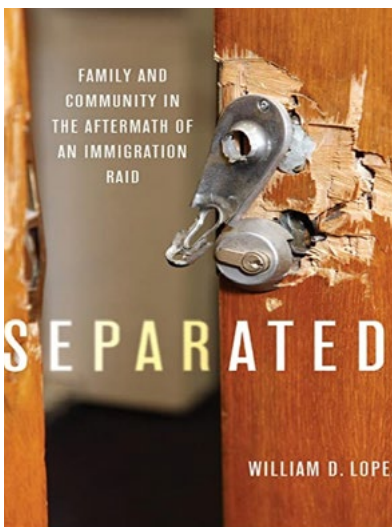
► **Nicole R. Fleetwood, 2020. "Marking Time"**

Fleetwood argues for the importance of the visual culture of family and friend photographs taken in front of prisoner-painted backdrops in prison waiting rooms in the US. In a discussion rooted in her engagement with her own family portraits with imprisoned loved ones, she argues that "prison photography is one of the largest practices of vernacular photography in the contemporary era." Fleetwood's consideration of these images, and the conditions of their making, offers critical insights into the relationships that sustain people inside and outside prison walls while countering histories of criminalizing photography like mug shots and prison ID cards.



► **William Garriott, 2013. "Policing Methamphetamine: Police Power and the War on Drugs in a Rural US Community," in *Policing and Contemporary Governance: The Anthropology of Police in Practice***

This article explores how ordinary people are deputized to do the work of policing in US rural communities. Pharmacists, park rangers, and neighbors get recruited - often reluctantly - to participate in the work of policing. This article (and the author's book, *Policing Methamphetamine: Narcopolitics in Rural America*), explores the impact of drug-war policing on social relations.



► **William D. Lopez, 2019. *Separated: Family and Community in the Aftermath of an Immigration Raid***

This book explores the social impact of an immigration raid on a Michigan community, showing how in addition to deportation itself, the threat of deportation and family separation work as powerful tools of immigration enforcement. From a public health perspective, Lopez demonstrates how arrests and deportations affect entire communities and how immigration enforcement, especially in the interior of the US, intertwines with local policing.





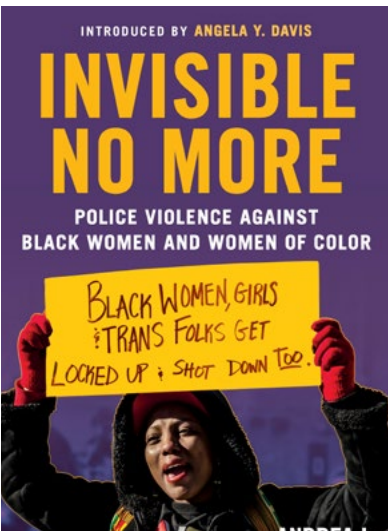
► **Stormy Ogden, 2004. "Ex-Prisoner Pomo Woman Speaks Out"**

This article offers a short history of how multiple tentacles of the prison industrial complex - policing, prisons, child welfare systems - capture and punish Indigenous communities, particularly women. Framing colonialism as intertwined with the prison industrial complex, Ogden outlines avenues of resistance.



► **Situation 6, 2014. Claudia Rankine and John Lucas.**

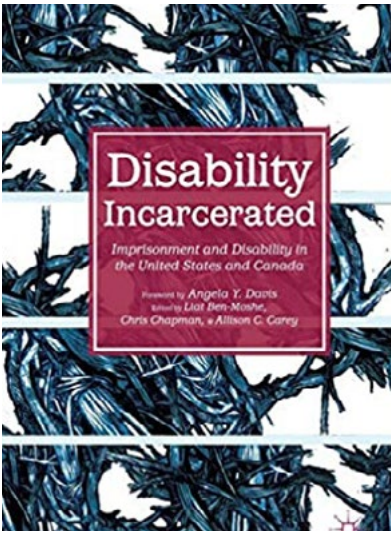
This film is one of a series of collaborations between poet Claudia Rankine and filmmaker John Lucas, juxtaposing video, audio, and text read from Rankine's book, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, to look at the persistence of police surveillance of Black people in everyday US life. This film discusses visual culture and language, and the uses of art and writing in relation to the PIC. (A version of the text in the video can also be found in an excerpt from *Citizen* on [poets.org](http://poets.org))



► **Andrea Ritchie, 2017. *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color***

- **Chapter 1** Enduring Legacies
- **Chapter 2** Policing Paradigms and Criminalizing Webs

These two chapters of Ritchie's book explore the historical and ongoing ways that Black women, Indigenous women, and women of color experience police violence and highlight the gendered dimensions of policing. Intervening on discourses about police violence that have centered cisgender men's experiences, these chapters (and the book) flag the specific ways policing harms women and queer people.



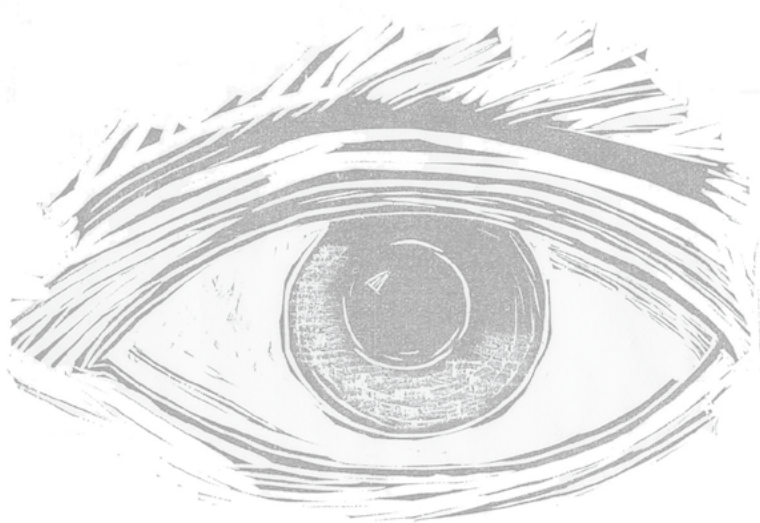
- ▶ **Syrus Ware, Joan Ruza, and Giselle Dias, 2014. "It Can't Be Fixed Because It's Not Broken: Racism and Disability in the Prison Industrial Complex," in *Disability Incarcerated*, eds. Liat Ben-Moshe, Chris Chapman, and Allison Carey**

This essay shows how the PIC criminalizes disability and creates new experiences of disability both within prison and after people are released. The essay draws on the experiences of imprisoned people in Canada to examine how the PIC links racialization, disability, and criminalization.



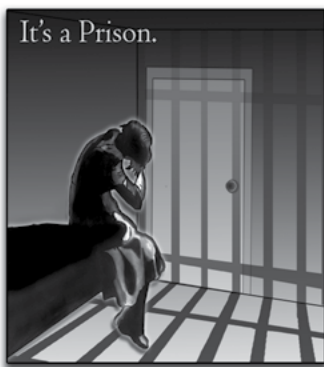
- ▶ ***Out in the Night*, 2014. Blair Dorosh Walther**

The film follows the case of the New Jersey 4, four young, Black, lesbian friends who were charged with assault, gang assault, and attempted murder for defending themselves against a violent, sexualized attack by an older man. The film explores the criminalization of queer sexuality: racialized, gendered, and sexualized harassment; selective punishment for self defense; and the impact incarceration has on communities and families.



# 5 WHAT DO ABOLITIONISTS WANT?

Reflecting the long history of Black radicalism and its overlapping diasporic, feminist, queer, and revolutionary streams, abolition seeks to expand and redefine freedom. Abolitionists are working to build worlds where prisons and policing, structured in punitive violence, are unthinkable and ultimately impossible. In contrast to calls for reformist improvements to the system through the elimination of private prisons, the curtailment of “mass incarceration,” or mitigation of police violence through body cameras, anti-bias training, or community policing, abolition dismantles the prison industrial complex and carceral state. Abolition is both a vision for the future and a creative practice of the present: it seeks to build new worlds at the same time that it enacts and creates them in the here-and-now through collective movement, community building, solidarity, art, teaching, and thinking. The resources in this section explore expansive visions of abolition as well as the concrete ways that grassroots movements move this vision into reality. These texts shed light on the connections between abolitionist politics and politics of Black liberation, decolonization, the elimination of borders, the end of racial capitalism, and transformative justice.



Unless you speak out, the biggest prison system in world is going to get bigger.

The State of California believes that the 40% of the women's prison population do not need to be there. AB 76 would really expand our shared prison system and build prisons to lock up an additional 4,500 women.

The bills target "non-violent, non-sexual female offenders" acknowledging that they do not need to be imprisoned. These measures would put the women in new programs instead of "maximum-security alternatives". New norms, new rules, same cage.

Contact your State Representative and tell them you oppose AB 76.

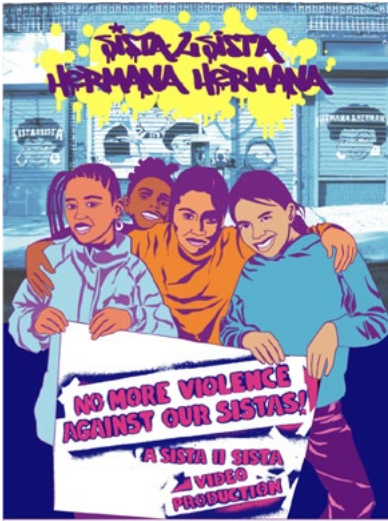
California Doesn't Need More Cages. Stop AB 76.

[www.civil liberties.org](http://www.civil liberties.org)

## ► Rose Braz, 2006. “Kinder, Gentler, Gender Responsive Cages: Prison Expansion Is Not Prison Reform”

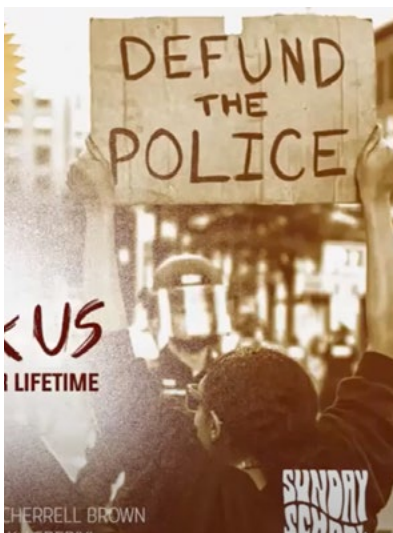
This article succinctly challenges the presumption that prisons can ever be remodeled to effectively address human needs. While focused on a mid-2000s proposal to build “gender-responsive” prisons, the argument extends to similar proposals (historical and contemporary) to build specialized prisons for other groups such as youth or people with disabilities.





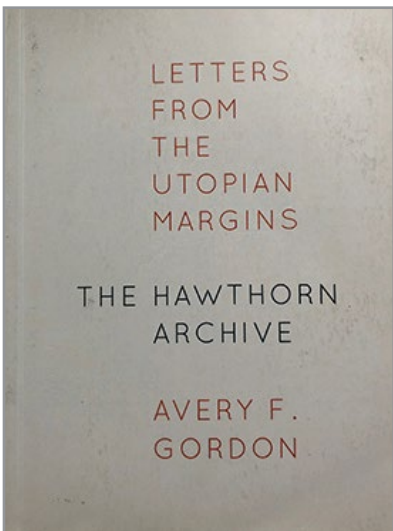
► **Nicole Burrowes, 2018. "Building the World We Want to See: A Herstory of Sista II Sista and the Struggle Against State and Interpersonal Violence"**

Burrowes elaborates how young Black and Latinx feminist activists organized in Brooklyn against policing in the 1990s / 2000s and shares their strategies, successes and challenges. This article describes how they developed a range of creative and holistic practices to educate and care for each other. Burrowes also addresses the organization's internal struggles and the resistance organizers experienced from members of their own communities.



► **Dream Defenders Sunday School, June 23, 2020**

In this virtual abolitionist school, the Dream Defenders team up with Angela Davis, K Agbebyi, Derecka Purnell, and Cherrell Brown to offer an inspirational and spiritually uplifting space of abolitionist song, oration, reflection, and calls to action. During this abolitionist school we learn from Angela Davis about the importance of abolition feminism and how it has been shaped by the organizing of queer and trans activists.



► **Avery Gordon, 2018. *The Hawthorn Archive***

► utopian | being-in-difference | Toni Cade Bambara

In this section of *The Hawthorn Archive*, Gordon looks closely at the work of Toni Cade Bambara in relation to the tensions between what is often memorialized as a white, male, Western framework of utopianism and the writings of Bambara, a Black “writer, filmmaker, community activist, and teacher,” through examining the development and capacity of two “terms of great importance to the individuals and projects associated with the archive: being in-difference and the abolitionist imaginary.”



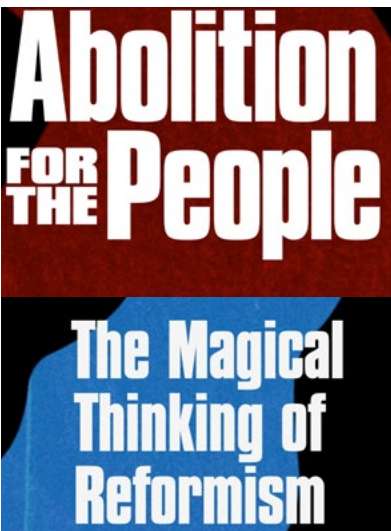
► **Rachel Herzing, 2017. “Standing Up for Our Communities: Why We Need a Police-Free Future”**

Herzing argues for the importance of building a police-free future by doing work in the here and now. Focusing on the importance of reducing contact with police in all aspects of everyday life as a means of containing the harm caused by policing, the article focuses on concrete steps people can take, starting today.



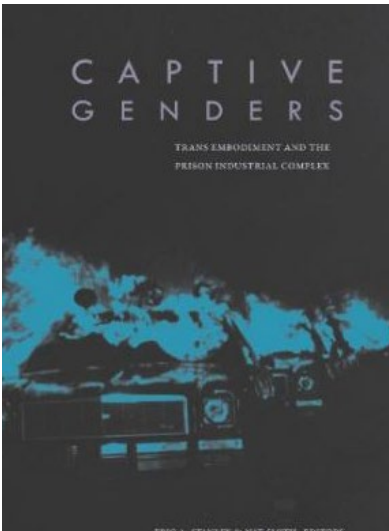
► **Mariame Kaba and Kelly Hayes, 2018. “A Jailbreak of the Imagination: Seeing Prisons for What They Are and Demanding Transformation”**

Kaba and Hayes give a concise and focused argument for the both / and of abolitionist work - seeing and fighting the multiple harms that we face (from climate change to mass criminalization and intimate partner violence) and continuing to seed and build the world(s) we want, in specific, strategic ways. They offer concrete examples of this work.



► **Dylan Rodriguez, 2020. “Reformism Isn’t Liberation, It’s Counterinsurgency”**

In this short article, Rodriguez clarifies the difference between “reform” and “reformism,” while illustrating how both are weaponized against liberation and abolition movements. This piece is from the “Abolition for the People” [series](#), which includes contributions from organizers, political prisoners, scholars, and advocates. The series provides a far-reaching abolitionist analysis of policing and incarceration that challenges reformist approaches and ideologies.



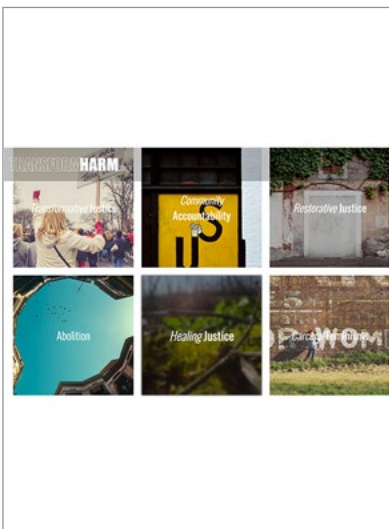
- ▶ **Morgan Bassichis, Alexander Lee, and Dean Spade, 2011/2015. "Building an Abolitionist Trans and Queer Movement with Everything We've Got" in *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*, eds. Eric Stanley and Nat Smith**

This chapter argues against the reformist and carceral tendencies of mainstream LGBT organizing and makes the case for an abolitionist trans and queer movement. The article outlines the differences between reformist and abolitionist solutions and debunks many of the myths that legitimize reformism.



- ▶ **Harsha Walia in conversation with Andrew Dilts, "Dismantle and Transform: On Abolition, Decolonization, and Insurgent Politics"**

This interview emphasizes the connections between decolonization, the abolition of borders, and the abolition of prisons. Walia and Dilts also discuss "non-reformist reforms" and contemplate the question of how abolitionists relate to the state.



- ▶ **TransformHarm.org, created by Mariame Kaba and designed by Lu Design Studio**

TransformHarm.org is a resource hub about ending violence. The site offers an introduction to transformative justice and includes selected articles, audio-visual resources, curricula, and more, organized into six focus areas: Transformative Justice, Community Accountability, Restorative Justice, Abolition, Healing Justice and Carceral Feminisms.

# 6 HOW DO ABOLITIONISTS STRUGGLE?

People have long resisted criminalization, imprisonment, surveillance, and the policing of borders. We develop creative ways to understand, live with, work around, and collectively push against these and other forms of violence that limit our lives. While resistance can have material and often fatal consequences, these practices also create the possibility for new worlds. The texts in this section share some of the stories, strategies, and tactics of resistance and community building that are often erased, minimized or ignored. It also highlights building as a form of fighting: in order to make policing and other parts of the prison industrial complex obsolete we must make anew.



► **Dan Berger, Mariame Kaba, and David Stein, 2017.**  
**"What Abolitionists Do"**

This article is a response to a previously published essay critiquing abolition as impractical and purely theoretical. By making connections with historical movements people also said were impractical, the essay offers both a conceptual refutation of this framing and a wide array of examples of how abolitionists have taken action and continue to act.



► ***Out: The Making of A Revolutionary, 2000.* Rhonda Collins and Sonja De Vries**

Convicted of "conspiring to influence, change, and protest policies and practices of the United States government through violent and illegal means," Laura Whitehorn, an out lesbian and one of six defendants in the Resistance Conspiracy Case (1988-90), spent 14 years in prison. *Out* is the story of her life and times: five decades of struggle for freedom and justice.



► **Just Seeds abolition images, Varied Artists**

Members of this artists' collective have spent over a decade producing visual culture - posters, cards, images - to document and build abolitionist organizing. Just Seeds also has a collection of free graphic images for downloading! Check it out [here](#).



► **Videos from Survived and Punished 2017-2018. Conceived and made by Hope Dector, Mariame Kaba, CeCe McDonald, Dean Spade, Lewis Wallace; Created by the Barnard Center for Research on Women and Survived & Punished.**

Short videos tell the stories of criminalized survivors of domestic and sexual violence and the grassroots campaigns for their freedom. These videos and the associated campaigns remind us how struggles for individual liberation must also be tied to wider demands for structural and systemic change.



► ***Re-Visions of Abolition: From Critical Resistance to A New Way of Life, 2021. Setsu Shigematsu.***

This film forwards an abolitionist analysis of the prison industrial complex and demonstrates ongoing organizing work featuring Melissa Burch, Susan Burton, Angela Y. Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Paula X Rojas, and Dylan Rodriguez. Designed as a teaching tool, Part I breaks down the history of the prison industrial complex, explaining its foundations in slavery, capitalism, and the racial-gendered violence it perpetuates. Part II articulates arguments for abolition versus reform and documents the organizing efforts of Critical Resistance and its collaboration with A New Way of Life.

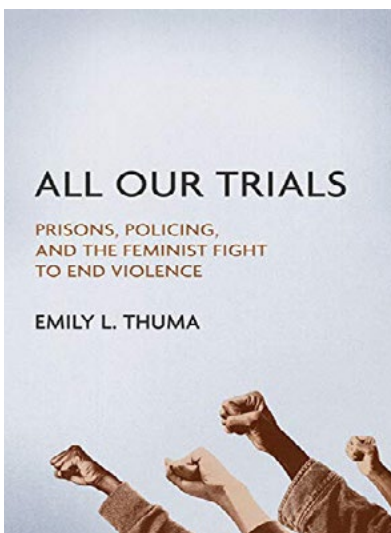




► ***Impossibility Now!, 2013.***

**Dean Spade with Basil Shadid and Hope Dector**

This short film manifesto examines how trans politics emerges to resist and dismantle racialized gender norms in the context of growing apparatuses of criminalization, immigration enforcement, and war. It calls for a critical trans politics that refuses recognition and inclusion on neoliberal terms and proposes a world without bosses, prisons, borders, or wars.



► ***Emily Thuma, 2019. All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence***

► **Chapter 3 Printing Abolition**

Thuma's book looks at the movement-building and knowledge-production work of anti-racist, anti-violence, and anti-prison feminists and queers in the late 1970s and early 1980s in various locations in the United States. She delves into specific struggles to support criminalized violence survivors that built communication and support across prison walls. Chapter 3 shows how feminist theories of abolishing gender-based violence were already present in these struggles, and pays specific attention to the role of small radical newsletters in organizing.

# STUDY

We struggle and organize by creating multiple containers, opportunities, and materials to grow political education. Check out other abolitionist study guides including:

[The Indigenous Abolition Study Guide, from the Yellowhead Institute](#) ; [Abolitionist Futures](#); [If You Are New To Abolition: Study Group Guide, from the Abolition Journal](#)

Critical Resistance Abolitionist Educators is a network of people who work in post-secondary education. This guide was created by Shana Agid, Melissa Burch, Priya Kandaswamy, Erica Meiners, Dylan Rodriguez and Setsu Shigematsu. Special thanks to Ujju Aggarwal and Laurel Mei-Singh for early contributions and to Ana Holschuh for design.