

# TIME/CUT

*Indiana Prison Newsletter*

**Issue 13 • Winter 2024**

Gardening in Prison

Abolition as a Global  
Movement

Police Tech & Social  
Control

Why More Women Are  
Being Incarcerated

*Presented by*





# TIME/CUT

is a publication for Indiana prisoners and their family and friends. It includes news, thoughts, and helpful resources from inside and outside the walls and around the world. The articles in the publication do not necessarily reflect on its contributors, creators, or distributors. Its contents are for informational purposes only. Time/Cut does not provide legal assistance or romantic arrangements.

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## The Gardener Who Grew Our Health Care in Prison

by Jimmy Iakovos

from *FilterMag.org*

Dec 2023

For most of his time in Georgia Department of Corrections custody, Charlie was assigned to the horticulture crew. Over the past 15 years, he cultivated about three dozen gardens—herbs, flowers, fruit trees, vegetables. The man is a walking botanical encyclopedia who cares for plants and nothing else, which makes conversing with him as edifying as it is ungovernable.

Arrested for shooting at state deputies as they ripped his pot plants from Mother Earth, Charlie was sentenced to 20 years.

“I did not shoot at the police,” Charlie told Filter. “Just shot in the air to scare them away so I could fetch the harvest.”

The state of Georgia doesn’t split hairs this way. If you discharge a firearm in the presence of law enforcement, parole is not for you. Charlie knew he’d be maxing out his sentence. We had a deal that if he made it out, I’d share his story, after I’d given him a sufficient head start.

With any luck Charlie is somewhere in the Blue Ridge Mountains by now, and will never be seen again. Almost all of his horticultural knowledge will go with him, partly because we had no idea what he was saying most of the time. But we understood the mission behind it: an uphill, mostly single-handed battle against the malnutrition and inaccessible health care forced upon his fellow prisoners. That, more than the plants themselves, is his legacy.

At the beginning of his sentence Charlie was assigned Close Security, the classification for prisoners with a history of violence or a tendency to leave prison without permission. He was therefore supervised at all times.

After a couple of years, his security level was reclassified to Medium. He was transferred to a new facility, one of the ones with flower beds by the admin buildings. He recognized some of the weeds as St. John’s Wort. Knowing of its antidepressant effects, Charlie helpfully set about weeding the garden.

“A deputy warden walked up and started telling me what he wanted done with the flower beds, and I said, ‘Sir, I’m not assigned to this detail,’” Charlie recalled. “And he said since I was showing an interest, I was the detail.”

Time passed. The deputy warden was promoted to warden, at a different prison, to which Charlie soon found himself transferred.

“He had made that happen and met me [at intake] to tell me in front of some other officers, ‘There’s wreck of a greenhouse here and it’s your job to make something of it,’” Charlie said.

“Over the years, as all those people retired and were replaced, I just kept doing what I do and everyone has been cool with it.”

His efforts fell into two broad categories: Feel Better plants, and Feel Good plants. We’ll start with the Feel Better.

An unlikely candidate for this prison was a barberry plant. South Georgia is not its ideal climate, but Charlie kept it reasonably happy by moving it back and forth between the yard and admin hallway according to the weather. Boil a mixture of root and seed, reduce down by one-third, let cool. Makes kidney stone passage less of an ordeal, and as pain relief doesn’t require forfeiting your commissary food to cover a co-pay from medical.

From behind one greenhouse Charlie cultivated dwarf fruit trees: apple, pear, orange, lemon, lime and cherry. The trees aren’t actually dwarf by nature, but by virtue of being kept in buckets—after all, they’re in prison too, and therefore not allowed to grow to their full potential. Still, the buckets made them portable and their roots easy to trim. Charlie cloned them all again and again, and this way maintained specimens that were small, but mature. Harvest fruit, chop and dehydrate peels, powderize, add to tea.

“If the greenhouses were in better repair we could pretty much keep a rotation of plants and trees constantly in the various stages of producing fruit,” Charlie said. “But alas, it is prison. There is no budget for that.”

In keeping with Charlie’s mission to get us closer to our recommended daily vitamin intake, the lawn behind security contained elderberry bushes, not to be confused with the purple-berried pokeweed. Pokeweed root is toxic if you take too much, but did wonders for our common colds when dosed knowledgeably as Charlie did. Fittingly, this plant was one he grew mostly for the prisoners who use drugs. Tea was brought out the moment someone started to get sick.

“Because you and I both know they won’t go near medical,” he said. “And it just keeps the cold going around and around.”

Flowering purple horsemint was for our gingivitis and toothaches. The chewable leaves were always in high demand, since we don’t get dental until something needs to be extracted.

Charlie couldn’t do anything about whether or not asthmatic prisoners got their inhalers. But he made sure there was always a bed of wormseed in the garden over by the chowhall.

Bark and flower from the dogwood tree was fever-and-chills tea. Bark from the cascara buckthorn tree was laxative tea. Needles from the fir trees were the anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, antioxidant tea.

With a reduction of the pipsissewa flower, Charlie made a tea



that helped with swelling, and as a poultice worked for sore muscles in general. Another poultice was white hellbore, to stave off infection from cuts. Part of daily life here from bumping into the fences along the walkways.

Somewhat incredibly, Charlie produced quinine tea from the bark from a cinchona tree. The tree is supposed to be in a rainforest somewhere but is instead in one of our greenhouses, where Charlie coaxed it into painstakingly slow growth and in time a small, but successful, harvest. A preferred cure-all of his.



During the summers, Charlie grew bloodroot and stockpiled the dried roots in a shed. By flu season, he'd have enough to make the decongesting tea that saw many of us through the winters. So when COVID first hit the prison, Charlie made tea.

At least 100 men with COVID symptoms drank this tea. Word of mouth brought it to the worst cases.

It was vile, but two doses and somehow you'd be breathing easier. You couldn't drink a third because taste buds were back to work.

No one cared what was in it at the time. When asked, Charlie said it was a base of his bloodroot tea, with add-ons based on symptoms. Mostly dried willow bark scrapings, and a yellow flower it seemed I was expected to know. What are its magical properties?

"It cures sarcasm," Charlie said. "That is candle bush. Cassia alata. Long before penicillin this plant was the cure for syphilis and gonorrhea. Kind of handy to have around. Mostly we use it here as a poultice for foot fungus. It contains the fungicide, chrysophanic acid. But it also breaks fevers, so I added it to the COVID tea."

No one, including Charlie, is swearing that any of this is the best-evidenced medical advice. But we don't have that here, and we did have Charlie.

"One of the nurses in medical had me raise angelica—Angelica atropurpurea," Charlie said. "She's Wiccan and used it to relieve menstrual cramps. It is also used [for] respiratory problems. I used it in some of the teas for COVID. Did it help? Nobody died, but that's no proof."



## **Attica Was More Than a Riot. It Offered a Framework for Revolutionary Struggle.**

by Victoria Law  
from TruthOut.org  
Nov 2023

The 1971 Attica prison uprising — and subsequent massacre — remains the most famous prison rebellion throughout the world. Lesser known is the prison organizing — and repression — that flourished in prisons in New York state and around the country both before and after the infamous rebellion.

In his new book, *Tip of the Spear: Black Radicalism, Prison Repression, and the Long Attica Revolt*, Orisanmi Burton chronicles the Black radical organizing in New York's men's prisons that preceded Attica as well as the state's response, which combined reforms as well as violence, isolation and sexual terror. In this exclusive interview for Truthout, Burton discusses his approach to this history and its lessons for prison organizing today.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

### **Victoria Law: What led you to write *Tip of the Spear*?**

Orisanmi Burton: I was given an intergenerational assignment from Eddie Ellis, an elder of the movement. In 2014, I was interviewing him and he said what would be helpful is if someone could use the tools of academia to elaborate the Black radical analysis of prisons and the prison movement. We developed that analysis, but we've never had the opportunity or the resources to document and explain our theory, politics, decisions and mistakes. So that was his assignment to me. I spent several years excavating that history, understanding analysis, and then trying to write it in a way that would be helpful for future generations.

### **The subtitle of your book is the Long Attica Revolt. Tell me more about that framing.**

Attica is one of the most famous prisons in the world because of the rebellion. The dominant understanding is that it unfolded over the course of four and a half days, that it was entirely confined to that single prison, and that the politics of that rebellion were confined to reforming the institution.

Then I began to interview elders of the prison movement. Whenever I would ask about Attica, some would answer the question by talking about the organizing in that prison, but others would talk about events that preceded Attica, but were deeply connected to that rebellion or the events that followed.

The rebellion in Attica was the culmination of a much more protracted period of struggle, or what I call a revolt, that traversed multiple carceral sites, that lasted for at least 13 months and continued after Attica.

Attica is really a shorthand term for a deep genealogy of radical prison struggle. The "long Attica revolt" refers to a struggle that had demands that are oriented toward improving prison conditions, but also a much broader set of radical and revolutionary demands that have to do with the total



transformation of society and also acting in solidarity with anti-colonial movements unfolding elsewhere in the world.

“The long Attica revolt” as a framework speaks to a much deeper and more expansive concept of really revolutionary and abolitionist struggle that was unfolding within the prison itself.

**Your book focuses repression and organizing in New York men’s prisons. Why did you decide to focus specifically on men’s prisons? And how does this reflect the documentation about incarcerated women’s organizing at the time?**

The book, as I said, started with Eddie Ellis, a man who was incarcerated in men’s prisons. Through Eddie, I got access to many of his comrades and so my network started that way.

I worked on the book over a number of years. [The decision to focus on men’s prisons] had to do with the sheer size and volume of the story that I was telling, and the amount of labor that had to go into documenting that story.

Given that I’m only studying men’s prisons, what I tried to do was bring a gender analysis to the text. I tried to think about how masculinity, manhood and gender violence are operative in this struggle.

I also give a nod to work that’s looking at what’s happening in women’s prisons, including your work, and the work of Sarah Haley, Joy James, and others. But the fact that one would have to make a decision like this speaks to the gendered organization of prisons themselves. People who are incarcerated are subjected to this state-managed gender binary and so the records, documentation and knowledge about what’s happening within these prisons and through them is often segregated in a number of ways, including gender.

**What was an instance that you uncovered that made you rethink what you thought you knew about prisons, repression and organizing during that period?**

I started the book with a speech by Queen Mother Audley Moore, a co-founder of the Republic of New Afrika and longtime civil rights organizer, who went into Green Haven in 1973. She gave a keynote address where she cited her long history of struggle all the way back to the Garvey movement. She emphasized that Black people as a whole are a colonized population, what she calls a “captive nation,” and that imprisoned Black people are therefore captured in a double sense. This is a profound intervention, because it means that political organizing and struggle within prisons isn’t solely or even primarily about changing prisons. It’s about abolishing the broader relationship

of captivity that Black people have to the United States.

I knew I wanted to have that speech in there and ultimately, decided to begin with it because the more I learned, the more I realized just how prescient her comments were.

At this time, the dominant sort of mode of political analysis was anti-colonialism. Black people and other people of color were increasingly thinking about themselves as colonized subjects and were demanding some form of independence or decolonization from the American project.

So much of what was happening in these prisons was about psychological warfare. It was the carceral warfare state, where prison administrators were trying to devise ways of pacifying the population, of making the [incarcerated] population feel like they could not win in a struggle, that they should not struggle, that they should be happy.

Much of what the prison was trying to figure out was how to make incarcerated people, but also all kinds of minoritized populations, content with their status as second-class citizens.

They were developing strategies for pacifying the population, for ensuring the continuance of peace in the absence of justice. How do we make them content? How do we stop them from rebelling?

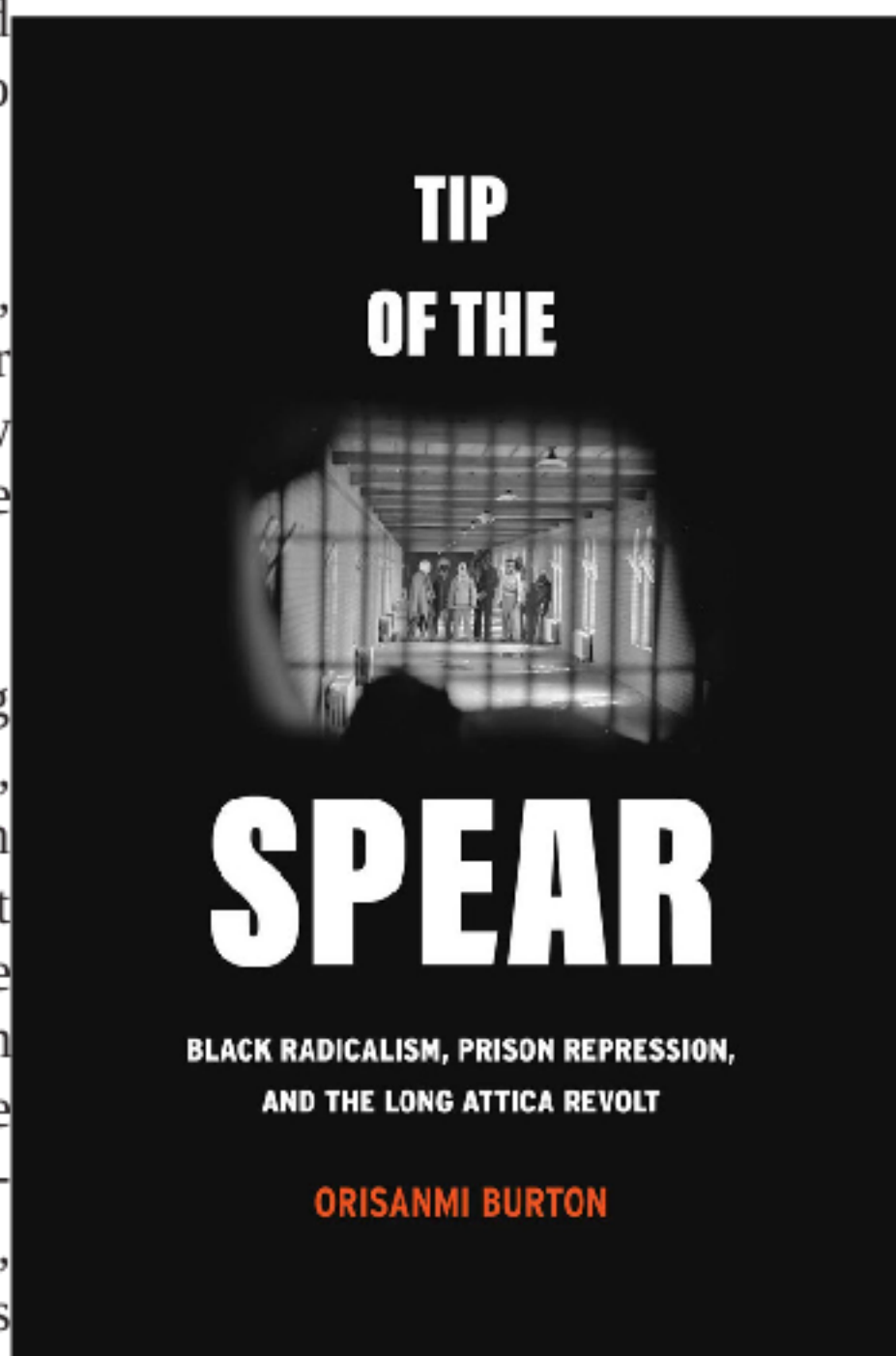
That’s very much what Queen Mother Moore’s speech was about, though it took me a while to realize just how true that was.

**Many people know about the FBI and COINTELPRO, but not many know that FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover also launched the Prison Activists**

**Surveillance Program (PRISACTS), a program of carceral counterintelligence. Tell me more about that.**

In one of J. Edgar Hoover’s last public speeches before he died in 1972, he mentions Attica. He talks about how the Attica rebellion represented an unholy alliance between criminals, Black criminals and Black revolutionaries. Then he dies and the FBI comes under new leadership. The reason I’m saying this is because Hoover is cited as a villain by the left. But the Prison Activist Surveillance Program, which is a prison-based successor to COINTELPRO, was launched under the tenure of his successors.

The program was launched during the period in which COINTELPRO was being exposed and it’s not as heavily documented as COINTELPRO. But what is clear is that the FBI were very concerned with Black radicalism in prisons.





They developed a liaison program through which the FBI would establish ongoing contacts with key people in prisons throughout the country. They organized a symposium in Quantico, Virginia, at the FBI headquarters called the National Symposium on Prisons as a Revolutionary Target, where they had prison administrators from all over the country, administrators from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, from the National Institute of Mental Health, and a few people there from the CIA as well. The symposium was to teach prison administrators and guards the tactics of counterrevolutionary warfare.

This is a key moment that helps to drive home the key thesis of the book, which is that prisons are a domain of war. At this symposium in 1973, here is the moment in which prison administrators were trained to think about their work as a domestic war [and trained by] people who had engaged in counterinsurgency warfare elsewhere throughout the world.

The first memo that I've seen from that program was offered a year to the day before George Jackson was assassinated. Now, that might just be a coincidence. But it's clear that the program itself was responding to George Jackson and to Attica. They were very concerned with how to neutralize this movement and they were explicitly adopting counterinsurgency strategies from elsewhere.

**Organizing continues to happen in prisons today and incarcerated organizers continue to face brutal repression. What are the lessons we can draw, knowing that there was specifically a COINTEL-like program targeting prison organizing?**

First, the state was very fearful and concerned about the capacity of Black radical organizing. The book shows the lengths that they went to try to contain the struggle. You can look at the existence of PRISACTS in a pessimistic way. But you could also look at it and say, This is how threatening the organizing was.

The state views prisons as reservoirs of radical political potential. The organizing and political education in the '70s were activating ordinary people to get involved and get organized.

That reservoir still exists today. The only thing that has changed is that the state has developed new techniques to try to prevent political organizing, to prevent political education from seizing hold of the population in the same way.

But I also think this history speaks to the need of organizers to think strategically and tactically and to understand that, when you're engaged in organization and when you're trying to politicize this population, you're going to come up against an opposition that is also organized and an opposition that is specifically thinking about war.

**What lessons can we learn from these 1970s movements?**

The state used a variety of different techniques to crush the movement, not just violence.

The Attica massacre gets talked about a lot, as it should, because it was horrible. But the massacre is not what effectively suppressed the long Attica revolt.

What was more effective were the reforms that were designed to demobilize the movement.

Many of these mechanisms, such as the formal grievance procedures, different forms of inmate self-governance and prison education programs, were designed to prevent any kind of radical transformation. That's their political function. That's why they were introduced in the wake of Attica.

One of the lessons is to think strategically. A lot of people already know this, even if they don't know the history. We need to understand that history in the context of counter-rebellion and counterinsurgency.

There's the narrative that prisons that got better after Attica, which in some ways is true. But the intent behind improvement was to counter rebellion. That's a contradiction that I think needs to be wrestled with.

This gets to another contradiction that I often see in abolitionist circles, which is the contradictions around reform and abolition. On the one hand, I don't think those two have to be mutually exclusive. The people who I centered in my story didn't necessarily see them as mutually exclusive. Oftentimes reforms are necessary to help people live because people are living under these horrible conditions.

At the same time, the state is looking at reforms through a counterinsurgency lens. It's interested in doling out reforms only insofar as they help to counter the possibility of rebellion and ensuring that no reforms diminish or curtail their power to dominate the population.



**Abolition Is a Global Movement. Here's What We Learned From Allies Worldwide.**

*by Victoria Law & Erica R. Meiners  
from TruthOut.org  
Jan 2024*

In 1992, formerly incarcerated women created Sisters Inside to advocate for the rights of women and girls behind bars in Queensland, Australia. While other grassroots groups and ad hoc campaigns had formed to work with incarcerated women, Sisters Inside remains the country's first organization founded and run by formerly incarcerated women. Over the last 31 years, the organization has provided legal and logistical support



to currently and formerly incarcerated women and pushed to end policies that cage people, such as imprisoning people for nonpayment of fines.

In November, Sisters Inside held its 10th conference, inviting organizers from across Australia and overseas to brainstorm and strategize under the theme “Abolition Feminism Now.” Both of us flew in from the United States, where mainstream media hypes every individual act of violence as part of a so-called surge of crime. In recent years, anti-prison organizing, and even mild reforms, have faced a well-funded backlash, particularly after nationwide uprisings and organizing efforts to defund the police in 2020. Being surrounded by both veteran organizers and those new to anti-prison organizing was the reinvigoration we hadn’t known that we needed.

In Brisbane, surrounded by lizards, loud birds and warm spring sunshine, hundreds of people gathered for three days of plenary sessions, workshops and tabling to connect and learn about organizing. The breadth and depth of the workshops reminded us that issues are intertwined — that ending the family policing system, borders and prisons must go hand in hand with developing meaningful and non-carceral responses to gender and sexual harm, and that ending gender and sexual harm requires challenging the false beliefs that borders and police make us safer.

Here are 10 things that fired us up during our time in Brisbane — and beyond. They reminded us that not only can we build a world in which people thrive, but that organizers are doing so daily.

### **Grassroots Networks Are Crucial!**

Small projects and networks are practicing abolition. In Melbourne, Flat Out celebrated its 35th year of supporting people both during their incarceration and after release. The group not only provides necessities, such as menstrual supplies, clothing and food that people desperately need after being released from prison, it also fights against the rising criminalization of women with its active campaign to stop the expansion of a women’s prison in the state of Victoria.

In Aotearoa (New Zealand), People Against Prisons Aotearoa (PAPA) began as an ad hoc protest against police marching in a 2015 Pride parade. The group started working with queer people behind bars before expanding its support to all people in prisons, regardless of sexual and gender identity. Like many other abolition feminist organizations, Flat Out and PAPA deepen public dialogues about abolition and feminism, through panels, posters, and other forms of critical community-based political education. The work is often labor-intensive and frequently run on a shoestring budget, but it also builds community. Each year, PAPA brings together people from all walks of life — from residents of a neighborhood nursing home to younger anarchists — to write holiday cards to incarcerated people.

### **Directly Impacted People Are the Core of These Movements.**

The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls, originally formed in the United States, has expanded to incubate the International Network of Formerly Incarcerated Women. Under the demand “Free her!” they are mobilizing to free women from jails and prisons and advocating to end the long-standing injustices, such as poverty, criminalization and racism, that push women into prison. In some U.S. cities, recognizing that poverty is a direct pathway to prison, groups have organized pilot programs providing guaranteed income payments. In Massachusetts, currently and formerly incarcerated people are demanding a five-year moratorium on all jail and prison construction or expansion and that those funds instead be channeled into resources enabling people to flourish.

The conference highlighted organizing spearheaded by formerly incarcerated women, both in Australia and overseas. In 2020, Sisters Inside Founder and Director Debbie Kilroy created the National Network of Incarcerated & Formerly Incarcerated Women & Girls, bringing together women, girls, feminine identifying and nonbinary people from across Australia to end incarceration. Kilroy closed the conference with the powerful reminder: Nothing about us without us.

### **Organizing Spans Generations.**

Lilla Watson, an Aboriginal octogenarian, artist and academic, recalled visiting the United States in the early 1970s, where she marched to free Angela Davis, who had been jailed on highly politicized murder charges. After a worldwide freedom campaign and a much-publicized trial, Davis was freed and became an international inspiration for generations of abolitionists. Half a century later, Davis sat in the audience while Watson recalled this connection.

Organizers born years, and even decades, after Davis’s well-publicized legal victory continue the fight to end criminalization and incarceration. In North Queensland, near Australia’s famous Great Barrier Reef, organizers launched the End Toxic Prisons campaign to stop the construction of two new youth prisons. Instead of pushing to raise the age of criminal responsibility, the campaign, guided by young First Nations people, counters media misinformation about youth crime and galvanizes local opposition to incarcerating young people at all.

### **We Need to Reach Across — and Dismantle — Borders.**

The U.S. continues to export its mass incarceration model across the globe. States in Australia are building new prisons based not on the Scandinavian models that are increasingly popular among prison administrators and politicians (and often touted as more humanitarian), but on the U.S. model of supermax prisons. The imprint of the prison built for the “worst of the worst” was clearly visible in our visit to the austere Southern Queensland Correctional Centre, where 300 women were warehoused in newly built concrete, cyclone fencing and coils of razor wire more than 100 kilometers outside of Brisbane.



As in prisons across the globe, many were already survivors of gender and sexual harm before arrest and, behind bars, are continually retraumatized by dehumanizing practices, such as routine strip searches.

### **The State Cannot Fix the Problems It Creates.**

Inquests are judicial inquiries to determine the circumstances and cause of a sudden death. In Australia, where inquests are mandatory for deaths in custody, the coroner conducts the process, which includes calling and questioning witnesses. For years, family members whose loved ones have died in police custody or while incarcerated often leave these hearings without answers, closure or accountability. Latoya Rule, whose brother Wayne Morrison died after police restrained him and put a spit hood over his head, noted that inquests do not prevent future deaths, result in more transparency for loved ones or compel accountability from police. Their family waited five years for an inquest into Morrison's death only to see prison guard after prison guard refuse to answer questions. They remain no closer to learning what happened in his final moments. Still, mobilizations led by loved ones have procured some wins, such as the decriminalization of "public drunkenness" and the banning of spit hoods, tactics that have long been used to criminalize and kill Aboriginal people.

### **New Technology Is Not a Win.**

Queensland's new prisons employ some of the latest technologies, including digital fingerprinting for visitors and, for those behind bars, "smart" toilets that restrict the number of flushes per day. These new technologies provide no opportunities for rehabilitation or transformation. Instead, they give the perception of modernized facilities, deepen surveillance and allow more public funds to be poured into incarceration rather than social safety nets.

In Canada, several prisons now utilize body scanners, allegedly to detect contraband. Yet these scanners have not replaced prisons' dehumanizing strip searches. Not only are the scanners used in addition to these retraumatizing practices, officers, unable to accurately read these scans, have misidentified body organs as drugs and sent people to solitary confinement as a result of these errors.

### **We Must Name and Recognize Our Wins.**

In 2019, lawmakers in Aotearoa (New Zealand) sought to arm police with guns in response to the shooting in Christchurch. At that point, police officers did not carry guns, but kept them locked in their cars. When police enacted a trial period for armed response teams, PAPA organized its Arms Down Campaign. With art created from people's stories of police violence, PAPA graphically illustrated the dangers of even non-militarized policing, particularly against Māori and Pasifika communities. They urged New Zealanders to call police and public officials in opposition to the measure. The campaign only gained real traction in 2020 when footage of U.S. police murdering George Floyd flooded news and social media feeds

worldwide, allowing New Zealanders to see the dangers inherent in policing. Although the trial period had ended by then, police officials had scheduled a review and decision on permanently implementing armed police for June 2020. Bowing to public pressure, they scrapped the plan altogether.

In Australia, family members have fought to end policies that have killed their loved ones. April Day's mother Tanya died in jail after police arrested her under its public intoxication law. Recognizing that the law allowed police to disproportionately target Aboriginal people, Day and other family members fought for years to decriminalize public drunkenness in Victoria. The law went into effect on Melbourne Cup Day, long known as the day when many white Australians are drunk in public without being arrested or even harassed by police.

### **Sometimes When We Fight, We Don't Win.**

Not all organizing results in victory. In 2020, Aotearoa held a referendum to legalize marijuana for personal recreation. PAPA members mobilized in support. The ongoing pandemic prevented in-person organizing and conversations, so the campaign pivoted to "letter boxing," or putting informational brochures in mailboxes. It was a mighty task for a small, grassroots group, but they connected with people across the country to ensure the widest possible reach. Still, the referendum failed to pass with only 48.4 percent voting in favor of legalization. But even losses can provide us with valuable insights on what to do next time. They can also forge new starting places and connections for future campaigns and actions.

### **Movement Assessment Is Critical. So Is Joy.**

As two people who have attended a number of conferences over the past few decades, we know that bringing people together can be chaotic, tiring and fraught with conflict. Yet it remains crucial to movement building. Sharing both space and experiences raises critical questions while also deepening analyses and coalitions. Coming together, we strengthen connections between seemingly disparate campaigns, time periods and regions. In a video clip, Erin Miles Cloud, a co-founder of the U.S.-based Movement for Family Power described how the U.S. child welfare system is actually a family policing system that punishes rather than helps vulnerable families. Her message resonated with an audience still reeling from the intergenerational traumas and devastation wrought by the Stolen Generations, a century-long government policy in which Aboriginal children were taken from their families.

Beyond sharpening our analysis, convenings also have the power to cultivate community and joy. From the sizzling poetry of Lorna Munro, to the smart and rollicking performance and music of Hot Brown Honey, to the fierceness of rapper Barkaa, art, music, poetry and dancing show us that abolition feminism isn't just necessary — it's also sexy and fun.

### **Support for Palestine Is Worldwide.**

Calls for a free Palestine were a consistent thread throughout



the conference. Speakers drew parallels between the violence of colonialism in Australia and across Palestine: Aboriginal women in Australia are incarcerated at more than 20 times the rate of non-Aboriginal women, while the state of Israel, a newer colonial power, has long used, and is now drastically increasing, incarceration to silence Palestinian dissent. Outside the conference, #FreePalestine and #LandBack street level organizing took place under the twin flags of Palestine and Aboriginal Australians. Across Australia (and the planet) growing weekly marches, direct actions preventing military weapons from being shipped to Israel, graffiti and posters wheatpasted on lampposts, were constant reminders of the deepening and international solidarity for an end to colonization and for a free Palestine.



## Facility Reports

from idocwatch.org

Indiana State Prison: Man is stabbed multiple times. Staff not only didn't call his wife/emergency contact, but wouldn't give her any information when she called them. After the stabbing, he was denied his tablet, headphones, clothes that were not covered in blood, a mat to sleep on, and hygiene products. This is inhumane, ridiculous, and sad!

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Pendleton CF: On Oct 6. a prisoner attacked an officer. This prisoner was removed, but, in retaliation, other prisoners were put on lockdown and have been given starvation diets. This is an act of collective punishment. Prisoners are given 3 cold lunches a day, with moldy food. There is no coffee, no recreation, no visitation, and are not being given commissary. This went on for at least 50 days.

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Westville: After (allegedly) being head-butted, guards attacked a shackled and hand-cuffed man they were escorting to medical. It seems that a Sgt. Williams and officer Davis were involved in the beating. These officers have also been involved in beatings of other prisoners in the past.

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Westville: A long term political prisoner has been denied access to communications, in a cell that doesn't have wifi.

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Plainfield: Prison investigator Gaskins shut down the law library indefinitely, without warning or explanation!



## So-Called "Child Welfare" Tears Families Apart. How Can We Repair This Harm?

by Eleanor J. Bader

from TruthOut.org

Dec 2023

When Yusef Presley was 5, he was removed from his family home and separated from his mom and 8-year-old sister due to allegations of maternal abuse. "I still think about that day, still

dream about it," he told me. "My mom had our best interests" at heart, Presley said, "but she did not know how to parent. She needed help. She had a lot on her plate and was being abused by a boyfriend. Money was tight. If the local community had invested in my family, we would have been OK. We needed assistance, but my sister and I did not need to be removed and separated from our mom and our community."

During the next eight years, Presley was sent to a multitude of foster homes. Although he was eventually adopted by an aunt, by that point, he had spent time in two facilities: First, a Kansas program that was closed by the state in 2014 and demolished in 2017 because it was too decrepit to repair; and then the Kansas Juvenile Correctional Complex (KJCC), a "reform school" that opened in 1879. "I felt like I was being starved at KJCC," Presley said. "I felt trapped. There were fights all the time and one of the guards kept telling me that he'd see me back at KJCC once I was released. It was a demoralizing, terrible place with unlivable conditions."

Thankfully, Presley defied the odds and never returned to KJCC. Now 27, he is a junior at Wichita State College and is majoring in organizational leadership and learning. He's also a youth advocate at Destination Innovation, where his work includes organizing alternatives to youth and adult incarceration and providing support for families caught in the child welfare system.

In addition, Presley is now part of a national movement to abolish prisons, end family policing and stop the war on drugs that feeds both systems.

Furthermore, he credits a serendipitous meeting with an abolitionist from Progeny KS with introducing him to the campaign to end what has become known as the foster-care-to-prison pipeline, the connective tissue between foster care, juvenile detention and adult confinement.

Alan J. Dettlaff, professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work and author of *Confronting the Racist Legacy of the American Child Welfare System: The Case for Abolition*, is also part of this multi-issue movement. He likens today's abolition organizing to 19th-century anti-slavery efforts that sought more than an end to chattel slavery and sought to eradicate white supremacy itself.

Like 19th-century abolition, today's abolitionist movement has both short-term and long-term goals. Changing attitudes, Dettlaff said, is key for success at both time scales. "Family policing and the violence inflicted on Black Americans, Brown Americans, Native Americans, disabled Americans and the poor run up against the myth of benevolence," he explained. "The general public believes that the child welfare system helps vulnerable children in need of protection and support. What they don't know is that 70 percent of kids are removed because of neglect, not sexual or physical abuse, and neglect



conflates directly with poverty.”

Other facts also rankle Dettlaff. Many people, he says, were justifiably horrified by the 30,000 family separations that occurred at the U.S.–Mexico border in 2020 and 2021. “Many psychologists likened it to torture,” he said. “At the same time, 3,000 American kids are separated from their families every week and, for the most part, people turn away and say nothing about it. Aren’t these separations also tantamount to torture?” he asked.

### Family Policing Conflates Poverty With Neglect

That torture is elevated when ableism enters the mix. This is because parents with disabilities are more likely than nondisabled parents to be referred to child welfare, said Robyn M. Powell, professor at the University of Oklahoma College of Law. “Disabled people tend to have more involvement with government programs so there are more people keeping watch,” she said.

Those workers, Powell says, typically question whether disabled parents should have children at all. Instead, she argues that the system should have to prove that a disabled person can’t adequately care for their child and that having readily available supports would be insufficient to make caretaking possible. “I’ve found that when disabled parents ask for help, the request is used against them, and when they don’t ask for help, it’s used against them,” she said.

Arbitrary Medicaid rules further exacerbate the problem, she said. “Personal care assistants, paid for by Medicaid, are not allowed to help with parenting. This is based on an ableist belief that disabled people should not be parents.”

Ableism, classism and racism are baked into the system, agrees Angela Olivia Burton, a former New York State court administrator, attorney and family policing abolition activist. This is why she — like Dettlaff, Powell and Presley — is working to educate the public about the harms caused by the over-policing of Black, Brown, Native, disabled and poor communities.

She is also working to repeal the federal legislation that institutionalized excessive family scrutiny.

“When CAPTA, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, was passed by Congress in 1974, it established a national system of Child Protective Services (CPS),” Burton explained. “It codified family policing into law and required each state to have a CPS system” with mandatory reporting for anyone who suspects that a child may be experiencing abuse or neglect.

But, she adds, the federal definition of abuse and neglect is so amorphous, “it has allowed each state to determine the terms as they will.” And likewise, there is not a uniform definition of who the mandatory reporters are. Each state has its own

laws on who has to contact CPS and, she says, “something that may trigger an investigation in New York may go under the radar in Arizona.” In some states, the definition of neglect, which prompts more than two-thirds of calls coming into CPS offices, includes a parent quite simply being unable to provide adequate food, clothing and shelter for their children. “It’s about poverty, a lack of resources,” Burton said. “We need to stop the bleeding and help people acquire the means to correct this lack of resources.”

Until the child welfare system is eliminated, Burton adds, “we also need to make sure that people being investigated by CPS have access to well-resourced attorneys and parent advocates to make sure that they know their rights; stop allowing anonymous complaints to be filed; stop severing children from their heritage; and stop paying someone else to raise children who are not being abused.”

### State-Level Efforts to Keep Families Intact

Paying attention to state legislation is also important, and the results are not always what one would expect. Texas is a case in point.

In a number of conservative states, such as Texas and Florida, the battle cry of “parental rights” has led a number of efforts to push through regressive policies — banning books, limiting racially inclusive and LGBTQIA+ affirming curricula, stopping comprehensive sex education from being taught in public school classrooms, and banning doctors from providing gender-affirming care to minors. But in the summer of 2023, a bipartisan effort that leaned heavily on the language of parental rights led to the passage of a raft of protections for parents being investigated by CPS in the Lone Star State. Among the changes, Texas parents can now refuse to let CPS investigators into their homes if they do not have a court order; children cannot be removed unless they are in imminent danger of harm; anonymous reporting, often by a vindictive ex or a landlord itching to raise the rent, is prohibited; and children being removed from their homes for cause must be given duffel bags and backpacks so that they do not have to use trash bags to transport their belongings. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Senate Bill 2120 requires attorneys to represent low-income parents who are threatened with the loss of their children.

New York State abolitionists are following Texas’s lead and are building on work that began decades earlier. Joyce McMillan is leading the way. McMillan founded Just Making a Change for Families (JMACforFamilies) in 2020 following two decades of work with other organizations. After temporarily losing custody of her two children in 1999, she started — initially as an unaffiliated individual — to investigate and research the over-policing of Black and Brown communities in New York City. She found stark disparities: Low-income communities of color (Brownsville, East New York, Harlem and the South Bronx) routinely saw thousands of child removals while



predominantly white communities (Greenwich Village, Park Slope, Riverdale and the Upper East Side) did not.

Worse, she saw pervasive trauma in high-removal areas. “My oldest daughter was 8 when she was taken from our home and it caused years and years of damage,” McMillan reports. “She needed extra coddling. I eventually realized that the child welfare system is preparing Black and Brown children for prison. We call it a pipeline, but it is a fast-moving train, readying youth of color to be separated from their homes and neighborhoods, subjecting them to random transfers from place to place, making them follow arbitrary rules, eat at specific times, and submit to constant scrutiny and surveillance.”

But the knowledge McMillan gleaned was also personal to her, as a mother. “As an adult, I learned that a drug test is not a parenting test. My positive drug test did not speak to my love for my children and did not speak to my ability to provide for them.”

Twenty-four years later, McMillan’s fury remains audible as she makes clear that she does not want other families to suffer as hers did. This is why she and JMACforFamilies are joining current efforts to push Congress to repeal CAPTA. In addition, she and JMACforFamilies are also advocating for the repeal of the Adoption and Safe Families Act, a federal bill that allows children to be placed for adoption if they’ve spent 15 of the last 22 months in foster care.

In addition, JMACforFamilies is working at the state level to get state legislators to follow Texas’s example and ensure that parents are told their rights, including the right to obtain counsel when child custody is at stake. Lastly, the group is pushing for a requirement of informed consent before drug testing can be done, and to end the policy that allows anonymous complaints about abuse or neglect to be filed — often from a vindictive ex or a landlord itching to raise the rent.

Then there’s the issue of providing treatment for those who have been traumatized by family separation. “When kids go into foster care, they typically need psychological help,” McMillan said. “They rarely get it. We have to address foster care at the front end of prison policies and abolition movements.” In essence, she adds, we have to invest in our communities and support the creation of available and affordable public housing, child care, health care, education and food security.

Critics Say Family Policing Can’t Be Reformed, Only Abolished

Abolishing family policing, advocates say, requires a multitiered and comprehensive strategy. It must merge on-the-ground legislative reforms with educational efforts to shift public attitudes about child protective services. Simultaneously, it must keep the big picture — abolition of the entire system — in focus.

For upEND, a collaborative abolition organization that works

primarily with social workers, this means contesting the racism, anti-Blackness, white supremacy, colonialism and racial capitalism that undergird the child welfare system. Among other things, upEND is working to eliminate the timeline for parents to permanently lose custody of their kids and is pushing for the kinds of concrete family supports advocated by McMillan — housing subsidies, access to counseling, health care, food and educational and job opportunities — to ensure that family reunification is both possible and successful. Other long-term goals include decriminalizing drug use and sex work.

Likewise, Ayami Hatanaka, advocate and researcher at JMACforFamilies, underscores that the organization is working to ensure that every family threatened with child removal knows their rights at the outset of a CPS investigation. JMACforFamilies is also pushing to ensure legal advocates are available to represent families when a removal is threatened. Moreover, the group is working to shift the way reporters cover the child welfare system and is educating journalists about what Dettlaff calls “the myth of benevolence.” Helping media understand the harms caused by family separation and seeing the interconnections between racism, poverty and family scrutiny, they say, is imperative.

What’s more, helping people like Presley deal with the damage of child removal remains central to abolitionist efforts.

Brian Stanley, a court advocate at Avenues for Justice, one of the first alternative-to-incarceration programs in the United States, routinely works with youth aged 13 to 24 when they return home from detention or foster care.

“They have tremendous trust issues,” he said. “There is often a lot of boundary testing and issues of abandonment that we have to work through. Initially, most returnees will push me away, but I am persistent and try to be steady and let them know that I’m here. I recognize their vulnerability. I get to know their families, and can meet them on a park bench if that’s what they need. My phone does not get turned off at 5 p.m.”

While this is laudable, abolitionists maintain that aftercare would be unnecessary if families were allowed to stay together in the first place. Rather than ripping children away and paying strangers to care for them, they argue that providing struggling families with financial, psychological, medical and cultural support is paramount to building healthy communities.

In *Achieving Justice for Disabled Parents and Their Children: An Abolitionist Approach*, Powell reports that in 2019, 430,000 U.S. kids were separated from their families and placed in foster care; 70,000 never returned home.

“Reforms,” she writes, “are not enough to remedy the panoply of injustices these families face. Fixes to the child welfare system will not work because it is not broken. The child welfare system is doing exactly what it was designed to do:



Pathologize, control and punish marginalized communities, including disabled parents and children.”



## **Over 100 people are refusing meals at the privately-run Northwest Detention Center, which has a history of controversy and similar strikes.**

by Grace Deng

from [washingtonstatestandard.com](http://washingtonstatestandard.com)

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On a side street in Tacoma, wedged between railyards and the Puyallup River just off Interstate 5, sits the Northwest Detention Center, one of the largest federal immigrant detention facilities in the nation.

It's privately run, long-mired in controversy and as of Friday, about 100 detainees there were refusing meals to protest conditions at the site.

Hunger strikes have become common at the detention center, with six already this year, according to Maru Mora Villalpando, founder of La Resistencia. The grassroots organization, led by undocumented immigrants, wants the facility closed and has organized a rally outside the gates every night during the current hunger strike, which has gone on for about six days.

A private company, The GEO Group, runs the detention center on behalf of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

On a chilly night Thursday, there were only five protesters outside of the detention center's gates — six, if you count the 1-year-old baby that one person had brought along.

Wendy Pantoja, an organizer at La Resistencia, explained that the number of people who show up varies. There were around 15 on Wednesday, she said. But the goal remains the same: it's important for detainees to know there are people on the outside who care about them. “Sometimes they hear our chants and shout back,” Pantoja said.

The detainees participating in the hunger strike are demanding immediate release or immediate deportation if they have final deportation orders, “so they are not exposed to inhumane detention conditions,” according to La Resistencia. “We will get free or die,” a letter the detainees wrote said.

About 105 detainees are on hunger strike, according to La Resistencia. One, Jesus Rodríguez Martínez, told the group that he had lost 20 pounds in a week. Pantoja said another group of detainees is thinking about joining the hunger strike.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement said in a statement that it “is committed to ensuring that all those [in] its custody reside in safe, secure, and humane environments.” The agency added that “due to privacy rules, ICE is prohibited from discussing

individuals engaged in a hunger strike by name or specifics of their case absent the detainee's consent.”

GEO Group said the group of detainees on hunger strike is “small.”

“We take our role as a service provider to the federal government with the utmost seriousness and strive to treat all those entrusted to our care with dignity and respect,” the company said in a statement. “GEO has a longstanding commitment to respecting the human rights of the individuals in our care and to ethical practices in all aspects of our services.”

### History of problems

Troubling conditions at the facility, including allegations of medical neglect, reports of sexual assaults, and the use of tear gas, have been documented in the past, including by the University of Washington Center for Human Rights.

“Operation of the facility comes at a terrible human cost,” one UW report reads, describing a lack of follow-up on detainee complaints that contributes to a “cycle of cruelty.”

Dirty laundry, a lack of cleanliness and unsafe food are among the major concerns. Detained people have reported spoiled, uncooked food – even food infested with worms.

“The food is the worst food on earth,” said Chidi Emmanuel Megwa, a detainee who was on a hunger strike in early November. The Standard spoke to Megwa before detainees launched the most recent strike. Megwa is in the facility over financial crimes he claims he did not commit.

But despite years of attention on the site by activists, researchers, and news media, little has changed, according to advocates who want to see it closed.

State efforts to shutter the facility or require more oversight have run into legal obstacles.

At the protest, Pantoja played recordings of phone calls with the detainees, many of whom are in solitary confinement, she said.

The University of Washington Center for Human Rights found that ICE routinely uses solitary confinement as a form of punishment. Solitary confinement is used at the Northwest Detention Center more often than any other immigration detention center in the country, said Angelina Snodgrass Godoy, director of the UW Center for Human Rights.

Between Sept. 1, 2021, and Aug. 31, 2022, the facility had an average daily population of 374 detainees, with a maximum capacity of 1,575, according to a May report from the Department of Homeland Security. However, the contract between ICE and The GEO Group ensures the federal government pays for 1,181



beds, regardless of how many detainees are held. It's the only privately-run, for-profit detention center in Washington state.

Many detainees are not from the area where the site is located. Megwa, for example, was transported from California and went on strike because authorities denied his request to be released on bond while awaiting further legal proceedings. He has a wife and two kids. "Even if you want to detain me, detain me where I can see my kids," Megwa said. "Even if you want to deport someone, they have a right to see their family." Megwa was on a hunger strike for nine days before stopping for health reasons.

The current strike is not the largest in the center's history. The first one La Resistencia supported in 2014 involved over 1,200 detainees, said Villalpando, the organization's leader.

While there isn't data on how effective hunger strikes are at the detention center, Godoy, with the UW Center for Human Rights, said that hunger strikes are often the only way detainees can make their voices heard. She can't recall a long-term improvement to conditions resulting from a hunger strike, but has heard of "modest gains," like "chicken served at meals."

Godoy called the official grievance process at the facility "ridiculously ineffective." The UW Human Rights Center's most recent report was titled "Calls to Nowhere," because researchers found ICE does not follow up on calls to the sexual assault complaint hotline at the facility.

"Research has corroborated what we've long heard people say: 'you file these grievances and they go nowhere,'" Godoy said.

Villalpando said hunger strikes are effective because they shed light on "a system intentionally designed to be hidden from public view."

#### Legislation hits roadblocks

Washington's Legislature passed a law in 2021 aimed at shutting down the Northwest Detention Center by 2025, but it is unenforceable due to a court decision from last year over a similar California law that sought to ban private prisons in the state.

"California cannot exert this level of control over the federal government's detention operations," a panel of 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals judges ruled. Washington conceded after months of consideration that it, too, was bound by the ruling decision, The Seattle Times reported. A state law approved this year was intended to give the state greater oversight of conditions in the facility, including through inspections by the state Department of Health. The GEO Group has sued the state to stop enforcement of that law.

The operators of the facility denied the Department of Health entry on Tuesday for an inspection, according to the agency. Godoy says much of the responsibility for the facility's

conditions and existence lies with Congress. Washington's representatives have signed letters condemning the center's conditions. Two representatives, Pramila Jayapal and Adam Smith, have introduced the Dignity for Detained Immigrants Act to end "the inhumane conditions of detention centers" and protect the civil and human rights of immigrants. The bill's 119 cosponsors in the Republican-controlled House are all Democrats. It's been referred to the Judiciary and Homeland Security committees.

Sen. Patty Murray, of Washington, is one of six Democratic and Independent senators who have signed on as cosponsors to a related bill in the Senate. But it, too, has failed to gain traction. Godoy said there is much more congressional lawmakers could do – such as demanding hearings and assisting with public records requests. "In terms of actually delivering results, we don't see a lot of movement," she said.

In lieu of action by the government or The GEO Group, La Resistencia will continue holding rallies outside of the facility until the hunger strikes are over. "Our goal is to end detention centers," Villalpando said, adding: "I don't think there's a way to make a cage more humane."



### **When Abolitionists Say "Free Them All," We Mean Palestine Too**

*by Nadine Naber  
from TruthOut.org  
December 2023*

With every escalation of United States wars — whether the post-9/11 war of terror or Genocide Joe Biden's current war on Palestine — we witness an escalation in policing and the militarization of the U.S. border. It is no coincidence that the Senate is currently discussing changes to the U.S. migration system as part of a military aid package related to Israel and Ukraine, in the name of "national security." Israel purchases more than 80 percent of its weapons and military technology from the U.S., using the billions of dollars of military assistance it receives from the U.S. annually. The U.S. in turn supports Israel to operate as the police of the Middle East, North Africa, and the world over. Leftists, abolitionists and antiwar activists need to understand that our struggles against policing, prisons and U.S. empire are inseparable. As my INCITE! Comrade Clarissa Rojas and I have written, just as U.S. empire has always relied upon policing and containment as interconnected strategies for securing global power, it has always been militarist, existing in a permanent state of war and expansion, obsessively concerned with the extractive accumulation of land, resources, cultures and the people it commodifies into power and capital.

During this profoundly terrorizing moment of Palestinian genocide, we need to acknowledge how the structures of incarceration, anti-migrant violence and U.S. conquest have always gone hand in hand.



The INCITE! Movement has been a network of radical feminists of color that began organizing at the turn of the 21st century, during the year preceding the launch of the U.S. global war of terror. It was driven by the idea that the existence of the U.S. nation-state is based on colonialism, empire-building, war-making and enslavement. We understood that the first European settlers to arrive on Turtle Island captured Indigenous people to use them as chattel; that carceral systems have emerged in the context of periods of colonial land settlement; and that European colonization of Turtle Island included securing borders to strengthen the power of the U.S. nation-state.

Rojas taught me that the institutional inheritance of vigilante settlers and the U.S.'s genealogy of colonial violence formalized into *la migra* (Border Patrol), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the detention and deportation regime. Queer abolitionists Joey Mogul, Andrea Ritchie and Kay Whitlock teach us that systematic policing and punishment of gender and sexual variance were integral to colonization in the Americas. Indigenous feminist Luana Ross also teaches us that since European contact, Indigenous peoples in the Americas have always been imprisoned, "confined to forts, boarding schools, orphanages, jails and prisons and on reservations."

If we are going to strive for prison abolition, we must also strive for the abolition of the military. Here are five reasons why we cannot abolish one without the other.

### 1. Militarization of the Police

The militarization of the police is an outgrowth of the "war on drugs," first declared by President Richard Nixon and expanded by Ronald Reagan, that has been propelled forward through the post-9/11 "war on terror." Especially in this post-2001 context, military contractors such as Blackhawk Industries have gained broader markets by selling their equipment — including stun grenades, armored tanks and counterattack vehicles — to police agencies with massive Department of Homeland Security (DHS) grants. Military contractors are also paid to train cops and SWAT teams, binding the military, policing and profit closer together.

Many of us remember the summer of 2014, when activists in Ferguson, Missouri, faced the military-grade weapons of four city and state police departments — tear gas, smoke bombs, stun grenades and tanks — while at the same time Palestinians were confronting Israel's heavy artillery shelling, massive use of cannons, mortars and half-ton to one-ton missiles. The same U.S. company, Combined Systems Inc., made the tear gas canisters fired in both Ferguson and Gaza. This is why it would be a mistake to forge solidarity from Ferguson to Gaza based only upon the idea that our struggles are "similar" (i.e., both communities faced tanks, tear gas, etc.) — because our struggles are also interconnected. The same institutions that attacked Black protesters in Ferguson had been sharing military technology and strategies with the Israeli army.

Indeed, thousands of U.S. police officers, sheriffs, border patrol agents, ICE officers and FBI agents have trained with Israeli military and police forces. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a so-called civil rights group, in fact contributes to the militarization of U.S. policing by bringing U.S. law enforcement agents to visit Israeli checkpoints and military prisons, all while helping both Democrats and Republicans to expand systems of surveillance, racial profiling and the repression of public protests through the use of force. Every presidential administration has supported the Israeli settler-colonization of Palestine not only to strengthen the U.S.'s global interests, but also to strengthen the power of white capital and elites. They do this, in part, through the expansion of policing.

The links between militarism and policing are especially clear in Arab and Muslim communities. Consider the DHS campaign, "If You See Something, Say Something." As the Arab American Action Network (AAAN) has revealed, this program works through Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs). As the AAAN explains, SARs recruit community members to surveil those around them during everyday moments, and report anything that "doesn't seem quite right." We end up with random community members reporting, say, a man who looks "Muslim" sitting on a bench at a train station or taking a picture of a bridge. Deemed "suspicious," Arab and Muslim people end up on government watch lists. Through the Countering Violent Extremism program, DHS also provides funding to local groups such as teachers, cops or mental health professionals to train community members to report other community members who show signs of "extremism." Yet these "signs" — like growing a beard or praying five times a day — provide a blueprint for the racial profiling Muslims.

### 2. Privatization

The U.S. and Israel both outsource surveillance technologies to private companies, a practice often called cyber or surveillance capitalism. The U.S. helps Israel test these technologies and strategies of policing and repression on Palestinians. The U.S. then imports these technologies back for domestic use. Every time the U.S. launches a new war "abroad," it imports its violent technologies of surveillance, the torture of prisoners, or its repression of activists back home to the U.S. Scholar Ila Ravichandran refers to this as an "import/export" approach to surveillance. Notably, the U.S.'s repression of pro-Palestinian activism helps rationalize the repression of all of our BIPOC movements. This enables the U.S. to target activists, especially members of the movement for Black lives with terrorism charges. For example, after the police-perpetrated killing of George Floyd — may he rest in peace and power — DHS collected intelligence on protesters who were arrested for trivial criminal infractions having little to no connection to domestic terrorism. More of us should be outraged and deeply concerned that the Department of Homeland Security is surveilling protesters and collecting lists not only of activists but also their friends, family members and social media associates — whether or not these



associates engage in any political activity themselves.

This surveillance continues the legacy of programs like the FBI's COINTELPRO between 1956–1971. Since the '60s, the ADL worked closely with the FBI to place under secret investigation not only neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups like the KKK, but also tens of thousands of left-leaning groups, including anti-apartheid, Black Power, Chicana and Indigenous movement activists. They especially sought to paint the Black Power movement as antisemitic, which helped disrupt support for the Black Panthers. Zionist pressure groups like the ADL have always understood that controlling and containing BIPOC movements is integral to repressing Palestinian resistance. In this sense, we need to be clear that U.S. empire understands that it will fall when our movements learn to refuse a "Progressive except for Palestine" politics. We cannot strive for racial justice aims such as abolition while remaining silent on U.S. imperial wars.

### 3. Border Violence

The military-industrial complex (MIC) depends on the policing of borders, including both U.S. state and vigilante violence against migrants. The U.S.'s murderous practices on the Mexican border borrow from Israel's border policing and the U.S. and Israel use their borders as laboratories for new forms of militarized police enforcement and control. For example, on the Tohono O'odham Nation's reservation, near the Arizona-Mexico border, the company Elbit Systems of America, based in Israel, has built surveillance towers that increase police and border control's capacity to surveil and track people's everyday lives, contribute to the militarization of Native lands and reinforce false militarist ideas about "protecting" borders from "enemy" migrants who "threaten" the U.S.'s economy and security. The U.S. leans on Elbit especially since it has already "tested" its practices on Palestinians through its work on Israel's separation wall and the border of the Gaza Strip.

Let us also not forget how the U.S. relied on 500 pages of documents from the Israeli military in the federal U.S. deportation case of beloved community activist Rasmia Odeh. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Justice, in collaboration with Israel, put Odeh, leader of the Arab Women's Committee, on trial for allegedly lying on her naturalization application 10 years earlier. Here, the U.S. went on a fishing expedition to target a 69-year-old Palestinian American activist, and then used her immigration papers, filed a decade earlier, to build a deportation case against her. The U.S. claimed that she failed to indicate that she had previously been incarcerated. While Odeh was indeed incarcerated for 10 years in an Israeli prison before immigrating to the U.S., she was a political prisoner. An Israeli military sweep had picked her and 500 other Palestinians up in 1969. They sexually tortured her for 45 days, coerced her to confess to two bombings and incarcerated her for the next 10 years before exiling her from her Palestinian homeland. Before her immigration trial, the judge, Gershwin Drain, ruled that Odeh was forbidden from mentioning her imprisonment

in Israel in court. Reifying U.S. rape culture, while he silenced her from telling her story of sexual assault at the hands of the Israeli military, he allowed the U.S. prosecutor to rely on Israeli military documents to portray her as a "bomber" — which he repeated at least 50 times throughout the trial, leading the jury to deem her guilty of immigration fraud, sending her into a second exile from the U.S. back to Jordan.

### 4. Dispossession and Disinvestment

The MIC depends on moving resources from working class people of color and migrant communities into the U.S. war machine. Cuts in local resources our communities need have everything to do with Genocide Joe currently pushing to give at least \$14.3 billion in aid to Israel. Nearly every mass uprising against police violence has been about much more than the cops. Ferguson rose up against the killing of Mike Brown and growing gentrification, segregation, the denial of social services to Black communities and the poverty created by defunding communities to fund militarism. Currently, local and state institutions have insufficient resources to care for migrants in cities like Chicago as police budgets only continue to grow.

If we are going to strive for abolition and create alternatives to policing, we are going to need to do the same in relation to militarism. Can we imagine alternatives to military recruitment of young people of color who are sent to die as fodder on the front lines of U.S. wars in service of white supremacist capital? Or of our BIPOC women, queer and trans siblings who face disproportionate acts of sexualized violence in the military? In Black, Latino and Native American communities, people have a far greater chance of going to prison than of getting a decent education, and some young people are choosing the military to avoid what they see as an inevitable trip to prison. As Angela Davis puts it, young people of color should not have to choose between prison or the military.

### 5. Heteropatriarchy

The military-industrial complex requires heteropatriarchal violence and the enforcement of a gender binary. Sexualized violence is not a mere impact of, or secondary issue to, policing and militarism. It is essential to it. These connected systems rely on rape and sexual assault as a form of control and punishment and a fear tactic.

Gender-based violence has been a core component of the ongoing colonization of Palestine. For more than 75 years, Israeli military officers have used systemic rape, sexual assault, and the threat of rape of Palestinians as a tool of colonization and control. Given that the U.S. finds its perfect ally in Israel, it is no surprise that U.S. cops have also enacted sexualized violence on Black and Brown bodies. According to the report "Shrouded in Silence," police sexual violence includes sexual harassment like "cat calling," forcible touching, unlawful strip searches and physical cavity searches, as well as rape and sexual assault. To be sure, sexualized violence has been a tool used in nearly every context involving militarization, colonization



and war. Yet when the survivors are Palestinian (or people of color more broadly), courts and popular discourse cover it up and invisibilize it. We should be asking why then, only after Israelis have reported experiences of rape, are the U.S. state, corporate media and Zionists the world over finally wanting to talk about sexualized violence and rape in Palestine/Israel? If we really want to end gender violence, we must, all at once, stand against all instances of sexualized violence while refusing to be manipulated into the U.S. and Israel's colonial feminist instrumentalization of sexual violence to justify genocide.

As corporate media sensationalize the idea of colonized "Arab Muslim men" raping predominantly "white Israeli women," let us turn to decolonial feminists and feminists of color to guide our responses. The INCITE! Movement and the Palestinian Feminist Collective teach us that manipulating feminist efforts to end gender violence has been a key white supremacist and colonial strategy for centuries. In the late 19th century and early 20th century, the British relied upon the false idea of the "white man's burden" to justify colonization, so they manufactured stories about white European women needing to be "saved" from alleged sexual savagery of Arab and Muslim men. Palestinian feminists like Islah Jad teach us that the Israeli settler-colonial state, born out of this context of European expansion, and its promoters, have relied upon this European colonial feminist legacy to justify the ongoing colonization of Palestine.

Such myths were also used against Indigenous peoples to legitimize the colonization of Turtle Island, and anti-Blackness emerged through similar racist-sexist tropes. These convergences become especially clear when we consider 1492, when Europeans, in their conquest of Turtle Island, targeted Indigenous people using the same sexist-racist tropes they used against Muslims and Jews in Spain. The idea that white women are damsels in distress, in need of "protection" from Black and Brown men has long reinforced white supremacist violence. During periods of enslavement, the U.S. used accusations that Black men raped white women to justify lynching, while white men were emboldened to sexually assault Black women, who had no protection from their attacks. Until today, the way courts are more likely to charge Black men compared to white men in sexual violence cases reinforces the same moral panic about Black men and Black communities that enables intensified policing.

Arab and Muslim feminists across the globe were therefore not surprised when the U.S. borrowed these colonial feminist strategies in the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq as they rationalized the incredibly racist and sexist idea that bombing these countries is a viable feminist strategy. We were especially concerned that weaponizing gender violence for the purpose of war contributes to patriarchal efforts to disavow it. However, recent months have seen a revival of anti-militarist, decolonial, abolitionist-feminist organizing that culminated in forging the INCITE! Palestine Force. In collaboration with the Palestinian

Feminist Collective, we have been circulating public art as part of a call to BIPOC movements in the U.S. to take daring public art actions to disrupt the flow of weapons and capital funding the Palestinian genocide and to help grow mass protests and boycotts. While our movement strives to uplift the connections across Palestinian liberation and U.S.-based BIPOC struggles, we also insist on resisting all forms of sexualized violence and the colonial feminist U.S. and Israeli strategy that uses racist arguments about alleged sexual assault to justify and intensify genocide. Let us affirm that when we say no one is free until Palestine is free, we mean no one. Here's to a free Gaza, a free Palestine, and the affirmation of life, love and rage from Turtle Island to Palestine.



## **Police Tech Isn't Designed to Be Accurate — It's Made to Exert Social Control**

*by James Kilgore  
from TruthOut.org  
Dec 2023*

In the past 15 years, policing has grown its reach, largely through an array of technologies that record and store our personal details and daily activities. Using algorithms and other formulae, authorities are able to repurpose data to meet the emerging demands of the criminal legal and immigration systems. From predictive policing to GPS-enabled ankle monitors to gunshot trackers to massive interlinked databases, police are extending their capacity to track and control. But in recent years, communities, researchers and activists have begun to build a critique of these technologies. Their critique may ultimately take us well beyond liberal notions of privacy to address fundamental questions of political power and freedom.

### **Predictive Policing**

One key target has been predictive policing. Implemented as early as 2008, predictive policing gathers data on incidents of crime and people who commit crime to predict future events and trends. Over the years, various versions of this policing technology, such as LASER or Hot Spot, have proven problematic. The most recent exposé of this widely used technology surfaced in an October 2023 piece by Aaron Sankin and Surya Mattu, published jointly by The Markup and Wired. The authors' findings revealed that the policing technology of the widely contracted company Geolitica (formerly PredPol) had a success rate of less than 1 percent in its mission of predicting the time and place of a crime. Drawing on more than 23,000 predictions from 360 locations in Plainfield, New Jersey, the authors found a success rate of 0.6 percent for burglary and 0.1 percent for assaults and robberies. Part of the reason for these disastrous results was a statistical model which yields a large number of predictions in the hope of capturing at least some crime incidents in their net — a little like buying 1,000 lottery tickets in the hopes of getting at least one winner, regardless of how much is lost along the way.



Predictive policing algorithms also incorporate racial bias, often directing law enforcement to communities already rife with police, surveillance and high arrest rates. The Electronic Frontier Foundation describes predictive policing as a “self-fulfilling prophecy,” meaning that if authorities direct more police to an area or at a targeted group, police will make more arrests there regardless of the presence of crime.

The shortcomings of predictive policing led Plainfield authorities to follow in the footsteps of Los Angeles and other former clients of Geolitica and cancel their contract. Los Angeles’s cancellation grew out of a campaign led by the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, whose activists revealed the racist bias in the technology’s predictions and the false logic of the company’s claim that “criminal offenders are essentially hunter-gatherers; they forage for opportunities to commit crimes.”

#### GPS Monitoring

Studies of GPS-enabled electronic monitors reveal patterns of inaccuracy. In 2023, a data scrape led by freelance data journalist Matt Chapman uncovered gross inaccuracies in the pretrial GPS monitoring program in Cook County, Illinois — the largest in the nation. Chapman found the devices generated thousands of false alerts, often leading to police raids and baseless arrests. A separate 2021 Cook County study concluded that 80 percent of the alarms for violation of electronic monitoring rules were “false positives.” These false alerts can have serious consequences. One respondent described the trauma of receiving six texts per day over a period of 18 months that delivered false alerts about alleged electronic monitoring violations. One of those false alerts led to a two-day stint in jail. His fate was not unique. Truthout has talked with dozens of people across the country who have been wrongly sent back to prison after their “tracking” device reported that they were located several blocks, even several miles, away from where they actually were. One Chicago woman told us that a false alert led to her arrest. She subsequently fell in her jail cell, fractured her jaw and needed surgery when she was released.

#### Gunshot Trackers

SoundThinking (formerly ShotSpotter) is a detection technology that claims to track and trace the sounds of gunshots in urban areas. But studies in several of the more than 100 cities where SoundThinking has contracts paint an alarming picture of inaccuracy. Despite complaints that false alerts disproportionately target Black and Brown neighborhoods, most decision-makers maintain their infatuation with the product. For its part, SoundThinking remains content with business as usual. In over 20 years of operation, the company has not produced a single scientific study testing how reliably their technology can tell the difference between the sound of gunfire and other loud noises. Instead, the company aggressively defends the secrecy of their product design. When a SoundThinking alert in Chicago led to the arrest of an individual, the company refused a court order to bring forward evidence of how it assessed gunshot sounds. The firm chose instead to accept a contempt

of court charge. Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson has pledged to not renew the city’s contract with SoundThinking in 2024. City leaders in Dayton, Atlanta and Seattle have taken similar steps by recently blocking or ending SoundThinking contracts.

#### Other Technologies

Racial bias has surfaced in other technologies, most notably in facial recognition apps that have led to the misidentification, and in some cases arrest, of at least six Black men in a number of cities including Detroit, New Orleans and Baltimore. Moreover, a 2023 New Orleans study contended that this technology fell short in proponents’ claims to be able to solve crime.

Risk assessment tools that build algorithms based on data from racist criminal legal institutions and social service agencies have also come under fire from several scholars and researchers arguing that they wrongly classify people’s suitability for pretrial release or the appropriateness of a sentence.

#### Less Regulated Than Toasters

Part of the explanation for these inaccuracies lies with the failure to adequately test these technologies before marketing. While toaster producers must conform to stringent regulations and subject their products to rigorous testing, in the high-stakes world of policing, producers often get a free pass.

The only technical requirement for an electronic ankle monitor at the national level is an optional set of standards produced in 2016 by the National Institute of Justice requiring a geolocation accuracy of 98 feet. Most residences, especially urban apartments, could not accommodate a person who is 98 feet from the geolocator box. Hence a miscalculation of 98 feet would register as a violation of household restrictions.

Meanwhile, Black computer scientist Joy Buolamwini used research on her own face to expose what she labeled the “coded gaze.” The coded gaze refers to the data base of faces used to create models for prediction. In Buolamwini’s assessment, the database of faces for testing this technology is disproportionately white and male, making the software more likely to identify a face as white and male. In fact, Buolamwini, who is a dark-skinned Black woman, found that the technology could not even see her face, apparently because she was out of the norm.

Rather than developing rigorous pre-marketing testing protocols, as tech writer Dhruv Mehrota told Truthout, these technologies “are tested in the field.” Dillon Reisman, founder of the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey’s Automated Injustice Project, told The Markup that all over New Jersey, companies are selling “unproven, untested tools that promise to solve all of law enforcement’s needs, and, in the end, all they do is worsen the inequalities of policing and for no benefit to public safety.”

Instead of providing test results, police technology companies



primarily rely on promoting individual success stories or simplistically attributing reductions in crime and the saving of lives to the presence of their technologies without considering other factors. Dayton, Ohio-based human rights activist Julio Mateo told Truthout that SoundThinking tries “to play up the situations in which these technologies help and try to make invisible the times when people are searched and traumatized.”

Companies and decision-makers seem not to consider the opportunity costs or ancillary impact of using these devices. For example, in voting for the reinstatement of SoundThinking in New Orleans after a two-year ban, Black city councilor Eugene Green proclaimed, “If we have it for 10 years and it only solves one crime, but there’s no abuse, then that’s a victory for the citizens of New Orleans.” Like most supporters of police technology, Green failed to acknowledge that the financial and human resources devoted to SoundThinking could have gone to programs proven to prevent violence by providing direct benefits to impacted populations in the form of services such as mental wellness, after-school activities and job training. Similarly, Green’s comments overlooked the trauma of people subjected to repeated false alerts.

On the surface, these outrageous failures to test police technologies without even the rigor demanded of a toaster appear puzzling. We expect our phones, laptops, tablets, and every other device we use to meet a certain consumer standard. A cellphone that consistently connected us to the wrong number or jumbled the entries in our contact lists would have a very short shelf life. But completely different standards apply to technologies of control and oppression, especially those that deal with Black people and other marginalized populations.

#### Why the Paradox Continues

This apparent paradox exists for several reasons. At a systems level, the decentralized structure of policing and law enforcement facilitates the expansion of these technologies. Local authorities typically make their own decisions on surveillance and policing. For the purveyors of these technologies, local decision-making offers a huge and welcoming marketplace. While cities like Boston and San Francisco have banned facial recognition, most smaller jurisdictions lack the technical expertise and resources to conduct serious investigations into police technology. They rarely have policies or research agendas to address the potential perils of apps like facial recognition or gunshot trackers. As a result, the main sources of information for local government are frequently the company representatives themselves. In many cases, local police or sheriffs, operating through their own networks, become the major promoters of these technologies across regions, largely because they enhance that image of the technical efficiency of their operations.

The decentralized structure also makes mounting national opposition campaigns more challenging, especially since federal authorities have chosen not to impose regulations. In fact, in many instances, federal authorities promote such usage,

offering free access to surplus military equipment and invasive surveillance technology through the Law Enforcement Support Office’s 1033 Program as well as grants operating through the Department of Homeland Security and National Security Agency. As of 2021, more than 10,000 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies were participating in the 1033 Program. Further, the emergence of COVID-19 relief funds through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) directed new resource flows to local authorities for police surveillance technologies such as automatic license plate-readers, facial recognition systems, gunshot detection programs and phone hacking tools. President Joe Biden encouraged such expenditures during an address to a Gun Violence Prevention Task Force meeting in 2022, urging cities to purchase “gun-fighting technologies, like technologies that hears, locates gunshots so there can be immediate response because you know exactly where it came from.” The nonprofit Electronic Privacy Information Center estimated that as of September 2022, at least 70 local governments had allocated ARPA funding to surveillance technology.

In addition to systemic factors, police technology also requires a controlling narrative. What researcher Evgeny Morozov calls technological-solutionism, is essential to that narrative. Technological-solutionism influences decision-makers and thought leaders to ignore options for addressing deep social problems like white supremacy or the need to redistribute income and resources. Instead, technological-solutionism recasts complex social phenomena as “neatly defined problems with definite, computable solutions or as transparent and self-evident processes that can be easily optimized — if only the right algorithms are in place!” In contemporary capitalism such solutions enhance the profits and the power of Big Tech while making claims to address inequities, particularly those based on race. This obsession with technological solutions dampens efforts at critique and provides space for expanding or tweaking police technology. Moreover, technological-solutionism has emerged amid a fundamental restructuring of contemporary capitalism, characterized by the rise of Big Tech and the expansion of policing in all its forms. This transformation has enabled a range of “solutions” unimaginable less than two decades ago, including the technologies discussed here.

#### We Desperately Need a New Framework for Tech

However, we are only in the early days of what I refer to as “digital colonialism,” a period that began with the launch of the first iPhone in 2007. In the world of digital colonialism, solutions come from tech giants like Google, Microsoft, Apple, Meta and Amazon. In the manner of colonialists of the past, Big Tech leads the establishment of a settler regime within the unconquered territory of the digital world. The companies set the rules, control the technology and dictate the regime of accumulation. Like colonial states, these powers value order and hierarchies based on race, ethnicity and gender. Just as colonial states offered the Bible, Western education and the products of industrialization, so do Amazon and their ilk offer the digital world of Chrome, cellphones and Uber in exchange



for the essential raw material for their empire: data.

As immense as the data on current computer clouds may seem, the colonial oligarchs are just starting to figure out how to deploy artificial intelligence to collect and use people's data to both maximize their profits and extend the depth of social control. Data from facial recognition, crudely racist as it may be, is only beginning to intersect with other punitive and controlling technologies. While research has unearthed several of the shortcomings of predictive policing and gunshot locators, exposing these flaws represents only a baby step on the path to challenging the immense power of the digital monopolists.

For the moment, to borrow a phrase from Audre Lorde, critics are using the master's tools to contest the power of Big Tech. Like the first discoverers of gold in South Africa, activists and researchers are grabbing a few nuggets of consumer products while handing over a lot more wealth in terms of biometrics and other data. Transforming these power dynamics won't come from merely attacking the inaccuracies or racial bias baked into modern surveillance and policing. In fact, enhancing the technical capacity or reducing the racial bias in these technologies may only create more efficient punitive regimes.

Many of these technologies simply have no place in a world that respects life. Databases have many uses, especially in tracking climate change or air quality, but only if informed by a social justice framework that is not driven by profit nor dogmatic paradigms that either deify or totally reject technology.

We remain a long way from putting such frameworks in place. At a moment when the cutting-edge of technology and surveillance and the world's political acumen are trained on Gaza, a tiny strip of land which is perhaps the ultimate laboratory for these technologies, building that framework looms all the more urgent.



## **Inmate wants college degree but faces roadblocks from Indiana government**

*by Kody Fisher*

*from WishTV.com*

*Oct 2023*

A man serving decades in prison claims roadblocks are making it hard to get a bachelor's degree.

His accusations sparked a monthslong I-Team 8 investigation into the education opportunities provided to inmates.

“Prison, it's an environment where you have to pick and choose paths. You can't toe the line, so you're either doing good, or you're just all the way doing bad,” said Victor Karp in the visitation area of the Branchville Correctional Facility.

Karp told I-Team 8 he's picking the path of good while

serving 24 years for burglary. His version of that is getting a college degree. “It's going to change my family. It'll change my community, because I'm not that virus, or that cancer, that they've got to keep taking away.”

Karp arrived at the Branchville Correctional Facility in January and immediately wanted to enroll in college.

“The process has been pulling teeth,” Karp said.

He says other inmates who want to get degrees face similar challenges at the southern Indiana prison that's off State Road 37 a couple of miles south of I-64 interchange in Perry County.

“Just signing up for school. People didn't even know that college was coming back. Nobody knew about this Pell Grant when I showed up here in January, so I told everybody, ‘Hey, Pell Grants here. We can go to school again.’ That was a roadblock because then you have to ask the counselor. The counselor, it's not her fault that she doesn't know, because the DOC (Indiana Department of Correction) doesn't tell her. When you tell her she says, ‘Well, I'll look into it.’ Then a couple of days later she's like, ‘Here's the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid ).’ It's just one step. It's just always negative,” Karp said.

Through a lengthy and frustratingly slow process, Karp used federal funding through the Second Chance Pell grant program to enroll in a correspondence degree program through Oakland City University. In preparation for learning, he asked prison officials if he could create a study hall twice a week in a building that wasn't being used.

Karp said, “The request was to use the chapel building, or the re-entry building, while it's not being used for two hours a week. They denied that flat-out two days later.”

I-Team 8 asked if the inmates could simply have a study hall environment in their dorm. Karp said, “No. I mean, we could sit down and we could get into a group of seven or eight, but there's still chaos surrounding us. It's like going to a rock concert and trying to study.”

The Indiana Department of Correction refused I-Team 8's request for an on-camera interview to talk about the challenges Karp claims he's facing. The department instead asked for detailed questions that they would respond to with a statement.

I-Team 8 asked them why Karp's request to create a study hall was denied, if it has enough staff to provide security for a study hall, and if Karp's claims that the process of finding and enrolling in school was frustrating slow because counselors aren't told about specific programs.

The response from the Indiana Department of Correction did not answer specific questions related to Karp's claims.



The department's statement says it provides education options, including career technical programs and degree partnerships with Ivy Tech Community College, Indiana Tech, the University of Notre Dame, and Holy Cross College.

The department statement added, "Each incarcerated individual works with a case manager to develop an individualized case plan that best fits their needs and includes available educational opportunities."

I-Team 8 reached out to the university where Karp is enrolled to ask about some of his challenges. Oakland City University said in a statement, "There are multiple challenges when serving incarcerated students; notwithstanding the rules governing how we may provide that service. It is challenging when adhering to the differing rules at the various institutions and how those rules affect our ability to instruct. So, at this time, Oakland City University is in no position to elaborate further until the Indiana Department of Corrections makes a decision on the instructional institution of its Second Chance Pell program."

With nine years left on his sentence, Karp said, he's more determined than ever to get his degree, and to help other inmates navigate the process. "I want change. I want change in prison. I want people to realize that we're still in here. We're still coming out there. If you want us to be better, help us."

I-Team 8 asked why people should care about inmates' efforts to get a college education.

Karp said, "Everybody should care about this. We're coming home to you. If you want us to be better for you and to stop selling dope, robbing, whatever we were doing to hurt you, you should care. You should care that I get an education because it's going to better me. It's going to better you. It's going to better our community."



**Statement by Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network on the 23 November 2023 raids in Germany**  
*Nov 2023*

Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network denounces in the strongest terms the raids carried out by German police in four federal states, with a particular focus in Berlin, targeting Palestinians labeled by the German state as members or supporters of Samidoun or of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas. We express our deepest solidarity with all of those subjected to these raids today, and we view these raids as a clear attempt by the German state to terrorize the Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities in Germany and, more broadly, the popular sentiment in support of Palestinian liberation. These actions today build upon the ban of Samidoun several weeks ago, the bans on demonstrations, police attacks on communities, racist media incitement and fascist political,

social and cultural assaults on all members of these targeted communities.

Further, these raids are an attempt by the German state to advance the Zionist genocide being carried out at this moment in occupied Palestine, which has already taken the lives of over 14,000 Palestinians, displaced over half of the Palestinians of Gaza, destroyed dozens of hospitals, schools, mosques and churches, and wounded tens of thousands more. They are also an attempt to silence all voices who speak out for the liberation of Palestinian prisoners, particularly at this moment, when six prisoners have been martyred in occupation jails in the past month, when prisoners are subjected to daily torture and abuse, and when a prisoner exchange is potentially on the horizon and requires the support of all people of conscience.

Instead of acting as a responsible party – sanctioning the Israeli occupation regime, expelling its ambassador and invoking the Genocide Convention to protect Palestinians – the proper activities of any state that claims, as does Germany, to have learned its lessons from Germany's role as a perpetrator of Nazi genocide – it instead has increased its military support and arms sales to the Israeli occupation tenfold in just the past two months while imposing a level of police repression unprecedented since German reunification on the Palestinian community and supporters of Palestine more broadly.

We assert that these attacks on people who were Samidoun members prior to the 2nd November ban on Samidoun in Germany as well on people who participate in demonstrations and mass actions in defense of Palestine will fail in the attempt to terrorize and silence the community and the rising voice of justice in Palestine. The tens of thousands of people who fill the streets for every call for Palestine will continue to do so, even as they face police assault and arrest for declaring such simple demands as, "End the genocide" and "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."

Our energies and efforts around the world are focused on supporting the heroic Palestinian people in Gaza and throughout occupied Palestine and organizing everywhere in exile and diaspora, on the international, Arab and Palestinian levels, to bring an end to the genocide, to affirm the legitimacy and leadership of the Palestinian resistance, and to liberate Palestine, all of Palestine. The systemic racist abuse directed at the Palestinian people and the Arab and Muslim communities more broadly will not silence us nor will it suppress our work. Whether the repression is taking place in Germany, France, Britain, Canada or the United States, it is clear that these attacks on strugglers for justice in Palestine reflects only the desperation of the imperialist powers to defend their illegitimate Zionist settler colonial project planted in the heart of the Arab region by all means, including tearing apart all of their proclamations and pledges of democracy, human rights, freedom of expression and freedom of association. We express our clear solidarity with all people and organizations who have been targeted for



arrest, detention, police raids, searches, harassment, employer retaliation, official silencing and other forms of persecution for their positions on Palestinian liberation.

Despite all the attacks, the reality is clear: the people stand with Palestine. From the tens, indeed hundreds of thousands that defy state repression in Germany to take to the streets for Palestine, to the masses in France that rise up against police bans on mobilization, to the millions in Britain marching despite attempts to ban the Palestinian flag, to the ongoing actions in Britain, Canada and the United States to materially confront and challenge the war machine through direct actions like those of Palestine Action – and this is just in the heart of the imperial core. In Latin America, Colombia, Venezuela, Cuba, Belize, Bolivia have cut ties, recalled their ambassadors or affirmed their rejection of the Israeli occupation regime, demanding an end to the genocide. South Africa’s parliament has voted to expel the Israeli ambassador. And of course, in the Arab region, the heroic and unparalleled role of the Lebanese, Yemeni and Iraqi resistance is unified with the clear sentiment and spirit of the people to shame every reactionary regime that is complicit in the genocide in Palestine and the imperialist plans for the region.

The images of hundreds of masked and heavily armed police invading the apartments of Palestinian students, workers and refugees in Germany today appears as an imitation of the daily invasions of the Israeli occupation forces in Palestinian homes in occupied Palestine, as well as a disturbing echo of Germany’s own Nazi fascist history. And as Palestinians in occupied Palestine have never stopped struggling despite over 75 years of Zionist occupation and 100 years of colonialism, these attacks will not silence the growing movement in Germany and every other imperialist power involved in attacking Palestine, as new generations refuse their involvement and complicity in genocide.

We affirm: No bans, police raids or criminalization will silence the spirit, the will and the organization of the Palestinian, Arab and internationalist voices confronting imperialism, Zionism and reaction. As Samidoun, we are committed to challenging the ban and these attacks by all legal means, and our eyes will not be turned away from our role in working urgently to end the genocide and free all Palestinian prisoners. From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free. Long live the Palestinian resistance. Victory, return, total liberation and decolonization for all of Palestine.



## **Rising commissary prices in Florida prisons lead to boycotts, outcry**

*by Amanda Rabines  
from TampBay.com  
Oct 2023*

Maria Valdivieso likes to send her incarcerated son photos of

his 2-year-old son, who she watches over while he’s in prison.

“I love you[. B]e safe, behave and mind your business,” Valdivieso said in a message containing photos of the boy feeding a giraffe at the zoo.

“It was a big milestone for my grandson because he has autism,” she told the Orlando Sentinel. “But I had to carefully select which pictures I wanted to send.”

That’s because she could only afford to send three.

Phone calls, messages and the sharing of media, all of which are subject to costs and fees, are part of her weekly budget in addition to transferring about \$50 a week so her son can buy things like toothpaste and soup. Every \$50 transfer is charged an additional \$8.95 processing fee by the prison banking service company Jpay.

In August, things got more expensive for Valdivieso when a new contract between the Florida Department of Corrections and Keefe Commissary Network increased the costs of snack food and toiletries sold inside prisons.

Male menu commissary items increased by as much as 80%, according to an analysis by the Orlando Sentinel.

Since then, Valdivieso said her 22-year-old son is communicating less, eating less and getting less of the things he may need. He’s been imprisoned in the state since 2020 and is returning home next year.

“Money does not go far anymore,” she said. “Everything has gotten so extremely expensive.”

People who are incarcerated in the state of Florida have to contend with prices set by canteen operators under contract with FDC, and because a majority of them do not earn salaries, people advocating for prison reform say higher rates tend to disproportionately hurt low-income households.

“Across the country we see prisons using commissaries and communication systems and other services that are offered to incarcerated people as a means of squeezing money out of the poorest of families,” said Wanda Bertram, a spokesperson at the Prison Policy Initiative. “These are people who are already struggling, people who are one lost paycheck away from bankruptcy or people who cannot handle a medical emergency.”

Paul Walker, a spokesperson for the Florida Department of Corrections, said prices in the new commissary menus and order forms are the result of negotiations, nationwide inflation and efforts to provide a variety of products.

“While FDC was able to limit price increases over the past couple of years, the nation has experienced record inflation



over the same time,” he said in an email.

He added that Keefe Commissary Network provided pricing relative to the cost of supplying and maintaining the inventory in prisons across Florida.

FDC did not provide the Orlando Sentinel with a requested copy of the fair market value analysis report that Keefe Commissary Network is contractually required to prepare for the department. Representatives with Keefe did not respond to a request for an interview.

‘How is that fair market?’

Similarly to people outside prison, people who are incarcerated can buy things like food, over-the-counter medicine and hygiene products. But unlike the outside world, price competition does not exist inside prison. Instead, the value of goods is determined by the contractor and signed off by the Florida Department of Corrections.

The Sentinel found more than 60% of the items sold in the male canteen menu went up in price as a result of the new contract.

Four ounces of saltine crackers used to cost \$1.16; now they cost \$2.80. The Big AZ frozen sandwiches found in gas station convenience stores, a staple inside many Florida prisons, went up by roughly 30%. And a pack of 100 cotton swabs costs \$1.33, up from 78 cents.

About 25% of the items went down in price and less than 15% of items cost the same.

“We can go buy a 40-pack of water from Walmart for \$5.36, but [FDC] decides to sell [a single bottle of] water for \$1-plus,” said author Walter Dunn, a formerly incarcerated man who overturned his sentence after nine years in state prison. “How is that a fair market?”

Food purchased from the commissary can cost more than double the price for similar items sold by large retailers that tend to sell items at a cost-saving volume.

Under the new contract, a bottle of water costs more than seven times the average wholesale price in 2021, according to the Beverage Marketing Corporation.

In Florida prisons, one roll of toilet paper costs an incarcerated person \$1.82. As of Wednesday, a pack of a dozen Scott Brand toilet paper rolls costs \$10.68, or 89 cents per roll, on Walmart’s online retail store.

Two caplets of extra strength Tylenol cost \$1.24 inside a Florida prison. Walgreen’s online store sells 100 caplets for about 14 cents each.

At a senate committee meeting Wednesday, FDC Secretary

Ricky Dixon said he doesn’t disagree with the outcry about the prices.

He told legislators on the Appropriations Committee on Criminal and Civil Justice that FDC is working with the vendor to lower the costs of certain items like water and ramen.

The department is also reevaluating limits to the amount of money a person who is incarcerated can receive, capped at \$100 a week.

“No one claims, the vendor or us, that we compete with Walmart or Walgreens,” he told legislators. He said canteen operations run similarly to gas station convenience stores where there is a premium added to the value of goods.

“But I don’t want to be dismissive to all the complaints because they do appear to be priced high,” he said.

‘This is a lucrative business’

Sarah Couture, state director and senior research strategist at the Fines and Fees Justice Center in Tampa, said the average grocery store markup in the U.S. is between 1% and 3%.

“It’s insane the markups when it comes to prisons and jails,” Couture said. “Using that chicken ramen example from Walmart, it is 2.53 times more expensive in Florida prisons at \$1.06 than what we’re paying. That’s not inflation.”

In August, the Consumer Price Index for grocery store food was 3% higher than last year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Food-at-home prices increased by 11.4% in 2022 and are expected to grow this year but at a slower rate.

Provisions in the previous contract already allowed the commissary contractor to raise prices up to 10% every year. People familiar with canteen prices inside Florida prisons say they did increase annually.

An analysis of canteen prices between 2013 and 2023 shows the cost of toothpaste, tampons, certain frozen sandwiches and pain relief pills have steadily increased over the last ten years.

“From a business perspective you can see this is a lucrative business,” Couture said. “Somebody figured out this could be a revenue stream, so that’s what they did. They went and talked to legislators and the local level politicians and said, ‘Let me take this off your hands, we’ll run this for you,’ and then they jacked up the prices.”

In the new contract, Keefe Commissary Network could request to increase prices every six months by no more than 10%. An exemption clause allows the vendor to increase prices by more than 10% if the contractor can provide documentation of “extreme and unforeseeable market volatility,” among other requirements.



The contractor will compensate the department at the commission rate of 35.6% under the new contract.

During the fiscal year of 2021, FDC made about \$26.8 million. The previous commission rate was slightly above 20% of all gross sales, according to a prior contract with Trinity Services Group, which is owned by the same company as Keefe Group.

In fiscal year 2022, FDC made about \$28.3 million off commissary commissions.

Revenue generated from canteen sales goes into the recently expanded Inmate Welfare Trust Fund, which is meant to be used to fund things like educational programs.

But Denise Rock, the executive director of the prisoner advocacy group Florida Cares, said she worries the system is broken.

She said she has concerns that the money generated off of canteen sales and telephone commissions, paid by the incarcerated population and their families, will be used to supplement operating expenses and maintenance costs instead of being spent on things like school supplies.

She points to the recent canteen contract which includes value-added services for things like installing 92 recreation yard pavilions and outfitting vending machines with ID scanners.

“All these value-added services are great, but it doesn’t belong in a canteen contract,” she said. “It’s getting paid for with our money. It does not feel fair we don’t have a say in how the money is spent.”

‘We ain’t paying no more’

When a majority of the commissary prices increased more than 10% in August, the department faced an onslaught of criticism from families of people who are incarcerated, prison reform groups and prisoners who lost their ability to afford items they deem essential, like shower sandals.

Dunn said commissary items help supplement a lack of appetizing food and hygienic products issued by the state.

“Hygiene products offered at commissary are a necessity,” he emphasized. “The toothpaste and soap the prison is offering are not adequate.”

He called the markups “astronomical” for people in prison who are likely not earning salaries.

In Florida, only 2% of the prison population, or about 1,700 workers, are paid by the self-funded nonprofit PRIDE Enterprises, which runs work programs in the state system. Those who are paid earn less than a dollar per hour, according

to a 2022 report by the ACLU and the Global Human Rights Clinic of the University of Chicago Law School.

When people serving time in prison learned of the new contract, they revolted, with a plan to boycott the price increases.

A message shared within prisons read: “No one goes to the canteen for anything NO ONE. Like straight up forbidden. This is statewide.”

In a video shared with the Sentinel, a detained man participating in the boycott called attention to the price of one packet of ramen.

In Florida, ramen increased 25% to \$1.06. In Texas prisons, a packet of low sodium ramen noodles costs 35 cents. “But in Florida we paying extra,” the man said in the video. “We ain’t paying no more.”

The Florida Department of Corrections did not respond to a request to comment on the boycotts.

Staple items more expensive in Florida  
Compared to three other state correctional departments, prices for staple items like instant ramen noodles, coffee and water bottles are for the most part cheaper than in Florida’s correctional system.

In Illinois and Texas, bottles of water and packets of ramen at state-run correctional institutions can be purchased for less than 35 cents and more than four ounces of instant coffee ranges between \$1.40 and \$4.50.

The correctional departments in both states said the agencies contract with multiple canteen operators.

Nevada, which exclusively uses Keefe Group, sells a packet of ramen for 67 cents and four ounces of instant coffee costs \$4.32. Bottled water costs \$1.87, the highest amount for bottled water among the four states.

Meanwhile, inside Florida’s prisons, a packet of ramen costs \$1.06, a bottle of water costs \$1.15 and four ounces of instant coffee costs \$6.99.

Amy McCourt said both she and her incarcerated boyfriend are struggling to adjust to the new price changes.

She said her boyfriend is prioritizing buying hygiene products before anything else.

There will be days he cannot afford to buy canteen food when chow hall portions are too small or unappealing for him.

“There have been financial times where I’ve been able to send him the max per week so \$400 a month. We’re not in that



financial situation right now,” she said. “He’s been hit on both ends. He’s getting a reduction in his income, so to speak, and also getting hit with price increases.”

Rock sees the markups as a blow to the local economies where people with incarcerated loved ones live.

“When we go back home we don’t go out to dinner or spend money on a haircut,” she said. “We can’t afford it.”



## **Why are more women in the U.S. being incarcerated?**

*by Chanelle Chandler*

*from News.Yahoo.com*

*Dec 2023*

A report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics in November revealed that for the first time in almost a decade, U.S. prison populations have increased — namely among women. Advocates for prison reform are calling the uptick a “war on women” that’s getting worse for certain groups over time.

“Women were not historically considered as culpable for crimes, because of a larger patriarchy at force that sort of benefited women in this one area,” Ashley Nellis, co-director of research at the Sentencing Project — a nonprofit organization that advocates for an “end to extreme punishments” — explained to Yahoo News. “Now it’s not considered to be as taboo for law enforcement, courts and judges to lay a heavy hand on women.”

According to the Sentencing Project, the crimes that most women are convicted of are property- or drug-related. Dominique Grant, a campaign and community organizer for Women on the Rise, an Atlanta-based organization that serves justice-impacted women of color, explained to Yahoo News that the residuals of the Reagan-era campaign to wage a “War on Drugs” and the new opioid crisis expanded the policing of women.

### **By the numbers**

- The number of incarcerated women in the U.S. increased by more than 525% from 1980 (26,326) to 2021 (168,449).
- At least 80% of women who have been sentenced to more than a year in state or federal correctional facilities are age 30 or older.
- In 2021, Black women were imprisoned at 1.6 times the rate of white women, the Sentencing Project found.
- In 2021, Latinx women were imprisoned at 1.3 times the rate of white women.
- The rate of imprisonment for white women has increased by 12%.

“At this rate, it would take about 75 years to get back to pre-mass incarceration time,” Nellis said. “The pace of decarceration is so slow that there will be a whole new generation that’s been affected by it.”

Nellis explains while some states are making inroads in decarceration, the work done is not happening quickly enough and there are factors that need to be addressed to reduce women’s imprisonment.

### **Generational pipeline and trauma**

A 2016 study from the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that over half of women in U.S. prisons are mothers with children under the age of 18.

“When you have a system where peak incarceration has gone up by 500%, that’s also families that have gone up 500% that are being impacted by the criminal justice system, that are being impacted by having a sister or a mother in the system. Typically, when a mom is incarcerated, the child has to go into the custody or the care of someone who may not know the family and they are inserted into Child Protective Services, which affects families,” Grant explained.

With such a large portion of people who are considered primary caregivers in the carceral system, Grant warns against the intergenerational pipeline to incarceration.

“My grandmother was arrested and incarcerated and she didn’t have anyone to take care of my father and my aunt,” Grant shared. “They were left to fend for themselves. Ultimately, that led to them having lives filled with incarceration, trauma or substance use disorders. Now they have children that they’re not present for.”

### **Lack of resources**

Nellis says that for most women who have been affected by the criminal justice system, their primary offenses are poverty driven. The Prison Policy Initiative, a nonprofit think tank focused on criminal justice, says that over half of women are more likely to be unemployed in the month before an arrest.

“It’s really for systems outside the correction systems to handle, like providing better housing and resources for women with children, ramping up public assistance, ending structural racism, those kinds of things that are sort of outside the criminal legal system are the ones that really should be focused on,” Nellis explains.

Grant adds that making sure women earn livable wages and have access to social services so they can survive and sustain economically would significantly reduce the prison population and chances of reentry.

A Women & Health report released in 2014 stated that women who are incarcerated have a higher risk of mental health problems than women who are not in the criminal legal system and typically turn to substance abuse.

Grant recalls a time when she was suffering severely from



mental health crises and researched psychedelics as a way to cope.

“I’m thinking that I’m taking the appropriate steps to take care of my mental health and I came in contact with the system,” Grant shared. She ended up with a Class A felony and was arrested for the first time.

#### Expansion of law enforcement

As new policies, like the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, and laws to combat the immigration and opioid crises are being ushered in, more states are creating pathways for women to enter the legal system. Stiff penalties for nonviolent crimes have also been left in place. The Equal Justice Initiative adds that reforms in policy “have led to mandatory or ‘dual’ arrests for fighting back against domestic violence, increasing criminalization of school-aged girls’ misbehavior, and the criminalization of women who support themselves through sex work.”

Nellis advises that when women come in contact with the legal system, the effort should be placed toward diverting that woman from the system and getting to the root cause of why they are committing an offense in the first place.



### **Private immigration prison in Tacoma ordered to pay \$23M in minimum wage case**

by David Gutman

from *SeattleTimes.com*

Dec 2023

A private immigration prison in Tacoma must pay more than \$23 million in back pay and penalties for violating Washington’s minimum wage law by paying people it detains just \$1 a day, a unanimous Washington state Supreme Court confirmed Thursday.

But the case, which has seesawed between federal and state court, still remains on appeal in a federal appeals court.

The Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma can hold up to 1,575 people as they await review of their immigration status and potential deportation. Under its contract with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the facility must provide a voluntary work program for people it detains, giving them the option to earn money while in custody.



### **Shawn Fain’s New Year’s Resolution Is to Lay the Ground for a National Strike**

by Jonathan Rosenblum

from *TheNation.com*

Dec 2023

Imagine it’s the evening of April 30, 2028. The nation is roiling as millions of workers coast to coast prepare to walk off the

job in an unprecedented May Day national strike. Workers in manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, grocery, high tech, hospitality, and public services have mobilized and committed to bring the economy to a halt unless their bold demands are met: Medicare for All, a \$30/hour minimum wage, and a tax on billionaires to massively increase public education funding.

That’s the sort of vision that United Auto Workers (UAW) President Shawn Fain has challenged the rest of the labor movement to begin organizing toward.

At the end of October, in announcing strike settlements at the Big Three auto companies, Fain noted that the UAW contracts all expire the day before May Day 2028. He urged other unions to align their contracts with the UAW. “If we’re truly going to take on the billionaire class and rebuild the economy so that it starts to work for the many and not the few, then it’s important that we not only strike, but that we strike together,” he said.

Workers have organized national strikes in other countries, where labor movements are stronger and there’s a history of national bargaining around social demands. Not so in the US, where the post-WWII political establishment—too often with the complicity of union leaders—intentionally created and enforced a labor law framework that partitioned the working class by establishing bargaining at the enterprise level, rather than by sector or whole industries. In the US system, workers are left to fight separate battles, worksite by worksite, for health care, fair pay, and health and safety rights—things we’re more powerful fighting for together.

Fain’s May Day throwdown takes aim at capital’s divide-and-conquer legal regime. But to be successful in 2028, the labor movement will need millions of workers to join in: those now in unions, who should begin to line up contracts for that decisive date, and many more who are not yet in unions but are beginning to organize.

This vision is what makes the new surge of auto worker organizing the UAW is currently embarking on particularly momentous.

In the wake of the UAW’s breakthrough strike and contract settlements at Ford, General Motors, and Stellantis, workers at the industry’s growing non-union plants—Toyota, Honda, Subaru, Hyundai, BMW, VW, Tesla, and more—are beginning to organize on a scale not seen in generations. Thousands of workers have signed union cards in the last few weeks. The UAW has dispatched organizers to non-union plants and launched a splashy national media campaign along with social media organizing tools.

“When we return to the bargaining table in 2028, it won’t just be with the Big 3, but with the Big 5 or Big 6,” Fain predicted.

That’s much easier said than done. Executives at Toyota et al.



already are mounting anti-union campaigns, with carrots—raises of up to 11 percent—and sticks—anti-union meetings, videos, harassment of union leafleteers, and one-on-one lectures by supervisors about the evils of unions. These companies have control in the workplace and will stop at nothing to thwart the incipient worker rebellions. In the past, auto executives have hired the worst-of-the-worst union-busting law firms—outfits like Littler Mendelson, who are the brains and muscle behind Starbucks’ union-quashing efforts. Expect the same army of pinstriped busters this time around in auto plants.

UAW members scored big when they struck and won contracts at the Big 3 that began to claw back the concessions of the last generation. It took hard work, and the divided ratification votes showed that UAW members are not done demanding their share. It will be an even bigger challenge—another order of magnitude harder—to beat Elon Musk and his fellow auto CEOs and successfully organize non-union auto workers on a mass basis.

Yet we must all root for and materially support the auto workers, because their victories will lay the foundation for the vision Fain laid out, the opportunity to do battle for social and economic justice on a national, class-wide basis.

Today the UAW represents only about 15 percent of the 990,000 US automobile and parts manufacturing workers. That’s down from a peak of 1.5 million UAW members in 1979, when 80 percent of US auto manufacturing was unionized and UAW contracts drove industry standards.

The biggest automaker in the US? It’s no longer General Motors. In 2021 Toyota beat GM to become number one in the US, churning out millions of cars and trucks at its 10 manufacturing plants, all but one located in so-called “right to work” states where anti-union laws weaken worker organization and suppress wages.

For years, UAW leaders gave lip service to organizing those and other plants. In the last decade, the union badly mangled efforts to organize at Nissan and Volkswagen, in both cases underestimating the potency of the anti-union campaigns and underappreciating the need to build strong in-plant union committees.

On Dec. 11, Fain delivered a speech on Facebook Live to autoworkers and supporters where he recounted the broader uprising that began during the UAW strike. At the non-union factories, “autoworkers weren’t just writing us messages, they were signing union cards,” he said. “They found old organizing websites—some made their own websites, and just started signing up. They were tuning in to our Facebook Live updates, our stories, our materials, they made their own stickers with our UAW wheel and posted them all over non-union plants.”

Once the strike concluded in late October, momentum grew for

signing union cards, the precondition for a union representation election. By law unions must get a minimum of 30 percent of workers to sign union authorization cards before they can request a vote conducted by the National Labor Relations Board. UAW organizers say they aim to get 70 percent sign-up at plants before filing, to ensure there’s enough support to overcome management opposition.

VW workers in Chattanooga, Tennessee were the first to surpass the 30 percent threshold in their plant of 3,800. On Dec. 7, they took their campaign public, unveiling a video along with a website featuring a list of the 187 members of the in-plant Volunteer Organizing Committee (VOC). As workers at other auto plants meet the 30 percent threshold, they too will go public.

A confluence of factors is driving the momentum. To be sure, the gains UAW members made at the Big 3 are a huge inspiration for workers. But also motivating the union push are the punishing non-union working conditions. This year, VW eliminated two holidays and increased insurance costs for workers, according to Zack Curvin, a VW powertrain assembly line worker in Chattanooga. VW also instituted a line speedup, telling workers that the company wants to see “a car a minute off the line,” almost double the line speed of two years ago, Curvin told me, adding that VW has been reducing time for maintenance and workers often struggle with broken or substandard equipment.

An autoworker I spoke with at Rivian’s 6,000-worker plant in Normal, Illinois said his colleagues were frustrated that the company was expecting workers to use vacation time or take unpaid “voluntary time off” when the plant shuts down for three weeks of retooling next spring.

When Jeff Allen began working at Toyota’s massive Georgetown, Kentucky plant in 1994, “we had free health insurance and Toyota pretty much followed what the UAW had,” he told me. But over the years, Toyota shifted healthcare costs onto workers, trimmed retirement, and kept wages down.

None of these indignities or austerity measures were because the companies were hurting financially. The “German Three”—BMW, Mercedes, and VW—made \$460 billion in profits over the last decade. Toyota made \$250 billion in profits in the same 10-year period, while opening a food bank for Allen and his 9,500 coworkers at the Georgetown plant, according to the UAW.

Workers at these and other plants have tried to organize and failed before, but this time feels different, they said. In the past, Allen said he and his coworkers “just leafleted and assumed people would come on board.” This time, “we’re going back to old school, talking to people one on one,” he told me.

Yolanda Peoples, a 12-year VW assembly line worker, described



to me how VOC members “are trying to hit every part of the plant, from young to old.” On national auto worker organizing calls, Peoples said, she’s gained skills and insights from other workers about how to approach workers who are on the fence or skeptical. Rather than barge ahead with a union rap, she’s practiced asking questions, drawing out worker concerns and hopes. “I’ll ask them, ‘Have you ever gone through anything that you wouldn’t want your son or daughter to go through?’ Make it more personal. Everyone has that one story,” she said.

This daily organizing work is unflashy—but absolutely essential. Too many past organizing campaigns—not just the UAW’s failed attempts, but efforts by other unions in myriad industries—have faltered when organizers took organizing shortcuts, fell back on gimmicks, or underestimated the scale of employer resistance. They tried to “sell” workers on the union, rather than challenge workers to step up and make the union their own. They soft-pedaled the fight against the boss, rather than describing a power struggle between workers and management.

To withstand the tornado of the full-blown anti-union campaign, organizers must place the power struggle front-and-center in conversations, and they must build a union structure inside the workplace that can withstand the hostile winds. That means recruiting respected workers on every shift, in every work area and department, to serve on the plant VOC so they can educate, unite, bolster, and move a majority of coworkers into action.

It doesn’t matter how deeply felt the workplace issues are, how righteous the fight seems to be, how popular it is with the wider public, if there is not a tight internal organizing structure that is tested through collective union actions: vote yes petitions, sticker-up days, and other demonstrations of majority worker support. The harder the boss fight workers face, the more solid the structure needs to be—and the more often it needs to be tested.

In Chattanooga, Curvin described how he and his fellow VOC members have talked to 85 percent of his line coworkers, and a majority have signed union cards. “I’m amazed at how quickly things have moved,” he said. “There’s a lot of strong will to help each other out.”

A BMW worker in South Carolina described to me how he and his coworkers have identified every work area—bumper line, assembly, paint shop, body shop, and so on—and are methodically identifying which areas have VOC members and which don’t.

That’s the sort of rigorous organizing that will be required to win. These initial organizing steps are a sign that workers and the UAW are keen to avoid repeating past mistakes. Still, there inevitably will be temptations to take organizing shortcuts, become enamored with glitzy media, or overvalue the public vibe or a politician’s endorsement. It will be important to bear

in mind that the same UAW contracts that provide non-union workers the courage to stand up and fight also give the bosses of the multinational companies more incentive than ever before to fight the union. They have unlimited resources with which to wage that war, and surely will deploy them.

But if the workers continue to organize in a disciplined manner, the coming months and years could see the UAW grow by the tens of thousands, or even more. That is an exciting prospect, not just for the workers in these plants, but for all of us in the labor movement who heard Fain’s call to arms and have circled May Day 2028 in our calendars.



## **Virginia prisons defy new state law against solitary confinement**

*from SF BayView.com*

*Dec 2023*

Introduction: Rashid and comrades declare hunger strike

Despite extreme measures to prevent his contact with the outside world, well known prison policy influencer Kevin “Rashid” Johnson and a group of comrades have reached supporters to announce they began a hunger strike on Dec. 26 “to protest and shed light on VADOC’s continued practice of long-term solitary confinement. He is urging all of us to share this with our contacts,” writes the supporter who for years has faithfully transcribed his stories.

Several participants who have severe health conditions make this hunger strike particularly dangerous for them, Rashid noted, but they believe in this issue. The prisoners involved are Kevin “Rashid” Johnson (1007485), Jason Barrett (1092874), Rodney Lester (1429887), Charles Cousino (2213403), Eric Thompson (1208012), Joe Thomas (1193196) and Nguyen Tuan (1098070).

During the strike, it is being asked that supporters contact the Virginia Department of Corrections as well as the governor of Virginia to demand an end – in fact as well as theory – to this controversial practice. Tell the officials that the hunger strikers have our full support.

All readers who believe in freedom are asked to read this story and then contact the following Virginia officials:

– David Robinson, VADOC Central Administration, P.O. Box 26963, Richmond, VA 23261, 804-887-8078, david.robinson@vadoc.virginia.gov

– Virginia DOC Director Chadwick S Dotson, 804-674-3081, Chadwick.Dotson@vadoc.virginia.gov

– Rose L. Durbin, VADOC Central Administration, 804-887-7921, Rose.Durbin@vadoc.virginia.gov





# Rest in Power



## Ed Mead

On November 6, 2023, lifelong abolitionist, writer, fighter, and former political prisoner Ed Mead joined the ancestors. Ed died at home, on his 82nd birthday, after almost a decade of battling late stage lung cancer.

Ed Mead did not live a conventional life. As his lifelong friend and comrade, Mark Cook, is fond of saying, Ed spent his life “kicking ass for the working class.” After spending much of his youth in reform “schools” and detention centers along the Pacific coast, Ed became politicized in prison in the 1960s. He was a founding member of the George Jackson Brigade, a revolutionary guerilla underground organization based in the Pacific Northwest in the mid-to-late 1970s. Ed spent 35 years of his life in prisons, 18 of which were for his political actions as a member of the George Jackson Brigade.

While in prison for his part in armed struggle, Ed helped to form Men Against Sexism (MAS) at Walla Walla State Penitentiary in Washington. With other comrades, Ed helped to put an end to prisoner-on-prisoner sexual assault and other forms of abuse at Walla Walla. While imprisoned, Ed was a prodigious journalist. He co-founded and wrote for the Red Dragon in the 1970s, The Abolitionist in the 1980s (different from the contemporary newspaper of that name), and Prison Legal News, which still exists and is the longest running newspaper produced by and for current and former prisoners in the United States.

Once released from prison in 1993, Ed worked tirelessly with revolutionary organizations and prisoner support groups, including but not limited to the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee, the Attica Brothers Legal Defense Committee, the Seattle chapter of the National Jericho Movement, All of Us or None, and the National Lawyers Guild. Ed created the Free Mark Cook Organizing Committee and worked relentlessly to free his comrade Mark Cook, who was finally released in 2000. Ed believed changing prisons will come from the prisoners themselves. This belief motivated his work on publications featuring prisoner journalism and communications.

*“Regardless of when a general change in political consciousness may come to the U.S., the fact remains that the march of history and the forces of progress are on our side. Through the process of our struggle we will make important changes right now, changes that will also help to propel that much needed rise in consciousness right here in the belly of the beast.”*

— Ed Mead (1941–2023)

## Ed Poindexter

Former Black Panther Party leader Ed Poindexter, who was framed up and imprisoned for 53 years, died Dec. 7 in a Nebraska prison at the age of 79. In the last few years, his family and supporters fought for his compassionate release, as he was suffering from advanced kidney disease and Parkinson’s disease.

Known as the “Omaha Two,” Poindexter and Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa (formerly David Rice), became well known as organizers of protests against police brutality in the late 1960s, including the 1969 killing of 14-year-old Vivian Strong. For this, they were targeted by the Omaha police; agents of the ATF; and by the FBI.

They were framed up in August 1970 on charges of killing an Omaha police officer, who had been lured into a home where a suitcase bomb exploded.

Supporters of Poindexter and we Langa had forced out into the open government documents showing how authorities were out to discredit and dismantle the Panthers’ political work. Witnesses placed the two Black rights fighters elsewhere at the time of the killing. Nonetheless, Poindexter and we Langa were convicted and sentenced to life in prison. We Langa died in 2016 after 45 years behind bars.

Poindexter had deserved a new trial because of the “credible reports of significant misconduct in the prosecution” of the case, Mindy Rush Chipman, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Nebraska, said after his death. “Ultimately, you cannot separate this case from the circumstances at the time which continue to this day, namely law enforcement agencies targeting people and groups calling for racial justice.”

From the day they were arrested in 1970, to the day they died, Poindexter and we Langa maintained their innocence. They were never broken by the prison system.

Ed spent his time in prison learning, writing and teaching about self-esteem, and developing motivational programs for other prisoners and at-risk youth.





– Beth Cabell, Division of Institutions, 804-834-9967, beth.cabell@vadoc

– Gov. Glenn Youngkin, 804-786-2211, glenn.youngkin@governor.virginia.gov

This is Rashid's list of demands:

1. To stop the censorship of my writings and correspondence, especially with publishers and media people, which many of my correspondents are.
2. Stop manipulating policies, statuses and circumstances to keep me incommunicado.
3. Return me to Sussex 1 State Prison where I can receive medical care for symptomatic chronic heart failure and chronic edema.
4. Remove me from solitary confinement and referral to ROSP's long term segregation/step down program.
5. Remove me from ROSP and Wise County, where clearly I am targeted with vendettas from past confinement and resistance to exposures of abuses. Recall I was held in illegal solitary confinement here at ROSP and Wallens Ridge State Prison for 14 years (by many of the same people still working at these prisons and over this western region who are now ranking officials).
6. Stop retaliation for my writings exposing abuses of prisoners within VDOC prisons."

Dare to struggle Dare to win!

All power to the people!



### *Writing to Prisoners*

Since prisoners are often transferred between facilities, we won't print addresses that can quickly become outdated. Instead, we'll direct you to the Indiana DOC "Offender Database" on their website. You can look up their current location with their DOC# (listed on Table of Contents). We use the number because the names they use are often not the state name that the DOC lists them under. And then look up the mailing address for that facility. Correspondence and engagement with what they've written here is welcome.

Some tips for writing to prisoners: Be clear about your intentions. Share something of yourself and also be curious to learn more about them. If you're not sure where to start, reference ideas they have written about. Don't say anything sketchy or incriminating for yourself or others. Assume that everything you write is being copied and read by prison administrators. Use only blue or black ink on white, lined paper in plain, white envelopes. Keep in mind that prison is, in many ways, the epitome of toxic masculinity and saturated with problematic and harmful ideas and social norms. Prisoners often will not have the latest language or frameworks for social justice. Be generous and seek to understand their different experiences, but also don't be afraid to engage and share your own experiences. Be mindful of power disparities between people who are incarcerated and those who aren't.

If you prefer to correspond online, you can set up an account at [web.connectnetwork.com](http://web.connectnetwork.com)

## **TIME/CUT**

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Chapters and associates in Indianapolis,  
South Bend, Evansville, Bloomington, and Gary