

CRITICAL RESISTANCE



ANNUAL REPORT 2014

We deserve



The fight against the prison industrial complex (PIC) takes many forms. Critical Resistance understands that even as we work for PIC abolition we must simultaneously build community self-determination. We fight for abolition by halting prison and jail construction projects; depriving law enforcement of its tools of repression; and starving the system of resources it uses to maintain itself. We build self-determination by directing those resources to healthy alternatives and programs that empower communities and don't rely on prisons and police; supporting prisoner-led organizing; facilitating political education; and taking concrete steps toward building a world free of the prison industrial complex.

We are in a moment where the questions Critical Resistance (CR) has been raising for the last 15 years have come to a head. 2014 saw the prison industrial complex struck by widespread growing outrage against the violence of policing. The enormous wave of protests, mobilizations, and organizing sparked by the uprisings in Ferguson have put the police's structurally oppressive role into the national spotlight. However, this increased attention and movement reminds us not only that we have an opportunity to engage more people than ever in this fight, but that what we fight for now will have lasting impacts on our perceptions and experiences of public safety for decades to come.

We believe, as abolitionists, that policing and imprisonment do not make us safe. We know ending the violence of policing is not going to be achieved by adjusting the attitudes of people in uniform who carry guns. We also know that liberation is not going to become when we reassert ourselves as individuals who matter. Liberation always comes through collective struggle that demands shifts in power and self-determination. We are enthusiastic to continue sustaining the growing momentum of anti-policing organizing in the U.S. and connecting it to the fight against prisons, jails, and political repression.

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FIGHTING FOR ABOLITION



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No More Jails!

For the last 15 years, CR has been deep in the trenches battling against jail and prison construction projects. In 2014, CR's California-based chapters focused on halting two proposed jails: one in Los Angeles and another in San Francisco. As members of local coalitions, CR's Oakland and Los Angeles chapters have continued to organize against the growth of California's jail system and for life affirming programs and services to get and keep people out of cages.

The San Francisco Jail Fight Coalition—which is challenging a controversial proposal for a new \$456 million jail project in San Francisco County—includes advocates for housing justice, formerly imprisoned people, architects and planners, children of imprisoned people, and concerned residents. The coalition has done an excellent job of highlighting the wastefulness of this proposal, arguing that San Francisco currently has more jail capacity than it uses even as the jail population continues to steadily decrease. The coalition has also drawn attention to the ways the project wages war on poor people and communities of color, demonstrating that the vast majority of people held in the jail are awaiting trial and simply can't afford bail, noting the relationship between gentrification and imprisonment in the county. In 2014 Black residents accounted for 4% of San Francisco's population, while comprising 56% of people held in the county's jails.

Opposition to the proposed new jail in San Francisco continues to grow, with new members representing labor, social service providers, and social justice organizations joining the fight. With our continued efforts, we hope 2015 will be the year this wasteful jail project is scrapped altogether.



In Southern California, CR Los Angeles helped galvanize opposition to a proposed new jail for women through a series of mobilizations, public presentations, and pressure on decision-makers to address the social and environmental hazards of the jail project. CR Los Angeles members engaged in outreach activities in Lancaster, where the jail is slated for construction, to help raise awareness and increase local opposition to the plan. Chapter members have also begun work on a zine to use in their outreach efforts that examines how gender dynamics have been used to justify construction of new jails for women. CR Los Angeles is a member

of the LA No More Jails Coalition, through which it works with allies to challenge the new jail on environmental grounds, and advocate for the diversion of realignment funds from law enforcement to programs and services

aimed at keeping people out of jail. With some changes to the composition of LA County's Board of Supervisors during the last elections, 2015

may provide new opportunities to work with LA County lawmakers to re-examine the county's jail building schemes.

On the East coast, CR New York City has been adding its voice to a growing movement of people calling for the closure of New York State's notorious Attica Prison

and prisons across the state. The campaign, recently named *Beyond Attica: Close Prisons - Build Communities*, will be taking off in 2015. As one part of that effort, CR New York City has been collecting oral histories from survivors of Attica to document the continued legacy of repression, survival, and resistance at Attica. The interviews combine still photos, video, and audio. We hope that information from people that survived the brutality of New York State's prisons will add a powerful layer of data making the case the Attica must be closed.



Top: Critical Resistance-Los Angeles and allies raise public awareness of the proposed new women's jail in Lancaster. (photo by TVx3).

Middle right: LA No More Jails Coalition (photo by Kim McGill, YJC).

Bottom left: Members of CR-NYC.





Abolish Solitary Confinement!

In 2014, CR continued to amplify the core demands of the California prison hunger strikers as a member of the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition through rallies, teach-ins, mobilizations, and strategic communications that kept the issue of solitary confinement in public consciousness. As part of that work,



Top: Members of CR mobilize against Urban Shield.

Middle left: CR and allies at the one-year anniversary of the 2013 CA Prisoner Hunger Strikes (photo by Scott Braley).

CR Oakland also developed a workshop to share with students, community groups, and people interested in learning more about the issue. The workshop provides basic information about solitary confinement and how it is used as well as ways to join the fight to abolish the practice of solitary confinement.

CR Oakland members additionally initiated a letter writing and interview project in the fall of 2014 to build stronger relationships with people who are or have been in solitary and to solicit their ideas about ways to fight solitary. Their responses will be used to inform the next steps in a longer-term campaign the chapter will take up against solitary. The chapter also seeks to increase contact with loved ones of people imprisoned in solitary to deepen collaboration and support their needs.

Urban Shield out of Oakland

In September 2014, CR Oakland joined its allies in mobilizing community pressure to drive the Urban Shield weapons expo and militarized police training exercises out of Oakland. CR Oakland, in collaboration with allies including Arab Resource and Organizing Center, War Resisters League, International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, ONYX Organizing Committee, and Anakbayan-East Bay, joined forces to prevent future Urban Shield activities from being held in Oakland. This was a huge victory that was many years in the making and involved the persistent effort of many local groups.

But our work has just begun. While we are excited about our victory in securing a commitment from the City of Oakland that it will not renew its contract with Urban Shield, the city has not committed to withdraw its participation completely, and the activities are slated to be moved to another city in the county in 2015. CR will continue to fight against the militarization of policing and emergency responses in the year ahead and looks forward to expanding the number and range of people in the fight.

BUILDING SELF-DETERMINATION

Community Conversations

In 2014 CR Portland convened a series of community conversations exploring the dimensions of policing in Portland. The goal of the conversations was to bring Portland residents together to discuss the impacts of policing on communities in the city, learn about current organizing efforts addressing these impacts, and to assess where CR Portland might best be able to contribute to those efforts. Each conversation focused on how policing affects a particular aspect of the Portland community, including communities of color, immigrants, and youth. The series will conclude in 2015 with a discussion about alternatives to policing that could work in Portland.



Oakland Power Projects

2014 was a big year for CR Oakland's new Oakland Power Projects (OPP). The goal of OPP is to develop and support projects that augment community power and wellbeing, while simultaneously increasing Oakland residents' skills and confidence to not rely on the cops.



Top right: Packed house at CR-PDX's Community Conversation on Policing and Migrant Justice.

Bottom left: Busy day at the Fruitvale Community Garden.

In the research phase of the project, CR Oakland members interviewed residents across the city to learn about their experiences with the police, what makes them feel safe, and what kinds of things they think could make Oakland a better place to live. Based on information from the initial round of interviews, chapter members decided to explore ways to augment community health and healing projects that could help Oakland residents

not feel as if calling the police is their only option if they're worried about people being hurt. In November the chapter hosted a community meeting for all the residents and health workers they interviewed for the project to share back what they had learned to date and to think collectively about a project to initiate together in 2015. They plan to design and provide community-based "Know Your Options" education so Oakland residents can access the healthcare that they need while minimizing potential police contact.

CR Oakland also continues to help maintain the Fruitvale Community Garden (initiated as a project of the Stop the Injunctions Coalition) to provide a community green space in which neighbors can work together and share resources. In spring 2014 the City of Oakland targeted the garden for eviction. The eviction notice sparked an overwhelming grassroots defense, and today the garden still stands as a thriving community resource. CR thanks the dozens of community groups and individuals that defended the Fruitvale Community Garden.



Connecting across Walls

Imprisoned people organizing for their own self-determination is a necessary piece of the movement for PIC abolition. Connections and communication between imprisoned organizers and movements outside prisons and jails are crucial to that goal.



CR's newspaper, *The Abolitionist*, is dedicated to developing shared political analysis with imprisoned people, increasing inside-outside communication, and augmenting organizing capacity inside prison walls. In 2014 we distributed nearly 12,000 issues of the paper on the themes "Art and Abolition,"

"Women and Gender Liberation," and "Capitalism, Anti-Capitalism, and the Prison Industrial Complex." Written by people living inside and outside of jails, prisons, and detention centers, *The Abolitionist* has been an important tool in amplifying imprisoned writers' voices while sharing information about organizing and activism happening outside the confines of cages.

CR members continued to correspond with thousands of imprisoned people across the United States, sharing information and resources, encouraging prisoners' organizing efforts, and reminding people that they have not been forgotten. 2014 saw the expansion of CR's prisoner mail programs, with the Portland and New York chapters joining CR Oakland in holding regular letter writing sessions and bringing in volunteers to join members in communicating with prisoners in their respective geographical regions.

Sharing Our Vision

CR Los Angeles continued collaborating with A New Way of Life on the Leadership, Education, Action and Dialogue Project (LEAD) in 2014. Residents at A New Way of Life, an organization providing housing and support services to formerly imprisoned women and gender non-conforming people in South Central Los Angeles, participate in LEAD workshops to share their own experiences, learn new information about the prison industrial complex and how to fight it, and hear about opportunities to get involved in local organizing.

Critical Resistance also facilitated dozens of workshops, public events, and speaking engagements to continue to help make PIC abolition common sense. A few highlights include: a collaboration between CR New York City and artist Ashley Hunt in coordination with the CUE Art Foundation's "To Shoot a Kite" exhibit, CR Oakland's "Dreaming Wildly, Fighting to Win II" featuring Ruthie Wilson Gilmore and CeCe MacDonal, CR Portland's Community Conversations series, and an art auction and community event hosted by CR Los Angeles, featuring the Los Angeles Poverty Department, Melissa Burch, and Fred Moten. These events and the many others our members were involved in during 2014 help us push forward the logic of abolition while offering practical examples, creative interpretations, and personal experiences to help make that logic common sense.



Top: CeCe McDonald and Ruthie Wilson Gilmore discuss solitary confinement, gender policing, strategies for liberation and social media at "Dreaming Wildly, Fighting to Win II".

Middle left: *The Abolitionist* newspaper.

Bottom right: Los Angeles Poverty Department performs "State of Incarceration" at "DREAMING WILDLY//FIGHTING TO WIN" in LA (photo by Roxy Farhat).

CR IN TRANSITION

2014 was a year of exciting transitions at Critical Resistance. CR Portland completed its first year of work together! We're excited to see where the information they gathered during their community conversations will take their work in 2015.

In July, CR welcomed Mohamed Sheh as our new Media and Communications Director. His first day on the job was the anniversary of the initiation of the historic 2013 California prisoner hunger strike. Mohamed jumped

on the mic at a rally and got right to work. Since then, Mohamed has helped keep CR's strategic communications sharp and effective. We're honored to have him on board.

2014 also saw the inauguration of CR's Community Advisory Board. We are honored to work with a group of people, both inside and outside of prison walls, that represents such a breadth and depth of movement experience and knowledge. CR's advisors are:

Kai Lumumba Barrow

Ellen Barry

Dolores Canales

*California Families to Abolish
Solitary Confinement*

Melanie Cervantes

Dignidad Rebelde

Linda Evans

All of Us or None

Craig Gilmore

*California Prison
Moratorium Project*

Ruthie Gilmore

City University of New York

Avery Gordon

*University of California, Santa
Barbara*

Bonnie Kerness

*American Friends Service
Committee*

Lara Kiswani

*Arab Resource and
Organizing Center*

Claude Marks

Freedom Archives

Laura Pulido

University of Southern California

Beth Richie

University of Illinois at Chicago

Phil Scraton

Queens College, Belfast

Walt Senterfitt

Jaime Veve

Eddy Zheng

Asian Prisoner Support Committee

Note: There are also imprisoned people on our Advisory Board, but to prevent retaliation from prison regimes, they are not named.

GROWTH

CR is proud of what we have built as an organization and a movement, and this year again confirmed our role in the struggle to abolish the prison industrial complex: to lay bare the PIC's death-dealing violence and to boldly envision a world free of the prison industrial complex. We know our fight is far from over.

In 2015 we will continue to take up the challenge to fight for community self-determination, not better policing. We need to reinforce the common sense that human beings do not belong in cages. We will stand together to resist the forces that silence dissent in favor of social control. We are hopeful and confident that 2015 holds great potential for us to catalyze the sparks of 2014 into larger, more fierce struggles.

Over the last five years, CR has transitioned from being primarily funded by foundations to grassroots funding becoming our primary source of income. We carried out a successful strategy to build a grassroots donor base and last year was another successful milestone: in 2014, 65% of CR's income was raised through grassroots fundraising. Thanks to all our donors and funders for contributing to CR's ongoing success. We are now ready to seed new chapters and expand the scope of our work, and we look forward to doing this with your support. Our fight against the PIC would not be possible without you. And, with your help, 2015 will be a year of growth—for our vision, the movement, and our organization.

In the first days of 2015, CR was devastated to lose one of our members. Zachary Ontiveros was a dedicated member of our Oakland chapter and helped anchor the editorial collective for *The Abolitionist* newspaper. A fund has been started in Zachary's name to provide support for CR members in crisis. *The Zachary Project*, initiated by Zachary's aunt, Pat Salazar, and her children, Lindsey, Brooke, and Aaron, is a beautiful commemoration of Zachary's life and work. To learn more about how to contribute to *The Zachary Project*, please visit the "donate" page of CR's website.

