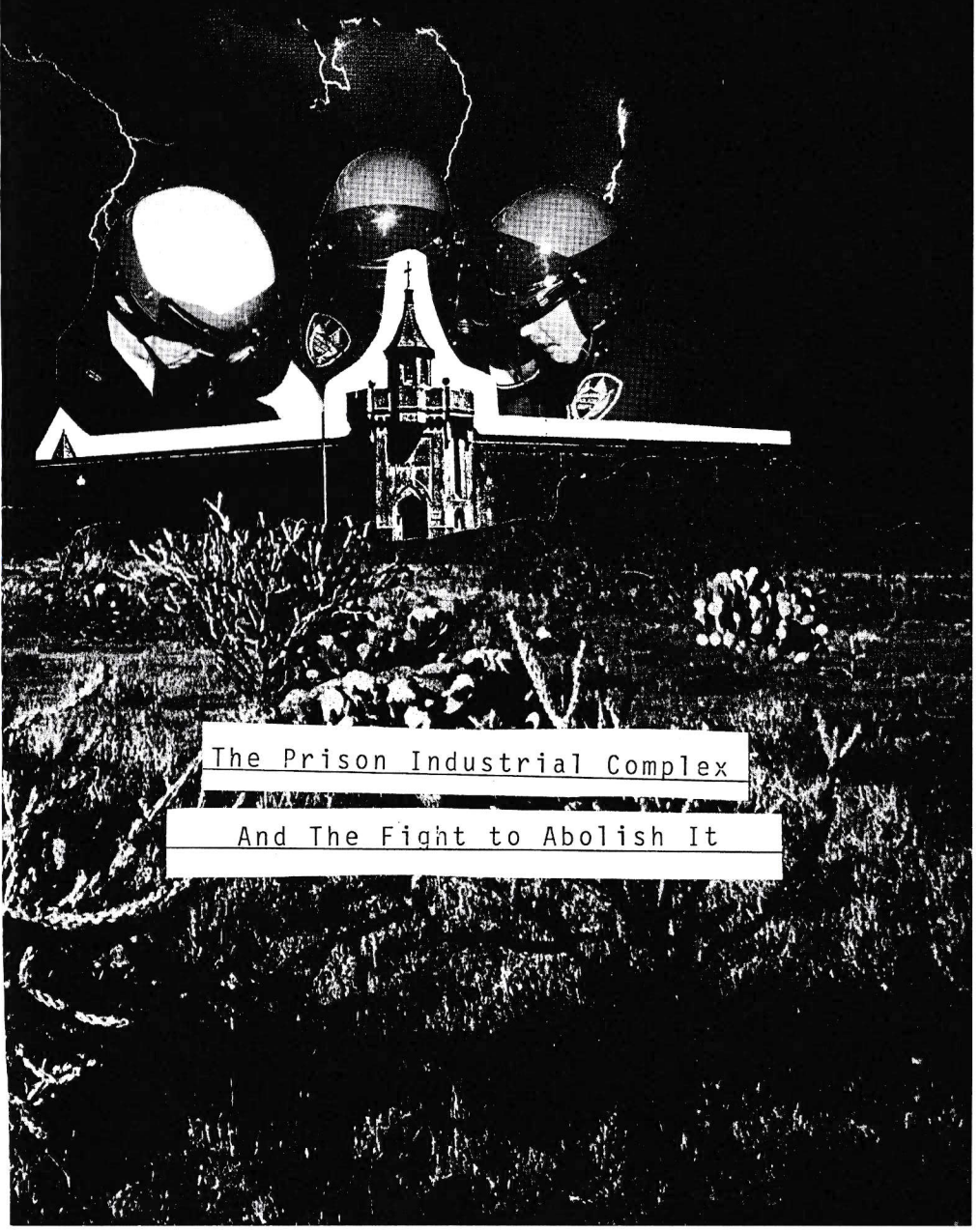


A Better World Is Possible



The Prison Industrial Complex

And The Fight to Abolish It

## Who is Critical Resistance?

Critical Resistance (CR) is a national grass-roots organization working to abolish the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe.

### CR's Portland Chapter:

-Hosts monthly mail nights writing to imprisoned people across Oregon and Washington

-Organizes political education events in our community about Abolition, Policing, and the PIC

-Launched and anchors the Care Not Cops Campaign which works to defund and disband the Portland Police Bureau, abolish gang policing, and uplift self-determined community care.

To learn more about  
Critical Resistance  
Visit [criticalresistance.org](http://criticalresistance.org)  
On Instagram @Criticalresistance  
And Twitter @C\_Resistance

## Where do Modern Police and Prisons come from?

### Police

Modern police departments and practices have their origins in maintaining the system of chattel slavery in North America. Organized units of white men were hired, or volunteered, to patrol plantations and the living areas of enslaved Black people to enforce the social order of white supremacy, and to recapture Black people who were escaping to the North.

The first organized police departments enforced an ever growing list of laws and cultural rules that work to maintain the social and economic relationship of white supremacy and the economy of capitalism.

Modern policing is deeply rooted in the genocide of Native people. Armed white settlers were directed by the US government to violently expand the territory of the US by destroying the land, food supply, and lives of Native people.

The police use force to deny Black people, people of color, and the working class the ability to form financial and social security.

The police today work very similarly to how they were intended to function in the 1800s. The police murders of George Floyd, Elijah McClain, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and countless others, are part of the legacy of policing.

## Prisons

Prisons are designed to cage and warehouse human beings.

After the abolition of slavery, the prison system began to expand. New laws made it illegal for Black and indigenous people to be jobless, to gather with one another, to be out at night, etc. Their lives were criminalized.

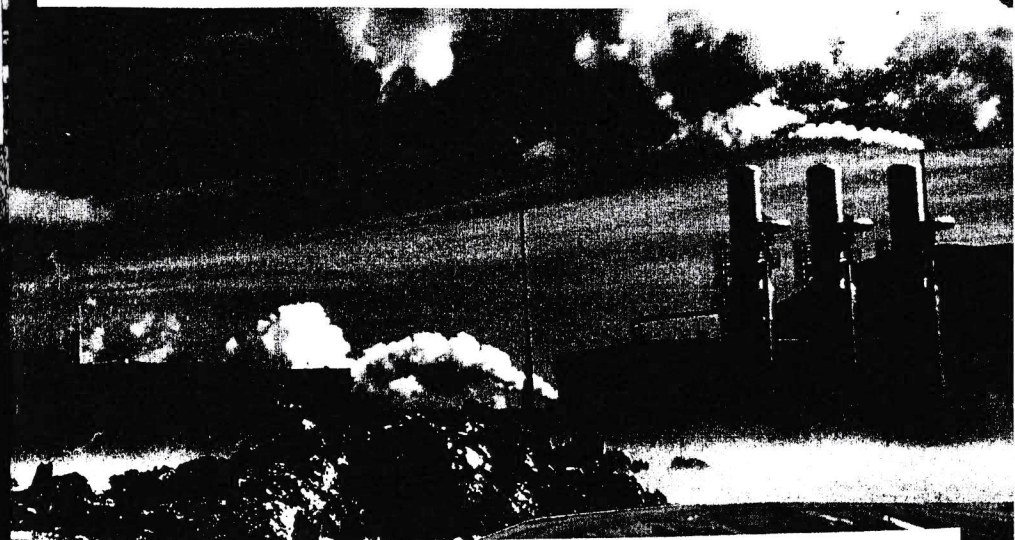
Currently, prisons litter the landscape. Today, over 2.3 million people are imprisoned in the US. Data shows that 1 in 3 Black men will experience being imprisoned in their lifetime. Prisons and jails have become the "catch all solution" for any and all social issues, and people of color are incredibly overrepresented in prisons, jails, and detention centers.

### What is the Prison Industrial Complex?

The Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) is a term we use to describe the different but connected ways our society uses systems of surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as a way to maintain white supremacy, and to attempt to respond to economic, social, and political problems (whether real or perceived).

Our government and corporations benefit from and work to maintain the PIC. They are both explicitly (highly visible - we can see it) and implicitly (less visible - we have to look for it!) working together.

The PIC includes prisons, jails, immigration detention centers, policing, courts, electronic monitoring, probation, economic and legislative policies that criminalize communities, corporations who fund and are funded by prisons, and many other forms of surveillance, policing and imprisonment, and the systems that benefit from them.



Picture the PIC as a vast web of different systems, shapes, and forms, that are under the control and direction of the US government and corporations.

The PIC targets Black and Indigenous people and people of color (BIPOC) and people experiencing poverty. Its power is maintained by relying on and promoting stereotypes of people of color, queer people, immigrants, and youth as "criminal" or "deviant".

Because the logic of the PIC is so embedded in our society, we grow up believing in the need for punishment as a solution to harm. Abolishing the PIC means abolishing the way we police each other and ourselves.



## What is Abolition?

Abolition is a political vision with the goal of eliminating prisons, policing, surveillance, and the systems that sustain the PIC, while also creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment.

Abolition is both a practical organizing tool and a long-term goal.

Abolition asks us to dismantle oppressive systems, and to build new models that represent how we want to live in the future.




## Why Doesn't Reform Work?

"Police reform" or "prison reform", refers to changes to the PIC that attempt to limit the violence of policing and imprisonment.

People advocating for police reform might support things like body cameras for cops, more "de-escalation" or "cultural sensitivity" training, limiting use of force, or sentencing killer cops to prison.

People advocating for prison reform might support things like more programming for people in prison, the construction of new "better" prisons, an end to "mass" incarceration, or supporting electronic monitoring as an alternative to physical prisons.

These reforms suggest that the PIC is "broken", and that with a few small changes, it can be an effective means to make our communities safer and address harm. These reforms fail to acknowledge the ways that the existence of the PIC itself is violent, and is a cause of harm - not a solution to it.



We know that no amount of de-escalation or cultural sensitivity training has ever or will ever end police violence. We know that the police murder people in cities where cops have body cameras and limits on use of force. We know that removing people from their families, and communities, or placing them on house arrest, does not prevent or address harm but exposes people to more violence, and places emotional and financial burdens on them and their loved ones.

We know that the PIC isn't broken - it is working exactly as intended. This means that there is no way to make it better - it must be dismantled. As abolitionists we do not want reforms that expand, normalize, or reinforce the PIC.

Instead of police reform, abolitionists fight for removing cops from schools, repealing laws that criminalize survival, and ultimately defunding and disbanding the police.

While abolitionists may advocate for changes in prisons that improve the quality of life for imprisoned people, we also fight for things that will reduce the life and scope of the PIC altogether, such as shutting down prisons and stopping new ones from being built.

## GLOSSARY

### Political Education

Political education is the process of study, research, working to sharpen your analysis (or how you view and understand something) in order to better understand the systems we are up against and how to effectively dismantle them.

This can look like reading a zine or a book, listening to a podcast, watching a documentary or online webinar.

Political education is a strategy that can be used in communities together. This can look like hosting workshops on a particular topic or skill that can then be brought back into the community.

### Community Care

Community care is investing in housing, healthcare, education, and transit, so that everyone has their basic needs met.

Community Care refers to the ways in which a community finds ways to support itself and each other outside of systems run and supported by the state.

This can look like people getting together to make and pass out food to their houseless neighbors, fundraising for a family in the community who experienced a loss or medical emergency, or even babysitting a neighbor for free.



## Surveillance

Surveillance refers to the techniques and technologies that the government uses to track, observe, and collect information about people's movement, communications, and activities.

Prisons are a place of constant surveillance where people's behavior is constantly watched, documented, and regulated.

Formerly imprisoned people, people awaiting trial, and people awaiting deportation hearings experience surveillance such as electronic monitoring, alcohol detectors, GPS tracking, or being observed through microphones and video.

Family and friends of currently or formerly imprisoned people, immigrant communities, and Black and brown communities experience surveillance through tactics like increased police presence in their neighborhoods and schools, and the creation and maintenance of gang databases that track people's movement, relationships, and internet use.

Surveillance is a way to squash political dissent. As technologies of surveillance advance, the use of video and security cameras, phone taps, cell phone locators, facial recognition, and tracking of internet usage are becoming more widespread.

Information is used to track protestors, target political leaders, limit access to information, create fear and paranoia, and coordinate physical and ideological repression of political movements.

## Mass Incarceration

Mass Incarceration refers to the extreme growth of the prison system since the 1980s in response to "tough on crime" policies introduced by President Reagan and many other politicians at the time. Corporations became much more involved in prison construction, supplying goods and services to prisons, and benefiting from prison labor. The number of prisons and amount of people imprisoned has increased exponentially. Many supporters of prison reform speak out against mass incarceration but not necessarily against incarceration itself.

As abolitionists, we want to push back on the emphasis of "mass" incarceration. While we fight against prison expansion, we know that the PIC is specific about who it targets, and relies on and reproduces systems of racism, classism, and patriarchy. We know that prisons must be dismantled - not just downsized.

