

BEYOND WALLS

5 FILMS FOR PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX ABOLITION

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The following terms may come up in the films and or after-screening discussion, and are important to know when discussing Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) abolition. These definitions were provided by Critical Resistance.

Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) is a term to describe the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems.

Prison industrial complex (PIC) Abolition is a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment. From where we are now, sometimes it is challenging to imagine what abolition is going to look like. Abolition isn't just about getting rid of buildings full of cages. It's also about undoing the society we live in because the PIC both feeds on and maintains oppression and inequalities through punishment, violence, and controls millions of people. Because the PIC is not an isolated system, abolition is a broad strategy. An abolitionist vision means that we must build models today that can represent how we want to live in the future. It means developing practical strategies for taking small steps that move us toward making our dreams real and that lead us all to believe that things really could be different. It means living this vision in our daily lives. Abolition is both a practical organizing tool and a long-term goal.

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Policing is a social relationship made up of a set of practices that are empowered by the state to enforce law and social control through the use of force. Reinforcing the oppressive social and economic relationships that have been central to the US throughout its history, the roots of policing in the United States are closely linked to the capture of people escaping slavery, the enforcement of Black Codes, and administration of society's compliance with racial capitalism. Similarly, police forces have been used to keep new immigrants "in line" and to prevent the poor and working classes from making demands. As social conditions change, how policing is used to target poor people, people of color, immigrants, and others who do not conform on the street or in their homes also shifts. The choices policing requires about which people to target, what to target them for, and when to arrest and book them play a major role in who ultimately gets imprisoned.

Criminalization is the process through which actions become illegal and people become labeled "criminal." Entire groups of people and communities are criminalized when targeted by policing. "Crime" is constructed; what is considered a crime changes across time and space, sometimes very quickly. Often those changes happen because of political forces that are manipulating public fears instead of responding to the issue at hand.

Reformist While "reform" simply means a change, reformist refers to a kind of liberal political leaning that maintains the current oppressive system by insisting the system is broken and just needs to be fixed. Claiming the PIC (or any of its tools) is broken supports it continuing to exist. Reformist reforms, or reformist change, are about improving institutions so that they can work better. But when an institution is rooted in oppression historically and is designed in order to maintain powerlessness and inequity, making that system work better will increase its ability to inflict harm and violence. If the job of a system is racialized social control, then fixing it to do its job better will improve how it carries out racialized social control. The system needs to be completely uprooted and dismantled in order to end its oppressive power over our lives.

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