

# BEYOND WALLS

5 FILMS FOR PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX ABOLITION

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



If you are hosting a screening of *Beyond Walls*, use this discussion guide to prepare for your screening. This guide is not intended to be comprehensive, but exists to give you a few ideas of things to consider when making plans, along with talking points for discussing Prison Industrial Complex abolition, and ways to engage your audience to ensure your event makes the most impact.

# TALKING POINTS

**What about the...?** Often prison industrial complex (PIC) abolitionists will be asked how they will respond to murders, rapes, and child abuse. If PIC abolitionists don't want to use policing or imprisonment, they are asked, what will they do when these terrible harms happen? PIC abolitionists take harm seriously. That is why they want to eliminate a system that generates as much harm as the prison industrial complex. Additionally, the prison industrial complex is not an effective mechanism for preventing violence or harm; rather, the prison industrial complex often reinforces existing harm. In our current system, instead of directing resources to the communities most impacted by violence with proven prevention strategies (economic support, access to therapeutic services, etc.), they are used to promote further state violence and disenfranchisement. PIC abolitionists are involved in many projects to prevent and address these kinds of harms and are doing so with drastically fewer resources and legitimacy than provided the prison industrial complex.

**The whole is more important than the parts.** The prison industrial complex (PIC) is a system made up of various institutions, dynamics, actors, and influences. While it can be helpful to pick a place to begin fighting against the violence of this system, it's crucial to keep the whole system in mind. Campaigns you take up against surveillance or policing will impact sentencing and imprisonment, for instance. Your work will be more impactful if your struggle against one part of the system doesn't make it harder for people working against other parts of the system to reach their goals as well. Even a struggle against one aspect should be done with the whole in mind. Ultimately, the entire system is the problem, not just one aspect of it.



**Life and scope.** The ultimate goal of prison industrial complex abolition is the elimination of the entire system. Most often opportunities to address a specific aspect of the system are presented rather than to take on the system as a whole. In those moments, it's important for people advancing prison industrial complex abolitionist politics to think about strategies that do not extend the life or scope of the prison industrial complex (even accidentally). Before taking up a campaign or project, PIC abolitionists should ask themselves, does it build up the PIC's power; allow the PIC to gain control over more people, space, or resources; strengthen the PIC's legitimacy, or extend the PIC's ability to keep going? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, the project or campaign should be adjusted or abandoned.

**Building and eliminating.** Prison industrial complex abolition is always already a politics that advocates both destruction and construction. People who say things like, "but what are abolitionists for?" or "I support abolition, but we also need to build things" misunderstand the politics. Prison industrial complex abolitionists seek the elimination of the prison industrial complex because it poses the most substantial barriers to our abilities to develop healthy, self-determined ways of living. We cannot adequately create the conditions necessary for our best living conditions while those barriers remain, and we should not presume that we can just build our way out of our current situation. The prison industrial complex will not just wither away; we must eliminate it. Both building and elimination are essential parts of this political approach.

**Short-term to long-term.** Critics of prison industrial complex abolition sometimes suggest that abolitionists are not practical or do not take into consideration the present-day, real life suffering of the many people impacted by the harm created by the PIC. Many people who practice PIC abolitionist politics are directly motivated by this suffering and do not take it lightly (including the many currently and formerly imprisoned people who practice these politics). Because they take it so seriously, PIC abolitionists advocate to eliminate the harms rather than improve the system's ability to be harmful. PIC abolitionists must create short-term steps that do not compromise their long-term vision, but as decades of organizing has demonstrated, this is possible. That means securing releases of people from prison rather than making prison conditions "better;" or intervening in situations of interpersonal harm rather than advocating for changes in policing practices, for example.



# TIPS FOR FACILITATING TALK BACKS

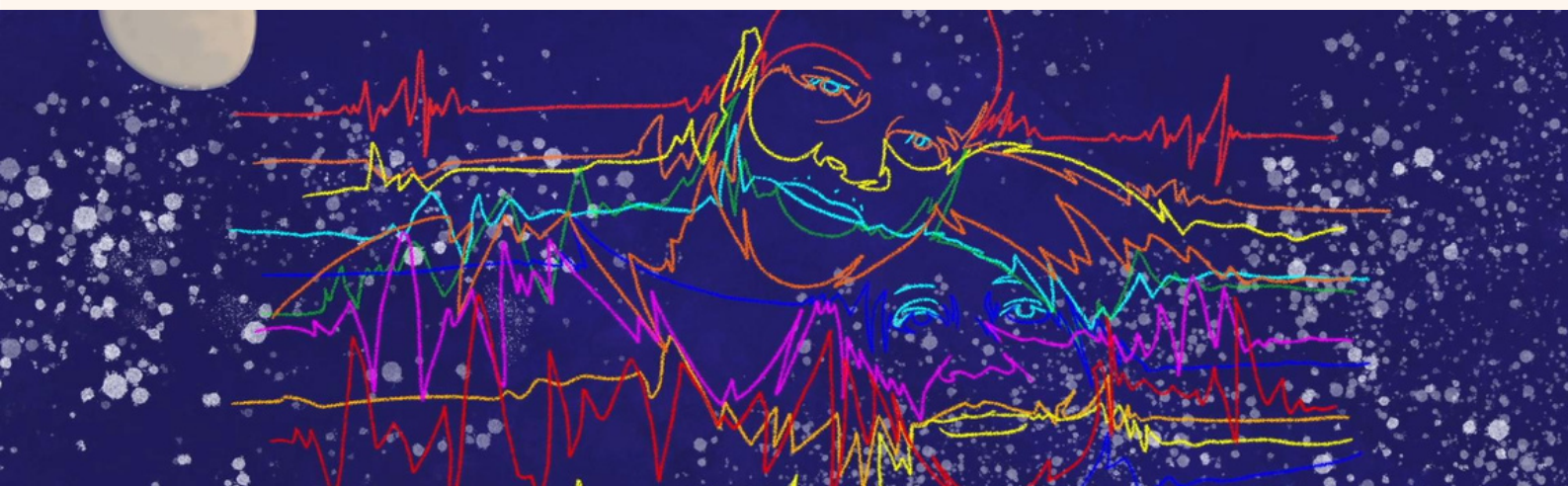
**1. Make a plan.** Before the session takes place, make sure that you have an idea of what you'd like to achieve (what are the goals of doing this talk back? what outcomes are you hoping for?) and how you want to try to achieve those goals. While that does not need to mean having every moment scripted, you should give yourself some direction. For instance, after the films are over, will you immediately solicit responses and questions from the audience? Will you provide an opportunity for filmmakers or abolition organizers to speak to the audience? Will you share how Beyond Walls connects to issues in your community? Are there some starter questions you'd like to begin with?

**2. Engage filmmakers and local organizers/activists.** Before the session, invite filmmakers featured in the films as well as local organizers and activists to participate in the session. Anyone you invite should be able to speak to the issues raised by the films and discuss opportunities to be involved in local organizing or activism.

**3. Prepare to ensure that audience members have opportunities to participate without anyone dominating the conversation.** You may need to manage the flow of conversation. During sessions such as these people with strong opinions or experiences may want to share. Those offerings can enrich the conversation a lot. They will be more useful if they are in conversation with ideas shared by others. A facilitator may be tempted to let someone with lived experience dominate the conversation out of respect, however, multiple perspectives will make the conversation more dynamic. Likewise, a person with strong opposition to abolitionist politics may want to pose a stream of challenges. Their challenges will be best engaged rather than let to pile up without any discussion. Also, supporting principled struggle is different from allowing arguing or fighting. Facilitating everyone's engagement can be challenging, but will be worth it.

**4. If you don't know the answer, don't pretend.** Feel free to admit it. If you don't know the answers to a question being asked from details about how the prison industrial complex works or how to make PIC abolitionist politics real, it's OK. Prison industrial complex abolition is a big goal and there are many ways to realize it. While you may not know exactly what to do, people are organizing to make the politics real today, so you can assure people that the best way to get started is to join an organization putting abolitionist politics to work.

**5. Have resources available for audience members to use after the session.** It's unlikely that all the audience's questions will be addressed in any one discussion. It may be helpful to have additional resources available that audience members could use for study and engagement after the event. Additionally, it is useful to highlight opportunities for audience members to support campaigns and projects being run by local groups. It's important for your audiences to have meaningful and accessible ways to get involved. We have included several resources on the Beyond Walls website that can be shared with audiences.



# DISCUSSION IDEAS

Whether you're hosting a panel discussion, Q&A with your audience, or dividing everyone up into break out groups to go over these topics, use the following ideas for questions to guide the conversations.

## Discussion Question Ideas for Panel Discussion:

1. Can you introduce yourself and share your initial thoughts and reactions after watching these films?
2. What is your connection to the issues discussed in these films? Tell us how you got involved in PIC abolition.
3. In the two short animations, *Defund the Police*, and *Practical Abolition*, both films demonstrate that investments in the PIC prevents investments in actual measures that keep communities safe. Can you share more on how the PIC creates major barriers to the kinds of safety we need to live?
4. In *What these Walls Wont Hold* and *Calls From Home*, both films demonstrate our deep need as humans to connect with each other and how building relationships can support resistance to the PIC. Can you share more on the importance of relationships and community to do this work?
5. Taken together, these films show how the PIC is impacting different communities nationwide - from the Bay Area to the mountains of rural Appalachia. Could you speak to the importance of coalition building in this movement between communities that may seem very different and far apart, but are all being impacted by the prison system in different ways??
6. What are local organizations doing about PIC abolition locally? What can audience members do to support their efforts? (or efforts generally if there is nothing local)

## Discussion Questions Ideas for Audiences (could be the entire audience or break-out groups depending on size and set-up):

1. What are your initial thoughts/reactions after watching these films? Ask them to use one word to describe their thoughts or feelings about the film.
2. Was there information in the films that was new to you? If so, what is your response to it?
3. Was there a moment or statement in the films that stood out or challenged your thinking in new ways?
4. Where do you get most of your ideas about policing, prisons, and courts?
5. Has anyone been affected by policing, or prisons, or surveillance, or courts & would you be willing to share your story?
6. What are some of the harms that you see *prisons* enacting in these films?
7. What are you missing in your community that you need more of? What are some barriers for people to live their most well and healthy lives? What problems do these barriers cause?
8. What are ways your community could create safety without involving the police or prisons?

If you have any questions about this guide or *Beyond Walls*, feel free to email Working Films at [info@workingfilms.org](mailto:info@workingfilms.org).

**THIS GUIDE IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF THE DEEP WISDOM AND INTENTION SHARED WITH US BY OUR ORGANIZATIONAL COLLABORATORS, AND THE MANY ONLINE RESOURCES CREATED BY PIC ABOLITIONISTS, THOSE WHO CONTRIBUTED INCLUDE: ALL OF US OR NONE, AMISTAD LAW PROJECT, CENTER FOR POLITICAL EDUCATION, CRITICAL RESISTANCE, FREE MUMIA MOVEMENT, INTERRUPTING CRIMINALIZATION, NO NEW JAILS NETWORK, UNCOMMON LAW, AND THE TEAMS BEHIND: WHAT THESE WALLS WONT HOLD, I'M FREE NOW YOU ARE FREE, DEFUND THE POLICE, PRACTICAL ABOLITION, & CALLS FROM HOME.**