Selections from [Critical Resistance Abolitionist Toolkit](http://criticalresistance.org/resources/the-abolitionist-toolkit/)

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Source: Critical Resistance

[**Definitions**](Definitions)

Prison Industrial Complex:

PIC is a term used to describe the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems. Through its reach and impact, *the PIC helps maintain the authority of people who get their power through racial, economic and other structural privileges*…The PIC is both a tool of the state – used to control people and maintain its own power – and a system used to legitimize the state by claiming that only it can create "safety" for people living under it.

Abolition:

PIC (Prison Industrial Complex) Abolition is a political vision that seeks to eliminate the need for prisons, policing, and surveillance by creating sustainable alternatives to punishment and imprisonment. From where we are now, sometimes we can't really imagine what abolition is going to look like. *Abolition isn't simply about getting rid of buildings full of cages (prisons and jails), but about undoing the society we live in* because the system we are working to end both feeds on and perpetuates structural oppression and inequalities through punishment, violence, and the control of literally millions of people. Because the prison industrial complex is not an isolated system, abolition is a broad strategy. Abolition is both a practical organizing tool and a long term goal.

Abolition vs. Reform:

The main difference is in ideals and long-term goals.
- Abolition = no PIC
- Reform = "Better" PIC

Abolitionists are not trying to improve the PIC, therefore strengthening it. We are trying to dismantle it and create alternatives to inhumane punishment conditions. There are times that the goals of abolitionists and reformists can intersect, such as education programs, but the ultimate goal for abolitionists is a future without cages.

The State = the government

The set of people who determine the laws and policies and decide whose interests are important. The PIC is a tool the state uses to control people, maintain its own power, and legitimize itself by creating the narrative that it is the only way to create "safety" in society. The power of the state is an outside force but also gets internalized in the minds of the people subject to it.

Race & Racism:

Race is a false category humans have created based on outer characteristics. It is a social construct not a scientific one. *Racism* is when this idea of race is used to separate people and determine whose lives are worthy. The concept of race is used as a basis for social inequities.

The creation of race and the formal uses of racism are at the core of the PIC. Prisons, policing, surveillance and other manifestations of the PIC are made possible by exploiting racial inequalities and strengthening the role of these inequalities in society.

Community (see also "collective," "collectivity"):

Communities are always being redefined by the people in them. They can be geographical or based on identity or situation, even something as small as a group of friends. Our ideas of community are groupings in which people are accountable to each other and, as an everyday practice, act on the principles of abolition to confront harm and create real safety. The goal is to respond to harm while avoiding state involvement as much as possible.

[7 steps to abolition work](#) (strategy)

1. Make sure that you don't settle for short term victories that reinforce the PIC in the long run.
2. Think about where you are working to undo the PIC.
3. Form coalitions with an awareness of others' goals that might not support abolition.
4. No to NIMBY (Not-in-my-backyard) campaigns. We are interested in no prisons anywhere not just in changing the locations.
5. Work toward building alternative institutions and practices that promote self-determination for individuals and communities.
6. Avoid perpetuating ideas of the PIC by using their words to describe people and situations. (Ex. Prisoner vs. inmate or criminal)
7. Consider the long-term goals and effects as well as the short-term of any project.

Questions to Ask Yourself when Working on Prison/Criminal Justice Issues:

- Does your work prioritize those most harmed by the PIC?
- Does your work refuse to make distinctions between "good" prisoners and "bad" prisoners?
- Does your work seek to make the PIC a less viable solution to problems?
- Are you working to help others understand the distinctions between reform, non-reformist reform, and abolition?
- Does your work reject any expansion of the PIC?
- Does your work suggest workable alternatives?
- Does your immediate work make future challenges to the PIC possible?

Connections to the PIC

Houselessness

- Houseless people's activities for basic survival (seeking shelter, food, etc.) are criminalized
- Lack of an address makes it hard to participate as a citizen (vote, receive benefits, apply for jobs)
- Having a criminal record, often for non-harmful activities like loitering, makes it harder to get housing or employment

Queer People and the PIC

- Queer youth often end up homeless to escape abusive environments
- Policing and surveillance target displays of affection by queers and often read transgender people as sex workers
- Prisoners are forced into *male* and *female* segregated spaces
- Prisoners taking hormones are often denied access to the hormones

Health Care and the PIC

- Tens of millions of people in the U.S. are without health insurance
- Insurance doesn't always ensure adequate or affordable care
- Health of houseless people is especially vulnerable
- Prisoners
  - Have trouble even getting access to a doctor
  - Have medicines kept from them or are not given them on the proper schedule
  - Increasingly being forced to pay for medical care
  - Not informed of positive tests for illnesses
  - Can face sexual abuse from doctors

Mental Health and the PIC

- Mental health problems are often a sign that other health needs are not being met. They can also be caused or exacerbated by poor living conditions, such as poverty and lack of options for social mobility.
- Mental Illness makes it more likely that people will come into contact with the PIC and in turn, prison makes mental illness worse.
- We must create individualized solutions and not punish people for their mental illness.
- Mental hospitals can use approaches similar to prison such as isolation, and are not a viable alternative, as they are currently structured.

School and the PIC

- We need to keep schools from supporting and maintaining the PIC.
- Discipline policies target students of color and reflect philosophies of punishment rather than accountability or empowerment.
- Standardized tests advantage certain demographics, therefore denying those who don't fit and labeling them as failures

Militarization

- We must challenge the idea that using military ideas and equipment builds safe communities.

Benefits and Rights

- People receiving benefits are at a greater risk of surveillance and harsh restrictions.
- Former prisoners can be denied benefits such as public housing and welfare, and the right to vote.

Environmental Racism

- Environmental safety regulations are not enforced when it only affects communities of color, including decisions made about land use that do not involve community input.
- Prison buildings themselves are environmental hazards and harmful to the communities where they are built.

Immigration

- Policies based on force, punishment, and racism
- Non-citizens and immigrants
    - Face surveillance and harassment by police as well as agencies that should be providing services
    - Can be deported for even minor offenses
    - Denied entry with no proof of wrongdoing
    - Can be held indefinitely with no proof or trial (2001 USA Patriot Act)

Policing

- Police pay attention to concerns of wealthy/white people and their property at the expense of poorer people and people of color
- Racial profiling = white supremacist harm
- Police can intimidate those who file complaints
- Civilian Review Boards are part of the government and just another tool of punishment

[Crime = Harm](#) (alternative practices)

- Alternative Practices
  - Are better for those who have harmed and those who were harmed
  - Emphasize personal and social transformation, accountability, equality, fairness, understanding, cooperation, sharing, solidarity, forgiveness.
- Transformative Justice - places the power to respond to harm in the hands of those harmed
- Crime is a word related to a system of laws. Harm can also be done by those in power and be completely legal.
- Understanding the root or social causes of harm helps to show the need for broad social change.
- Victims who want to heal are undesirable in our current system, as opposed to those wanting retribution. Victims who want to punish are more useful and therefore encouraged by the court system.

[Common sense](#) (How to talk to people where they're at)

- Show how in some ways, in some places, abolition is already common sense.
- Listen to people to find out where they are at. What do they already believe and what have they just never stopped to consider?
- Ask "What makes you feel safe?"
- Show how we work on a daily basis from the premise that punishment is harmful and ultimately ineffective.