

# IN THE BELLY

an abolitionist journal

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MAY 2020



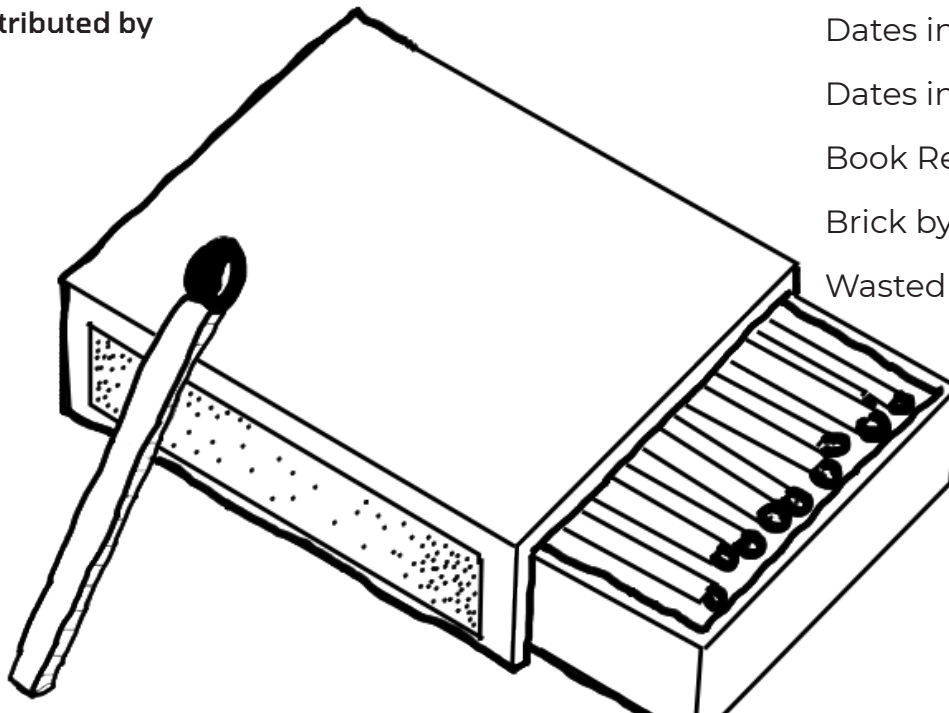
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# Welcome, Comrades

*In The Belly* is a journal by and for people who are held captive by the Prison-Industrial Complex. For people whose lives are impacted, determined, and overshadowed by punishment and incarceration daily: prisoners and their families, loved ones, friends, communities and comrades.

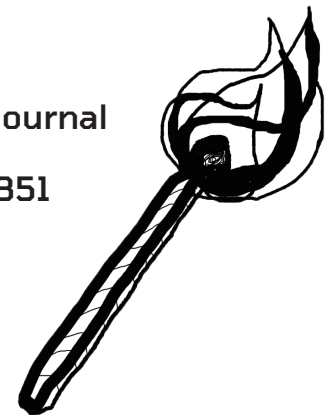
Our project is to strengthen the bonds between all of us to overcome the state's regime of isolation, to study and learn together, and to build a world without prisons. We want this to work like a kind of forum, a tool for facilitating discussion and a platform for mutual political education. Sometimes that will mean questions in one issue, and answers in the next. Principled disagreement. Call and response.

Subscription for incarcerated people is 100% free. Just write us to tell us you want to keep receiving *In The Belly*, and we'll keep sending it in. Money-wise, we are completely sustained by outside supporters' donations.

We hope you'll read it. We hope you'll go farther and talk about it, share it, copy it, and mark it up. Lend it out, read it again. And we hope you'll write in it. We encourage all our incarcerated readers to send in their writing, and tell us what you want to see develop, grow, and change.

Send submissions, art, poems, articles, reflections, ramblings and questions, comments, and feedback to the address below. Be sure to tell us whether you want what you send to be published, and if so, what name you would like to publish under. All the artwork will have to appear in black and white, for now. We hope to hear from you soon.

**In The Belly Journal**  
**PO Box 67**  
**Ithaca, NY 14851**



# Why this? Why now?

by Stephen Wilson

Sometimes, a crisis can become an impetus, a reason to do what should have been done a long time ago. At the onset of COVID19 in the United States, many of us in the penal abolition movement realized that we lacked the means to keep each other informed and to stay connected. We needed a way everyone, imprisoned folk and their outside allies, could connect and learn. While lots of information is available online, prisoners cannot access it. We cannot participate in social media like those outside the walls. We need print publications to stay informed and connected to those outside. We need print publications to participate in conversations about prisons, policing, incarceration and strategies that actually produce safety and justice.

As Rachel Herzing said, "I think there is, what I would call, an over reliance on social media which has meant that a lot of people are just left out... There are many people living in cages who don't have access to social media. And even those who do, they might not have access to it in the same real time that people living outside cages do... So there are potentially millions of people who don't have a voice in the conversation."

Print publications facilitate the flow of information in between imprisoned folk and between imprisoned and their outside allies. It's important that we are part of the conversation, that we dialogue with each other and our supporters. Such dialogues are central to our organizing strategies and ultimate goal. Print publications enable us to have collective dialogues about what we want our movement to be about and to create space for everyone seeking liberation. Print publications collapse the distance between us.

These cages were constructed to divide and isolate. We cannot tear them down alone. We have to cre-

ate spaces, where we can come together and learn, study, discuss, debate, strategize and assess. Mariame Kaba said, "I don't think you can work on your own. There's definitely no way to dismantle the systems we're trying to dismantle on our own. That's first and foremost." We need each other to learn, to grow, to win. Audre Lorde said, "Without community, there is no liberation."

We have to build forwards together, as imprisoned folk, formerly imprisoned folk, families and friends of imprisoned and formerly imprisoned folk, allies, accomplices and supporters. We need spaces to develop different perspectives and educate each other. We need to have conversations, but they must be inclusive. So much of what is written about prisons, policing and incarceration is inaccessible to prisoners. It is riddled with so much jargon that there is no way for most prisoners to enter the texts. It wasn't written with imprisoned folk in mind.

We need material that is understandable and compelling. We need works that speak directly to those most impacted and their daily problems. That work can be intellectually rigorous, well-researched, and still accessible to mass audiences. We need print publications. Without them, we cannot learn, change or connect. Before we can dismantle the system and bring about a world without cages, we must learn to build with each other right where we are.

Prison is a place of separation, alienation and division. Administrators and officers often play off prisoners' differences to keep us separated. Sadly, many of us fall for the divide and conquer tactic. It takes work and study to be able to recognize the set of practices used by the state to maintain control. It takes work and study to be able to understand, disrupt, and dismantle the PIC. We need political education. Political education will provide us with useful tools of analysis. By study, I am referring to what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney write about in their book *The Undercommons*: "Study is the relation to other people that happens when we're

we're building something of our own, or at least something that isn't planned for or provided in the institution."

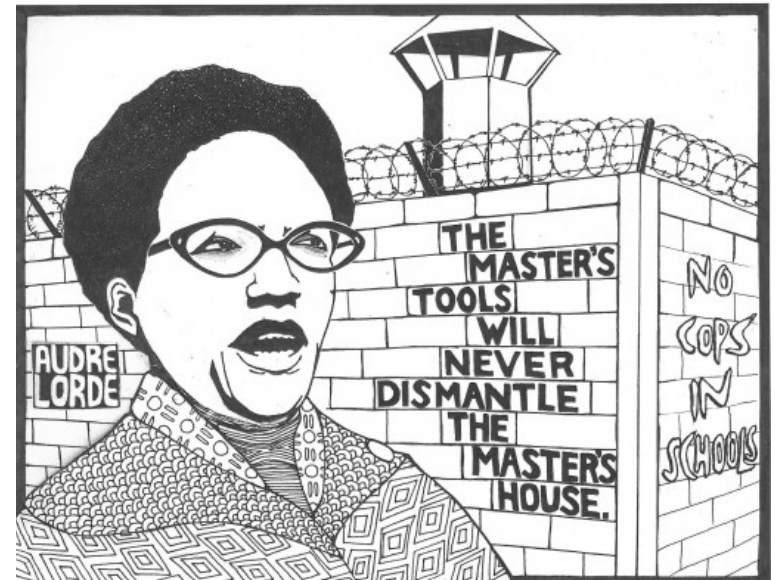
That something that isn't being provided is political education: the knowledge that helps a person to understand the whys and hows of their life. It is consciousness-raising knowledge that once obtained, empowers one to change one's life and one's world. It is important that we understand power, how it has been and is being used against us. It is imperative that we learn to see the world in newly critical and imaginative ways. Like Frank Wilderson said, "It's a revolutionary idea just to create the space to deal with this stuff."

It's work. It will require time, energy and patience. We have a lot to unlearn. Robin D. G. Kelley said, "People don't come to the movement intellectual blank slates, but loaded down with cultural and ideological baggage molded by their race, class, gender, work, community, religion, history, upbringing and collective memory." The work we do, the studying, teaching, advocating and attempts at institutional change, expose and chip away the lies that prop up and undergird oppressive systems. Our learning and teaching are intentional interventions in the systems the PIC depends upon to survive.

Frank Wilderson said, "We must provide ourselves with an 'intramural context' in which we can discuss our issues." It is my hope and intention that *In The Belly* is that intramural context. It is my hope that through its pages, we connect with each other and build a stronger, more inclusive movement. It is my hope that in it, we will have constructive dialogues and conversations about who we are and what we want. It is my hope that *In The Belly* challenges us to broaden our definitions of justice, community and freedom. I hope its pages provide us with tools we can use to grow study groups across this world, inside and outside the walls. I hope its pages provide us the sustenance to keep moving forward together. In struggle, Stevie.

## ***Freedom is a habit.*** – Kuwasi Balagoon

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Do you know who made this? Let us know!

# What is Abolition?

by I.J.

We are abolitionists, working to build a world without prisons, police, punishment and confinement. At first, this sounds scary to a lot of people. That's probably because people actually have a pretty good sense of what that would take. In order for our society to not have prisons, we will need major changes. For one, we will need to actually deal with harm, which is different from crime.

We experience harm in many different ways. There's interpersonal harm, which is most of what our current system claims to deal with (even though it fails). Acts like murder, sexual assault, and robbery. But there's also poverty, structural racism, and exploitation. There are deadly drone attacks, sanctions that starve and kill people in Iran and Venezuela, and there is the toxic water in Flint, Michigan. For most of us, paying rent is a form of harm, but we can't call the cops on our landlord for charging us to live. We can't even call the cops on our landlords when they won't fix the sink.

As abolitionists, we say that the current system, which they call "the criminal justice" system, produces more harm than it prevents, and offers zero justice. It is based on prisons, punishment, probation, police, and private property. These institutions, along with a bunch of private companies that sell them goods and services, make up the Prison-Industrial Complex, or the "PIC." We don't believe the system is broken, needing to be fixed. We believe this system is working exactly as it is supposed to: as an oppressive, violent regime that upholds white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy. People have been reforming the PIC for centuries - what we have to do is abolish it.

The PIC emerges from colonialism, slavery, and union busting. As an extension of colonialism and slavery, the PIC disproportionately harms Black, Brown and Indigenous people. As an agent of strike-break

ing and union busting, the PIC, and especially policing, enforces a strict and violent social order that keeps us divided, alienated from each other, and unable to unite against all the forms of oppression we face. Through all of this runs gendered violence - women, queer and trans people experience specific harms and injustices on top of the rest. Abolition is a project to destroy these systems of oppression and replace them with something new. Or maybe many things new.

We're not promising a world without harm. People hurt each other, and that won't change. But why do we all just accept that the appropriate response to harm is more harm, administered by the state? What experience from our own lives tells us that locking someone up is the best way to help them, or the person they may have hurt? Why are we so quick to call the cops on each other? These are big questions, and abolition is a massive project that is nothing less than a total and revolutionary re-ordering of society. But it is also based on things we do for each other every single day. When we don't call the cops, we're doing abolition. We do it when we hurt someone, when we actually make it up to them and regain their trust, and when we give someone the chance to regain our trust. We do abolition, when we show solidarity by sharing some of what's ours, or by taking a risk for a friend.

On a broader scale, we do abolition by weakening the PIC in any way we can. That can mean fighting to abolish mandatory minimum sentences, putting an end to the practice of re-incarcerating people for parole violations, and building neighborhood councils that resolve conflicts without cops. A lot of abolition can look like what reformers do. But the difference is that reformers think that we can fix these problems and have a fair, non-racist criminal justice system. We say that's impossible - the whole thing has to be torn up, root and stem. So when we push for reforms, we push for reforms that weaken the system rather than strengthen and legitimize it. Fellow abolitionist and comrade Ruth Wilson Gilmore

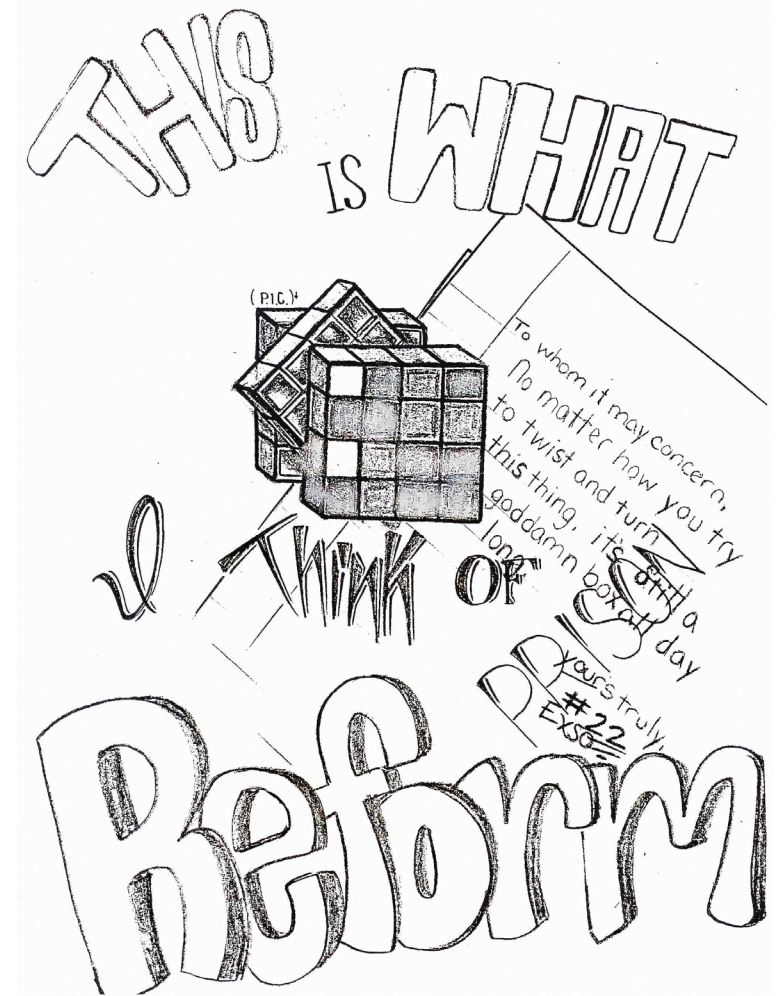
calls these “non-reformist reforms.” For example, building new jails to deal with overcrowding is a reformist reform - it ensures another century of jailing people. A non-reformist reform would be something like decarcerating and shrinking jail populations by funding communities and decriminalizing sex work, drugs, and homelessness. It won't get us full abolition this year, but it pushes us that much closer.

Most importantly, abolition means cultivating community inside, and building strong connections between inside and outside. This movement has always been, and will always be led by currently and formerly imprisoned people. We keep that going with study groups, political education, mutual aid, letter-writing, and personal relationships based on trust and solidarity. It is our hope that this journal is doing the work of abolition.

So what is abolition? Ruth Wilson Gilmore says that abolition is usually thought of as absence - no more jails, no prisons, and no cops - but what it's really about is presence. What do we want to build together that will make prisons, jails, cops and landlords obsolete? What kind of world do we want? These might seem like lofty questions, but they are important for us to think about as we organize. As we struggle, study, and build community together, the answer to this question - What is Abolition? - will evolve and grow. And when we remember that every single empire, every single social order, and every economic system that humans have ever made has come to an end, we can start to think of abolition as not only possible, but necessary.

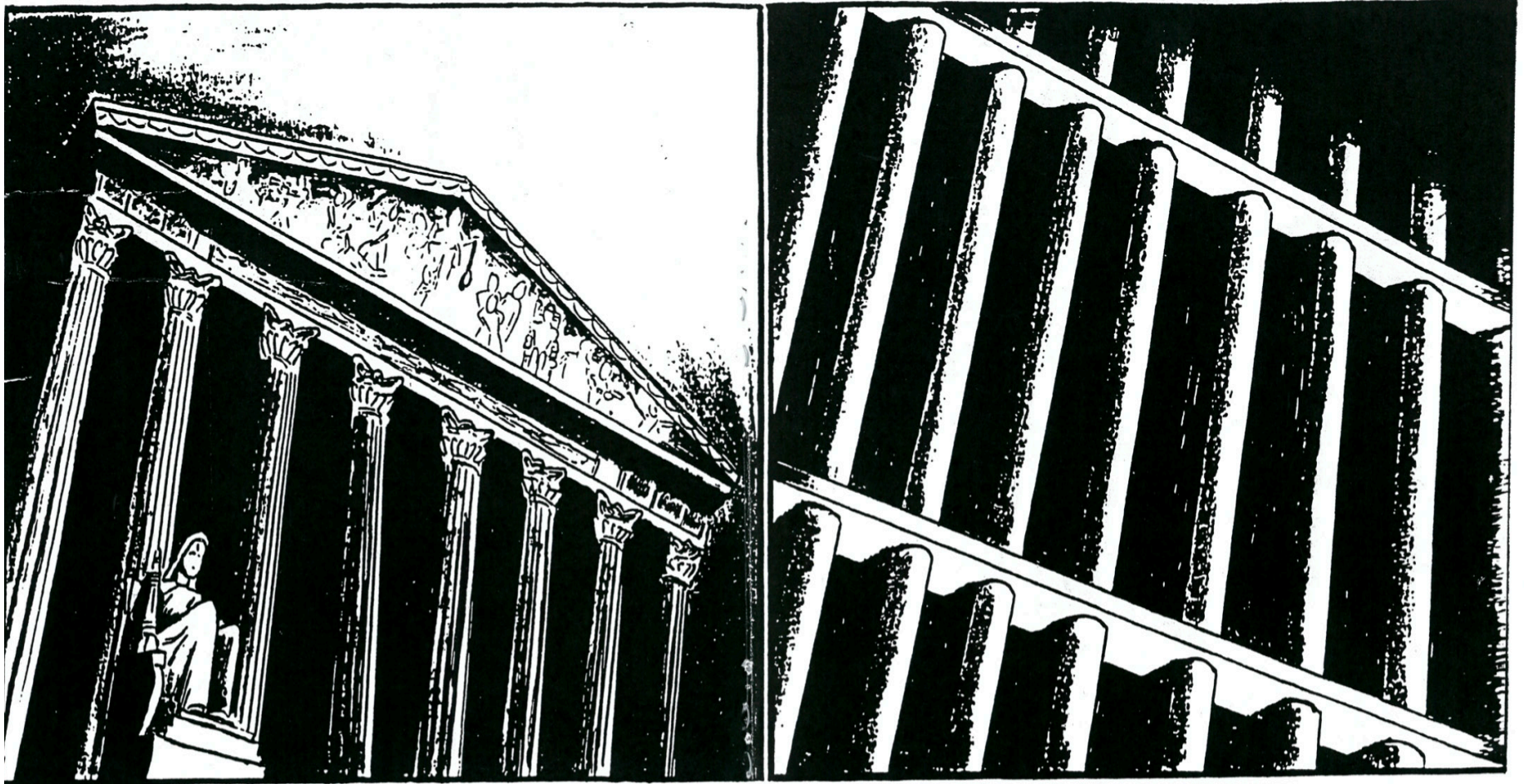
**What does abolition mean to you? Tell us in a few words, paragraphs, poetry or art!**

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Artwork by #22 EXSO

Artwork by Todd Hyung-Rae Tarselli



**IN JUST US**

# The Yard

by Stephen Wilson

Before,  
a call would come,  
a bell screeching through  
the mumble thick air.  
And we'd flow to the yard,  
cursing the sun  
that beat down upon us.  
We'd walk the perimeter  
of the ankle-high grass,  
eyeing the full-court game  
or the handball contest,  
envying the few who made it out first  
to the two or three shadows  
that could protect us.  
But that was then.  
Now,  
there's no call,  
just a steel-mesh ceiling  
and four long,  
corpse-gray,  
soul-collapsing  
concrete walls.  
20' x 40'

A box called a yard.  
As we watch the three-on-three game,  
in the cold, angulated shadows,  
the memory of grass licking our ankles,  
achingly flows through our minds.  
And we curse the sun  
that used to beat down upon us.  
The Hell of Memory  
We have rehabbed the dead,  
manufactured meaning & heroes  
from frail illusions.  
Our uncelebrated lives lost,  
crashed upon the reefs of experience.  
Unmendably broken.  
Lesson:  
We cannot unlearn the old silences,  
the hell of memory.  
That invincible maniac,  
its brutalizing smile  
and nerve-jangling laughter lashes us,  
as we struggle against time  
in a land with no clocks.

# Abolition in Action: Demands in the Covid-19 Crisis

Across the world, prisoners are fighting for survival and protections against the virus. Here are some demands from prisoners behind the wall in the USA:

## Strike at Rikers, NY (reprint from poster)

As of March 22nd, 2020, two dorms of 45 inmates at Rikers are refusing to leave our dorms for work duties or for meals.

We take these actions in protest of:

- The lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies provided to inmates.
- The crowded living conditions imposed on us prior to the pandemic and made worse by the daily addition of new inmates from other facilities some of which are highly likely to have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus.
- The arbitrary disconnection of our phones for three hours on the morning of Sunday March 22nd, 2020.

We demand the same calls issued by the Board of Corrections, that all inmates:

- Over 50
- With parole violations
- At high risk due to health conditions
- With less than a year of sentenced time

BE IMMEDIATELY RELEASED.

We do this in solidarity with the striking prisoners of Hudson County.

## Demands from Pennsylvania

1. Release prisoners, especially those with compromised immune systems and the elderly (over 50). Also, we hold that all pretrial detainees who have been entered into bail should be released. They are being held due to poverty. Lastly, those with clemency and parole petitions should have their decisions and releases expedited. Healthcare

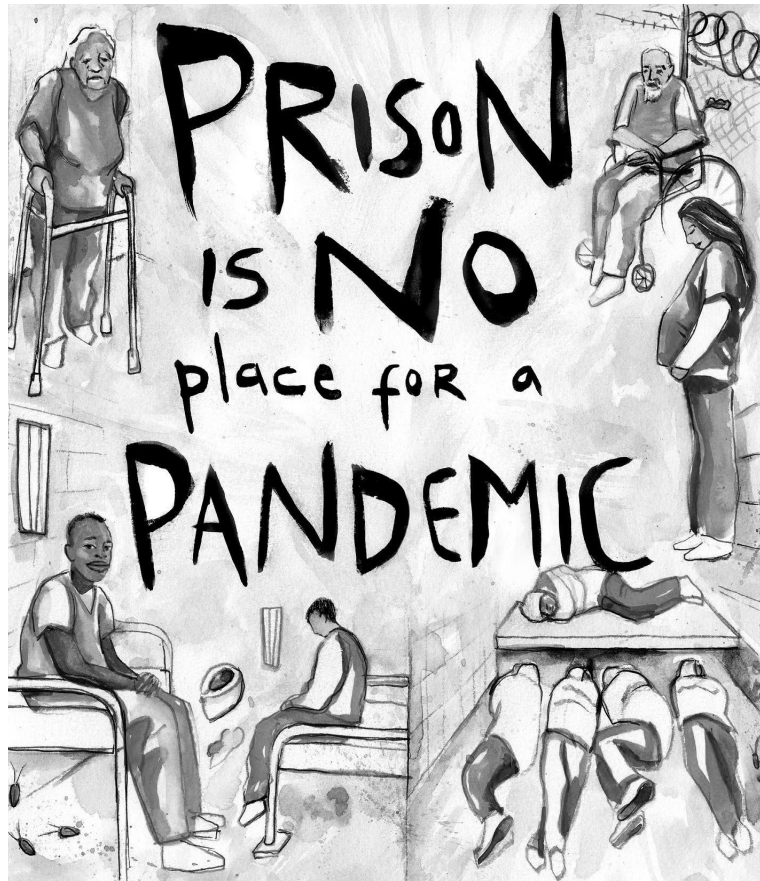
inside is notoriously negligent. While all of us are vulnerable, certain populations face more vulnerability. They should be prioritized for release.

2. Prevention measures should be taken that mitigate the chances of prisoner becoming infected. Most important, the DOC needs to enact measures that protect prisoners from being infected by their employees. The only way we will become infected is if the staff brings COVID19 inside. Proactive steps need to be taken to diminish, if not to eliminate, the chances of this occurring. Currently, little is being done to prevent DOC staff from infecting prisoners.

## Demands from Inside Injustice

Prisons, jails, and detention centers across Amerikka are the epicenter of state-sanctioned violence and death. Covid-19 only makes clear to outsiders what we inside have always known: the state is cruelly indifferent to injustice inside and the mass death of prisoners. The only real solution is to burn the prisons. Immediately, we demand:

1. The release and resourcing of all those locked up, beginning with those most vulnerable to infection and those near their release dates.
2. Free communication (phone calls, emails, and video calls) with loved ones outside.
3. Free soap and cleaning supplies for all prisoners distributed twice a week.
4. Mandatory masks, gloves, and testing for COs.
5. Free masks, gloves, and testing for all prisoners coming into contact with COs and civilian prison staff.
6. Weekly access to canteen, commissary, and package rooms.
7. Daily access to showers, the yard, recreation time, and the law library of no less than three hours.
8. An end to forced labor, aka prison slavery.
9. An end to solitary confinement, especially to quarantine sick or presumptively sick prisoners.



*Artwork by Micah Bazant,  
courtesy of the Brennan Center*

## **Release People from Jail to Prevent Coronavirus Catastrophe Behind Bars**

Reprint from *Shadowproof*, by Jose Saldana, Komrade Z,  
and Nadja Guyot

COVID-19, the novel coronavirus spreading across the globe, exposes the dangers of the U.S.'s eroded and underfunded safety net.

Inadequate public health infrastructure and a lack of access to health care, paid sick leave, and basic material needs leave us woefully unprepared to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and care for people who get sick in our communities.

But the threat to people incarcerated in jails, prisons, and detention centers across the United States is even greater.

The coronavirus crisis compounds the health crisis that incarcerated people across the country face every day, some for years and decades. This is especially true for elderly incarcerated men and women, who face heightened risk of death and injury from the virus.

For example, over 675 elderly incarcerated people have died in New York State prisons alone since 2011. The vast majority are people of color and the average age at death is 58 years old. This is a human crisis hidden behind prison walls.

People who are hyper-policed and disproportionately incarcerated—Black and brown working-class people, people who use drugs, homeless people, trans and gender nonconforming people, people with disabilities, and people with mental illness—come from communities most impacted by chronic illness and lack of access to medical care prior to being incarcerated.

Health services in jails may be a person's first contact with medical personnel and where they first receive diagnoses. Once incarcerated, jails,

prisons, and detention centers expose people to incarceration-specific health risks, exacerbating existing health conditions and provoking new ones.

While infectious diseases—from legionnaires disease to chickenpox, tuberculosis to scabies—circulate rapidly and regularly through correctional institutions, prisons are more concerned with maintaining order than ensuring health.

Prison staff minimize serious illness, deter incarcerated people from raising health concerns, neglect to take them to medical appointments, berate and punish them for being sick, and retaliate against them by withholding care. Health care co-pays make accessing healthcare nearly impossible, especially at the average wage for prison labor of 14 cents an hour.

In Florida, incarcerated people say when an infectious disease has been detected, physicians become agents of punishment, stripping incarcerated people of their clothes and belongings and quarantining them in crowded cells with other sick people.

Under non-pandemic conditions, incarceration makes already-sick people sicker and makes healthy people less healthy. Jails, prisons, and detention centers are notoriously deadly in their lack of medical care. Medical services are set up not to provide care but to guard against “costly” utilization and lawsuits.

Fundamentally, the physical facts of confinement—restricted movement, overcrowding, lack of access to sunlight and healthy food, and the severing of family and community ties—increase incarcerated people’s vulnerability to illness and reduce their capacity to fight infection.

COVID-19 and other recent crises bring these failures into dramatic and devastating relief. In 2019, for example, as Justice Department lawyers argued in front of the Supreme Court that access to soap wasn’t mandated by law, mumps rocketed through immigration detention centers across Texas. And incarcerated people are rou-

tinely left at the mercy of hurricanes and other dangerous weather conditions, even as they fill sandbags and fight fires to protect communities outside the prison walls.

So it should come as no surprise that jails and prisons across the country are woefully unprepared to protect incarcerated people from the unique threats posed by coronavirus.

There is currently no soap in the Metropolitan Detention Center, the federal jail in Sunset Park, Brooklyn that just last year was without heat, hot water, electricity, and medical care during the coldest days of winter. Hand sanitizer is contraband for incarcerated people in many jurisdictions (even as prison labor is being deployed to produce it) because it contains alcohol. In Florida, cleaning supplies like bleach are contraband and incarcerated people can be punished for possession.

Instead of prioritizing expanding access to coronavirus testing and comprehensive and humane medical care, jails, prisons, and detention centers are likely to rely on restricting family visits, putting potentially-infected people in “medical keep-lock,” solitary confinement, and facility-wide lockdowns to ostensibly prevent the disease’s spread.

This is not healthcare, it is punishment, and it will increase incarcerated people’s vulnerability to illness, mental health distress, and suicide.

COVID-19’s impact on the elderly, who are already suffering from serious age-related chronic ailments, will be devastating. And people who are already housed separately (and inadequately) for serious health issues will be further marginalized, treated as second-class people in a third-class world, even as they will likely be the first to feel the effects of the coronavirus.

Prison clinics have demonstrated time and again that they will fail to provide adequate care to growing numbers of sick people as privatized health care services cut costs on regular medical needs.

Fortunately, the public health evidence is clear.

If incarcerating people is bad for individual and community health and increases health disparities of race, class, ability, gender, and national origin, keeping people out of jail, prison, and immigration detention and releasing people who are currently confined is good for our health and safety.

In response to the threat to incarcerated people posed by coronavirus, local, state, and federal jurisdictions must use their powers, including pardon and clemency, to release people now, beginning with elderly, ill, immunocompromised, and pregnant people.

Jurisdictions also must seize this moment to reduce “jail churn”—the rate at which people cycle through local jails exacerbating the spread of illness—by reducing arrests, declining prosecution, decriminalizing conduct, eliminating pretrial detention, and releasing people to fight their cases from home. Providing life’s necessities instead of criminalizing survival strategies will help, too.

By pursuing a strategy of radical decarceration we can divest from the jails and prisons that are making our communities sick and sicker, and invest in community-based, humane, and dignified healthcare for all, in the face of COVID-19 and beyond.

## **My Mind Today in Solitary**

by Indy

**PREJUDICE** comes from Fear and a lack of understanding, and life takes a toll as it’s truly demanding.

**DISCRIMINATION** has been around since the beginning of time. We must stand strong, Together, in this great divide.

**HATE** is bred from envy and a non sexual lust. They wish to be us so bad they can’t adjust.

**OPPRESSION** happens because we are all unique and different. We are **BOLD & BEAUTIFUL**. We Must make a difference.

**HOPE** is the potion that keeps us alive. Believe to succeed and we will survive.

**LOVE** by itself is potent and pure, the only thing in this world that is certain to cure.

**HAPPINESS** is a source within our **SELF**, put your worries and inhibitions away on a shelf.

**LIFE** is what u make it at the end of the day. I choose to live my life **OUT!!!HAPPY &GAY(Bi)!!**

# Apparitional Encounters

by C. R. G.

*The [prison] regime breaks some, physically exterminates others. An uncounted many...awaken a new and incorrigible political fantasy, which continuously haunts civil society and its resident nonimprisoned activists and intellectuals.*

- Dylan Rodríguez,  
*Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals  
and the U.S. Prison Regime, (2006)*  
referencing his correspondence with Hugo Yogi Pinell

Almost every day I speak with a friend, loved one, or political acquaintance who is imprisoned. Mostly organizers I'm collaborating with on projects. Some days more than once. Some days I speak with multiple people locked up. People I sincerely and truly care about. Whether by phone or letter or email, I do it on principle. Everyday contact is made with someone. I've been doing this for the past year with increasing consistency. I'm not paid to do this. It is part of my praxis & a process of what can only inadequately be called solidarity.

I'm trying to think about the language [we/i] use to describe the unique presence in my life of co-organizers and friends more generally who are locked up. That is, their "absent" presence, or rather their present absence, in the moments when we are not communicating. When the phone hangs up. When the jPay or ConnectNet emails take days to process. In the moments when I am incapacitated or unable to reach people. Their presence remains, in my mind, always, in my body-memory and lifeworld. In the spaces between contact and communication. In the ebb, pause, and break. They never fully leave me, and what I'm realizing is neither I them. An unbreakable intimacy, a political kinship and communalism amidst unspeakable asymmetries.

There is transformation—both personal and communal—in the unfolding of such relationships

that makes this sociality something more significant to interrogate than considering it mere "correspondence." There is a transformative element to it. More significant to acknowledge may be the processes of transformation that occur in the void between the structurally-fleeting instances of momentary connection which define correspondence across prison walls.

Avery Gordon writes in her study of haunting as material social phenomena: "Transformation means something distinct from resistance...It is the precarious but motivated transition from being troubled, often inexplicably or by repetitively stuck explanations, to doing something else." Thinking about "haunting" as a concept gets me closer to thinking about this situation. The circumstances and the affective register of it all.

The longer I do this work, the more I have come to realize that it is an apparitional encounter—with the absent-presence of some of my best friends and accomplices held in bondage by the United States—that motivates and compels me to continue to fight as often as this encounter, quite always actually, serves to reinscribe the isolation, the trauma, the pain, and the deprivation that defines state captivity, bodily disintegration, and community disorganization.

Although I still am not satisfied with it, "haunting" as a concept nevertheless gets me closer to describing the structure of feeling (or something more?) at play here, despite its negative connotation in the public imaginary and characteristic, symptomatic fear.

In the intensely present absence of imprisoned comrades, in the moments when conditions of disappearance become most stark and real, how does this sociality and feeling of collectivity remain potent or in tact for the non-imprisoned?

Albeit mostly invisible, albeit asymmetrically experienced, what does this look like on both ends of the relation that is in lay terms described through the dichotomy of "inside/outside"?

The question of absent presence can also be posed inversely regarding the captive-imprisoned.

I experience the world from a position of social life, of relative bodily freedom and mobility as non-imprisoned and outwardly cis-gendered and white, while my imprisoned comrades [live] in systematically enforced civil/social death. Literal not just figurative/metaphorical social death.

As a structure of feeling, how can meditating on the apparitional presence of the absent imprisoned activist (in what are often distended moments disappearance from the field of social visibility) and its living effects, give rationale and imperative, new affective drives and psychic registers, or create the possibility and circumstances for its own undoing?

How do such encounters force us to reckon with, or in the best case, participate in the precarious but motivated transition from being troubled, often inexplicably or by repetitively stuck explanations, to doing something else?

To be clear, I'm not trying to normalize the carceral regime that keeps us torn apart; but rather, in the midst of organizing, fighting, and daily waging counter-warfare against criminalization and imprisonment, what are the forms of sociality—and in my case as in maybe yours: radical political community—that we (differences in positionality considered) are the collective authors and producers of across prison walls?

I'm being careful to parse out the operative aspects here for many reasons. But whatever it may be, such encounters with the present absence of my incarcerated loved ones', and its lingering effectivity, is what compels and paradoxically nourishes me. It is such encounters that drive my madness (the violent fluctuation and instability of my lived mental health, my sorrow and grief and range of anxieties) yet simultaneously orient me towards a horizon of struggle not yet fully articulated.

"This is a pre-paid called from [first name, last name for C.R.G.]..." is engrained by scolding hot iron in my psyche.

As much as a haunting that pains me to no end

it is the very stuff that moves me to change things. One of the many sources of my compulsive commitments to abolitionist praxis. I wonder for how many others this sentiment resonates.

In their absence. During lapses in communication. In the midst of aspirational, apparitional longing for connection. How do I encounter the ghostly presence that remains of an imprisoned loved-one? How do I do this? How do I make space for it? How do I generalize its collective, social expression in ways that rupture open historical processes? In ways that cut against the grain of petty bourgeois fatalism. In ways that reorient human geography. In ways that galvanize mass struggle in the direction of abolition.

[we/i] need abolition now.

NO  
MATTER  
HOW LONG IT TAKES,  
REAL CHANGES WILL COME,  
AND THE GREATEST PERSONAL REWARD  
LIES IN OUR INVOLVEMENT AND CONTRIBUTIONS,  
EVEN IF IT MAY APPEAR THAT NOTHING SIGNIFICANT  
OR OF IMPACT REALLY HAPPENED  
DURING OUR TIMES  
BUT IT DID  
BECAUSE  
EVERY SINCERE EFFORT  
IS AS SPECIAL AS EVERY HUMAN LIFE.  
- HUGO PINELL

---

January 22

"Well said comrade!!!

I will meditate on this further, but for the time being.....

Comrade George once said: 'WE MUST PROVE THAT PRISONS DON'T WORK'. Meaning while this Gestapo Police State aim to destroy, dehumanize, and break us via their sadistic tactics, we must constantly struggle towards rebuilding/redeeming ourselves and thus our communities.

This entails forging relations (human bridges) with such beautiful human beings as yourself, and doing this relative to our struggle of eradicating prisons altogether.

This has been the impetus towards our connectedness & we have managed to continue building from here via our work with/in the W.L. NOLEN MENTORSHIP PROGRAM. For example, we haven't communicated in days, but my first concerns expressed to you was concerning your well being.

This is what camaraderie entails. It's about a communalism relative to humanity.

REVOLUTIONARY LOVE,  
Kijana Tashiri Askari (of the W.L. Nolen Mentorship Program)"

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"Dear C R G,

I have always thought or imagined prisoners as ghosts.

Our families are left with the presence of an absence when we're imprisoned. Our lives are spoken about in the past tense, like the dead. When we are acknowledged in the present tense, reference is always made to our social/civil death: he or she is locked up. We are not seen, but the remnants of our lives are visible. Our families and friends have to explain to others why they see pictures of us but we're never around or rarely mentioned.

People are told to let us go, to go in living without us, but they find it hard to shake our ghosts. Our loved ones are often shamed for loving a dead person. They are told that living means forgetting us.

I often feel haunted by dead friends, lost to HIV and

violence. I feel indebted. I cannot shake their ghosts. I don't know if I want to. They motivate me. Being haunted is a part of my praxis, my world view.

I was intrigued by your comments regarding "the void between structurally fleeting instances of momentary connection"... This in fact is where the work is processed. This is where we synthesize info. We enter this void to do the work. We leave it to connect again, sharing what we've learned and experienced. Then we enter it again. I know I do.

Always,  
Stevie (of Dreaming Freedom, Practicing Abolition)"



Do you know who made this? Let us know!

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# 23 Hours

by Sarah Torres

*Dedicated to participants of the '11 and '13  
California prisoner hunger strikes*

23 hours here I am  
7 by 11, barely room to stand

I try to think of you every day, try to see your  
face.  
In a room full of gray, time is starting to erase

23 hours here I am  
Only touch I feel is from a guard's glove-cov-  
ered hand

It's been so long since I've felt the sun on my  
skin  
Fear I'm losing my mind

They are trying to win,

trying to bring me down.

Look to the day when I'll see the sun rise  
Feel the rain drops falling from the sky

Hold your hand,  
feel your embrace  
Tell you a funny story

See that smile on your face, smile in your eyes

Stand together—  
Inside and outside, it's up to us all

Stand together—  
Please hear our call

Stand together—  
Break through these prison walls  
Stand together—  
There's no time to...

# Dates in Radical History:

## May

**May 01** May Day! The first day of May is International Worker's Day, a holiday celebrating working and poor people and the struggle against capitalism and oppression. It also commemorates the Haymarket Massacre of 1886, which came 3 days later.

**May 02 1973** Assata Shakur is arrested, Zayd Malik Shakur is murdered by police.

**May 04 1886** The Haymarket Massacre: At a demonstration in Chicago to demand that the working day be shortened to 8 hours, the cops tried to disburse the crowd violently. Someone - no one knows who - attacked the cops. A bunch of people were killed as the cops opened fire. Afterward, 8 anarchists were convicted of murder with no evidence. Their names were: Albert Parsons, August Spies, Samuel Fielden, Oscar Neebe, Michael Schwab, George Engel, Adolph Fischer and Louis Lingg. Parsons, Spies, Engel and Fisher were hanged, and Lingg took his own life. The remaining three were pardoned 6 years later.

**May 04 1973** Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army member Sundiata Acoli arrested.

**May 05 1818** Karl Marx is born.

**May 05 1981** Irish Republic Army leader Bobby Sands dies on hunger strike.

**May 09 1800** John Brown, slavery abolitionist and leader of the Raid on Harper's Ferry, is born.

**May 19 1925** Malcolm X is born.

**May 12 1916** Irish Republican Army leader James Connolly executed for leading the failed revolutionary Easter Rising against Britain.

**May 13 1985** Philly police bomb the MOVE home from a helicopter, murdering 11 people and incinerating a city block.

**May 15** Nakba Day: The day Palestinians mark the invasion of their ancestral lands by the settler colonial State of Israel.

**May 17 2017** Chelsea Manning freed after 7 years' incarceration. Chelsea has just been freed again after she was jailed for refusing to snitch.

**May 19 1890** Ho Chi Minh is born.

**May 20 1743** Toussaint L'Ouverture, hero of the Haitian Revolution, is born.

**May 23 1838** Beginning of the "trail of tears," the murderous removal of Cherokee people from their ancestral lands that is ongoing today.

# Dates in Radical History: June

**June 01  
1977** Indigenous rights fighter and member of the American Indian Movement Leonard Peltier is given two life sentences for the deaths of FBI agents at a shootout at Pine Ridge Reservation.

**June 01  
1975** The George Jackson Brigade attacks DOC headquarters in Seattle, Washington.

**June 02  
1863** Harriet Tubman leads the Combahee River Raid, helping more than 700 enslaved people to freedom.

**June 04  
1972** After more than a year in jail, abolitionist Angela Davis is acquitted of kidnapping and murder charges.

**June 07  
1954** The Guatemalan government is overthrown by the CIA.

**June 10  
1997** After 27 years in prison, Black Panther Party member Geronimo Ji-Jaga is released.

**June 12  
2016** Anti-LGBTQ shooter murders 49 people and leaves 58 wounded at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. This is the deadliest attack on LGBTQ people in USA's history.

**June 13  
1983** The Prison abolitionist journal Bulldozer is raided by cops in Toronto.

**June 16  
1971** Tupac Shakur is born.

**June 16  
1976** 700 students are killed in the Soweto massacre during an uprising against apartheid in South Africa.

**June 19** Juneteenth! This day marks the legal end to slavery in the USA, and many people were freed. In reality however, slavery continued because this proclamation only applied to former confederate states, and because the proclamation was casually enforced and made exceptions for criminalized people.

**June 26  
1975** Shootout at Pine Ridge Reservation between members of the American Indian Movement and the FBI.

**June 27  
1869** Anarchist and feminist Emma Goldman is born.

**June 27  
1905** The worker-run union Industrial Workers of the World is founded.

**June 28  
1969** Riots break out at the Stonewall Inn, when members of the NYC LGBTQ communities led by trans women of color decide to fight back against police violence and harassment.

**June 29  
1917** W. E. B. DuBois leads silent march against lynching in NYC.

# Book Reviews

## ***Are Prisons Obsolete?* by Angela Y. Davis (2003)**

Reviewed by S.J.

I was raised, as I would bet many of us were, with the dominant societal understanding that bad people go to prison. Some are innocent, and those people will be released as soon as the court system knows that they are innocent. Prison was for protection, even if this truth was unspoken. The perceived safety of people anywhere was due to the workings of cops and prisons. Punishment kept us safe. People who did wrong went to prison. Systems kept us safe, others did harm. But, who is the “us”? Who are the “others”?

Did police keep you safe? Have prisons kept you and your families safe? Have they prevented harm? Has criminalization resulted in a society with less harm, especially for those of us who are Black/Brown/Indigenous, queer, and poor)? In *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Angela Davis dives into these contradictions and more. Davis succinctly covers much ground in her six-chapter, 103-page book. In this book, Davis outlines a lot of semi-complete thoughts, I had had before reading it in 2018. A year, where I had spent a lot of time thinking about living in a society where prisons are oppressive, but did not really understand what my place was in helping change society.

I believe that *Are Prisons Obsolete?* is a tremendously important starting point for thinking about how our society uses prison as a contradictory method of “harm reduction” and how it is colored by the United States’ history of settler-colonial slavery, theft, and exploitation, how there have come to be 2.3 million people caged in prisons, jails, and detention centers, and most urgently, what the alternative might look like.

***Radical simply means “grasping things at the root.” - Angela Davis***

## ***Assata: An Autobiography* by Assata Shakur (1987)**

Reviewed by S.J.

*Love is contraband in Hell  
cause love is an acid  
that melts away bars.*

*But you, me and tomorrow  
hold hands and make vows  
that the struggle will multiply.*

- Assata Shakur

*Assata*, the self-titled autobiography of Black Panther Assata Shakur gives me hope.

It is a beautifully written narrative jumping back and forth between Assata’s upbringing, ideological transformation, incarceration, sham trial, wrongful conviction, and brutalization by the police. But its message gives me hope that I can do something to change this world, where prisons seem like a given, exploitation of most a must, and where decay is a result of imperialist settler-colonial capitalism.

While these structures that oppress us, including the prison, seem so strong and so static, there is so much that goes into fortifying them and keeping them strong - in schools, in churches, in media, on the lips of “our” elected politicians. But as Assata Shakur writes:

*And, If I know anything at all / It’s that a wall is just a wall  
And nothing more at all / It can be broken down.*

These structures exist because the people of our society allow them to exist. Our society sees prisoners as others, those that can be thrown away, those who can be disposed of, those who are irredeemable. I, and I hope you will join me, say that no, every human being is capable of love and a prison is not a place that repairs anyone. If anyone grows inside, it’s in spite of the system, not because of it.

In *Assata*, Shakur shows us her ideological development in opposing capitalism, imperialism, settler-colonialism, cis-hetero-patriarchy, and incarceration,

which are just a few of the systems that oppress us.

Furthermore, Assata Shakur was able to find joy and maintain her hope and faith in a better world, even under the most brutal conditions. I would be very curious to hear, how you are able to experience joy even under the brutal conditions of incarceration? Sending love, light, and peace to you whenever you are reading this.

***And if not now,  
when?***

**– Hillel the Elder**

***If not today, then  
tomorrow.***

**– Khadra Muhammad  
Hasan al-Zuwaidi**

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Have you read a good book or an article recently that you would like to review from an abolitionist perspective?

Let us know, and submit it to *In The Belly!*

## **Brick by Brick, Word by Word**

Here's a passage from *A Handbook For Abolitionists*:

**In order to shape a new vision of a better future, every social change movement discovers the need to create its own language and definitions.**

Language is related to power. The world is differently experienced, visualized and experienced by the powerful and the powerless. Thus, the vocabulary coined by those who control the prisons is 'dishonest.' Dishonest, because it is based on a series of false assumptions.

**In creating a new system, we need to consciously abandon the jargon that camouflages the reality of caging and develop honest language as we build our movement.**

What does "crime" mean to you?

What does "safety" mean to you?

These are not rhetorical questions - tell us, and we'll print it in the "Brick by Brick, Word by Word" section in the next issue of *In The Belly!*


# Wasted

by Stephen Wilson

Sprawled,  
smeared across the couch,  
heavy, half-closed lids,  
glassy eyes reflecting  
light from the T.V.

Bart and Lisa  
watch the wreckage:  
his regularly scheduled descent  
into cancellation.





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