

IF THEY BUILD IT

ORGANIZING LESSONS & STRATEGIES
AGAINST CARCERAL INFRASTRUCTURE



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**ORGANIZING LESSONS &
STRATEGIES AGAINST CARCERAL
INFRASTRUCTURE**

Community Justice Exchange

May 2025

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Report design and illustrations by Noah Jodice.

Intro

Recent years have seen intensified state efforts to entrap, disappear, and control people, in the US and beyond. As the state carries out mass deportations, imposes harsher punishments, and ramps up criminalization, it does so by dramatically expanding the prison system, generating an authoritarian culture of fear, while suppressing all resistance against such expansions.¹ It is within this context that struggles to close and demolish existing carceral infrastructure, and prevent new infrastructure from being created, have once again become critical interventions in movement building. Ending the ballooning amount of resources dedicated to the creation of jails, prisons, penal colonies, detention centers, military bases, precincts, armories, fusion centers, real time crime centers, penitentiaries, training facilities, and other carceral facilities, occupying communities across the US, has always presented a number of challenges,

directly related to the political and economic conditions of the moment.

Organizers' efforts to dismantle jails and end practices of detention must grapple with a fractured movement landscape, the relentless criminalization of protesters, and worsening multifold crises of impoverishment, militarism, and white supremacy, all bolstered by an enthusiastically pro-prison administration. These liberatory struggles must also contend with efforts by the state to co-opt and neutralize transgressive elements of abolitionist movements while simultaneously avoiding complicity in new, innovative, and more comprehensive evolutions in carceral control. Whether fighting a \$120 million 'Cop City' in Atlanta or \$8 billion in proposed jail expansion in New York City, organizers have steadfastly asserted that abolition requires an end to all forms of imprisonment—without the birth of new ones. They have had to take on not just prisoncrats, but those within their

Figure 1: 'New Jail, Still Criminalized,' art by Noah Jodice.

communities who capitulate to state intimidation. Despite the myriad obstacles, fights against carceral infrastructure, detention and social control alike, will be necessary to combat state-led efforts to rapidly expand criminalization.

This resource documents the convening of the No New Jails Network (NNJN), a project that brought together 10 campaigns and organizations from around the US between 2020-2023 to share strategies and knowledge from their respective campaigns, localities, and organizations. While the network is no longer active, the learnings of the network can offer organizers a way to strengthen their collective position against the growth of carceral infrastructure and towards moratoriums on construction and development. This resource also offers several recommendations which ideally will be taken up by those continuing to fight to close cages or prevent construction. The lessons and recommendations, while rooted in anti-jail organizing, can be applied to efforts to combat all kinds of carceral infrastructure.

A note on language: Throughout this resource, terms including ‘carceral infrastructure,’ ‘cages,’ and ‘facilities’ are used to describe the facilities where people are detained or imprisoned. The ‘Prison Industrial Complex’ (PIC) ‘carceral dragnet,’ and ‘carceral state’ are used to describe the overall system of extraction, control, and punishment within which these facilities exist.

Figure 2: No Youth Jail Protest Seattle, March 2, 2018.



What is Carceral Infrastructure?

Although many of the recommendations and tools in this resource are derived from fights against county and city jail facilities, they assert an abolitionist approach towards infrastructure more broadly. In addition to jails and prisons (state, federal, Indian, and military), penitentiaries, penal colonies, holding cells, police precincts, police training facilities, detention centers, and fusion centers, are all examples of carceral infrastructure that encounter organized opposition. Other facilities which often also solicit opposition campaigns include places not often considered carceral, but which enact coercion, confinement, and control nonetheless. Examples include psychiatric facilities, homeless shelters, and nursing homes, all of which are discussed in less detail here but nonetheless fall under the category of ‘carceral infrastructure.’ Other kinds of infrastructure, such as armories or technology, which are not physical facilities where police are trained or work or where people are physically caged, fall outside of the scope of this resource. Similarly, physical spaces rendered carceral because of surveillance or

how they interact with the PIC—for example, house arrest—are outside of the scope of this resource.

In connecting different kinds of fights to each other, this resource is not implying that they are the same or that people experience the impacts of each kind of infrastructure similarly. A police training facility does not entrap people in the same way as a prison and a military base impacts many different people outside of the U.S. in ways that affect how we organize against bases. Rather, the connections between these fights and the framework of carceral infrastructure help us respond to the ways in which systems overlap, formally and informally, and are rooted in similar histories of dispossession, colonialism, and torture. They share data, target similar communities, and recycle buildings amongst them. These fights must be considered part of one broad movement—not to generalize or lose their technical specificities—but to recognize that all the forces of carceral control in the US are tied.

How to Use This Resource

Below are some suggestions for how this resource can be used by organizers, researchers, archivists, students, and anyone interested in organizing against carceral infrastructure.

1. This resource is not an exhaustive guide to pretrial detention, carceral infrastructure, or the history of anti-jail organizing, but rather an attempt to document the NNJN's work with a series of reflections and experiences on what was learned.
2. This resource aims to offer recommendations and tools rather than "models" for building a campaign that suggest that every county, every city, are the same. None of the local fights mentioned here, nor any of the suggestions about the strategies used in one place, are necessarily meant to be utilized as a template for another place. The context, location, and time in which each fight occurs are specific and present unique obstacles and challenges. These reflections and observations can hopefully inform and inspire local fights, while encouraging those fights to be grounded in their particular social, political, and economic context.
3. This resource focuses on highlighting what can be learned from the campaigns in the NNJN overall rather than dwelling on whether they each "won" or "lost". The metric by which a loss or win can be understood when it comes to anti-jail organizing is not fixed—infrastructure projects often return after they've been defeated. At other times, campaigns "lose" their effort to close a facility but the jail ends up closing some time later anyways. Many incarcerated people's lives can be improved as a result of anti-expansion and closure campaigns, and opportunities for future movement building can also be secured.

At the end of this document is an *Appendix* which includes further details about the NNJN, explanations of key concepts in greater depth, and a glossary of terms. It is recommended that readers take a look at the key concepts within the Appendix *before* reading the document. These key concepts are raised throughout each section and are useful lenses for grappling with some of the learnings from the NNJN.

Key Concepts will be **hyperlinked and highlighted in yellow** and glossary terms will be **hyperlinked and highlighted in blue**. For those reading on a computer or a phone, when you click on the term, it will take you to their definition in the appendix.

There are 5 sections included in this resource:

SECTION 1 historicizes jails as a site of struggle, as well as the lineages of activism that have grounded anti-jail organizing and resources predating this publication.

SECTION 2 details the structure, composition, and internal dynamics of the NNJN.

SECTION 3 goes over the collective learnings of the campaigns within the NNJN, as well as lessons from the network development process.

SECTION 4 offers strategic recommendations against flattening, co-optation, and net-widening for anti-infrastructure campaigns.

SECTION 5 uses those learnings, as well as the recommendations from section 4, to present a tool organizers can use to assess their own landscape and develop their organizing campaigns.



You will see these “carceral humanist” characters throughout the resource, visualizing some of the ways carceral preservationists have tried to rebrand incarceration and social control as positive services.

SECTION 1:

Jails as a Site of Struggle

People have always resisted punishment, coercion, caging, detention, and deportation, even as these systems have been endlessly reformed, repackaged, and resold in efforts to thwart organizers from challenging the status quo. As prison industrial complex (PIC) abolitionist organization Critical Resistance notes, “in fact, the first modern western prisons were a reform to systems of capital punishment in the 1800’s.”² Conservatives and liberals alike have adopted different methods to further expand and entrench the carceral state, whether those methods are outright racist or somehow disguised as more humane. As punishment preservationists, mainstream social scientists, and white supremacists have stoked fears of crime, liberal reformists have come up with ways to make carcerality more efficient, comfortable or prettier. Abolitionist resistance, which first emerged against chattel slavery and colonization, and later against the PIC, has emerged as a force not only against those who believe staunchly in criminal-

ization, but also as a response to reformers who believe the system is merely broken and can be made more efficient or humane. People resisting jail construction, expansion, and demanding closure must now not only contend with billion dollar bureaucracies, but with giant networks of philanthropic investment, nonprofit co-optation, and the specter of carceral humanist reform. The demand for “No New Jails” has been embraced once again amidst this landscape as a way of holding the line against carceral humanists and conservatives alike.

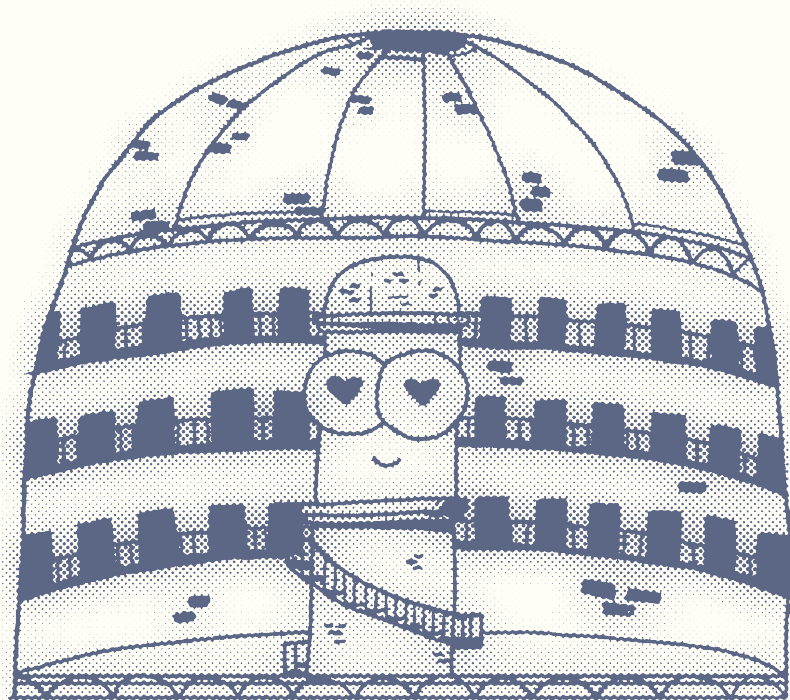
Organizing to close down old jails and stop new ones from opening is part of a broader vision for abolition, which recognizes jails as historic and significant sites of state violence, where conditions for racial capitalism, white supremacy, and **border imperialism** are manufactured and reinforced. Attempts to promote jails as capable of providing care or services or of being responsive to trauma, are

clear attempts to pacify anger against the violence of jailing. The jail has been, and will always be, a technology of anti-Black and eugenicist violence, whether it looks like a penitentiary, an asylum, or a court holding cell.

Abolitionist organizing also offers us a direct counter to authoritarian and fascist captures of power, because the punishment system supplies the force used to maintain fascist repression. As members of the Institute for Abolitionist Accompaniment have written, “through disruption, containment, and intimidation—by restricting movement or association, denying access to resources and credentials, separating family members, and disrupting employment, among other things—elements of the prison industrial complex stifle resistance to hegemonic power.”³ And as imprisoned activists have detailed for decades, the PIC manufactures

and entrenches fascism, while reformist attempts to compromise or make nice with these forces prioritize precarious, exclusionary, stability over long-term and liberatory transformations. As right-wing institutions and groups attempt to use the punishment system to regain power, sustained struggles against carceral infrastructure will be essential to fighting back.

Jails—and the massive penal systems that augment them, including courts, prosecutors, police, prisons, supervision, probation, family policing—operate as a mechanism of the carceral state, subjecting people to indebtedness, surveillance, and torture. From the jailers’ point of view, ‘crime’ is theorized, racialized, and problematized in ways for which carcerality is always the solution. Jails are also uniquely positioned sites of carceral power, not just as physical buildings, but entire systems where anti-social public and



private interests converge to reflect how dominant powers are responding to resistance and survival under the conditions imposed by authoritarian populism. While the tools and lessons offered here are especially relevant to anti-jail campaigns, they will also undoubtedly apply to many other forms of resistance against the PIC.

A quick look at the numbers: “**nearly 2 million people** are imprisoned in 1,566 state prisons, 98 federal prisons, 3,116 local jails, 1,277 juvenile correctional facilities, 133 immigration detention facilities, and 80 Indian country jails, as well as in military prisons, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories—at a system-wide cost of at least \$182 billion each year,” according to the Prison Policy Initiative, numbers that stand to grow rapidly in the coming decade.⁴ While each type of facility is specific and requires efforts tailored

to its particular qualities, ultimately these systems buffer each other.

In their book *The Jail is Everywhere* Jack Norton, Lydia Pelot-Hobbs, and Judah Schept write, “Your jail fight matters. It is at the center of the struggle against mass incarceration. Jails rely on criminalization and incarceration to address crises of development, deindustrialization, public health, and public education. They make those crises worse. To defeat plans for a new or expanded jail in your county of 10,000 people, or in your city of 10 million, is to organize a different future, the one that all of us deserve and that we can build together.”⁵ In addition to *The Jail is Everywhere*, this resource is part of the broad archive of anticarceral resistance and in particular, documentations of anti-jail organizing.

“Your jail fight matters. It is at the center of the struggle against mass incarceration. Jails rely on criminalization and incarceration to address crises of development, deindustrialization, public health, and public education. They make those crises worse. To defeat plans for a new or expanded jail in your county of 10,000 people, or in your city of 10 million, is to organize a different future, the one that all of us deserve and that we can build together.”

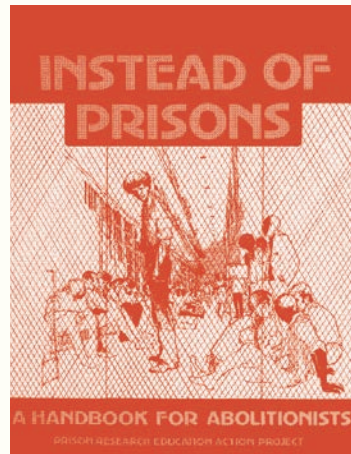
— FROM *THE JAIL IS EVERYWHERE*

Existing Resources, and Their Limits

Existing tools for grassroots organizers waging campaigns to close a local jail or stop a new one from opening help us to recognize the immense history of these efforts, even as we grow and evolve from past demands to new ones.

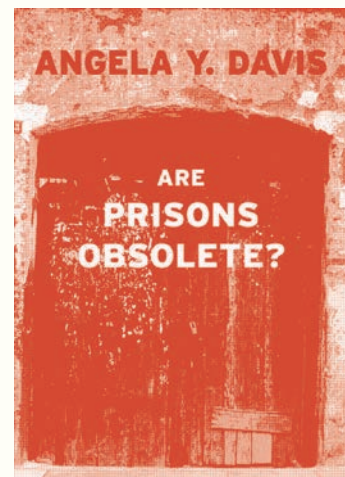
The tools below in particular were critically considered when writing this resource. Although they vary widely in approach, politics, and strategic goals, they are mentioned here because altogether they offer a number of methods and tactics for freeing people and dismantling prisons and jails. They also mark some significant moments and campaigns in anti-infrastructure organizing history.

The authors of these resources assert the importance of not only dismantling facilities, but imagining and developing life-affirming structures, organizations, and institutions that keep communities together and preserve their resilience. In some cases, they call for “alternatives” to incarceration, for example, with the 1976 handbook suggesting “non-incarcera[ti]on alternatives” such as community programs for sex offenders, or as the Vera resource suggests, “expand use of citations in lieu of arrest.” But, as discussed in depth in *Section 3*, **all alternatives are not made equal, and many alternatives reproduce forms of carceral control that easily become tools for incarcerating larger numbers of people when political winds change.** This resource builds off the important lessons and limitations of these previous resources with hopes of further strengthening fights against carceral infrastructure and the entire PIC.



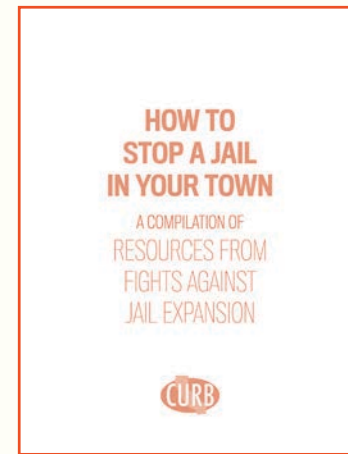
1976, HANDBOOK FOR ABOLITIONISTS

As far back as 1976, incarcerated people collaborated with outside advocates to produce a handbook arguing against the use of caging, claiming that “doing nothing is seen as a better response than imprisonment.”



2003, ARE PRISONS OBSOLETE?

In her seminal book, Angela Davis asks us to think of decarceration as “a constellation of alternative strategies and institutions, with the ultimate aim of removing the prison from the social and ideological landscapes of our society.”⁶



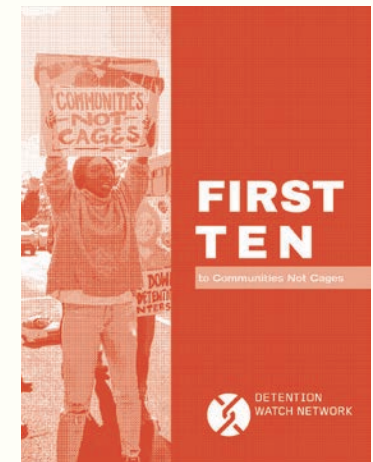
2013, HOW TO STOP A JAIL IN YOUR TOWN

Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB) compiled a list of resources under a guide, building on over a decade of organizing to close CA jails and prisons. CURB’s ‘[The People’s Plan for Prison Closure \(PPPC\)](#)’ report also offers a number of instructive closure demands.



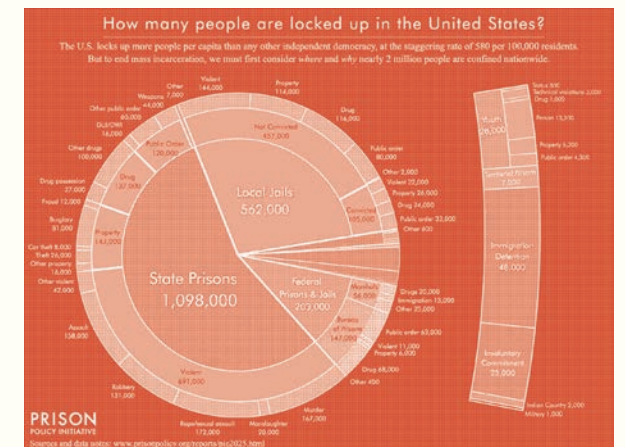
2021, A TOOLKIT FOR DECARCERATION IN YOUR COMMUNITY

In 2021, the Vera Institute published a number of resources on reducing jail populations, including a toolkit for policymakers with the intention of decarceration, not closure or abolition. As is later discussed in this resource, decarceration is only part of the picture, but this resource draws on some of the ideas and concepts put forward in Vera’s In Our Backyards work.



2021, FIRST TEN TO COMMUNITIES NOT CAGES

This report by Detention Watch Network highlights ten key fights against detention centers, as well as some of the ways activists have argued for the shutting down of detention centers.



2023, TOOLS FOR FIGHTING JAIL EXPANSION

Prison Policy Initiative published a toolkit for arguing against jail expansion noting that “The 2020 response to the COVID-19 pandemic showed us that we can reduce jail populations when we want to.”

SECTION 2:

The No New Jails Network

This section delves into the No New Jails Network itself, especially its internal composition and tensions as an organizing formation. In the Appendix you will find additional details about the organizations and campaigns in the Network, as well as its structure.

“We call for a national moratorium on jail construction, in alignment with efforts to close down US prisons, jails, and detention centers without building new ones. Our campaigns mark renewed community-led efforts towards freedom and abolition, by demanding governments divest from jail construction and invest in a stronger social safety net. Instead of putting billions into the design, administration, construction and subsequent management of jails, we demand investing billions into non-carceral violence prevention, non-institutional community care, harm reduction, and crisis management systems. Our campaigns reject reformist efforts to rebrand jails, prisons, and detention centers as humane. We advocate for the abolitionist vision of a world where public value is placed on healing and caregiving.”

— NNJN Manifesto, 2021

Figure 3: Decarcerate Kansas City Rally, April 2025.



NNJN was originally convened in 2020 following the rebellion that rose up after the Minneapolis Police Department’s murder of George Floyd as both a learning and strategy space for campaigns across the US that were organizing to close old jails and stop new ones from being constructed. The network’s original membership included campaigns from Washington, New York, Maine, California, Kentucky, Florida, Georgia, and Washington DC. NNJN originally hoped to be a way to grow movement capacity to organize against construction projects.

There were generally three levels of participation within the network: coordinating member, general member, and connected campaign. Campaigns with organizers who regularly attended meetings, contributed to projects, or otherwise participated in study and analysis within the NNJN were generally considered ‘coordinating members.’ Anti-jail campaigns and decarceral efforts—such as those in Indiana, Missouri, Hawaii, Texas, Illinois, Michigan, Arizona, and Oklahoma—were part of the larger orbit of the network and would join as speakers or provide information for projects as general members. Connected campaigns were campaigns that participated in the network through one off calls and events. On all three levels of participation, the campaigns varied greatly, not only

in terms of where they were geographically, but in terms of their size, approach, and whether the anti-jail campaign was part of a wider political strategy.

Criteria for being a ‘coordinating member’ at the NNJN’s outset required committing to the principles of the moratorium statement and having abolitionist affinities. Organizations that advocated for decarceration through jail reform or expansion were not invited to be part of the network in any way—a distinction that became harder and harder to maintain as time went on, as detailed below.

Groups who were coordinating members had divergent roots and varying structures; they are covered more in the next subsection. No New Jails DC, for example, was a grassroots abolitionist group responding to a proposal for a jail that was announced by the city, but no action to actually approve or build the jail was taken. No Penobscot County Jail Expansion in Bangor, Maine was similarly a group of local residents and grassroots activists joining forces to stop a facility expansion. Fight Toxic Prisons, on the other hand, was a national formation providing coaching and support to both grassroots activists and bigger nonprofits in their anti-jail advocacy. Decarcerate Sacramento, in California, had already successfully prevented an expansion of the Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center (RCCC) but grew to advocate around jail population reduction and budget reinvestment. Differences in structure and political context were generative within the NNJN because they enabled organizers to learn about new or untried strategies, but they also contributed to tensions.

Internal Dynamics and Tensions Within The NNJN

The NNJN did not grow into a significant abolitionist organizing formation in and of itself. This may partly be because (1) contextual and structural differences between the campaigns, as well as (2) key areas of political misalignment.

In order to appreciate dynamics that surfaced within the network and which also appear within larger efforts to dismantle jail infrastructure, it is important to understand certain structural and contextual differences between the campaigns operating within the NNJN:

- The origins of jail expansion differed per county and city. Some counties claimed to be building entirely new facilities in response to overcrowding while others were expanding a particular section of their building or building smaller jails. Differing origin points for jail expansion naturally meant that campaigns within the NNJN had different goals and strategies.
- Every jail project being fought had different local dynamics and formations through which it was being contested. In some places, informal crews of neighbors organized to prevent construction in their neighborhood. In other cities, opposition to jail construction was rooted in non-profit advocacy. In others, coalitions of organizations of all different sizes steered a multipronged campaign that included decarceration as one of its goals. The

Differences in structure and political context were generative within the NNJN because they enabled organizers to learn about new or untried strategies, but they also contributed to tensions.

campaign’s structure and leadership impacted its sustainability and duration, as well as how many resources organizers had to continue their work.

- Notably, not all of the anti-jail campaigns and coalitions were publicly abolitionist.

In addition to these differences, there was a lack of political alignment in at least two areas.

The *first* key area of misalignment had to do with varying understandings of compromise, success, and failure among the broader movement to dismantle jails, often resulting in the specific political realities of different localities. For organizers in conservative and rural counties, the pressure to have a particular abolitionist hardline could feel alienating and removed from their realities—despite freedom for all being the ultimate vision of the NNJN. The level of existing community organizing that dealt with policing and mass incarceration impacted the ideological orientation of the campaign. Such dynamics reflect the complex reality of geographically-specific fights against jail expansion where political choices are often constrained and people don’t have the option of holding an inflexible line. Nonetheless, the network’s consequential inability to have strong shared

principles or alignment around tactics or demands limited its ability to grow or push a particular strategy towards carceral infrastructure.

The *second* misalignment had to do with the differing levels of politicization around pretrial control and different levels of consent towards its expansion, depending on members’ and their organizations’ calculus about decarceration. In certain counties, court mandated treatment, diversion, and expansions of supervisions were being proposed as decarceral alternatives. These were not uniformly opposed across all NNJN organizations or their coalitions. This confused the abolitionism of the NNJN—if certain members supported increased funding to

carceral agencies, was the network still an abolitionist project? How could the group then determine who to *exclude*? *Would this not open the network up to non-abolitionist organizations who advocated for smaller jails? Where was the point at which a jail became nonreformist, and was it meaningful? And where was the line for compromise?* These and other questions vexed organizers over the period of the campaign.

The inability to resolve these critical points of alignment ultimately impacted what the NNJN could accomplish together. NNJN members shared among them a commitment

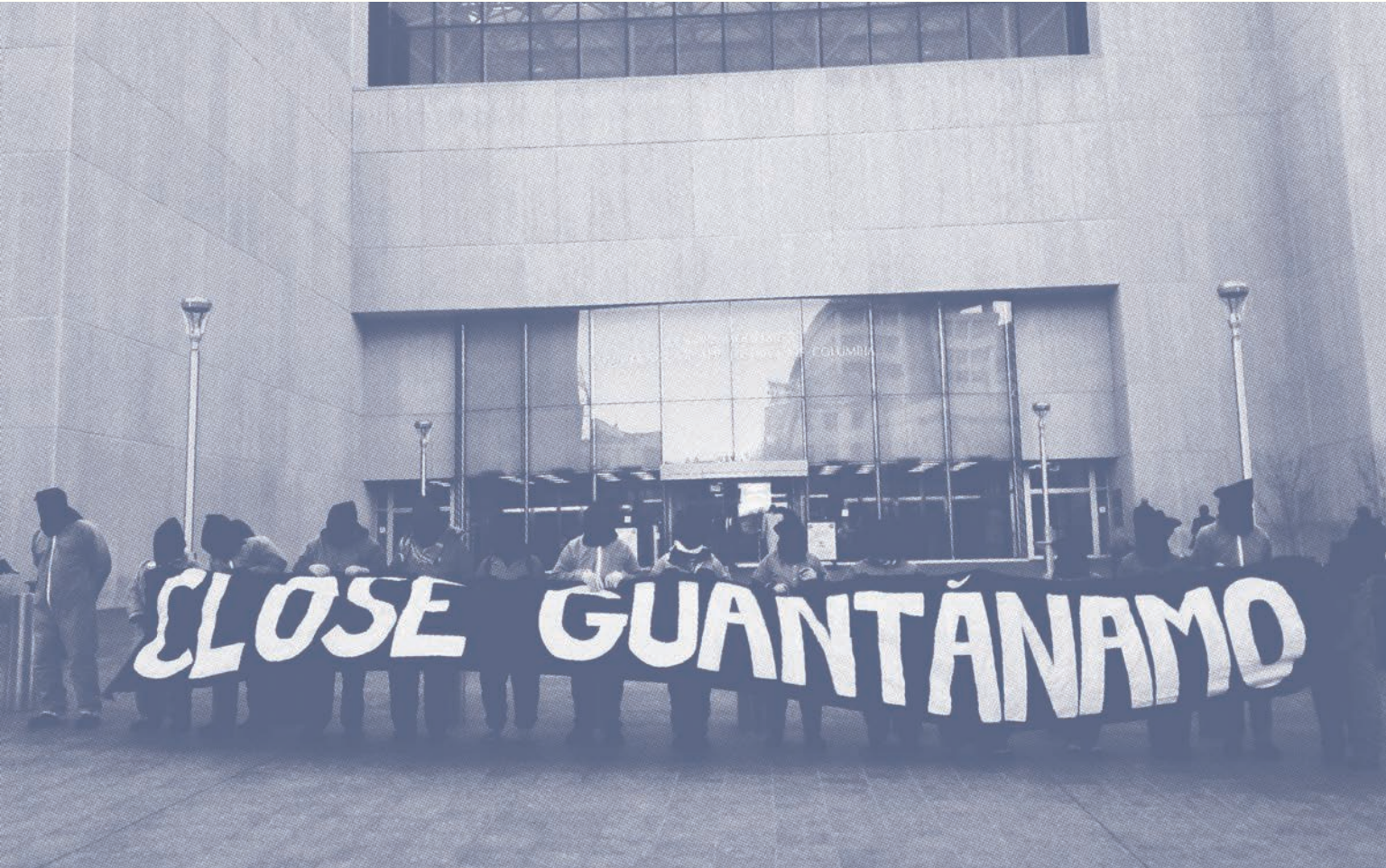
The inability to resolve critical points of alignment ultimately impacted what the NNJN could accomplish together.

to decarceration, solidarity across prison walls, and an analysis that more jails would not equal freedom, but the aforementioned tensions meant that the NNJN as a network did not have its own overarching campaign, goals, or organizing strategy apart from supporting a national moratorium on jail construction.

Despite these tensions, the discussions, meetings, projects, and relationships borne through the network’s development allowed for the observation and consolidation of a number of patterns and trends around carceral infrastructure development that may prove useful to future organizers that are detailed in

the next section. The NNJN offered a vehicle to assess and link what, at first, appeared to be disconnected and disparate movements across decades and geography. Alongside organizations like CURB and Critical Resistance, NNJN helped to catalyze abolitionist attention and debate around facility closure ahead of an oncoming construction boom we are living through currently. And lastly, it demonstrated the usefulness of the network structure and of trying something, even when it doesn’t last or isn’t where a bulk of movement attention is focused, because the dynamics that led to its ending provide a rich source of origin points for future organizing.

Figure 4: Demonstrators outside Superior Court in Washington, DC wait for a “Close Guantanamo” trial to begin. Jan 3, 2012.



No New Youth Jail, Seattle, WA:

Worked to stop King County from building a \$210 million new youth jail, which was announced it would close less than a year after it was opened (but is currently open).

No New SF Jail Coalition, San Francisco, CA:

After preventing a new jail from being built in 2015, focused on shutting down County Jail #4 through decarceration, without new jails.

No New Sac Jail, Sacramento, CA:

Over five years, fought to stop \$2 billion, which was cancelled in 2021 and again put on hold in 2025.

Stop the Musick, Orange County, CA:

From 2020 to 2024, organized to stop the reopening and expansion of the James A. Musick Facility, a proposed mental health jail.

Fight Toxic Prisons, KY & AL:

Organized against the construction of federal prisons through highlighting how prisons contribute to climate collapse.

Cuyahoga County Jail Coalition, Cleveland, OH:

Fought against the building of a new jail facility in Garfield Heights, demanding county resources go towards addressing root causes of incarceration.

No New Penobscot Jail, Bangor, ME:

Opposed the expansion of the the Penobscot County Jail, and use of COVID-19 aid funds for construction. The county is still considering the jail for expansion.

Shut Down Wyatt, Central Falls, RI:

Migrant communities fought (and continue to oppose) the Donald W. Wyatt Detention Facility and its contract with ICE.

No New Jails NYC, New York, NY:

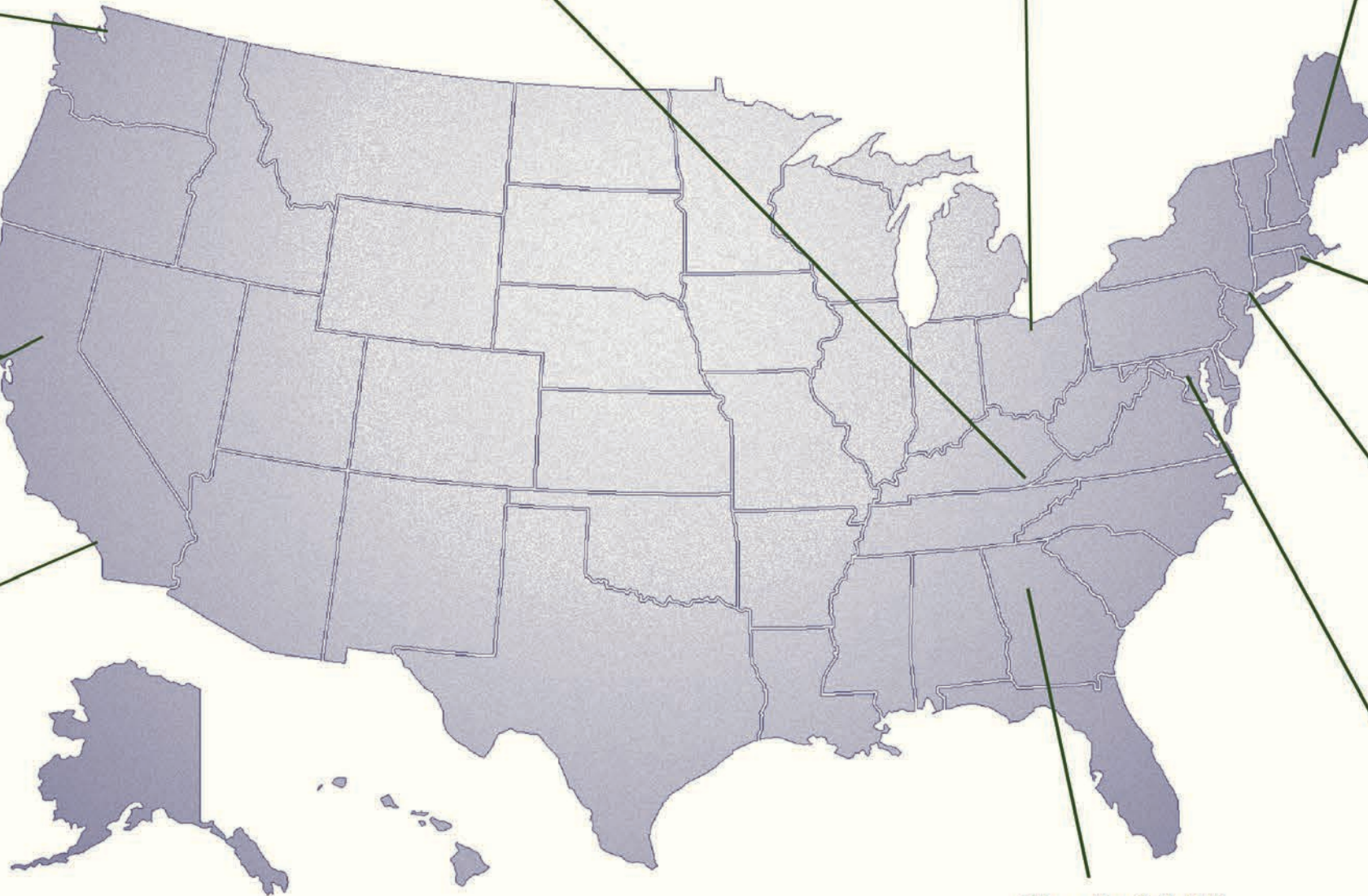
Organized against four new "mega jails" that were proposed as a path to closing down Rikers Island Correctional Facility.

No New Jails DC:

Opposed \$700 million jail plan proposed by the city and demanded "no new jails, freedom for incarcerated people, and a new collective approach to safety that truly reduces violence and increases resources in our communities."

Close the Jail ATL, Atlanta, GA:

Called for the closure of f the Atlanta City Detention Center and for it to be repurposed for the Center for Wellness and Freedom.



NNJN Member Campaigns

Reflections From NNJN Member Organizers

“Closure is a small kernel—we know that if the Wyatt gets closed, the people on the inside are likely to be moved to another facility. Even a campaign win would be one domino in a much longer series. We take a lot of influence from direct action campaigns to close prisons and find alternative ways of community.”

**June Kramer,
Shut Down Wyatt**

“One reflection that organizers who were involved in the campaign earlier have shared is that the decision to frame the 2019 [Atlanta Jail Closure] task force as a victory might have backfired in some ways, because it led people to believe the jail was already closing rather than something that still had to be fought for. It was a decision that made sense at the time, but that became much more tricky with the onset of covid and the crime wave propaganda. Another reflection is that having a reduced base during covid was very difficult, and everyone was so deep in rapid response that it was difficult to maintain those relationships and keep people turning out. I’m not sure how that might have gone differently, but something to consider.”

Micah Herskind, Close the Jails ATL

“The NNSFJ Coalition held a line throughout our campaign to refuse any new jail construction, including any jails by another name. We pushed back against re-opening of old closed jails. We pushed back against a plan by the DA to open up a “Behavioral Health and Justice Center,” which we successfully articulated to be a jail. And when we stopped jail funding in 2015, we turned to building with those imprisoned in the jails and then to closing the jail at 850 Bryant. Because all of the organizations in the Coalition were already abolitionists, it made this much easier.”

Andrew Szeto, No New Jails San Francisco

SECTION 3:

Lessons From the No New Jails Network

The experiences from the NNJN are outlined here in four categories which organizers can use to map their own local context and anti-infrastructure fight. They refer to the context for organizing against a jail and common hurdles people might encounter in their efforts. None of these categories are absolute—many of the actors and institutions named under each could also fall under another category. For example, county corrections departments are certainly a threat to anti-infrastructure organizing but they are also part of the landscape. The categories offered here are meant to provide a framework for thinking through all the different dynamics and groups typically relevant to anti-expansion organizing.

1. Landscape: This category refers to the local political, economic, and social conditions that surround the jail expansion proposal. It often involves crises which bring public attention to jailing and requires understanding recent political history in that place. This category includes factors such as negative conditions, consent decrees, correctional brutality, pretrial reforms, and the criminalization of migrants and

homeless people. This can also, notably, include the landscape *after* a proposal has been approved or construction has begun.

2. Threats: This category references what organizers are up against and in particular, *who* is promoting jail expansion as a solution (for example, whether as a response to crime or scandal). This often includes elected officials, consultancies, think tanks, and advocacy organizations as well as law enforcement.

3. Rationale: This refers to how construction and expansion are justified and through what forms, which often run the gamut from the obviously right-wing (for example, crime rate propaganda) to the seemingly benevolent (such as concerns for the health of criminalized people). This category also includes **carceral humanist** motivations, such as wanting to improve the design of jail facilities and expanding treatment for people inside.

4. Movement: This refers to the challenging dynamics of organizing itself, particularly those having to do with how campaigns and coalitions structure themselves and the strategies they pursue to achieve their goals. This includes coalitional and interpersonal conflict, dynamics around the role of formerly incarcerated people, ‘zombie’ proposals that were once defeated and rose again, and the limits of disinvestment and/or investment as strategic demands.

Each of the following subsections will provide more detail on the dynamics mentioned above.



Figure 5: ‘No New Jails’ by Josh Macphee.

LANDSCAPE

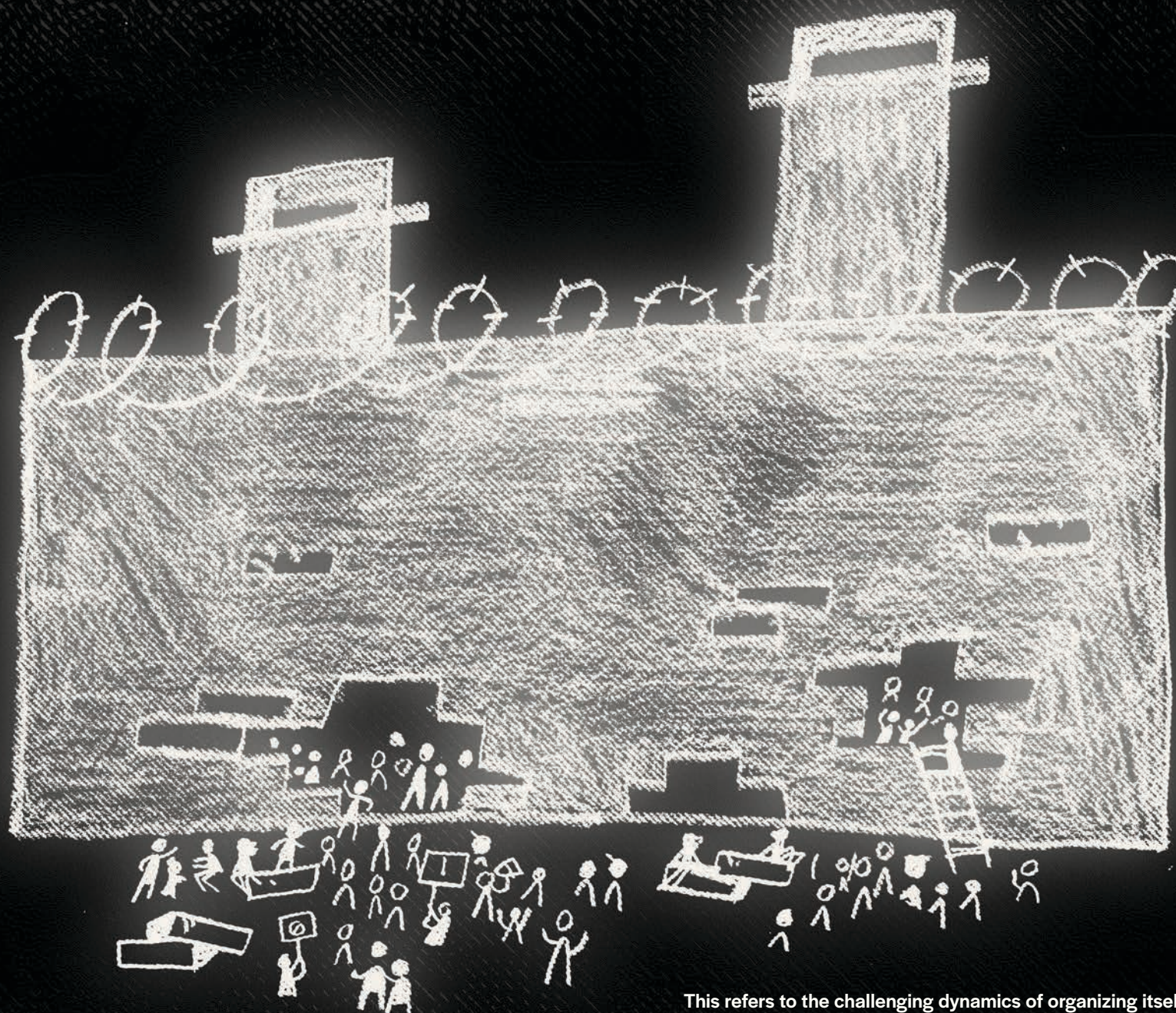


This category refers to the local political, economic, and social conditions that surround the jail expansion proposal. It often involves crises which bring public attention to jailing and requires understanding recent political history in that place. This category includes factors such as negative conditions, consent decrees, correctional brutality, pretrial reforms, and the criminalization of migrants and homeless people. This can also, notably, include the landscape after a proposal has been approved or construction has begun.

RATIONALE



This refers to how construction and expansion are justified and through what forms, which often run the gamut from the obviously right-wing (for example, crime rate propaganda) to the seemingly benevolent (such as concerns for the health of criminalized people). This category also includes carceral humanist motivations, such as wanting to improve the design of jail facilities and expanding treatment for people inside.



THREATS



This category references what organizers are up against and in particular, who is promoting jail expansion as a solution (for example, whether as a response to crime or scandal). This often includes elected officials, consultancies, thinktanks, and advocacy organizations as well as law enforcement.

MOVEMENT



This refers to the challenging dynamics of organizing itself, particularly those having to do with how campaigns and coalitions structure themselves and the strategies they pursue to achieve their goals. This includes coalitional and interpersonal conflict, dynamics around the role of formerly incarcerated people, 'zombie' proposals that were once defeated and rose again, and the limits of disinvestment and/or investment as strategic demands.



Landscape

The social, political, and economic landscape around a site of carceral infrastructure significantly impacts whether or not an effort to abolish it can even emerge. This refers to the evolving *context* for the fight, which exists at all times—even if the jail has been approved for expansion. This aspect of the terrain also determines the organizations and people who will play a key role in fighting a jail or supporting an expansion.

1. Criminalization, Lawfare, and Policing:

This landscape category refers to policies which determine who is being targeted for criminalization, jailing, supervision, and surveillance. Historically, Black, trans, poor, migrant, and disabled communities have been on the frontlines of experiencing state violence, with certain trends being especially relevant in recent years. For organizers wanting to get rid of a jail, being attentive to who is being criminalized can be a way to identify sites of solidarity, as well as strategies for advocacy. Looking forward, it is necessary to pay attention to the following trends of criminalization:

- **CRIMINALIZATION AND DEPORTATION OF MIGRANTS:** The vast majority of deportations happen through poli-ICE collusions, **data criminalization**, and jails and prisons. Increases in migrant policing have meant more people being arrested and detained by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement than there are facilities to cage them. As a result, there are a number of new detention centers being built, as well as old crim-system prisons and jails being repurposed as immigration detention centers. Companies like GEO Group will also profit from the reopenings of private prisons for migrant detention. Furthermore, federal immigration enforcement officials rely heavily on the criminal punishment system to identify non-citizens for detention and deportation, creating what is often referred to as the “arrest-to-deportation pipeline.” In some

counties, ICE has formed an (287(g) agreements with a state or local agency—most often a county sheriff who runs a local jail. These delegate specific immigration enforcement authority to designated officers within the local agency. Elsewhere, legislation increases time inside for people who are migrants. In Florida, for example, there is more prison time for certain charges if the person arrested is undocumented.⁷

- **POLICING OF PROTESTERS:** There has been a widespread escalation in police responses to actions of dissent, as well as a rise in the amount of protest activity. Direct action and protest against pipelines, genocide, and police violence have met with spectacular repression. Participants in the George Floyd Uprisings and Stop Cop City, as well as student protesters in the Palestine solidarity movement, have faced felony charges for their organizing with some being placed on a form of pretrial monitoring for years⁸ sows fear and confusion among organizers, while dissuading them from pursuing certain strategies and increasing the risks of engaging in protest action.
- **POLICING OF STREET-ECONOMIES & HOMELESSNESS:** Predatory development, rapid urban gentrification, and the relentless commodification of housing have pushed record numbers of people onto the street while pressuring elected officials to manage these groups of people by disappearing them into jails, shelters, hospitals and halfway houses. Meanwhile, migrants and precarious workers earning their living through sex work and street vending have

faced increased criminalization due to similar requirements in efforts to “clean up” cities. People criminalized for living or working outside, for using or selling drugs, often cycle in and out of jails. Increased management and attention on these groups often (if not always) leads to expansions of pretrial control, court power, and the introduction of carceral alternatives.

2.
Preexisting Responses
to Conditions Advocacy &
Scandal:

Deaths and deplorable conditions inside jails impact the landscape by spurring public outrage against incarceration and mobilizing networks and organizations of activists to form anti-jail coalitions and campaigns. When lawsuits or federal consent decrees are attempted as the solution to brutality or deteriorating prison conditions, these too can impact the landscape for organizing anti-jail campaigns.

- **DEATHS IN CUSTODY:** These catalyze public movements against jails as well as political interest in closure, renovation, or construction. But these atrocities are often reframed by pro-expansion groups to justify renovation or new construction.
- **CONDITIONS LITIGATION:** Conditions litigation is a legal process that addresses issues with the living conditions in prisons and jails. Lawsuits around solitary confinement, quality of healthcare, sexual assault,

discrimination inside, all fall under this category. Advocates often use conditions litigation to provide relief to people once they are released or to their families, but can also engage in it through an impact strategy where it is meant to spur some larger political change. Conditions litigation can lead to calls for a renovated facility, closure, or a new facility.

- **CONSENT DECREES:** Federal consent decrees are sometimes issued to mandate that a jail improve its operations -- often in response to deaths in custody or in response to physical and sexual violence experienced by incarcerated people inside. Cook County Jail, in Chicago, for example, was under federal oversight for 40 years, including most recently under a consent decree passed in 2010 to reduce the use of force by correctional staff at the jail. These can provide a basis for future jail expansion and also increase federal oversight over jails. Several jail proposals fought by members of the NNJN came out of cities repeatedly violating their consent decrees, leading county and city governments to determine that there could be no improvements, only a replacement jail.

3.
Legislative Reform:

Legislation is important in two ways when it comes to fighting carceral infrastructure. First, it may be used by campaigns to produce conditions that are hospitable to securing facility closure. Decriminalization policy is an example of legislative advocacy that seeks to

If public opinion is that decriminalization has led to more crime, people might support opening a new prison or treatment center and the campaign will have to counter such narratives in their outreach.

reduce the number of people being arrested for particular crimes. Other examples of significant reforms include sentencing and parole reforms which can reduce time spent in a cage for certain charges. Second, recently passed legislative reforms will impact the landscape for any anti-infrastructure fight. If public opinion is that decriminalization has led to more crime, people might support opening a new prison or treatment center and the campaign will have to counter such narratives in their outreach. Legislative advocacy is severely limited by political interests and opposition, as well as by the inherent liberal reformism at the core of much policy advocacy.

- **PRETRIAL REFORM:** Many anti-jail campaigns have tied their jail closure demands to advocacy around reforms to the pretrial system both locally and at the state level. Bail reform, in particular, has attracted a lot of attention from activists and politicians alike. But other reforms, such as discovery reforms (ensuring that the accused person had complete and immediate access to all of the prosecution’s evidence against them) and speedy trial

(ensuring that accused people had access to a trial without delay) are also common to see amid anti-jail campaigns. Pretrial reforms will majorly affect local conditions for jail closure and conditions advocacy. In Illinois, for example, statewide legislative reform—the Pretrial Fairness Act—eliminated money bonds in their entirety and completely restructured the pretrial decision making system in Illinois with the goal of decarceration.⁹ Since the implementation, the Coalition to End Money Bond reports that, “the number of people incarcerated pretrial has decreased by 14% in Cook County, 14% in other urban counties, and 25% in rural counties.” That being said, solely utilizing legislative tactics can be a slow process with high risk and few permanent rewards. It can take up huge amounts of energy only to result in reforms that are easily undone. It can also lead to more funding going into prosecutors and judges to deal with more complex pretrial proceedings. This is why in Atlanta, while the Stop Cop City movement was active, organizers pursued legislative tactics (a referendum to repeal the leasing of land to Atlanta police) alongside other kinds of action.

4.

Government Processes:

Government bureaucracy and opaque processes mean that communities are often disempowered from making changes to policy around criminalization and caging. Labyrinthine and confusing processes can mean a lot of time is spent simply identifying possible sites of intervention and figuring out who holds power and what each person does. Additionally, anti-jail campaigns can be derailed by making incorrect assessments about these sites of power and where decisions are made.

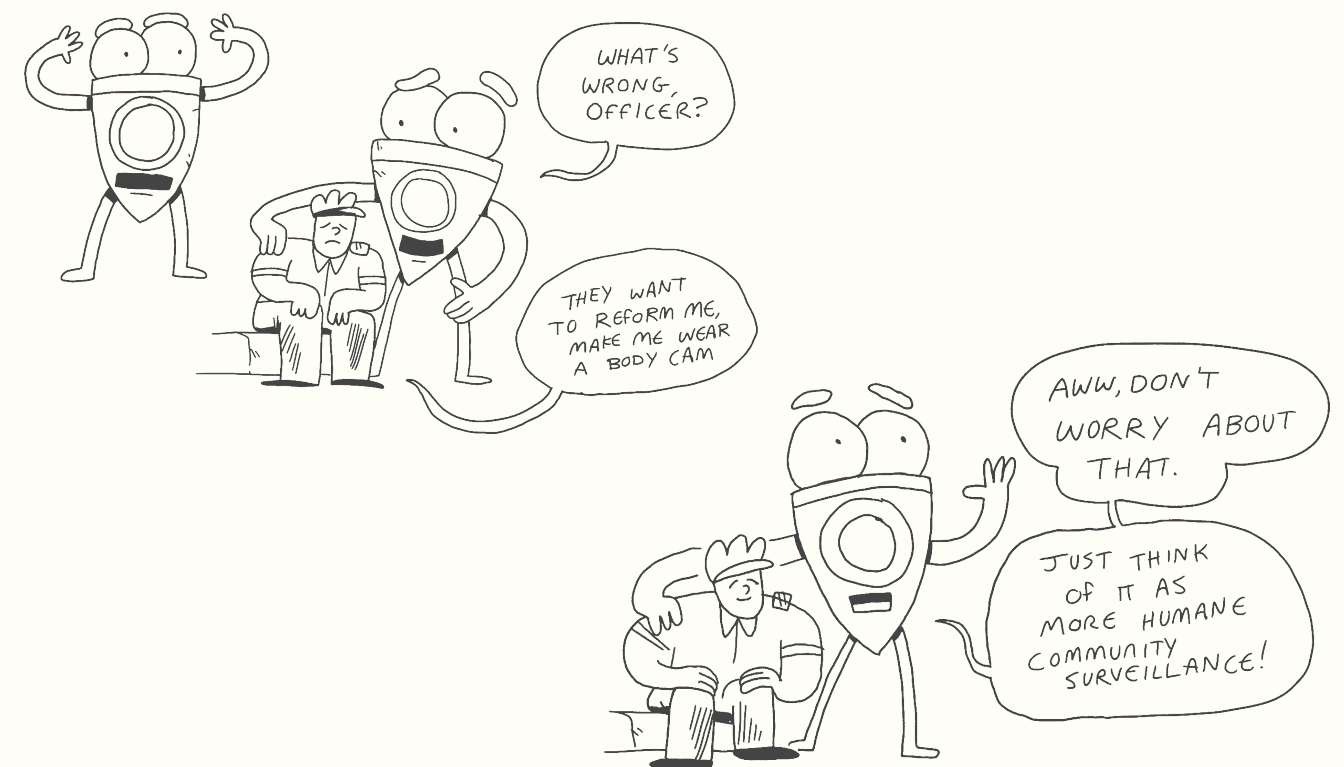
- **FINANCING:** How a facility construction is funded, the costs of maintaining it or renovating it, and the amount of public resources dedicated to these functions are a main area of focus for organizers. Organizers have to understand how funds are allocated for the maintenance, renovation, and construction of ‘public safety’ projects, who has control over these funds, and where this funding comes from. These questions are often the first to be asked because they can also help identify opportunities for unfunding and blocking a construction project, and make or break a project. For example, in Champaign, IL, organizers successfully fought a \$20 mil jail project because it was too costly to build—until the county diverted COVID-19 emergency [American Rescue Plan Act](#) funds to do so. Anti-jail organizers have often politicized the amount of funds going to building new jails or maintaining old ones by showing all the life-affirming things that could be funded instead, or they’ve pointed out

that the county/city is taking on debt in order to finance the facility, debt that future generations will have to pay.

- **TIMELINES:** By the time organizers decide to oppose a jail expansion proposal, they’re often too late. A public indication or intent to pursue jail construction by the local government is usually the result of months, if not years, of back door conversations and committee meetings. This can make it difficult for organizers to determine what is actually the right level of escalation by the time they are ready to publicly reject the jail. It can also lead to inaccurate understandings of power brokers and stakeholders. For example, prior to the public announcement of a jail proposal process, certain consultants or commission members tasked with providing the justification for building a new jail might make for good targets in order to prevent the project before it is even public. Once the proposal is announced, however, city and county leaders (council members, commissioners) may have more power in vetoing the proposal. Either way, prison preservationists often hide their plotting behind government bureaucracy and administration, which campaigns have to counter by having as clear an understanding of their landscape and the points of intervention as possible.
- **INABILITY TO ASSESS POWER:** Part of the reason public interest groups (housing nonprofits, legal aid organizations, re-entry support organizations, for example) may go along with a jail construction proposal is that they use it to fight for **alternatives to incarceration** as well as other services that

people need. Or they are using a model of a more “humane” facility to fight against the existence of a bigger one that is falling apart. Or they are sure of their ability to steward the jail construction process as community stakeholders, despite community stakeholder committees often acting as a rubber stamp for already-decided proposals. Elected officials often operate on a ‘quid pro quo’ basis, i.e. if you can secure me votes, I will support this platform and make a formal pledge towards it. These exchanges rely on officials following through on their promises, which does not always happen.

Inaccurate calculations about the amount of power an organization, group, or coalition has to enforce their demands at various stages of expansion or closure can lead to compromises with nothing in return. During the implementation of certain policies and agencies, plans can be lost within the larger government bureaucracy and convoluted beyond the reach of advocates. The lack of transparency and accountability within political practices means that people aiming for decarceration have actually been duped into supporting more criminalization and surveillance.





Threats

While many factors pose a challenge for organizing against jails, here the term ‘threats’ specifically refers to the people and dynamics which threaten to derail and destroy anti-jail organizing. These are the private and state entities that have a vested interest in expanding the PIC and co-opt, pacify, and criminalize movements to do so. The reasons for this are detailed in much of the existing grassroots and academic scholarship on the carceral state, and are highly dependent on local histories and contexts.¹⁰ A simple reason why these threats exist is that prison preservationists have sought to maintain and expand state power on bipartisan terms in order to sustain racial capitalism, benefit from the crises it produces, and discipline those who cannot participate in it or choose not to. This subsection details those who aim to prevent or stifle opposition to jail expansion, including institutions, organizations, and companies, as well as actual police, prosecutors, correctional commissioners, and correctional unions.

1. Co-optation:

The threat of co-optation exists towards any liberatory movement. ‘Co-optation’ here refers to the methods, discourses, laws, and actions through which the state and private entities claim to espouse the values of a progressive movement, while actually diluting and diminishing those values by offering something less than what people demand. Elected officials, philanthropy, and nonprofits also may participate in the co-optation to win elections, gain funds, or preserve their brand.

- **ELECTED OFFICIALS:** Engaging with elected officials is almost always guaranteed when fighting jail expansion, even if the organizing is not necessarily waged in a bid for office. Elected officials also often determine whether funding is approved for a certain capital project. Candidates for office will often take sides in highly politicized jail fights. While working with these individuals can be strategically necessary, most politicians do not support abolishing jails and freeing them all, so every engagement is a negotiation, not a partnership, likely to come with offers of compromise. The mayor’s office, in particular, is hugely influential because they are responsible for responding to “crime” and their stance on police and crime determines how a city allocates resources. The past decade has seen a number of racially and gender diverse mayors elected, who have promised to prioritize “criminal justice reform” by which they have meant expanding law enforcement power and mass supervision. Appealing to candidates or elected officials

can lead to precarious alliances. Overt focus on winning their support or refuting it can take up large amounts of organizing energy, often with limited results.

- **BIG PHILANTHROPY:** Philanthropy is the source of much division and debate within liberatory movements at large that cannot be summarized here. Some movement activists believe all private wealth is a threat to abolitionist organizing, while others see it as an indispensable source of support for resource-starved movements. Regardless of where one stands on this debate, philanthropic institutions can and do facilitate the capture and co-optation of radical movements because they wield immense power to set the agenda of movements through the kind of advocacy that they fund. Progressively-minded investments into criminal justice “innovation,” “reimagining jails,” “data based reform,” and “justice centered design” have funded criminological research that justifies carceral expansion. In their book *Skyscraper Jails*, Jarrod Shanahan and Zhandarka Kurti discuss the role of philanthropy in supporting the borough-based jail expansion in New York City saying, “With millions of dollars from big philanthropy, the #CLOSErikers campaign fought for reforms that would rescue the legitimacy of the US punishment system, and the ruling class itself, while deploying the vernacular of social justice and even abolition.”¹¹ When organizing against carceral infrastructure, it is important to “follow the money” and name when funders are putting their power behind technologies and solutions which entrench carceral control.

▪ **CARCERAL NONPROFITS:** To include nonprofit organizations here does not mean that all nonprofits present a threat to anti-jail organizing but rather that *carceral nonprofits* will co-opt public demands for ending incarceration into liberal narratives that tokenize the experiences of criminalized people and promote stopgap, expansionist, solutions. A carceral nonprofit is one that advocates for expansions of surveillance, criminalization, justice innovation, and jailing while pretending to be humanitarian. Carceral nonprofits are not always those focused on criminal justice reform, but can be organizations responding to community crises or racial justice groups (where the organization focuses on reducing incarceration as part of a broader racial justice campaign). Carceral nonprofits often crowd out abolitionist and autonomous organizing efforts by either claiming to be more legitimate purveyors of decarceral reforms or by using their large budgets and paid staff to push untested, uncreative, solutions as ‘models.’ At the same time, there are plenty of movement-aligned nonprofit organizations that are open to shifting their methods, organizing their membership, or amplifying abolitionist demands.

▪ **OTHER ORGANIZATIONS:** Not all reform-minded orgs. that co-opt are non-profits. Many faith-based orgs. are deeply involved in this and some community-based, volunteerist orgs. as well, as well as some unions who have members working in prisons, jails. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), for example, has

A carceral nonprofit is one that advocates for expansions of surveillance, criminalization, justice innovation, and jailing while pretending to be humanitarian.

been a major source of opposition to reforms in Illinois because it is the leading organizer of prison guards in the state, as well as in several other states. These orgs. also impact conditions by supporting candidates for election. It’s important to note that coalitions and campaigns will have to do their own landscape assessment to determine whether an organization, whether a nonprofit or something else, can be organized out of their carceral and expansionist positions or if they will actually threaten the long term abolitionist and radical vision.”

2. Preservation:

Carceral institutions and their actors are committed to preserving their power to punish others. Police, corrections, and courts work alongside the media, corporations, and private institutions to leverage racial stereotypes and public fear to not only preserve, but expand, their jobs. They obstruct liberatory organizing, as they were designed to do, and in many cases, deploy tactics to actively oppose and disorganize decarceral and abolitionist groups. This threat may be obvious to anyone fighting carceral infrastructure, but it can’t be underestimated how much sway

it holds over convincing residents to support further caging and criminalization.

▪ **SHERIFFS AND CORRECTIONAL COMMISSIONERS:** Officials who are tasked with the oversight and administration of local jails are, most obviously, a threat to any anti-carceral effort. As in many places, sheriffs in New Orleans, LA and Erie County, NY have actively lobbied for new jails, claiming these will modernize incarceration. Sheriffs have fought to win contracts for holding criminalized migrants and people with psychiatric diagnoses. ICE officials, CBP officers, and other agents of the carceral state also often play this role.



Figure 6: Protesters at a June 30, 2018 Immigration Rally Carry a Sign Urging the Governor of Pennsylvania to Close an Berks Detention Facility.

Sheriffs, however, are notable for their efforts in facilitating coordination between the criminal legal and the immigration enforcement systems. Sheriffs are typically elected officials, while jail commissioners are often appointed positions but depending on whether the county has one or both or more, these are who will often testify at public hearings on jail conditions, arguing for more funding, more workers, and new facilities.

- **CORRECTIONAL UNIONS:** Labor organizations and unions of correctional officers are powerful institutions that represent the interests of correctional officers, often in opposition to anything that would dismantle, interrupt, or interfere with their power. There are county and state based correctional unions, as well as national ones. AFSCME has 62,000 corrections officers and 23,000 corrections employees in their ranks. Around the country, correctional unions have opposed restrictions on solitary confinement, organized for recruitment and funding, made donations to pro-incarceration political candidates, and poured resources into media and advertising that spotlights correctional professionals as heroes. If a county has a correctional union, they are likely to oppose any major decarceration, and will actively fight to have jail expansion approved.
- **DISTRICT ATTORNEYS:** A district attorney (DA) prosecutes crimes, investigates, and represents the government in court. How DAs choose to prosecute certain kinds of cases, as well as their support for pretrial reforms, impacts the rate of criminalization.

The office of the DA therefore is a political one, responsible for prosecutions that represent the interests of residents, mayors, council members, property developers, police, representatives, and correctional administrators. In that sense, DAs and their prosecution priorities are a part of the landscape, but as law enforcement officials who are primarily tasked with responding to ‘crime’ they are a threat to any group attempting to get rid of cages altogether. DAs are unlikely to support policies and strategies which would eliminate their office, a goal that is part of the abolitionist vision. Their goal is to incarcerate the ‘right’ people and oppose any changes that might result in freedom for people held in jail. During the early height of the COVID-19 pandemic, despite making performative pledges to reduce pretrial incarceration, the head prosecutors in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Chicago continued to request high money bail, to request people be jailed without option for release, and to contest money bail reductions.¹² Additionally, DA offices are often slow and lethargic, leading to many people sitting in jail for extended periods of time while they wait to be indicted. This is a complicated dynamic for organizers who must oppose this backlog without advocating for the indictment of more people.

PROGRESSIVE PROSECUTORS:

Additionally, attempts to elect so-called progressive prosecutors over the past decade have only expanded prosecutor power and derailed community power-building. Although prosecutors are drivers of incarceration, they cannot individually undo decades of hyper-criminalization and incarceration.¹³

- **PRIVATE CORPORATIONS & PRIVATE EQUITY:** Private companies stand to win big contracts with infrastructure expansion, as they operate phone, visitation, health-care, and food services inside, among other things (with the biggest contracts being for demolition and construction). Private companies and contracts are more likely to be a target for anti-jail campaigns after the construction has begun and requests for proposals have been released.
- **MEDIA:** Media and narrative strategy is an integral part of any closure or demolition campaign, but mainstream and centrist media are often unsympathetic to such campaigns, while conservative media is outrightly hostile. Propaganda about the risks of closure, correctional job loss, or the need for ‘efficient’ crime management are used by right-wing media to stir up residential panic about crime rates and quality of life. Anti-infrastructure organizers have navigated oppositional and liberal media by 1) producing their own print, digital, and social media 2) cultivating long-term relationships with friendly outlets and journalists and 3) deprioritizing media in their work.

3.
Compromise:

The threats of compromise refer to the many ways private and state institutions respond to popular demands by providing false or half solutions. For anti-carceral organizers, developing the ability to discern when a demand has been genuinely met versus when something is being offered as a compromise is a key skill. Millions, and in some cases, billions, of dollars are dedicated by counties towards public relations and consultants to develop methods of reducing public spending while responding to demands for reform, while simultaneously maintaining law-and-order. Many of these compromises implicitly suggest that the *administration* of jails is the problem rather than their existence, and suggest changes that make different people responsible for running the jail, or increase the number of programs within the jail, or change the jail’s architecture or design.

- **JAIL ASSESSORS AND THINK TANKS:** Jail assessments are analyses, often conducted by private companies who have been hired by a county, to analyze the operations of the current jail and make recommendations for building a new jail or expanding an existing one.¹⁴ These private companies ‘consult’ on correctional facility development, penal administration, and crime management. Sometimes called “justice system assessments,” “needs assessments,” “master plans,” or “feasibility studies” inform counties’ discussions of whether they should invest in a new jail or expand an existing one.
 - Think tanks dedicated to reforming

mass incarceration or innovating crime response play a similar role to jail assessor companies in providing a legitimate, workable, narrative for jail expansion.

- Similarly, task forces and commissions appointed by elected officials to develop recommendations for reforming responses to crime promote solutions which expand pretrial control.

- **FEDERAL GOVERNMENT:** The federal government can pose many threats (depending on the facility, the feds can fund and defund facilities, while passing laws that expand reform while limiting possibilities for organizing). One example of how federal involvement can pose the threat of compromise is federal oversight over deplorable jails. Repeated violations of a consent decree, or high levels of death can lead to federal oversight of jails, which is presented as an ultimate intervention against political mismanagement of the facilities. A receivership is a legal remedy in lawsuits seeking to reform jails and prisons.¹⁵ It strips the government of control and puts a neutral, court-appointed expert—the “receiver”—in charge, and is typically used if other tactics have failed. The goal of federal oversight in such a case is to realign the jail with federal constitutional standards, yet it can be presented by its advocates as a major decarceral step in so far as it results in releases. Receiverships come with the threat of compromise because they typically advance the false argument that carceral violence is a problem of resources and administration, and with the right people in charge and proper administrative systems, jails can

be less violent. Additionally, the federal government’s own prisons and detention centers are often as rife with problems as any county jail.

- **NIMBYISM:** Not-in-my-backyard advocates often complain about the effects that jail construction has on property values, air quality, and traffic. They are not opposed to jails, and might even support them, but they are opposed to jails in their own neighborhoods. They pose a threat because they can offer justifications for moving a jail elsewhere, thereby deferring the problem, and they can also compete with anti-jail advocates for the attention of other residents and elected officials. Their pro-jail arguments are often racially-based, wanting jails to be re-located far from comfortable, predominantly white suburbs.

4.

Repression:

In the wake of Stop Cop City prosecutions, as well as the vast number of political prosecutions against Palestine solidarity protesters and against people who provide or seek abortions, the threat of repression is a major consideration for organizers. Inside prisons, jails, and detention centers, repression and punishment are the norm, where being affiliated with certain movements can have majorly detrimental consequences.

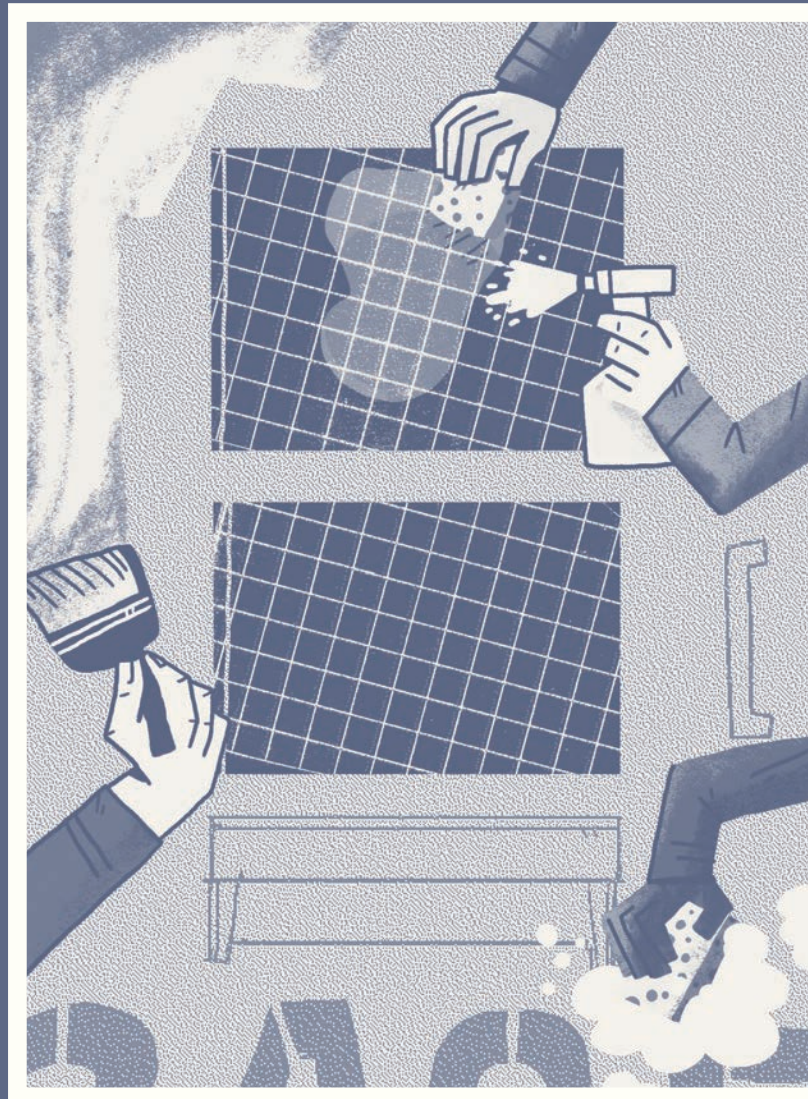
- **FEDERAL, STATE, AND COUNTY PROSECUTORS:** Legal actions including Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO), Strategic Lawsuit

Against Public Participation (SLAPP), as well as prosecutions under the Sedition Act and charges against activists for engaging in organizing activity have increased over the past decade. In particular, groups attempting to redistribute resources, fundraise, gather large numbers of people, and engage in actions observed as seditious by the state may face surveillance, targeting, and outright brutality. Many of the ways that repression unfolds against anti-jail organizers is through already existing aspects of the PIC, including through carceral telecommunications services like Global Tel Link (GTL) and Securus Technologies. Censorship and withholding of mail from people inside carceral facilities obstructs the efforts of people outside from building relationships with them. The costs of email, telephone services, visitation, video visits, stamps, and the many functional failures of these systems make it hard to build relationships with those inside. These obstacles

necessitate creative tactics and consistent efforts to connect with people who are held in the facilities.

- **CORRECTIONAL GUARDS:** Participating in abolitionist organizing or any activism that could be affiliated to criminalized activities or movements facing repression can lead to major consequences for incarcerated and detained people. Guards and administrators will come down hard on anyone they perceive to be engaging in political and protest work. They can receive tickets, have time added to their sentence, be sent to solitary confinement, or be refused parole. This can dissuade incarcerated people from participating in campaigns, even if they want to. For non-incarcerated organizers fighting jails, the risk of retaliation should mean that they approach their communications with people inside with caution, while also building safety plans for potentially risky situations.

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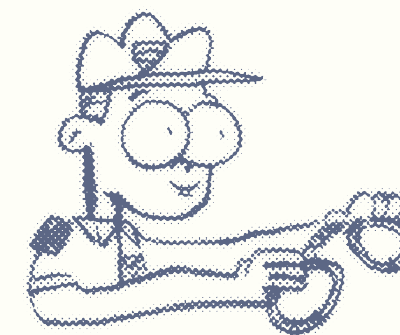
Rationale

The rationale category refers to methods prison expansionists use to justify the growth of criminalization and promote jail building. They relate to the ‘landscape’ and ‘threat’ categories by opening up pathways for co-optation and compromise, as well as appearing to be responsive to the political and economic conditions. Rationales for jail expansion can run from the obviously racist and classist to the carceral humane, and they almost always imply that some kind of cage is better than nothing. For campaigns, it’s important to acknowledge and be responsive to crumbling infrastructure and dire conditions inside in ways that delegitimize **carceral humanist** solutions.

1. Improved Jail Design:

Many counties and elected officials in the past two decades have embraced ‘design thinking’ as an approach to modernizing their jail facilities. While existing jails are generally austere, marked by crumbling infrastructure, these aesthetic modifications of jails are attempts to wash over the base violence of incarceration. Whether through the architecture of the building itself, or the concept of “justice campuses” (where the courts, jails, and other correctional administration would be in the same area of the city, similar to a college campus), these attempts ultimately are more concerned with how a jail looks than what occurs inside.

- **SCANDINAVIAN DESIGN:** The trend of designing jails based on how they are run in Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Denmark has proliferated based on the idea that those countries treat prisoners better. These are decontextualized observations. Not only do these countries provide much more social support for their residents, but they are all much smaller in size with far fewer people in jails and prisons than the US. Additionally, these fantasies of design obscure jail expansion and make false promises about what design is capable of resolving. In 2024, SCI Chester in Pennsylvania was called “Little Scandinavia” for allowing incarcerated people inside to cook their own meals and



order their own groceries. While increased autonomy can be good, “experiments” such as SCI Chester’s allow prison expansionists to trivialize the endless problems of violence and ill treatment that persist even with the creation of so-called better units. Organizers have responded to such proposals by pointing to the cyclical nature of this argument and how old jails once were considered cutting edge by both criminological and design standards, yet were modern sites of torture despite these promises.

- **ARCHITECTS AND SUBCONTRACTORS:** Architecture firms and construction contractors have received increased attention over the past two decades for their role in designing jails. With certain jail fights, architectural firms and boards have even come out either supporting or opposing design of such facilities. The American Institute of Architects’ (AIA) in 2020 even approved new rules to the Institute’s Code

of Ethics and Professional Conduct saying, “Members shall not knowingly design spaces intended for torture, including indefinite or prolonged solitary confinement.”¹⁶ Architects can be called upon to take a stand but architectural and engineering firms are often

tasked with consulting on design processes which involve responding to community input and envisioning ‘nicer’ jails. In general, subcontractor companies for medical care, cleaning, and food supply all have a vested interest in justifying carceral expansion.

2.

Jails as Care Providers:

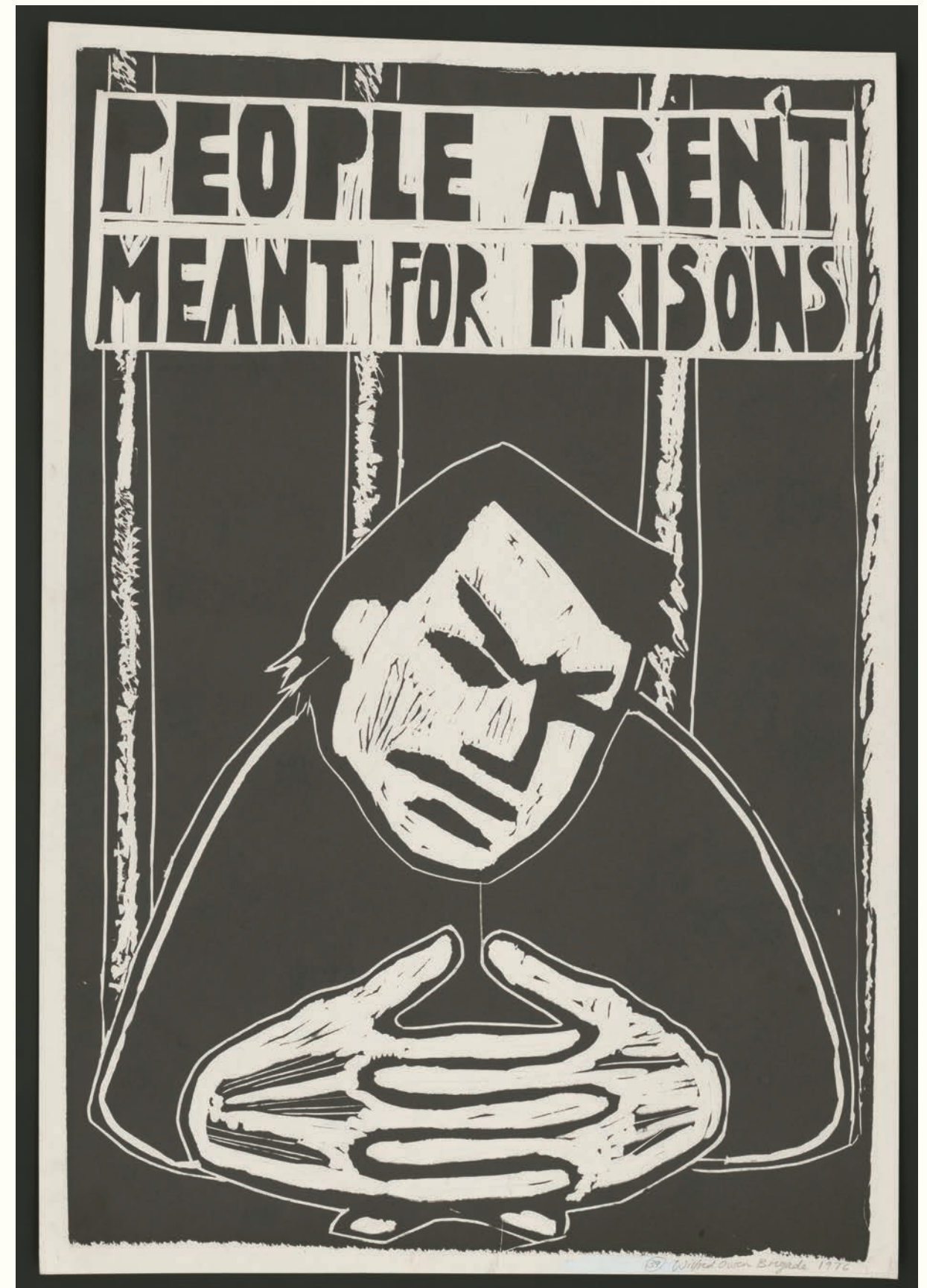
For as long as local jails have existed, rationales around their ability to do more or less rehabilitation, provide more or less care, be more or less violent than some other form of punishment, have also existed. In recent times, the idea that jails can be responsive to the needs of particular groups, such as disabled people, LGBTQIA people, or survivors of domestic and sexual violence, has been prominent. These rationales co-opt demands for gender, racial, trans, and disability justice into justifications for carceral control, thereby weakening these movements' abilities to hold a certain line against the PIC. It can be difficult for organizers to challenge these rationales without coming across as though they are unconcerned with the day-to-day conditions inside jails or the needs of incarcerated people. Finding ways to validate the need for better conditions inside (e.g., more healthcare access, heaters, ADA accessibility, lower commissary prices) while preventing the state from using this advocacy as a scapegoat to expand carceral power, has been key for campaigns as a means of growing inside-outside solidarity.

- **TRAUMA INFORMED JAILS:** This rationale suggests that certain changes to crime response—arrest, prosecution, incarceration—are capable of responding to the preexisting therapeutic needs of incarcerated people or increasing jails' ability to meet the needs of survivors and disabled people inside. This is essentially a lie peddled to pacify the complaints of liberal residents and organizations, or to

assuage the concerns of organizations who advocate for marginalized groups. It's not only paternalistic reformers who support 'trauma informed' jailing or jails as mental healthcare. In Georgia's Fulton County, for example, Sheriff Pat Labat talks proudly about how the jail is the largest mental health provider in the county, which is why he supports expanding it.

- **FEMINIST JAILS:** Some counties proposed jails to be 'gender-responsive' arguing that the specific needs of people of marginalized genders or of youth could not be met in the existing jail. Organizers countered this by saying that a jail could not meet anyone's needs, period, and that arbitrarily deciding certain genders were more or less violent perpetuated racist and sexist ideas. In 2022, a letter was published opposing proposals for a women's jail in New York City, which noted "From sexual violence on the plantations to forced sterilization in state prisons and ICE centers, punishment in this country has always been gendered and racialized."¹⁷

Figure 7: People Aren't Meant for Prisons, 1953.





Movement

The 'movement' category refers to aspects of anti-jail organizing that pose challenges originating from the internal organizing. This covers conflict within organizations, inability to resolve principled disagreements, the role of liberal representation politics, the challenges of forging solidarities with criminalized people, and the struggle around certain demands.

1.

'Common Denominator' Politics:

Modern day movements owe much to the way early 20th century leftist movements envisioned the "united front" and "popular" front of struggle, where broad groups of people come together around a shared vision that reaches across the ideological spectrum. Although this can be an effective way to move through ideological and strategic misalignment, the tendency towards unity can sometimes result in 'common denominator' politics. In such cases, there is an avoidance of topics and ideas which might lead to tension or conflict, in order to move the most widely supported work or demand forward.

- **COALITIONS:** Coalitional organizing is necessary for movement power building *and* it can lead to common-denominator politics. A coalition is a useful structure for pursuing ambitious changes and legislation for a number of reasons. Coalitions can often have broader agendas that tie other demands to the jail, reinforcing the relationship between welfare and criminalization. Coalitions are also complicated structures, with organizations representing different priorities, values and goals. While this can be a strategy for preventing gridlock and burnout, it can also—at worst—lead more radical organizations to be complicit in liberal and reformist policies. At other times, it can lead to a limited acceptance of very limited, incremental change, as the more visionary strategies and analyses are not agreed upon by everyone in the group. Political incrementalism does not adequately respond to the scale of attacks

against marginalized communities. It produces stagnation and cyclicity, where small changes are a drop in the bucket of multiple crises. This is not advice against building tables, coalitions, or other structures meant to allow for the participation of multiple stakeholders, but a note that racial justice and criminal justice coalitions have occasionally ended up supporting expansions of criminalization, social control, and caging due to the 'common denominator' phenomenon.

- **LIMITED NUMBER OF TACTICS:** In an organizing landscape with many different kinds of players such as nonprofits, political offices, academic institutions, neighborhood organizations, and ad-hoc mutual aid formations, there will often be a diversity of tactics and strategies with varying levels of personal and organizational risk and impact. 'Common denominator' politics can influence groups to avoid certain tactics even if they see a lot of value in those tactics, depending on the landscape and politics of the coalition. For example, direct action is a useful and at times vital tactic to oppose construction, whether bird-dogging a politician, hosting a march, or blocking a bulldozer. It can also be incredibly challenging for all of the reasons named under the 'repression' section, such as the risks of arrest and retaliation, but also because of widely different perspectives on what defines direct action and whether criminalized actions will endanger a broader coalition or campaign. Embracing a number of tactics and distributing tactics across a wide number of organizations is a requirement for moving a campaign forward.

2.

Strategic Choices:

There are many ways to stop a facility from opening or to close it. No two sites will have the same conditions over time or even at the same time. But choices about which strategies to pursue can have movement implications by 1) visibilizing certain strategies as universally effective 2) promoting certain strategies as more liberatory than they are and 3) obscuring conflict and serious critique that exists around certain strategies. For example, corporate pressure campaigns to end private detention center contracts may be occasionally effective, but are not strategic in every situation where the county leases a jail to a private contractor. Below are examples of some strategies that are prominent within jail closure organizing and how they demonstrate these movement impacts.

- **BUDGET ORGANIZING:** Strategies which focus on defunding the police or divesting from corrections and into services have been a popular way for organizers to try to reduce correctional budgets. Occasionally, these have resulted in significant disinvestments from policing. But divest-invest and budget-based organizing comes with a range of strategic issues including first, that social provisioning is expensive. Funding housing, schools, transport, and education is a costly thing and although any funds are better than none, budget fights can place organizers in the position of negotiating for pennies. Second, there are few 1-1 comparisons for policing. Sometimes there is no alternative to jail, there are no replacements, and the jail simply should not exist.

Third, budget processes may become the entirety of the organizing—they require a high level of knowledge and skill around municipal finance, and budget advocacy can take immense time and energy. Lastly, divest-invest demands such as “trauma not treatment” “care not cages” etc take resources from one carceral function and put them in another, while proclaiming a successful divestment. These are not to say budget advocacy can never be supportive of fighting against infrastructure, but that government processes are unreliable and organizers must proceed with caution and a sense of limitations involved in the process, as well as a sense of whether such a use of valuable energy is strategic.

- **FINANCE (BONDS, CREDIT, TAX):** For jails, financing for construction is often made through bonds, money raised through a specific tax, or through private contractors. Storytelling and mobilizing people around the way a particular facility is funded can be a major way to engage and bring people in. Bonds, for example, are essentially debt taken out by a city’s current government, to be paid back by a future government and future residents. They incentivize political leadership to make carceral construction a cost effective thing in the long run, and also incentivize for profit contracts between agencies (for example, between local jails and ICE). This is a movement challenge in that municipal finance is often confusing and obscure by design, and determining 1) where the money is coming from 2) how to politicize these funds and 3) track the various contracts and expenses, is a significant task. One way advocates have responded is

by claiming “if they build it they will fill it,” to refer to how construction will always require efforts to fill the space and make it financially viable.

3.

Sustainability:

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing leftist movements today is that everyone is enduring the multifold impacts of white supremacy, climate disaster, militarism, capitalist extraction, and resource scarcity. Dispossessed groups are waging struggles on every front to protect what they still have. Adding to this is that fights to close down facilities or stop their expansion can take decades. The often cyclical nature of organizing against carceral infrastructure can make jails unappealing to organize against or exhaust what capacity exists, leading to a weakening of local movement infrastructure. Sustaining these fights remains a major obstacle for groups.

- **DEMANDS:** The concept of the ‘demand’ itself is a complicated one when it comes to facility fights. Demands are a framework given to movements by the state—they imply that those in power must be convinced to support liberatory goals, and that freedom, wellbeing, care, rest, liberation are all debatable things. Demands against jailing run the gamut, from “shut it down” to “housing not handcuffs” to, of course, “no new jails.” How an anti-jail group forms its demands, what the demands are, and how they are conveyed provides many opportunities for ideological development, community outreach, and collective

The often cyclical nature of organizing against carceral infrastructure can make jails unappealing to organize against or exhaust what capacity exists, leading to a weakening of local movement infrastructure. Sustaining these fights remains a major obstacle for groups.

political education. It can also provide many opportunities for co-optation and conflict.

- **ZOMBIE PROPOSALS:** The process of fighting carceral infrastructure involves constant challenges around things ending and coming “back.” In Letcher County, KY, for example, organizers with Build Community Not Prisons once again must stop the same federal prison from being constructed that they defeated in 2018.¹⁸ Others will temporarily close the facility only to reopen it to cage some other group.¹⁹ The same ideas, the same laws, the same efforts will return even after they were defeated or defunded. It is demoralizing for organizers to successfully fight an expansion project only to see it return and have to run yet another massive effort against it. This leads to drop off and overall movement exhaustion. The fickle nature of politicians and government agencies means advocates cannot ever ‘relax’—they must always be vigilant about some other addition, some other compromise or a reversal of past promises. When projects resurface, they often protect themselves against the criticisms of the last round, making it doubly difficult to defeat it another time.

- **INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT:** As with any organizing, interpersonal conflicts between members of a campaign or organization can be devastating to its sustainability. In particular, conflicts between people who have experienced state violence and those who haven’t, or conflicts about power, can derail the vision of the organization and limit its ability to refuse a compromise or common denominator vision. While this is a small section here, in practice, interpersonal conflict or harm that occurs within organizations and coalitions can be a huge source of exhaustion and disorganization. Many of the movement challenges mentioned here can be a source of conflict and tension that, without ample and robust structures for conflict response, may derail the entire fight.

The next section offers an idea of the bigger picture painted by these various dynamics and granular aspects of a facility closure or anti-expansion campaign. It identifies overarching themes across the various challenges involved in this organizing and offers recommendations for how to approach these challenges in the future.

When projects resurface, they often protect themselves against the criticisms of the last round, making it doubly difficult to defeat it another time.

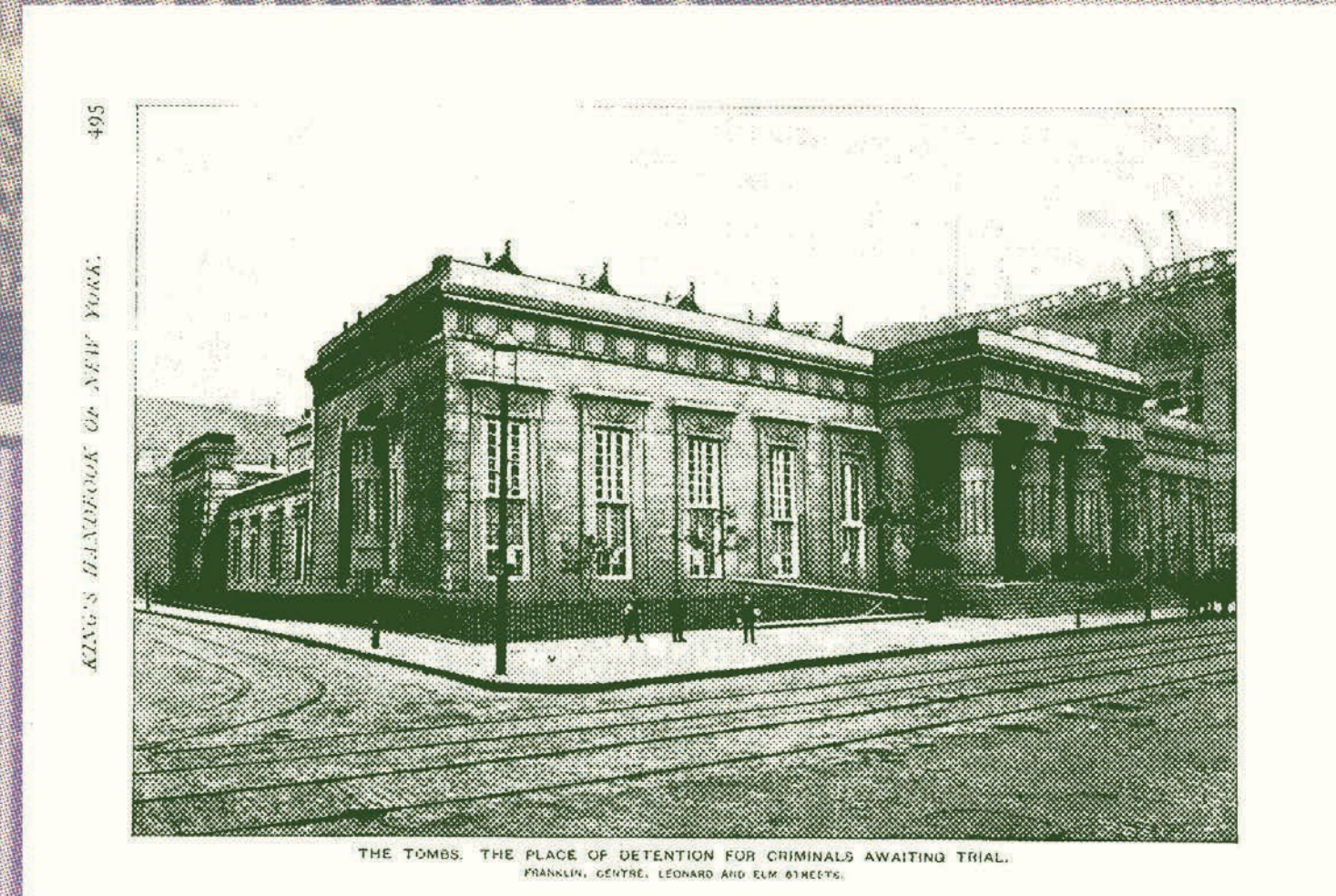


Figure 8: ‘Rebuilding the Tombs,’ art by Noah Jodice.

The Impact of Closure Fights on People Inside

One aspect of facility fights that does not neatly fit into the above assessment categories are the role, opinions, and fate of people inside the facilities destined for expansion, renovation, or closure. Incarcerated people do not fit into one of the categories above because they are not monolithic—they can be both supportive and antagonistic. They are also the first to experience the cascading impacts of anti-expansion advocacy and closure organizing. Below are three examples of potential negative impacts on people inside that outside organizers should consider when engaging in these fights.

RETALIATION: When a facility is slated for renovation, those inside must endure worse living conditions, arbitrary transfers, as well as increased restrictions on their movement and actions while construction is happening. During closure fights, imprisoned people can experience higher surveillance and worse conditions inside, for a number of reasons. Participating in any activity that might threaten the system comes with a higher risk. Correctional guards can

become volatile when faced with the possibility of losing work. Surveillance may increase if the facility is under a consent decree or being monitored by an outside institution. Programs may be ended if they are seen as inciting unrest. Imprisoned people associated with the organizing can be sent to solitary, denied parole, or receive other forms of disciplinary consequences.

TRANSFERS: When prisons, jails, or detention centers *do* close, the process is drawn out over many years and often leads to transfers of people inside instead of releases. For example, when FCI Dublin in California finally closed—three years after sexual and physical violence against prisoners inside was exposed—most of the women inside were transferred to other states per BOP mandate. During these transfers, they “didn’t receive proper medical care and were reportedly subjected to ‘mistreatment, harassment, neglect, and abuse while in transit.’”²⁰

Similarly, after ICE ended its contract with Irwin County Detention Center, most of the migrants jailed inside were

transferred to other detention centers instead of being released.²¹

WARM CLOSURES: This term refers to when a facility is meant to be closed, but in actuality just ends certain programs, transfers some people, and stops using select buildings. Washington State Reformatory Unit (WSR) in Monroe, Washington, for example, was announced to be closing. The announcement drew different perspectives from people incarcerated at WSR, as documented by incarcerated writers Felix Sitthivong and Tomas Keen.²² Some people inside WSR—including Sitthivong—spoke out publicly, asserting that abolitionists must always support closure even if it means losing these programs and opportunities. Those who opposed closure, like Keen, claimed that the state would never actually close a prison and that this was an attempt to destroy the political radicalism being nurtured within WSR and to fracture cross-walls community and family relationships. Since 2021, WSR has indeed only undergone a ‘warm closure’ where people inside have been transferred out in the name of reducing

beds, while programs and cultural groups have been defunded or ended. While at first WDOC’s faux decarceration might have seemed to be cause for celebration and hope, inside abolitionists who viewed the memo with skepticism accurately identified the so-called decarceral effort as a counterinsurgency tactic. They also predicted that the lifting of COVID restrictions and courts reopening would result in so many cases that any prisons which reduced their beds would need to re-add those beds.²³ The example of WSR helps demonstrate how abolitionists behind prison walls can sometimes challenge how advocates outside understand reformism and expansion. Building political education within and working with people who will be impacted by a closure is sure to sharpen overall strategy within a facility fight.

Strategic Recommendation 4, in the next section, specifically addresses how inside-outside relationship building within the context of anti-infrastructure fights must not replicate politics of representation and deference in misguided pursuit of finding ‘authentic’ spokespeople.

High-based jails?

fewer people in jail
ilities that promote dignity for those who visit, and work there
inside the jails, fostering community connections, and providing greater access

Safer.

The new facilities will be the model for direct supervision housing. Each housing unit will be equipped with case programming, support services, and medical spaces. Every jail cell will have direct access to natural light and the residential style finishes and furniture will be comfortable and humane.

Fairer.

The jails will be increasing access, allowing people and service

as part of the Borough-Based Early Works, such as disarm

"in dignity and respect the families, attorneys, courts, and service providers, provide appropriate housing, enhanced opportunities for



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including people in cus
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institutional.

Promote safety and
clear sight lines, simpl
technology that supp
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welcoming.

Grant a sense of pe
site to move safely a
program spaces. Wh
personalize their spa
for personal spaces

4. Foster wellbeing b
comfort. Maximize a
wherever possible.
well as opportunitie
environmental conc
mitigating air quality

5. Create inclusive
requirements to pr
of people with diff
racial, ethnic, gen

Beyond Rikers

Closing Rikers

SECTION 4:

Strategic Recommendations to Refute Compromise

The recommendations in this section reflect years of organizing. They provide a lens with which to understand the tensions within the No New Jails Network, as well as ways to build upon its strengths and learnings. These recommendations are not offered as discouragements or to isolate any one organization or tactic. They are instead meant to encourage organizers to be more willing to disagree with each other, to engage in principled conflict, and undertake political education towards more robust and strategic efforts.

Abolitionists organizing against their local correctional systems have to consider how to “hold the line” against expansion, while remaining nimble and dynamic enough to adapt to evolving political conditions. They have to attempt to mitigate harm while possible, while delinking community support from police power. Below are four recommendations to strengthen groups’ resilience against co-optation, compromise, and complicity in their organizing to prevent or abolish carceral infrastructure.

Recommendation 1:
Decarceration as a Step
Towards Abolition, Not
PIC Expansion

Recommendation 3:
The National is Not
Local, Resisting
Flattening and Model-
Based Thinking.

Recommendation 2:
Organizers
Must Question
Replacements,
Alternatives, and
Solutions for Carceral
Infrastructure

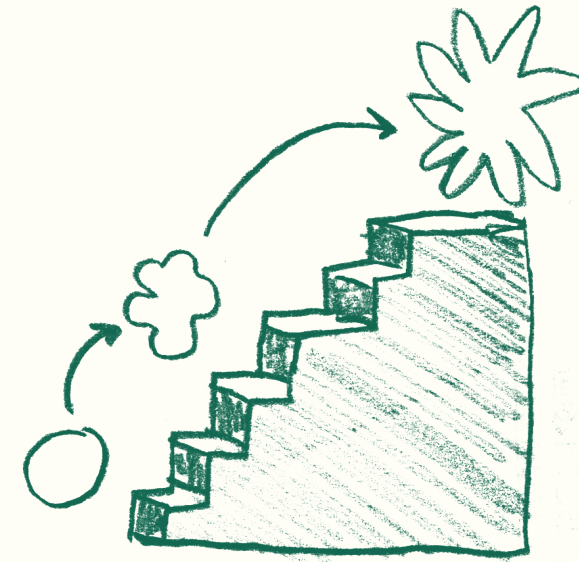
Recommendation 4:
Against the Shallow
Politics of
Representation,
Towards Solidarity

When it comes to stopping a jail, “wins” and “losses” are murky and even unhelpful concepts. Many of the campaigns and efforts mentioned in this guide were aiming to prevent a jail project from being approved or considered. Some were successful in this goal and many were not. Others struggled with the aftermath of a jail project moving forward. It is important to recognize that the approval of the jail project was not the end of many campaigns, nor do the recommendations and learnings in this guide abide by the perspective that construction of a new facility means the end of all possibilities for organizing.

As later sections cover, the possibility of assessing one’s landscape and responding to the conditions is always available to attentive organizers. As you delve into the rest of the recommendations and reflections offered here, consider the achievements of a particular campaign by its ability to transform the local condition towards more liberatory possibilities inasmuch as its ability to materially transform the lives of criminalized and incarcerated people.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Decarceration as a Step Towards Abolition, Not PIC Expansion



The goal of emptying cages is one that many anti-jail organizers share, but the means by which we achieve this goal and what we do after are as critical as the goal itself. Centering decarceration as the ultimate goal can threaten to derail more expansive organizing against the **carceral state**. By seeing decarceration as a strategic demand, rather than an ultimate one, we can at least attempt to counteract ‘decarceral’ **net-widening** solutions offered by the state.

Reducing the amount of people incarcerated and detained in cages is a critical goal for any abolitionist organizer. In anti-infrastructure campaigns, advocating for decarceral policies has been a way for campaigns to make the argument that a jail can and should close,

with policies ranging from releases to pretrial reform. Slashing bed capacity and securing releases through decriminalization and declination policy are materially impactful for those inside carceral facilities. But decarceration can, and does, occur while other aspects of the carceral system and carceral control expand. It is important to understand why decarceral policy has bipartisan appeal and how it can lead to net-widening. Integrating a critical analysis of decarceration is crucial to preparing anti-infrastructure organizers to combat this expansion and leverage decarceration instead as a strategy towards abolition.

How Can Decarceration Lead to Overall Carceral Expansion?

Decarceral policies appeal strongly not only to abolitionists, but also to prison preservationists and pro-police politicians who want to preserve and expand the PIC through decarceration. They appeal to our opponents for two primary reasons.

First, as the costs of detention continue to rise, comptrollers, commissioners, mayors, council members, and other carceral policy makers in certain counties have seen decarceration as a way to save and make money. Aging jail infrastructure, lawsuits, and the costs of warehousing people have created unending fiscal burdens. Finding ways to distribute and offset the cost of punishment, so that it lives within multiple agency budgets or reduces the number of people under the state’s care, has been a key goal for states over the past

several decades. Thus moving people out of jail and prison facilities into programs, services, and other kinds of facilities where costs are either lower or are covered by private companies, offers a compelling fiscal incentive. Decarceration—from the perspective of the state—opens up the possibilities of profitable service contracts, dispersed cost burdens, and critically, wider nets of procedural management and mass surveillance that further integrate policing into municipal governance.

This recommendation highlights that the promises of ‘decarceration’ have become a popular way to co-opt anti-carceral movements.

Second, as there are more public calls for criminal justice reform, reducing the number of people detained in correctional facilities can project the image of a government taking public protest seriously, even as they just move people around to other facilities or invest in other carceral programs where

supervision or surveillance happens outside the physical cage. The carceral state must find new ways to justify itself while appearing to be responsive to public demands for reform. The crisis of legitimacy racking counties’ penal systems necessitates state responses which maintain social control while pretending to give it up, and this can often look like reduced jail populations while still expanding carceral control over people’s lives.

We must be wary of decarceration as the end goal because it can easily be used by our opponents towards ends that actually expand the size, scope, resources and legitimacy of the carceral state.

Decarceration Towards PIC Expansion in Seattle, WA

King County, where Seattle is located, provides an example of this dynamic. Over the past 15 years, King County has pioneered “community-police” partnerships as well as a number of decarceral reforms, including being the first to develop Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD), which expands funding for organizations that accept case management and treatment referrals from law enforcement.²⁴ The program was implemented in King County alongside several other alternatives throughout the 2000s including Community Center for Alternative Programs (CCAP) and Therapeutic Assisted Diversion (TAD), in addition to already existing “in-carceration prevention” programs including Community Courts, Drug Courts, and Regional Mental Health Court.²⁵

County policymakers point to the lowered numbers as an example of successful decarceration and reform. King County’s jail population has been steadily declining since the early 2000s. As of July 1, 2024, the adult jails in King County housed less than 1,500 adults—a fifty percent reduction since the beginning of the millennium. Yet, despite all of this, King County is not only pursuing the construction of a new jail, but is *also* keeping its youth jail open, which had been slated to close in 2020.²⁶

Decarceral policy-making in Seattle did not lead to a shrinking of the PIC in King County.²⁷ It expanded it through supervision programs AND through proposed construction.

TLDR: Decarceration Towards Abolition

Decarceration is an important strategy to counter the relentless entrapment of people inside prisons and jails, but how we decarcerate is key to achieving our goals. In addition to getting people out of cages, point blank, making sure that a zero sum, “anything but jails” assumption isn’t what’s driving your advocacy is critical in order to avoid accidentally expanding, reinforcing and legitimizing the system.

It is also crucial that anti-infrastructure organizers refuse to exceptionalize detention and imprisonment in their efforts to prevent expansions and construction, even as they locate these facilities as key sites of the struggle against racist violence, settler colo-

nialism and social control. Exceptionalizing detention can lead to narratives that suggest non-detention punishment is more acceptable than prison time. Time inside a cage is one step of the many, many, steps that exist within processes of carceral punishment. Instead of claiming that detention and imprisonment are the *primary* violence, a more effective strategy might be instead to identify how they are connected to other expansions of surveillance and criminalization, and use these connections to forge relationships with partner organizations.

This analysis is not suggesting that groups abandon their conditions advocacy or stop trying to get people out of cages. It is in fact absolutely necessary to advocate for releases alongside anti-infrastructure campaigns. Instead, this recommendation highlights that the promises of ‘decarceration’ have become a popular way to co-opt anti-carceral movements. In many cases, organizers and advocacy groups are not even the ones coming up with the expansionist programs and policy, only the ones asking for more dignity for people inside the cages. The recommendation, therefore, is to remain vigilant against the ways in which movement demands are absorbed towards the ends of PIC preservationists and to pair demands for release with demands for facility closure, defunding, and demolition, with the abolition of all forms of carceral control as the ultimate goal.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Organizers Must Question Replacements, Alternatives, and Solutions for Carceral Infrastructure



Refusing the privatization and enclosure of public resources and police integration into social welfare, while countering these incursions with anti-capitalist, pro-social demands, must be a part of our strategy against capitalism and mass incarceration. However, anti-jail organizers should interrogate solutions that seek to “replace” or append some aspect of the criminal punishment system.

Campaigns and organizations across the US have uplifted the need for “alternatives” to police, prosecution, imprisonment, and the methods these systems use to respond to crime. They have advocated for replacement jails, restorative justice interventions, treatment centers, ‘trauma informed’

services, electronic monitoring, diversion programming, vocational training, crisis hotlines, problem solving courts, and more.²⁸ The demand for “alternatives” varies greatly depending on who is making the demand, how it’s funded, and where it’s located. An “alternative” can be prison by another name, as Maya Schenwar and Victoria Law have highlighted how many replacements and ‘solutions’ for state violence effectively repackage and rebrand incarceration.²⁹

As outlined in *Section 3*, anti-infrastructure campaigns face the threat of being co-opted by the state, resulting not in closure but in new buildings, stronger courts, more surveillance. Many of the existing jails that we all currently fight to close were themselves presented as alternatives, going all the way back to incarceration itself—billed as a more effective and more humane way to punish criminals than corporal and capital punishment. It is therefore incredibly relevant for any group organized in a facility fight to have an orientation around replacements and alternatives because opposition to new construction or renovation is often met with asks of ‘what instead.’ Additionally, demands for certain solutions will have an ideological impact on other abolitionists organizing in the locality and being principled and clear on what communities *do want* is critical to the long term abolitionist and anti-capitalist horizon. For the few people who even are able to access these resources, they can be a life-saver and better than a jail stay. Yet, these successes don’t remove the burden on organizers, whether in small mutual aid groups, or in large nonprofit organizations, to be careful so that they don’t capitulate to the PIC.

Why Should Organizers Be Wary of “Alternatives”?³⁰

There are three main reasons why organizers must interrogate the kinds of replacements and solutions offered by the state.

First, as elaborated in the first recommendation, many of these ‘alternatives’ grow carceral power and expand the dragnet while claiming to be getting people out of jails. For example, much of the advocacy against jail expansion has focused on the lack of mental healthcare inside jails, the health impacts of incarceration, the use of jails as psychiatric facilities, the criminalization of madness and disability, and the lack of social support for people who are disabled. It’s not uncommon to see statistics which say “x number of people in this facility are mentally ill.” In response to this kind of advocacy, states and counties have rolled out a number of carceral and ableist alternatives, from building modern day asylums to expansions of mental health courts to increased use of involuntary commitment (often called “assisted outpatient treatment” or AOT), ultimately capturing and absorbing public demands for releases and free, high quality healthcare into a **carceral reform**. Reformers and conservatives alike have touted AOT as a more humane alternative to jails with promises of ‘wrap-around services’, even if these **sanist, ableist** programs empower community policing and authorize police and clinicians to kidnap vulnerable people and strip them of their rights. For abolitionist anti-infrastructure organizers, it is necessary to reject and organize against such solutions by having deep solidarities with mad, disabled, and criminalized people

and fostering a collective campaign-wide understanding of concepts such as **eugenics** and social control.

Secondly, “alternatives” yoke the provision of resources or services to being arrested or prosecuted, while simultaneously distracting from widespread demands for public resources and entitlements. On the one hand, public housing, public education, medicaid / medicare, and public transport are some of the resources that have suffered due to **neoliberal restructuring**, which has meted out austerity and prescribed individual resiliency as the ultimate sign of a successful society. On the other, the institutions through which people can resist and reclaim these resources (such as unions, tenant associations, community centers) have also been systematically disempowered or defunded through anti-communist, anti-socialist political campaigns. This duality of **organized abandonment** has been exacerbated by enduring racist tropes about who accesses public welfare, as well as through criminological and conservative discourses that racialize poverty and indebtedness and tie these to criminality.³¹ The key concepts in the appendix of this discourse dive deeper into how organized abandonment allows the state to hold public wealth hostage and how the state leverages resources to enforce compliance with carceral systems.

Within anti-infrastructure campaigns, demands for services or resources are therefore often an admirable attempt to restore what has been taken from our communities. However, because the alternatives are mediated through the carceral state, instead of meeting needs for housing or healthcare, they

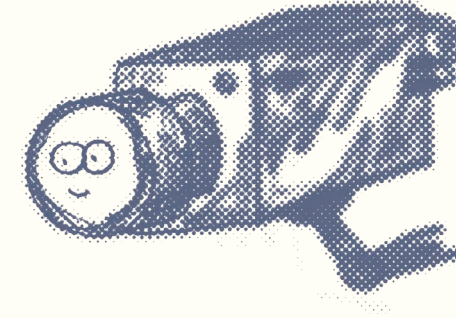


Figure 9: Posters from a No New Jails NYC rally in April 2019.

ultimately expand carceral power and control over people's everyday lives. 'Alternative' services shuttle people into temporary settings like shelters and hospitals, keeping people in perpetual cycles of precarity and leaving them vulnerable to arrest. Ambitious and visionary organizers must develop principles that prioritize self-determination for marginalized people. They must critically assess the assumptions inherent within their demands/campaigns to buffer against reinforcing social categories which render certain people expendable or manageable. If we want resources and entitlements, we must build power and fight for them completely disconnected from the criminal punishment system.

The third reason to question "alternatives" is that many replacement programs and services enable carceral creep by expanding the reach of the carceral state into the everyday and public. This carceral creep into all aspects of living is justified through the logic which says the real problem with incarceration is not the underlying dynamics of punishment, control, confinement or coercion, but about WHO is doing it and WHERE it happens. They identify poor administration as a primary cause for violence inside jails and prisons, instead of identifying that these systems are fundamentally incapable of delivering justice or safety. Alternatives created as a result of this logic strengthen carceral control outside

the criminal legal system into places like hospitals, schools, and non-profits. They enable non-police, like social workers, nurses or teachers, to exercise police power by proxy. They dilute and co-opt the value of "community" by making aspects of "community" the cage and its wardens. In her book *Prison Land*, Brett Story notes how "in the context of its appropriation by the central institutions of the carceral state, the term community designates both an ideological strategy of legitimation and a geographic site of action," adding that community corrections systems like parole and probation have only skyrocketed with calls for criminal justice reform.³² Organizers therefore must be vigilant on how they talk about "community" and "community-based" resources in their campaigns as to guard against its dilution and co-option into carceral alternatives.



TLDR: The Demand is Freedom, Not Other Forms of Control

During anti-jail campaigns, communities often find themselves backed into a corner, having to present a "viable" plan that accomplishes whatever the city claims the jail will accomplish: better conditions, less violence, fewer beds, better management, more services. Organizers are then put in the position of figuring out something that is simultaneously not a jail yet sufficiently solves for

what the state is identifying as the problem (for example, crime, homelessness, protest). The origin of the 'alternative' then becomes 'not-a-jail,' which is an incredibly limiting place to begin imaging pathways to freedom and safety. Occasionally organizers pre-emptively propose programs or resources as a part of longer-term campaigns to reduce detention capacity in their city. Yet, even in these situations, the task of envisioning what can exist instead is still determined in relation to the jail, in which the problems are defined by the logic of the PIC, which can often feel like a cyclical and futile effort.

Anti-infrastructure campaigns must question replacements because they are marketed as responses to demands for change and reform, but often do not shift power away from cops, cages, or courts, and still result in criminalization or deportation. Such replacements facilitate and extend the white supremacist, imperialist, capitalist state's ability to punish, control, and disappear people, often do little to transform the landscape for organizing, and they can strengthen the institutions and systems we're struggling against. Challenging net-widening and refusing co-optation in our demands and solutions does not mean rejecting every possible program or service, but rather sharpening our ability to discern when the compromises are worth making. Campaigns will feel the pressure to respond to neighbors' demands for what should be done about crime instead of jailing and they will also feel the pressure to essentially

become policymakers and urban planners. Figuring out demands and identifying solutions are strategic challenges that have a variety of responses and do not require defaulting to providing alternatives that expand carceral control. It's possible to support local communities in imagining and reflecting upon what they might want instead of a jail. And it's possible to do so without taking on the burden of proposing some replacement that will siphon people into some other form of state control.

Rather than attempting to catalog every form of alternative and its pros and cons, this strategic recommendation is about building the capacity within our organizations to refuse becoming accessories to carceral operations. The replacements addressed here are promoted as reducing exposure to state violence and enabling a transition away from incarceration, but they are better understood as carceral expansion due to the ways in which they widen the overall net of the PIC.

ARE ALL ALTERNATIVES THE SAME?

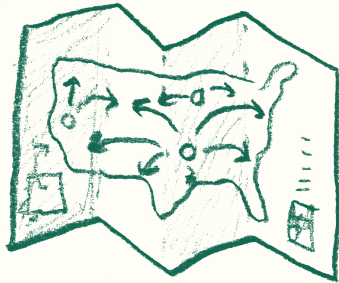
No. Nor is this recommendation suggesting that all alternatives are equally problematic or questionable. This recommendation is focused on alternatives formalized, funded, and implemented by the state with the support of nonprofit and private organizations which pair decarceration and closure with expansions of population management and social control.³³ It is a criticism of alternatives that devolve police power into communities, that deputize non-police to act on behalf of police, and that allow the jail to leak into aspects of everyday life. It is also a criticism of how the carceral state seizes on liberatory organizing to offer half solutions rather than ones which truly sustain life and reorganize power relations. This recommendation is also not focused on efforts by grassroots, underground, or informal networks to decommodify social support or do crisis response in order to reduce the number of people targeted by the state (i.e. community run harm reduction distros), which have their own strengths and weaknesses but by and large do not attempt to supplant the criminal legal system.³⁴ Therefore, this section should also be seen as advocating for a systemic analysis rather than one that seeks to condemn individual organizations or campaigns.



Figure 10: Conference against CDCR in January 2013.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

The National is Not Local, Resisting Movement Flattening and Model- Based Thinking



Criminal justice reform is riddled with attempts to produce “models” for crime management and reform, while anti-carceral and abolitionist organizing is also marked by efforts to replicate struggles from other contexts in order to achieve similar results. Although movements in other places must be studied and assessed (and their lessons and failures integrated by organizations beyond that place), the tendency of national coalitions and organizations to offer templates to local groups diminishes contextual, local expertise, leadership, and creativity.

Abolition is not a localized movement, it is also national and global. Learning from the tactics used by people in other counties, states, and even countries is a crucial form of political education for organizers. Within the US, such learning happens through a number of forms, including through national organi-

zations who support and connect struggles happening around the country, and through exchange between organizers based in different regions. These exchanges often result in legislative reforms, for example, being duplicated from place to place, or frameworks for decarceration being adapted from one place to another. As reforming mass incarceration has become a more mainstream political goal, there are also several racial justice and criminal justice reform organizations, along a wide political spectrum, who take responsibility for stewarding the mass movement against the PIC. In this role, they develop policies and solutions that can be adapted by organizers from one place to another.

Connecting across geography can foster creativity, generate new campaign strategies, and bolster movements. It can also, conversely, lead to a ‘template’ based approach to organizing, where tactics in one place are treated as models for all similar organizing. For example, conditions litigation is not an effective strategy in every place with a dilapidated facility. In some places, conditions litigation will empower jail builders and renovators, whereas in others it may provide a modicum of relief based on the conditions. Yet, conditions litigation is often hyped as a broadly applicable tactic for decarceration.

Decontextualized adaptations can lead to a ‘flattening’ of nuanced contextual dynamics as only certain aspects of a localized effort are conveyed across geographic boundaries. Serious strategic disagreements, specific local histories, and interpersonal debates are not conveyed, leading to mischaracterizations of why a particular group pursued a particular



Figure 11: Stop Cop City graffiti along the Proctor Creek Greenway Trail, 2023.

tactic. When flattening happens, organizers expect to get the same results from pursuing the same tactic elsewhere, and can be disappointed when it doesn’t land the same way for their campaign.

The No New Jails Network emerged from several organizers’ instinct that sharing lessons and strategies across different campaigns would ultimately strengthen their respective local efforts. It became clear, over time, that this was an ambitious goal. As detailed earlier

in this resource, many campaigns were dealing with widely different political contexts, had different structures, or were resourced in vastly different ways. Tactics could not easily be replicated from one place to another.

Such dynamics within the NNJN inform this recommendation, which encourages organizers to ground in deep study of other movements, rather than accepting generalized narratives and seeking to template and replicate what others have done.

Why Should We Resist Flattening?

First of all, in terms of carceral infrastructure, the relation between the local and national is complicated by the fact that one kind of carceral infrastructure is not interchangeable with another. A jail is not an armory, an armory is not a training facility, and so on. Often, two jails in different counties of the same state are barely the same. While they may be the same on an analytical and ideological level, the actual nature of a particular facility, who is involved, how it is being constructed and funded, who it impacts, will largely differ. The instinct to create templates is one that can often lead specifically placed organizers into frustrating situations where there is no comparable entity for them to target. While successful tactics should be adapted, they should reflect the reality of the power structures in a particular place in order to avoid being ahistorical and support overall strengthening of their movement. For example, while many guides for undertaking jail closure fights may encourage targeting technical violations (a failure to comply with the conditions of release, which is not a new crime), this will not be an effective strategy for a county where most people are detained rather than released.

Secondly, just as no two facilities are the same, no two localities, counties, or states are exactly the same. In the NNJN, for example, certain organizations did not promote themselves as abolitionist projects locally due to the conservative political environment around them, while campaigns elsewhere publicly described themselves as abolitionist in order

The instinct to create templates is one that can often lead specifically placed organizers into frustrating situations where there is no comparable entity for them to target.

to make an intervention against liberal reformism in their local government. National organizations and conveners therefore must offer ways for local groups to right-size demands and tactics from elsewhere to their specific context, while still maintaining the radical core of the original demand. This is necessary also because academia, the non-profit industrial complex and philanthropy can tend to privilege the perspectives and challenges faced by better resourced campaigns in larger cities, which may then feel inapplicable for organizers in rural or smaller areas. It's necessary for national movements to counteract asymmetrical power dynamics by highlighting the strategic debates that are specific to each fight and place.

Finally, communities have their own rich histories of resistance and conflict that should inform their work and open up new opportunities. Whether the scope of the campaign is a state or a county or a neighborhood, there will be relevant experiences that are specific to that place. There are delicate networks of relationships between friends, families, neighbors, coworkers, and comrades built over multiple years of meetings, events, protests, parties, and more. Campaigns and organizations should commit to documenting and debriefing the lessons of their local struggles without quickly moving to adapt to the latest popular campaign from another place. Moreover, it is important that residents with the organizational memory of what has worked and what hasn't worked in that place are consulted. When local organizations adopt models or templates from other places without working in the community to adapt the lessons to what already exists, they

threaten these networks and waste the lessons of past localized struggles. And when national organizations seek to create models or offer templated solutions to people from one place to another, they contribute to the flattening of a complex movement with a diversity of tactics.

TLDR: Stay Grounded In Context, Glean Inspiration From Elsewhere

'The national is not local' is a recommendation for approaches to anti-carceral organizing that are *honest* and *rigorous* about what led a particular local movement to success or failure. It calls for organizers and campaigns to undertake thorough, if not exhaustive, mapping of their landscape. It also calls for them to engage in studying other struggles deeply, not ignore or copy them. By doing this, they can avoid flattening within the movement and maintain the integrity of complex debates which require discussion and study. As more and more people join fights against carceral infrastructure, they will need to be engaged in relevant political education around both local anti-carceral history and movements elsewhere. Through political education, landscape mapping, and forward-thinking research, campaigns will produce organizing that is robust and creative rather than rote in its approach. The worksheet in the next section of this resource offers some questions to prompt this mapping.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Against the Shallow Politics of Representation, Towards Solidarity



Organizers and advocates must find methods to mobilize and empower marginalized people without falling to debates over who is the most “authentic” spokesperson for a movement. Building with criminalized and impacted communities and addressing the material needs of people who are targeted by state violence is necessary for any infrastructure fight, but this cannot be mediated through a surface level politics that seeks to tokenize people and turn them into one dimensional figures.

On the one hand, solidarity with people who have been to jail or are currently caged is a matter of exercising a political commitment to destroying the literal and metaphorical walls created by the PIC. On the other hand,

a dangerous and corrosive politics of representation has become the norm, particularly among campaigns for prison and jail reform, and even among abolitionist groups. Liberal and shallow understandings of who is ‘authorized’ to speak about criminalization or organize against jails have contributed to disorganization among the larger PIC abolitionist movement, and struggles against jail expansion have suffered from such perspectives as well.

Politicking and opportunism obscure that, locally, for myriad reasons, most residents oppose building or expanding jails (whether they oppose devolving these jails into the community is another issue). The politics of representation is distinct from ‘identity politics,’ a framework created by Black feminists to convey how their radical politics emerge from experiencing the intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender.

Representation politics, by comparison, is a diluted version of identity politics, where someone’s political perspectives and opinions are less important than whether they appear to be an “authentic” spokesperson for that movement. The tokenization of particular marginalized experiences and weaponizing of these experiences to advocate for carceral expansion can also be understood as a form of ‘**identity reductionism**’, which “simplifies and commodifies identity, reducing it to a set of superficial characteristics rather than recognizing it as rooted in deep historical and material conditions.”³⁵

Why Should We Be Wary of Representation Politics and Identity Reductionism?

Claims to authenticity and quibbling over who is more or less disempowered are used to diminish and refute criticisms and political disagreement, therefore weakening the entire liberatory and revolutionary struggle. In anti-jail campaigns, the politics of representation result in criminalized people being tokenized for their experiences, patronized for their centrist or right-wing views, or treated as infallible experts on the topic of incarceration. They can also result in bad-faith quarrels among organizers about whose experiences are the most ‘authentic’ and whether abolitionist groups who are lacking in representation of marginalized groups should defer to ones that have more marginalized people, even if those people support carceral expansion. Surface level engagement with others’ time inside a cage or deferring to directly impacted people obscures complicated lived experiences and turns them into reform fodder. It allows those with the language of abolition and freedom to overshadow those actually working to deploy abolitionist tactics by holding difficult lines against expansion.

Jarrold Shanahan and Zhandarka Kurti discuss these dynamics in their book *Skyscraper Jails*. Their work details the development of the borough based jails plan in New York City. As they discuss, efforts to resist this plan were—in part—demobilized by debates around abolitionists’ authenticity:

“Leftist spaces have not really found a way to balance righteous imperatives like anti-racism and feminism with the equally important need for open and honest debate, in which all participants say what they are really thinking and are free to disagree. Many projects have succumbed instead to what Olúfemi O. Táíwò calls “deference politics,” the practice of conceding, without substantive debate, to whomever can claim to be most marginalized or impacted by the issue at hand. This comes from a good place, but in practice it isn’t much of a politics at all.”³⁶

Criminalized people are not a monolith. Many currently and formerly criminalized and incarcerated people are abolitionists and revolutionaries. However, many criminalized people have also called for expansions of pretrial control, for nicer and better jails, for so-called gender expansive jails, for expansions of involuntary treatment and the construction of mental health jails, and a number of other things that are decidedly carceral and reformist. Representation politics can result in impacted communities feeling diminished and sidelined by abolitionist responses to their reform advocacy. These dynamics are not helped by the fact that nonprofit and academic cultures, who benefit from carceral and reformist changes, promote competition, careerism, and pit people against each other for funding and opportunities. Additionally, reformist and carceral organizations prey on groups of criminalized people by incentivizing their participation in incrementalist and expansionist proposals to project themselves as legitimate participants in these movements.

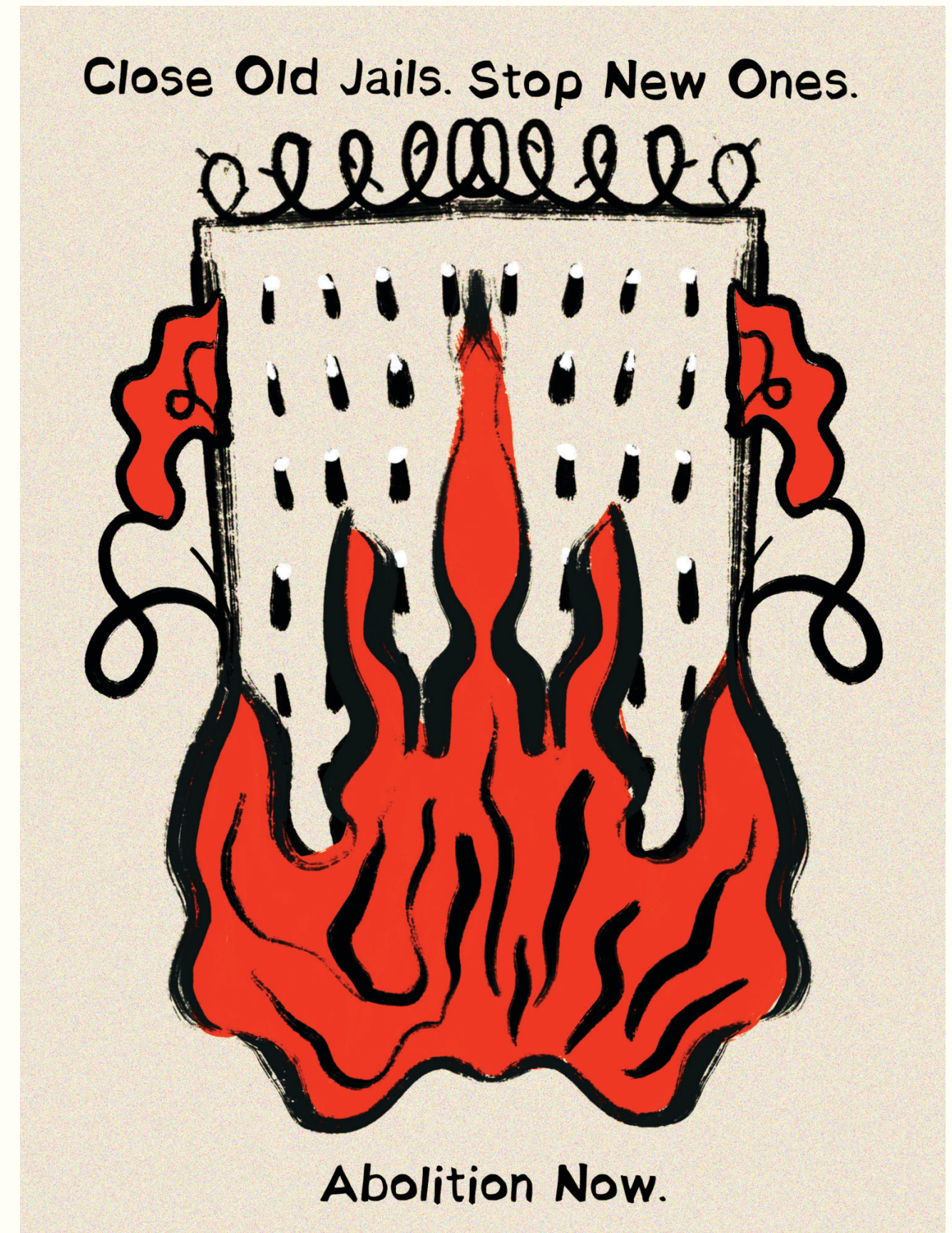
TLDR: Against Representation, Towards Solidarity

This recommendation does not suggest that movements should not strive to include multiple kinds of people and, in particular, prioritize the perspectives of people who have been targeted by the criminal punishment system. Calls for more representation emerged, after all, from the conspicuous whiteness of movement spaces where people who were spoken about or who were most impacted were not in the room. Historically, groups led by formerly incarcerated people, as well as the actions of people currently in jail and prison, have been critical and indispensable for achieving bold and necessary changes towards freedom. Jails have been places where intellectuals, thieves, soldiers, and dissidents meet and form relationships, where nuanced and rich understandings about the world are cultivated. These reasons are why anti-jail campaigns *should* pursue strategies that reach people outside of typical settings and connect with people inside the facilities to partake in collective political education, while ensuring those strategies are in pursuit of solidarity, not tokenism and shallow representation.

Underlying these recommendations is a challenge to abolitionist organizations to strengthen their muscle to be in tension and conflict with one another, accept criticism, and integrate what has been learned. These recommendations are meant as offerings, not to scold but to reckon with the watershed political moment at which we all find ourselves. As criminalization only grows, our resilience and discernment must also grow.

Each of these recommendations seeks to address an aspect of anti-infrastructure organizing that is challenging, not to suggest that everyone runs a perfectly neat abolitionist campaign. There are many complex choices involved in negotiating with those who hold power, while trying to represent and enact the best interests of people inside the cages. Nonetheless, there have been hundreds of radical efforts to shut down carceral facilities that have not proposed an alternative, a replacement, or a better prison. They prove that we can imagine decarceration, divestment, and dismantling without offloading harm onto increasingly precarious and more marginalized people.

Figure 12: “Close Old Jails. Stop New Ones. Abolition Now,” by Mon M.



SECTION 5:

So You Want to Stop a Jail: A Worksheet

The recommendations and interventions outlined in previous sections may paint a dire picture of the broader abolitionist movement, but they are meant to ground and inspire future organizing. Noting our areas of growth is not meant to discourage experimentation, but rather to inform it. Ultimately, it is only through the practical application of the analysis within this document that movements will continue to build on what has already been achieved. This section is for anyone wondering how to interpret or utilize some of the lessons and recommendations offered here in their practical, on the ground, organizing. The first part of the worksheet focuses on how the **landscape**, **threats**, **rationale**, and **movement** categories can be used to map a local jail fight. The second part offers tools for applying the recommendations from *Section 4*.

PART 1:

Mapping Your Fight

You can use the categories above to write out what you know about each of these dynamics in your own locality. Once you've noted down the people, laws, and places relevant to each category, you can use the questions below to develop a wide map of your terrain. "Mapping the Prison Industrial Complex," a resource by Micah Herskind, also compiles multiple methods of visualizing and mapping your local Prison Industrial Complex (abolitionist.tools/Mapping-the-PIC).

Once you've mapped your terrain, use the answers to inform your research priorities (what more do you need to know?), your outreach (which organizations will need to be closely connected to the campaign?), and your targets (who has the power to make the changes you've identified?). In closure or anti-construction fights, all tactics can be on the table, not just policy or electoral pressure. Use the worksheet to help identify what feels strategic and logical, rather than following a pre-established template of advocacy and pressure.

1. Landscape

- 1. What are the county, city, and state laws governing criminalization passed in the past decade?
- 2. How have people been resisting criminalization in your locality in the past decade years, and who are they?
- 3. What charges are people being arrested with, how many, and in which areas? Who is experiencing the impact of criminalization?
- 4. What stories and movements do people historically associate with local resistance to jailing?
- 5. Are there abolitionist organizations, community spaces, or collectives that already exist locally, however small?

2. Threats

- 1. What kinds of narratives are currently being shared about crime in the local media?
- 2. Which elected officials and government officials have taken a stance against the existing jail or a new one?
- 3. Is there public information about instances of violence, or federal oversight of the local jail?
- 4. What organizations, if any, are advocating for new jails, and what evidence are they using to promote this solution?
- 5. Are there consultants, taskforces, or thinktanks, or other private companies associated with the new jails or assessments of the current jail? If so, what are their main activities? What funding have they received?

3. Rationale

- 1. What are the public narratives associated with the existing facility?
- 2. How are politicians and advocates referring to the need for an expanded or new facility, what cause are they providing?
- 3. Are there public materials about the proposed expansion or ongoing construction that can be studied and countered?
- 4. Who are the credible people that exist to speak to why these solutions offered are false or insufficient?
- 5. What are the concerns of the community that the facility will be in? What language do they speak, and are there resources for translation?

4. Movement

- 1. Is it likely that large numbers of people will be engaged and mobilized locally to fight this jail, or is it more likely that a small number of dedicated people will consistently resist it?
- 2. What are methods through which criminalized and incarcerated people can be informed and brought into the campaign?
- 3. Is it possible to trace how the jail will be funded and how can that be easily explained to people? If so, what have they revealed to us? If not, how can we find more information on the funding?
- 4. What kinds of practices exist among the organizers to build discernment and continuously self-assess their campaign and its structure?
- 5. What are the threat models for organizers (i.e. risks associated with being part of the anti-jail effort) within the campaign, or inside facilities, and how can these be preemptively addressed as the campaign is built?

PART 2:

Tactics for Applying Recommendations

The tactics below are ways to implement the four strategic recommendations detailed in *Section 4*. They are not exhaustive, but are highlighted here as important to consider for any organizer, coalition, or campaign that aims to not just close down or stop carceral expansion, but also to politicize the existence of carceral infrastructure. These tactics correspond to the categories above by addressing key sites of tension and contradiction that often appear in such campaigns, such as ‘forever fights’ where decades might be spent on trying to close one facility.

**As a reminder,
these are the four strategic
recommendations:**

**1.
Decarceration as a
Step Towards Abolition,
not PIC Expansion**

**2.
Organizers Must
Question
Replacements,
Alternatives, and
Solutions for Carceral
Infrastructure**

**3.
The National is
Not Local, Resisting
Flattening and Model-
Based Thinking**

**4.
Against the Shallow
Politics of
Representation,
Towards Solidarity**

The suggested tactics here are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather provide a starting place for thinking about the complexities and requirements of principled struggle against carceral expansion. To return to the recommendations made earlier in this resource, resisting the urge to flatten our struggles, extract from local movements, and compromise with the carceral state are principles worth holding on to in any anti-carceral fight, especially against jails.

Note: Many of the applications below necessitate breaking down existing hierarchical solidarities between ‘criminal’ and ‘noncriminal’ as well as ‘terrorist’ and ‘peaceful protest,’ because such divisions legitimize how the state understands and characterizes dissent and survival. It will be difficult for anti-infrastructure organizers to build the coalitions necessary for their effort if those in the campaign continue to indulge in the idea that some things are inherently criminal while others are not. Similarly, if certain kinds of tactics are considered illegitimate while others are uplifted it will implicitly serve to justify criminalizations and attacks on certain forms of organizing. While resolving long standing intra community conflict and biases often rooted in transmisogyny, anti-Blackness, ableism, and classism is not always possible for a campaign, avoiding public narratives which perpetuate divisions among marginalized people is key. By moving from “these are the wrong people to be in prison” to “no one should be in prison” we can work to break down such hierarchies.

How can we strengthen our organizing, particularly when the political culture is focused on expanding detention, not closing facilities?

DE-SILOING

It makes sense that people coming together to stop a jail want to build with others who have similar knowledge or background in the same movement. Often, organizers in anti-carceral fights narrowly hone in on organizations who focus on police, prisons, etc within their power map, even if they share little to no political alignment and are unlikely to be moved. In these situations, there might be more opportunities found within forging connections across movements. Anti-poverty, labor, climate justice, harm reduction, and housing justice movements, for example, often have their own analysis and understanding of what is happening inside the jail and to criminalize people. Rather than seeing these movements as parallel, integrating them into the campaign can be a method for coming up with strategies and solutions that do not replicate reforms opposed by other groups of people. Working alongside indigenous activists to take back land, with climate activists to preserve a forest, or abortion advocates to decriminalize reproductive care are also closure strategies. De-siloing is different from just building a coalition with groups who represent different movements and supporting each other's legislation. It refers to integrating expertise and knowledge from other movements into the facility fight by creatively engaging many kinds of people and connecting the facility fight to their struggles.

DIVERSITY OF TARGETS

The 'big' targets can feel compelling, whether that's certain politicians or the agency behind the correctional expansion, but often subtargets like subcontractors and those who hold power at lower levels are equally useful for delay strategies. An infrastructure project involves hundreds, if not thousands, of administrative and funding decisions, all of which might offer a possibility for intervention. Doing the research and fostering connections with officials strategically positioned to provide information can help identify these subtargets.

DIVERSITY OF TACTICS

It can feel enticing to hone in on just a few specific tactics that have been successful in past years of jail closure efforts. Utilizing a wide variety of methods to pressure those with closure power and to engage large amounts of people is, however, an overall better strategy because it can support staying focused on the ultimate goal of closure and demolition. Consistently assessing, evolving and adding tactics is a way to avoid becoming overly enmeshed within government processes, as well as a way to support more people in getting involved.

INSIDE/OUTSIDE SOLIDARITY

As has been said many times throughout this guide, the experiences and perspectives of people inside the facilities we seek to dismantle are invaluable to any political effort. Ultimately, incarcerated and criminalized people have always been the ones who have won their own freedoms. Accompanying people inside jails as they organize behind the walls, undertaking political education with them, redistributing resources to them, and connecting with their families, will go far in building long-term relationships beyond a particular campaign or moment. This will also recenter the primary site of power to be inside the jail rather than in city hall. Shifting the material realities of incarcerated and criminalized people is how abolitionists expand the possibilities associated with closure and demolition of cages.

RESEARCH

High quality research and inquiry are the cornerstone of any liberatory organizing effort, including anti-infrastructure fights. Research doesn't just mean reading reports or accessing data, it also means community conversations, town halls, letter writing, participatory research, social listening, collective storytelling, and other forms of knowledge production and sharing that can produce a more thorough picture of opportunities available to stop a project. Developing research skills, having groups of people who are committed to finding information, and developing relationships with people who can provide hard to access information (whether they are likely or unlikely partners) can totally change the strategic direction of a campaign. For example, building a relationship with prison union leadership, while not a long term partnership, can be a way of getting information about conditions and numbers inside a facility. Non-traditional forms of research can also support in resolving absences and gaps around knowledge that are common, such as the absence of imprisoned peoples' thinking when it comes to campaign design.

How can we hold the line against replacements and alternatives that reproduce the PIC, expand carceral control, and siphon resources away from non-punitive, voluntary, public support?

POLITICAL EDUCATION

While the goal of fighting a jail is to prevent its construction and approval, the process of organizing is an opportunity to grow the local movement for future struggles, whether or not the jail is built. Political education, town halls, panels, community engagement, and cultural activations are a worthwhile strategy for educating people on why a jail is not good for their community, and getting them activated in political movements. While many organizers do this as a part of their work, it should not be underestimated or diminished in its importance to the longevity and resilience of local movements. Framing the approval or defeat of the jail as the only goal or the ultimate goal can lead to a narrow focus, and even end in disappointment.

NAMING DEVOLUTION

Devolving criminalization and incarceration into community-based settings is not a sufficient end goal for movements, especially if we do not want to become each others' wardens. It's common for campaigns against construction to advocate for community-centric, restorative care. Yet, it is important to understand and name that the widespread decimation of public resources and services will not be fixed by empowering individuals to act on behalf of the police. Teachers, doctors, nurses, caretakers, social workers, and crisis responders should not be expected to fill the gaps left

by a lack of social welfare, nor should they be expected to perform as quasi-police. Anti-jail organizers can seek to reduce harm instead by uplifting and strengthening organizing demands being made by other movements within the county or state. For example, rather than proposing that the city expand treatment for people when they're arrested, campaigns can partner with disability justice groups to echo demands for syringe service programs and publicly funded peer respite centers for those in crisis.

REFUSAL

Throughout this guide, there are observations about how organizers are backed into a corner where they must propose an affirmative vision or alternative in order to legitimize their organizing. Choosing to do nothing, or to refuse to do the work of policymakers and urban planners for them, must be seen as a viable option in these conditions. The stakes for choosing to compromise or agreeing to provide some alternative vision are high and threaten to deradicalize anticarceral movements. Yet the stakes for refusing to offer something else can also feel high and come with a retraction of funding or a sense of purposelessness. It is true that sometimes refusing can feel impossible. But refusal to participate, as a response, can be hugely valuable in holding the line on a particular issue and creating possibilities for continued abolitionist struggle.

How can we assess or adapt when we become stuck or are asked to make impossible choices?

PIVOTING

Being responsive to changing conditions is a key skill for any organizer, and this is the same for anti-infrastructure organizing. Some fights to close a jail or stop a new one have lasted over a decade. Entire administrations can change during this time, and new laws and reforms can be implemented. It can become unstrategic to focus on jails in a particular place versus other aspects of the PIC. Organizers should embrace the pivot, meaning that they should embrace changing strategies, structures, demands, and goals in response to the shifting landscape and threats. Even when the vision of freedom or abolition stays the same, the tactics and intermediate goals can differ and evolve.

EXIT STRATEGIES

It is often very difficult to stop a jail or close it down, and often very difficult to sustain the many fronts of organizing required to do so. Over the duration of the fight, conditions will change and new obstacles will develop, draining organizers' capacity to continue responding to new dynamics. Increasing criminalization and retaliation can be incredibly demoralizing. At other times, insurgent organizers are offered a "seat at the table" in exchange for accepting a loss, like a taskforce spot, or a jail oversight representative. At times like this, these groups must seriously consider exit strategies, document their efforts, and live to struggle another day. Aversion to ending a campaign can eventually lead to exhaustion and concession. Sometimes ending a campaign, responsibly and with intention, can be the best choice for the overall future of your local organizing ecosystem.

The suggested tactics are meant to provide a starting place for thinking about the complexities and requirements of principled struggle against carceral expansion. This worksheet will hopefully support you as you consider whether to take on a campaign against carceral infrastructure.

SECTION 6:

Conclusion

While fights against the construction, operation, and expansion of prisons, jails, and detention centers have seen some major wins in the past twenty decades, we are far from moratoriums on construction. Criminalization is a centuries-old project of white supremacist, capitalist, colonial statehood, which continues to animate the apparatus of mass incarceration that structures and normalizes US social, political and economic life in ways that are fundamentally anti-Black and xenophobic.

At the time of writing, carceral preservationists and racist oligarchs across the country are capitalizing on the widespread, rapid expansions of criminalization that are occurring through fascist and white supremacist paradigms of who is ‘undeserving’ versus ‘deserving’; ‘legal’ versus ‘criminal’; ‘violent’ versus ‘nonviolent.’ Public and private institutions alike are stoking myths of migrant criminality and deploying race science in order to justify funding militarism and imperialism. Sheriffs

are renewing 287(g) agreements to allow local police to function as immigration enforcement, while cities are creating exclusion zones to ban homeless people, street vendors, and sex workers. Facilities, such as Etowah County Jail in Gadsden, Alabama, that once closed, are being reopened. The Trump administration is pursuing a \$45 billion expansion of detention centers, while local jails are adding beds for migrants, even as state prisons are being opened in order to solve for overcrowding and poor conditions.³⁷

Bipartisan backlash to popular abolitionist movements of the 2010s threatens to undo even incremental anti-carceral achievements of the past decade. In places where leftist activists are not encountering an all out war on marginalized communities in every public space, they are instead contending with renewed enthusiasm for **neoliberal**, bare-minimum, reforms that attempt to squeeze resources out of austerity budgets.

Political leaders generally either openly embrace criminalization and incarceration as population management strategies or pretend otherwise while funneling more funding towards social control programs, soft-policing, and surveillance.

This grim catalog of our current conditions isn’t here to scare readers into immobility or nonaction, but to provide a sober assessment of the reasons why infrastructure and moratorium fights are not going anywhere. Under these conditions, capitulation to false solutions and half-progress is not an option. None of the recommendations or tools in this resource were created with the intention of scolding any group that may attempt certain tactics, but rather to invite disagreement, debate, and define the collective political line that we might all uphold. Within the framework of this resource, anti-infrastructure efforts are not the only or best method to shrink and dismantle the carceral state, nor are they guaranteed success. Rather, they are opportunities for movement building and contending with dynamic political complexi-

ties that may grow our collective analysis and skills.

The struggle to abolish the PIC and free them all has been a long enduring one. Organizing against jails and other kinds of infrastructure are not new. The past half century of radical organizing against mass incarceration has given us many methods to build upon and grow from, if we choose to do so. We can meet such dire conditions, sharpened by the collective knowledge of principled (and successful) campaigns, coalitions, and actions that predate this moment. Abolitionist, decolonial, anti-capitalist, internationalist, and anti-imperialist movements can help us identify strategies that reject the counterinsurgent politics of representation, appeal and deference. By embracing and documenting our failures, disagreements, and tensions, rather than erasing them, we can open up opportunities for ingenuity and experimentation. And by articulating what we want for our communities, without compromise—freedom, peace, wellbeing, self-determination, liberation—we get that much closer to our goals.

The past half century of radical organizing against mass incarceration has given us many methods to build upon and grow from, if we choose to do so.

Appendix



Figure 13: Unity March outside the Champaign County Jail in Illinois, 2015.

Key Concepts

The following conceptual frameworks can be thought of as foundational pillars for this guide, or lenses through which the learnings can be processed. Key concepts are a step towards building the kinds of shared understandings that might engineer greater alignment within our efforts to dismantle carceral infrastructure. These particular frameworks ground the abolitionist principles of this document and allude to its lineage. They are dynamic, and changing as circumstances, experiences, and language evolve.

1. Organized Abandonment

Originally phrased by management consultant Peter Drucker, “organized abandonment” is a concept that has been taken up and critically developed by abolitionist geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore, among others, as a way to describe the deliberate nature of how institutions, both private and public, govern

populations through callous yet purposeful neglect, relegating many humans and other lifeforms as surplus to the contemporary political economic order.

Rather than saying it is just banks or the military or one university or one jail, ‘organized abandonment’ as a concept gives us a way to think about why these forces collaborate together—and to what end. The decisions that produce unemployment and then criminalize poverty, or produce homelessness and then criminalize loitering, which in turn exposes people to further violence and possible death, are some examples of the concept.

Organized abandonment doesn’t only refer to structural inequality that is baked into systems, but additionally refers to the people and institutions—bankers, landlords, police, clerks, etc.—who make decisions in order to preserve the racial and economic status quo. It shifts attention and blame away from the individual who is experiencing organized abandonment (whether in the form of

poverty, homelessness, joblessness, criminalization, etc) to the institutions which create and exacerbate it.

In this case, ‘organized abandonment’ is a framework for thinking about how jails are part of a carceral state that deliberately engineers vulnerability among certain groups of people in order to use them as fodder for maintaining the racial capitalist status quo.

2. Carceral Humanism

Organizer and PIC abolitionist James Kilgore coined this phrase during a campaign to stop jail construction in Champaign-Urbana, IL to accurately describe efforts to reform the carceral state in ways that will supposedly make it more benevolent or ‘humane,’ but instead further entrench its power. Jails designed with more windows, or less painful monitors, or app-based supervision—and funding for these projects—all justify themselves through the language of humanitarianism. This phenomenon is not new but in recent years has been a convenient way to justify entrenched and preexisting racist, capitalist, and carceral instincts.

Carceral humanism as a framework is closely tied to:

- **SOFT POLICING**, which refers to the use of medical professionals, counselors, teachers and other so called ‘non police’ to substitute for law enforcement in settings such as hospitals and schools. As Mariame Kaba and Andrea Ritchie write in their book *No*

More Police, “The institutions we think of as advancing social good also work to contain, regulate, and criminalize individuals and populations—all in service of social and economic policy that favors corporations over communities, and individual wealth over collective well-being.”³⁸

- **NET-WIDENING**, which is used to describe how reforms to the ways cages and cops function often serve to expand the number of people they can surveil and control.

Carceral humanism is hugely relevant for understanding pretrial innovation and jail expansion because it describes how prison preservationists have co-opted community concerns around jailing and used them to justify construction and renovation.

3. Carceral Devolution

Carceral devolution is the process of transferring the authority to supervise and rehabilitate prisoners from the state to local jurisdictions. This can include shifting prisoners from state prisons to local jails. Sociologist Reuben Miller also uses the term to refer to how criminal legal system processes and actions have been ‘devolved’ to be undertaken in other settings such as nursing homes, schools, halfway houses, and re-entry centers.³⁹ These devolutions shift the geography of punitive social control away from large scale state institutions like the prisons towards community corrections spearheaded by non-state actors and third-party penal voluntary sectors.

4.
Capitalism &
Neoliberalism

Narratives about the expansion of mass incarceration and jail construction often focus on “profit” attempting to determine who is financially gaining from building new jails. But as Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Jackie Wang, Eugene Puryear, Brett Story, CLR James, and many more have addressed—the relationship between jails, money, profit, and debt is complex due to the conditions created by capitalism. It’s often less about a group of people profiting directly and more about how jails fit into the political economy of a city, state, and the country. Jails produce indebtedness and impoverish people, push people into joblessness and homelessness, and suck up state resources in ways that enable the scapegoating of people who need social services.

For this toolkit, capitalism and neoliberalism are key frameworks because of how the financing of jail demolition, renovation, expansion and construction can impact that county’s budget for decades to come and completely realign the financial priorities of its policymakers. Most jails are funded through public bonds and debt that is then paid back by the municipality over time; they’re quite literally an “IOU” for future communities. And as this toolkit covers in *Section 4* expansions of the carceral state have gone hand in hand with cuts to social spending on resources like libraries, public housing, and schools as city leaders have conceded the management of these to private companies

and contractors. Jails have become de facto providers of healthcare and housing in geographies where political leaders choose to save on public goods, a trend that is a hallmark of neoliberal capitalism.

5.
Pretrial Freedom:

As Brett Davidson, Elisabeth Epps, Sharyln Grace, Atara Rich-Shea write in their essay “Pretrial incarceration does not exist solely in the realm of the criminal legal system. Jails expand the reach of other punitive regimes such as ICE and child welfare systems...”⁴⁰ Pretrial freedom is a demand that articulates freedom from supervision, incarceration, and all forms of restriction during the pretrial period *as well as* the abolition of all systems that rely on jails to warehouse, process, detain, and remove people. As a framework, it moves us towards opposing all forms of carceral control rather than just bail or jail by recognizing that our horizon is not just ending detention.

Glossary

ABLEISM: Talila A. Lewis, lawyer and abolitionist educator, defines ableism as ‘A system of assigning value to people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in eugenics, anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. This systemic oppression that leads to people and society determining people’s value based on their culture, age, language, appearance, religion, birth or living place, “health/ wellness”, and/ or their ability to satisfactorily re/ produce, “excel” and “behave.” You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.’⁴¹ Ableism is also tied to sanism, which refers to structural oppression against people who are perceived to have non-normative ways of communicating, behaving, or responding to stress (this may or may not be mediated through a medical diagnosis). These oppressions are often heightened along race, gender, and class lines.

Carceral sanism describes how the carceral state specifically targets and criminalizes disabled and mad people.

ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION: ATIs, when capitalized, refers to public initiatives and programs that claim to divert people away from the physical jail or reduce time spent inside. These can be programs run through correctional systems, through the municipal government, or they can be run by contractors providing services. They often direct people into other settings that are not jail such as hospitals, shelters, rehabilitation centers, and halfway houses. ATIs can be used as part of diversion programs, where participation in them only happens through a court-mandated order, or they can involve risk assessment where people are targeted for programming due to where they live or their race, age, and gender.

BORDER IMPERIALISM: Instead of seeing the rush of migrants at borders in the United States and Europe as the source of the crisis, the term border imperialism directs our attention to the border itself as the source of the crisis. Organizer and author Harsha Walia explains that border imperialism encapsulates four elements: “first, the mass displacement of impoverished and colonized communities resulting from asymmetrical relations of global power, and the simultaneous securitization of the border against those migrants whom capitalism and empire have displaced; second, the criminalization of migration with severe punishment and discipline of those deemed ‘alien’ or ‘illegal’; third, the entrenchment of a racialized hierarchy of citizenship by arbitrating who legitimately constitutes the nation-state; and fourth, the state-mediated exploitation of migrant labor, akin to conditions of slavery and servitude, by capitalist interests.”⁴²

CARCERAL CREEP: Coined by Mimi Kim, this term refers to a sociological concept describing the gradual expansion of the criminal legal system, particularly through the increasing reliance on incarceration, often occurring when social movements advocating for protection against certain issues, like domestic violence, inadvertently become overly reliant on criminal justice solutions, leading to unintended negative consequences for marginalized communities. It can also describe how aspects of the system become part of settings that are not necessarily designed for punishment, such as parks, schools, and hospitals.

CARCERAL REFORMS: Carceral reforms are changes to how criminalized people are managed, administered, tracked, prosecuted, sentenced, and caged that grow the power of the carceral state. They do this by driving resources to the PIC, reifying carceral logics, making certain groups of people more vulnerable to death, and expanding state and private entities’ ability to benefit from the marginalization and criminalization of these groups of people.

CARCERAL STATE: This is a term used to refer to the institutions, processes, relationships, resources, and methods that organize, distribute, and manage state power through criminalization, detention, incarceration, surveillance, and incarceration. This includes not just jails, prisons, detention centers, treatment facilities, and other physical buildings, but laws which determine criminality and innocence, tools and technologies which enable the subjugation of people, and economic and social structures which facilitate systemic violence against groups of otherized and marginalized people.

DATA CRIMINALIZATION: Data criminalization describes the creation, archiving, theft, resale and analysis of seemingly objective data that courts and police use to argue that certain people are threats or risks, based on information created by and culled from state and commercial sources. Criminalizing data is often created by surveillance.

DECARCERATION: Sometimes used interchangeably with excarceration, this refers to reducing the number of people held in correctional facilities through legal, administrative, or other changes.

EUGENICS & RACE SCIENCE: Eugenics refers to a white supremacist, cisheteropatriarchal, ableist pseudoscience that marks certain people as genetically superior to others. It’s a term used often to discuss how criminalizing discourses have made use of pseudoscientific concepts that are supposedly backed by data in order to justify dehumanization, collective punishment, social control and biometric registration of individuals and groups that are targeted by the state. In this tradition, concepts like “mental degeneracy,” “loose family morals,” “criminal,” and “high-risk,” are deployed.

PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX: As defined by Critical Resistance, “The prison industrial complex (PIC) is a term we use 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 and maintains the authority of people who get their power through racial, economic and other privileges. There are many ways this power is collected and maintained through the PIC, including creating mass media images that keep alive stereotypes of people of color, poor people, queer people, immigrants, youth, and other oppressed communities as criminal, delinquent, or deviant. This power is also maintained by earning huge profits for private companies that deal with prisons and

police forces; helping earn political gains for “tough on crime” politicians; increasing the influence of prison guard and police unions; and eliminating social and political dissent by oppressed communities that make demands for self-determination and reorganization of power in the US.”⁴³

MORATORIUM: A legally authorized temporary suspension of an activity or law until future consideration warrants lifting the suspension.

NET-WIDENING: Coined by sociologist Stanley Cohen, this phrase refers to the process of administrative, legal, or practical changes that result in a great number of individuals who are vulnerable to being tracked or trapped by carceral systems.

PRETRIAL CONTROL: Used to reference all of the ways the behavior and movement of people are controlled before they are sentenced, even outside of detention, in response to whatever they are accused of. Pretrial supervision and other kinds of pretrial services, depending on what they do, are part of how pretrial control is enforced.

PRETRIAL DETENTION: Pretrial detention, sometimes referred to as remand, is when someone who has been arrested is detained in jail prior to their trial or sentencing. Jails are usually used for pretrial detention, although sometimes can hold people who have been sentenced as well as migrants and people who were meant to go to a hospital. They are not *solely* for pretrial detention.

RACIAL CAPITALISM: As geographer and organizer Ruth Wilson Gilmore has said, “Capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it...All capitalism is racial from its beginning, which is to say the capitalism that we have inherited is constantly and reproducing itself and it will continue to depend on racial practice and racial hierarchy. No matter what.” Capitalism requires a division of labor and power. There are those who own and profit from the factories, the land, the intellectual property, the companies and there are those whose labor is exploited to produce value that keeps the economy going. One of the ways our society differentiates between these roles and preserves the power of the capital owning class is by justifying these differences as racial hierarchies. Groups of people are classified based on real or imagined attributes and their lives are devalued on account of these traits. Criminalization is a tool the state uses to manage those discarded by racial capitalism, and reinforces race and class based hierarchies by marking people with criminal records and depriving them of life chances.

REPRESENTATION POLITICS / IDENTITY REDUCTIONISM: The idea that someone’s gender, race, age, or other identity markers are the most valuable and significant indicators of their politics, regardless of the power they hold and how they choose to use it. This dilutes the concept of ‘identity politics’ as put forward by the Combahee River Collective to highlight how experiences of oppression should be understood as rooted in one’s identities and how this understanding can help shape more visionary responses to violence and injustice. Representation politics is less concerned with the quality of the responses and more concerned with having the “right” spokesperson.

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Endnotes

1. A Request for Proposals released by Department of Homeland Security’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement on April 7 2025 invites contractors to submit proposals to provide new detention facilities, transportation, security guards, medical support and other administrative services worth as much as \$45 billion over the next two years, which it expects to receive from Congress and the Department of Defense, among other sources. These new facilities can operate under the lower conditions standards the agency uses for contracts with local jails and prisons.

2. Critical Resistance (n.d), *Towards the Abolition of Imprisonment: Dismantling Jails*, <https://criticalresistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/no-jails-draft-for-BTB.pdf>.

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6. Davis, A. Y., (2011), *Are prisons obsolete?*. Seven Stories Press, 107.

7. The Detention Watch Network has a number of resources, including their report ‘If You Build It, ICE Will Fill It,’ which details that immigrants in counties with more detention space are significantly more likely to be arrested and detained by ICE and the Communities Not Cages Core Narrative to help organizers navigate detention expansions, whether public or private. The Immigration Legal Resource Center similarly has a number of tools to help understand the Arrest to Deportation pipeline and the role of sheriffs in facilitation deportation, as well as a toolkit on ending 287(g) contracts.

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10. Anthropologist Orisanmi Burton’s *Tip of the Spear: Black Radicalism, Prison Repression, and the Long Attica Revolt* (2024) documents the counterinsurgent and repressive tactics used by New York State to destroy the uprising within Attica in 1971. Ethnic Studies professor Dylan Rodriguez has also written at length about the perils of reformism and how reforms threaten liberatory movements within and outside prison walls. Abolitionist organizers Mariame Kaba and Andrea Ritchie’s *No More Police* (2022) outlines the many failures of contemporary police reforms. Writers Nancy Heitzig and Kay Whitlock in *Carceral Con* (2021) describe how the bipartisan reform industry has created an expanding web of neoliberal public-private partnerships that reproduce structural racial and economic inequality. Disability scholar Liat Ben-Moshe’s *Decarcerating Disability* (2020) enumerates some of the ways in which demands for disability justice and access have been historically used to fuel carceral expansion. Political scientist Naomi Murakawa’s scholarship, particularly her paper ‘Mass Incarceration Is Dead, Long Live the Carceral State!’ (2020),’ demonstrates

how expansions of the carceral state have been facilitated through bipartisan reforms that pretend to be responsive to popular movements, but actually neutralize them. Both Brett Story’s *Prison Land* (2019) and Jackie Wang’s *Carceral Capitalism* (2018) explore how land and economy are structured around the continued existence and growth of the PIC beyond physical facilities.

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19. This is why CURB, in their 2021 report on Closing CA Prisons, makes sure to highlight that "Closed Prisons Must Stay Closed," writing that: "A serious plan for prison closure means that closed prisons stay closed; prison populations are reduced through releases, not transfers to other unsafe facilities; Corrections budgets are slashed; investments in reentry and other services are prioritized; voices of justice-impacted people are heard; and that labor solutions for displaced prison staff are front and center." Californians United for a Responsible Budget. (2021) *The Peoples' Plan for Prison Closure* <https://curbprisonspending.org/uploads/docs/resource-library/Peoples-Plan-for-Prison-Closure.pdf>, 28.
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24. LEAD has been a model for similar programs in cities like Albany and Pittsburgh. Albany's city website describes the program as "In lieu of the normal criminal justice system cycle - booking, detention, prosecution, conviction, incarceration - individuals are instead referred into a trauma-informed intensive case-management program where the individual receives a wide range of support services, often including transitional and permanent housing and/or drug treatment," Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion. City of Albany. <https://www.albanyny.gov/366/Law-Enforcement-Assisted-Diversion-LEAD>
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28. Community Justice Exchange's resource *Beyond Courts* has a section on 'Problem Solving Courts' which asserts that, "Many diversion programs are operated in partnership with nonprofits, hospitals, treatment centers, or community based organizations—their connection to community-based organizations can make them appear benign, if not positive. However, offering treatment, counseling, or job training through the criminal punishment system is not the same as providing these resources directly in the community, outside of the court system. Access to care, housing, treatment and resources should never come at the cost of an arrest or prosecution." No New Jails Initiative. (n.d) *Problem Creating Courts*. <https://beyondcourts.org/en/learn/problem-creating-courts>
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30. There are a number of resources which exist to help organizers assess common reforms, including Critical Resistance's 'Reformist reforms vs. abolitionist steps to end IMPRISONMENT' and upEND's 'Framework for Evaluating Reformist Reforms Vs. Abolitionist Steps' in the Family Policing System.
31. Gilmore, R. W. (2022). *Abolition Geography: Essays Towards Liberation*. Verso Books, 20.
32. Story adds, "Comprising places where everyday life happens and is reproduced, community is also where people encounter the political and economic structures that produce and uphold the social order." Story, B. (2019). *Prison Land : Mapping Carceral Power Across Neoliberal America*. University Of Minnesota Press, 141.
33. An alternative-to-911 crisis hotline is not the same as a diversion program is not the same as an electronic monitor is not the same as a new jail is not the same as drug testing is not the same as a homeless shelter.
34. Shira Hassan, abolitionist practitioner, has a workbook titled 'Painting the Ocean & Sky' which provides useful criteria for developing abolitionist crisis response projects. Hassan, S. (n.d) *Painting the Ocean & the Sky*, <https://www.interruptingcriminalization.com/resources-all/ocean-sky>
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39. Miller, R. J. (2014). Devolving the carceral state: Race, prisoner reentry, and the micro-politics of urban poverty management. *Punishment & Society*, 16(3), 305-335.
40. Brett Davidson, Elisabeth Epps, Sharyln Grace, Atara Rich-Shea, *Moving from Ending Money Bail to Demanding Pre-trial Freedom* (2020, December 20) Law and Political Economy Project. <https://lpeproject.org/blog/moving-from-ending-money-bail-to-demanding-pretrial-freedom/>
41. Working definition by Talila Lewis developed in community with disabled Black & negatively racialized folks. Lewis, T. (2022, January) *Working Definition of Ableism*. Talia Lewis. bit.ly/ableism2022
42. Walia, H. (2013). *Undoing Border Imperialism*. AK Press, 6.
43. Cohen, S. (1985). Visions of social control: Crime, punishment and classification, 41-42.

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Figure 1: ‘New Jail, Same Criminalization,’ artwork courtesy of Noah Jodice. pg. 6.

Figure 2: No Youth Jail Protest Seattle, March 2, 2018. | Credit: cactusbones (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/cactusbones/26878810917/>), CC BY-NC-SA 2.0, pg. 8

Figure 3: Decarcerate Kansas City Rally, April 2025. | Image courtesy of Decarcerate Kansas City, pg. 18

Figure 4: Demonstrators outside Superior Court in Washington, DC wait for a “Close Guantanamo” trial to begin. Jan 3, 2012. | Credit: Mike Benedetti (https://www.flickr.com/photos/mike_benedetti/6628881983/), CC BY-NC-SA 2.0, pg. 23

Figure 5: No New Jails poster | Art by Josh Macphee (<https://justseeds.org/graphic/no-new-jails/>), CC BY-NC-SA 2.0, pg. 29

Figure 6: Protesters At a June 30, 2018 Immigration Rally Carry a Sign Urging the Governor of Pennsylvania to Close an Berks Detention Facility | Credit: AmericanDralion (<https://www.deviantart.com/american-dralion/art/Shut-It-Down-753287969>), CC BY-NC-SA 3.0, pg 41

Figure 7: People Aren’t Meant for Prisons, 1953, by Rachel Romero, Wilfred Owen Brigade (<https://lccn.loc.gov/2015647455>), Library of Congress Public Domain.

Figure 8: ‘Rebuilding the Tombs,’ artwork courtesy of Noah Jodice. pg. 55

Figure 9: Posters from a No New Jails NYC rally in April 2019. | Image courtesy of Paul Frangipane (<https://brooklyneagle.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/community-jail-hearing-06-by-paul-frangipane-e1557490080810.jpg>), pg 68

Figure 10: Conference against CDCR in Jan 2013 | Credit: Daniel Arauz (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:26_Rally_at_Chowchilla_Valley_State_Prison_for_Women.jpg), CC BY-NC-SA 2.0, pg. 71

Figure 11: Stop Cop City graffiti along the Proctor Creek Greenway Trail, 2023 | Credit: Tyler Laht, (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stop_Cop_City.jpg), CC BY-NC-SA 2.0, pg. 73

Figure 12: “Close Old Jails. Stop New Ones. Abolition Now,” | Image courtesy of Mon M, 2022, pg 78

Figure 13: Unity March outside the Champaign County Jail in Illinois, 2015 | Image courtesy of Build Programs Not Jails, pg. 94

About the NNJN

THE NNJN'S COORDINATING MEMBERS INCLUDED:

No Penobscot County Jail Expansion | *Portland, ME*
Close the Jail ATL | *Atlanta, GA*
Shut Down 850 Bryant | *San Francisco, CA*
Decarcerate Sacramento | *Sacramento, CA*
Stop the Musick | *Anaheim, CA*
No New Youth Jail | *Seattle, WA*
No New Jails NYC | *New York, NY*
No New Jails DC | *Washington DC*
Derail the Jail Madison | *Madison, WI*

BUT IT ALSO UNDERTOOK SEVERAL MAPPING AND SURVEY PROJECTS FEATURING CAMPAIGNS IN:

Cuyahoga County Jail Coalition | *Cleveland, OH*
No New Jails Detroit | *Detroit, MI*
Shut Down Wyatt | *Providence, RI*
Close the Workhouse | *St. Louis, MO*
Decarcerate Kansas City | *Kansas City, MO*
No New Jail Travis County | *Austin, TX*
No New Jail Coalition Pima County | *Tucson, AZ*
No Oahu Jail | *Oahu, HI*
No More Jails | *Champaign-Urbana, IL*
ChangeMakers Fort Wayne | *Fort Wayne, IN*
No New Jail Oklahoma | *Oklahoma City, OK*
Stop Phase III NOLA | *New Orleans, LA*

*Note: Not all of these campaigns were active between
2020-2023, some began and ended prior to 2020.*