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# Behind Bars: prison abolition and collective work toward social justice

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**BEHIND BARS: PRISON ABOLITION AND COLLECTIVE WORK  
TOWARD SOCIAL JUSTICE**

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PIM 70

A Capstone Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Masters of Social Justice in  
Intercultural Relations at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

May 25, 2012

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*Emily Pulsfus*

*May 25, 2012*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is dedicated to my parents- who taught me to always be good to others. Their support and encouragement continuously pushes me to do better and more.

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All power to all the people.<sup>i</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Work toward the collective movements for liberation has proven to be a difficult task for those who have chosen to dedicate their lives and work to make social change. A close examination of the non-profit industrial complex and the connections with the prison-industrial complex will enable social change agents to better articulate the ways in which we can move forward toward a more just world. The question central to my research asks: Is prison abolition necessary for social justice? To answer this question I will use an analysis of the non-profit industrial complex to explore how a social justice institution, such as World Learning, can achieve their mission and vision and be funded by the same foundations and corporations that fund the prison-industrial complex. To contextualize this theoretical analysis I examined data from SIT/World Learning and explained it through the theory of the non-profit industrial complex. I will focus on the current economic system of masked imperialism, global capitalism, which inhibits movements from formulating successful strategies of resistance, transformation and transcendence.

Through this examination, I conclude that social justice is incompatible with the logic of capitalism, thus questioning the source of funding to organizations such as SIT/World Learning in contradiction to its goals. I hope to show contradictions within SIT/World Learning and urge the graduates from that institution to examine and transform the way in which we think about our collective work for social justice.

“There is something profoundly indelible and emboldening in realizing that one’s own political struggle is deeply connected to a vibrant, robust, creative, and beautiful legacy of collective imagination and creative social labor.” -Dylan Rodriguez<sup>3</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

‘Working for social justice’ is a statement I hear often in the World Learning community, as well as in organizing against the prison-industrial complex. I know my optimistic perspective toward social change may be seen by many as impossible, but I feel a close examination of the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC) and the connections with the prison-industrial complex (PIC) are imperative. These connections can help us better articulate the ways in which we analyze and make collective change, meaning a focused and concerted vision through which we both question and build the world we wish to see.

My time spent in classes at SIT Graduate Institute and the subsequent internship for my practicum at Critical Resistance has caused me to question how we, my comrades and peers, go about doing our collective “work” for social justice. I believe the facts prove that the only solution to the social injustice of the PIC is PIC abolition. This paper will emphasize my belief that abolition from the PIC as a pedagogical approach is necessary for doing any social justice work and an important direction of analysis for my current and future work.

In this paper I will show the connections between abolition from the prison-industrial complex to how the non-profit industrial complex and capital accumulation shapes the way organizers approach work in the name of social justice. In the United States, the non-profit as well as foundations have focus on a charity discourse. Through this charity discourse, non-profits are not seeking to understand the economic and social mechanisms that create and generate poverty and imprisonment but instead perpetuate its existence by replicating the same



modes of implementation. In this paper, critical analysis of the political economy and the reproduction of class system will be asserted to understand the revolutionary tactics used by anti-prison activists and those looking to do work outside of the non-profit industrial complex.

The United States is in a crisis regarding the prison system, there are currently over 2.3 million Americans and hundreds of thousands of undocumented people and children behind prison walls (Rodriguez, 2010). The crisis has drawn attention through the Supreme Court rule for California's need to reduce overcrowding, a prisoner-led hunger strike inside prisons across the country against inhumane conditions, and countless activist inside and outside of prison walls working to get the voices of those inside heard. The population of prisoners in the country has continually risen and reform has yet to alter conditions both inside and out of prison walls.

*With many organizations not taking notice of this enormous crisis in the United States and how it affects our collective work for social justice, I am forced to question who is actually managing and controlling the struggles of social justice? Why does social justice based organizations not take up the analysis of the prison-industrial complex in their work?*

I decided to go to SIT Graduate Institute during my last year of bachelor studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Upon exploring schools I went to the SIT website and this statement was on the front page: "SIT Graduate Institute equips students with theoretical knowledge, field experience, and professional skills. Programs are based on an experiential learning model and a commitment to social justice and intercultural communication" (sit.edu). I knew a school stating their commitment to social justice was the place for me.

With World Learning entering its 80<sup>th</sup> year in existence, it has influenced thousands of social change agents who are working in 70 countries. Thousands of people can give testimony to the great social change it has brought to the world. While this is true for many students, faculty and others involved with World Learning, there are also existing facts which are in direct contradiction within the mission of World Learning through the funding of the programs, as well as the corporate approach to hiring and firing of faculty and staff. These issues are necessary for continue asking critical questions to guide ongoing improvement

According to World Learning *Facts and Figures* sheet the International Development and Exchange department is receiving funds from the following: “Active donors: United States Agency for International Development, US Department of Labor, US Department of State, Massachusetts Department of Education, Deloitte, CAMBER Corporation, Cisco, Council of American Overseas Research Centers, AMIDEAST, Ford Foundation, World Bank, Save the Children, Hummer Tuttle Foundation, The United Nations Democracy Fund, Urban Institute” (World Learning, 2011). In this paper I will review a few of these foundations and corporations in which influence World Learning directly through funding and how those sources create contradictions to social justice work.

*The overarching purpose of this paper is to understand the connections of the non-profit industrial complex to the prison industrial complex and using data and case study of World Learning, and the affected national and international policy.*

My goal is to not just look at World Learning, but to examine the way in which the state uses non-profits to do the following, which is laid out in the INCITE! Anthology *The Revolution*

*Will Not be Funded*: “monitor and control social justice movements, divert public monies into private hands through foundations, manage and control dissent in order to make the world safe for capitalism, redirect activist energies into career-based modes of organizing instead of mass-based organizing capable of actually transforming society, allow corporations to mask their exploitative and colonial work practices through ‘philanthropic’ work, encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures rather than challenge them” (INCITE!, 2007). SIT students can really take this quote and be thinking about where these types of control can fit into our daily work.

Through my analysis of data and policy, I find it most important to understand how capital accumulation works, who controls the modes of production, who labors, who is confined in prison walls, and how the different powers are used to stall or in most cases extinguish social justice movements. This also questions how the capitalist system crushes liberation movements for all who seek self determination: the determination of one’s own fate or course of action without compulsion (free will definition: dictionary.com). If we choose to expand our knowledge of our social existence, we can then move toward a deeper analysis of social justice work.

The mode of production of material life conditions is the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. -Karl Kautsky and Georgi Plekhanov

To ensure a shared starting point for analysis, let us look first at how neo-liberal economics is used in an emancipatory framework. Fred Magdoff explains how neo-liberal economic works in brief:

The neoliberal theory goes as follows. The removal of barriers to the flow of goods and capital permits a country to concentrate on developing the areas in which it has a “comparative advantage.” That is to say, the country should focus on mining, growing, or manufacturing the products for which it has an advantage due to climate, natural resources, a skilled labor force or other factors. Then it can purchase whatever else it needs with the currency earned by exporting these products. In addition, the theory goes, these steps overcome one of the main

hindrances to development of the countries of the periphery—a lack of investment capital to build factories, communication systems, roads, and ports. It follows, according to the neoliberal logic, that making conditions more attractive to foreign corporations (for example, by allowing them to repatriate all of their profits) means that they will invest more, leading to greater economic development and prosperity. Markets for goods and capital, freed of government control, will work in ways that magically create optimum conditions for all—a win-win situation with no losers!

In this paper I will now demonstrate the connections between the free market system and the prison industrial complex and then those connections to the non-profit system. Then connect the nonprofit sector to the majority of work done by graduate students from SIT work.

Under capitalism, a class based system, the owning class, owns the modes of production. Since the bottom line is the sole goal of corporations, certain actions are taken to maximize profit, and changes are made in connection to those profits. Through the free market theory there needs to be a large population unemployed or under employed, and in a position to not ‘create trouble’ or revolt. Those in control of the modes of production need to find space and place for those folks. California, which has the fifth largest of the world economies, saw a huge boom in industrial jobs in the 1950s, as people from all over the states moved to California to fill these jobs. When the owners of these corporations found cheaper labor overseas, an enormous number of jobs were lost, due to outsourcing, by the 1980s and 2000s in California.

The timing of the unemployment in California coincides with the prison boom in the state as well as the end of the Vietnam War and a national recession between 1968 and 1973. Between 1970 and 2000, twenty three prisons were built in California, most in rural areas. Also during this time the state of California under the leadership of former Governor Reagan began the War on Drugs, implemented the Three-strike law, and coerced the anti-violence movement.

The prison population now makes up 1% of the population, the ‘underclass’ society. Those under surveillance in this country are extremely disproportionately below the poverty line.

Between draconian laws, loss of jobs, and the correlation that 90% of those under surveillance of that 1% make less than 25,000 a year, is something that any social change agent should take into their works analysis (Family and Corrections Network). Also during this time, we see a major growth in the non-profit sector. Thousands of new non-profits were formed to fill the needs that the government was not fulfilling. Charitable practices were seen as help to those individuals in need instead of a systemic problem.

This paper will connect the larger political economy and the connections to material conditions. I will show how hard powers such as the prison system work with the owning class to control and monitor the majority of humanity to continue the control of wealth and power. Hard power is enacted by the owning class through structures, institutions and laws. The laws are created along with a rationale of “public safety” and with an objective of profit maximization. Part of the hard power structures and laws are police and prisons. Those structures are then able to control the body; people in prison are incapacitated, and stripped of the determination of where and how their bodies are used.

Currently around 33% of Black men in this country ages 18-30 are in prison or under direct surveillance from police (Davis, 2005). When people in this country (those targeted by the PIC) choose a stint in the military over an inevitable stint in prison, it should cause us to wonder whether we should not try to introduce alternatives that actually address the root cause of the social issue.

I will use Marxist theory of historical materialism to relate the modes of production and their material circumstances thus questioning if World Learning seeks to build a world of alternative material circumstances, and if World Learning as an organization, has not built up the analysis of the political economy, what work is actually being done? I will also focus on soft

powers; which are the ideological and cultural components that function as the glue for those larger structures. These soft powers such as non-governmental organizations and the education system are psychological comforts to keep the majority of the population in at a certain level of difference. The connections between the hard and soft powers implemented from the bourgeoisie, owning class, and how it silences and maintains order in the minds and bodies of those oppressed, is necessary when looking at how those different powers operate in social justice struggles.

The prison industrial complex overtly suppresses opposition to the way it functions through culture, media and the disenfranchisement of prisoners. With its connection to the nonprofit function as a shadow state, doing what government is supposed to be doing with money in the areas of education and social services, thus calling into question each social change agents position within the nonprofit and foundation system (Gilmore & Rodriguez).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

“The more we listen, the better our questions are.” -anonymous

First, to ensure we share a common basis from which to examine these issues, I will define my terms and identify the sources of the frameworks, theories and methodologies that will be used for this paper. Second, I will explore how the prison-industrial complex works to self-sustain, and maintain the capitalist status quo. The key terms and ideas I identify are the: non-profit industrial complex (NPIC), prison-industrial complex (PIC), PIC abolition, and abolition pedagogy. These terms will help us to understand the connections they all have in our collective social justice work and where we can go from here.

### NON-PROFIT INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX (NPIC)

The Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC) is defined by Dylan Rodriguez: “a set of symbiotic relationships that link political and financial technologies of state and owning class control with surveillance over public political ideology, including and especially emergent progressive and leftist social movements” (INCITE!, 2007). Both Dylan Rodriguez and Ruth Wilson Gilmore also argue that there is a natural correlation between the NPIC and the PIC.

Andrea Smith explains this correlation:

While the PIC overtly suppresses dissent the NPIC manages and controls dissent by incorporating it into the state apparatus, functioning as a “shadow state” constituted by a network of institutions that do much of what government agencies are supposed to do with tax money in the areas of education and social services (INCITE!, Smith, 2007).

## HISTORY OF THE NONPROFIT SYSTEM

Before the industrial revolution in the United States, individuals not organizations did most of the charitable work (Smith, 2007). Now, however, most charitable work is done by organizations that are part of the NPIC system. Understanding the funding of an organization in which you work for or participate in are educated by is imperative when thinking about social justice work. If the funding sources are in direct contradiction to the mission and vision, what is our work actually doing? Christine E. Ahn argues that foundations are theoretically a correction for the ills of capitalism, however, if we look at where funding goes, is not toward effecting social change (Ahn, 2007).

Foundations are created through wealth from philanthropist, designed for grants and rewards given to individuals and organizations each foundation feels is deserving of the funds. When wealthy people create a foundation, they are able to dictate where funding is allocated while being exempt from taxes on that wealth. Then their wealth is made through corporations where the exploitation of labor has created the profit for these foundations to exist. This means the money that is exploited from laborers is then being re-funneled to the owners of foundations with little money being put back into the communities from which it was taken. Not only do foundations get to control where and who get the money, they also have the ability to then restrict what the money is used for. With no accountability from foundations we can presuppose that they are in place in order to protect elitism thus wealthy people are the controllers of social justice struggles (Ahn, 2007).

Foundations argue that the money is given by grants to communities, who are at liberty to do with them as they please. Although from the surface this could look to be the case, foundations are still in control of what organizations they find are deserving of funds and then with certain restraints on each moneys given.



## PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX (PIC)

The prison-industrial complex is defined by Critical Resistance: “[the] 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”(Critical Resistance, et al). Prison disrupts family, community and society as a whole. Once a person is in the prison system there is a 68-80% chance they will return to the creating a revolving door in the prison system, and thus not creating sustainable solutions to the reason people are locked up in the first place (Davis, 2005).

The prison-industrial complex (PIC) operates through many functions; I will focus on the following themes discussed by Angela Y. Davis in *Abolition Democracy*. Each one of the six themes highlighted help to understand the way in which the PIC works. The seven themes explained are: 1) disenfranchisement, 2) capital extraction, 3) social branding, 4) racial contract, 5) ritual violence, 6) sexual coercion, and 7) surplus repression.

The only states that allow prisoners the right to vote are Maine and Vermont; the rest of the prison population is disenfranchised and has no right to vote. This means close to seven million people, mostly people of color, are not allowed to vote in this country (Davis, 2005). This is not the only way that disenfranchisement works, people in prisons are not the only ones barred from voting: parolees, previously incarcerated, and those who were incarcerated before their eighteenth birthdays are also in this category.

Prisons have become not only cages for over two million people but also labor camps, and other forced prison work that leads to capital extraction. Capital extraction can be explained in this way: when people of color and the very poor are removed from their communities so is social wealth that wealth is not returned back to those communities (Davis, 2005). The more

recent rise in juvenile detention and the incarceration of youth at high rates also excludes youth in participation in the local economy from difficulty in being hired, already in places of high unemployment.

The imprisonment of women, transgender, and gender non-conforming is also at an all time high, around 400% (Family & Corrections). Instead of resisting police and prisons which reinforce rape and domestic violence both inside and outside of prison walls, the anti-violence movement worked with the state to increase police and prisons to increase safety for survivors of violence (Critical Resistance, Incite!, 2008) The impact of the NPIC on the anti violence movement has been devastating: most of the government funding has been through the Department of Justice. As a result, antiviolence organizations have taken up criminal justice solutions to ending violence that reinforce the PIC (INCITE!, Smith, 2007).

Social branding a person that is previously incarcerated creates a forever stamp of being part of the system and in turn makes it more difficult to return back to their communities and find work. The cultural reality of the United States puts what Angela Davis calls a racial contract “where it is more advantageous to be white than a person of color because all norms are de facto whiteness norms” (Davis, 2005). This then creates an us/them dichotomy within all communities, which makes the punishment on them and not the ‘us’. The racial contract manifests in many ways throughout the prison-industrial complex, from intense policing in urban spaces to sanctioned racial segregation within prison walls.

Violence in the prison system is endemic. This is an important factor when thinking about how the PIC actually creates more harm than it prevents. People on the outside create an attitude of deserving what “they” get in prison. Davis states, “Ritual violence cleanses and

expiates the social order” (Davis, 2005). Heavy violence decades before the prison boom and violence within the prison walls by guards are examples of cultural violence within and outside prisons in a form of social order discourse. The invasive masculinity by prisoners is matched by the sexual coercion enacted by prison guards (Davis, 2005). The sexual violence that escalates behind prison walls is also highly racialized.

I question the absence of thinking about prisons and jails when it is such a pervasive part of life. When prisons become a natural part of the life and even a necessity to live a ‘safe’ life, we stop questioning and prisons become inevitable, desirable, and the logical way to deal with harm (Davis, 2005). The institutionalization of prisons along with military and policing are all part of the prison industrial complex.

In these different themes – disenfranchisement, capital extraction, social branding, racial contract, ritual violence, sexual coercion, and surplus repression as laid out by Davis – we are able to see how the prisons have been normalized, thus enabling an all-purpose remedy through state norms and practices (Gilmore, 2007).

Ruthie Wilson Gilmore explains in her article *Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning* that the prison “crisis are territorial and multi-scalar; they overlap and sometimes interlock” (Gilmore, 2008). Among the explanations for prison population growth is the profit explanations of growth but most can be scrutinized and taken out of the analysis. The profit centered reason explains how prisons have been situated in rural areas which are in great need of jobs. The prison position provides employment opportunities for white guards while locking up prisoners of color (Gilmore, 2007).

Prisons have not always been the form of punishment and actually are only the last 30-40 years have they been the umbrella use of punishment as they are today where 1 in 100 people in this country are under surveillance (Davis, 2005). This fact posits imperial rule quest for global profit above all.

Capitalism is unstable by nature, with declines made by a few corporate and financial elite (Gilbert, 2008). The Great Depression of the 1930s followed by World War II shows how instantly the economy can shift and create great instability for all people. The creating of international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, created new terms for capital and labor within the US. Those arrangements worked well for capitalism until its breakdown a generation later between 1968 and 1973, “the seedbed for the burgeoning of the prison industrial complex and many related changes within US society” (Gilbert, 2008).

During what is known as the Reagan Era, politicians argued that tough on crime laws with longer sentences would keep communities safer. However, these laws and the consequential use of mass imprisonment have had no effect on official crime rates (Davis, 2003).

The “Three Strikes” Law is enacted by state governments requiring state courts to impose a 25 year to life sentence to persons who have been convicted of three or more serious criminal offenses. In the United States twenty six states have enacted the law. The “Three Strikes” law has greatly affected the increase of prisoners in the country especially in California. California has many cases of people serving life without the possibility of parole for minor offenses such as petty theft, and minor robbery cases. A person convicted can also get multiple strikes from one act if it includes two illegal actions.

The “Three Strikes” policy cost the government 500 million dollars to implement with no studies have shown a drop in crime (Chen, 2008). The law greatly disproportionately affects African-American men. In California where Black men make up only 3% of the population they make up 33% of second strike prisoners and 44% of “third strikers” (Chen, 2008).

The “War on Drugs” first used by Nixon in 1971 was spearheaded to fight ‘illegal’ drug trade. The subsequent laws within the United States have locked up over 500 thousand people per year in the U.S. The rise in drug laws and the prison boom coincide with one another. In California, Ronald Reagan during his gubernatorial seat in California and his subsequent presidency of the United States enacted a number of draconian laws.

As laws have changed, they have also worked to efficiently lock up more people than ever: 65 million people in this country are blocked from employment in some way. The link between PIC and employment is one of the most important factors helping the PIC manifest and gain power.

## **PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX- ABOLITION**

Critical Resistance’s analysis and meaning of PIC Abolition is as follows: “PIC Abolition is a political vision with the goal of eliminating prisons, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternative to punishment and imprisonment.” (Critical Resistance, et al)

Formulating and understanding how the PIC both feeds on and maintains oppression and inequalities has been central to my thinking and learning since the beginning of my practicum phase (criticalresistance.org). Although PIC abolition is a long-term goal for the organization, that may be far longer than my lifetime, it is the practical organizing tool and a strict framework

to analyze work from a holistic perspective. Abolition is about being able to envision a world without walls and applying that to abolitionist daily work and lives.

Scenes of power and punishment are everywhere. “The visual presentation of punish bodies has played a continuous role in the political and economic projects of the US—projects dangerous to the populations that threatened or resisted the ideals and progress of capital” (Cuevas, 2008). The legacy of state violence voiced by W.E.D Du Bois as early as the 1900s as well as recent militant policing often seen in the media around the Occupy Movement, shows the continuation of punishment over transformation. National and international scrutiny around excessive and deadly force by police has had little or reverse impact on the daily lives of people who are the victims of police violence.

Abolition isn’t just about getting rid of prisons, “abolition is the creation of possibilities for our dreams and demands for health and happiness—for what we want, not what we think we can get” (Abolition Now!, 2008). If we use reform tactics, we are missing out on an opportunity to actually be creative and move toward the world that can be collectively envisioned by those who seek self determination.

#### **ABOLITION AS A PEDAGOGICAL POSITION**

Currently in schools in the United States there is a greater emphasis on discipline rather than intellectual development, which means that schools contribute to prison pipeline. The social theory of the “prison regime” is not outside of our identity but rather “shape and deform our identities, communities, and modes of social interaction” (Rodriguez, 2007). Militarized physiological domination subsumes some groups, institutionalized routines modality of social (dis) organization.

Dylan Rodriguez argues that, “there can be no libratory teaching act, nor can an adequately critical pedagogical practice that does not attempt to become an abolitionist one” (Rodriguez, 2010). Abolition is a “radical” political position as well as a creative pedagogy, one that is creative and experimental instead of formulaic and programmatic. Rodriguez explains that their formulaic approaches can in no way capture the “biopolitics, dynamic statecraft, and internalized violence of genocidal and proto-genocidal systems of human domination” such as the prison system (Rodriguez, 2010).

The school to prison pipeline can be seen in many ways; metal detectors outside schools, police constantly present in halls, military offices within many urban high schools. The school can now be seen where a hard and soft power is combined from the owning class. Rodriguez inserts a way in which educators should and can position themselves in abolitionist praxis:

As a productive and creative praxis, this conception of abolition posits the material possibility and historical necessity of a social capacity for human freedom based on a cultural-economic infrastructure that supports the transformation of oppressive relations that are legacy of genocidal conquest, settler colonialism, racial slavery/capitalism, compulsory hetero-patriarchies, and global white supremacy. In this sense, abolitionist praxis does not singularly concern itself with the abolition of the prison-industrial complex, although it fundamentally and strategically prioritizes the prison as a central site for catalyzing broader, radical social transformation (Rodriguez, 2010)

Abolition in this way is not just about prisons but encompasses all oppressive relations that inhibit the work for self-determination.

## **HARM V. CRIME**

Central to the concept of abolition pedagogy is a paradigm shift from the concept of ‘crime’ and ‘crime reduction’ to one of examining ‘harm.’ Once we have a clear idea of the PIC, we can look at how it ties into the NPIC and how they support and reinforce one another. Harm is defined not only as something one does to another to hurt another individual or themselves,

but also the oppressive violence done by the prison-industrial complex. On the other hand, crime tends to be determined by those with the most power (criticalresistance.org). The United States has not seen a reduced amount of harm with the growth of prisons but instead a power relation between the certain groups that make up most of the imprisoned population.

One of the biggest insights to learning and understanding how the prison-industrial complex works are the ways in which we and think about language and societal norms such as prisons. “Crimes and criminals are fictitious events and characters in the sense that they have to be constructed before they can exist” (McMahon, 2008). If crime and criminals are a constructed, than who constructs the concept of what a crimes or criminal are?

Crime laws and criminal justice entail some reproduction of class based society (Hillard & Tombs, 2005). The approach to crime has changed significantly over time. The ‘tough on crime’ laws enacted have brought large changes in what is considered a crime and what is not. Some examples of the laws that have changed the landscape and imprisoned huge numbers of people before would not have been in this situation are the War on Drugs, and Three Strikes Law.



## METHODOLOGY

The overall approach I used in this study was participant observation along with qualitative and policy analysis. I used examples of how foundation funding has been used to help shape laws and practices around the world and has an effected radical organizing. I am using participant observation because I have moved to Oakland, California to organize with Critical Resistance as well as sharing life experiences in my research. The meaning of my experiences translates to my political work as well the research I take part in, which has been constructed through social situations as well as participation with members of Critical Resistance. I have received training and exposure to abolition pedagogy which is intrinsic to my research and writing.

I use an argumentative way of writing because my life experience has shown me that social justice is incompatible with capitalism. I will argue that a there is a direct contradiction if the things you are trying to change or abolish are also the entity which is controlling the funding of the organization you plan to do social change work from. My inquiry began with the framing of the non-profit industrial complex and the connections with the prison-industrial complex, the main focus of my practicum work, and the longer-term focus of my work. I then explored the mission and vision of World Learning along with data from SIT to understand the funding and operations.

I will insert an emancipatory paradigm in my thinking and writing as my intent is to pursue knowledge for the betterment of humankind and the environment. I position myself in the research through this explanation of the paradigm:

The development of such a paradigm stems from the gradual rejection of the positivist view of social research as the pursuit of absolute knowledge through the scientific method and the gradual disillusionment with the interpretive view of such research as the generation of socially useful knowledge within particular

historical and social contexts. The emancipatory paradigm, as the name implies, is about the facilitating of a politics of the possible by confronting social oppression at whatever levels it occurs' (Oliver, 1992: 110).

I am interested in looking at specifically the effectiveness of World Learning as a social justice institution, and more generally at non-profits as a whole that are in some way working for the betterment of human kind through the theory of the non-profit industrial complex. I will use qualitative data from World Learning and the subsequent foundations and corporations that fund it.

## **RATIONALE**

I believe the depth of one's analysis of the prison-industrial complex directs the type of work (not a 9-5 job, rather social change, 24/7 work) one chooses to do. This comes out of my experience and shift in my intent within my work in the world. Speaking as an SIT student, and for my peers in masters programs focusing on social justice, we have the access and resources to be informed and conscious individuals. If we choose, since it is a choice per the access, to ignore a core component of social justice struggle, we then have failed.

## ANALYSIS AND CONTEXTUALIZATION OF DATA RESULTS

### ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK:

- A historical materialist perspective, excerpt from Karl Marx work

This conception of history depends on our ability to expound the real process of production, starting out from the material production of life itself, and to comprehend the for of intercourse connected with the created by this mode of production, (i.e., civil society in its various stages), as the basis of all history; and to show it in action as State, to explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc., etc., and trace the origins of their growth from that basis; by which means of course, the whole thing can be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various sides of one another).

My analysis will come from a historical materialist position. If we are to critique the dimensions of human activity, historical materialism says that we must have an analysis of events that have influence on the development of our current circumstance including the examination of racism, poverty, class behavior, etc. This perspective is important because it helps to posit the understanding of the PIC abolition within a longer political history that tasks the world to transform material circumstances.

In the face of industrialization and globalization, charities (generally headed by the wealthy) created local organizations “deserving” of assistance. Charities viewed social ills, such as poverty, community breakdown to facilitate the flow of labor, and violence, as something individual instead of systematic. Charitable giving has increased greatly since the early 1900s when the first multimillionaires shielded their earnings from taxation through the creation of foundations, such foundations include; the Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Sage (INCITE! Smith, 2007). According to American Association of Fundraising, by 1955 donations from individuals, foundations and corporations reached \$7.7 billion, then reaching \$39 billion by 1974. According to Center for Philanthropy at Indiana University charitable giving have reached \$280.89 billion in 2010 from individuals, foundations, and corporations in the United States (<http://www.philanthropy.iupui.edu/news/2011/06/pr-GUSA.aspx>).

Through donations and charitable giving, non-profits have been created at an ever increasing rate. Foundation development has had criticism since its onset. The US Commission on Industrial Relations filed a report in 1916 which warned Congress that foundations were a great concern because of the concentrated wealth and power in the service of ideology, which benefitted capitalism. Testimony from Samuel Gompers within the report states, “In the effort to undertake to be all-pervading machinery for the molding of the minds of the people... in the constant industrial struggle for human betterment... [foundations] should be prohibited from exercising their functions, either by law or regulations” (INCITE, Smith, 2007). Despite these concerns, and criticism from all sides of foundations, during the 1960s foundations grew at a rate of 1,200 per year. They were also cited in financial magazines as tax-shelter tools (Billitteri, 2000).

#### CONNECTIONS TO ABOLITION PEDAGOGY

The prison regime is an apparatus that is current, meaning its advent is recent in terms of a historical perspective, but is institutionally and historically inseparable from the historical and contemporary structure of the large scale racist state violence (Rodriguez, 2010). Understanding this framework can enable abolitionist discussion as critical dialogue to the long historical struggle against colonialism, land conquest, slavery, and imperialism.

I am interested in the resistance to take up abolition as a pedagogical perspective from organizations and non-profits. Dylan Rodriguez writes, “... this resistance to engaging with abolitionist praxis seems to also derive from a deep and broad epistemological and cultural disciplining of the political imagination that makes liberationist dreams unspeakable.” The disciplining is produced through hegemonic state and cultural apparatuses and is especially amplified through liberal and progressive non profits that are thus limited by the non-profit industrial complex (Rodriguez, 2010).

With recidivism rates in California as high as 67.5% (crimereport.org) and within the UK at 58% people returning within two years, 'crime control' is not working (McMahon, 2008). If anything else were to work less than 30% of the time, we would get rid of it. This is where my understanding of the (in)justice system has made a turn. This is also where I have come to a better understanding of my abolition politics. For we cannot do work to reform this system to do better, there has been constant reform; the only way to actually make productive change is to abolish it.

In working with Critical Resistance, I learned to understand the reason anti-prison activists see all prisoners as 'political prisoners'. When understanding harm we can see that crime has no ontological reality. This then gives those in power the ability to do whatever they please and use the term 'crime' and 'criminal' 'terrorist' to make it acceptable. This means if it were someone else that did not get caught or a year before the law was put on the books, that person's action would not have been treated in the same way.

We lack the critical thinking of the daily abuses on people around the world and the environment through the advent of corporations and the exploitation of labor around the world. We rarely see the rich in prison walls, and for those we do go to different prisons than the rest. The huge disparity of people of color and poor whites locked up compared the enormity of harm done on a daily basis by police and prison guards can help us generate and refine our thoughts on abolition.

In our society the public must be swayed to see the need for 'crime control'. Those in power can influence public opinion into thinking there's a need for crime control. In this way, legitimacy is given to the conceptualization of crime and thus the crime industry, creating this

never-ending cycle. Thus, criminology has had an intimate relationship with the powerful; and explained through examination of the way the criminal justice system has been organized and created (McMahon, 2008).

We must find a way to understand harm – who and why people are targeted. With this understanding, we can easily see that harm matters more than crime thus building legitimacy for a harm reduction model, rather than the current criminal (in)justice system. Harm by the state is not distributed randomly, but marginalized groups of people are targeted at disproportionate rates, thus creating more legitimacy to why harm matters more than crime. “The social harm approach would concern physical harm, financial/economic harm, emotional and psychological harm, and sexual harm” (McMahon, 2008). I think the most important thing to note about making harm matter more than crime is that it can be interchanging: it is possible to not only think about harm done and where we go from there, but also what happened before the harm took place, while the harm happened, and *then* address the question of where we can go from there.

PIC abolition calls for radical change in our economic and class based system and shows the immense amount of cultural work that needs to be done. I feel the work of understanding harm versus crime can greatly alter our way of understanding and thus generally push us in to the right direction as well as creating accountability for where we receive funding.

## WORLD LEARNING FUNDING

Does World Learning/SIT seek to remake the world under transformed material circumstances?

In the following section, I compiled data found about some of the funders of World Learning programs including the Ford Foundation, World Bank, CISCO, SODEXO, Deloitte, and CAMBER.

### FORD FOUNDATION

According to Smith, during the Great Depression, ‘societal influence of foundations was curtailed by economic crisis.’ However after World War II, the Ford Foundation which was founded in 1936, regained prominence and focused on how to further US-style democracy interest both in the U.S. and abroad (INCITE!, Smith 2007).

There is a long history of covert acts used by the US government to spy on and curtail liberation and social justice movements around the world. From the Black Power movement in the United States to the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa, the Ford Foundation has shifted movement’s emphasis from liberation to Black capitalism (INCITE! Smith, 2007). Here is an example of Ford Foundation’s historic relationship with the CIA from Saunders:

In 1976, a Select Committee appointed to investigate US intelligence activities reported on the CIA’s penetration of the foundation field by the mid-1960s during 1963-6, of the 700 grants over \$10,000 given by 164 foundations, at least 108 involved partial or complete CIA funding. More importantly, CIA funding was involved in nearly half the grants made by these 164 foundations in the field of international activities during the same period.

“Bona fide” foundations such as Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie were considered “the best and most plausible kind of funding cover...” The architects of the foundation’s cultural policy in the aftermath of the Second World War were perfectly attuned to the political imperatives which supported America’s looming presence on the world stage. At times, it seemed as if the Ford Foundation was simply an extension of government in the area of international cultural propaganda.

During the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, the Ford Foundation was actively involved in programs that diverted the movement from anti-capitalist to pro-capitalist (INCITE, Smith, 2007). Ford donated \$900 million to Anglo American, a corporation that accounts for 25% of South Africa's GDP, with a goal to "bring more blacks into the mainstream economy" rather than challenging the status quo (McNeil, 1996).

## CISCO

How can an organization that receives funding from the state and foundations accepted funding when that state is involved in state violence against its people?

Cisco designs, manufactures and sells networking equipment and is one of the largest multinational corporations out of the United States. According to Cisco's reported earnings, 2011 annual revenue was \$43 billion (Cisco, 2011).

Cisco criticism has been long standing. In 2006, free speech advocates cited Cisco for selling equipment to China that helps with the censorship of websites (Chen 2006). In the fall of 2011, Cisco was accused of aiding the Chinese government in monitoring and apprehending members of the Falun Gong, a spiritual and meditative practice banned in China. The group found that part of Cisco's marketing pitch was their ability to monitor the group, and including a page in their power point presentation that boasted its ability to track 90% of the group's email traffic (Sengupta, 2011).

This type of censorship is directly related to the global prison-industrial complex, used for surveillance and imprisonment of people around the world. This relationship to the PIC and its connection to World Learning helps to reveal the impossibility of disconnecting funding from work.



## WORLD BANK

The World Bank along with the IMF and many non-profit/non-governmental organizations approach poverty with a one size fits all solution, that being capital accumulation. Their shift after World War II and its creation of structural adjustment programs has disrupted and devastated what is now referred to as the 'global south'.

People in countries affected by World Bank policy are disregarded in their desires of their own self determination and put in a binding situation which creates great debt for the country thus unequally affecting the poor and those with no policy making power.

World Learning's association with the World Bank makes it hard to understand the real connections they have in theory and practice of the mission and vision of World Learning.

## CAMBER

Chamber's connection to international defense engineering is at the center of how the prison-industrial complex expands and operates. Chamber's description of their website goes as follows, "Camber Corporation provides mission-critical engineering and technical services to Aerospace & Defense, National Security, and International government and commercial customers at over 100 locations worldwide" ([chamber.com](http://chamber.com)).

Camber Corporation's connections to National Security and Defense is in direct contradiction to World Learning's goals and mission for a more peaceful and just world, as well as in contradiction to the competencies of being a graduate of SIT Graduate Institute.

In 2006, Camber Corporation was part of a team which completed for a contract to create a way to 'catch' two million undocumented persons every year through high technology

(corpwatch.org). There is a direct contradiction (of an organization whose goal is a contract to imprison millions of people a year) for those of us at SIT who work with the Graduate Institute in policy classes on immigration and immigrant rights. The Camber Corporation is another example of a relationship and funding which should be called into question.

## **DELOITTE**

Deloitte is an auditing, financial advisory, tax and consulting and risk management corporation. Deloitte employs around 45,000 employees and is one of the world's largest auditing firms.

Deloitte is considered one of the big four along with Pricewaterhousecooper (PwC), Ernst & Young, and KPMG. Deloitte is the auditor of numerous multi-national corporations all round the world.

In 2008 the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board was concerned that Deloitte was overly reliant on the banks management and were not giving a careful enough review of how banks were valuing their mortgage-backed securities and loans said this: "a firm culture that allows, or tolerates, audit approaches that do not consistently emphasize the need for an appropriate level of critical analysis and collection of objective evidence, and that rely largely on management representations" (Norris 2011). The report cited 27 problems in 61 audits reviewed.

## **SODEXO**

Through much controversy, SIT Graduate Institute now employs Sodexo as the main food provider for the Vermont Campus. Sodexo is the world's largest food and facilities management company in the world.

In 2005, Sodexo agreed to an 80 million dollar lawsuit which cited Sodexo in barring black employees from promotions and segregation within the company (Texiera, 2005). These racist actions for which Sodexo was charged help to keep the prison-industrial complex alive and well. World Learning, a soft power, with another connection to a corporation which is guilty of institutionalized racism, which leads to capital extraction of certain, marginalized communities.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Crisis can be dangerous. We are left with the ability to build alternatives that create a critical analysis of what is happening and the imagination to make our dreams and demands possible. In this discussion I hope to send ideas for action and thought for analysis into all of the work done by those who seek to do social justice work in the name of self determination.

An example of failure in the free market system at the state level can be shown in the rise of the prison population in this country. Prisons only protect the public from those “few” who are caught and convicted, and by the laws which are asserted and what power the officer has inserted. There is a critical distance between who is “caught” and who poses a danger to the majority of the population. Among those in this group who become entrapped in the criminal justice system, are there because of “criminal” stereotypes which contribute to the great disparity of the number of people of color locked in cages in this country. Adding that most imprisoned people have been convicted of property related crimes, not violent crimes, can further the analysis and call into question the concept that society needs to be protected from those imprisoned (Knopp, 1979). Thus meaning the primary function of prisons is the control over a certain segment of society.

Corporations and connected foundations have a direct connection to the suffocation of revolutionary actions around the world. For those of us who ‘work’ for social justice this is another connection that must be made when thinking about and acting in our work.

There are some organizations that are working outside the non-profit system that are accomplishing much, if not more, than those funded by foundations. If foundations are only giving money to those with “expertise” in their opinion or “with strings attached,” the control is completely in the foundation’s hands.

Foundations, in the very fact of who is representing them, serve and protect elitism within social justice movements. Thus, ultimately disadvantage people-of-color organizations which do not have the same access to wealthy donors as do white-dominated organizations, such as SIT/World Learning (INCITE!, Smith, 2007). If we as workers for social justice choose to ignore this correlation, we are doing a disservice to our collective work, and keeping the current status quo.

The prison regime is historically and institutionally inseparable from the structure of the large-scale racist state violence. If we understand the historical and cultural components of the PIC we are able to see how a position of abolition is the only defensible pedagogical position. Dylan Rodriguez writes, “to live and work, learn and teach, and survive and thrive in a time defined by the capacity and political willingness to eliminate and neutralize populations through culturally valorized state sanctioned nexus of institutional violence, is to better understand why abolitionist praxis in this historical moment is primarily pedagogical, within and against the ‘system’ in which it occurs.”

When thinking about harm v. crime, we can more closely examine what type of harm non-profits and foundations have caused on greater social justice movements. What type of accountability can we demand for the ways our work has been undermined by capitalist structures and the exploitation of labor which is re-funneled back into the wealthy’s bank accounts.

Social harm can also lack objections to an ontological reality, but attempting to measure the impact of harm which people perceive and experience can be more effective than what is pre-ordered by the state (McMahon, 2008). Working with people from a holistic approach instead

of only where they are at then becomes more valued and thus creating a much more sustainable way to work through harm.

If we then apply this to the understanding of the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC), we can see how the PIC benefits greatly from the ‘criminal’ justice system. It is actually necessary to keep the free-market alive and well, for it serves the PIC wonderfully. If we as a society are not able to address harm in a different way and hold bureaucratic institutions accountable, then it serves only the powerful.

## HARM

While common sense would suggest a natural correlation between crime and prison, (more crime, more prisons) what actually happens to people does not in all times and places result in prison sentences (Gilmore, 2007). We use one umbrella term for ‘criminal acts’ from petty sale of a drug, to forged checks, even atrocious acts like rape are all defined under the same umbrella: as criminal acts punishable under the same terms through the same prosecution process. Our criminal justice system does this without thought or considerations that these acts can happen in very different circumstances, yet treated in the same way.

Many of these crimes often involve very little actual harm, yet are conceptualized under the same “criminal” umbrella. According to Hillard and Tombs in *Beyond criminology?*, in England the police records detail over 1,000 different ‘criminal’ events, most of which created little or no physical or even financial harm and often involve no victim (McMahon, 2008).

In addition to the lack of harm done in recorded crime, another huge concern about the PIC are the criminal justice policies enacted by individuals who have been socialized in a racist and gender normative society. These practices and policies are in direct contradiction to the

examination of what is actually the cause of most harm in the society. This approach does not work for many other reasons including its dependence upon when incidents are discovered, what area is being policed, and the legitimacy and truth that comes from the enforcement officers. The current definition of “crime” also excludes many serious forms of harm such as police violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, and corporate crime (McMahon, 2008). What is the legitimacy of this approach to crime if the health and safety of the majority of people are not being protected?

Hillard and Tombs explain that since we lack the ontological reality of crime, *mens rea*, the concept of the guilty mind, becomes incredibly important (McMahon, 2008). In the United States conspiracy to commit a crime is a form of crime; court can use the thought process to prosecute people, making it easy for government institutions to arrest and convict any person they see fit.

There can also be objections to the social harm model, but attempting to measure the impact of harm which people perceive and experience can be more effective than what is pre-ordered by the state (McMahon, 2008). Working with people from a holistic approach such as restorative justice and reconciliation instead of only where they are at that exact moment then becomes more valued and thus creates a much more sustainable way to work through harm for everyone who is affected by that harm.

Another aspect of approaching social harm is for mass harm done in society. Currently there are a very few number of people with money imprisoned, as well as very few cases of corporations taking responsibility or demanding that responsibility be taken from the courts. Criminology approaches are relationships generally between individuals, thus creating a problem

of working through corporate and state harm. Currently we attempt to squeeze in those ‘crimes’ into an individualistic notion of actions and intention to bureaucratic entities, thus not creating any accountability for the intentions of individuals that create them (McMahon, 2008).

If we then include this aspect within our understanding of the PIC, we can see how the prison industrial complex derives huge benefits from the ‘criminal’ justice system financially. Keeping the free-market alive and serving the PIC wonderfully. If there are not able to address harm in a different way and hold the owning class, which bureaucratic institutions are based, accountable, then the system will continue to serve only the rich.

There are countless alternatives to funding the PIC. In fact, the SIT Graduate Institute trains on theory and practice of alternatives including restorative circles, restorative justice practices, and a whole degree devoted to Conflict Transformation. We are linked to “fixing” the problem as well as taking part in the connections that fund the PIC. When any project or scientific test was continuously giving a 58-80% rate of not working we would get rid of it, but we cannot seem to connect those same 58-80% recidivism rate as failure of a system.

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<sup>i</sup> Taken in part by Black Panther Party slogan.

<sup>ii</sup> Excerpt from: Rodriguez, D., Jackson, J. L., Meiners, E. R., Ooten, M., Barraclough, L., Lai, P., et al. (2010). Teaching Against the Prison Industrial Complex. *Radical Teacher*, 88, 1-80.



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