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# Decommissioning Orleans Parish Prison: A Campaign to Build a Safer New Orleans / One Local Policy Step to Dismantle the Prison Industrial Complex

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**DECOMMISSIONING ORLEANS PARISH PRISON:  
A Campaign To Build A Safer New Orleans**  
A case study of one local policy step to dismantle the Prison  
Industrial Complex

**By Tara Echo**  
PIM 67

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a  
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## **DEDICATION**

This paper is dedicated to all those who experience life inside of cages, under constant surveillance, or in continual anticipation of harassment or brutality. For all those whose experiences have been limited by colonization, by being forced onto reservations, or being confined to man-made borders. This is for all those whose voices have been suppressed with force. For those who continue to be oppressed by non-self-determined decisions that create privileges benefiting some at the expense of others. This is also for all those who are willing to challenge their own privilege. This paper is for everyone who has refused to limit their vision to the confines of such a discourse and continue to struggle for something different.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I am grateful for all those who continually inspire me to connect with my ability to vision, those who push me to delve deeper with my analysis and challenge me to look more in depth at myself. This analysis stems from a collective practice of reflection, deconstruction, vision, and action with many people worldwide, though particularly the membership of the Critical Resistance's New Orleans chapter. I want to thank those who collectively engage me in practicing abolition. I am also grateful for those who have supported the writing of this paper by assuming shared responsibility for some of my daily tasks. The energy of many people went into this process.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**CJWG** Criminal Justice Working Group

**CR** Critical Resistance

**CRNOLA** Critical Resistance, New Orleans Chapter

**DA** District Attorney

**DOC** Department of Corrections

**DPS&C** Department of Public Safety and Corrections

**ICE** Immigration and Customs Enforcement

**LOS** Length of stay

**MIC** Military Industrial Complex

**NOLA** New Orleans, Louisiana

**NOPD** New Orleans Police Department

**OPP** Orleans Parish Prison

**OPPRC** Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition

**OPSO** Orleans Parish Sheriffs Office

**PIC** Prison Industrial Complex

This discourse or narrative: refers to Imperialism (which incorporates the interlocking structures of white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy, xenophobia, homophobia)

The current economic structure: refers to capitalism

## ABSTRACT

Today, nearly two and a half million people in the U.S. are living in cages, with New Orleans holding the highest per capita rate of incarceration. While we have consistently seen that building cages does not bring us any closer to actualizing safety, the sheriff and other city officials of New Orleans justify a financially profitable plan to create more cages-to warehouse more of the city's people-in the name of safety.

Using an abolitionist framework, this paper examines safety by differentiating between contributing factors of being secure and factors which create harm in our communities. By tracing these factors to their root, this paper analyzes how our current climate is shaped by a continual chain of historical events. Through this examination, this paper connects the effects of relational experiences to the symptoms we face and supports that our solutions to such symptoms must address their core.

I propose that the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) relies on continued violence to maintain interlocking systems of control, while individuals within its domain are stigmatized and encaged under its definition of crime. The analysis provided suggests that the current discourse actually causes more harm, steadily diminishing safety. Consequently, this paper supports that if we rely on the PIC to solve our lack of safety, we will never effectively address the issue.

This paper presents the above analysis, through the description of one case study of a policy advocacy campaign to fight a local jail expansion. However, the examined problem is not limited to New Orleans, and should not be approached in isolation from a national, and even global context. By analyzing the effectiveness of proposed policy solutions, this paper suggests that policy steps aimed to decarcerate can be an effective tool. Inevitably, the possibility for solutions to these problems, which I defend cannot be achieved within our current discourse, can only begin to be actualized through a long-term engagement in the practice of abolition.

In conclusion, this paper presents the possibility of self-determined solutions that recognize and address both state-inflicted harm and person-to-person harm, inevitably equipping us to better strengthen our communities and make us more secure than cages do.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The narrative that supports a need for the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) directs our attention mainly to individuals as the source of violence and harm. As we rely on the Prison Industrial Complex to 'contain' outbursts of these individual acts, our attention is diverted away from the violence the state also continually relies on to exist. Concurrent to individual acts of harm, I provide the following list of harm and violence inflicted so that we can broaden our scope of harm in the context of this paper's topic:

The displacement and removal of First Nations peoples in the conquest of this land relies on a continual process of violence. The enslavement of African peoples, referred to in *Breaking the Curse of Willie Lynch* as “the largest kidnapping ever to be experienced,” and the countless practices used to keep people enslaved for financial profit depended on gruesome violence that relied on the continual rape of African women and the violent separation of families. Post chattel slavery, reconstruction laws were created which targeted, suppressed and imprisoned freed Black peoples. The nation turned away as the KKK horrifically captured and killed Black people, burned Black schools, burned Black businesses, and bombed Black homes. City officials relied on white riot mobs to terrorize and suppress the advancement of Black peoples. Violence was also used against white folks who acted out of solidarity against such oppression. During the civil rights era, peaceful protestors were responded to with state violence. Political movements struggling for the liberation of oppressed peoples were suppressed with multiple forms of violence. Freedom of political beliefs was stifled by violence (as we saw with Cointelpro and the McCarthy Era). All liberation leaders have been targeted by violence; either killed, imprisoned, or discredited. The strategic design and creation of the ghetto is a form of violence. Violence had been used against women who were outspoken, through labeling them as witches. Women had also been violently subjugated (hence the rule of thumb). Industry that did not rely on enslaved labor was built on other forms of oppression, reliant upon the exploitative working conditions of poor/ immigrant labor. Trans and queer peoples are suppressed and targeted through multiple forms of harm. The conquest, colonization, and occupation of peoples on other lands, such as Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines relied on violence. And those are just some examples of overt violence.

Covert violence includes: The conditions prevalent in the extraction of resources and creation of surplus from the lands and labor of others (for example, oil extraction, banana plantations, coffee



plantations, clothing sweatshops, and the diamond industry). Through foreign policy, the U.S.' pursuance of political interests that support nations around the earth in the use of violence to undermine the liberation of peoples (such as in Israel, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Haiti, Guatemala, Vietnam, Brazil, Congo, Chile, and Libya, to name a few) still persists. The introduction of drugs and weapons into poor communities sets the stage for violence to proliferate. The testing of pharmaceutical drugs and the sterilization of poor women of color is a genocidal act of violence. Creating domestic policies that generate unequal access to resources perpetuates harm; for example: as neighborhoods maintained segregation through force, laws were created that ensured schools be paid for by local property tax. Policies that allow for a system of healthcare to be dictated by financial incentive rather than the human right to well-being are violent. Also, the continuation of life threatening environmental practices by corporations (by the use of lobbying, subsidies, and looking away) is violent to the earth and it's peoples in immeasurable ways. Enforcing dependency is harmful (such as through IMF and World Bank stipulations). The creation of an economic system that relies on the exploitation of peoples, lands, and resources, creating desperation, elicits pandemic harm. To keep people living in constant fear (as used by the media as a tactic to support vested interests) promotes violence. The suppression of one's ability to critically think, be informed, or have access to the knowledge of historical realities that create current conditions is a form of violence. The mental, spiritual and emotional long-term effects of the conditioning created by ideas of superiority and inferiority, can perpetuate violence in countless ways. Such tactics, that have been utilized by structural white patriarchy, lead me to add: structural white supremacy is a system of violence.

The first section of this paper will provide a brief timeline to demonstrate how the current Prison Industrial Complex finds its roots in structural white supremacy. I propose that in order to thoroughly examine solutions to the current climate, we must address its foundation. I am suggesting that when we analyze ways to deal with the harms we experience, as is the case in this campaign analysis, we must be able to trace the roots of harm that may be contributing factors, and to recognize the harm that may be inherent in the solutions we chose. If we deal with harm by relying on a system that generates harm, we will not make our communities safer.

Under the guise of securing community safety, city officials in New Orleans have embarked on a financially profitable plan to encage an unprecedented number of people. Contrary to the opposition voiced by the city's population and the data presented to officials that discredits larger prisons as a means to create safety, officials proceeded to support prison expansion. With the mayor boasting zero tolerance for crime and backing the sheriff's expansion of a human warehouse, support for the PIC

deflects our attention from addressing systemic harm. I reference Paulo Freire (1970) to broaden our perspective:

With the establishment of a relationship of oppression, violence has *already* begun. Never in history has violence been initiated by the oppressed. How could they be the initiators, if they themselves are the result of violence? There would be no oppressed had there been no prior situation of violence to establish their subjugation (p. 55). Once a situation of violence and oppression has been established, it engenders an entire way of life and behavior for those caught up in it-oppressors and oppressed alike. Both are submerged in this situation, and both bear the marks of oppression. Analysis of existential situations of oppression reveals that their inception lay in an act of violence-initiated by those with power. This violence, as a process, is perpetuated from generation to generation of oppressors, who become its heirs and are shaped in its climate. (p. 58)

When we rely on the PIC to solve our problems, we rely on an oppressive system to provide us with 'justice'. As I analyze the current context in this paper, I do not do so in isolation from the historical legacy that is continually manipulated to exist within modern society. Today, New Orleans has the highest incarceration rate in the country, setting a new world standard. The following section of this paper traces the events that brought us here.

“SLAVERY! How much misery is comprehended in that single word.” In the year 1829, abolitionist, David Walker, published the above statement in *Walkers Appeal*, having no knowledge of the immensity that word would continue to have in the years to come. The prison industrial complex continues a legacy that began with the enslavement of African peoples approximately four hundred years ago. “The largest kidnapping ever to be experienced” would later translate into the largest amount of humans to ever be caged. The mapping of this discourse verifies the devastating long-term effects to which oppressive policies can be written and implemented with ease, while non-oppressive policies cannot be factored in. That being said, this paper begins with a brief timeline of the strategic events that paved the way for the current problem later examined.

## II. CLIMATE

### A) Historical Context

Tracing the history of the issue, the following historical timeline is of particular importance to the practice of policy advocacy, in that our understanding of the system dictates the strategies we use to address the problems we face. This chain of events is an essential component to analyzing the current actions taken in this case study.

According to Howard Zinn (1980):

The United States government's support of slavery was based on an overpowering practicality. In 1790, a thousand tons of cotton were being produced every year in the South. By 1860, it was a million tons. In the same period, 500,000 slaves grew to 4 million. A system harried by slave rebellions and conspiracies (Gabriel Prosser, 1800, Denmark Vesey, 1822; Nat Turner, 1831) developed a network of controls in the southern states, backed by the laws, courts, armed forces, and race prejudice of the nation's political leaders. (p. 171)

Further:

It was the national government that, in Andrew Jackson's administration, collaborated with the South to keep abolitionist literature out of the mails in the southern states. It was the Supreme Court of the United States that declared in 1857 that the slave Dred Scott could not sue for his freedom because he was not a person, but property. Such a national government would never accept an end to slavery by rebellion. It would end slavery only under conditions controlled by whites, and only when required by the political and economic needs of the business elite of the North. (Zinn, 1980, p. 187)

In *The Peoples History of the United States*, Howard Zinn quoted an address Abraham Lincoln made to an audience in Charleston, Illinois:

I will say, then, that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races (applause); that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor

to intermarry with white people... And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race. (p.188)

A pass system was established, as one of the many tactics used at the time to maintain the status quo. This system allowed planters the ability to keep freed peoples working on plantations. Those who engineered this system purported it was to stop the spread of smallpox. In *Black Reconstruction*, DuBois (1935) quoted the April 30, 1865 *Tribune*:

The 'smallpox passes' will remain as an instructive feature in the history of abolition in Louisiana. It is none of those marks of servitude which are enforced upon us in view of controlling a population that has been declared free-that has to be let free. It is a deception practiced upon the emancipated slaves, who receive from one hand their liberty, and are deprived by the other hand of one of their most precious privileges-the right of moving at will. It is an outrage among the old free colored men, who used that right during the darkest and most gloomy years of the slavery regime, and now are deprived of the exercise of their traditional liberties. It is well for the world at large to know how practical liberty is understood in Louisiana. (p. 458)

Zinn (1980) explained:

With slavery abolished by order of government... its end could be orchestrated so as to set limits to emancipation. Liberation from the top would go only so far as the dominant groups permitted. If carried further by the momentum of war, the rhetoric of a crusade, it could be pulled back to a safer position. Thus, while the ending of slavery led to a reconstruction of national politics and economics, it was not a radical reconstruction, but a safe one-in fact, a profitable one. (p. 172)

As chattel slavery had reached its end, policy-makers in their separate states, met this crisis by strategizing to reconstruct laws that ensured their unequal power dynamic. Each of these emergency meetings are described in depth in DuBois' 700page *Black Reconstruction*, in which he stated, these laws, the Black Codes, "virtually reenacted slavery. By decision of the State Supreme Court, there

could never be any equality between white and other races” (p. 455). These codes, encompassing a long list of acts defined as crimes, became legislated and were to be enforced against freed Black peoples to ensure the polarization of status. Further, Martha Escobar (2008) offered the following description of this period: “vagrancy, unemployment, and missing work, changed prison demographics from predominantly white to largely Black prisoners” (p. 59).

In an interview with Trevor Paglen, Ruth Wilson Gilmore (n.d.) elaborated upon the significance of how the laws played a role in manipulating the events to follow: The Black Codes, she explained, were “laws passed that didn't have 'race' in the wording of them, but which had the same effect” (p. 8). “So, in the 1870s and 1880s, it was illegal to move around and it was illegal to stand still. You were either a vagrant or you were loitering...During this time, we saw the conversation around race change from “they're just not smart enough” to “they're not honest enough.” “Crime” became the all-purpose explanation for the struggles and disorder that were going on” (p. 5).

In 1865, The Thirteenth Amendment redefined the rules permitting slavery: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” It is not coincidental that the period that marked the forced end of chattel slavery, also marked the redefinition of crime laws permitting the use of state punishment against freed peoples, who faced closed doors wherever they sought work. The wording of the Thirteenth Amendment, coupled with newly defined crimes, paved the way for a new racially charged, economically lucrative practice: convict leasing.

Just two years after the so-called emancipation of slavery, nearly every state in the south had adopted this new system. In *No One is Criminal*, Martha Escobar quoted Angela Davis with the following: “The South produced the convict leasing system which provided Black bodies that were “leased” to meet the labor needs generated with the abolition of slavery and developing industrial capitalism” (p. 68). As men were arrested in the tens of thousands by these new crime laws, sheriffs and judges leased them directly out to corporations, to be used as they pleased. The horrific working conditions mimicked those of slavery, only this time they were administered by corporations, as well as plantations. This period marked the beginning of targeting Black men to fill jails.

In *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, Douglas Blackmon (2008) elaborated: “The laws passed to intimidate black men away from political participation were enforced by sending dissidents into slave mines or forced labor camps. The judges and sheriffs who sold convicts to giant corporate prison mines also leased even larger numbers of African Americans to local farmers, and allowed their neighbors and political supporters to acquire

still more black laborers directly from their courtrooms” (p. 6). Remnants of this practice appear in the context of this paper's case study later on.

Blackmon went on to say:

What's more, African Americans were portrayed by most historians as an almost static component of U.S. society. Their leaders changed with each generation, but the mass of black Americans were depicted as if the freed slaves of 1863 were the same people still not free fifty years later. There was no acknowledgment of the effects of cycle upon cycle of malevolent defeat, of the injury of seeing one generation rise above the cusp of poverty only to be indignantly crushed, of the impact of repeating tsunamis of violence and obliterated opportunities on each new generation of an ever-changing population outnumbered in persons and resources (p. 6). African Americans were trapped in a catch-22 between the laws criminalizing the mores of black life and other laws that effectively barred them from assimilating into mainstream white American society or improving their economic position (p. 108).

Blackmon stated, "despite the Shelby commissioners' initial reluctance to see their prisoners dispatched to commercial enterprises, the lure of private sector payments was simply more than any paternalistic good intentions could resist” (p. 80). Also, significant to our current context, as will be demonstrated in this particular campaign, it was not uncommon for city or state officials to also personally rely on enslaved labor.

Although the following differentiation is not abolitionist, I feel it is important to connect the similarities in imprisoning practices, then and now, that fill prisons mostly with acts that the state defines as 'minor offenses'. Per Blackmon:

Across the South, despite claimed reforms in many states, more prisoners than ever before were pressed into labor for private contractors- but now almost entirely through local customs and informal arrangements in city and county courts....The total number of men arrested on misdemeanor charges and subject to sale by county sheriffs in 1927 grew to 37,701... The triviality of the charges used to justify the massive numbers of people forced into labor never diminished. More than 12,500 people were arrested in Alabama in 1928 for possessing or

selling alcohol; 2,735 were charged with vagrancy; 2,014 with gaming; 458 for leaving the farm of an employer without permission; 154 with the age-old vehicle for stopping intimate relations between blacks and whites: adultery... Two Mississippi sheriffs reported making between \$20,000 and \$30,000 each during 1929 in extra compensation for procuring black laborers and selling them to local planters (p. 375).

As individual and state violence were waged (and documented) against the descendants of those enslaved, this era marked the strategic, temporary re-opening of U.S. borders for a new wave of European immigrants to fulfill the labor needs of a growing industry. Just as the first waves of poor white workers were pitted against First Nation and Black peoples, this wave, of which I am a descendant, would later be legislated into whiteness. The policies that opened the doors to these European immigrants and offered them the ability to work, were offered in direct relation to the policies that closed doors to Black people already living within the borders of the U.S. In, *On the Backs of Blacks*, Toni Morrison (1993) explains the process in which “African Americans have historically served the less than covert function of defining whites as the 'true' Americans.” Without a critical analysis of the context into which they entered, most newly arriving European immigrants internalized a belief in the 'protestant work ethic'. The inequity created by the economic system, along with the privileges obtained through whiteness, was misrepresented as success solely from their hard work. As these European ethnic groups gained access to resources through their 'Americanness', (their whiteness), the unexamined roots of their success rendered them easily swayed by the criminalization of poor Black people. From this point on, the criminalization of Black America would continue to be used as a divisive tactic.

After the practice of convict leasing came to an end, racial oppression continued to be present. President Nixon expressed a need to manipulate the public by stating, “the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to” (Gilbert, 2008, p. 35). As Black and First Nation liberation movements began to unify self-determined communities, Cointelpro was created under a false pretense to undermine, disrupt, and discredit such organizing. Cointelpro's fraud and exploitative tactics were later exposed, descriptively documented in secret files that were released through the media. The administrations' efforts, although exposed as violent manipulation, had already worked to solidify new criminalizing images of whole communities.

Consecutively, Reagan devised a plan to wage support for trickle-down economics. Despite the difficult conditions poor whites and European immigrants faced, the challenges of their survival were,

by no means equivalent to the experience Black people in America faced. The burden of slavery was followed by the hundred years of policies devised and re-written to maintain racially structured lack of access to resources. The latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked a series of reformist welfare policies geared toward a degree of 'inclusion' to such access. Following Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report that framed Black women as a source of economic exploitation that undermines America, the president backed an advertisement campaign that criminalized the image of poverty. Escobar (2008) stated, "Ronald Reagan schemed to implant the image of the "welfare queen" everlasting when in 1976 he gave a presidential campaign speech and cited alleged news stories... Although the story was later discredited, the message lived on" (p. 61). Reagan successfully redirected resources to big business elites.

As white neighborhoods either fought to keep Black families from moving in, or partook in 'white flight', most Black families were funneled into designated areas. Originally strategically used during the Nazi regime, ghettos were designed in Europe as largely confined areas, or concentration camps. bell hooks (2000) said of the ghetto:

Historical amnesia sets in and they conveniently forget that the fascists who engineered the Nazi holocaust did not begin with gas chambers but rather began their genocidal agenda by hoarding people together and depriving them of the basic necessities of life-adequate food, shelter, health care, etc. Lethal drugs like crack cocaine make gas chambers unnecessary in these modern times. Without outright naming, concentration camp-like conditions now exist in this nation in all major urban communities (p. 94).

Many US cities, in creating their urban blueprints, make sure there aren't any roads that lead directly from the designed ghetto to wealthy neighborhoods. While ghettos were meted out an influx of drugs, Reagan waged an internal war, the 'War on Drugs'. In *A System within the System: The Prison Industrial Complex and Imperialism*, David Gilbert (2008) described the devastation of the War on Drugs as follows:

There is no way this was a well-intentioned mistake. The US had already experienced Prohibition, which showed that outlawing a drug made the price skyrocket and thereby generated lethal violence and other crimes to build and control the trade. This misnamed war was conceived to mobilize the US public behind greatly increased police powers, used to



cripple and contain the Black and Latin@ communities,...and exploited to expand the burgeoning of the imprisoned population... The “tough on crime” politicians crusaded for cutbacks to both college classes and family visits for prisoners-the very two programs with the best proven success for reducing recidivism. Clearly the demagogues' concern wasn't to reduce crime to protect the good citizens... (p. 35).

Gilmore (n.d.) pointed out that "before the 1970s, crime had been a local issue. "Crime" became a national obsession... The whole system wouldn't be possible without racism, but racism has been renovated” (p. 9). According to hooks, “by the early seventies, the entire nation was being socialized via mass media to see the poor as parasites and predators whose ongoing need would make it impossible for anyone to have a good life. Hence it was deemed crucial for the survival of privileged classes to turn their backs on the poor” (p. 123). If political leaders were truly concerned with public safety, then they would focus our attention toward the long strand of blatantly racist policies, since the end of chattel slavery, that have compromised the safety and security of those it claims to have freed. The actual events of our history demonstrate that a so-called emancipation from slavery was never meant to be an emancipation from harm.

As also pointed out by hooks, “ruling class interests have a stake in reinforcing a politics of white supremacy, which continues to try to socialize white working-class and poor people to blame their economic plight on black people or people of color globally” (p. 117). In their 2008 *Statement on Gender Violence and The Prison Industrial Complex*, INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence and Critical Resistance (CR) have challenged us to reflect upon, “the links and overlap between the prison industrial complex and the military industrial complex in the US and overseas in terms of overall impacts of militarism and imperialism” (p. 18).

The Prison Industrial Complex, a term coined by Mike Davis in the mid-1990s, references the Military Industrial Complex, a term Dwight Eisenhower used as a warning to the U.S. in a 1961 state of the union address, stating:

Three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. Now this conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence-economic, political, even spiritual-is felt in every city, every statehouse, every office of the federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development, yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources,

and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the 'Military Industrial Complex'.

It is important for us to connect the effects of the ideology that supports a quest for individual profit, coupled with that of the MIC, on breaking down 'community' and creating harm. In *Recording Carceral Landscapes*, Ruth Wilson Gilmore (n.d.) spoke of one of the effects the MIC has had on this country:

One of the key cultural effects of the MIC has been to constantly refresh, renew, and reinvocate the culture of violence that holds this country together. There's an assumption in this country that says "when in doubt, attack." That's how people live their everyday lives. We have a permanent warfare mentality. We assume that our neighbor is threatening us and that we should harm them if they come over the fence. People in the US talk about self-defense as "I ought to kill someone who I think is threatening me" and then we say "that's just human nature." It's not human nature- it's American culture... To have this kind of MIC, you have to justify it by having a society that always imagines itself at war with someone else (p. 3).

According to INCITE & CR (2008), "over the past decade, the prison industrial complex has not only expanded, it has widened its web through greater collaboration and complicity with the military, immigration enforcement authorities, law enforcement agencies, child welfare agencies, mental health systems, and social assistance agencies" (p. 17). These relationships are essential to understand, especially in our analysis of alternative to incarceration models, as will be addressed later in this paper.

In the 80s and 90s prisons popped up like McDonald's around the US. In one decade, California alone spent \$10 billion on prisons. Gilbert (2008) concluded:

Today, 2,300,000 are held behind bars, about seven times the number in 1971...This dramatic change did not result from some sudden skyrocketing of criminal activity but rather from a radical expansion of what was designated as a crime and a draconian increase in the punishments. Such extreme measures were driven by considerations way beyond "criminal justice" and often at cross purposes to the proclaimed goal of "public safety" (p. 32).

Escobar (2008) noted that “while prisoners' labor continues to yield some economic revenue, the major profiteering occurs through industries that service prisons to meet the needs of the over two million people in them, such as food, clothing, health care, and so forth. Over half of the prison population is comprised of Black men, underscoring how Black male bodies continue to be made expendable, and criminality continues to serve as the marker of difference that constructs their disposability” (p. 59). Michelle Alexander (2010) further observed, “today there are more black men in prison than there were enslaved in 1850”.

Historically, poor white settlers lured to this continent by profit, were manipulated into fearing that their own chance at a better existence was threatened by the existence of peoples who lived here. The settlers had to be fed, and consume, a narrative that allowed them to justify the killing, displacement, and enslavement of hundreds of thousands of peoples. This narrative was indicative of a self-entitled right to exploit, through the means of competition, while maintaining a self-view of purity and viewing someone else as predatory. By internalizing the dehumanization of First Nation peoples, they played the role in expanding the nation by carrying out the terrorizing acts of genocide and displacement.

Dehumanization was also used to justify the practice of slavery for over two hundred years. Later, poor whites and immigrants of color continued to be manipulated into thinking the sustainability of freed Black peoples could only come at the expense of their own financial security. Not able to connect the root of their different exploitative circumstances, the dehumanization of Black peoples paved the path for poor whites to carry out horrific acts of violence.

Today, the Military Industrial Complex's ability to expand empire relies on the manipulation of the U.S. public, specifically military soldiers. Many people enter the military, seeing it as one of limited opportunities for paid employment. An essential training tactic the MIC continues to rely on, is to condition soldiers to dehumanize those deemed “the enemy.” This makes it possible for them to carry out mass murder and force.

As an expansive industry, the PIC creates employment opportunities on massive scales, where economic sustenance is lacking. In an unbroken succession in a six hundred year discourse of seeking individual financial security that relies on the dehumanization of peoples- predominantly peoples of color, trans-folks, and poor whites- employees of the PIC find their own financial security wrapped up in the criminalization of large numbers of peoples. This includes those of us paid to prescribe and treat symptoms of the PIC. When we participate in the PIC, we play a role in perpetuating the imperialist tactics of divide and conquer through new, modern day models.

The PIC adds to the cycle of violence as it makes living in a constant state of being policed,

surveilled, and controlled normative. In order for the masses to accept an immense structured system that relies on intimidation and punishment, caging humans, and even death, it requires us to continually embrace a narrative that fosters fear, hatred, and dehumanization to justify its means. Today, if we accept the limits of such a dichotomized narrative, seeing the PIC as a necessary means to the issues we face, we do so at the expense of critically challenging ourselves to find solutions that create security. This myopic approach keeps us in a state that can never address those harms, in fact, it proliferates them. In our present day, if we accept, and even rely on being policed and surveilled, and build more cages, continuing to hold the same values, we are responsible for carrying out the discourse that produces such ills.

This cycle then, narrowly limits our ability to build upon sustainable solutions together, that could limit the harms we experience. An alternative stems from strengthening our communities, which requires us to be accountable to each other in meeting our needs in meaningful ways and in collectively creating life-affirming ways to address harm in which all members of the community are valued, even the “actor” in the harm.

There are many other factors contributing to the creation of the Prison Industrial Complex as we know it today, that I will not list. The mapping of the events provided above, were offered to support why I advocate PIC abolition in the case study this paper will examine. These events also preface the analysis provided below of solutions to the case study's defined problem.

In telling this story, my wish is that it not only be viewed as the analysis of one approach to a specific issue, but that it be used as a tool to make connections to many other stories and experiences. The prison industrial complex cannot be analyzed in isolation. Its ability to expand is deeply connected to, and must be examined simultaneously with the expansion of the food empire, big business and fast food culture, the healthcare industry, educational cutbacks, border controls, outsourcing of jobs and reliance on immigrant labor, etc. Probing each of these issues will lead to the same set of core values. While the analysis provided in this case study is specific to New Orleans, lessons from this campaign can be applied in the context of advocacy work elsewhere; not limited to other campaigns against the PIC. Rather, this systemic analysis is influenced by, and could be applied to many movements and struggles. One such example is the connection between the abolitionist movement as a solution to the PIC and the food sovereignty movement as a solution to the creation and growth of the food empire. Just as prison reform is a response to the PIC that may allow it to continue, food security advocacy reforms maintain the food industrial complex.

## **B) Prison Industrial Complex**

When I discuss the PIC and PIC abolition in this paper, I am not solely referring to the edifice, the prison itself. Angela Davis (2003) speaks to the PIC as follows:

Since the 1980s, the prison system has become increasingly ensconced in the economic, political and ideological life of the United States and the transnational trafficking in U.S. commodities, culture, and ideas. Thus, the prison industrial complex is much more than the sum of all the jails and prisons in this country. It is a set of symbiotic relationships among correctional communities, transnational corporations, media conglomerates, guards' unions, and legislative and court agendas. If it is true that the contemporary meaning of punishment is fashioned through these relationships, then the most effective abolitionist strategies will contest these relationships and propose alternatives that pull them apart. What, then, would it mean to imagine a system in which punishment is not allowed to become the source of corporate profit? How can we imagine a society in which race and class are not primary determinants of punishment? Or one in which punishment itself is no longer the central concern in the making of justice (p. 107).

In an essay titled, *No One is Criminal*, Martha Escobar (2008) refers to crime as “a constructed crisis.” “The constructed crisis-the loss of “law and order”-unites crime to urban and urban to Blackness. The policies that develop to contain the “crime” crisis are thus policies constructed to control Black bodies” (p. 60). When we solely focus our attention on crime in this sense, we are diverted away from the crisis of a hegemony that creates this dynamic. This is not to say that person-to-person harms should not be recognized. Rather, if we truly want to address person-to-person harms, we must critically examine the situations that may generate them, as well as, the strategies we use to transform them. I support that the PIC does not address individual responsibility for harmful acts; it limits us to the parameters of a reactionary punitiveness that does not transform the situation. Later in this paper, I suggest, as one example, a model offered by the *Harm Free Zone Project* that recognizes individual responsibility and accountability for harmful acts, as well as societal responsibility to contributing harmful factors. This allows for every player, including the community and the person who committed the act to be an active player in manifesting a transformation.

When I talk about dismantling the PIC in this paper, it is from the perspective that the PIC is not just

made up of physical structures or institutional relationships. Its characteristics are entangled in our very beings (in our minds and spirit). All of us uphold the values and practices of the PIC. Our solutions cannot be so easy as to hold specific representatives of the state accountable. De-conditioning ourselves must be an essential component to dismantling its control. Abolition is often misconceived simply as an act of tearing down an existing structure. Abolition, as I refer to it here, is a dynamic process of transformation. Abolition does not mean not having any mechanisms of accountability. To the contrary, it actually requires a more holistic approach to accountability. Therefore, dismantling the PIC means constantly breaking down its conditioning within ourselves, while engaging in a collective process to practice interacting with each other differently.

Having internalized the PIC's narrative, many people respond to an analysis of the PIC with: "then what's your solution?" The solution cannot come from the substitution of one prescription with another. Paulo Freire (1970) spoke to this in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness.... To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity (p. 47).

Angela Davis, reminds us in *The World We Want* speech: "Just as DuBois... recognized that the genuine abolition of slavery would have required the radical construction of a democratic society, and not only political democracy but economic democracy, educational democracy... We can make similar observations about the abolition of prisons. Abolition directs us towards a new society." An abolitionist politic challenges us to question what we affirm. PIC abolition addresses all characteristics of the hegemony we inherit (breaking down systemized race, class, capital; private-property, control, patriarchy and paternalism, hierarchy, heteronormativity, competition and individualism). As will be examined in this case study, an abolitionist approach to the problems we face, allows us to holistically break down all forms of oppression, while simultaneously building upon the things that truly make us safe.

The alternative to the PIC, then, is not just an alternative to the edifice (the prison), it is an alternative to the entire hegemony that has been constructed to support its presence. We cannot expect such an alternative to result from persuading 'city officials' or demanding of them our rights. While

these tactics may be used as tools to reach our end goal, policy advocacy cannot solely alleviate oppression. With this paper, I seek to provide an analysis of the policy advocacy approaches that were taken in one campaign, to support an abolitionist perspective. With this case study, I examine the use of policy advocacy as a tangible approach to shrink the system.

### III. CONCEPTS AND METHOD

While the events and analysis of the case study provided in this paper are drawn from my own participation in this campaign, this analysis has not been solely shaped by my own reflection. As I am not attempting to speak on behalf of anyone else, the views expressed in this paper are my own. I also acknowledge that my description of abolition is limited to my own perspective. However, continually engaging with many others in analyses of approaches, strategies, and tactics guided every stage of this campaign. The act of processing this campaign has been grounded in an ongoing collective dialogue.

The descriptions of events of this policy advocacy process are informed by my participation in organizing this campaign as a member of Critical Resistance New Orleans (CRNOLA) and Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition (OPPRC). The analysis provided in this policy position paper includes secondary literature, along with reports submitted by various bodies addressing aspects of the identified problems. Data collection methods for this paper include websites, newspaper articles, academic writing, visual media recordings, meeting notes, organizational toolkits, and public testimony. In addition to research, reflection, and engaging in organizing, information for this paper was collected from having attended City Council meetings, Criminal Justice Working Group Meetings at City Hall, Public hearings, presentations made by the sheriff and others, as well as meeting and strategizing with CRNOLA and OPPRC organizers.

As a member of CRNOLA I participated in creating a video during this campaign. The video was created to be used as a tool for messaging, to gain visibility, and provide an outlet that reflected self-determined responses to the problem.

Methods for analysis in this paper cross referenced the following frameworks: “PIC concentric circles” and “Seven Easy Steps” from the Critical Resistance Abolitionist Tool Kit were used as tools for abolitionist analysis. Multiple frameworks from Rinku Sen's “Stir It Up” and VeneKlasen and Miller's “A New Weave of People, Power, and Politics” were referenced to guide campaign strategy analyses.

Authors cited in this paper include past and present organizers, scholars, visionaries, and/or historians who are currently engaged, directly impacted by the PIC, and/or privileged by its existence. Works cited reflect a spectrum of abolitionist and reformist views. Journalists were also referenced to describe the campaign climate.

An abolitionist framework is used to examine/ connect root causes of security, the factors that make up the PIC's control, and transformative approaches to harm. Honoring our ability to vision beyond the parameters of our conditioning, and to think strategically and creatively led me to write this paper.



#### **IV. ADVOCACY CONTEXT**

##### **A) National Climate**

While the common narrative surrounding prisons and policing is that they are a necessary means to ensure public safety, today, prison-providing companies are on the stock exchange and a few years ago, three judges in Florida bought a prison together. Many people are organizing against prison privatization, treating its financial profitability as a fairly new phenomenon. More importantly, it has been treated as a conflict of interest for government officials to invest in and/or personally profit from the so-called criminal justice system. As I agree we must challenge what this means for each of us, I advocate that as we do so, it is crucial that we critically examine what generates our current climate. When we trace the history of policing, surveilling, and imprisoning/containing people in the U.S., all have been tied to economic interests since their inception. As well, economic interests have been inextricably tied to white supremacy since the beginning of the United States.

The current economic structure has been a driving force in shaping the creation and existence of this nation state. This structure has been narrowly framed as the only means to which we can ensure the states', as well as its inhabitants', ability to survive and thrive. Anything that could threaten American capitalism, has been viewed as enemy to the state, and has been aggressively stifled. Inversely, throughout U.S. history, anytime people living within its borders have advocated for democracy, they have been met, in most circumstances, with resistance by the nation state. Through capitalism, if we depend on the means of competition for our ability to profit, we are reliant upon winning every gain at the expense of someone else's loss. This scenario is in direct conflict with the values of actual democracy. While the financial structure drives our actual discourse, many "act under the assumption of democracy." If we were to critically examine how the juxtaposition of practicing one theory (capitalism) under the assumption of the other (democracy) influences the symptoms of harm being perpetuated, it would transform our ability to solve them.

Therefore, use of conditioning becomes a necessary component to maintain this structure because an allegiance to the U.S. really means an allegiance to capitalism, at the expense of democracy. I propose then, that when we see city officials receiving financial incentives from the imprisonment of the city's residents, this is not a conflict of interest at all, or a corruption of a previously functioning environment and cannot be dealt with as one. The PIC continues to become more rapidly profitable at the expense of the people it targets. If we continue to meet this tendency by demanding more transparency or more ethical practices from officials, we remain locked in a cycle that will continue to reproduce its occurrence.

The Prison Industrial Complex, as Critical Resistance puts it, “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 similar privileges.” This includes the use of “eliminating social and political dissent by people of color, poor people, immigrants, and others who make demands of self-determination and reorganization of power in the US.”

Crime (as the state defines it), is only witnessed on such an immense scale in the western world. There is a direct correlation between the growth of person-to-person harms in our communities, and the combination of the values inherent in imperialism: encouragement to value personal profit, the lack of value in community at the expense of individual quest for profit, coupled with the lack of access to resources by many as a result of this quest. The effect, a rise in these harms, can never be solved by the PIC, as it is a component of this very structure.

The remainder of this paper describes one specific campaign against the growth of the PIC and analyzes the effectiveness of advocacy efforts to stop it.

### **B) Louisiana specific**

Investigative reporter, Cindy Chang recently released an 8 part investigative series for the Times-Picayune, titled *Louisiana Incarcerated: How we built the world's prison capital*. The following selected findings from the series, are significant to this paper's case study:

- Louisiana locks up more people per capita than any other state. One in 86 adult LAians is doing time, nearly double the national average. Of those Louisiana inmates, 53 percent are housed in local prisons- by far the highest percentage in the country...Among black men from NOLA, one in 14 is behind bars; one in seven is either in prison, on parole or on probation.
- Two decades ago, the last thing Louisiana sheriffs wanted was more inmates. The state prison system was under a federal court order to reduce overcrowding, and there was no money for new facilities... The state had two choices: Lock up fewer people or build more prisons... The backlog flowed to the sheriffs, who were outraged at having the problem foisted on them. Charles Foti, then the sheriff of Orleans Parish, famously dumped a busload of inmates in a state prison parking lot.

- Richard Stalder, who took over the Department of Corrections in 1992, saw a solution. Sweeten the financial incentives, he reasoned, and sheriffs would change their tune. Sure enough, an increased per diem payment and a guarantee of 40 percent occupancy was enough to spark an incarceration gold rush. Sheriffs, seeing jobs for their constituents and new equipment for their deputies, volunteered to build the new prisons the state could not afford. The once-recalcitrant Foti expanded his prison to more than 7,000 beds.
- Prison operators, who depend on the world's highest incarceration rate to survive, are a hidden driver behind the harsh sentencing laws that put so many people away for long periods.
- 40,000 people in Louisiana are incarcerated at once... Louisiana sheriffs now house more than half of inmates serving state time-by far the nation's highest percentage in local prisons. Their financial stake in the prison system means they will lose money if sentences are shortened.
- A good portion of Louisiana law enforcement is financed with dollars legally skimmed off the top of prison operations. Burk Foster, former professor at the University of LA stated, "You have people who are so invested in maintaining the present system- not just the sheriffs, but judges, prosecutors, other people who have links to it."
- But in order for the local prisons to remain profitable, the beds, which one prison operator in the series distastefully refers to as "honey holes," must remain full... Less than 100 percent occupancy means going in the red. Now, instead of unloading inmates, sheriffs compete with each other for the catch of the day. They trade inmates as they please- shipping some to a colleague with beds to fill, unloading a guy who complains too much or asking around for a skilled mechanic.
- The Louisiana Sheriffs' Association lobbies extensively on its members' behalf and funds campaigns through a related political action committee. Private prison companies have the resources to be major political donors themselves. With strategically placed contributions, they can influence legislation as well as potentially steer inmates to their own prisons... The prison lobby... thwarts nearly every reform that could result in fewer people behind bars... The lobbying muscle of the sheriffs, buttressed by a tough-on-crime electorate, keeps these harsh sentencing schemes firmly in place.
- According to Education Weeks State Report Cards, Louisiana was one of three states and the District of Columbia to receive an F for K-12 achievement in 2012, and, this year, the state, overall, is facing a \$220 million deficit in its \$25 Billion budget.

### **C) Problem**

In 2010, New Orleans Sheriff Marlin Gusman began construction to expand Orleans Parish Prison. After some damage from Hurricane Katrina, FEMA allotted \$90 million compensation to the damages the facility structurally endured. Public attention was raised over the construction, as it had not been clear as to what procedures the sheriff had gone through to gain approval for his project. Without any record of an approved zoning ordinance, media attention of the construction sparked public concern. The construction was halted while transparency was sought, and more confusion began to unfold. Organizers throughout the city began to collaborate and strategize to address this issue.

Apparently, the land the construction is being done on isn't owned by the city but by the sheriff's office. In the center of the current prison facility lies a few block grass stretch courtyard that a previous sheriff, Charles Foti bought from the mayor in 1992. The sheriff's office now privately owns that plot of land. As Matt Davis of *The Lens* put it, "The distinction is important because the sheriff's ownership of the land places him in a more powerful negotiating position with city officials over the new jail. The block is in a strategically important position... In the past, Gusman has been coy, asking what was wrong with a little green space" (January 25, 2011). Yet, the previous sheriff would not have convinced the mayor to sell him "a little green space," had it not been a strategic financial move.

Currently, OPP warehouses 3,500 people. Unchecked, the sheriff's expansion plan could include 5,800 beds, with a cost that could total \$250,000,000. Many City officials argue for the immediate need for a new facility, stating conditions created post-Katrina in the prison are so horrific. Acknowledging the need to improve quality of life for those confined to its walls, the reality experienced inside the confines of those walls, as well as outside in the streets of New Orleans, speak to much more than Katrina, and will not be addressed by building a new facility. According to an Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition (2010) fact sheet, "OPP was cited by the U.S. Department of Justice in Sept. 2009 for a pattern of violations of civil rights, including violence in the jail against prisoners and mistreatment of the mentally ill. There have been 7 deaths in the jail in 2010 thus far and numerous accounts of injuries due to assaults. Increasing the bed size runs the risk of exposing more New Orleanians to these dangerous conditions". Regardless of this fact, city officials were proceeding through the process to expand the prison.

Prior to public flags being raised, no known measures had been taken to address the expansion project. As the situation became more controversial, it was determined that a zoning ordinance would be proposed to city council to continue with the expansion. Not wanting a larger jail, community members and organizations, while conducting research as to the legalities of the situation, embarked on

a campaign to have language placed in the ordinance that would limit the size of the expansion. Consecutively, the mayor put two measures into place for a recommendation on the jail size. He commissioned someone acknowledged as a 'jail expert', Dr. James Austin, to make a recommendation on a 'right-sized jail.' He also established a Criminal Justice Working Group (CJWG) to review Dr. Austin's recommendation and assess the current climate to make their own recommendation on the total number of beds.

As a member of Critical Resistance New Orleans, I participated in the collective creation of a video, *Stop OPPression* (2010), to be used as a tool in this campaign. The following were highlighted in the video:

- Healthcare, housing, and education are already deeply underfunded in the city. How we spend limited local and federal rebuild resources reflects our priorities. At a time when over 30,000 blighted homes and Charity Hospital remain empty, and the city's homelessness rate has skyrocketed to more than 1 in every 25 people, \$250million will go toward more cages as folks experiencing homelessness and poverty are criminalized.
- New policies now prevent a person with a conviction access to public housing or section 8. New policies also block a person with a drug conviction access to food stamps (while policies creating racial disparities in drug related sentences are nationally standard). Conviction or not, public housing residents are surveilled and policed heavily. (This entails control over not allowing residents to have visitors to their homes, including family members.)

In any policy advocacy campaign, it is important to know as much about the stakeholders as possible. As I offer details about city officials in this paper, I do so solely for the purpose of strategizing. My intention is not to propose that any of them be held accountable to morality, or replaced by someone else as the solution. I highlight individual acts, not as a reflection of the individuals, but as part of an analysis of a system that makes such acts possible, if not encouraged.

For a hundred and fifty years, the enslavement of generations of African peoples was a financially profitable practice in Louisiana. Just two years after enslaved labor through chattel slavery ended, it was replaced with convict leasing in Louisiana. This oppressive practice was lucrative for the next fifty years. Had the interest of the people's safety been of concern to city officials, the end to this two hundred year violent legacy could have been met with reparative practices. After white people gained privileges from two hundred years worth of the free labor of Black people, the end of convict leasing

was met with a climate of institutional and individual racist violence, in which whites guarded such resources from access by Black Americans. Within thirty years of the forced end to the practice of convict leasing, in 1929 OPP was established. Today, OPP comprises five facilities.

During the Civil Rights era, in 1965, the second facility was built. Then, during Foti's administration, when policies made city jails much more lucrative for sheriffs in Louisiana, OPP was expanded upon greatly. In the wake of Katrina, the fifth facility began to be used. At present, the current sheriff argues that the jail size is not sufficient. If you drive by the almost fifteen block radius of OPP's continually expanding site, situated in the center of many Black neighborhoods and out of site from wealthy white ones, you will also pass multiple boarded up schools, clinics, homes, and small Black owned businesses within close proximity of it.

### The Sheriff

The Sheriff's Office currently employs approximately 700 people in the city of New Orleans. Although there isn't any evidence that supports that larger prisons create more safety, the sheriff frames safety as his main concern, while advocating to expand what is already the largest per capita county jail in the U.S. The sheriff has publicly stated, "There's already a design. We should feel compelled to start building immediately (from a humane perspective)." Yet, his narrative is contradictory to his actions. One example: According to an article in *The Lens*, the sheriff once stated he "would agree to change certain conditions in his jail in exchange for the Department of Justice dropping a threatened lawsuit against him... The department first threatened Gusman with such a lawsuit in September 2009 (over brutality by guards and medication administration)" (Davis, July 26, 2011).

The sheriff continually dodges responsibility for the jails expansion. For example, the sheriff stated that it is the city that builds the jail, while he only operates and manages it. Meanwhile, since construction of the expansion project had been temporarily thwarted, the sheriff seems to be rigorously advocating for his proposal. In a 2011 Q & A session with the sheriff about his vision for an expanded prison, he stated, "We don't have the funding for the mental health or drug facilities. We would have to ask FEMA to take that on." During the same session, he boasted the programs he offers. He also showed slides of the 'top of the line' fitness center the facility would include for his deputies.

### Per Diem Payment Structure

Aside from his office owning the land the expansion is being built upon, there are other ways this system is financially profitable to the sheriff. As specified by EngageNOLA (2011):

Under the current system, the City reimburses the Sheriff's Office for each night an inmate spends at OPP. The reimbursement rate is \$22.39 per inmate per night, which totals to a yearly payment of \$22.8 million. However, Gusman, in his 2011 budget request, stated that he required a reimbursement rate of closer to \$27 per inmate to provide adequate living conditions. The budget shortfall even prompted Gusman to send a letter to Chief Administrative Officer Andy Kopplin suggesting potential legal action: "Unless the city of New Orleans agrees to an increase in per diem and other payments, we will be forced to seek a legal remedy." By comparison, the Sheriff receives \$43 a day for housing federal inmates and \$26.39 for state prisoners.

The city began to use the per diem payment method from a consent decree in the early 1990's, as a financial incentive to sheriffs. There are not many cities that use this payment structure. Transparency regarding the allocation of these payments is lacking, as the sheriff does not submit itemized expenditures when he bills the city. Tracing the prison's spending then, becomes an impossible task. It doesn't seem coincidental that as one of few city jails to have a per diem rate, New Orleans is also one of few cities to engage people for long periods of time. This payment structure allows for the city to use citizen taxes to pay to fill these cages. OPP's 2011 Annual Budget Report shows an inmate per diem revenue of \$22,882,580. However, I propose that milking such financial incentives fits into the logic of the nation's current economic structure. The current situation we are facing with OPP is a result of this structure, rather than a matter of individual corruption.

### Immigration and Customs Enforcement

The sheriff also apparently receives financial incentives by holding ICE detainees. While many large and small businesses in New Orleans rely on the financial profits gained from exploiting the labor of undocumented peoples, city law enforcement agencies target the workers. Post-Katrina New Orleans, especially relied on the labor of such exploitation.

The U.S. allows for people to be booked as ICE detainees based solely upon suspicion that they may be undocumented. They may then be imprisoned up to forty eight hours. National law allows for sheriffs to make the decision as to whether or not to continue to imprison people as 'hold requests' until ICE steps in. There was a sheriff in Santa Fe, NM who refused to house ICE detainees, as he said they were brought in via racial profiling. ICE finances the imprisonment of people for the first forty eight hours. After that, if Sheriff Gusman decides he wants to hold people longer, he gets paid per diem by the city to do so. When the sheriff bills the city one lump sum, he does not document who is kept at his

will through this method. The New Orleans sheriff continually holds people longer than forty eight hours, and has apparently been known to imprison ICE detainees up to six months.

If it is financially lucrative to have empty beds filled, then the sheriff, and other city officials with vested interests, will find a way to fill them. Recognizing this incentive is critical to our approach to this problem. If the sheriff is restricted from filling the beds with one group of state defined 'criminals', then other categories of criminality begin to emerge.

### Paid Details

The description of a paid detail system is explained later in the New Orleans Police Department section of this paper. I just want to note here that the sheriff's office also engages in this practice. In a December 14, 2012 article by *The Lens* by Matt Davis, aspects of this system were exposed. Included in the article, "Gusman chose the son-in-law of his former top aide to coordinate the construction security detail. The former top aide donated over \$10,000 to Gusman's political campaigns and helped choose the selection of a construction manager."

### The Former Sheriff:

Charles Carmen Foti Jr. was the previous sheriff who purchased the land in question from the mayor. It was during his term that OPP became financially profitable to the sheriff's office, at which time the prison population doubled. According to Allen Johnson Jr. (2003) of *The Gambit*, as sheriff, Foti also came under criticism for "the use of inmates as a state labor force and operating a sailboat marina from which his office derived rental income." After his position as sheriff, he went on to be the Louisiana Attorney General.

### New Orleans Police Department

Here I offer another contributing factor to jail size in New Orleans. In 2011, the United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division released an investigative report on the NOPD. The following are highlighted from the *Investigation of the New Orleans Police Department* report:

- The investigation reports racial profiling and biased policing in New Orleans... We found that the deficiencies that lead to constitutional violations span the operation of the entire Department, from how officers are recruited, trained, supervised, and held accountable, to the operation of Paid Details... The Department has failed to take meaningful steps to counteract



and eradicate bias based on race, ethnicity, and LGBT status in its policing practices... In 2009, the Department arrested 500 African-American males and eight white males under the age of 17 for serious offenses... Of the 27 instances between January 2009 and May 2010 in which NOPD officers intentionally discharged their firearms at people, all 27 of the subjects of this deadly force were African American. In our sample of resisting arrest reports documenting uses of force between January 2009 and May 2010, we found that in 81 of the 96 uses of force we reviewed (84%), the subject of the force was African American.

- Our investigation, which covered incidents that occurred within the past two years and assessed practices as they exist currently, revealed a clear pattern of unconstitutional uses of force by NOPD officers... We found that officers use force against individuals, including persons in handcuffs, in circumstances that appeared not only unnecessary but deliberately retaliatory.
- NOPD's use of force practices present a significant threat to the safety of the public and NOPD officers... Detentions without reasonable suspicion are routine, and lead to unwarranted searches and arrests without probable cause... NOPD patrol officers and many members of the command staff described a Department that has long been statistics-driven- one that measures "productivity" by quantity... As one commander told us, [t]hese officers are under the gun to make arrest, arrest, arrest, which leads to civil rights violations and complaints.
- There are few aspects of NOPD more broadly troubling than its Paid Detail system... The Detail system is essentially a form of overtime work for officers... It is widely acknowledged in the policing field that some businesses hire officers on Detail with the expectation that officers will "look the other way" when faced with a conflict between enforcing the law and protecting the business's interest... NOPD officers who work neighborhood Details do the same work... but they are not supervised by NOPD... On average, officers work around 28 hours of details per week.

This report came at a time when the Public Defender's Office was not able to take clients as it had reached capacity. There had also been a 1994 DOJ report with findings that never got addressed. Under the current chief of police, Ronal Serpas' administration, the NOPD began to use the tactic of announcing arrest records of murder victims in news reports. Met with much criticism, the chief of police had announced to the public that he would end this practice, however he continues to defend his regular use of it. He had stated he supported this practice as a means to have an informed public. The

dehumanizing tactic that the police chief relies upon is one of many that continue to manipulate public opinion to preserve the PIC's discourse, at the expense of authentically being informed.

## **V. POLICY ISSUES AND ANALYSIS**

### **A) Advocates**

The main policy approach taken in this campaign was to advocate for the passing of a jail ordinance. The ordinance calls for a 1,438 cap to the number of beds permitted in the new jail facility. It demands the immediate demolition and/or decommissioning of the already existing facilities, to ensure the cap. It also calls for an end to the per diem payment structure for the sheriff.

All advocates against the expansion agree that if more beds are available, more beds will be filled. The economic incentives in the system mean that beds will not be left empty. As is evident in already existing prisons across the country, it is not economically wise to leave beds empty, regardless of prison size. As CR pointed out, “not only will we continue to arrest and lock up people locally, but we will also be using the beds available to lock up persons detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, by the state, and even by other states (as was reported recently in terms of Arkansas considering paying LA to jail its people)”.

### OPPRC

Advocates fighting the expansion of OPP include many individuals and organizations in New Orleans. The most prominent among the voices pushing to pass the ordinance, was the Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition (OPPRC). The coalition was originally formed in 2004, with the election of a new sheriff. In 2010, OPPRC re-convened, encompassing various organizations and individuals. Although these organizations and individuals represent many different experiences and views, all members agreed to limiting the size of OPP to 1,438 beds. All members also agreed that city officials could better use such funding toward creating safety by investing in the people of New Orleans in life-affirming ways.

The broad base that makes up the coalition includes organizations such as: Voices of the Ex-Offender (VOTE), The Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JJPL), SafeStreets, Congress of Day Laborers, VERA Institute, New Orleans Coalition on Open Governance (NOCOG), members of Critical Resistance, and faith-based leaders.

There are other local ally organizations to the struggle against the PIC, but not directly involved with OPPRC. Well before OPPRC re-convened to fight the jail expansion, 'Women with a Vision' had begun

a campaign to fight “crimes against nature” laws that is still ongoing. Also leading really important work in the city and against jail expansion, 'INCITE! Women of Color' has been working on the Women's Health & Justice Initiative. They have a poster campaign on reproductive justice and ending violence against women, especially women of color.

### Critical Resistance

The campaign approaches that I support in this paper stem from the collective strategizing of Critical Resistance New Orleans (CRNOLA). The majority of my participation in this campaign has been with CRNOLA, a chapter of a national abolitionist organization. Critical Resistance is guided by a mission to build an international movement to end the Prison Industrial Complex. In its mission statement, CR claims, “We do this by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe. We believe that basic necessities such as food, shelter, and freedom are what really makes our communities secure...Because we seek to abolish the PIC, we cannot support any work that extends its life or scope! Critical Resistance is building a grassroots movement to stop using punishment to “cure” complicated social problems.” Although Critical Resistance New Orleans' (CRNOLA) membership has joined OPPRC, the chapter had decided we could not do so formally as an organization, as the goals of the coalition were in conflict with CR's mission.

### **B) Policy Approaches**

To analyze this campaign, we must first examine the approaches taken to address this problem. As our history has illustrated, this problem links back to this country's inception. Within our current structure, laws will continue to be re-written, discretionarily worded, and applied to suit the same vested interests. Thus, while many approaches may temporarily address immediate symptoms, I present in this paper that nothing short of an abolitionist framework and practice will begin to chip away at its discourse.

The analysis below, is provided for the purpose of examining the long-term effectiveness of policy approaches being taken. It is not my interest to limit advocates to the confines of 'abolitionist' or 'reformist'. The politic guiding our actions is not stagnant, and our work encompasses a spectrum. However, I will provide a general analysis of some differences to address how our analyses of root causes of problems affect how we approach them, and ultimately our ability to overcome them. I embark on this with the long-term vision and goal to actualize transformations that address the symptoms being produced in this context.

### The Main Approach

Mainstream advocacy in the city is guided by demanding a series of reforms to address this problem. To reform means to make changes to improve a problem or situation, removing what is faulty or corrupt, with the end goal of a properly functioning system. In this sense, not wanting a larger jail can be addressed as a process problem. In order to improve the system, there must be an inherent belief that its initial discourse, functioning properly would not produce such outcomes. In this case, making improvements to remove what is faulty or corrupt, should bring the system back to its proper function, with renovations. Then, the question of how we interpret the system is key to our advocacy.

While all advocates agree that a larger jail is not a step toward genuine safety, the main policy approach advocated for was a smaller “right-size” jail, determining this size by the national rate of incarcerating people. Such a recommendation presumes an adherence to the practice of caging people as a necessary response to social problems, just not to the extent that it exists. This demand is supported by data research methods which provide comparisons of incarceration rates in relation to state defined crime rates. In effect, considerations for solutions reference “more effective” models of law enforcement and state run programs.

Demands for a smaller jail are supported by recommendations to revisit incarceration policies such as the use of summons, pre-trial detention, and approaches to 'non-violent offenses'. This approach elicits the demand that money be re-funneled toward state-based services and programs that are believed to reduce incarceration and recidivism rates. Proponents of this approach aim to redirect money toward government funded services in communities. In this case, there must first be an inherent belief that the U.S. criminal system is based on justice. Likewise, providing government programs and services is a means to achieve an alternative to the current condition.

As people lose their jobs, housing and family support to be incarcerated, vulnerability is increased. Many argue that this diminishes safety as it affects people's ability 'to meet their needs in lawful ways'. The main policy approach to this problem, is to relocate jail funds to state-based community resources.

Another approach is the demand to reform the per diem payment structure of the jail, reducing the sheriff's ability to profit from public money and the criminalization of so many of the city's people. Yet another approach is a demand for open governance from city officials, and more transparency from the sheriff's office, which includes written documentation of spending details to ensure better governance. And finally, approaches are being sought to achieve a more ethical practice in the policing of peoples. This demand calls to eliminate racial and class disparities in all aspects of the 'criminal justice system'.

### An Abolitionist Approach

Prison expansion is a symptom of a fundamental problem that includes the very existence of the prison industrial complex. Economic incentive as we know it and the creation of race are entangled at the very core of this system's function. As long as this remains our discourse, what we are experiencing in the system's current state is not broken, not in need of fixing. We cannot weed our way out of corruption in the current framework.

The PIC is a dynamic set of interests that have become systematized and internalized. As such, abolishing the PIC is not just about removing people from the edifice (prison), to remain under the surveillance and control of the police state that enforces the current political and economic structure. As stated earlier, it is important to pull apart and examine that which creates harm from that which make us safe to begin to see how the PIC is rooted in systems that create harm. The solutions we seek to address harm must challenge its ability to continue for our advocacy to be sustainable.

A perspective often taken by abolitionists is to think about how our advocacy efforts can leave room for the PIC to unintentionally flourish in the future, thus, we must ask ourselves if our actions will grow, maintain, or shrink it. Actually asking for a smaller jail legitimizes: a need for prisons, a system of caging people as a solution to social ills, as well as the current system's power to maintain control over people, while delegitimizing those imprisoned. In recognition that individual acts of harm will always exist, I argue that the PIC does not produce an environment conducive to transforming those experiences or creating life-affirming incentives for harm reduction.

Our use of language can have substantial implications for our advocacy outcomes. The term “over-incarceration” is frequently used to highlight the need for reform. Relational terms, such as “over-incarceration”, imply an acceptance of the practice of imprisonment in moderation. Even worse, this insinuates that there could be such a thing as under-incarceration. Although a lower rate of incarceration is an advocacy step toward no incarceration, we can work toward achieving that short-term goal without actually stating it as such. In order to ensure long-term sustainability of the policy change, we must be clear about what we are asking when making our demands.

The U.S. leads the world in incarceration rates. The dilemma produced here is that “over-incarceration” implicitly insinuates that the practice of incarceration is not problematic as long as it is keeping with a national per capita average. The rapidly growing national average rate of incarcerating people cannot be the determining factor that shapes our demand. Though our advocacy may be well-intentioned, asking for a cap of 1,438 beds means we are asking for a ten year commitment from the city to cage at least 1,438 people AT ALL TIMES.

City officials state their job is to ensure public safety and that the prison is a necessary mechanism to maintain that safety. Based on this premise, it is important for us to look deeply at the issue of safety. Insecurity, from lack of access to resources makes us less safe. The PIC funnels public money out of communities already disenfranchised and into a system of caging its people, which creates more insecurity. This incentive driven process renders criminalizing people profitable. Individual profit-seeking has always been a driving factor in the extraction of resources from whole communities into the hands of a few. Less resources available to the public, creates more harm in our communities.

We must be cautious about how we seek for our advocacy to pull people out of the edifice. By placing people in government run programs or services (such as pre-trial services or alternative incarceration centers), our solutions can rely on the continued use of constant control and surveillance. This power structure replaces our ability to create more balanced accountable models with each other. Angela Davis (2005) reminded us in *Are Prisons Obsolete*, Dr. Terry Kupers warned:

While diversion from prison into mental health care offers hope for reducing the prison population and providing treatment for many prisoners, however, it also has the potential to increase the repressiveness of the criminal justice system. New laws that expand involuntary outpatient treatment programs could also be applied to many other individuals who have merely failed to follow their treatment plans and will recycle into prisons.... Like people on probation and parole are still under the control of the PIC... so we need to be mindful of not just trading one cage for another (p. 107).

As we aim to build upon community solutions to societal harms, they must be self-determined responses. Vice versa, building upon strong self-determined communities shifts values and minimizes these harms.

As CRNOLA, we agreed we could not support state-sanctioned community service as an approach to decarcerate OPP; as it is not alternative to the PIC. It is reminiscent of convict leasing. Advocating for community service maintains a dynamic for already privileged people to benefit from the free labor of predominantly dis-privileged people. Court-appointed community service incorporates the stealing of resources (i.e. time, labor) from a community, to be used for someone else's profit. This is the antithesis of authentic community accountability. More deeply, the discourse of the PIC exists at the expense of breaking down and displacing communities. It strengthens state control and corporate interests at the expense of autonomous alliances.

We can begin a dialogue that addresses this catastrophic situation if we penetrate the means in which certain peoples have been marginalized from access to resources, rather than simply create inclusion to access through those very means. In this sense, when I advocate access to resources as a solution, my long-term goal is not employment, housing, healthcare, or education as they currently exist. As they are, they maintain a state of dependency on the structures which thrive off of exploitation. Relying on such dependency eliminates our ability to meet our needs ourselves. Non-profit organizations, programs, and social services often corroborate with the PIC's discourse in that they generally do not challenge dependency on structures of domination. Actual self-determined approaches to building authentic community responsibility have always been met with state force.

Within this economic structure, government and corporate interests have shared values. The very nature of capitalism maintains that there must, at all times, exist a pool of unemployed labor. Job training programs as a solution to the current problem do not alleviate this problem. An economic system that relies on the use of competition, properly functioning, will never advantage everyone. This economic structure has also proven to disproportionately privilege some at the expense of a large pool of people whose survival is dependent upon working for little money, which is inextricably connected to the political construction of race. Providing these tools increases individual knowledge and skills, but under the current economic model, obtaining a better chance in the workforce happens at the expense of the competition of one's neighbor. This dynamic, inevitably degrades collective sustainability and maintains an instability that fosters many harms. As long as the current economic system is valued and maintained, we will continue to experience a high rate of structural and individual harms that make us unsafe.

Racial profiling is a relational practice that stems from the normalization of white privilege. We cannot effectively eliminate racial profiling in the absence of analyzing the scope of oppression entailed in white supremacy. Borders of privilege are legislated into existence, while policing and punitive measures are used to maintain their boundaries. As these borders shift, the punitive measures accommodate them. We internalize these borders and perpetuate them ourselves.

Racial profiling is a real experience that needs to be addressed now. However, if we approach it in the absence of examining the forces behind the creation of a police presence in the U.S., we will never reach our end goal. We are facing racially composited structures, in which case we are ALL racialized in them. As a matter of course, a police department that racially profiles and criminalizes people of color is not a glitch that has formed. Just as we cannot discuss poverty without looking at the process of accumulation of wealth, we cannot discuss racial profiling in law enforcement without analyzing

systematized whiteness and capitalism. Racial profiling cannot be eliminated as long as the current framework is a continuation of the same discourse. There is a reason the prison industrial complex does not most severely impact majority rich, white folks. Therefore, envisioning and working toward a U.S. police force absent of racism is oxymoronic. While we work to expose cases of racial profiling and advocate to hold law enforcement accountable, if we work to deconstruct the extent of racism, we will begin to identify other oppressive forces linked to it, and our belief in a police state will inevitably begin to erode.

Manipulation has been used as a tool to limit our understanding of the situation we are in and the role we play in perpetuating it. This is evident in how our current narrative supports and carries out an action while using the antonymic word to that action. One example: this narrative supports that the U.S. represents freedom, while we know it actually continually relies on the use of terrorization both domestically and internationally. Within the same narrative, the people who struggle for freedom are labeled and treated as terrorist threats. The PIC continues to use these old tactics to pit us up against each other, so with the progression of time, we divide ourselves to its benefit in countless new ways. As these words represent ideas, we have to be able to critically analyze the language that is used by the PIC vs. the content of its message. We can challenge this tactic by exposing the PIC's values to discredit the sheriff's language, and rejecting its language in our own messages so that we break down the barriers created to instill fear and division.

#### Transformative approaches to harm:

As I propose the long-term goal of self-determined and autonomous community approaches to harm rather than the PIC, it is not my place to prescribe a specific solution. However, I present the following as an example that has been embraced. Malcolm X alluded to the fact that what's rational to the slave is absurd to the master. I do not offer the following with the intention of convincing city officials to support it. My policy recommendations, as mentioned earlier, are short-term decarceration strategies toward these long-term goals. In the spirit of a dual process model, I offer the following, for the reader, as an example of a collective response that could be practiced simultaneously to decarceration.

The following are excerpts from *Daring to Dream* by the Harm Free Zone Project's (n.d.), which is just one, of many approaches:

- Community accountability demands certain conditions: community investment, ongoing democratic dialogue, systemic analyses of oppression, agreed upon principles and practices,



clear boundaries and roles, vision and hope. The more autonomous the community becomes, the greater the degree to which these conditions will be fulfilled (p. 1).

- The methods used to address harm are described as “complex, fluid and interconnected... We have seen numerous attempts to reduce “crime” in our communities where these critical steps are bypassed in favor of immediate solutions... These types of programs are generally state-defined (or collaborate with the state) and do not present a discourse around systemic oppression or a critical analysis that seeks to understand the conditions in which many acts of harm take place. Nor are the long-range goals of community autonomy central to the goals of reducing crime. Inevitably, these models bolster and encourage the prison industrial complex” (p. 2).
- The spirit animating intervention and reparation is not punitive, but healing (p. 2). “The processes of community accountability allow the Actor...to be taken seriously.” The antithesis of the PIC, among other things, the Harm Free Zone Project expresses the need for the Actor of the harm to be seen by the community as: “1. inseparable from the community, 2. affected by a historical and present-day reality of oppression that influences the beliefs, character, desires, sense of self and relationships,”... and “a mirror for and of the community” (p. 3).

As the PIC categorizes people as 'violent' or 'non-violent offenders', one policy approach in this campaign is to advocate the release of the latter. A challenge to this approach: if we support the PIC's classification of criminality (also referred to as 'major or minor offenders'), we do not necessarily minimize its scope. Divisive strategies that get some people out at the expense of others, maintain the tools of divide and conquer that pit people up against each other. In such a relational approach, the alleviation of the dehumanizing situation of one group, is reached by condoning that of the other. If the goal of this approach is to be minimizing jail size, we must think about long-term effects as, for example, according to Bassichis, Lee & Spade (2011) "... growing numbers of transgender and gender non-conforming people are subjected to violence in the criminal legal system, in large part as a result of discrimination in employment, housing, and virtually every aspect of society” (p. 18).

As we advocate against specific policies, the borders of criminality are constantly being revised to include more. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore has pointed out in interview with Trevor Paglen (n.d.), “criminalization produces an endless supply of enemies” (p. 4). If the battle were to be won by advocates to eliminate the imprisonment of state determined non-violent offenses, within the current ethos of the PIC, policies can be re-written and/or “discretionarily” enforced to redefine the categories

that constitute violence. An example of a decarceration approach that is not divisive: as the next stage of this campaign, we began to plan advocacy around the elimination of policies that allow for imprisonment for inability to pay fines and fees.

Finally, the per diem payment structure does produce financial incentives for the sheriff to incarcerate people. While we advocate to eliminate this structure, if the strategy to end it is not carefully crafted, it can leave room for policy-makers to find other ways to transfer resources to suit powerful vested interests. As is indicative from the last 20 years of prison privatization across the U.S., saying no to funding being funneled directly from public monies will not necessarily minimize the city's rate of caging people.

Overall, if we simply approach the PIC with the goal of reforming it, we will continually be addressing symptoms of it. Whereas, an abolitionist framework is a tool that automatically connects each symptom. Tracing symptoms to their root connects thousands of policies disguised as separate causes, (i.e. war on drugs, disparities in sentencing, mandatory minimums, crimes against nature, homelessness, public housing curfew laws, gang injunction, trespassing, ICE and other detentions, etc.). Therefore, my goal with this policy paper is to provide a long-term analysis of the problem in order to support decisions made about short-term approaches in one case study.

"Still-abolition? Where do you put the prisoners? The 'criminals'? What's the alternative? First, having no alternative at all would create less crime than the present criminal training centers do. Second, the only full alternative is building the kind of society that does not need prisons: A decent redistribution of power and income so as to put out the hidden fire of burning envy that now flames up in crimes of property-both burglary by the poor and embezzlement by the affluent. And a decent sense of community that can support, reintegrate and truly rehabilitate those who suddenly become filled with fury or despair, and that can face them not as objects- 'criminals'-but as people who have committed illegal acts, as have almost all of us." - Arthur Waskow, Institute for Policy Studies

"An abolitionist approach that seeks to answer questions.... would not be looking for prison-like substitutes for the prison, such as house arrest safeguarded by electronic surveillance bracelets. Rather, positing decarceration as our overarching strategy, we would try to envision a continuum of alternatives to imprisonment-demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free physical and mental care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance." - Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete*, p. 107

Abolition is not just a guiding tool in our analysis and organizing, but also a practice, as well as a long-term alternative vision. Shrinking the system entails much more than just dismantling the current framework. Therefore, policy advocacy can be used as a tool but transformation entails much more. Abolition offers a model to legitimize and value every voice as integral to a collective decision-making and shaping body, at every stage of envisioning, building, deciding, implementing, and holding accountability.

As we decarcerate, we are also focusing on making our communities stronger to face structural and person-to-person harms in ways that are transformative, not punitive. This process can inform the ways in which we care for our health, educate ourselves, sustain ourselves and flourish. As we rely less on the PIC, we maximize our ability to create truly safe spaces and to respond to harm. One example of this dual process is described by Paula X. Rojas (2007) in *Are the Cops in our Heads and Hearts*:

Implicit in our models is what could be described as a spiritual framework for understanding power that recognizes and respects the humanity of all peoples. In these newer movements, such as the Zapatistas in Chiapas or the MTD (Unemployed Workers Movement) in Argentina, though each is very different from the other, the emphasis is on the people's struggle for autonomy, not gathering power to topple the state and take it over. Revolution is about the process of making power and creating autonomous communities that divest from the state. And as these autonomy movements build, they can become large enough to contest state power... These movements emphasize not just winning a specific political goal, but creating new communities that model the vision for liberation (p. 199).

This paper's analysis of approaches is not meant to invalidate any of our work. Nor is it to funnel reform/abolition into a false dichotomy of right and wrong. I do not think we can all just be placed into either category as we represent a spectrum of analyses, actions, experiences, and visions. My goal is to navigate through the challenges of determining common goals to build upon, as well as challenges to bridging gaps of understanding in order to collectively deepen our analysis (rather than create a dynamic of isolation and exclusivity in our organizing). As organizers, my goal is for us to be as strategic as possible with our energies.

## VI. ALLIED SOLUTIONS

### Coalition Organizing: Allied Solutions to the Problem

Advocates in the city were able to collectively build upon our immediate shared goal of not wanting a larger prison. As a coalition that represented many different perspectives of the PIC, navigating through this was a challenging process. Our long-term goals, which shaped the language of the demands, differed. As an organizational chapter, CRNOLA agreed our mission conflicted with the coalitions' points of unity, but we recognized the potential in our joint advocacy. As a solution, CRNOLA members joined the coalition as individuals.

As a coalition, we were able to craft multiple demands together. OPPRC's strategy against the jail expansion was to construct a jail ordinance that called for a 1,438 cap to the number of beds in the new facility. Those who sought to abolish the PIC, crafted a demand to immediately begin the decommissioning process of the five already existing facilities. We had to be realistic that the sheriff is in the process of building a new facility and that our reformist allies were fighting for a jail cap. Seeking a winnable goal, if the existing facilities were decommissioned, we would be ensuring the cap without asking for one, while supporting a decarceration strategy. One goal was for the advocacy of this campaign to present leeway to further decarceration strategies. We reached consensus on this strategy as the dismantling of the existing facilities served the dual purpose of ensuring a jail cap for those seeking a smaller jail, and a decarceration tactic that does not legitimize the system, for those seeking the elimination of jails.

The sheriff didn't seem to have any plan to give up the other five facilities. With the new facility capped, there would be room for him to manipulate the cap (and city officials to misinterpret it), by continuing to use the other facilities. Without the demolition of the other five buildings, the sheriff would have the opportunity to warehouse more people. To make certain there would be no space for the sheriff to continue construction of the new facility and later campaign to convince city officials that there was need to maintain the other facilities, we worded the demand as 'Decommission Now' and incorporated a timeline into the ordinance that would make clear this was to be effective immediately.

Collaborating allowed the space for organizers to engage each other in a dialogue that pushed us to deepen our analyses. We collaborated amongst the strengths of all of our organizations. As a coalition, our campaign gained access to more constituencies.

Initially, we loosely gathered to begin organizing together as a coalition. Well into the campaign, we established a loose infrastructure guided by points of unity, and a membership process. We also advocated for the adoption of a consensus-based decision-making process. As the campaign was time

sensitive, we often broke up into task force working committees and brought proposals back to the overall group. Different groups within the coalition contributed different resources, and access to funding sources varied.

Due to the factors that contributed to our participation, there were differences in what funders we answered to, what constituents we represented, and the degrees in which our organizations corroborated with the state. These factors ultimately affected how we developed and carried out strategies and tactics. They also affected how we were viewed in our advocacy. While some have more clout in communities most directly impacted by the PIC, others have more clout with the state. What we advocated for/against and how we advocated for it often reflected our relation to the state.

In *Stir It Up*, Rinku Sen (2003) raises the following point for choosing a coalition; “Two important distinctions stand out: the degree of formality in the relationship and the level of political alignment” (p. 136). She goes on to distinguish between tactical (for a specific campaign) and strategic (shared long-term goals and visions) relationships. While we have not yet determined the extent of this relationship, it seems we are finding ourselves somewhere in between the two. Although we do not all share long-term goals and visions at this moment, the first stage of the campaign has ended and we continue to build relationships with each other and try to strategize together.

As the above advocates began the campaign to have city council expand the language of the proposed jail zoning ordinance, the mayor constructed a Criminal Justice Working Group (CJWG), made up of city officials and, what he referred to as community-based leaders in the realm of “criminal justice.” The CJWG was intended to meet repeatedly, assess other state created models, research and recommendations and make a recommendation to his office on the jail size. The motive behind the mayor's formation of such a group is open for interpretation. He also commissioned 'an expert' to make an assessment and provide a written recommendation on a “proper jail size” to the CJWG for review.

Dr. James Austin of THE JFA Institute, was requested by the mayor, through the city of New Orleans, to write the recommendation. Written along with Ware & Ocker (2010), in the report titled *Policy Simulations of Alternative Options to Reduce the Orleans Parish Prison Ten-Year Projection*, Dr. Austin presented an estimated ten year projection “based on demographic, crime and arrest trends.” The following are highlights of the report's findings, along with the recommendation:

- The absolute number of pretrial inmates increased from 2010 to 2011, due to an increase in the length of stay (LOS). The overall LOS grew from 19 days to 30 days.
- The large difference in length of stay among whites and blacks even when controlling for the

charge/offense has continued. For Blacks, they have a LOS of 23 days versus 11 days for whites and 5 days for Hispanics.

- The state DPS&C inmate population can be lowered at the discretion of the Sheriff. However, such a reduction would severely reduce the Sheriff's revenues as the current budget is based on an archaic per diem structure. If the budget structure can be replaced with a more standard fixed budget appropriation based on modern accounting principles, the DPS&C inmate population can be substantially reduced.
- The two most prominent and most significant options that have been proposed are 1) implementation of a pretrial services agency and 2) reduction in the number of persons housed in the OPP who are state prisoners.
- Finally, a peaking factor of 7.5% is added to address seasonal fluctuations and the separation of people according to gender and security/classification designations. When this is added, the bed capacity required to house the OPP population by the year 2020, when these two reforms are implemented is 2,017. In essence, the two policy options would reduce the base projection by about 1,100 inmates or a 1/3<sup>rd</sup> reduction.

After reviewing Dr. Austin's report, the sheriff publicly responded by discrediting it and deemed the findings problematic.

### Addressing the Target

Advocates targeted city officials, even though we were aware there are always transactions behind closed doors serving the interests of powerful forces. Sen (2003) stated: "Often, we target government agencies and legislative bodies because we have leverage there... At least there we have language of democracy and accountability on our side" (p. 64). While transparency and accountability are vague terms that are impossible to verify within a hierarchical structure, the rhetoric exists that city officials represent the public. They must either have a public convinced that their decisions are necessary or, at minimum, seem to represent their constituents enough to justify their seats in office.

Within the state structure, the person we believe to ultimately decide is the mayor, as he would make the final decision to agree to meet our demands. The mayor is also the person we believe the state entrusts to hold the sheriff accountable. City council first holds the power to vote to pass or deny our demand. If they vote in our favor, the mayor potentially has the authority to veto it. Although the

mayor appears to be the primary decision-maker in the matter, targeting him directly did not seem to be the most valuable use of our energy in assuring our goal was met. The most promising way we saw to affect the mayor's decision was to first, target city council to vote in favor of the ordinance, and second, members of the CJWG to ensure that our concerns were addressed in making their recommendation.

Due to the lack of clarity in the mayor's motive and relationship with the sheriff's office, targeting him directly left too many blind spots and too much room for him to discredit our demands. However, if city council voted in favor of the ordinance, and the working group's recommendation supported the ordinance (especially after "his expert" Dr. Austin's report supported our demand), the mayor would be in a difficult position publicly to ignore it.

### **A) Primary Target Engagement: City Council**

Advocates crafted the demands in the jail ordinance with the goal of having it passed through city council. We initially weren't sure targeting city council would be a winnable strategy for this campaign. A few years ago, when advocates organized against the demolition of public housing in the city, the public was left out and city council voted unanimously in favor of the demolition. As we organized this campaign to reach the constituencies of each council member, we kept in mind that the next mayoral and city council elections would not be held until 2014.

#### Supportive Strategies and Tactics

The following are a variety of strategies and tactics that were used in an effort to influence our targets and achieve our short-term goal to meet our demands. They were birthed from mapping out two sets of campaign strategy charts (as OPPRC and as CRNOLA). Using VeneKlasen & Miller's (2002) SMART Objectives Framework (p175), CRNOLA developed our strategy chart over the course of a two day campaign planning retreat. During the course of the campaign, advocates revisited, evaluated, and re-defined our goals when appropriate, as organizations and a coalition.

**Lobbying:** There are six council members representing six districts in Orleans Parish. In the beginning, two council members seemed to be in support of passing the ordinance, one was unclear on her stance, and we perceived three to be difficult wins. The council member holding the at large seat seemed to be in clear support of our advocacy. The most lobbying was geared toward the council member heading the district that the expansion was taking place in.

In preparation for the council vote, different members of the coalition made appointments to meet with each council person, covering all districts, to lobby and gauge their prospective stances in order to



assess necessary next steps. This gave us the chance to inform them of our position on the issue and to get their attention. Being a coalition representing many organizations in the city, increased our lobbying power. Special attention was paid to engaging the council members who seemed to be on the fence.

As the coalition's makeup ranged in the context of politic, choosing tactics was sometimes challenging. Some advocates focused more heavily on establishing relationships with state defined decision-makers. For example, one member may have only been comfortable whispering in the ears of policy-makers, saying please and thank you. A draw toward this approach may be influenced by a person's degree of privilege or employment through the state. Others were only comfortable placing demands rather than asks.

**Mobilization:** The strategic decision to collaborate as a coalition widened our range of support. As a unified presence joining a number of constituencies throughout the city, our advocacy was strengthened. We were also able to connect the work of our constituencies, building upon some of our movements. Together, we were able to reach much more people.

**Public Outreach and Petitioning:** In order to bring visibility to this issue, we created and circulated flyers for outreach. As well, we sent out email blasts to our list-serves. Since there were some differences in our points of unity, CRNOLA created it's own flyer, in addition to OPPRC's flyer. The coalition circulated a petition and presented it to city council members.

Much of CRNOLA's energy went toward outreach. This was challenging to our membership capacity as a fairly small group, especially one in which our organizing relies solely on our own time. Outreach tactics included going door to door in each of our neighborhoods with our talking points. We also mapped out the city and chose strategic locations that many people frequent, especially in each district. We had created individual petition cards to be designated to the council member of each district. The cards called for a vote in favor of our demand. We tabled and stood in front of chosen locations for days/weeks engaging people about the topic and collecting signed petition cards. The cards were then sorted out by district. Rather than drop the cards off at council members' offices, we decided this tactic to pressure council members (with a substantial collection of signatures from their constituents) could be strengthened by publicly presenting them with the media present. The day of the city council hearing, we took the microphone and presented a bag stacked with the signed petition cards to the council. We had chosen to use individual petition cards instead of long signed petitions for volume.

Most of the feedback received was positive. One thing we hadn't thought through ahead of time was

to collect information on people who wanted to get involved. Although we had names and districts, we hadn't collected contact information to follow up with anyone. This could have been a great mobilizing tool, but the decision to collect many signatures in a short amount of time overshadowed our ability to plan more strategically here.

**Public pressure:** We planned well the day of the city council hearing. All members of the coalition agreed to represent ourselves as a unified presence. Not only did we pack the house, we all agreed to wear one color so there would be no question as to how many people showed up in support of the ordinance vs. in opposition to it. Wearing one color strengthened our presence by conveying that we didn't just appear in numbers, but were present as one organized body. We also knew that having the media present, with an entire room in support of the ordinance, would allow added pressure for council members to represent the public with their vote. Previous to that day, we strategically picked talking points before signing up to speak, so as to make sure all points were covered.

As some members of the coalition are faith-based organizers, a petition letter was crafted specifically for the support of faith-based leaders in the city. Members of the coalition reached out to Sr. Helen Prejean, the author of *Dead Man Walking*. She not only wrote an op-ed in support of our goal, she flew to New Orleans to participate in a community based public hearing and then again, the day city council was to vote. Both tactics were used to gain clout.

**Media Attention:** A variety of tactics were used to raise awareness of the issue, mobilize the public, and pressure targets. In using the media as a tool, we were also able to voice a message that challenged the rhetoric predominantly reaching the public about the issue. That message served as a catalyst to connect the current issue of the expanded prison with the things that truly make us safe.

We identified allies amongst local radio programs and journalists in local newspapers. Advocates wrote and submitted op-ed articles and secured spots on radio talk shows to publicize the campaign's talking points. While CRNOLA had little funding as a chapter, members of the coalition had access to funding sources. The coalition purchased a \$3,600 billboard with donated money to gain visibility.

CRNOLA created a short video, *Stop OPPression*, highlighting the use of FEMA and city funding to create a larger prison in a devastated New Orleans. In the video, community members voiced visions for alternatives. The video was used as a popular education tool and was sent out via email blast with action steps to call council members. While the op-eds and the billboard were informative tools that gained the most visibility in the campaign, the video gave voice to community determined solutions. Our intention was to also use it as a tool for mobilization, by arranging events to show it publicly. Due to capacity and time sensitivity, this vision did not manifest during the campaign thus far.

There is no doubt all advocates are in agreement that it is imperative for the public to have access to all stages of decision-making. NOCOG, a member of OPPRC, arranged to have CJWG meetings live streamed and media presence was requested for all public hearings and meetings. This served a dual role by also putting pressure on those at the table that the people were watching.

Having a continued presence: Two public hearings were held, each in a different part of the city, with a panel of representatives from the CJWG. In preparation for the hearings, CRNOLA phone banked our constituency and offered transportation to get people out. Members of the working group presented the plans for the jail and the public expressed concerns over the expansion. There was a full house at both hearings with the majority of the room getting up to speak. Voices ranged from elders to children; folks who have experienced incarceration and folks referred to by the state as victims of crime. All accounts, except for one employee of the sheriff's office, were in opposition of the expansion. It seemed apparent that the majority of city officials present did not take the concerns of the public seriously, both at the events and later, as none of the concerns were referenced in the process of deciding upon a recommendation.

While the system purports to represent the will of the people, this process did not suggested such. At the end of the day, decision-making did not reflect the public's voice. The city officials who were opposition stakeholders seemed to be going through the motions of fulfilling a mandatory attendance.

The day of the city council hearing, council members voted unanimously in the favor of the advocates. Not only did those who were clear constituents vote to pass the ordinance, those we gauged on the fence and in possible opposition voted in our favor. As stated earlier, when we crafted the demand, we were specific so that the sheriff could not manipulate the cap. Our anticipation seemed to be confirmed the day city council voted. One councilwoman cautioned the public, construction of the new facility would be approximately a two year process. Passing the ordinance then, would just be the first step in a long process to ensure its manifestation. That forewarning seemed to insinuate "inside" knowledge of the sheriff's possible motives. This aligned with the sheriff's behavior. As we advocated to pass the jail ordinance, the sheriff seemed patient and confident through that process. Once the ordinance was passed, the sheriff began to advocating a larger jail, regardless of the ordinance. We knew at this stage that to ensure the follow through of this policy, we must monitor city officials and stay engaged throughout the entire process.

The message and framing: The coalition presented a clear message to city officials, backed with data that a larger jail would not make us safer. As city officials often tend to have fiscal concerns, seeking "efficient" solutions, we proposed that larger prisons are expensive for the city to maintain and

do not reduce crime rates. Our message spoke to a better use of funding as the prison will drain city resources. This allowed us to open the space to offer alternatives that speak to the needs of the city's people, who will be impacted by this decision. We encouraged them to vote in support of the things that can make the people of this city more secure. By demanding that we invest in people, we pointed out that it is clear that city officials are not if they choose to fund the jail.

CRNOLA needed a message that spoke to stopping the jail expansion without condoning a jail at all. Since the acronym for Orleans Parish Prison is OPP, a member of CRNOLA came up with the term "STOP OPPression." This became our campaign phrase and our chapter used various tactics to keep it visible at all times. We stenciled t-shirts to hand out and wear at the public hearings. STOP OPPression also headed our flyers and titled our video. To engage members of our communities, our talking points were more loosely offered to open a dialogue rather than convince others of supporting our stance. One approach to public outreach involved gathering collective voices that spoke to self-determined priorities. As stated earlier, "with the rhetoric of democracy on our side," the narrative suggests that city officials are meant to represent the people. We sent out the message in our video that "NOLA citizens should be the experts in determining what NOLA needs."

Luntz argued that the use of framing by politicians is about deceiving rather than informing. If politicians go through great lengths and pay money to find ways to dis-inform us, we must think about why an informed, critically thinking public would be a danger to their interests. The sheriff framed his financially profitable project in terms of 'crime-fighting', which consists of labeling and punishing 'criminals' by means of containment. CR redirects the focus of crime to challenge people to think about what makes us secure. Rather than adopt the PIC's language of crime, the message we use differentiates between what makes us secure and what creates harm. This broadens our scope to name person-to-person harms as well as systemic harms. By exposing the harms that the PIC produces, we can expand our analysis to address these harms in positive ways that do not rely on oppression. By defining safety ourselves, we are countering a message that is pervasively fed to the public, which magnifies the threat of criminal activity and instills fear. The image accompanied by this message strategically and implicitly targets Blackness, poverty, and deviance from normativity as the problem.

As I explained earlier, the very existence of the PIC has been made possible by injustices produced by interlocking systems of domination and oppression, thriving off of them. Actual justice would make the structure of the PIC unable to maintain itself. As this is not an option within its domain, the PIC, then co-opts the language of justice, defining it by the state's use of punishment. When we internalize the PIC, our own ability to see other possibilities for ourselves are removed and as a result we cannot

see justice for ourselves outside of the realm of state punishment. We must be able to recognize the PIC within ourselves, not just in someone else's uniform. When I read news articles describing person-to-person harms experienced in our communities daily, they are predominantly followed by calls or demands for "justice." In our lack of vision past the PIC's control over us, we immediately respond to harm by requesting punishment through its continued presence, all the while demeaning our own agency. The PIC supports an atmosphere that keeps us in a cycle of harming each other and in return, wanting to punish each other.

**B) Secondary Target Engagement: Criminal Justice Working Group**

Though the first stage of the campaign felt somewhat victorious, the following stage revealed otherwise. Although the Mayor's position and ties to the Sheriff are not clear, the Mayor's choices for the composition of the working group suggest the protection of specific vested interests. While he claimed he tried to represent a broad range of people, the mayor's choices seemed heavily biased and posed a conflict of interest in my opinion. Not only were most of the campaign's opposition stakeholders chosen to be on the CJWG, individuals chosen also had close personal ties to the sheriff.

The mayor had not publicly stated his position on the jail size, however, he boasts 'Zero Tolerance' for crime. He continues to publicly back the police chief, regardless of his continual lack of investigation into police brutality. In the wake of such a damning report of the NOPD, in one of multiple recent cases where civilians were killed by police, the mayor solely relied upon the officers' reports of the incident. He immediately deemed the officers as 'heroes', without any consideration of the perspective of the civilian wounded while in handcuffs (who's brother was killed). By continuing the practice of backing unchecked police aggression, this sends a message to the people of the city that the mayor not only trusts the discretion of a highly racially discriminatory police department, but that he meets their unchecked use of force by celebrating their actions as heroic. He also sends a message that reflects a tolerance of state-to-civilian abuse and brutality, while maintaining that he will not legitimize the experience of those targeted.

The mayor composited the working group with the police chief, the sheriff, the District Attorney, some current and retired judges, a council member, a Public Defender, a faith based leader, and a couple of representatives from state recognized community organizations. Andy Kopplin, the first deputy mayor and chief administrative officer, was appointed to facilitate the decision-making process. Some community organizations that were initially meant to be represented on the CJWG, were removed from the list before the group began to meet. At a community meeting, a local organizer and

member of OPPRC, Donald Chopan, criticized city officials for not appointing anyone grounded in the community to the working group. He powerfully stated, “it is imperative because we feel it.”

The portion of the campaign that addressed the CJWG was much more challenging to navigate than pursuing the City Council vote. Getting to know the policy space to influence players presented difficulty in that the extent of their personal, political, and financial ties to the sheriff were often conflictual and unclear. The Sheriff's placement on the CJWG put him in a position to be able to sway the opinions of colleagues if he so chose, while also directly participating in the decision-making process. As the prison expansion is his project, the Sheriff is the main opponent in this campaign. Although we know the PIC is profitable to many people, specifics of the financial stakes of city administrators are unknown. It is also important to note that money is not the only stake. Many city administrators gain visibility and self-legitimacy 'fighting crime.' Some are driven by pressure from quotas or court watch. Below are a couple examples of conflicts of interest between the Sheriff and other working group members.

Media coverage has recently revealed that a member of the group, Chief Judge Paul Sens, had hired the sheriff's wife at the municipal courthouse. The judge referred to Ms. Gusman as a friend and defended his position to hire her without posting an available position or accepting applications. Also, as specified by Matt Davis (February 9, 2012) of *The Lens*: “Sens' brother, John Sens is a top official in the Sheriff's Office, serving as Marlin Gusman's purchasing agent.”

Another news article from Tom Gogola (April 4, 2012) of *The Lens* revealed that the sheriff hired Judge Sens' wife, also without any record of positions available or a hiring process. Ms. Sens was hired to handle foreclosed or blighted house sales, without an appraisal experience as a real estate appraiser. According to an April article, “records show that Ann Sens earned \$91,200 since early January 2011.”

When the District Attorney ran for his position, the sheriff supported him in running. According to D.A. Leon A. Cannizzaro Jr.'s own 2008 advertisement while running for the position, as a criminal court judge, he prosecuted more “violent criminals” than all other (judges”).

Regardless of the lack of clarity toward the mayor's true intentions, we embarked on this stage of the campaign knowing that it would not make him look good if he disregarded Dr. Austen's recommendation and city council's vote, which were both in opposition to a larger jail as a 'best practice'. We mapped out our potential immediate allies, our strongest opponents, and those in-between within the group.

The Decision-Making Process

“Regardless of which group we're talking about, privilege generally allows people to assume a certain level of acceptance, inclusion, and respect in the world, to operate within a relatively wide comfort zone. Privilege increases the odds of having things your own way, of being able to set the agenda in a social situation and determine the rules and standards and how they're applied. Privilege grants the cultural authority to make judgements about others and to have those judgements stick. It allows people to define reality and to have prevailing definitions of reality fit their experience. Privilege means being able to decide who gets taken seriously, who receives attention, who is accountable to whom and for what. And it grants a presumption of superiority and social permission to act on that presumption without having to worry about being challenged.”

-Allen Johnson

The CJWG meetings were indicative of an exclusive power dynamic that is enabled by peoples' coercion to the rhetoric of democracy. While the public is 'permitted' to attend CJWG meetings, there are two layers of seated bodies. Those around the table making decisions, and those expected to sit in silence in the audience. This expectation is reinforced with the looming presence of security guards surveilling us to protect those at the table. The mere fact that police presence in this particular space seems to exist to protect them (at the table) from us (in the audience) is telling.

Momentarily sitting in a feeling of disempowerment, witnessing this process, as I looked around the room at my peers, some of whom attend such meetings in an effort to ensure transparency and government accountability, all I could think of was a Keynes quote. “Capitalism is the extraordinary belief that the nastiest of men, for the nastiest of reasons, will somehow work for the benefit of us all.” When our own participation in the decisions that affect our lives is limited to this reliance, we have to critically assess what aiming for open governance leaves us with.

The experience of sitting in this room comes as no surprise. We need not look farther than the streets of New Orleans to deconstruct what happens in the rooms of such edifices. The polarities of experiences are indicative of such a decision-making process. Yet, actually sitting inside the room, scrounging for leeway to be a minutely active player, only through someone else's agreement to carry your message, clarified for me the need to struggle for abolition.

Advocating for the demands of the ordinance to be actualized, we immediately sought out potential allies in the group to see who would be willing to advocate that our demands are upheld. We knew that if the language of these demands were to be altered, the end result could differ by 1,000 more prison

beds. We advocated for the CJWG to take all necessary steps to assess the current climate before authorizing the continuation of the jail construction. The working group was originally meant to meet for three full months, yet it hastily voted, without a sufficient examination of essential agenda items. The agenda items that were treated as superfluous, rather than fundamental, to making such a decision included the role of race and class in the city's practice of incarceration.

After the CJWG made its recommendation to continue with the construction of the new jail facility, members of the group agreed to continue to meet and discuss essential determining factors as an afterthought. The Deputy Mayor nonchalantly coupled the working group members into appointed duo committees. Of all of the members in the group, he appointed the Sheriff on the committee to review additional local jail size capacity. With the expansion of the facility already approved and way underway, a deadline was not set for committee recommendations.

The campaign is still ongoing today. When it first started, the sheriff had alluded to having a backup plan. After City Council passed the ordinance, the CJWG passed the resolution, and Dr. Austen submitted his recommendation, all in support of a jail cap, the sheriff recently announced the addition of another new facility underway, already approved by the mayor's office, which will warehouse over 600 more people. With the assistance of the Deputy Mayor, who facilitated decision-making processes outline above, it seems there may even be additional expansion plans to follow.

### Transparency

As advocates in this campaign, we all had varying expectations of the role transparent governance can play. Organizers advocating for open governance were great at making sure CJWG planning and decision-making meetings were recorded and made available to the public. Tactics, such as this are crucial to maintaining public access to information and letting policy-makers know their actions are not going unchecked. However, the events of this campaign seemed to reinforce that as long as we rely on exclusive decision-making processes, exclusive interests will always be protected. City officials can always take measures, such as we saw with the creation of a Criminal Justice Working Group, that appear to ensure transparent processes in decision-making. Yet there may always be covert stakes guiding such measures. This played out in the selected make-up of the CJWG in relation to the swift decision, and the ability for the sheriff's and mayor's offices to override each so-called democratic process in the end. If we truly want transparent decision-making processes, they must be decision-making processes that are not limited to a few, (such as engaging in group-centered dialogue and consensus based decision-making). The processes that were meant to supply us with transparency, in



this case study, seemed to feel more like we were spending our time and energy playing a game.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, despite advocacy efforts to stop it, the city of New Orleans is moving forward with its financially profitable plan to expand its prison. There isn't any evidence, anywhere in the U.S., that prison expansion leads to more secure communities. Further, this case study leads me to conclude that transforming harm is not the main component of pursuing such a path. As we are searching for solutions to our current crisis, in order to make our communities safer, we must begin to engage in a process that connects all of the contributing factors reinforcing such a discourse. One step that can be taken to change a current problem is to step back and deeply trace its root.

We are not locked into the path of an ever-growing prison industrial complex. The realm of our possibility to transform the issues we face relies on our ability to vision passed the parameters of the PIC's agenda. We create and maintain structures, and we have agency to deconstruct them. If we truly want to actualize safer communities, then our advocacy cannot fall short of these steps.

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**EVALUATION**

My critique of the effectiveness of policy positions, advocacy strategies, and decision-making processes in this campaign has been provided throughout the paper. The purpose of providing this analysis was to critically examine the reality of advocacy work.

As stated in the Methods and Concepts Section of this paper, when I first set out to write this case study, I had intended to describe a tangible approach to abolition that used policy to shrink the system. Our initial goal had been achieved as our desired short-term policy change had been put on the agenda and successfully passed. However, during the writing of this paper, events unfolded that led to the desired policy being blocked from implementation. Even though our intended policy change had been voted upon, our advocacy did not lead to the desired outcome. My knowledge of the relationships, private conversations, and shared interests amongst city decision-makers that led to this outcome is limited.

Abolition is a dual process that entails steps to dismantle the current structure on the one hand, while building upon a collective practice toward a different vision on the other. Therefore, from an abolitionist framework, policy advocacy was just a tool to shrink the PIC's control. Although that has not been effective thus far, many strengths grew out of this campaign that support the latter.

Other goals that we identified during our campaign strategy sessions were achieved: This campaign built upon the practice of shared leadership, as well as consensus-based decision-making amongst organizers. This strengthened allied relationships and broadened our network. Through messaging, awareness was increased about the effects of the issue. Through mobilization, the foundation for dialogue to continue to engage in the issue was strengthened. As we were not advocating for more participation in support of the current structure of governance, our organizing throughout the campaign aimed to keep abolition on the table amongst organizers and broaden the lens' shaping participatory approaches to the PIC.

Messaging was a challenge since we organized together as a coalition but advocated messages that supported two different outcomes. Though our messages were aimed at different constituencies, such a divisiveness could be detrimental to achieving any sort of change in the long run. In the future, we hope to include political education amongst coalition members to expand our dialogue together.

Although we built upon shared leadership on the outside, our campaign did not find ways to integrate with the voices and organizing efforts of people inside the walls of OPP. I hope we can find ways to address this limitation in future campaigns. Also, amongst our coalition, many advocates held paid positions to organize, which meant meeting and planning sessions were not very conducive to

family centered or worker centered participation. As a result, organizing the campaign did not challenge the normativity of business culture and at to a large extent, maintained exclusive participation in planning. This is something we must challenge ourselves to look deeply at as we organize further.

When we initially created our campaign strategy chart, although we referenced the SMART framework, we were not realistic about capacity. It affected many aspects of this campaign, in that much of the time we spent planning strategies was lost since we didn't have the capacity to actualize them all. In the future, it may be better to develop fewer strategies that are achievable than many great strategies that do not get pursued.

Many often think of abolition as overwhelming and unrealistic, opting to approach the system in ways that allow for it to maintain itself or grow. If we intent to improve upon our work, my recommendation, and the reason why I hope this paper can be a tool, is for us to continually evaluate the long-term effectiveness of promoting non-abolitionist reforms to create change. If we see working toward abolition as an unrealistic goal, then our work does not actually seek justice. If we limit ourselves to that cynicism, then we prevent ourselves from obtaining liberation. 'Conditioning' tunnels our vision so that we do not access solutions that are true alternatives. Engaging in a process to break down that internalized conditioning is the most crucial component to actualizing real justice. As we break down the components of our narrow lens, other possibilities present themselves. Visions of abolition then, are essential to obtaining justice.

### **LESSONS LEARNED**

Most of the policy advocacy frameworks I have come across reference criteria for strengthening empowerment that my experience in this campaign has lead me to question. I believe that participation in policy advocacy enhances a sense of personal and group empowerment, but if the end goal is to effect a decision-making process that is not self-determined, without actually challenging our reliance on such a process, then I believe the long-term effect is disempowering.

In *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde (1984) stated: "What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable... For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (p. 111-112).

The *Seven Steps for Abolition Framework* that I referenced in this paper helped me to name non-

reformist reforms. The concept of using policy advocacy as a tool, only with the intention of shrinking the system, can be applied to any advocacy campaign, addressing any issue. The criteria (the seven steps) that help to determine if advocacy efforts shrink, maintain, or leave room for the PIC to grow can be applied to any system of oppression. But unless our reforms are abolitionist tools, I see policy advocacy as a result of 'believing in the mythology' which keeps us occupied. A reform is an alteration, but in the end, it's still a suit.