



5,016 men

USP Victorville and FCI Victorville Medium I & II, Victorville, California

Rumbling up a hot August hill to the top where the pavement meets sky, they give way to a rolling horizon in the distance. Atop it sits a cityscape in grey. With your shift in perspective and a new downhill speed, this scape is too uniform to be a city, rising up in singularity as you descend.

This is a different kind of city.

The road vibrates through the steering wheel as the non-city expands to fill your windshield, a sunray cuts into that crack you haven't fixed in the glass and then a flare as you realize the mass of it — like a whale next to you that you can't behold in your eye at once, its just fin, belly, skin, its eye stares back and

now it sees you too.

Factory, armory, economy, a geology, a mass-scale of people.

Desert cars break the trance, whir by as if this large obvious thing were as natural as the rock on which it's built, for they drive to work in this prison, or the military base next to it, or the factories next to it that produce other things than rage, and

it sinks into a mountain and recedes in your rear view mirror.

Now the sun sets too and the moon rises.

Ashley: Could we go alphabetically, starting with you, Amber-Rose?

Amber-Rose: I knew you were going to say that for some reason.

Ashley: Not the first time that's happened?

Amber-Rose: You know how it is, with "A," we have the same initials, right? So my name is Amber-Rose Howard. I'm the statewide co-coordinator for Californians United for Responsible Budget, otherwise known as CURB. CURB is a coalition of over 80 organizations across the state that are fighting to reduce the number of people who are incarcerated in state prison and in county jail, to reduce the number of state prisons and county jails altogether, including fighting the expansion and construction of new facilities. Also to capture the budget savings at the state and at the county levels, so that funds saved from spending dollars on public safety is redirected from corrections, probation, and policing and actually put back into the social safety net, into social services and alternatives to incarceration so that we envision a society that prioritizes care over cages and people over profit. We do that by doing state budget advocacy, we do legislative policy work, we do jail fights at the county level and also, budget fights at the county level, trying to see what we can do to push our board of supervisors to start to move dollars from probation and policing and put that into community based alternatives.

Ashley: You covered so much so quick! Thank you Amber-Rose. So "D" comes next, Dylan?

Dylan: Alright. I'm Dylan Rodriguez. I'm a professor at University of California Riverside. I've taught in the Department of ethnic studies for 16 years. More recently I've joined the Department of Media and Cultural Studies. I'm also the chair of the Academic Senate, dealing with faculty governance, and I'm the president-elect of the American Studies Association. That's my academic background.

My background in this conversation has to do with being part of what started as an anti-prison, radical kind of confrontation with the carceral state movement in the mid- to late-90s. I was one of the first people to be part of the Critical Resistance organizing collective back in 1996, '97 and '98.

I've worked around carceral and prison abolition for more than twenty years now, since well before the term abolition circulated in any acceptable way—the way it does now. Now it seems like everyone identifies as an abolitionist, even folks who are very pro-police. Maybe that can be part of our conversation, Ashley?

I write a lot. I talk a lot. I teach courses a lot. I work with lots of different community organizations,

activist organizations, abolitionist organizations and collectives.

My most recent piece of writing came out in the Harvard law review in the spring. I wrote the introduction for a special issue they had on carceral abolition. And if you'd told me, shoot, as recently as ten years ago, five years ago, that the Harvard Law Review would do a special issue on prison abolition, I would've thrown up all over you.

So, we're in a different period right now, one where we actually have to think closely about what it means for the term, the content, and the politics of abolition. It actually makes me very skeptical and hesitant in some ways, and really creative and optimistic and others.

Ashley: That's a great tension to return to, especially that growth in the claiming of "abolitionist." So, "H"?

Hilda: Okay, I'm Hilda Cruz. I've been an organizer for a very long time now, over 20 years. I am currently with the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity, a coalition of faith groups and churches that come together to talk about two main issues: one is the issue of immigration, and the other one is the criminalization of people. And so we work closely with churches in regards to the detention centers and all of these policies that are very anti-immigrant. We also have a program called Justice Not Jails, because that's another area where, as people of faith, we really need to focus and change the systems that continue to criminalize people and cage them.

Ashley: Thank you Hilda. So as each of you knows, the project that this conversation is a part of is titled *Degrees of Visibility*. It's made up of landscape photographs, stories and numbers that study how prisons, jails and detention centers are concealed, camouflaged, hidden from the public, and what that has to do with how the prison industrial complex grows without people seeing it. This includes a connection to a kind of counter-insurgency architecture that goes back in part to the prison rebellions of the 60s and 70s.

Each time I've shown the work, I have tried to connect it with what's happening locally. And what's going on right now around here also seems to mark out particular geography—three organizing fronts along side large-scale effects of the prison industrial complex, all shaping Southern California.

So we have the jail fight in L.A., its crisis and two recent victories together; we have the boom in re-entry populations in San Bernardino Count, which come from decades of intensely draconian sentencing and prison policy, and perhaps displacement from different parts of Los Angeles County as well; and then the border detention and policing politics that begin not so far from Claremont, and then spread south and east. For some reason they all

seem to overlap around Claremont, intersecting around it. But marking that as a framework for now, how about we start to get at it through the urgent projects that you are each working on right now?

Amber-Rose: The L.A. County jail fight work started about seven years ago. There was a plan introduced to construct two new jails. One was going to be a women's jail in Mira Loma, and then the other would be a replacement for the Men's Central Jail in downtown L.A.

For seven years, CURB and other organizations had come together in coalition to figure out how to stop that jail plan. It was about \$3.5 billion that would be spent in order to have these two new jails constructed and operated. And so we had groups from all ranges and diverse areas of social justice reform involved—we had environmental justice groups and folks that were in unions, and then everyone in between, all the criminal justice players, folks that do work for immigrant justice, folks that do racial justice work. We had folks from across the spectrum joining in because cages are at the intersection where all of us really are impacted.

So the first step was to stop the construction of the women's jail, which was in San Bernardino County, but it was meant to house women coming out of L.A. So that was stopped with lots and lots and lots of effort. And then the last leg of that fight was to stop them in the Men's Central Jail reconstruction, which passed a couple of weeks ago.

Now obviously this was introduced seven years ago, and folks have been organizing in L.A. for a very long time. But I think what really pushed the Board of Supervisors to change their position and vote down the plan for those jails is realizing that half of the incarcerated population in Los Angeles County are there because of mental health issues. They need treatment. So realizing that we're locking up folks with mental health issues and bringing those issues to light; realizing that folks could literally be released to community-based organizations that can serve them, rather than having them sit in cages; realizing that in half of L.A. County and other counties—Riverside for example—half of the jail population is pre-trial, meaning not actually convicted of anything; also thinking through what is happening on a national level, and especially in California with criminal justice reform, where people are really focusing on how can we actually bring down these populations, how can we reverse some of the draconian policies that keep people locked up for such long periods of time.

Those things worked together to get us to the moment where, finally, this \$3.5 billion jail plan is stopped. It's canceled.

The next step though, and what I think curb is really involved

in now with Justice L.A. and other organizations on the ground, is figuring out what do we do with all the money that was allocated for those new jails? How can we actually construct mental wellness centers where folks can be treated; how can we increase the capacity of community-based organizations who are already doing that work so that they can help, instead of funnelling all that money back into probation, back into sheriffs, back into corrections. So that's where the fight is now in L.A.

And we're also thinking through pre-trial reform. The state went through a battle last year on whether or not we should end cash bail. And so Justice L.A., CURB and other groups are thinking that through, and the conversation is obviously much bigger than just cash bail.

There'll be a referendum on the ballot next year where people can vote to say, do we go back to the original system of cash bail? Or do we move forward with this SB 10 structure of pre-trial, which includes risk assessment tools that we all know are racially biased, that we all know will actually incarcerate more people than the current system of cash bail.

So in looking at that, we're saying that actually, all of this is wrong. Cash bail is not the issue alone. The issue is holding folks as guilty before proven so. So we want to preserve the presumption of innocence, that's our framework for pre-trial reform.

That means making sure that we are assessing people's needs rather than their risk. Looking at what people's actual crisis is, and then how can we help them move through the court process, cause we're still under the system. So that's a lot of the work that's happening in L.A. as next steps after the jail fight victory.

And on the state level, a part of what's helping move all of this along, by holding the narrative and shifting it away from a punishment-driven public safety model, is that we're attacking extreme sentencing structures.

Over the last three years, we've passed at least two policies that are really impactful. One of them was SB 180 in 2017, authored by Senator Holly Mitchell, which repealed the three-year sentence "enhancement" for people convicted with prior drug convictions. That makes sure that nobody gets sentenced to an extra three years just because they've been in prison for drug convictions in a previous case. There are a lot of folks in county jails who are sentenced and serving time under those sentencing structures, and this gives them the opportunity to appeal, to get resented or released.

Similarly, SB 1393 gave judicial discretion back from another, mandatory, five-year sentence enhancement, which people would get when coming to court if they've previously had a serious or violent conviction. This was mandatory, and as of January 1st this year, it's no longer mandatory.

And folks have the opportunity to actually go back to court to get re-sentenced, possibly have those five-year enhancements—which can also be stacked on top of one another, removed from their sentence. So the folks sitting in these cages, they actually have the opportunity to get up and go home early, or to get their sentence rescinded.

This year, we're trying to repeal the one-year sentence enhancement, which affects at least a third of the state population locked up, and which of course adds to their time being served. A state analysis came out that said that about \$130 million can be saved in just the first three years if we repeal this enhancement. That one is SB 136, authored by Senator Scott Wiener, and we'll see, next week is the end of the legislative session.

But working on extreme policies and trying to break down all of these punishment-driven, draconian sentencing structures at the state level also helps inform what release can look like at the county level, or to think about the amount of the population sitting there who have actually, already served their time. And how can we work that into different counties, looking at their populations and what they're being held on, in order to argue that we actually need less cages and more spaces for folks to return home; more spaces for folks to get services; more spaces for folks to get treatment, jobs, housing and all of those things that people need.

Ashley: In what you just broke down, I'm thinking about how many kinds of carceral layers or layers of incarceration you can see in these steps, especially with the enhancements, which, I just can't help but think about outside the cultural impulse to "supersize" things. Like wherever you can just throw some more calories onto an already unhealthy meal, this taste for more but alienated from any sense of the consequences.

But as you describe them, all those efforts feel *decarceral* to me, like methods that are, at each step, looking to add up to decarceration—not as one big monolithic thing, but as all these little screws that can each be turned, loosening the structure turn by turn.

Amber-Rose: Oh yeah, absolutely. It's all decarceration measures, and we use that term a lot. We say that we are *decarcerating* and *divesting*. It's crazy though, because this prison boom that we find ourselves in happened basically overnight, like in 20 years we went from 12 prisons to over 30 in California. So, it's like all of these policies expand the system very quickly, but we're only able to scale back one at a time and do it very slowly. And so that's the frustration, of course.

But what's great is that resources are coming down, I think like Dylan mentioned earlier, where people think abolition is "sexy" now. The

funders want to throw dollars at it if people want to be involved, even while not fully understanding the big picture of what it means. But Critical Resistance is one of the founding members of the CURB coalition, and I think that helps us hold true to those abolitionist perspectives—including that this whole thing is a failure. Let's not continue to look at an isolated individual and what we consider their lone part in public safety looks like, but actually look at



the model for public safety as a whole and figure out how to deconstruct, decarcerate, and divest.

Ashley: I think there's a really important tie there back to Dylan's original question around abolition, the skepticism and the excitement. For the difference in what "treatment" is, between what this coming model of local care will be versus that of the state's sense of "care," in their reformist model of the "women's village"—which is what they were going to call the new women's prison, Mira Loma, before it was defeated, which was really just another prison. I wonder if that isn't a really important distinction in terms of what abolition means or is in practice?

Dylan: Well, in sticking with our alphabetical order, I'll loyally proceed, Ashley. I want to just honor what it is that Amber-Rose spoke to and say that I fondly remember the founding moments of CURB and having the highest aspirations for it. It's something else seeing its work exceed the ambitions that I, personally, held for it. So, I think that it's important to acknowledge that, especially in these times.

The work that I've been engaged with is primarily pedagogical, conceptual. I'm engaged with political cultures around... well, I don't want to call it mass incarceration, but around what is really, in my thinking, *carceral domestic war*. I'm interested in thinking broadly and popularly around how to communicate the condition of carceral domestic war in a way that confronts the increasingly canonical language of mass incarceration, which I actually don't think makes fucking sense.

I think it's the wrong language, a language that has been institutionalized, despite the best and most radical intentions of a lot of organizers, activists and thinkers, who in the early 90s, early 2000s, were using the language of "mass incarceration" to talk about mass black incarceration, mass brown incarceration. But it was really the targeting of particular criminalized populations, people, bodies, sexualities, with documentation or

lack thereof, for criminalization. That's what people meant by mass. What it has turned into is something different. I'm interested in challenging that.

There's a pretty concrete way that particular events in political culture, such as the publication and popularization of Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow*, take hold. I guess it has been about 10 years since its publication, and the way that that book in particular popularized a certain language—including the language of mass incarceration and a historical analogy to Jim Crow segregation—which I think was useful for folks. It was important, in the moment, to try to come to terms with the condition that we're in, but it ultimately sells the analysis short of what I would hope would be a more adequate, abolitionist analysis.

One of the fundamental problems is that we think about Jim Crow essentially as the analogy. But we have to go much further back than Jim Crow segregation to think about the carceral condition and the carceral domestic war that we are inhabiting and fighting in different ways. This is the foundation of not just the United States of America, but of the New World hemisphere: which is a carceral project. The entire project has been carceral from the start. And not only that, it's been a carceral project that was articulated through the structures of white ascendancy, of white supremacy, of white coloniality of the making of Afro descended people as chattel. So we've got to challenge this political culture and the language of mass incarceration, because what I think has happened in the years since the

publication of the New Jim Crow is that we've seen strains of its language turn into a kind of liberal, nonprofit industrial complex, back door, white supremacist language. It's ultimately a language that universalizes a condition that is actually fueled by a racist, carceral state that has long been anti-black, and is recently and profoundly anti-brown, Islamophobic and white supremacist. So it is not *mass*, it's *targeted*.

So a central part of the work that I've been doing the last ten or fifteen years is trying to push alternate radical, encompassing languages that I'm hopeful will better communicate both the urgency and the confrontation that an abolitionist practice requires. I don't think that we can identify ourselves with an abolitionist praxis unless we understand the condition that we've called the prison industrial complex, and which others now call mass incarceration, unless we understand it as a state of war. Otherwise, I would argue, we are not clear on what it is that we're trying to abolish.

And not only that, but we are also failing to take seriously the language, the institutions and the systemic practices that the carceral state engages in, which is racist, misogynist, homophobic, transphobic, in order to construct a carceral society.

So I think my interest is there: challenging an increasingly popularized, liberal-progressive language that is pushing for prison reform, criminal justice reform—for at the point at which you have Van Jones and Jared Kushner featured on a CNN special about prison reform, you know you are in trouble. You probably need to get some better political and analytical clarity on what your project is, the minute that that shit happens.

Hilda: I think you guys have hit it right spot on. Part of the work that we've been doing is thinking about our language, but because I work with faith communities, it's also looking at what are our core beliefs.

One of the core beliefs is that if we are going to mend the past, we must actually *know* and *understand* what happened in the past. For us it's very important to talk about white supremacy and why it is that even today, we don't have equity.

We talk a lot about equity, we talk a lot about race, but we haven't really sat down and had a conversation about what you were just saying, Dylan. And that's about the systemic, white racist systems that were started from the get-go, and how we just continue giving them new, sophisticated names.

For example, I was thinking of that "women's village," when in reality it was just going to be another prison. Right now we have SB 32, a proposition that's been going back and forth between the Senate and the Assembly, it has to do with stopping the expansion of detention centers. California became one of the largest

detention states, we have one of the largest immigrant detention facilities in the nation, and now they're trying to expand it.

Two weeks ago we were given the news that the Department of Health and Human Services is thinking of building a new prison, but instead of calling it a "children's detention camp," which is what it will be, they're calling it "a shelter," and they're actually reaching out to the Office of Refugee Resettlement to begin looking for a site in California, for a prison that will house up to 430 children—immigrant children.

But they don't want to call it a detention center for children because of what happened in Texas, when they had to close the temporary camps for children and move them to Florida, and then the controversy there at the Homestead facility — it got on the news, people were really upset, and so they closed that place, but we still don't know what happened to over 2000 children who were in that camp.

So what we're seeing is this perpetuation of the same systems you described, which are targeting people of color and incarcerating them for profit. And when people stand up with a big outcry about what's happening, they just remove it from one part of the country, place it somewhere else and give it a fancier name.

And so I am working on those two bills, including SB 32, which is trying to stop the detention facilities from growing, correct me if I'm wrong, Amber-Rose, does that also stop state prisons in California? Or is it just for-profit institutions?

Amber-Rose: Yeah, it'll stop the state from contracting with private prisons out of state, so that they can't send anybody out of state into private prison beds. But the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is looking for a way to sneak it in anyways.

Hilda: Beyond that I work mainly with the immigrant community and the detention center in Adelanto. Some of the county jails that were contracting with ICE have stopped due to previous policy that was voted for, here, (commas) in California, but we are still dealing with the direct contracts with between the federal government and companies like GEO, making profits off of criminalizing and incarcerating immigrants.

Ashley: And Hilda, the one that is kind of closest to the Claremont area is that Adelanto facility?

Hilda: The Adelanto facility is about the only one left in California because of the legislation that stopped ICE from contracting for beds with county jails. The prison right now holds a little bit over 2,000 people—2,000 immigrants.

Ashley: Thinking about the

children's facilities, and thinking back to what Dylan was saying about carcerality as a kind of war-making, or as a technique of war, I am thinking about the separation of families right now, and how much war tactics include destroying family structure, and destroying community structure.

Dylan: That's actually a technique of genocide. It's not just war, it's at bare minimum, proto-genocidal.

Even if we adhere to the most conservative definition of genocide, which is the United Nations'

get past that horizon of reform and realize? If we stick to reform, we're actually replicating the problem, we're probably making it worse.

Amber-Rose: Yeah, I think all of that is dead on. It's on point. It's relevant. I think about that in terms of the role that CURB plays in all of this work. It's a difficult one because we're trying to make sure that we're giving that piece of political education, so that folks understand if you end at reform, or if your vision of dismantling this thing is just ending the ability for people to



definition, there's a strong argument to be made that this is actually a genocidal practice. So, it bleeds that distinction that we typically want to draw between the carceral world, between the carceral regime that we're living in, and these particular logics of state and state-sanctioned (include dash) violence.

For example, a lot of the work that we have to do all the time is survival shit, right? Like we've got to confront the most acute expressions of gendered, racist state violence as they are acted upon people's bodies and the bodies of our loved ones, and so forth. The challenge is to sustain those forms of struggle in a way that's interconnected with an abolitionist analysis, perspective, and practice: which is against the carceral world, against the carceral civilization that we are suffering under all the time.

This is to say that part of the abolition we are engaged in is trying to abolish genocide. *You don't reform genocide. There's no progressive way to make it more humane.* You try to survive genocidal violence and logics. But the only ethical position to take toward the violence of genocide is to fucking abolish it. That's what I think is missing.

A lot of us are saying this, but I think that we still have to push all of our friends, colleagues and acquaintances who are getting more attracted to the language of abolition, to challenge the limits of that thinking and to say, *no, the horizon is not reformed*, because, as we all know, prisons and jails and detention centers, those are already reforms. Angela Davis taught us that, decades ago. So what do we do to

profit off of it—if that's where you stop, then we're never going to get where we're going. We're only going to build sexier systems, ones that the world can digest until the next scandal, continuing to kill black and brown people. And I think we try to communicate that.

But also in our practices, we do hold space to say that we're not against reform measures or reform actions that go in the direction of abolition. So we know that we have to sort of finesse in the way that we're moving because, number one, we don't have as many resources as the opposition. We never have and we never will. So we have to be very smart and very strategic in how we manipulate this thing and how we get to dismantle it. We're not against steps that might look like reform, because it's not everything at once; as long as people understand that it's not the end game. That's only getting us a quarter of the way where we really need to be.

And then, number two is holding the line so that folks really understand that it's a systemic thing, so that people are not so willing to leave other folks behind or carve people out. Because when you do that, you're essentially holding up this system, saying we believe in this system and we want to keep it, we just need a better way to decide who's deserving of being pinned and oppressed under the system and who's not.

And by that, when we're working on policies, folks would be like, let's carve out all the sex offenders. Let's carve out all the people convicted of rape, let's carve out all the people that

are convicted of murder or anything to do with children and these types of things. Although we're not saying that people shouldn't be held accountable; we're saying that if we are fighting to shut this thing down, and we make space to say it's okay if you just hold these people, but let those one's go, then what we're doing is reinforcing the system. Then we're saying that you only got wrong who you're oppressing with it, but it is still great. We love it. Keep going.

So we try to push our member organizations past that, to say, stretch your mind a little bit and stop focusing so much on the person and what they did in their crisis. Because again, like Dylan said, people are out here facing genocide. People's lives are threatened every single day. People are out here trying to survive. People are raised with colonized minds. The patriarchy that has influence on the actions of men in our neighborhoods is why men in our neighborhoods are doing this. It's not their mamas and daddies 'cause they was poor. It's a lot bigger than that. We are all operating under colonized minds, right?

So stop looking only at the person and what they did and how they harmed, and think of this bigger picture. Yes, there needs to be accountability, and we have to figure out what that looks like as we continue to grow the minds of our community members.

And that's a lot of the grassroots work that's happening. That's why political education works. That's why the Black Panthers were so successful, right? Because you're decolonizing minds at the ground level. And that's how we can fix what's happening in our communities, or at least shift it a whole lot.

But when looking at the system, we gotta hold it accountable, 100%. We give them no outs. We don't say, yep, that person deserves it, this person doesn't. Break down those dichotomies. Hold the system fully accountable.

But it's very hard. We're not funded a lot, not like so many of our member organizations with much more money than we have, because a lot of times we can't hold down the sexy shit, you know? We have to hold down the stuff that people are like, "ugh..."

I'm formerly incarcerated my damn self, you know? I was convicted of a serious violent felony at the age of 18. And so when talking about what this looks like, if I took the time to explain to you what that situation looks like, you'd be like, "really, you were convicted of a serious violent felony?"

There's so many layers when you're looking at it personally that we want to make sure people are holding the whole system accountable, and that's really tough to do. We're everybody's favorite, but we're not everybody's favorite.

Ashley: Dylan, you introduced what you're doing right now as being pedagogical and conceptual.

And Hilda, you were talking about this renaming of things, and in a way that is also conceptual, right? The women's village, for example, makes something seem palatable, when it's really the same old shit. Then I hear Amber-Rose talking through these pieces, these screws within the machine that can each be turned, removed, as minor steps in dismantling, decarcerating. That's conceptual too, to see across them, becoming political, tactical. But when it comes to the local care centers that are supposed to replace the new jails, it seems that "care" in that case would be a care that is different than the "women's village" tried to masquerade under. What's the difference between those two kinds of care?

Hilda: I just want to make a little comment first. When Dylan was talking about, "carceral domestic war," I thought he said "work." And in reality, this is how Donald Trump promised to create more jobs, jobs detaining and imprisoning people.

This is one thing that I noticed people struggling with in shutting down the detention facility in Adelanto, that it also brings jobs to the local community, you know? And so there are always little "buts" in the conversation about its problems, because they're also seeing benefits from these large prisons. Or when we'd have conversations with people of faith about incarceration, "yeah, but they did commit a crime, they must be punished." And so those conversations are, as Amber-Rose said, like little schools where you have to work with people, teaching moments, to say, "well wait, that's not what our creator wanted for us." These are the types of jobs that nobody should be working at. Our government should be creating other types of opportunities for the people. So anyhow, that's what came to mind when Dylan was talking about "carceral domestic war" but I heard "work."

Dylan: But can I ask a question, Hilda? What do people say when you come at them with the notion that Jesus Christ was an abolitionist, that he was on the side of sex workers and the criminalized and the incarcerated? I mean, look, I grew up Catholic. I'm Filipino, and that's not the Jesus I was taught. But once I actually read the stuff for myself and reflected back on it, I think this person was a model in a way, right? He was somebody who was actually crucified. In so many different ways, he actually embodies an abolitionist practice, and he said this openly. How do people in Christian faith communities respond when you challenge them with that, against this whole being punitive and crushing people thing, because they been convicted of something?

Hilda: Well it really depends on how they view and received their notion of Christianity, right? I think it comes down to that, because the

other thing that we see right now under Donald Trump is how some Christian denominations, the big mega churches, they're actually using the Gospel to justify what he's doing.

But I'm asking, would Jesus want these camps or would Jesus want to incarcerate children? Didn't he say, "let the children come to me"? And he was a person who nurtured not only the children, but healed the parents and healed the society that they lived in. And so when you're able to challenge that and give a different perspective, with a story, a personal story of somebody they see, it clicks.

But one of the things that we're still fighting, big time, even within congregations and churches, is this colonized mentality of white supremacy. And so until we can sit down and have a true dialogue about how that has hurt us instead of help us, we're not going to be able to hear it, or to transform. To get to that transformative place, that is what we are seeking.

Ashley: So this helps me to reformulate my last question, which is: How is care abolitionist? Is care abolitionist? Not just tearing down walls and so on, but building things up?

Amber-Rose: My first thought is that one of the things that drives this system is patriarchy. *Patriarchy is division that excludes care, leading instead with punishment.* Of course, it's man-powered and does not acknowledge the existence or reality of anyone else's power, or anyone who does not identify with its particular picture of a man. It especially does not acknowledge the beauty in autonomy and self-determination.

So when we talk about leading with care, we're talking about literally looking at one of the main drivers of this system of oppression and breaking that down. We are saying, for all this time we've practiced this belief that punishment for harm is going to heal us from those harms, that it is going to erase those harms, we're just erasing people.

So this has failed, this practice has failed. It's all wrong. Let's do the opposite of what patriarchy teaches us, which is to lead with punishment and domination and control and say, no, let's move from the other end and see where we end up. Let's actually lead with care. Let's start to see what's happening to people. Let's listen to people. Let's live with people. Let's be in community. Let's see what we can do for one another. Let's honor the power and this space. Let's honor the power of everyone and make space for all people to figure out what safety looks like.

I bet if people felt cared for and were safe and could establish community, because they weren't being pushed out and driven off of their land —land stolen, right? — I mean, I don't know a single person I went to high school with who still lives in the community that we grew up in. So giving people space is care,

to actually build with one another and care for one another, that is literally attacking and abolishing a driver of the systems that we're trying to get rid of. Yeah, care, for me, is like, Ding! Bingo.

Dylan: I have a concise, complimentary response to this, which I want to say to the question of how to do abolition right.

How do you do abolition? It's not this kind of ma... Well it *is* magical! But it's not *inaccessible*. It's not mysterious. It is entirely magical in the sense that people do magic every fucking day, right? Like it's magic to survive under conditions that are protal-genocidal, that *is* fucking magic.

But how do you engage in a practice of care as a part of abolition? All you have to do is look at the historical record, the historical archive and talk to elders and survivors. Think about the stories that people would share about what they did to make it through the most profoundly difficult situations that one can imagine.

This is what I think is really beautiful about the recent Netflix show, "When They See Us." You have one entire episode that's focused on one of the exonerated Five's experience as probably the youngest person at Rikers Island. You see what it was that he did to survive those conditions, and there you can foster a sense of the communities and familial connections and kind of caring and loving connections that are built under the conditions —the most concentrated racist state violence that is pretty much imaginable.

So for abolitionists, practices of care are always happening anyways, and how do we make those practices of care, especially under conditions of duress, a paradigm for practicing human being? A paradigm against the civilizational, white supremacist paradigm of human being, which is carceral, which is patriarchal, which is gender binary, which is all the things that we know are so deeply oppressive and fundamentally violent.

That's part of what abolition means as part of the Black Radical Tradition, where it is already a kind of highlighting of how different carceral violated communities of black people generated forms of survival — as forms of creativity, of art, of community, of family, food, ecology, economy and so forth, under the most concentrated conditions of anti-black, racial, colonial war.

So that's what care as abolition means for me, you've got to just look at the historical record, study the archive, talk to people, listen to the stories, and also just look around you. Because when I say "archive," I don't just mean the dusty ones in the library. I'm talking about the archive that is embodied in the skin and flesh that is right next to you.

Ashley: So if we also think about this in relation to this immediate question of re-entry, to the urgent geography

of people who are getting out, what does organizing need to look like for people's needs in that position?

Amber-Rose: It's happening now, I've seen it firsthand. I worked in it. I'll give you an example of A New Way of Life re-entry project.

A New Way of Life is a place where you've got women who have been thrown away, tossed away, locked up. Then they get out.

Well, when you're locked up, what happens? You're removed from your community. You're plucked out, you lose everything and connection to everyone. So when you get back, the most practical thing that you need is connection to people. You need to reestablish what it looks like to have people around you in support. And that's one of the things that I've seen happen when you go and pick someone up at the spot that they're released to, and you bring them to a home and say, "here's a room for you."

You know, you're not worrying about how you're going to pay for it or what it's gonna look like, because we've already talked —you've written me a letter from inside, I've written you back.

So we pick you up and bring you to this place. We give you community right away. Lots of it has to do with preparing food together, eating food together, and then getting to know the people who are now in this new community with you, helping get introduced to the city again. Lots of folks are released to cities that they're not even from, because they can't go back to where they're from. So they're in a whole new place, but they have hands on deck to say, this is where the market is and this is how you get the bus line or this is where you get information from.

Helping people get things that we know we need under this system to operate: getting your ID, your Social Security card, whatever it is that you need to actually function; getting you access to those things. And then also moving you into spaces that previously you had been deprived of, which is space to be politically educated, space for therapy, the kinds of community care that we do to heal one another, transformative justice circles and spaces.

It's about reconnecting people to people. And that makes space for one of the things that I think is so hard to do, which is to define your individuality again, and to find your place in a caring community, after coming from a dark hole where no one cares.

So that's something very practical, and A New Way of Life does a great job with that because they're also partnered with All of Us or None. From just reestablishing you with folks all the way to getting your record expunged and getting a job, the space to decolonize and to re-understand this place that you're in.

That's why the recidivism rate through there is so much better than through prisons. People decolonize in a real way and then are able to

reestablish and maneuver differently, with more strategy and more thought.

Hilda: I know that in L.A. through our Justice Not Jails work, we also have a Beyond Bars Congregation. It's working with people of faith to be able to do what Amber-Rose just explained: creating those teams of accompaniment. That's what I like to call them, where people really surround one another, there are circles of care for the person who's been impacted so that they're able to be reintegrated into society and be able to function again. So I think that's a very important part of what needs to happen, how we think of care for one another.

We also do that for the asylum seekers once they are released from either detention, or when they are able to come to our community and want to settle down in our community. We connect them with a congregation or a church that has an accompaniment team precisely to do the same thing, where they need to get their children enrolled in school, how to get an ID, where to take public transportation, how to get from place A to place B, and eventually build community in the place that they settle. That's a very important part of the job for both communities, for the immigrant community generally, but also for people who are just coming out of prison.

Dylan: I'll just throw in a word regarding the project called the Underground Scholars Initiative, started up at UC Berkeley. It was a pleasure for me to watch that happen because I knew some of the founding members, a bunch of them are from Southern California and L.A. And just full disclosure, I happen to be one of the co-faculty advisors for a pretty new chapter of Underground Scholars here at UC Riverside.

I think the way the Underground Scholars Initiative is happening on the ground is potentially an abolitionist articulation of what, from a different view, looks like a pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps kind of liberal narrative, of people who have been incarcerated making good, going to the university, to get a degree, etcetera. I think about how Underground Scholars has been narrated by university administrators, by corporate media and so forth. But talking with the people who actually populate the Underground Scholars, meaning system-impacted people, formerly incarcerated people who've now begun to seize the public resources of the public university—I think that there's an abolitionist potential there, one where we could begin to address and abolish the white supremacist, neoliberal, colonial university.

That's yet another site to think about your question, Ashley, which is how do you do abolition? Well, it's abolition not merely of the carceral regimes that are the most blatantly obvious ones

articulating racist domestic war, meaning jails, prisons, detention centers; but they might also entail things like public schooling, public research universities and public, community colleges, public teaching universities. Those institutions, their logics of institutionalization might actually need to be confronted and transformed, if not abolished as well.

As Underground Scholars becomes another stream within a broader picture of how re-entry happens, I think that there's a way that those of us engaged with that particular form need to be on the ground, thinking and talking through everything with that group of students and scholars and colleagues, to bring an abolitionist practice and abolitionist analysis into this institution too. I think that's a really critical as part of the reentry conversation.

By this, I also mean to think about the university or colleges as primary sites of re-entry, instead of exceptional ones, which is the way that it's articulated now. It's like the Dream Act, right? You have the exceptional few, the relative few, and then you have everyone else. What if universities, schools, junior colleges, state universities, what if they became primary sites for reentry?

Ashley: And then it seems we can continue to expand that as well—to think about where else that institutionalization and its carceral logics extend, where they can be undone, but also, in recognizing the re-entry already taking place within them, help to re-orient them around an abolitionist practice.

And in terms of the original question for this conversation, which put it another way is what is the carcerality of Southern California, as a layered and intersecting geography, I think this shows a key aspect of that geography, a decarceral terrain in tension with its carceral ones.

I feel like Amber-Rose also gave us some kind of sandwich ends for understanding that, in terms of time and the scope of the carcerality of this space. This was between how easily you went earlier from "stolen land" on one hand, which I heard in relation to the indigenous dispossession that first brought this carcerality to this landscape, to talking about the effects of gentrification today, where nobody lives where they used to live, no one is where they grew up. And I feel like those brackets of displacement, past and present, feel really important to understanding how all of this stuff, all of this history, institutions, practices, colonialities and mindsets, sit here on top of one another.

Amber-Rose: I think when talking about incarceration, that's the driver of it. I also do not like to use the term "mass incarceration," but in thinking of Kelly Lytle Hernandez' book, *City of Inmates*, it starts with the line, "Mass incarceration is mass elimination."

What it has meant to do is to

erase and eliminate folks, in the drive of manifest destiny of white men coming in, erasing people off the land and taking it. And when you see that happen, obviously with the original manifest destiny from centuries ago, and then you see it repeat now in neighborhoods, it's like we talked earlier about how you just move the system around a little bit and put another name on it. But it's the same thing. In some places, we're shooting you dead in the head and killing you, and in others, you're just erased and eliminated, and in either case, nobody gets held accountable.

And it causes issues for family members too. You're moving them out of communities. In other spaces you're muscling with your money, but it's the same thing. You're eliminating folks and part of that is let's lock them up. It's a lot easier to put family into crisis when we literally erase their heroes and their loved ones from their lives. Put them in these cages and let's take that land. Let's just build more prisons. Let's keep erasing them. Let's just keep stuffing all these black and brown people in these prisons and eliminating them and doing exactly what we came to do centuries ago. It has not stopped. It's just viewed differently. It's understood, we have different language for it now.

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Images by Ashley Hunt:

"5,016 men, USP Victorville and FCI Victorville Medium I & II, Victorville, California" (cover);
"9,201 men and a maximum of 50 women, Men's Central Jail and Twin Towers Correctional Facility, Los Angeles, California" (right);
"United States Penitentiary, Atlanta, Erased, 2016" (back).

Other images:

"Adelante sin Adelanto," provided by Hilda Cruz
"Community Based Solutions, No Prison No Jails," provided by Critical Resistance
Printed as a part of *Degrees of Visibility*, a large body of photographs that study the landscapes in which prisons, jails and detention centers sit, throughout all 50 U.S. states and territories. For its exhibition at Pitzer College Art Galleries, 2019.

Also see "Four Directions from Allensworth" (2017), a conversation with Rachel Herzing and Isaac Ontiveros at Allensworth California State Historic Park, and "Weak, False and Filled with Holes" (2018), with Elizabeth Webb on Charlottesville and the history of resistance to *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, and "Bourbon, Basketball and Horseracing" (2018), with Debraun Thomas and Judah Schept on anti-prison organizing and the taking back memory in public between Lexington, Kentucky and Eastern Kentucky coal country.

Hilda Cruz, is a Faith Organizer for Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity, she organizes congregations

and trains leaders to respond to the needs of immigrant communities in the San Bernardino and Riverside Counties.

Amber-Rose Howard is a poet, public speaker and organizer from Pomona, California. Experiencing a felony conviction as a young adult propelled Amber-Rose into a lifetime commitment of organizing against the Prison Industrial Complex and building up the power of Black people and all others impacted by state violence. Amber-Rose holds a BA in Communication Studies concentrated in Public Argumentation & Rhetoric from California State University, San Bernardino. She is a graduate of the Women's Foundation of California, Women's Policy Institute fellowship program and a proud member of All of Us Or None. Amber-Rose currently directs Policy and Budget Advocacy as a Statewide Coordinator for Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB), a statewide coalition of over 80 grassroots organizations working to reduce the amount of people incarcerated, stop prison and jail construction and expansion, and shift state and local spending from policing and corrections to supportive human services, bridging movements for racial, economic and environmental justice in CA and across the Nation.

Dylan Rodríguez (he/him) is Professor of Media and Cultural Studies and former Chair of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Riverside. He is 2019-2020 President-Elect of the American Studies Association. Dr. Rodríguez's faculty peers elected him for two terms as Chair of the UCR Academic Senate between 2016 and 2018. He is the author of two books: *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the US Prison Regime* (2006) and *Suspended Apocalypse: White Supremacy, Genocide, and the Filipino Condition* (2009), and is a co-editor of the landmark text *Critical Ethnic Studies: A Reader* (2016). His next book, *White Reconstruction*, is forthcoming in 2020 from Fordham University Press. Dylan has helped build the foundations for three emergent scholarly fields: critical carceral/prison studies, critical ethnic studies, and critical Filipinx studies. He has spoken and written in a wide cross-section of scholarly and public venues, including Social Text, Radical History Review, American Quarterly, The Real News Network, and Huffington Post Live. His thinking, writing, and teaching focus on how regimes of social liquidation, cultural extermination, physiological evisceration, and racist terror become normalized features of everyday life in the alleged "post-civil rights" and "post-racial" moments. He is interested in the forms of collective genius and creativity that emerge from such conditions, and how such insurgencies envision—and practice—transformations of power and community.

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<http://degreesofvisibility.info>
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Ashley Hunt, 2019



