

# WHAT IS PRISON ABOLITION?

## **Prison Abolition Exhibit**

**Fall 2019**

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# WHAT IS PRISON ABOLITION?

## MASS INCARCERATION

The United States incarcerates more citizens than any other country. The U.S. contains 5% of the world's population but accounts for 25% of prisoners worldwide. Since 1970, our incarcerated population has increased by 700%, far outpacing increases in population and crime rates.

People of color are disproportionately affected by mass incarceration - 1 out of every 3 Black men are likely to end up in prison, while 1 out of every 17 white men can expect the same.

But how about this:  
Instead of asking whether anyone should be locked up or go free, why don't we think about why we solve problems by repeating the kind of behavior that brought us the problem in the first place?

- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 2019

## PRISON ABOLITION IS

Prison abolition is the goal for a variety of activists who aim to radically change how our society deals with crime and punishment. They argue that rehabilitation and preparing those convicted for re-entry into society is no longer the focus of the prison system.

"Prison abolition is asking to make sure abolition isn't just about getting rid of buildings full of cages. It's also about ending the profit and the violence that the prison industrial complex has built on and maintain exposure and inequalities through punishment, violence, and control, without of course."

Because the P.C. is an anachronistic system, abolition is a radical strategy. An abolitionist vision means that we must build modes before they can represent them, we must be in the future of mass deinstitutionalization for taking social steps that move us toward ending our prisons and that we will be able to build that society, clearly, could be different. It means being this vision in our daily lives, abolition is both a positive organizing tool and a long-term goal.

- Ruth Wilson Gilmore

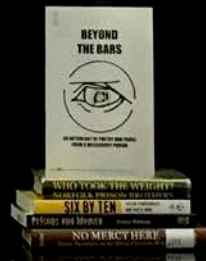
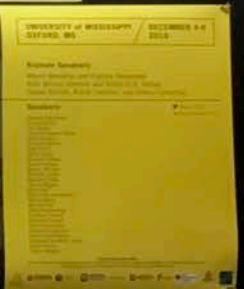
## ALTERNATIVES

Abolitionists' proposals to reduce incarceration (2015, p. 17-18) offer a variety of alternatives:

- Make public safety a responsibility of local communities
- Redistribute funding away from prisons and policing towards housing, education, jobs, etc. to address the root contributors to crime and incarceration
- Rehabilitation or treatment programs for mental health issues and substance abuse
- Educational or vocational training programs in and out of prisons
- Eliminate cash bail
- Eliminate imprisonment for low-level crimes
- Reform the parole system
- Create support systems for integrating previously incarcerated people back into society
- Eliminate mandatory minimum sentencing

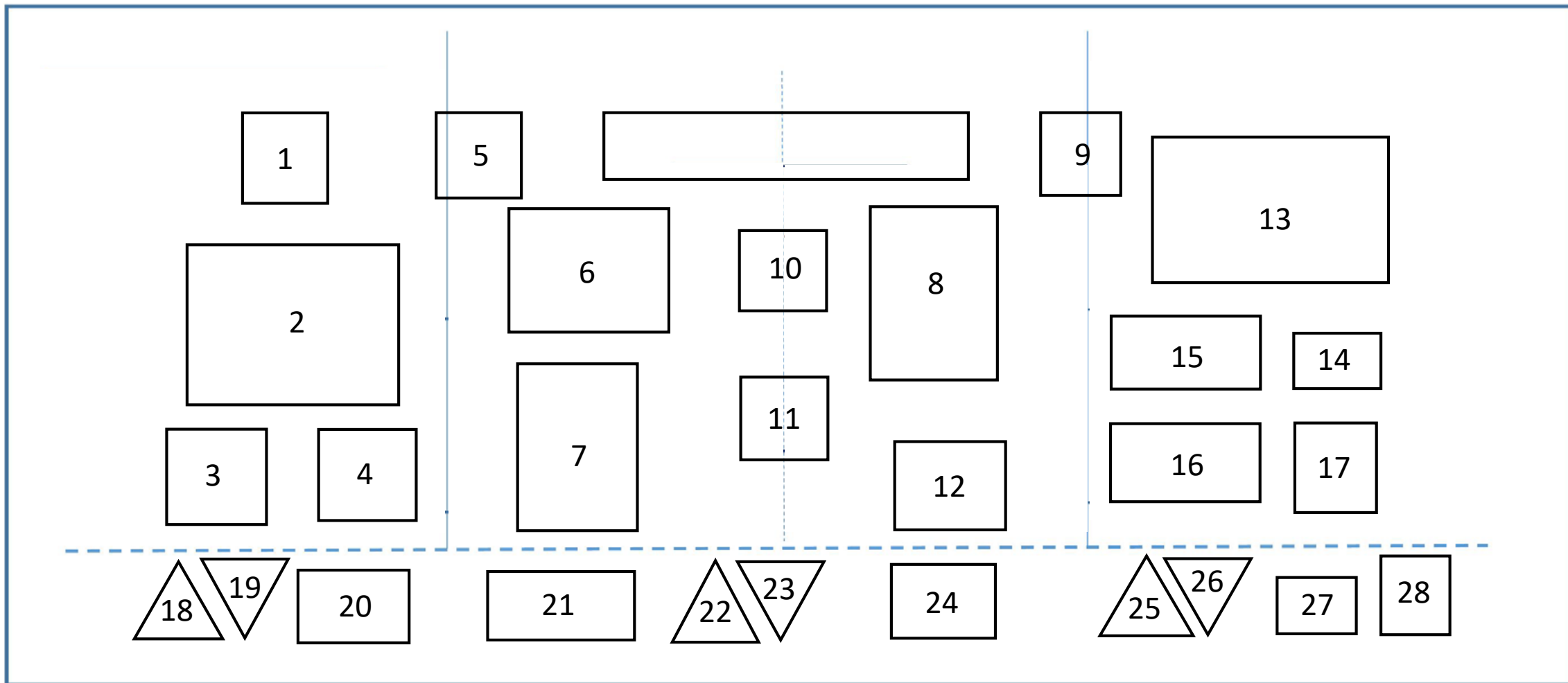
## MAKING & UNMAKING MASS INCARCERATION

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# Exhibit Map



\* Map not to scale



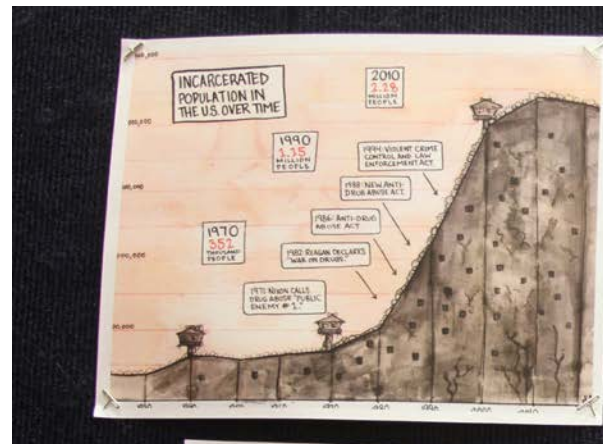
1. Graphic by Dan Nott

## Mass Incarceration

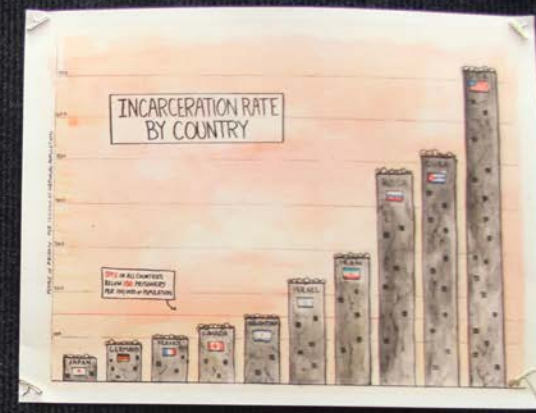
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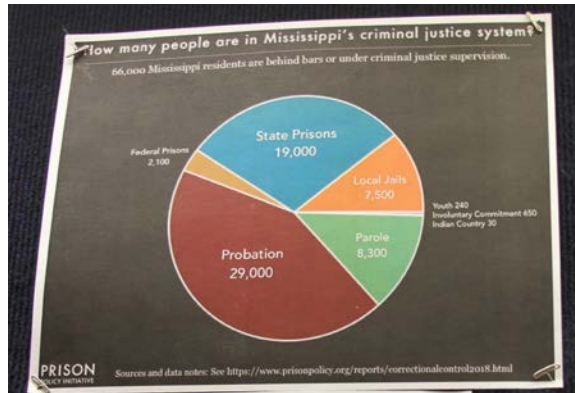
3. Incarcerated Population in the U.S. Over Time  
Graphic by Dan Nott



4. Incarceration Rate by Country  
Graphic by Dan Nott







5. How Many People were in Mississippi's Criminal Justice System in 2018?

But how about this:

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- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 2019

6.

## PRISON ABOLITION IS

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"From where we are now, sometimes we can't really imagine what abolition is going to look like. Abolition isn't just about getting rid of buildings full of cages. It's also about undoing the society we live in because the PIC [prison industrial complex] both feeds on and maintains oppression and inequalities through punishment, violence, and controls millions of people.

Because the PIC is not an isolated system, abolition is a broad strategy. An abolitionist vision means that we must build models today that can represent how we want to live in the future. It means developing practical strategies for taking small steps that move us toward making our dreams real and that lead us all to believe that things really could be different. It means living this vision in our daily lives. Abolition is both a practical organizing tool and a long-term goal."

--Critical Resistance

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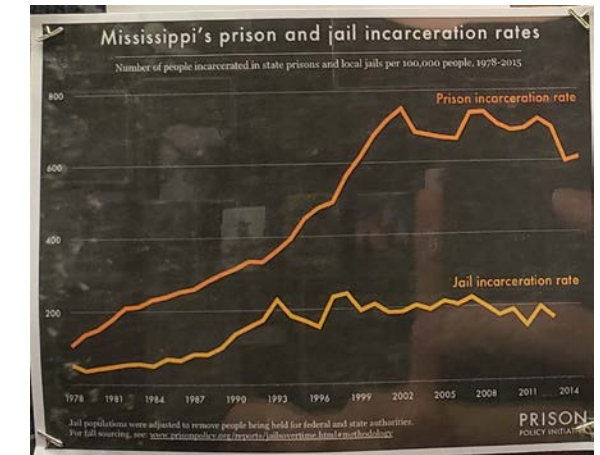
## ALTERNATIVES

Abolitionists' proposals to reduce incarceration rates or provide alternatives to prison include:

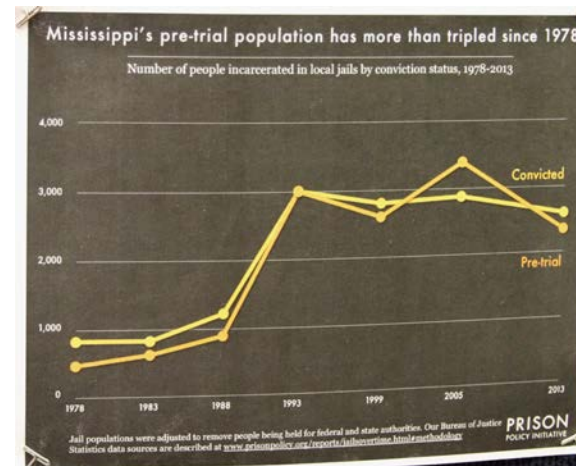
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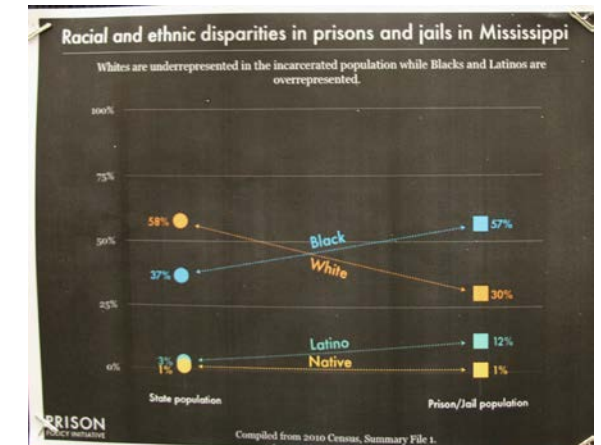
9. Mississippi Incarceration Rates by Race/Ethnicity, 2010



10. Number of People Incarcerated in State Prisons and Local Jails per 100,000 People, 1978-2015



11. Number of People Incarcerated in Local Jails by Conviction Status, 1978-2013



12. Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Prisons and Jails in Mississippi, 2010



Curious? Learn more at...



14.

In 2016, the activist group Critical Resistance organized in opposition to the County of Los Angeles' plan to build a new women's jail in Lancaster, CA. Critical Resistance sought testimonies from people incarcerated in the area, some of which are reprinted here.

Samuel: "Based on my personal knowledge and experience the so called building of a 'new' jail/prison is never a good idea because once built it would have to fill or fail, so the filling of the new facility would come about by WHATEVER means to simply justify the expense."

Kelsey: "I am definitely opposed to a new women's jail in Lancaster because of several reasons. The women in the community of Lancaster are going to be subjected to being placed in jail for things they would normally receive a ticket for, or probation is going to turn into county jail time! It's no different than when they built all these prisons they came up with a way to imprison more people to fill them up by changing laws 'Three Strikes Law' and others which will continue to destroy families."

Ruben: "Instead of building a new jail I would rather see money being used for more rehabilitational programs and educational programs for our children."

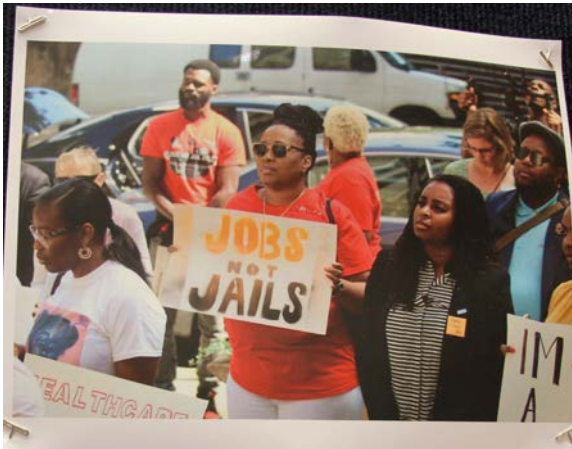
15.





**In May 2019, building on years of organizing and activism around decarceration, the Atlanta City Council voted to close the city's detention center.**

16.



17. Roberta Myers, Director of State Strategy at the Legal Action Center, participates in Close the Jail ATL's Redemption Day on May 20, 2019

Organizers with the Racial Justice Action Center campaigned for years to bring about conditions that enabled the closure of the Atlanta City Detention Center. They worked to shift policing and incarceration away from "quality of life issues" like mental health, homelessness, and substance abuse to focus more on substantive safety issues. They also worked with immigrant rights advocates to end the city's contract with ICE (Immigrations and Customs Enforcement).

In 2018, organizers launched the Close the Jail ATL campaign, led by Women on the Rise, which brought together policymakers and people directly impacted by the system of policing and incarceration. The campaign's goal is to repurpose the Atlanta City Detention Center into a Center for Wellness & Freedom, using the funds formerly used to support the jail to support services to help the community thrive.

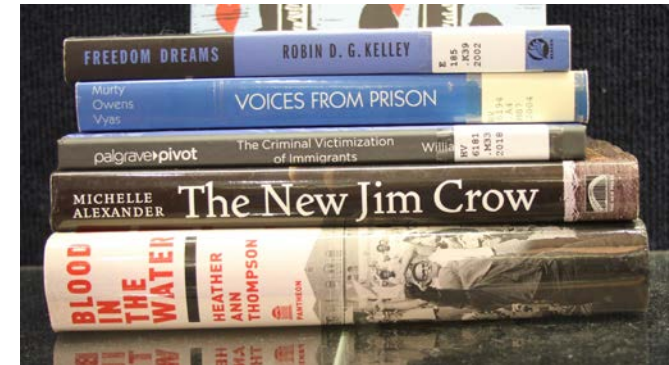
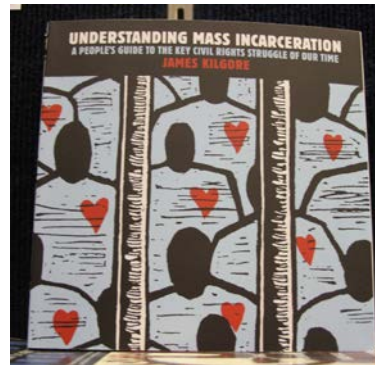
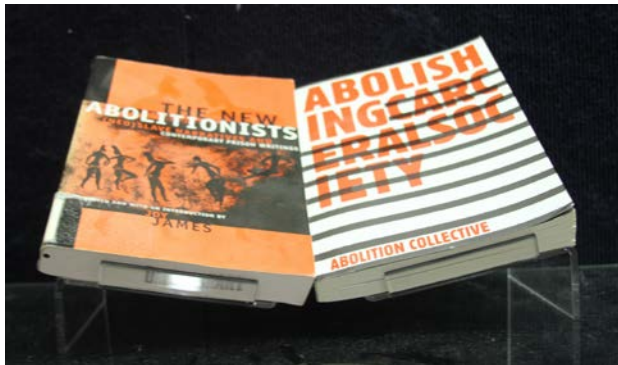
Learn more at [CloseTheJailATL.org](https://CloseTheJailATL.org)



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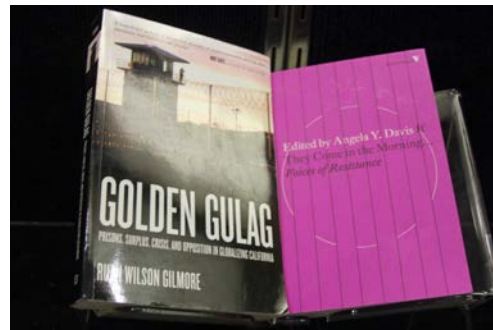
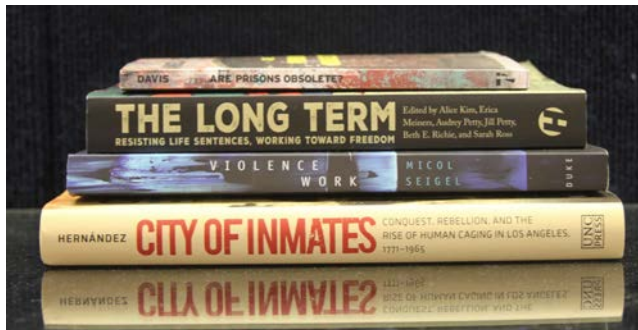
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- 20.3 Murty, Komanduri S., Angela M. Owens, and Ashwin G. Vyas. *Voices from Prison: An Ethnographic Study of Black Male Prisoners*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004.
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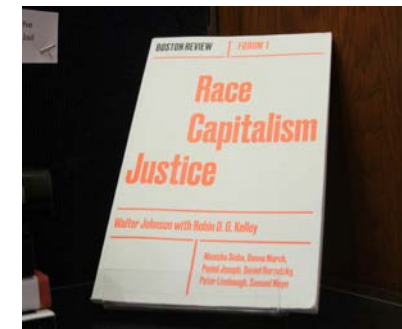
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