

WHAT CAN WE DO?

We have been taught to trust the prisons as a simple solution to complex social problems. When we realize that the prison system is not only an ineffective tool to end rape and domestic violence, but actually increases violence in our communities, we can sometimes feel powerless. But we are not powerless and we are not alone. We have vital resources in our families, our communities, and our friendships to create grassroots strategies for safety and accountability. With support from CARA and other great organizations listed below, we can build our capacity to create safer, more supportive, and more loving communities.

RESOURCES:

Seattle organizations that can assist you with developing grassroots safety and accountability strategies:

CARA, 206.322.4856, www.cara-seattle.org, info@cara-seattle.org

The Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian, and Gay Survivors of Abuse, 206.568.7777, www.nwnetwork.org, info@nwnetwork.org

Asian & Pacific Islander Women & Family Safety Center, 206.467.9976

Chaya, 206-325-0325, www.chayaseattle.org, chaya@chayaseattle.org

More Information:

To learn more about how the criminal system and the PIC are harming survivors of sexual and domestic violence, you can check out the following resources:

INCITE! – Critical Resistance Statement on Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex: <http://www.incite-national.org/involve/statement.html>

“Whose Safety? Women of Color and the Violence of Law Enforcement” by Anannya Bhattacharjee: <http://www.afsc.org/community/WhoseSafety.pdf>

“Community Accountability within the People of Color Progressive Movement” published by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence: <http://www.incite-national.org/involve/cmtty-acc-poc.pdf>

Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology, edited by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence

Compelled to Crime: The Gender Entrapment of Battered, Black Women by Beth Richie

Inventing the Savage: The Social Construction of Native American Criminality by Luana Ross

Policing the National Body, edited by Jael Silliman and Anannya Bhattacharjee

CARA would like to especially acknowledge the visionary work of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (www.incite-national.org), a national movement of women of color working to end violence against communities of color. INCITE! has provided critical leadership in pushing the anti-violence movement away from further entrenchment into the criminal system, and towards a vision of true liberation.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

THE ANTI-VIOLENCE MOVEMENT ACTIVELY RESISTING THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX



Drawing by Eric Drooker
www.drooker.com/graphics

CARA / Communities Against Rape and Abuse
801 – 23rd Ave. S., #G1, Seattle, WA 98144
206.322.4856
www.cara-seattle.org

A BRIEF HISTORY:

The contemporary U.S. movement to end rape and domestic violence sprung from the powerful women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In a climate where rape and domestic violence were not taken seriously by a misogynist culture, anti-violence activists struggled for solutions to keep women from being battered and assaulted. Many activists declared that domestic violence and sexual assault are serious *crimes* in order to compel people, as well as institutions, to take violence against women more seriously. At the same time, the criminal system, including prisons, was growing exponentially under the Nixon, Reagan, Bush I and II, and Clinton Administrations. Throughout the 1980s, 90s, and 2000s, conservatives and corporations co-opted the agenda of the anti-violence movement to justify their own campaigns such as the War on Drugs and the War on Terrorism. Ironically, these law-and-order campaigns have been very harmful to survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

Today, there are many progressive and radical arms of the anti-violence movement, primarily led by women of color, that are actively challenging our partnership with the criminal system. Though we will continue to prioritize the safety of survivors and our communities, we will not let ourselves be co-opted.



Drawing by Matt Wuerker, www.mwuerker.com

WHAT IS THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX (PIC)?

The prison industrial complex (PIC) refers to a massive multi-billion dollar industry that promotes the exponential expansion of prisons, jails, immigrant detention center, and juvenile detention centers. The PIC is represented by corporations that profit from incarceration, politicians who target people of color so that they appear to be "tough on crime," and the media that represents a slanted view of how crime looks in our communities. In order to survive, the PIC uses propaganda to convince the public how much we need prisons; uses public support to strengthen harmful law-and-order agendas such as the "War on Drugs" and the "War on Terrorism"; uses these agendas to justify imprisoning disenfranchised people of color, poor people, and people with disabilities; leverages the resulting increasing rate of incarceration for prison-related corporate investments (construction, maintenance, goods and services); pockets the profit; uses profit to create more propaganda.

HOW IS THE PIC HARMFUL TO SURVIVORS?

Although the lion's share of public funding dedicated to addressing domestic and sexual violence goes to the prisons and policing, most survivors never access the criminal system for protection or justice. In the meantime, the prison industrial complex is actually having a terrible impact on many survivors of rape and abuse:

- **The War on Drugs has incarcerated thousands of survivors of rape and abuse.** Women who have experienced abuse are more likely to use drugs as a coping mechanism. For example, rape victims with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are 26 times more likely than non-rape victims to have two or more major serious drug abuse problems.¹ Women who have abusive partners that sell or abuse drugs are sometimes threatened by their partners to participate. Also, women who are poor because of domestic violence sometimes turn to drug-related income sources.²
- **Prisons are a location for intensely high rates of sexual violence and exploitation.** Many women, men, and children are raped and sexually exploited by prison guards as well as other inmates while in prison. The number of sexual assaults in prison is three to four times higher than the number outside prison walls. (See Stop Prison Rape, www.spr.org). Juveniles in adult prisons are especially vulnerable to sexual assault. Also prison rape is resulting in increasingly high rates of HIV and other STDs among prisoners.
- **Increasing collaboration between federal immigration law enforcement and local police endangers immigrant survivors.** The U.S. Department of Justice continues its expansion of ICE (immigration law enforcement) influence and activities into local policing and incarceration. The "War on Terrorism" has resulted in the detainment and deportation of thousands of immigrants, effectively decreasing the trust immigrant survivors have for any law enforcement.
- **Of women convicted of violent crimes, the vast majority were convicted for defending themselves or their children from abuse.** In California alone, there are 600 women in prison for killing their abusers in self-defense. Average prison terms are twice as long for killing husbands as for killing wives.³ Also, mandatory arrest laws and untrained police officers sometimes result in survivors of domestic violence being arrested for domestic violence crimes instead of the perpetrators.⁴
- **Prisons waste critical public resources.** The exorbitant cost of prisons limits national resources that ought to be used for economic justice. Social services – including services for survivors of rape and abuse – are cut in order to make more room in state and federal budgets for the maintenance of the prison industrial complex. Survivors are left without the critical resources we need to address our experience of abuse. Communities also need those resources to create our own safety and accountability strategies.
- **Prisons don't work.** Prisons do not help to transform abusive people. When people who batter or rape are incarcerated, they are not set up with the services they need to ensure that, when they are released, their behavior will have changed. Instead, prisons isolate, de-humanize, and humiliate inmates. Sometimes prisoners may even change for the worse after they have experienced incarceration. After they are released, they can sometimes be more dangerous to the community than they were originally.

¹ Kilpatrick, Dean. National Victim Assistance Academy, Chapter 9: Sexual Assault, 1999.

² Unifem Gender Issues Fact Sheet, #6, <http://www.unifem-eseasia.org/Gendiss/Gendiss6.htm>

³ Prison Activist Resource Center, www.prisonactivist.org

⁴ "Victim-Defendants: An Emerging Challenge in Responding to Domestic Violence in Seattle and the King County Region," published by the King County Coalition of Domestic Violence in April 2003