A zine for and about those impacted by the Prison Industrial Complex.

Volume 1, Issue 1

March 2017
Artwork by an indigenous prisoner in Queensland Correctional Centre.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Letter From the Editor</td>
<td>Emily Gaston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Prison Industrial Complex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bodies Under Lock and Key: The Policing of Transgender Women in Male Prisons</td>
<td>Kelsey Maxwell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Photo Requests from Solitary: Colorado Edition</td>
<td>A photo project by Mads Engel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Interview with Inside/Out Youth Services Program Director, Lisa Shoenstein</td>
<td>Olivia Blackmon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Moms Behind Bars: Stereotypes of Black Female Criminality Fuel the Prison Industrial Complex</td>
<td>Olivia Blackmon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Interview with an Inmate</td>
<td>Olivia Blackmon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>The Subjugation of Black Women’s Bodies: Pervasive Violence and Mass Incarceration</td>
<td>Kelsey Maxwell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Readers,

We are living in a precarious economic, social, and political time: one in which the mass incarceration and policing of bodies has become commonplace throughout the United States. The prison industrial complex (PIC) in this country is a profoundly powerful system and a policing tool of racism, sexism, cissexism, transphobia, and capitalist patriarchy. The criminalization of bodies of color, trans bodies, queerness, and so forth has sharpened inequality and the oppression that some persons and communities face at the hands of others. As Sara Ahmed, scholar of feminist, queer, and critical race theory, might consider, the PIC has become as expression of attunement: a way in which what is considered out of sync with the world becomes in sync. Attunement acts as a “technique of power” and one through which deviant persons are made “to experience what is in tune as violence” (Ahmed, 41). In this case, prison—and the prison system—become the weapon through which control and power is kept.

This magazine seeks to illuminate the realities of the PIC and the impact that the system is having on individuals, communities, and this country as a whole. We hope to share critical information and insight about the operations of the prison system within the United States and consider various connections and contradictions between the numerous marginalized communities it targets. Ultimately, the goal is to contemplate identity and difference, to recognize the impact that such realities have on persons within and outside of the PIC, and to educate about—and advocate for—those impacted by the prison system. In the words of Audre Lorde, “in a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior” (Lorde, 289). The PIC is deeply representative of this dynamic of inequality.

In our analysis and critique of the prison system, we employ feminist theory to understand the ways in which the PIC creates and perpetuates oppression. Feminist thinkers and theorists—especially those who have grounded their work in intersectional considerations of oppression—have been essential in considering the impact of difference on systems of inequality. As Joan Scott considers, “to do anything else is to buy into the political argument that sameness is a requirement for equality, an untenable position for feminists (and historians) who know that power is constructed on and so must be challenged from the ground of difference” (Scott, 404). We hope to shed further light on the impact of difference within our society and the profound implications of that difference for individuals and communities within the prison system.

We would like to note that none of the creators of this magazine are currently—or have been previously—incarcerated. We speak from positions outside of the prison system. However, we use only those sources that are proven credible and seek to share the experiences and theories of those incarcerated—or impacted by incarceration—first and foremost.

Sincerely,
Emily Gaston
Editor
The Prison Industrial Complex

What is the Prison Industrial Complex?

When the interests of government and industry converge, public policy serves to criminalize marginalized peoples while multinational corporations benefit from their incarceration. The term “Prison Industrial Complex” (PIC) refers to the prison system itself as well as the politics and capitalist agendas that keep the system in place. The PIC allows groups in positions of privilege and power to maintain their authority through orchestrated violence against poor persons, persons of color, LGTBQIA+ persons, and other marginalized individuals and communities.

THINGS ARE GETTING WORSE!

On February 23, 2017, the Trump administration reversed the Obama-era decision to reduce private prison use. Private prisons are usually charge a daily rate per prisoner in order to cover the costs of resources and investment while also turning a profit. More people in prisons means greater profit. Stock prices of the largest American prison corporations, GEO Group and CoreCivic (or CCA, Corrections Corporation of America), spiked immediately following Attorney General Jeff Sessions’ twitter memo.

Private prison corporations will continue to grow and spend millions lobbying and funneling investments to candidates. As they lobby for policy that leads to dramatic rise in incarceration rates, all problems pertaining to mass incarceration will intensify. While CoreCivic (CCA), the largest private prison corporation in the United States, was a member of the American Legislative Executive Council (ALEC), ALEC hard-pressed the privatization of prisons while also pushing for harsher sentencing (“get tough on crime,” “war on drugs,” “three strikes,” and “zero tolerance” policies are a few examples). In other words, CoreCivic (CCA) has used its position within ALEC to profit off of the mass incarceration of marginalized persons and communities.
Bodies Under Lock and Key: The Policing of Transgender Women in Male Prisons

Article by Kelsey Maxwell

In the United States, the prison industrial complex (PIC) is a profoundly powerful institution. Transgender women and non-binary persons are among those that face the most discrimination within this system. As a result of their deviant identities, they are disproportionately vulnerable to violence and mistreatment based upon cissexism and transphobia. The injustices that gender non-conforming people face in prisons mirrors those that they experience on a daily basis as so-called “free” citizens in the United States. The experience of trans women within the PIC acts as an important example of systematic establishments of inequality. (continued on next pp.)
Prisons perpetuate gender normativity and the two-sex system through the disciplining of non-conforming bodies. As prisons are organized according to biological sex, many gender non-conforming people are forced into prisons that are inconsistent with their identities. Parallel issues also prevail outside of the system as gender non-conforming bodies are continually invalidated based upon the sex division of public spaces: especially public bathrooms (Halperstam, 496). These problems exemplify the pervasiveness of gender policing in our society. This form of policing relies heavily on the defining of appropriate gender performance. In this process, gender has been theoretically and practically linked to sex. When persons perform their gender according to their “biological sex” (cisgender) they receive status and not scorn. Prisons are representative of the institutionalization of cissexism: the belief that trans identified genders are inferior to or less authentic than those of cissexuals (Serano, 547). Paula Rae Witherspoon, a trans woman incarcerated in Texas, recounts her experience in Prison claiming that trans people are often stripped of their dignity as well as their identity:

“I was put in a caged area where over 200 men witnessed, gawked, and made fun of me... Then I was forced to strip off my clothes, bra, panties and stand nude in front of them while I changed clothes. This generated a lot of ‘cat calls,’ whistles, and more lewd comments. The floor Sgt got so mad he pulled me out, emptied the barber shop out, and ordered the barber to ‘skin him like an onion and cut those DAMN NAILS’” (Witherspoon, 211).

The transphobic discrimination that Witherspoon experienced is not uncommon. Within the prison system, non-binary persons are not only denied the right to assert their own sex, but they are also forced into cisgender performance. This policing of gender non-conforming bodies perpetuates the superiority of gender conforming people. The assumed value of the binary system leads to the forceful erasure of trans identities. Prisons are then used as profound tools in perpetuating discrimination and violence against gender non-conforming persons.

The social structures that evolve in prisons are highly predicated on performing normative gender practices. As Judith Butler explains in “Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,” “Subject” status cannot exist without the existence of an “Other” (Butler, 439). Within male prisons, cisgender men reaffirm their “Subject” status by “Othering” and objectifying gender non-conforming persons through aggression and physical violence. Male prisoners reproduce normative masculinity and hierarchical structures of power through gender policing.

In male prisons, masculinity is asserted through the ability to rape and dominate trans women and feminine men. Both inmates and corrections officers (COs) are responsible for rape, and for the victims, compliance is necessary for survival. Glaysa, a transgender woman imprisoned in a men’s prison in upstate New York, recounts her experiences with persistent violence and harassment:

“I have faced violence where I have been beaten and raped because of my being a transgender with female breasts and feminine. I have been burned out of a cell block & dorm because I wouldn’t give an inmate sex...I have been harassed verbally and have had others grab my female breasts and ass because they knew I was transgender and figured they can get away with such actions—which they do most of the time due to the fact no one cares what happens to us transgenders inside” (Rivera, 18).

Trans women are objectified and abused based upon their subordinate and “Other” status in society. In identifying with a gender that is in opposition to their biological sex, they are victim to transphobic violence within the PIC. The pervasiveness of violence towards trans women in prison reaffirms the object status of feminine bodies and the subordination of femininity in society. The implication of COs in violating trans bodies indicates the extent of the issue within and outside of prison walls.

Even when the corrections officers are not the perpetrators in male prisons, they commonly validate—or turn a blind eye towards—violence
against gender non-conforming people. COs are far less likely to intervene when trans women and gay men are under attack because they believe trans people deserve it based upon their “inappropriate” gender performance (Rivera, 20). Furthermore, although is it well known that trans women are more likely to be raped by their cell mate, many prisons take no preventative measures and ignore requests from trans women to be relocated when they are suffering repeated assault. A transgender woman explains the abuse and neglect she faces during her time in prison:

“I’m raped on a daily basis, I’ve made complaint after complaint, but no response. No success. I’m scared to push forward with my complaints against officers for beating me...The Inspector General said officers have a right to do that to me. That I’m just a man and shouldn’t be dressing like this.... When you get beat up real bad and they don’t want to take you out to get checked out, they put you in the snake pit. They threw me in the snake pit for 6 months after beating me up. Six months! They’re animals...I got beat up by 12 officers. I’m only 123 lbs” (Rivera, 20).

This trans woman’s experience clearly demonstrates the pervasiveness of violence against trans bodies in prison systems. The lack of autonomy that trans persons have due to their marginalized status limits—or entirely prevents—them from ending abuse. The rape of trans women based on their performance of femininity reaf-

firms the assumed intrinsic link between femininity and sexual objectification. The sexual assault of trans women furthers their Object status within prisons.

When prisons do take responsibility for protecting trans women and feminine men, they usually do so by placing them in solitary confinement where they are subject to inferior living conditions. Many trans people have reported that within solitary confinement COs clearly provided them with less food, restricted their access to time outside of their cell, and refused to provide them with necessary health care (Nemec, 220). These transphobic practices within the prison system work to punish non-binary persons and erase trans identity.

Trans women face further discrimination through lack of adequate health care services. It is common for trans women to be denied the right to hormone medications or given improper doses. This is blatantly illegal. However, there is no system in place to enforce the specific laws that have been erected in many states to protect trans people from this mistreatment. Furthermore even if they are lucky—or wealthy—enough to meet with a health care provider, the doctors are usually not educated on trans health. Doctors often misunderstand trans health issues as “cosmetic problems” and fail to recognize—or value—identity expression and practice as an essential health issue. This form of violence is particularly concerning because numerous medical studies have demonstrated that denial of sexual reassignment therapies (hormone treatment, counseling, ect.) increases the likelihood of suicide by tenfold (Rivera, 28).

Additionally, trans women and feminine men are more vulnerable to contracting diseases such as STIs, HIV and AIDS because of rape and battery. These diseases are highly stigmatized in prison, and people who are HIV+ face increased stigmatization and are often denied proper treatment. Failure on the part of correctional administrators to promote harm reduction strategies further compounds the problem. Overall, transphobia and Cissexism permeate the boundaries of health care in prisons and severely affect the lives of trans inmates.

Understanding the atrocities that trans and non-binary persons face is a means of better understanding the ways in which trans people face abuse in society as a result of the strict implementation of the binary. The lived experiences of trans gender women and gender non-conforming persons within the PIC exemplifies the ways in which hierarchical power structures are created and reproduced in order to police and control deviant bodies. The PIC is a key example of an institution that profits on the mistreatment and oppression of marginalized persons and communities. In doing so, it reproduces social inequalities related to sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, and class.
ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT JUSTICE?

DO YOU HAVE A LEGAL DEGREE?

HELP US FIGHT THE PRISON SYSTEM!

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE EVERY YEAR ARE WRONGLY ACCUSED OF CRIMES OR FACE UNREASONABLY HARSH SENTENCING. WE NEED LAWYERS TO DO PRO BONO WORK.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL THE NUMBER BELOW AND COME JOIN OUR TEAM.

WE ARE ALSO HIRING INTERNS AT THIS TIME

CALL: 729-3489-0099
These images are part of a project that Colorado College student, Mads Engel, is working on. The purpose is to raise awareness about the Prison Industrial Complex and the specific impact of forced isolation on incarcerated individuals. Like others before it, the project sends out photo request forms to prison inmates in solitary confinement and connects their requests with volunteers who create the images and send them back. Above are some of the already completed request forms and subsequent images. Mads is always looking for new volunteers; to get involved with the project email photorequestsfromsolitaryco@gmail.com or follow them on Facebook.
Inmate Chris Martinez photoshopped next to lowrider (Above)
Chris’ photo request form (Below)

We will make a photograph for you Name: Chris K. Martinez

Would you like to request one? Date: July 5, 2019

If so, fill out this form and describe a photograph you personally would like to receive. A volunteer will make a photograph based on your description below.

You may request a photograph of anything that is not prohibited by prison rules. Of course, in the space below, please describe what you would like to see in your photograph. (You could describe a person, place, object, scene or idea.) feel free to use the other side of this page to describe your request as well.

While incarcerated, it is hard to keep relationships with friends and family, no close as they once were or as we would like them to be. I have...

Do you have any specific instructions for the photographer? Please see reverse...

Organizations working to end the use of solitary confinement may use your photograph or request for purposes of public education, media use or fundraising. If so, we could use your name or you could remain anonymous.

If you would like us to use your name, what name should we use? Christopher K. Martinez

Send your responses to: Madeleine Engel
Interdisciplinary Arts at Colorado College
14 E. Cache La Poudre Street
Colorado Springs, CO 80903

Thank you with the restricted use of phones the communication is harder (it seems as if it’s the only source of communication). I have also been fortunate to have a friend that has been here for me while being “out there” in society. She has been a real true girlfriend and I would like to say thank you to her. I am a fan of Lowriders Magazine, but even then magazines are usually replete with content along with the magazine, the cars and Lowriders lifestyle has always been in my heart. Can you please take a photo of a Lowrider (my favorite is a 1959 ‘Vicky’ but in the paint somewhere I would like to photoshop the words “thank you” as if it was inscribed). I am also sending a photo of you to see if you can photoshop me into the photo as well. Chris also said, there is a quick sketch of the angle of the photo of Lowrider...
The Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) profits from orchestrated violence against poor persons, persons of color, and LGBTQIA+ persons. This violence often begins in public schools where zero-tolerance policies, high-stakes testing, insufficient education around social justice issues, and police presence create a school-to-prison pipeline that pushes some young people directly into the system (Wald; McGrew). Insofar as the public school system is an institution of the state, systemic and systematic racism are evident in the school system’s distribution of funds and treatment of students. Many LGBTQIA+ youth not only face discrimination at school but also at home. If home life is aversive or if they are kicked out of their homes, youth are more likely to experience homelessness and consequently encounter a number of associated obstacles. Non-heteronormative and gender-nonconforming youth are likely to be barred from shelters and excluded from other places established to help homeless populations. However, no federal programs have been designed to meet the needs of LGBTQIA+ youths experiencing homelessness (National Coalition for the Homeless). For these reasons, LGBTQIA+ youth are at an especially high risk for arrest and incarceration. Rather than provide marginalized youth with adequate resources and skills to succeed, the system serves to deprive and criminalize them in order to further its own capitalist agenda.

Safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ youth are scarce, especially in conservative areas like Colorado Springs where funding for social justice programs is not a priority. And when spaces do exist, they may not be accessible to everyone. Inside/Out Youth Services is working to change this for youth in Colorado Springs. The non-profit works with LGBTQIA+ youth and allies ages 13-22 to provide services ranging from emotional support to skill building. At this time Inside/Out is the only service for LGBTQIA+ youth in Colorado Springs, and its impact on the community is absolutely crucial for this population. Last year alone, they reached 600 individuals, and a 20% increase is expected this year.

Lisa Shoenstein, Inside/Out’s program manager, has been working with the organization for about a year and a half. She graduated from the University of Colorado in Denver with degrees in philosophy and social justice. She took a 50% pay cut when she started working at Inside/Out, and doesn’t regret a thing.
Lisa wanted to clarify that she is not speaking as the official poster child of Inside/Out and that her opinions do not necessarily reflect the stances of the organization as a whole.

**Interviewer:** For those who don’t know about Inside/Out, could you talk about the organization’s mission and the services you offer?

**LISA:** Sure, our mission is to educate, advocate, and empower LGBTQ youth in the Pikes Peak Region which is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning or queer youth. The organization started in 1990 and was originally funded as a program through the Public Health and then became a non-profit in (I believe) ’97 or ’98. We have been non-profit since then. The programs we run range from suicide prevention and workshops, [to] support and discussion groups. We just started a support and discussion group that is trans specific for our transgender youth, since they are facing sometimes significantly different challenges then cis-gender youth or people whose gender identity matches the sex they are assigned at birth. We do a cooking class on Wednesday to help build life skills. We got tired of seeing kids just eating microwave mac-and-cheese cups and decided we can do better—we need to do better. We do a movie night on Wednesday nights and Friday we do recreation nights...We do a lot of outreach as well, and I like to bring youth whenever I can. We took five youth, and then one more met us up, to the capital for lobby day in Denver on the 27th of February. So, we went and talked to our legislators and representatives. We do presentations for local schools, businesses, other health providers. Any opportunity I can to involve youth in those experiences. It is one thing for me to talk to an organization; it is another thing to say these are our youth. It is a different impact for everybody.

**Interviewer:** How did you choose this line of work?

**LISA:** I grew up in Colorado Springs. I graduated from Palmer. Inside/Out existed when I went to high school, but I didn’t know it existed. A friend of mine that used to sit on the board of directors made it his mission to get as many volunteers as possible and said you should do this. And I thought, you are right...I should totally do that, and so I came on as a volunteer. I am a member of the LGBTQ community and as a Colorado Springs native, I think I have really seen the climate of hostility and abusive discourse and rhetoric that is really leveraged here, and I think that makes for a real urgency. El Paso County has the fourth highest youth suicide rate in the nation—that might even be climbing. We have kids dying by suicide at Discovery Canyon High School at a horrific rate. And, some of the questions that aren’t being asked by the tasks forces that deal with these suicides are around LGBTQ status and identity, and we suspect that that’s playing a larger part than is currently being acknowledged and so we are pushing to ask those questions. The ED sits on the board of a couple of those task forces. I want these kids to know that they are amazing, that they have potential and promise. I don’t think they are hearing that a lot of places. Some of our youth come from supportive households, but many of them do not. And, the statistics for LGBTQ youth for incarceration, for drug abuse, for relationship violence, for unemployment, for suicide, for depression are just ghastly. So, anything that we can do to change the score, I am happy to be part of. I took a fifty percent pay cut to come here. My needs are simple fortunately, but the work we do here is really important. We literally save lives every time we unlock the front door and that’s a big deal: to watch these kids blossom, and find connection, and find each other and discover that they are not the only one who feels the way they do, and there are other people who are fighting through similar experiences and celebrating similar victories. The importance of that cannot be emphasized enough.”

**Interviewer:** You mentioned drugs and the prison system. How would you say that your experience working with youths in Colorado Springs has altered your perception of the Prison Industrial Complex?
foster care and not supportive situations. Probably a quarter of our youth are in the system one way or another as young people. And again, recidivism isn’t a guarantee but it’s a real thing especially when as a young person you have this idea enforced with the label that you’re a criminal, you’re a deviant, and you’ll always be than. That’s a really powerful message to have to turn around at any age, but when youth are already convinced of that at 16, 17, 18, 19, that’s a lot of work to try to undo here in the couple hours we get them a week.

Interviewer: Could you speak to the current political climate?

LISA: Part of the political climate [is that] there’s a new urgency that people recognize. The urgency has always been there but under the current regime, the current dictatorship - you can change that if you need to, but I’m a revolutionary at heart – people are scared. These young people are scared. And I think they have reason to be. Parents are scared. People in the community are more moved to do something than I think perhaps if the election had gone another way, we might have labored under the illusion that everything’s fine because now we have a woman president and everything’s hunky dory so the work is done. When really communities that have been sidelined and marginalized have always been fighting that fight. The fights that we’re fighting now are not new. They have been around, and they’re just more obvious now. So I’m not exactly thrilled about the political climate, but I see a lot of people moved to action that might not have been otherwise and I have to look for the bright side in this line of work or I will freak out. Last year we served 600 unique kids, 600 unique individuals, and I would expect to see a 20% increase in that, at least 20%, which is really exciting.

Interviewer: How do you mediate difference within these spaces and further educate young persons about identity and positionality?

LISA: All these butterflies on the walls are the kind of agreed upon guides to conduct in this space. And we try to run a very youth-driven space, because honestly there is nothing I hate worse than policing young people. ‘Put some space between your bodies. Get your feet off the couch. Why are you pouring your popcorn in the couch? What’re you doing? Are you gonna clean that up?’ Like that is my least favorite thing. I don’t have kids. That’s why I don’t have kids. And I don’t think it’s actually effective, but when youth can hold each other accountable, that actually has much more impact. There are facilitators here that will kind of watch what’s going on at a kind of a meta level and as often as possible, we try to refer the youth to each other to kind of mediate behavior and to moderate behavior. We do a thing called check in every day that there are youth here that we say name, age, pronouns, everybody selects a butterfly rule so that it’s constantly a part of
the conversation, and then we'll do a question of the day. We also do a butterfly rule of the month and a coping skill of the month so that these are things that are constantly being discussed. And if we see something get out of hand, which sometimes we do, we find several different ways to bring it up in a group and engage in group discussion and get everybody's input. That spawned a lot of conversations about what it means to be a safe space. What it means to be a safe space for everybody. What are the practical things we can do to ensure that, beyond just saying that it's safe space, how do we make it that way? And what does it mean to be an ally? Allies are welcome here. Straight young men who want to behave like allies will always have a place here. We want everybody to have a place here. So what does it mean then to be an ally, to be non-LGBTQ and to be here, what behavior is expected? To the youth that are LGBTQ, what do they see as making a good ally? And in that way, they can kind of tell each other what the expectation is. And that's a piece that as I get more into my role as program director, my boss has really tasked me with finding ways to make: to bring these ideas into the practical pieces of our programming so that these are conversations that we are constantly having explicitly. And, as much as I hate to police youth, I love turning their thinking are pretty good ways you can handle that?’ to really provoke them into problem solving, which for some of our kiddos is a completely new experience. Nobody's asking them what they think, how they would handle it, what they think is a good idea. If they say something outrageous, instead of saying 'That's dumb!' challenging them, 'I'm going to push back on that a little. 'Why do you think that would be helpful? Why do you think that wouldn't be helpful?’ And doing that publicly as often as is appropriate so that everybody can benefit from that conversation. You know, if you're in school right, and you're in a class, if some person asks a question, you know there's somebody else in that class who's got the same question. So it's very much like that here. If one person wants to know and they're willing to go out on a limb in front of everybody and ask, I want everybody to benefit from that discussion...

Interviewer: Yeah, does that create a sense of validation?

LISA: I don't know that they're getting [validation]. Some of the youth are and some of our youth aren't. I don't know that people are being taught to think and to think critically. And part of this comes from my educational background, you can't get a degree in philosophy without really having to do an annoying amount of critical thinking and analysis and then taking that when I got interested in social justice issues, it's great if we're gonna sit down and think great thought but if they're not helping real people – I don't want to stand around the academy and eat cheese and talk about how clever we are, because we decided that language doesn't really say anything. That's not the kind of philosophy I want to do. We can take these great ideas and apply them to real people and help teach them to think and teach them to question and teach them to rely on each other rather than some super structure, I sneak that in as much as possible and try to incorporate it into the way we do things. We'll be here. You can come to me for the answer, but I'm not going to say 'Aw, I'm sure it will all work out O.K.' I've never said that. Some of my youth laugh because it starts out 'Well I don't know how that's going to work out but it's going to get different. It may get worse before it gets better because that's reality.' And I want our kids to know that they can come here inside the space and have safe, supportive, trusted adults to come to. Even if you have trusted adults as parents, growing up with trusted adults who aren't your parents is vital and can be the difference literally between life and death for these young people. And then to take what nourishment they receive here, to take that out in the world prepared for the possibility that the rest of the world may not be kind, safe, and loving. There are some really serious challenges that they are going to face and we're making sure that they have some legs under the table. Not just one leg under the table; get a bunch of legs under there, coping skills, and suicide prevention, and how to be able to cook for yourself if you're 19 and you got thrown out and you're working a minimum
wage job because you can’t get a better job because you have no experience, and you have 30 dollars a week to eat, how do you do that and live? How do you negotiate bad situations if you have drug problems? If you have self-harm habits? What do you do before going to shoot up? What can you do before cutting yourself? Three things. I need you to think of three things. Not just that you could do, but that you yourself would do. And try those out. I need you to try those out. And really pushing that, positively pushing that responsibility back to these young people to help them build resiliency so that they know they’re capable of doing that, they’re capable of problem solving, they’re capable of self-care. Because, I think the truth is, all of them are. And if nobody has ever shown them that, then that’s what we get to do. And that can be tough when they’re already 18, 19, 20 and kind of hard-boiled and thick skinned about the world, but we have some pretty amazing breakthroughs. The most troublesome youth that 98% they make me want to pull my hair out but the other 2% they have these moments of vulnerability that are so moving, that remind us of the silhouette of the fragile young person who’s in there under all those hard layers who just needs somebody to care long enough to give them a shot, and we get to do that which is pretty cool.

Lisa stated that the academy’s philosophy is not the kind of philosophy she wants to do. Instead she works with youth to create theory through their real-life experiences. She strives to encourage intellectual conversations and develop critical thinking behaviors among youth, ultimately enabling youth to define their space and define the roles of their allies on their own terms. These discussions embody the idea that theory does not necessarily come from the academy. In “Black Feminist Thought,” social theorist Patricia Collins works to redefine what we think of as intellectual discourse. She acknowledges the Black feminist intellectuals who exist outside of the academy and the extensive history of Black women’s intellectual discourse. Theory that is created and circulated by regular people through art, poetry, etc. is not inferior to other forms of theory. Social thought, she says, comes in many forms, all of which must be valued.

We cannot prove which theories are “correct,” or how exactly they should be applied and followed. What we can do is ask the questions: To who is this theory accessible? Understandable? Can those in pain use this theory to heal? In “Theory as Liberatory Practice,” bell hooks argues, “Any theory that cannot be shared in everyday conversation cannot be used to educate the public” (hooks, 38). Theory must have links to lived realities; it must come from positions of discomfort and struggle. If theory is created as a way to cope with pain and empower those who experience it, the gap between theory and practice will close. This is exactly what is happening at Inside/Out. The program teaches youth to challenge each other, spark intellectual discussions, and create new ways of thinking about their experiences. Rather than an administrator constantly regulating, youth are able to hold each other accountable, which Lisa says is far more effective.

All Inside/Out youth learn how to help each other become better allies and advocates; LGTBQIA+ youth specifically are able to take the lead in articulating their needs and boundaries. No one wants to admit that their “feminism” is damaging to others, but this accountability is absolutely crucial in building a practice where no one is sidelined or ignored. The kind of accountability that Lisa describes is not so much “calling out” or “knocking down,” but is rather practice of creating a communal vision of something greater that can be worked on together. There is no such thing as a perfect activist. However, in considering how activists like Lisa Shoenstein navigate forms of inequality, we can better theorize about our own forms of activism.
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Moms Behind Bars: Stereotypes of Black Female Criminality Fuel the Prison Industrial Complex

Article by Olivia Blackmon
What are the consequences of buying into stereotypes of Black mothers? Why do white Americans entertain the notion of an irresponsible, single Black mother who raises delinquents and uses welfare money to pay for drugs? In *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander explains that this conflation of Blackness with crime does not happen “organically”, but is rather constructed by media elites who profit from writing drug war propaganda. Thus, images of the “Black welfare mother” and the “crack baby” are tools used by both the criminal justice system and the child welfare system to enforce a racist, sexist, and classist agenda obvious in arrest rates and convictions.

These stereotypes were first popularized during Reagan’s campaign for presidency, as he consistently referred to “welfare queens” who show no desire to do work, use government aid to support a drug habit, and continue to have children out of wedlock (Gilman, 247). The same stereotype has since been employed as a scare tactic, convincing voters that immoral and scheming Black mothers are cheating them out of their hard-earned tax money (Douglas). Poor mothers who need access to health-related and financial resources are then refused help on this basis and left to operate within a system that forms and fortifies harmful stereotypes. In her article, “Prison, Foster Care, and the Systemic Punishment of Black Mothers,” Dorothy Roberts states, These stereotypes do not simply percolate in some disem-bodied white psyche. They are reinforced and recreated by foster care and prison, which leave the impression that Black women are naturally prone to commit crimes and abuse their children. Stereotypes of maternal irresponsibility created and enforced by the child welfare system’s disproportionate supervision of Black children help to sustain mass incarceration, and stereotypes of Black female criminality help to sustain foster care.” (Roberts, 1492)

As such, the “welfare mom” stereotype is employed to purport foster care and prison systems, and mass incarceration of Black mothers is a tool by which family and community ties are broken and racial disadvantage is transferred to subsequent generations.

In her book, *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed, scholar of feminist, queer, and critical race theory, argues “what you are perceived as being can be what stops you from being” (Ahmed, 143). Simply put, others’ perceptions of you can act as walls – limits on where and how you can exist. She states, “The walls are precisely evidence of the materiality of race and gender; though of course this is a materiality that only some come up against,” (Ahmed, 147). Although the walls Ahmed is describing here are metaphysical, we can see their physical manifestations in prisons, where very tangible walls are built around black and brown bodies. In “Celling Black Bodies: Black Women in the Global Prison Industrial Complex,” Prison Abolitionist Julia Sudbury argues, “the challenge... is to make visible the women hidden behind prison walls and to dismantle the profitable synergies between drug enforcement, the prison industry, international financial institutions, media, and politicians that are celling Black women in ever increasing numbers” (Sudbury, 72).

Black women in particular are the fastest growing prison population, yet they are almost never convicted of violent crimes that would pose a threat to the general public. The number of Black women incarcerated for minor drug offenses, mainly personal use, increased over 800% between the years of 1986 and 1991 (The Sentencing Project). According to research conducted in 2012, Black women have a one in nineteen chance of being incarcerated (as opposed to a one in forty-five chance for Latina women and one in one hundred and eighteen for white women). Most incarcerated women are mothers who have children under the age of eighteen (The Sentencing Project).

In *Chicana Lives and Criminal Justice: Voices from El Barrio*, activist and academic Juanita Diaz-Cotto explains that poor mothers who cannot afford the costs of private drug recovery programs are funneled into the criminal justice system. For this reason, poor mothers are less likely to seek help for addiction because they know it may lead to loss of parental rights. Diaz-Cotto states, “For those women who have substance abuse problems, a combination of mandatory re-
porting requirements and the child abuse and neglect laws serve to deprive them of access to medical services, pre-natal care, and even substance abuse counseling” (Diaz-Cotto, 24) In Tennessee, for example, state law sends mothers to prison for giving birth to a child who shows symptoms of withdrawal. Mandatory sentencing laws like this are increasing the number of mothers in prison, and the number of children with a mother in prison more than doubled between 1991 and 2007. In 2007, there were 1.7 million children in America with at least one parent in prison, more than seventy percent of whom were children of color;” (Roberts, 1481).

Most incarcerated mothers are the primary caregivers of their children at the time they go to prison, and many children do not have a father at home to take on the primary caregiver role (Roberts, 1482). If fathers are already “warehoused in prison” at the time of the mother’s incarceration, another family member must step up to become their child’s caregiver (Alexander, 180). If this is not possible, the child is taken by the state. However, the state is in no way prepared to be a parent. If the mother is released from prison, she may not have access to jobs, stable housing, or welfare programs because of her history with drug use. Consequently, she is deemed unable to meet the child welfare agency’s standards for reunification with her children. Her parental rights are terminated. The convergence of prison and foster care often means losing custody of children permanently. Many mothers consider this the ultimate state punishment.

The long-term effects of foster care on children in state custody could be the subject of a separate essay, but it is important to acknowledge here that foster and group homes often act as a channel into the Prison Industrial Complex. People that lived in a foster home at some point in their lifetime are much more likely to experience homelessness and a range of related issues as consequence (Roberts, 1480). Moreover, the criminalization of homelessness is just another way that underlying, systemic forms of oppression function in the U.S.

The social services that benefit poor women are often cut to accommodate budget as a result of increased prison populations (Diaz-Cotto, 26). Poor women of color suffer the most from these cuts, as lack of resources and liberties push them into unplanned motherhood and the PIC. In “The Liberation of Black Women,” Pauli Murray discusses the increased economic responsibility of Black mothers in comparison to white mothers, and the racial difference in union employment. Black mothers are overrepresented in nonunion jobs, particularly in nonunion domestic employment (Murray, 206). These jobs are not likely to offer overtime pay, pension plans, family healthcare, or adequate maternal leave options. Sudbury argues for the connection between these prison-like conditions of nonunion labor and the rising number of women in prisons in the global north.

“Prisons serve a vital role in suppressing dissent and invisibilizing disenfranchised populations. They therefore maintain the viability of corporate globalization and mask its devastating effects on global majority communities. Prisons also play a direct role in capital accumulation since their operation generates profit for corporations engaged in building, equipping and operating them as well as those employing prisoners as cheap labour. Increasingly, Black women and women of colour are the raw material that fuel the prison industrial complex: as scapegoats of tough-on-crime rhetoric, targets of drug busting operations that generate millions for police, customs and military budgets, or workers sewing and assembling electronics in prison workshops” (Sudbury, 72).

Thus, there is a need for a new, anti-racist feminism which employs cross-movement efforts to address the various angles of systemic injustice that work to punish “dangerous” parents of color and their equally “troubling” children. We need to advocate for intersectional feminism, universal healthcare, and the decriminalization of mothers struggling with drug abuse issues.
If you have an incarcerated family member or loved one, please get involved and join one of our support groups.

INTERESTED IN TALKING?

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WWW.PRISON.SUPPORT.PROJECT.COM
Black & Pink was founded to connect LGBTQ inmates and “free world” allies in the prison abolitionist movement. The organization’s work, which is driven by inmates, includes countless services for groups most targeted by the PIC. Free world allies organize protests, accompany inmates in court, help those who are released transition back to society, and provide resources and companionship for inmates during incarceration. Any and all inmates are welcome to sign up for a pen-pal service through Black & Pink to connect with allies. We used this service to connect with D*****.

1. Could you introduce yourself?

“My name is D*****. I am from Wichita, Kansas. I have been incarcerated since 2005, and I am serving a 15-year sentence, which I only have about 11 months left on to do. I have three grown children, 2 daughters, one son, and four grand-children, which have came into existence since I have been incarcerated. I am not a bad person just have made some bad choices. I enjoy helping others when I can. I am compassionate and loyal. I am a straight Black male. I got to where I am due to that someone gave me up to the police so they watched me. I still take full responsibility for my actions in why I am here cause if I hadn’t been doing what I was doing then I would be at home, I didn’t have to sell drugs but I did.”

2. How has your experience been affected by your race and class?

“By being incarcerated you see so many Black and brown brothers here in the federal bureau of prisons, I am aware that the mass incarceration that had been going on for a couple of decades was designed to incarcerate all peoples of color, we are the most hated people here on these shores of the united states by a people whose nature is to cause chaos, destruction, and bloodshed. The judicial system is racist as well. It was set up not to give us equal and fair justice.”

3. How do you feel race, class, and sexuality impact the social dynamics and interactions between inmates? Between inmates and officers?

“Well as far as race goes in here, they are always using the divide and conquer, they like to keep inmates battling with each other, the Blacks against the Mexicans and the Blacks against the whites.... Now the officers most of the white officers are racist and you have some that’s not but most of them try to treat us less than a man which we are that first then an inmate and they always want to threaten us with an incident report or by threatening us to send us to solitary confinement and once again most of our people that work in these prisons oppress us harder than the white ones due because they want to be accepted by the whites in their social circle which they will never accept them they only use them for a means to an end.”
4. Describe your access to resources in terms of legal help and mental and physical health.

“We have access to a law computer to look up cases and etc. If ones are fighting their case for need to file an administrative remedy, I don’t know how access to mental health is but physical health well you have access but they don’t solve any problems, they always put you off or tell you to buy something from the store such as aspirin or etc.”

5. What are your dreams/aspirations for the future?

“My dream is to get out and start my own trucking company so that I can do for self and be in the position to help others as well as be able to leave my grandchildren a financial head start in life so that they wont have to struggle. I also want to be able to help children that are in need and maybe be a mentor to those children that don’t have a father figure in their life so they don’t take the road I took that landed me in federal prison.”

6. Has your experience changed your perception of your identity (race/class/ethnicity/gender/sexuality) or your relationship with yourself? If so, in what ways?

“Being in prison had made me very pro Black. I love my people even those who don’t love themselves and it always saddens me when I see them acting other than themselves... Coming to prison has made me know who I am as a Black man and love myself and accept my own. I enjoy reading especially about history and I have learned that most of the things we have been taught in the public school system is a lie as far as our history, so as I have learned about it over the years it made me love my people and myself a lot more.”
It is a commonly held conception that people in prison, especially those with marginalized identities, are completely at fault for their incarceration. The initiation of the “war on drugs” and the development of racist tropes such as “crack mother” have been disseminated to perpetuate unidimensional perceptions of marginalized communities. These are deeply related to populations of incarcerated people (Sudbury, 169). As a result, many people fail to consider the numerous “axes of oppression” that lead marginalized people to criminality (Collins, 447). Black women have been particularly vulnerable to incarceration within the prison industrial complex (PIC): comprising 54% of women in prison in 2010 (Bureau of Justice Statistics). This heightened vulnerability is fueled by racist economic, social, and legal institutions that force black women into criminality. As Audre Lorde considers in “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference”, Black women are currently the “group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior” (Lorde, 289).

One of the most significant axes of oppression that lead Black women to be charged for drug related crimes is sexual assault and battery. African American women experience domestic violence at a rate 35% higher than that of white women, and roughly 2.5% higher than the rate of other races (Gross, 29). In many cases, Black women are pushed into criminality as a coping mechanism to abuser’s threats or as a survival mechanism after escaping their abuser’s violence. Black women are more likely to avoid seeking help though legal or social institutions because these institutions have been erected within a racist and discriminatory framework. As such, these organizations fail to adequately protect Black women. Therefore, it is essential to understand the systems and conditions that limit the mobility and freedom of Black persons and leverage their criminalization.

For incarcerated women, there is a high correlation between drug use, histories of abuse, and socioeconomic status. Battered women frequently begin their drug habits as a way to prevent or lessen abuse—and its impacts—within a relationship (Moe, 125). This habit often
leads to addiction and creates further dependency between women and their abuser based on access to addictive substances and money (Arnold, 155). Moreover, for poor women who do not have access to health care resources, drugs and alcohol are frequently self-prescribed to numb the physical pain after an assault. (Moe, 125). It is important to note that the statistics on drug use are not an accurate representation of the reality of drug use in the United States. The documented drug use is the drug use of populations that are vulnerable to police profiling and arrest - the same populations that are vulnerable to domestic violence.

Due to their positional-ity in society, Black women are more vulnerable to incarceration as a result of drug use and addiction. Economic marginality, poor schooling, and inadequate job opportunities are some of the axes of oppression which lead black women to economic dependence on their abuser. All of these realities converge to limit the mobility of Black women, heightening their dependency on their abusers (Crenshaw, 485). Additionally, Black women are the largest population in the United States that lack access to healthcare. This means that they are more likely to become dependent on self-medicating with illicit drugs (Arnold, 157). When addiction ensues, Black women become even more engulfed in poverty and are more likely to take part in crime as a means of survival. This endless cycle of poverty, abuse, and drug addiction is far too common, and is a result of the systematic racism and sexism that Black women face in our society. It is through these systems that Black women are funneled into incarceration.

Furthermore, social programs neglect to protect Black women from battery and sexual abuse. The anti-violence movement—active throughout the past decade—has emphasized the notion that vulnerability to abuse is universal (Miller, 117). In an attempt to prevent the stigmatization of violence against women as a racial issue, the movement has utilized phrases such as “any woman could be a battered woman” (Richie, 90). According to feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, activists believed this might prevent “opponents [from] dismiss[ing] violence as a minority problem and therefore, not deserving of aggressive action” (Crenshaw, 487). However, Crenshaw further asserts that in appealing to ‘all women,’ “women of color can be erased by the strategic silences of anti-racism and feminism” (Crenshaw, 487). This deficient anti-violence movement has shaped the policies erected to end violence against women, and black women have suffered as a result.

Moreover, the institutions that supposedly exist to protect battered women often discriminate against poor Black women. As Beth Richie articulates in her novel “Arrested Justice”, Black women who report abuse and sexual assault to state officials are more likely to encounter uninformed service providers, unsympathetic community members, and rigid representatives of the state who blame them for their experiences and ignore the structural conditions in place to oppress them (Richie, 119). Crenshaw further articulates this as she notes that women of color are also less likely to call the police. She calls this “a hesitancy likely due to a general unwillingness among people of color to subject their lives to the scrutiny and control of the police force that is frequently hostile” (Crenshaw, 488). The hostile and discriminatory nature of legal institutions leaves Black Women much more vulnerable to repeated abuse. As a result, many Black women are forced to take part in illegal activity (prostitution, fraud, theft, and violence) in order to survive (Arnold, 153).

Laws regarding drug related offenses serve to punish marginalized communities, especially Black women. The passing of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act in 1986 sought to target drug users as criminals instead of as persons in need of medical treatment (Sudbury, 170). As a result, mandatory sentencing began being prescribed for those who committed drug offenses (Sudbury, 171). This law has most heavily impacted marginalized women; this is evident through the drastic increase of incarcerated Black and Latino women after the law’s passing. Between 1986 and 1991, the number of Black women in federal prison for drug related crime increased by 828% (Miller, 93). Additionally, 68% of Black women in prison report that they have been victim to repeated instances of abuse and assault prior to incarcera-
tion (Gross, 29). These statistics indicate the importance of understanding the relationship between the incarceration of Black women and the pervasiveness of violence against them.

Drug trafficking is one of the many ways that the mandatory sentencing of Black women—often victims of sexual assault—has increased. Women’s subordinate roles in abusive relationships transcend to their role within drug trafficking operations (Sudbury, 174). Almost exclusively serving as mules, women are coerced or forced into drug trafficking by abusive partners and receive little or no monetary reward for their services (Sudbury, 172). As these individuals accumulate no wealth, they have very little mobility or freedom to leave violent relationships or the illicit activities they may be involved in. However, due to their public and direct role in the trafficking, they are the most subject to being caught and potentially incarcerated (Sudbury, 177).

According to the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, the mandatory sentence for drug related crimes can be waived for those who provide substantial assistance in the prosecution of another person (Sudbury, 171). However, because of the vulnerable and dependent place that survivors of sexual assault inhabit, they are far less likely to betray their partner or others involved in the trafficking (Sudbury, 171). Often, these women are not even provided with enough information about the operation to rat out others (Sudbury, 171). Due to their subordinated status within these illegal activities, it is far more likely for women to face incarceration and receive longer sentences (Sudbury, 171). Once again, due to economic marginality and the prevalence of abuse, Black women are more vulnerable to incarceration.

Not only are mandatory sentences increasingly detrimental to Black women, but the determination of mandatory sentencing is heavily littered with racist and classist undertones (Gross, 30). Cheaper drugs, which are more common within marginalized communities, usually have a far greater minimum sentencing. For example, crack-cocaine—cheaper and more common—has a minimum sentence 100 times greater than powder cocaine (Sudbury, 171). Crack-cocaine has been associated with Black populations despite the fact that it is far more commonly used among white populations. The Bureau of Justice has determined that Black women are far more likely to be sentenced for drug related offenses than white women, and their sentences are longer and harsher (Miller, 119). This has been attributed to racial bias within the justice system, where judges stereotype Black women as criminals and drug attics (Miller, 119). As Patricia Hill Collins considers in “Black Feminist Thought”, “a Black women’s standpoint...is not only embedded in context but exists in a situation characterized by domination” (Collins, 447). Evidently, legal institutions have been built upon racist frameworks that seek to control and dominate Black women’s bodies through erroneous drug related charges.

Subject to racism, sexism, economic marginality, and high rates of domestic abuse, Black women inhabit a particularly marginalized position within American Society. Social and legal institutions predicated upon racism and racial biases leave Black women with little economic mobility and in positions of extraordinary risk for domestic violence. The criminalization of the drug use—that often follows instances of sexual assault—functions through widely accepted racist-driven narratives that serve to funnel Black women into the prison system. This cycle is a profound example of the policing of Black bodies—especially Black women’s bodies—through systems and institutions set up to discipline, redirect, and erase the lives of individuals and communities of color.
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Letter From the Editor

The Prison Industrial Complex

Lisa Shoenstein with Inside/Out Youth Services: Empowering the LGBTQIA+ Youth of Colorado Springs

Bodies Under Lock and Key: The Policing of Transgender Women in Male Prisons
The Subjugation of Black Women’s Bodies: Pervasive Violence and Mass Incarceration


Photo Citations


Additional images and photographs were contributed by Incarceration Nation: exhibition by Colorado College’s Prison Project.
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From left to right: Kelsey Maxwell ('18), Emily Gaston ('18), Will Cannistraro ('20), and Olivia Blackmon ('18).