



Ashes Ashes

words by Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Shana Agid, Dalaaja Foreman, Sophia Gurulé, Pilar Maschi, and Albert Saint Jean, with the voice of Alia Ali

*On the occasion of the announced closure of Rikers Island as a jail complex:
A meditation on its past, present, and its future demise
through an abolitionist imagining by organizers and thinkers.*

Music by Cirilo Montenegro-Hunt and Ashley Hunt
By Ashley Hunt 2020

POSTSCRIPT

Lockdown, Abolitionist Consciousness, and the Carcerality of COVID-19: A Postscript to ‘Ashes Ashes’

An interview with Ruth Wilson Gilmore

“Ashes Ashes” saw its post-production interrupted by the spread, stoppages and shut-downs of the COVID-19 pandemic. As many prisons, jails and detention centers, including Rikers Island itself, were ravaged at the intersection of the virus and the institutional neglect that characterizes imprisonment, this follow-up interview with Ruth Wilson Gilmore was conducted on May 24th, 2020, via Zoom between Los Angeles and Lisbon.

Ashley Hunt: Okay, we’re recording here. My first question is where we were, you and me, when we last spoke, and where are you now?

Ruth Wilson Gilmore: The last time we had a conversation face-to-face, Ashley, we were in my living room in Washington Heights, in Manhattan, in the city of New York and the state of New York, in the United States. And it was not a long time before New York went on pause, and the entire country ground slowly, but not evenly to a halt.

Now I’m sitting in Lisbon, Portugal, where the state of emergency was lifted a couple of weeks ago, and the country is slowly reopening. Things here are extremely well-organized. Very few people have died as compared with the United States and many other countries. And you

and I are seeing each other face-to-face now thanks to amazing internet technologies.

AH: And in relation to those differing impacts of COVID-19, is there any correlation you’ve noticed between the US’ COVID-19 statistics and its imprisonment statistics?

RWG: A couple of weeks ago, when fewer people in the United States had died, but the number of people who had died of COVID catastrophes was already reaching astronomical heights, I noticed that roughly one-in-four people on the planet who’s locked up is locked up in a prison or jail or detention center in the United States, and that at the time, about one-in-four people on the planet known to have died of COVID has died in the United States.

Now that could just be a coincidence, but there seems to be something underlying that rather profound connection that over the last two weeks is becoming more and more clear to the eye. And what’s becoming clear to the eye is that *where life is precious, life is precious*.

And by that, I don’t mean that people should necessarily fuss over one another, but I do mean that people — through their governmental institutions, private institutions, family, and community institutions — look after each other and do not abandon one another, especially when things become hard.

In the United States over the last several decades, it has become a matter

of political expediency, moral failure, infrastructural neglect and social catastrophe that all kinds of people have been abandoned; whether their abandonment is to prison and jail, to substandard housing, to the remarkably uneven access that people have (or do not have) to healthcare, to jobs, to insurance, to retirement and so forth.

So if we put all these things together, what we can see is not so much that carcerality makes vulnerability to COVID happen, but rather, *places where carcerality is an all-purpose solution to social problems, we see the deadly effects of COVID so clearly on the surface of society, everywhere*. We can see this in Brazil where things are very bad. We can see it in the United Kingdom where things are really bad. We can see it in the Russian Federation where things are really bad. And so we have to ask the question: How is it that carcerality and vulnerability (to a virus that nobody even thought about six months ago) go together?



AH: So what about that in terms of the politics and enforcement of lockdown restrictions?

RWG: Do you mean lockdown in general? Like social distancing, “people stay home” lockdown? Or do you mean lockdown inside lockups?

AH: I’m thinking outside of actual, official lockups.

RWG: I don’t even remember what year it was, but when those unhappy brothers blew up the Boston marathon, one of the things that struck me was how swiftly a teeming metropolis area went into this condition called “lockdown.” It was an amazing thing, perhaps necessary to safeguard people’s lives, because nobody knew exactly what had happened. But the idea of lockdown that circulated, in the area of unforeseeable deadliness, erupting in a city or in a school where there’s a “school shooter,” where it’s also called “lockdown,” it has become very much a part of an everyday U.S. consciousness.

What do we do when a virus is moving rapidly through a society? We can’t see it, we don’t know where it is, we can’t measure its arrival, we can’t be sure of its departure, so we should all cooperate to lessen the likelihood that this virus will touch too many people. So far so good: cooperate to lessen the likelihood that the virus will touch too many people.

But it interests me that this cooperation, this lifesaving impulse, is “lockdown.” I’m interested in understanding what goes through all different kinds of people’s minds when they normalize that what should save lives is called “lockdown” rather than something else.

And I’m not saying that if we just hit a nicer name for it, everybody would be cool and not coughing on people who work at Costco. That’s not my point. My point is how, and to what extent have we become such thoroughly militarized subjects that lockdown is the way we think about being in the world toward the goal of

achieving some kind of group safety; and how, and to what extent do people who think that they ought be exempt from those protocols express their insistence upon their own exemption. Whether that exemption is to go to the state house with guns and say, “let us free,” or making oneself vulnerable to COVID as an expression of freedom; or whether, and to what extent, people imagine that the only way to be safe from COVID is for the police to enforce protocols in whatever communities the police decide to enforce those

through the social arrangements that would best impede that movement, and what the consequences of those social arrangements ought to be.

I’ve talked to people in Egypt, where the government is quite authoritarian, but the response to the virus has been extremely good from a public health point of view. And all of the hospitals, including the military hospitals, are open to the general public. I’ve talked to people in West Africa and South Africa and a few other places around the world. We see that it’s not just a matter

Ashes Ashes (After Rikers)

I

When Rikers Island was covered in cages, it was made into a secret.

Cut off from the city, fortified, accessible only by a mile-long bridge that crossed the River like a moat to a castle, a part of this island’s fortification was that it could no longer be seen.

An island made of ash, it was built up upon a smaller island, extended with landfill made from burnt garbage — tons and tons of ashes from the city’s 19th century trash.

Burned at waste dumps that blackened the sky and debris swept up from city streets, this trash was hauled through the river on barges, built up into layers of island by the city’s prisoners, building a bigger, hidden landscape for their own, new cages.

At one end of Manhattan stood the world’s most iconic symbol for liberty in a statue, while up the River, between Manhattan, Queens and the Bronx, were hidden what that symbol couldn’t admit to — people: people from whom liberty’s wealth was extracted, hour by hour, body by body, block by block, red lined by the banks and blue lined by the police. Both lines strangled and tangled, hogtied and handcuffed, the hidden dimension of a freedom that masked its bondage in the language of crime.

protocols. So that’s one thing I think about when thinking about “lockdown.”

Various countries have instituted all kinds of social distancing and mask requirements and emptied streets, and all kinds of things to keep the virus from circulating. It’s not a matter of politics that the virus can go from person to person to person. But what is a matter of politics is how people sort

of the austerity driven politics of the United States or the United Kingdom that lead to this particularly militarized and police-driven way of thinking. But rather there is this fragility, all over the surface of the planet today, that we can all attribute to COVID, but it’s also attributed to both the international and transnational relations of global capitalism — which make possible the

fact that a relatively poor state in Northeast Brazil has had to compete with the United States of America to get personal protective gear for people who work in their hospitals, where they had to re-route shipments from China through Addis Ababa instead of New York so that the shipments aren’t taken — which is to say seized — by a rich country. It’s really a remarkable thing.

And all of this is related to this question of lockdown, and what underlies lockdown, which is how polities respond to an uncontrollable threat by figuring out who can be more readily abandoned, in an organized way, and who then should be policed with organized violence, as opposed to some other response.

AH: One of the first days that things started to loosen up in New York City, in what we thought was the end of COVID’s “first wave,” two black men were beaten by police — one for not wearing protective gear and the other one just for being a bystander. Yet in some communities, there is no enforcement at all. I’m thinking about this selective enforcement, on one hand, against many free folks’ metaphor for their quarantine fatigue, complaining, “I’m imprisoned.” I’m thinking about this against what you said about us becoming such militarized subjects: I for one am absolutely not locked down in a prison, and I believe I should not equate my inconvenience with the conditions of those who are, but I also don’t think it’s accurate to say that we aren’t also all “carceral subjects,” where even the relatively free are bound up in and harmed by mass carcerality.

RWG: There are these two kinds of autonomy that people try to realize. One is the autonomy to be able to move around, while the other autonomy is the ability to stay put, and the dialectics of these shape so

much of how people experience space in place in the world. So the kinds of things that interrupt the ability to move around include things like international borders, the inability to pay for transportation costs, or the way police police; using certain kinds of optics and other habits to impede the movement of some people, while enabling the movement of others.

But similarly, the ability to stay put has everything to do with whether or not one needs to show some kind of identification to be in a particular territory, or whether one is allowed to sleep in the subway at night when one has nowhere else to sleep, or whether one can sit outside of a supermarket panhandling and hoping to get a bite to eat — all of these things are interrelated.

So at international borders, the way that people's skin appears to certain kinds of observers tells them that that arrangement of skin over muscles and flesh can proceed or may not proceed. Everyone can tell the story about being snatched on the street or at the airport, or at the train station or in the subway, or riding on the freeway; people have these stories that they tell, and they all resolve in one way or another into how we can understand *what underlies carcerality in the first place*. And what underlies carcerality in the first place is not at all crime and punishment, but rather it is the ability of individuals, households, institutions, including states, to enable some people to move and to prevent other people from moving.

So over the last, you know, half a millennium, the word “freedom” has become a cry of entitlement, a cry of desire, a cry of opposition, a cry of contentment. If you read and you study, you see “freedom” keeps coming up, under the aegis of the decolonial, or of Marxist struggle or various other aegises, where the struggle has to

do with how we can, each of us, *as space-time*, be in and move through and therefore make space-time that is in excess of our bodies.

So in a place like the city of New York, where so many people are locked up for so many different reasons, and so many are forbidden to move, it's not surprising to me that people cooped up under COVID but who are not actually under the control of armed officials who

where people are quite literally locked down, the deadliness of COVID is circulating and people are sick. And many people will probably suffer tremendously because they can't go anywhere, and they're not getting any kind of care. And many of my comrades rightly say, “we have to free the people who are locked up because that's their only hope for living.” And yet, nobody's being freed.

to do with that. But I do know that a complaint doesn't make political consciousness, even if it might open some people up so that political consciousness comes in. All kinds of other things have to happen too. Art is essential. And what I've been talking about lately as *rehearsal* is also essential, asking, “what can we rehearse that brings into being a world that is different from this world.”

And going back to New York city, and the fact that Rikers Island is such a deadly place, so many people fought for such a long time to close Rikers, but unfortunately, that struggle diverged into two streams. One stream was an abolitionist struggle: Close it and do other things. And the second stream was not abolitionist: Close it and keep doing the same things, but elsewhere.

“We're going to say we'll close Rikers, but we'll spend \$11 billion to build four new jails that are going to be just so wonderfully luxurious that people won't mind that they're in jail, the way they mind that they're in jail now.” And here the dynamic triangle that connects policing and organized violence with a really big chunk of the city's budget, which is to say the city's social wage, gives us further insight into the difficulty of breaking the common sense of carceral — that if we all shout that “the police are going out and rousing young black and brown men,” that's not news.

So the problem that we encounter in New York and beyond is how to make abolition consciousness flourish? And where it flourishes, I think, is somewhere beyond complaint. That is to say, that if abolition is a vision, it's gotta be a vision that shows how people cobble things together, in a variety of ways, in order to make their lives better.

So take the mutual aid that people are doing in the city of New York during COVID.



This is helping to distribute resources that, in a fully formed abolitionist vision, ought to go through the structures of the state, making it a state that exists for the wellbeing of people, not for organized, violent control of people. As rehearsals of that vision of wellbeing, people are doing all kinds of projects that bring together activists, organizers, artists, and so forth to see how the world is actually, already being remade. And it's the hardest to see it now, because things are so dire; but it might also be that now is the time to look as well as we can and as profoundly as we can, because things are so dire.

AH: In our initial interview for “Ashes Ashes,” you say that one of the mistakes of the campaign to close Rikers was to believe that “things fix things” — that a new building would fix the problems of

Rikers while doing nothing to change the social relations that will still be left in place. And as you just reminded us, in order to change these social relations, you ask “What are the things that people already do?” So the mutual aid projects happening now, the new relationships they introduce and rehearse, they introduce relations different from carceral social relations. How else does one change these relations?

RWG: I've maintained for a while that all kinds of criminal justice professionals and their enablers from well-resourced foundations and cities and states go off on these junkets, generally to Scandinavia, visiting a prison in Norway or in Sweden or in Denmark, and then they fly back to the United States and they announce, “We have seen the future! And we can make a prison here that

is as nice as the prison there.” And the people will wear their own clothes, they'll be called by their own names, they might get a furlough and eventually things are going to be “humanized.”

So of course, what the people who go on those junkets refuse to do is to look at where the prisons they tour are, or ask, what kind of society are those prisons a part? They imagine that they can go and pick up a piece of a different social order, transplant that piece through clever architecture and a retraining of staff, into a place where in every other way, the fundamentals of social life are ruled by organized abandonment, kept in check and from overflowing their boundaries by organized violence. They say, no, no, no. We can drop this down into the city of New York and four of the five boroughs and have

the wonders of Scandinavia flourish in the city of New York.

And they're encouraged in this by a lot of people who talk endlessly about “dehumanization” and “humanization,” and not about social relations and those larger fundamentals of social life into which they'll be dropped. Those discussing “humanization” need to spend a few minutes reading Sylvia Wynter, or reading some of her students who explain to us really beautifully what Wynter's category of “human” means — which is not the “Enlightenment human” toward which “non-enlightened humans” have supposedly been creeping for membership for over a half of a millennium. They could read Katherine McKittrick, Paul Gilroy, about planetary humanism, or the work of a lot of thinkers and writers and artists who have thought about

II

Rikers' first prisoners were captives-made-slaves. Not in the jails that would come to be built on the island, but in the slave pens and auction blocks of Richard Riker and his business partners.

Two centuries after the Rycker family put their Dutch name on this island of the Lenape, Matinecock and Wappinger peoples, who would survive their removal, massacre, and mass imprisonment in military reservations as far away as Oklaboma, Richard Riker became the first District Attorney of New York County. Known as one of the “Kidnappers Club” with his business partners, they were nicknamed that by the original abolitionists before the Civil War, for using the U.S.’ Fugitive Slave Act to kidnap free black New Yorkers, imprison and sell them to slave traders.

Casting one person's freedom as a crime, their liberty as lawlessness, their autonomy as trespassing out of their place, guilty of possessing humanity, this frame-up set the template for the criminalization to come, which would later feed people into a system of prison slavery, after chattel slavery had been abolished.

For while Emancipation abolished a marketplace, it didn't abolish the social world that fed off that market, its violence, vision and ritual. And the prisoners forced to build up Riker's Island from 90 to 400 acres-wide knew this as well as anyone.

will hurt them if they move, are saying, “I feel unfree,” “I feel like this is a carceral situation.” Because carceral logic shapes so much of how people make sense of things today.

And I'm really glad you've asked me these questions, because it leads to something else that I was hoping we were going to talk about. At the moment, for all kinds of good reasons, a lot of people, especially, but not exclusively abolitionists, are talking about the fact that inside actual lockups,

So we have to ask ourselves a question about how, and to what extent, a tendency toward human sacrifice connects with the carceral logic through which people make sense of the world today and ask ourselves what we should say, other than that “people are going to die,” because that apparently is not “news.”

The fact that people are going to die hasn't changed any policy. So we're not saying the right thing to enough people, and I'm not sure what



the way to fix the social order of capitalism — which is to say racial capitalism, or all of capitalism and colonialism, and what Stuart Hall called the global allocation of material and symbolic resources.

What are the social relations that we are rehearsing into being by building new jails, as opposed to the ones we rehearse into being by refusing jails?

Let’s consider the ones that the movement of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence have rehearsed into being by making interventions so that people don’t get hurt, rather than calling 911 after somebody’s hurt to make sure the person who made the hurt is punished. These are the usual examples we give, but they’re important examples because they take seriously problems of violence and interpersonal harm.

The presence that abolition should be is not a presence



III

As the country’s prisoners slaved to build a new infrastructure after its Civil War, on Rikers, the ground beneath the prisoners’ feet smoldered and smoked, as capital’s garbage decomposed into gas and heat, erupting around them in geysers of flame and ash.

The city was a machine for capital then, chewing up people and things to make more capital, while making people into things — poor things whose impoverishment and toil produced the wealth of others.

Beneath the wheels of this progress they churned and we’re categorized as waste: pulverized, dehumanized, disenfranchised; into ruins of life to be capitalized upon, just as the city’s debris itself became material for more growth.

Alongside the trash was the rubble dug up for subway tunnels; earth dug out for skyscraper foundations; the demolition of old buildings; and even the rubble of a war-ruined Europe, shipped back to the U.S. on emptied ships needing ballast; each a displacement of life and land built into new territory — Ellis Island, Battery Park, Riker’s Island and more, as New York unfolded its map out onto the world.

that leaves the social order intact but drops a new building, which will have a long life, into it. That is not abolition.

And this all goes to underscore, again, how carceral logic shapes this mistake, believing that people who get locked up

can “become human” if we just apply to them the right combination of real estate design and guard duty, or what is now getting called “wraparound services.”

AH: So if it is social relations and not merely “things” that need to be changed, can you explain more what you see those social relations being? Obviously we’re not talking about the relations between retrained guards and imprisoned people, but a larger vision at stake for the society within which all these prisons and jails sit.

RWG: The first is this: The most human way of being in the world is for us to be dependent, not independent. So I was talking about autonomy earlier, but dependence, radical dependence is a good thing, not a bad thing. So we should depend on each other. And that’s what we see with

mutual aid (not only the mutual aid that’s arisen in this time of crisis but across time), which is this radical dependency — the notion that people have an obligation to each other and that we ought to create enough institutional infrastructure for our needs, so that obligation

doesn’t require volunteerism to perpetuate. So I don’t have to volunteer to help you, Ashley, for you to get the help you need when you need it. And yet, I should feel that because I could volunteer to help you, that our dependency on each other is a precious thing, which I would

like to always keep alive. So that’s the rehearsal we need, a rehearsal that makes us feel the co-constitution of agency and structure so that we don’t think that structures are over there and agency is what we’ve got, but rather that through *rehearsal*, that we’re

making this world. And a part of making it is making ourselves aware — *conscientization* — aware of what we need in order to perpetuate the possibility of welfare for ourselves and the planet.

ABOLITIONIST PLATFORM TOWARD HEALTHY COMMUNITIES NOW AND BEYOND COVID-19*

1. DEMAND FREEDOM FOR ALL IMPRISONED AND DETAINED PEOPLE, AND DEFEND THEIR AND THEIR ONES’ WELLBEING.

2. RESIST SURVEILLANCE, POLICING, & MILITARIZED RESPONSES TO COVID-19.

3. DEMAND PEOPLE’S ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTHCARE NOW & INTO THE FUTURE.

4. ENSURE PEOPLE’S ACCESS TO HOUSING, FOOD, AND ECONOMIC SECURITY.

5. SUPPORT INTERNATIONALISM / END U.S. IMPERIALISM & MILITARISM.

*** THIS PLATFORM ENDORSED BY:**

Black and Pink	LGBT Books to Prisoners
Black Visions Collective	National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls
California Coalition for Women Prisoners	National Lawyers Guild
Californians United for a Responsible Budget	Philadelphia Bail Fund
Chicago Community Bond Fund	Reclaim the Block
Community Justice Exchange	Release Aging People in Prison
Critical Resistance	Southerners on New Ground
Dignity Not Detention Coalition	Survived & Punished
East Tennessee Harm Reduction	The Red Nation

building. As abolitionists, we believe that social structures, both formal and informal, need to support people’s lives and ability to live. We also believe that policing, imprisonment, and surveillance do not, and cannot, ensure safety or create opportunities for care. As a severe public health crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated abolitionist demands and practices as the most common sense and practical steps to ensure that we are as strong and healthy as possible.

The abolition of the prison industrial complex is about dismantling cages and oppressive structures while building up the resources, practices, and institutions that support healthy and self-determined communities. It requires all of us. As Ruthie Gilmore noted during Los Angeles for Abolition: Dismantling Jails and Building Liberation (Sept. 2019), “abolition is a practical program of radical change cobbled together from the work that people do in disparate struggles every day.”

We are seeing this already in the massive movements to share resources, look out for each other, and build networks and structures for care across cities and towns, neighborhoods, and virtual communities. Here, we uplift calls for life-saving measures to address the needs of prisoners and loved ones, people facing housing and food insecurity – long term or with the loss of work now, and people who are targeted for arrest and detention. These are real, clear, and concrete steps for stemming the pandemic now among millions of the most vulnerable and changing the social and political structures that guarantee that vulnerability.

How we address this crisis will determine what our society looks like after it passes. We are committed to seeding a more abolitionist future.

<http://criticalresistance.org/abolitionist-platform-toward-healthy-communities-now-and-onward/>



IV

When Riker's Island was covered in cages, the fiction of these artificial landscapes settled into reality, and Riker's Island was seeded with a life that cared little about its fortifications, its laws and limits that sought to set this island apart.

Between the lockdowns and the policing of its captives, the regime policed its natural life as well — plant life shaved close to the ground, bird life shoosed away, fish repelled by toxic leaks, and animals burrowed beneath the traps that'd been set for them.

Despite its captivity, life thrived: it digested the land, feeding upon the debris of histories, the sediment of memories, and ruins becoming compost for growth.

Inch-by-inch, year-by-year, Riker's territory was surrendered, accidentally, to a new life that thrives upon waste, composting garbage into soil and binding it with roots, converting its poison into nutrient and air.

While this new life made the island's growth appear natural, concealing the toxicity of each new cage, the more toxicity it exuded, the more this new life flourished, spread and, eventually, took over.

A rebellion of leaf, flower, stem and root, they vined their way into Riker's foundations, opened its roofs, rusted its bars and short-circuited its cameras. A takeover, an overturning, a re-rooting, re-purposing revolt, they breathed off oxygen that fed the flames of Riker's collapse, tumbling back down into ash.



V

And with Riker’s death, so died one dream of capital, its erasure of “human” from what people mean: 1. to racialize and re-value, so that you can exploit; 2. then as you exploit, to imprison the people who refuse: first to force their labor, and then to turn their captivity, their imprisonment itself, into more capital. Like money that gains interest in a bank, or a parking meter that collects on a car sitting still, it was a dream to capitalize upon the labor and then upon the warehousing of bodies. Through an alchemy of meanings, by marking bodies as “without value” and as “criminal,” their human value is exchanged into finance value, into market value and price.

It was a dream where the debt of what has been stolen from people is blamed on those same people, refinanced and mortgaged, bundled and packaged into new fiscal instruments. Not to detox, but to erase the fingerprints of capital from the poverty it has created, from the lives it shortens and the communities it breaks — calling it “progress,” “order,” and “safety.” What abolition required was not just Riker’s death or that of similar islands along the archipelago of cages, but the death of this dream and what it permitted: the re-concealing of slavery as a carceral foundation of society, but in plain, normal, everyday sight.

Now there would be two futures: One a shell game, moving this debt of justice out from beneath one shell and under a new one. The other, the ending of that game altogether, lifting all the shells at once and revealing the ruse, calling in all debts; returning what was taken, in power, culture, language, and dignity, and the cages that have helped to steal it. For locked in this piece of capital’s machinery were not only architecture but ideas — ideas given substance, in bodies both appearing and disappeared.

Whose violence punished and whose made heroic? Whose medicines and markets are legal and whose are outlaw? Whose activism, resistance, refusal and fight are of god’s army, and whose are of the devil’s, of crime and terror? Whose security are the police and whose are the gang, the guard or the prisoner. Whose weapons are protection and whose are the threat? Whose joy and thriving are innocent and beauty, and whose are menace, threat, and fugitive?

Evidence! offered the island: The cage, the convict, the condemned, if she’s locked up then she will be the sacrifice through whom we will win our redemption...

#CuomoLetThemGo

RAPP CAMPAIGN: OUR DEMANDS *

WHAT: #CuomoLetThemGo is a grassroots campaign led by the *Release Aging People in Prison Campaign*, *Parole Preparation Project* and other community based groups demanding that Governor Andrew Cuomo immediately release people from New York State Prisons who are vulnerable to COVID-19.

WHO: We are a collection of organizations, advocates, organizers, doctors, public health experts, educators, scholars, professors, social workers and others who believe that Governor Cuomo and New York State must act now to save lives and stop the COVID-19 crisis inside New York’s 52 state prisons.

WHY: People in prison are particularly vulnerable to harm and death by COVID-19. Social distancing in crowded, controlled, and closed prisons is impossible. Prisons are hotbeds for viruses and diseases. All public health experts and medical professionals agree that the only way to stop the spread of COVID-19 in prisons is to release large numbers of incarcerated people, especially those who are older and/ or have underlying health conditions. We Demand the Immediate Release of People in New York State Prisons.

OUR DEMANDS

Grant immediate executive clemency to vulnerable people without excluding broad categories of people based on crime or convictions

Grant parole release to parole-eligible people, including: vulnerable people and people who have been granted parole but haven’t yet been released.

Ensure all future parole board interviews continue in a timely and consistent manner.

Release people serving determinate sentences who are one year or less from their scheduled conditional release date or maximum expiration date and grant all time allowances.

WE DEMAND HEALTHY REENTRY

Expedite field investigations of residences and residential treatment programs to ensure swift release of incarcerated people.

Develop a comprehensive housing and healthcare plan for all returning people.

Partner with existing reentry and community-based organizations who are ready to support people released during the pandemic

Instruct the city and state housing authorities to lift the current ban on formerly incarcerated people living in public housing.

WE DEMAND SAFE AND JUST SUPERVISION

Lift all travel restrictions for people on parole so they may travel to their preferred location for self-isolation.Remove electronic monitoring systems from the bodies/homes of people on supervision.

Suspend all programming requirements for people on supervision.

Suspend all remaining technical violations immediately and indefinitely.

Terminate all parole and probation supervision for people who have successfully completed one year of supervision.

Train parole and probation staff in current healthcare practices and statewide orders.

WE DEMAND IMPROVED CONDITIONS INSIDE NEW YORK STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Testing and Prevention: Testing must be readily available to all incarcerated people and staff, and DOCCS must immediately implement measures to prevent the spread of the virus within state correctional facilities.

Treatment and Care: DOCCS must immediately develop a medical quarantine and treatment plan to prevent a catastrophic loss of life in our state prisons.

Communication and Visits: Free and unlimited access to phone calls, emails and letters will ensure incarcerated people can stay in touch with family members and loved ones during the pandemic. Unlimited access to legal counsel and the courts is a fundamental right and must not be compromised.

Confinement and Movement: Freedom of movement and access to the outdoors is essential to the dignity, physical health and mental well-being of all people, especially those incarcerated. DOCCS must institute facility-wide policies that curb the spread of COVID-19, while ensuring that measures do not deprive anyone of their basic liberties. Especially in this moment, DOCCS must end the use of solitary confinement, lifting any keeplock mandates and remove all people from solitary confinement and return them to individual cells.

Access to Services: Regular and uninterrupted access to supportive services ensures that incarcerated people can meet their basic needs and survive a pandemic.

Prison Labor: Incarcerated workers must be protected and justly compensated if they chose to provide invaluable labor to the state.

Further Criminalization: State and local officials must not abuse public health orders to further criminalize our communities as they attempt to survive this pandemic.

Monitoring and Transparency: Guarantee transparency and access to information regarding the conditions in prison and preparations made to address the danger of coronavirus and its spread.

* <http://rappcampaign.com>

#ClemencyNow

NEW YORK CITY TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE HUB: VALUES, PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES *

THE NYC TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE HUB SERVES THREE PRIMARY PURPOSES:

- 1. Provide political education for anyone interested in transformative justice and community accountability.
- 2. Provide a space for people actively engaged in the work to process, and get consultations and support.
- 3. Provide more connectivity and visibility across groups doing TJ and CA work. The NYCTJH orients all of our work from the following shared values, principles, and practices. We relied on ideas developed by BATJC and Creative Interventions to establish values, principles and practices for our formation:

VALUES

Interdependence
Integrity and authentic connection
Trust
Compassion
Humility and courage
Healing
Responsibility and accountability
Sharing and sustainability
Transformation and growth
Liberation and possibility
Safety and risk taking (recognizing that safety sometimes requires risk-taking)
Holism (taking into account potential well-being of all people involved)

PRINCIPLES

Value-based work
Personal and systemic transformation
Building through relationship and trust
Taking accountability
Showing up for each other out of duty and choice
People who have caused harm can change, and also need to be included in changing structures and systems
We recognize that accountability is an ongoing process and is not imposed from the outside

* <https://nyctjhub.com>

PRACTICES

Proactively taking accountability
Prioritizing our relationships with ourselves and each other over actions or goals
Encouraging decentralized growth
Holding the humanity and dignity of everyone
Holding contradictions and complexity
Engaging in personal growth and healing work outside of group
Collective action and collective leadership
Challenging oppressive dynamics in the service of connection and trust
Engaging in conflict openly and honestly
Putting the work first, keeping it moving forward
Individual and collective reflection and adaptation
Expressing gratitude and appreciation
Prioritize the self-determination of the survivor
We see safety as relative and a constant negotiation
We do not believe in never uncomfortable space - safety and discomfort are not the same thing
We center ourselves in work to end sexual violence because we believe it is important enough to stand on its own as an area of focus. Our survival demands this. However, we know that the daily violence of racism/white supremacy, sexism/transphobia/patriarchy, classism/capitalism, and homophobia/heterosexism are the intersecting sources of sexual violence, the reasons it happens. If we want to end sexual violence, we must end these belief systems and the institutions that support them. We work to transform ourselves and our society along the way to clear a path for healthy, affirming cultures and communities.



JUSTICE FOR JAMEL NOISE DEMO



BRING NOISE MAKERS

Friday August 21 @ 5pm
MDC Brooklyn: 80 29th st. Sunset Park, Brooklyn

Produced to accompany Ashes Ashes, by Ashley Hunt, 2020.

Images from front to back: Randall’s Island Tree, New York (Rikers Island), by Ashley Hunt • Day of Action to End Life Imprisonment and Reunite Families at New York State Capitol, April 21, 2020, by Walter Hergt, RAPP • Two-day Vigil and Graveside Sit at Fishkill Correctional Facility to honor those who have died of coronavirus behind bars and fight for NOT ONE MORE DEATH, by Walter Hergt, RAPP • Shorehaven Tree, The Bronx (Rikers Island), by Ashley Hunt • Day of Action to End Life Imprisonment and Reunite Families at New York State Capitol, April 21, 2020, by Walter Hergt • College Point Trees, Queens (Rikers Island), by Ashley Hunt • Queer Liberation March, by Leandro Justen • Free Them All, by Shana Agid • Pass Elder Parole for All No Exclusions, by Walter Hergt, RAPP • Justice for Jamel Floyd Noise Demo, RAPP Campaign • Hunt’s Point Tree, The Bronx (Rikers Island), by Ashley Hunt

