

Developing Co-ops with Incarcerated and Returning Citizens

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Gratitude/Acknowledge

- The original occupants of the land
- Remember our ancestors,
- the struggles of enslaved laborers, & all those who labor without just compensation,
- and the efforts for liberation through cooperative ownership.

Introductions

- Who are we in this room?
- What is the Prison Industrial Complex?

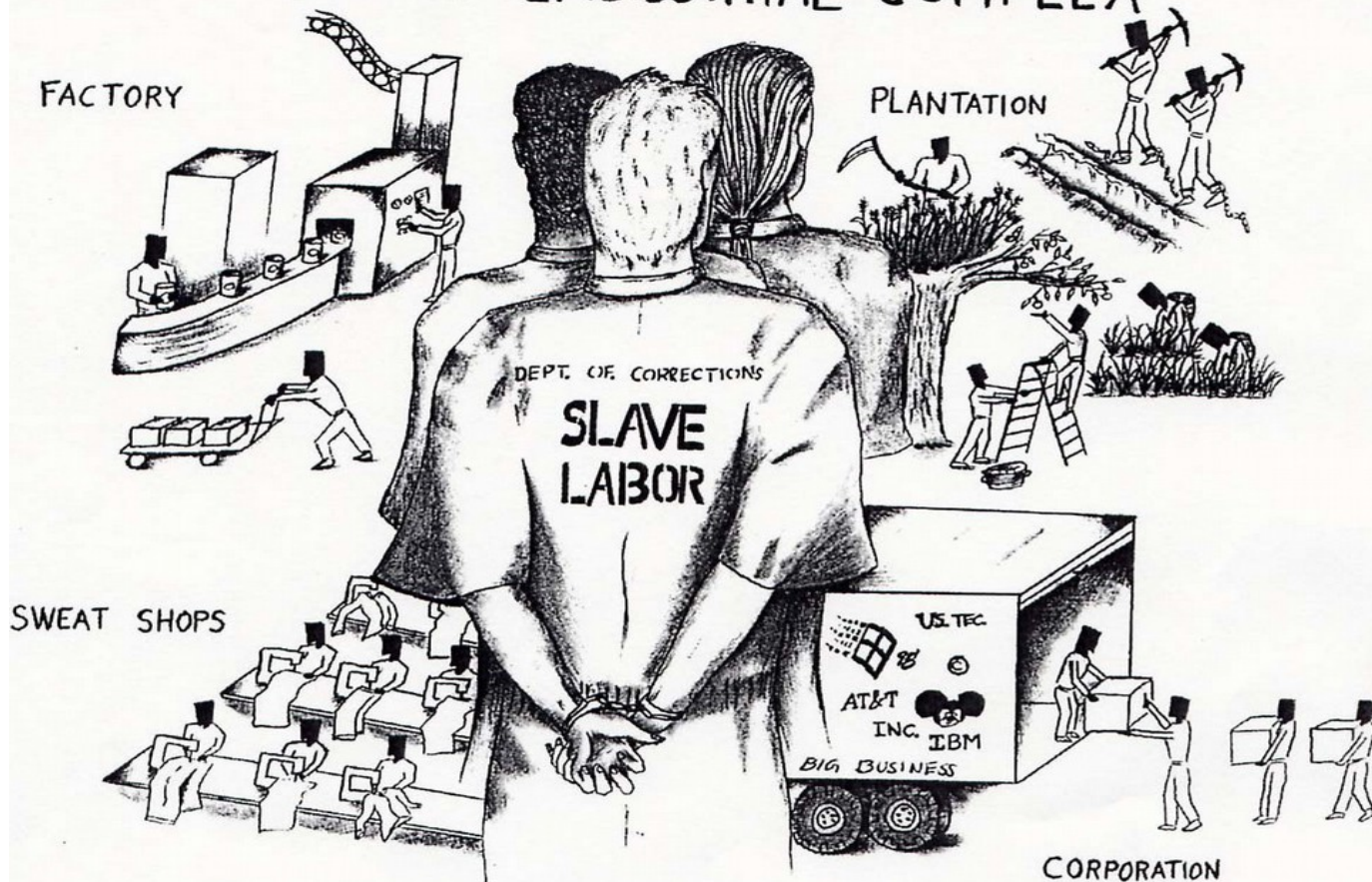
Definition of Prison Industrial Complex

- PIC is a political economic system of interlocking institutions based in the criminal justice system and incarceration processes.
- Network of political, economic, social and ideological interests and institutions that mass incarcerate primarily poor people of color.

Elements of PIC

- History of government policies – enslavement, 13th amendment, free labor?, convict leasing system, immigration policies
- Political – current government policies
- Institutional/Economic – low-income assaulted; global economy; privatization; prison system most profitable industry
- Media/ideology– coverage is uneven & derogatory

PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX



- 19 CENTS AN HOUR
- NO BENEFITS
- NO MEDICAL
- NO VACATIONS
- PENALTY FOR REFUSAL TO WORK-
- SOLITARY CONFINEMENT
- LOSS OF PAROLE
- LOSS OF PROGRAMS

- Previous graphic from:

<http://www.prisonabolition.org/what-is-the-prison-industrial-complex/>

- Vicious cycle/ multiple systems map:

<http://correctionsproject.com/prisonmaps/pic4.htm>

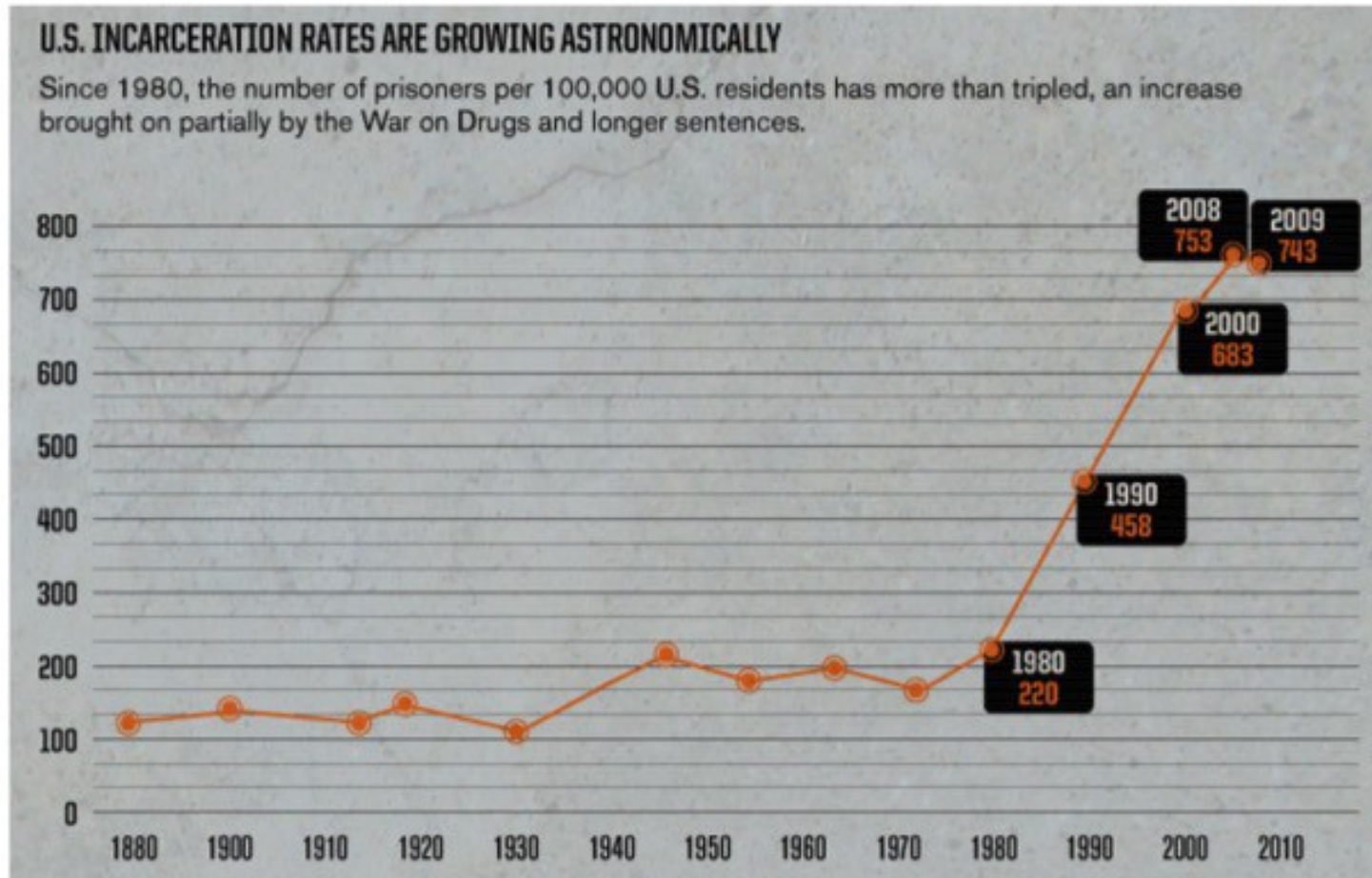
Media

- Message conveyed - Blackness and criminality are inextricably related.
Difference highlighted
- Media reinforce this: The media provide readily accessible depictions of criminality, which may help to shape perceptions about crime and subsequent justice practices.
- Disproportionate amount of the media coverage devoted to violent crimes for which Black males are more likely than others to be arrested.

Scope

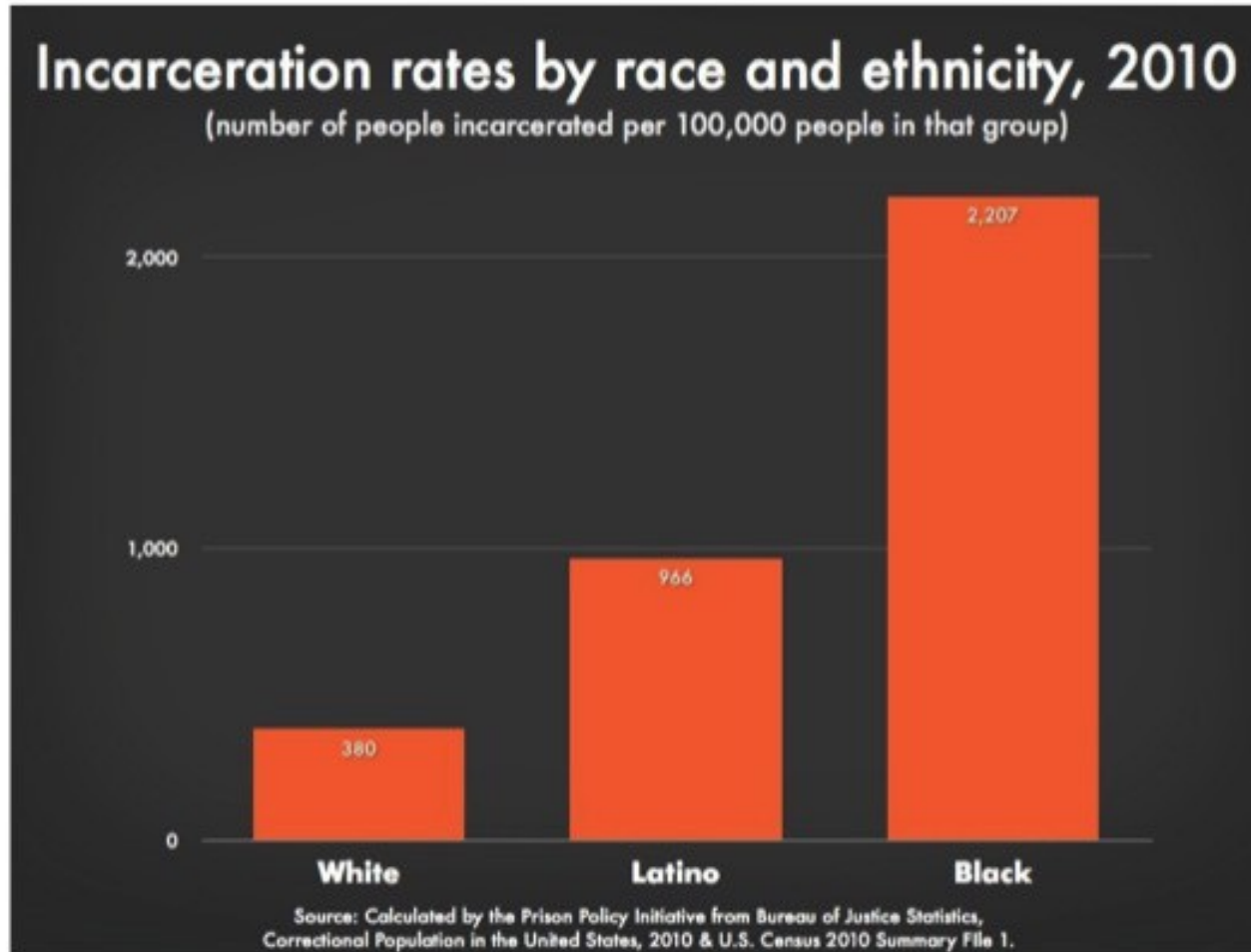
- The US Criminal justice system is raced and gendered at every stage:
 - Arrests (racial profiling; media portrayals, neighborhood characteristics)
 - Charges (prosecutors decisions, no role for judges or communities)
 - Sentencing (mandatory minimums; plea bargaining; lawyer quality)
 - Incarceration (convict leasing; unequal conditions, death row)
 - Parole

US Incarceration Rates Growing



<https://www.good.is/infographics/transparency-america-s-absurdly-high-incarceration-rate#open> h/t Prison Culture Blog

By Race & Ethnicity



PLC and Community Justice

- What is the relationship between the Prison Industrial Complex and community-based approaches to justice/ community justice?
- Are they compatible, or opposite kinds of strategies, and why or how?

Co-ops as a Grassroots Comm Econ Dev Tool

- Cooperatives address market failure, and are both anti-poverty strategies and community building strategies.
- Cooperative ownership helps address underdevelopment and economic isolation and marginality.
- Co-ops anchor the local economy.

Anchoring

- Keep the benefits of capital & production recirculating among those who produce them, service them, and need them.

Co-ops for Incarcerated or Formerly Incarcerated

- Exploited populations –within and without PIC
- Employers won't hire – must legally identify themselves; or use as slave labor in prison
- Need new or different skills;
- Newcomer in some way;
- Bad previous experience(s)

Discussion

- Why would incarcerated citizens own their own worker cooperates?
- Benefits?
- Challenges?
- Know examples?
- Why would returning citizens own their own worker cooperatives?
- Benefits, challenges, examples?

Examples

- Co-op Solutions
 - Italy
 - Puerto Rico
 - Canada

Italy

- The MoU of Federsolidarietà with the Ministry of Justice and Prison Administration Department (DAP) in 1998
- commitment of social cooperatives in promoting services towards prisoners and their needs, especially entrepreneurial activities inside and outside jails

Italy, con't

- Support by the Prison Administration Department to the work of directors of prisons building with social cooperatives at local level for the creation of work opportunities for prisoners;
- Realisation of a survey of facilities and spaces inside prisons that could be used for entrepreneurial activities.

Social Cooperative “in Prisons”

- There are about 100 social cooperatives in Italy working in prisons
- of “type b” of the social cooperatives (52 social cooperatives employing 370 prisoners)
- Ministry statistics: recidivism rate is about 80% - very critical situation of prisons in Italy
- Recidivism rate for those employed by social cooperatives: less than 10%
- Single cases tend to confirm even lower rates (Ghelos, Menatwork)

Learning From Italian Practices (Weaver)

- The co-ops provide support to the families of imprisoned workers and facilitate family mediation; create the space for family contact to occur in more natural and private environments.
- Also provide work within the co-operative as well as supporting access to 'mainstream' employment, drawing on their network of professional relationships.

Desistence

- Provide values driven work and sense of family or reconnection to people and “family”
- Paid employment for those disadvantaged in the labour market includes prisoners and former prisoners – those in custody, on partial release and post release.
- Solidarity, cultural and relational environment in the co-ops generates resources that enable desistance, recovery and integration.

Cooperativa ARIGOS, Puerto Rico

- Began with art therapy
- Learned about co-op model and demanded co-op education
- Changed co-op law – meeting with Governor
- Rephrased the 7 principles; internal rules
- MOU with Corrections Department – 15% (office space, electricity, etc); have to pay for extra security
- 10% retained; 75% to owners
- Only 2 recidivists of 50 + who got out over 10 years.

Future in Puerto Rico

- 3 More Co-ops
- Men's: technology, solar
- Women's: Tanos Co-op: bakery now sewing
- Much slower development
- Challenges of what to do with returning citizens

InsideArt, Canada

- Imprisoned artists and community artists own a marketing craft cooperative together.
- The co-op aids the incarcerated artists in obtaining the supplies they need, supports their art, and sells the finished products at fairs and through the internet.
- Once released, the artists already own part of a business, have a job and have a community to connect with.

Barriers to developing & supporting such worker co-ops/social co-ops

- Prison bureaucracies,
- Corrections administrations/prison directors keep changing and not always interested,
- Lack of information about cooperatives,
- Social inequalities and potential for elitism
- Society's view of prisoners as non-deserving of human rights,
- Commodification of prisoners and prison slave labor.

Benefits

- More control over one's life and work
- Decent humanized work with living wages and ownership equity
- Develop trust and solidarity relationships
- Increase skills and capacities, new kinds of leadership
- Change behavior in prison
- True rehabilitation, resocialization, reintegration
- Reduce recidivism

Transformative

Roberto Rodriguez:

- This model is the only option we have for jobs to support our families.

But also:

- “I will say anywhere that the program with the co-op model changes lives” - it’s a transformative process. We are not the same after engaging with the co-op
- Weaver finds same: importance of work, sense of family, ability to support family

USA?

- How do we bring these models to the USA?
- What do we need to know?
- Who do we need to influence?
- What policies/laws need to change
- Who will lead this movement?

Wrap Up

- Last Comments around room
- Thank you!
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