

HERBALISM, INCARCERATION & ABOLITION



**SOLIDARITY
APOTHECARY**





OVERVIEW



OVERVIEW

- Welcome/Practicalities/Content Warning
- About Nicole/the Solidarity Apothecary
- Incarceration/the Prison Industrial Complex
- Health impacts of incarceration
- Practicing herbalism in prison
- Healing from prison & herbal support for PTSD/traumatic stress
- Introduction to Abolition
- Role of herbalism in abolitionist movements
- Q&A



WELCOME

- Hugely grateful for your presence, time & energy
- Participation & self-reflection
- Questions & Answers at the end – however, you can ask clarifying questions when needed
- Content warning



CARE

- There will be a recording!
- Totally normal to dissociate when hearing distressing things
- Find an anchor to support you through the call <3
- Organise with a friend/comrade to debrief if possible
- Journal
- Move



DISCLAIMERS

- Absolutely massive topic in a small amount of time!
- One 'lens' of state violence e.g. there are countless other forms of state violence
- The distribution of this violence and oppression is not even
- Abolitionist movements led by Black feminists & radicals
- The prison system is global but this talk focuses on so-called US & UK
- The British state mastered the art of state craft through colonialism especially penal colonialism



ABOUT ME

- Nicole Rose (she/her)
- My lineages are English, Welsh and Irish
- DIY herbalist for over a decade, completed formal clinical training with the Plant Medicine School in Ireland
- Runs the Solidarity Apothecary supporting people experiencing state violence with herbal medicines
- Navigated traumatic stress & PTSD since childhood, prison & repression etc.



ABOUT THE SOLIDARITY APOTHECARY

- The mission of the Solidarity Apothecary is to materially support revolutionary struggles and communities with plant medicines to strengthen collective autonomy, self-defence and resilience to climate change, capitalism and state violence.
- www.solidarityapothecary.org



ABOUT THE SOLIDARITY APOTHECARY

- Supporting people harmed by State violence with herbal medicines e.g. care packages, one-to-one support
- Distributing the Prisoner's Herbal Book to people in prison worldwide
- Mobile Clinic supporting Refugees in Northern France
- Ukraine Herbal Solidarity
- Supporting frontline organisers
- Frontline Herbalism Podcast
- Main political organising is prisoner support & abolitionist struggles





INCARCERATION & THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX



WHAT IS YOUR FIRST MEMORY OF PRISON?



HOW MANY PEOPLE IN US PRISONS ARE SERVING A LIFE SENTENCE?

- A) 1 in 10 people
- B) 1 in 20 people
- C) 1 in 7 people
- D) 1 in 50 people



- Correct answer: C, 1 in 7
- Source:
<https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/no-end-in-sight-americas-enduring-reliance-on-life-sentences/>
- One in 7 people in U.S. prisons is serving a life sentence, either life without parole (LWOP), life with parole (LWP) or virtual life (50 years or more), totaling 203,865 people.



HOW MUCH HIGHER ARE AVERAGE INCARCERATION RATES OF BLACK PEOPLE TO WHITE PEOPLE IN THE SO-CALLED US? (2021)

A) X 6

B) X 5

C) X 4

D) X 3

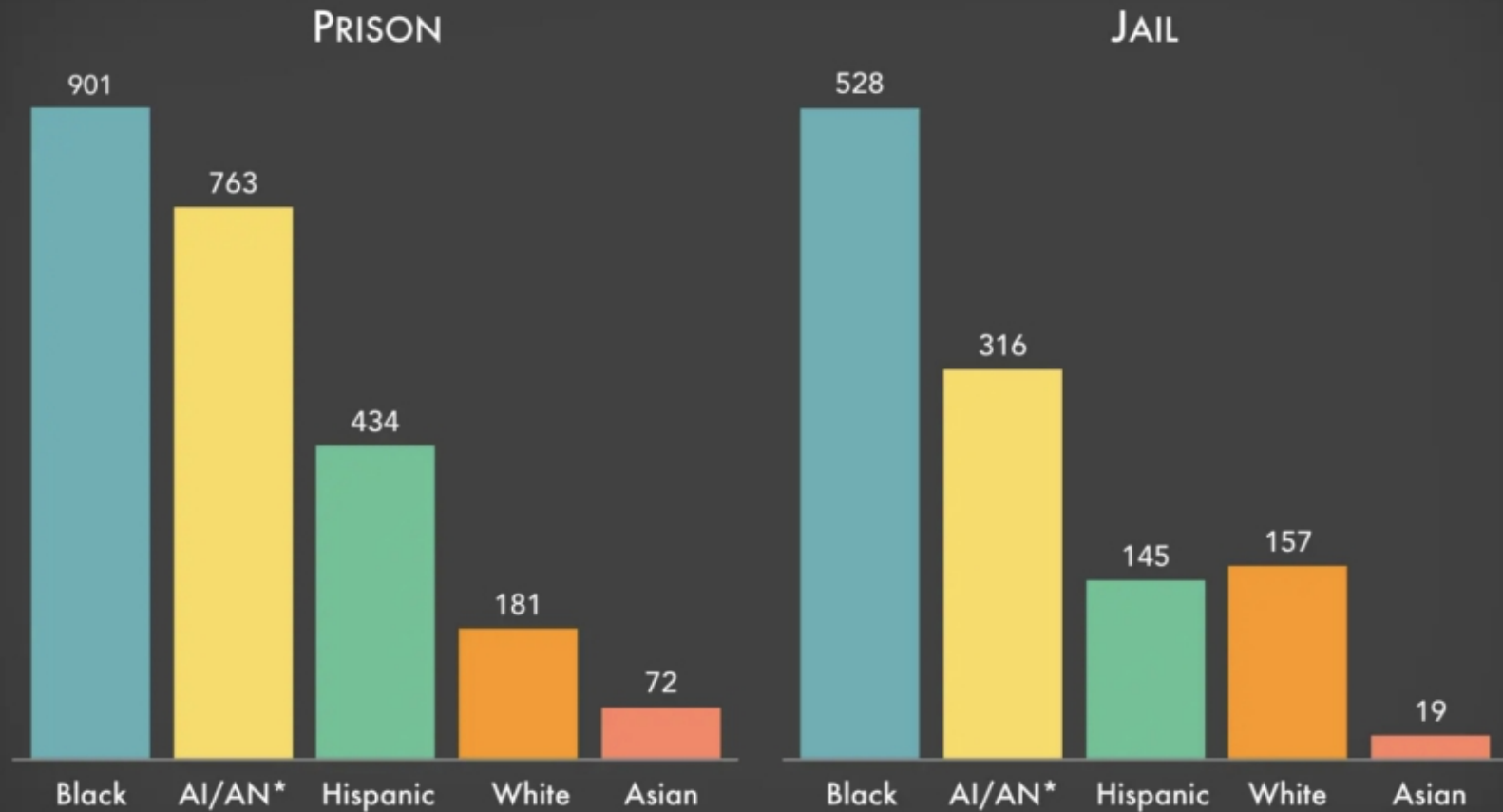


- Correct answer: A x 6
- Sources:
https://static.prisonpolicy.org/images/black_white_prison_disparities_2021-2X.webp
- https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2023/09/27/updated_race_data/
- <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2020/07/27/disparities/>



Racial disparities in incarceration rates, 2021

Number of people incarcerated in local jails and prisons per 100,000 people in each racial or ethnic category



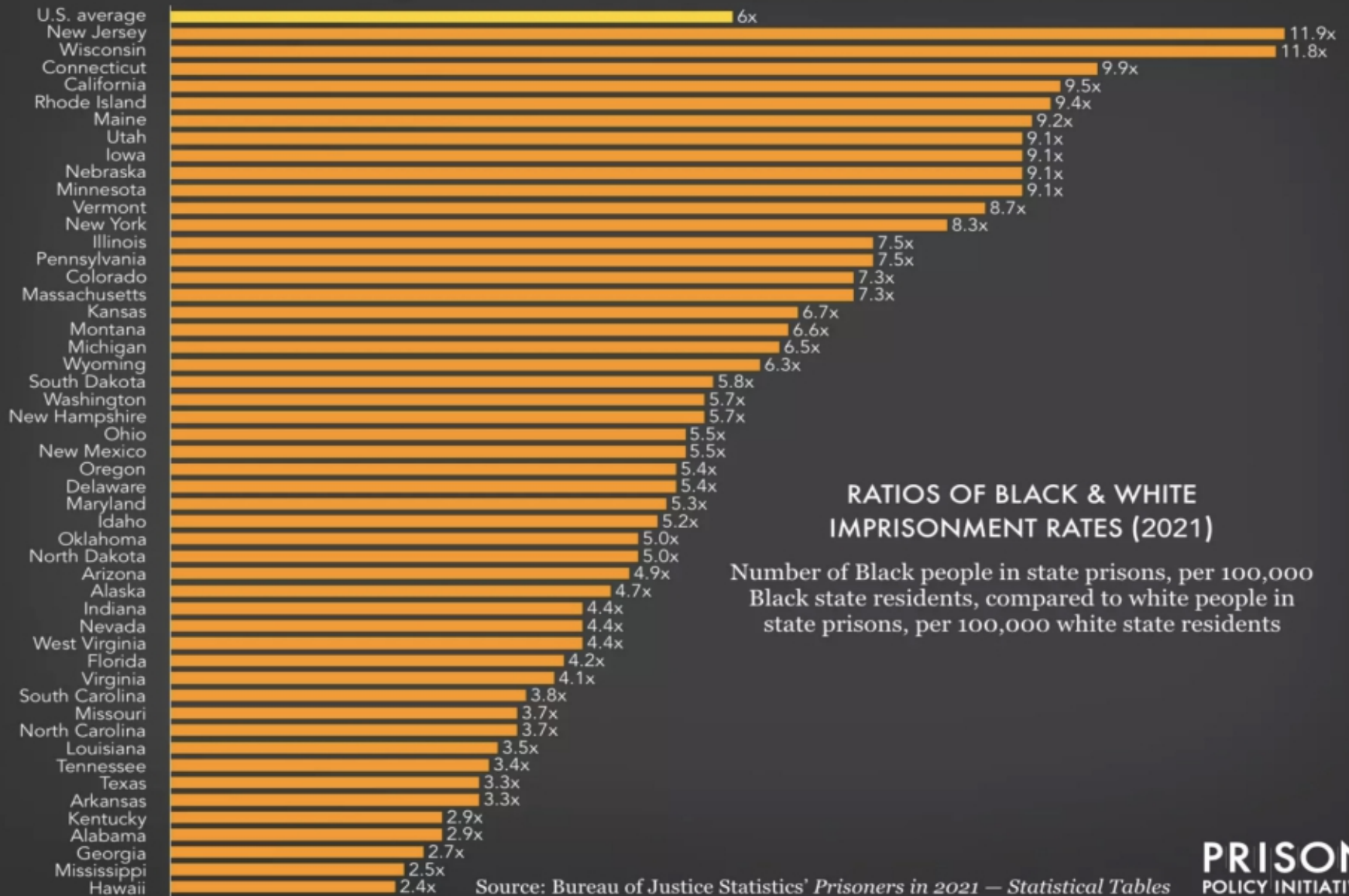
*American Indian/Alaska Native

Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Jail Inmates in 2021*, Table 4 and *Prisoners in 2021*, Table 5

PRISON
POLICY INITIATIVE



How much higher are Black incarceration rates than white?



PRISON
POLICY INITIATIVE



**AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY IN THE UK IS ROUGHLY 80 YEARS
(ALTHOUGH THERE ARE MASSIVE CLASS DISPARITIES IN
THESE STATISTICS).**

**WHAT IS THE AVERAGE AGE OF DEATH FOR PEOPLE IN PRISON
IN THE UK?**

- A) 78 years old
- B) 56 years old
- C) 70 years old
- D) 65 years old



- Correct answer: B, 56 years old (47 for women as of 2010 statistics)
- Sources:
<https://www.medact.org/2020/blogs/mind-the-gap-healthcare-disparities-in-uk-prisons/>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2010/aug/08/prison-natural-deaths-inquiry-call>



HOW MUCH HIGHER WAS THE RATE OF DEATH OF PEOPLE IN PRISON DYING FROM COVID-19 IN UK PRISONS?

- A) The same
- B) 1.5 x higher
- C) 2 x higher
- D) 3 x higher



- Correct answer: D, 3 x higher
- Sources:
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2021/mar/covid-19-death-rate-among-people-prison-three-times-higher-public>
- In the US: 20% higher -
<https://usafacts.org/articles/how-many-people-in-prisons-died-of-covid-19/>



HOW MANY CHILDREN HAVE A PARENT WHO IS INCARCERATED IN THE US?

- A) 1.25 million children
- B) 1 million children
- C) 800,000 children
- D) 500,000 children



- Correct answer: A, 1.25 million children (and nearly one in four is under 4 years old)
- Source:
<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2022/08/11/parental-incarceration/>



WHAT IS THE REDUCED LIFE EXPECTANCY OF SOMEONE WHO HAS AN INCARCERATED FAMILY MEMBER IN THE US?

- A) 6 months less
- B) 12 months less
- C) 2 years less
- D) 2.6 years less



- Correct answer: D, 2.6 years (and for people with 3 or more family members it's 4.6 years less)
- Sources:
<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/07/12/family-incarceration/>
- <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2780438>

People with incarcerated immediate family members have reduced life expectancy
Compared to people with no incarcerated family



Created by the Prison Policy Initiative with data from Sundaresh et al., 2021.



Mass incarceration directly impacts millions of people

But just how many, and in what ways?

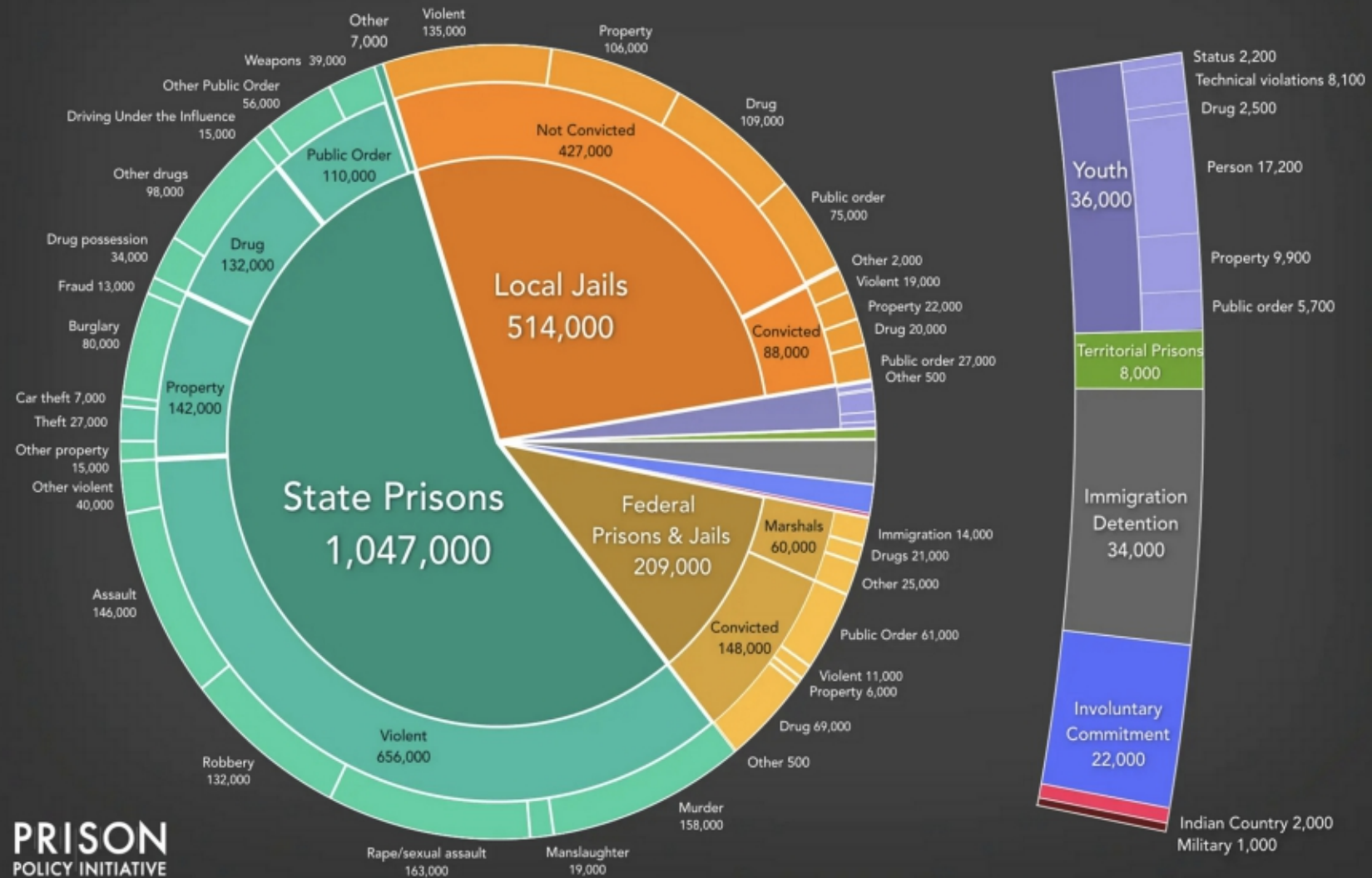


Compiled by the Prison Policy Initiative from 2020 Bureau of Justice Statistics data; Shannon, et al. (2017) *The Growth, Scope, and Spatial Distribution of People With Felony Records in the United States, 1948-2010*; SEARCH's *Survey of State Criminal History Information Systems, 2018* (estimate of criminal records created according to the methodology of NELP's 65 Million 'Need Not Apply;'); and FWD.us (2018) *Every Second: The Impact of the Incarceration Crisis on America's Families*



How many people are locked up in the United States?

The U.S. locks up more people per capita than any other nation, at the staggering rate of 565 per 100,000 residents. But to end mass incarceration, we must first consider *where* and *why* 1.9 million people are confined nationwide.

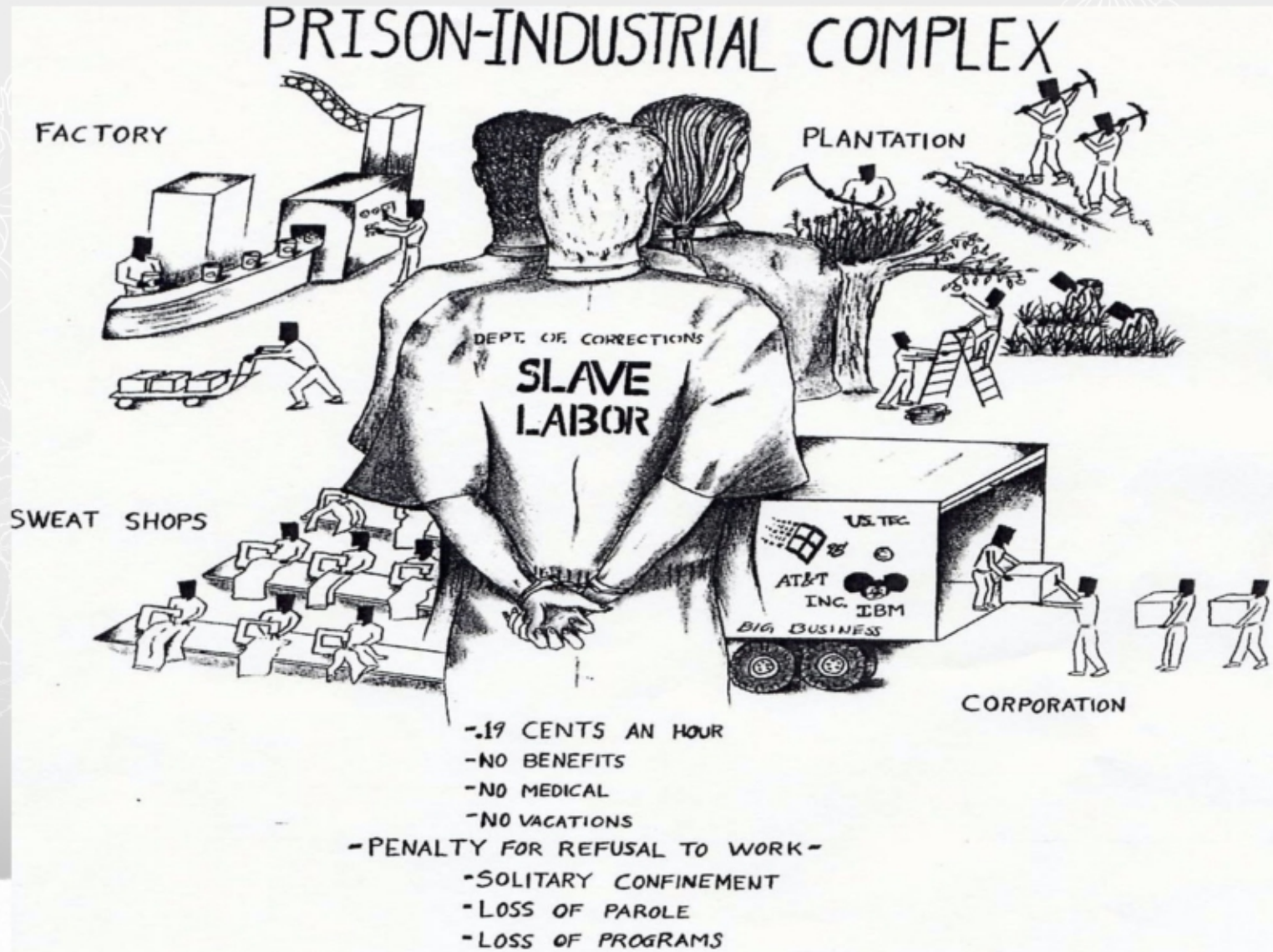


PRISON
POLICY INITIATIVE

Sources and data notes: www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2023.html



WHAT IS THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX?



WHAT IS THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX?

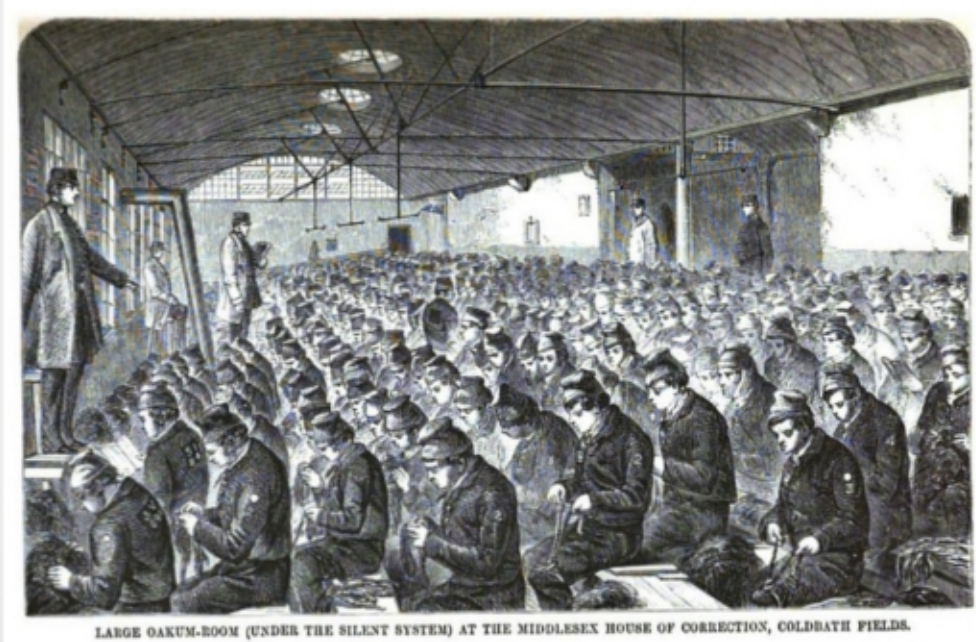
“The prison industrial complex (PIC) is a term we use to describe the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems.”

– Critical Resistance



NOTES ON PRISON LABOUR

- Used as a tool for conquest & domination e.g. colonisation, making goods for armies etc
- Prisoners have no rights as workers in prison
- If prisoners refuse to work they are punished.. Discipline & control.
- Now: maintaining jail, mundane/repetitive work, low skilled jobs, specialist roles.
- Global force within capitalism





THE HEALTH IMPACTS OF INCARCERATION



HEALTH IMPACTS OF INCARCERATION

- Prisoners experience intense medical neglect
- Individuals living in correctional facilities are approximately three times more likely to have HIV or AIDS and are more likely to have hepatitis C and tuberculosis. –
<https://www.aafp.org/about/policies/all/incarceration.html>
- Chronic illness
- Absolute lack of autonomy/dependency of officers for most basic of needs
- Healthcare is commonly privatised
- Large numbers of people with disabilities (and prison is disabling)



THE TRAUMA OF INCARCERATION



FEAR AND THREAT TO LIFE

Prison is a state of prolonged, repeated trauma with an inability to escape.

Incarceration is an **overwhelming experience** that can significantly change people - socially, emotionally and physiologically. While all prisons are different, it is extremely common to experience an **ongoing threat to life** - to fear for our safety (due to the frequent violence from officers 'bending up' people, as well as prisoners attacking each other, threats of sexual violence etc). People surrounding us may be frequently self-harming or trying to take their own lives.



**SOLIDARITY
APOTHECARY**

POWERLESSNESS

Prison is designed to create a dynamic of **overwhelming powerlessness**. People are commonly forced to violate their own moral principles. There is a surrendering to the violence against us and others which can 'rupture' what it means to be human.



SOLIDARITY
APOTHECARY

LACK OF CONTROL

People in prison have an **unrelenting lack of control** over their lives. From the smallest thing - like accessing more toilet paper - to when they will access parole, nearly every decision is controlled by others. Lack of control and consistent uncertainty create havoc for the bodymind soul.



SOLIDARITY
APOTHECARY

HYPERVIGILANCE & IMMOBILISATION

Prison forces people to live in **a state of hyperarousal and hypervigilance** for sometimes years on end. The fight/flight energy of the nervous system can be released in brief moments of release (exercise, fighting etc) however, in general, this surge of mobilisation generally has nowhere to go. Especially when people are physically **immobilised** in a cage/cell.



SOLIDARITY
APOTHECARY

COERCIVE CONTROL

Prison is coercive control. **Prison officers gain control and power by eroding a person's autonomy and self-esteem through acts of intimidation, threats, and humiliation.**

“Coercive control is a pattern of behaviour which seeks to undermine a person's self-esteem or sense of self and restrict or remove their liberty or freedom. It describes a variety of controlling acts including manipulation, intimidation, sexual coercion, gaslighting (a form of psychological abuse in which a victim is manipulated into doubting their own memory and sanity).” - Every aspect is present in prison, often from multiple people (including several officers and sometimes other prisoners). There is no escape.



**SOLIDARITY
APOTHECARY**

SEVERING FROM SUPPORT

Prison disconnects – people are severed from sources of support. Calls and visits are a lifeline, but many people are deprived from these due to economic & other circumstances.

There are exceptions, but **many people feel abandoned** and cast alone, increasing the traumatising of imprisonment.



SOLIDARITY
APOTHECARY

DISSOCIATION

In order to endure imprisonment, dissociation is absolutely necessary.

For some, this can be through substances (in prison and after).

Prison severs a person's relationship to their body. In order to survive, they have to disconnect from their own body. This has long-term effects after prison in their ability to live fully.



SOLIDARITY
APOTHECARY

SHAME

Prisoners are considered natural, normal and necessary in society. The experiences of the prisoner are normalised, justified, 'do the crime, do the time'. Jokes about 'dropping the soap' and prison rape are common. **The trauma of the person in prison becomes invisibilized, unnamed, unrecognised.** People may look at issues that led to prison but fail to identify the traumatising of imprisonment itself. **Whatever people go through, popular culture believes you deserved it.** Shame is a common trauma dynamic and built-in to the prison system - society hates you and you loathe yourself.



SOLIDARITY
APOTHECARY

MULTIPLE LAYERS OF TRAUMA & OPPRESSION

Author Karlene Faith writes that “Prison is a place where all injustices converge”. In addition to all the common trauma dynamics in the slides above, **prison will also magnify and enable all forms of other oppression.** For example, racial trauma - prisoners will be targeted with racial violence, or people will experience transphobia through attacks and sexual violence, people will experience ableism, and all other forms of oppression.



SOLIDARITY
APOTHECARY

MOVEMENT BREAK





PRACTICING HERBALISM IN PRISON



**JUST TO BE CLEAR:
THE SOLUTION IS NOT HERBALISM IN PRISON, THE
SOLUTION IS NO MORE PRISONS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**



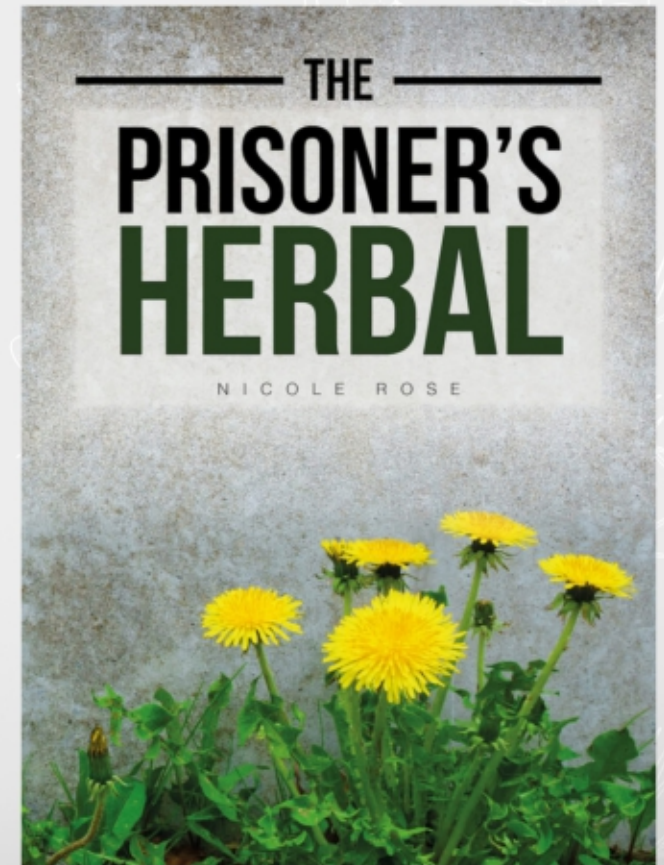
HERBALISM IN PRISON: MY EXPERIENCES

- Job in prison 'gardens'
- Learning from older women & Traveller women
- Constant experimentation
- Smuggling weeds in my bra!
- Drying roots on prison radiator
- Sleeping with dandelion root under pillow
- Canteen remedies e.g. salt, pepper
- Distance learning courses



THE PRISONER'S HERBAL BOOK

- Brought together my experiences
- Medicine making in a prison environment
- Profiles of ten commonly found herbs e.g. Dandelion, Plantain, Yarrow, Chickweed, Mallow, Nettle, Chamomile, Selfheal, Daisy & Rose
- Extensive section on canteen remedies e.g. fruits & vegetables, spices & condiments, tea & coffee
- Connecting with plant allies
- Wound care



— THE —
**PRISONER'S
HERBAL**

NICOLE ROSE



I find it so interesting

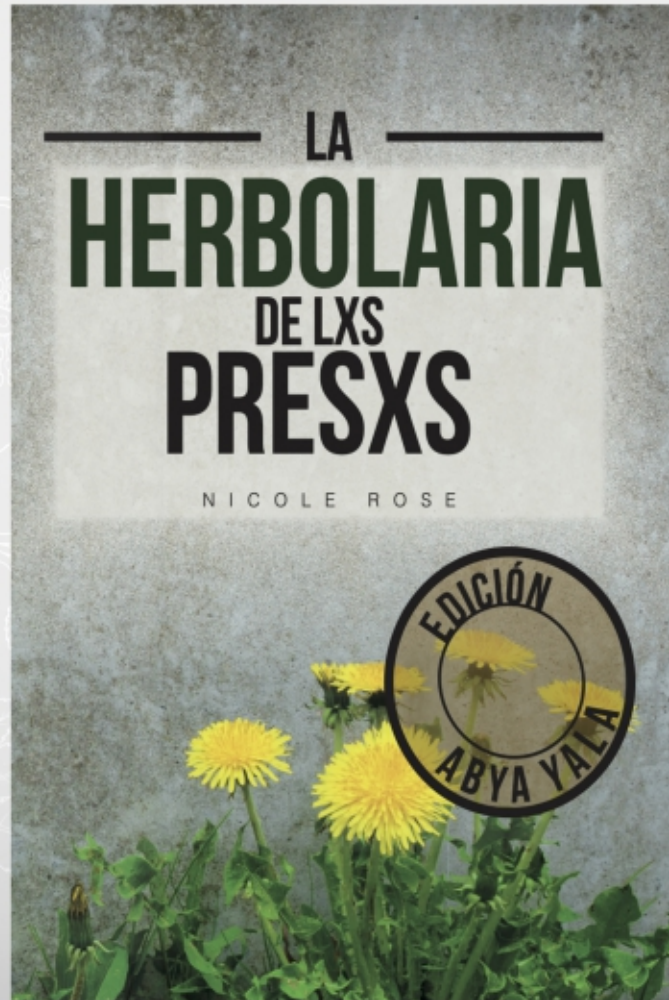


THE PRISONER'S HERBAL DISTRIBUTION

- 3,000 books have been distributed
- Mostly UK and US
- Advertised in newspapers & newsletters to prisoners via existing projects
- Friends & family also send in requests
- Prisoner book projects
- Translated into two 'Spanish' versions e.g. Spain & Mexico
- Italian, German & French versions coming soon



LA HERBOLARIA DE LXS PRESXS



HOW MIGHT HERBALISM BE LIBERATING FOR PRISONERS?



WHY IS HERBALISM LIBERATING FOR PRISONERS?

- Sense of connection & relationship
- Strength from natural world & aliveness
- Overcoming powerlessness/building health autonomy
- 'Safe and social' state/parasympathetic potential
- Passion/hobby/source of stimulation & learning
- Spiritual support/anticolonial/ancestral connections



TESTIMONIALS

“ Herbs keep me alive in prison



I love your herbal book... Personally I can not over state how this book has helped me in prison. I have many ailments from asthma, COPD, severe reactive skin. Unfortunately our prison yard is mostly concrete. But I have managed to treat my ailments by picking dandelion leaves to eat and wash. Also we have some plantain that grows so I use that for lots of things. Also we have a bit of clover so I use all what I can. On the out I lived in a field and never touched detergent. I have a good knowledge of herbs but your book has bolstered up my own knowledge and the use of canteen items as well is amazing. Thank you all so much for this book. Herbs keep me alive in prison and give me light and greenery.

Stuart
HMP Rye Hill



TESTIMONIALS

“ It connected me to plants and weeds in a way that I never expected



The Prisoner's Herbal book was fantastic, a very enjoyable and informative read. It connected me to plants and weeds in a way that I never expected!! ... The book was a perfect way for me to learn myself about how easy it is to pass by different plants and shrubs when you don't know what they are!! I am using the book to study what little life grows in here as its mainly all tarmac/concrete. You're more than welcome to put on social media in your own words that I love the book and use it to learn as much as possible!

Russell Hawkes
HMP Featherstone



TESTIMONIALS

“ So thankful for this book!

So thankful for this book! It has brought a wonderful educational perspective to our group living inside the walls of a California district prison. each week we discuss a different plant, it's benefits and it's uses. thank you for writing this! and most of all, thank you for sharing with folks who are incarcerated ❤️

Calliope

Insight Garden Program



TESTIMONIALS

“ I have used The Prisoner’s

I have used The Prisoner’s Herbal as a reference for writing a Plant Profile column in a newsletter for people in Indiana (USA) state prisons. Having the input and wisdom from someone who knows herbalism and has the experience of being locked up has been such an amazing resource! It helped me feel confident that learning and teaching about plants can be relevant and meaningful for anyone, even those the state is attempting to deprive of any connection to the wild world. Thank you, Nicole!

Satele

TIME/cut Newsletter





HEALING FROM PRISON & HERBAL SUPPORT FOR TRAUMA



COMMON EXPERIENCES SHARED BY FORMER PRISONERS

- Destruction of relationships/support system
- Practical challenges dominate e.g. housing, money, lack of employment
- Fear/distrust in people offering support (due to P.I.C), hyper independence
- Loneliness/alienation socially, emotionally, politically
- Highly impacted nervous system e.g. constant fight/flight
- PTSD from prison - nightmares, panic attacks, flashbacks etc
- Compounded trauma from pre-prison life
- Chronic health issues especially gut health & immune system
- Drug use. Polypharmacy/can be on several medications
- 'Post incarceration syndrome'



WHAT IS TRAUMA?

- No single definition!
- Τραῦμα – Trauma is the Greek word for wound or damage
- One definition is that trauma is a distressing, disturbing or wounding experience or injury experienced in many ways over a lifetime
- Trauma is also starting to be recognised as the *response* to a distressing, disturbing or wounding experience



HOW TRAUMA CAN AFFECT THE BODY

- Trauma shapes every person's body differently
- From ways that people express distress e.g. nightmares, panic attacks to longer-term chronic illness and dis-ease
- We are intimately connected to our environments and the various forces that shape our lives



HOW THE BODY EXPRESSES DISTRESS

**SLEEP
DISTURBANCES**

**CHANGES IN
WORLDVIEW**

**MEMORIES,
FLASHBACKS
& TRIGGERS**

**CHRONIC
DISCONNECTEDNESS**

**AROUSAL &
REACTIVITY**

TRAUMA RESPONSE FRAMEWORK



HERBAL ALLIES

- Herbalism is based on relationships. With plants, you are never alone
- It is the act of herbalism that is healing
- Plant medicines can transform your life by enabling a deeper relationship with the land, improving sleep and digestion, preventing disease, reducing inflammation and aiding the nervous system to rest and recover while surviving and resisting this oppressive world.
- Many herbs can support people recover from trauma
- NB - herbal safety



NERVINES

- Herbs that have an affinity with the nervous system
- Relaxant nervines e.g. Lavender, Chamomile, Lemon Balm etc.
- Cardiac nervines e.g. Hawthorn, Rose, Motherwort, Linden Flower etc.
- Hypnotic nervines e.g. Skullcap, Passionflower, Hops, Wild Lettuce etc
- Nervine tonics e.g. Milky Oats, Vervain, St John's Wort, Betony etc.





INTRODUCTION TO ABOLITION



WHAT IS ABOLITION?

WHAT DOES ABOLITION MEAN TO YOU?



ABOLITION

- “abolition /abə'liʃ(ə)n/
- Noun
- 1. the action of abolishing a system, practice, or institution”
- A verb, a practice. It consists of the actions we take to build safety and to tear down harmful institutions.



ABOLITIONIST APPROACHES

“An abolitionist approach ... would require us to imagine a constellation of alternative strategies and institutions, with the ultimate aim of removing the prison from the social and ideological landscapes of our society.”

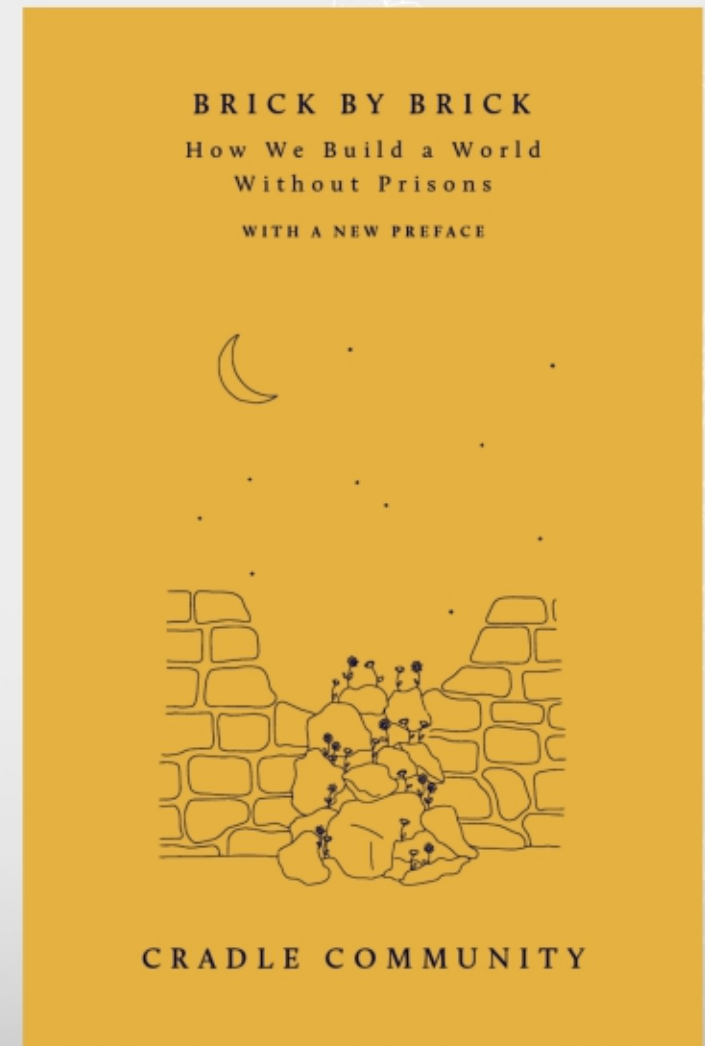
- Angela Davis



BRICK BY BRICK

“A world without prisons is nothing like the world we live in now. It is a world built on collective safety and care – for all of us. To build such a world, it is essential that we abolish the prison system and every structure that serves to deprive us of our freedom, safety and dignity. The global prison abolitionist movement resists all forms of violence and oppression, inviting us to work to transform our relationships with each other and with the earth”

- Cradle Community



BUILDING A PRISON FREE WORLD





THE ROLE OF HERBALISM IN ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENTS



**WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL
ROLES FOR HERBALISTS IN
MOVEMENTS WORKING FOR
ABOLITION?**

WHAT CAN WE DO?



THE ROLE OF HERBALISM IN ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENTS

- Massive question demanding collective answers & experiments.
- We also have to organise & fight like everyone else
- Abolition/ Anarchism for me means eradicating all forms of domination - including within herbalism (white supremacy, cultural appropriation, classism, ableism, transphobia etc.)
- No conversation about herbalism can happen without conversations about LAND BACK, decolonisation, redistribution etc.
- We have to challenge the capitalist appropriations of herbalism & the exploitation of plant and human communities



HERBALISM & ABOLITION

- Prisoner Solidarity: 11 million people worldwide in prisons excluded from herbalism
- Herbalists can support people leaving prison & recovering from state violence
- Herbalists can support anti-repression efforts e.g. defendant herbal support
- Herbalists can support frontline organisers to sustain their work
- Herbalist street medics can support protests, riots & insurrections.
- Herbalists can hold space at occupations & sites of resistance
- They can offer care to people fleeing state violence at border hotspots
- Herbalists can support plant communities
- Herbalists can offer popular education on plant medicine



ANTICAPITALIST HERBALISM

“Herbalists should go with the flow, embrace being on the wrong side of capitalism and the law, and put our energies towards establishing decentralized, autonomous, grassroots health networks that empower community self-reliance, provide care to those most in need, and reduce the need for people to access conventional medicine.”

- Dave Meesters



PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: SOLITARY GARDENS



PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: SOLITARY GARDENS



CLOSING CHECK OUT & WHAT IS YOUR NEXT STEP

