

Envisioning Abolition in Our Local Asian American Communities



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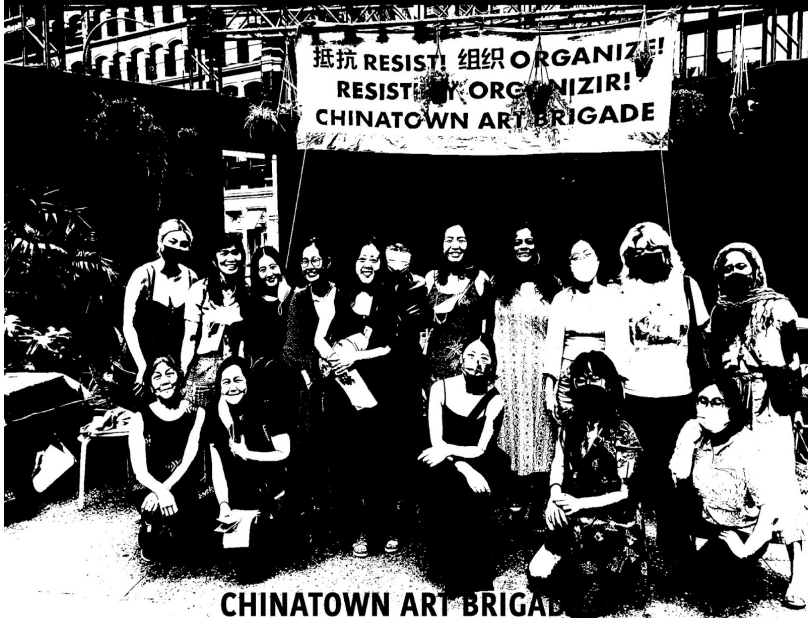
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ENVISIONING ABOLITION IN OUR LOCAL ASIAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

A TEACH IN TO COMBAT ANTI-ASIAN HATE AND STRENGTHEN BLACK/ASIAN SOLIDARITY WITH SPEAKERS FROM CAAAV:ORGANIZING ASIAN COMMUNITIES, RED CANARY SONG, ASIAN AMERICAN FEMINIST COLLECTIVE AND THE CHINATOWN ART BRIGADE.



CHINATOWN ART BRIGADE

LL: We're gathered here today on the ancestral homelands of the Lenape people. Astor Place specifically was once a central meeting point of three Lenape tribes— the Canarsie, the Sapohannikan, and the Manhattan peoples— who called this place Kintecoying (“Crossroads of Three Nations”) because it was a place where three major trails intersected. As was tradition for meeting places, here— perhaps where this Red Stage is set up—was a sacred oak tree under which people would meet, trade, play, hold tribal councils and ceremonies, and otherwise make Indigenous life. Where we are gathered today was, is, and will always be Indigenous space. New York City is home to the highest concentration of Indigenous peoples in the U.S., more than 100,000 people. On these Lenape homelands, we join Native peoples here and across the world in their ongoing struggle against settler colonialism. For those of us who are settlers, that means interrogating our relationship to the land that we are now on. As Kanaka Maoli scholar Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua asks us to ask ourselves: given my and my family's relationship to history and to the other people who exist here, what is my *kuleana*— my relational obligation to this land and its native stewards? To imagine a different relationship to land and to each other is also the work of abolition.



This event was inspired by the protests of this past summer in response to the most recent spate of police murders of Black people and the more public dialogue around abolition and defunding the police that followed; the rise in violent public attacks on Asian Americans; the shooting and targeting of massage parlors and vulnerable Asian migrant women workers in Georgia; and, here in the city, the carceral response to these events in the form of

the NYPD Asian Hate Crimes Task Force. That the first national conversations on race and racist violence that took place after the

events and uprisings of the summer were centered on “Stop Asian Hate Crimes,” a criminal justice framework centered on the individual perpetrator and which sets up the expansion of the prison industrial complex (PIC), is consistent with how Asian Americans have historically been used as a wedge between white hegemonic power and racialized groups, particularly Black and brown folks. “Stop Asian Hate” also does not reflect how racist violence actually shows up in our own communities, stratified by class, gender, immigration status, language, and the histories of the places from and routes by which people come here. We’re holding this event in order to center histories of Asian American organizing and racial justice work that have been made possible by and that contribute to the rich histories of abolitionist organizing against the racist capitalist settler state that is the U.S.

Our understanding of abolition is informed by the Black radical tradition and generations of Black freedom fighters who have articulated abolition as a political vision and a practice that demands the abolition of all forms of policing and police because it understands that policing itself is the problem. Abolition means the fundamental redefinition of ideas of safety and of justice away from the police, the law, the courts as a way of dealing with our social, economic, political and interpersonal problems. This means that the entire foundation of our political order, which is built on anti-Blackness, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism, must be fundamentally rethought and dismantled.

BY: The Chinatown Art Brigade is an intergenerational collective driven by the fundamental belief that our cultural, material, and aesthetic modes of production have the power to advance social change, racial justice, and economic justice. We are comprised of



Asian-American/Asian diasporic identifying artists, video makers, writers, educators, scholars, and activists with deep roots in Manhattan's Chinatown and the Chinatowns throughout New York City. Together we make work that centers art and culture as a way to support community-led organizing against gentrification, displacement, and racialized capitalism. Gentrification and mass displacement are inextricably tied and part of the same system of the PIC that incarcerates, criminalizes, and perpetuates state-sanctioned violence against our communities of color.

I wanted to say a little bit more about why abolition and why we are talking about this within the context of Asian American communities. A lot of Asian groups have been calling for more police presence, which we're absolutely opposed to because it criminalizes folks of color and pits us against each other. But also, as a working class kid who grew up in Sunset Park, Brooklyn to garment worker parents, I often think about how do I talk to folks like my parents, folks of their generation who are in their 70s and 80s? How do we actually see folks where they're at and not use these sorts of words like abolition or white supremacy? Like, what does that actually mean? How do we talk to people about that? Folks in our communities, monolingual immigrants, Chinese, Korean, and South Asian immigrants? How do we actually have these conversations with them? That's also where the impetus for this teach-in comes from. The carceral state and incarceration is part of the same system of labor exploitation and gentrification, all these things are really tied together.

We're going to talk a little bit later about the new jail that is being built in Chinatown. They're breaking ground next year and how the Museum of Chinese in America, how a lot of these cultural institutions, were complicit in building this jail, and how these are also tied together.

EH: Hello everyone. CAAAV has been organizing Asian communities in so-called New York City, Lenape land, since 1986.

We've organized around a bunch of different issues, but the past two decades we've been focusing on housing justice and stopping gentrification, in particular in Chinatown and also in western Queens. We have the Chinatown Tenants Union, a youth chapter, and the Asian Tenants Union. I'm an organizer with the Asian Tenants Union. The Asian Tenants Union organizes Chinese, Bangla, and Korean speaking public housing residents in Western Queens. We believe that our power comes from our relationships and our decision making power about our own homes, neighbors, and neighborhoods.



So a lot of what I do is having conversations with public housing residents in Mandarin and Cantonese and building deep relationships and getting them to see this vision of working class people reclaiming New York City in our collective interest, and seeing that vision and moving powerfully together and also winning our campaigns. Currently we're in a campaign against the privatization of public housing. We recently won and stopped the NYCHA Trust or the Blueprint plan from passing through, which would have privatized all of public housing in NYC.

When I first started doing explicitly abolitionist organizing, which was around de Blasio's plan to build new jails, I asked one of my mentors, Cara Page, who does a lot of healing justice and Black liberation work that is inherently abolitionist: how do I explain abolition and transformative justice to people from a variety of understandings and familiarities with it? I was going to host a meeting in Chinatown with a bunch of different community members that have influence over the neighborhood. And Cara actually brought up a story from CAAAV and how CAAAV during Hurricane Sandy stepped up and did mutual aid for the

neighborhood when our elders and people in our neighborhood were stuck up in their homes. Elderly people several floors up without electricity or water and CAAAV organized to get our people what we need, like phone chargers, water, electricity. That showed how when the state fails us, when the state is not there to meet our needs, we have our community and we have our solutions. And we do it through our relationships and our neighborly relations and this commitment to take care of each other. That showed me the story of how we go through crisis over crisis in this country, that we come up with solutions for our own communities. And I think when talking about abolition, a big learning for a lot of people is that it's a project not only of taking down prisons and carceral systems, but also what we do to build the communities and relationships we need to live beyond the state. We see the state not being there for us a lot of the times. And so telling those stories and showing those possibilities is really important.

In my organizing with public housing residents, a lot of my recent conversations where abolition comes up is around our sense of safety and our fear of the anti-Asian attacks and violence that have been happening. In these conversations, moving through the emotions of fear and figuring out what safety means to us, that's where the organizing tools of having deep conversations and agitating each other, interrupting to be like, "What do you really mean by you feel safe when the police are in the subway station?" or "What actually is true safety?" or "Why is it that police are our only option or the normal option that we think of?" when we actually think through materially, when there are language barriers, what is this policeman at the subway station actually going to do for us? And so what I've been learning is, through the story of CAAAV doing mutual aid during Hurricane Sandy, that we need to show the material collective interest we have in abolition.

What we've seen work with our base of working class Asian folks is linking it to property. So for public housing and for gentrification in Chinatown, we can see whose side the police are on. They're going

to protect property over your own home. They're going to protect your landlord's house rather than your home and your right to have a home. I think for public housing, there is also an anti-privatization campaign, bringing back the land acknowledgment and decolonization. We're not there yet, but there's a lot of possibility for understanding how housing and land is not for profit. I think for me personally, decolonization has been really important in understanding safety.

Another example that moves our members is, as Betty talked about, because a lot of Asian working class folks are low-wage workers who are really exploited, thinking through their own experiences with police and their bosses. When there's wage theft and they go and hold their bosses accountable for the wages that were stolen from them and the boss calls the police, who are the police there for? Understanding that the police are there to protect the bosses and property and this exploitative relationship.

Doing organizing with CAAAV has taught me that showing our collective material interest is really important. Also how we have these conversations—I think transformative justice and struggling through the messiness and the emotions is also really important. What I'm learning also is that for a lot of our folks, safety is based in a desire for authority. One of my goals as an organizer is to understand and to help people understand that they have the inherent right to have authority over their own lives and that we do not need to look towards the state for that authority. Through our deep relationships and our collective people power, we can decide what happens to our own homes and how we keep ourselves safe.

So to conclude, I think it's important to use organizing tools to get people to understand what is the collective material interest and also really leaning into “nothing is this or that.” Transformative justice and Indigenous pedagogy and knowledge teaches us that things aren't this or that and to really move into what's in between and struggle through that together.

AT: Who keeps us safe? We keep us safe! Who keeps us safe? We keep us safe! I have really been contemplating that chant since George Floyd was murdered last year and thinking about what actually keep us safe. I've been an educator in classrooms for ten years now, which is bonkers to me. I teach fifth grade. How many of you as students felt like you weren't heard or safe in your classrooms ever? Often times that's because, as Em said earlier, we're looking for a person of authority to say, "Hey, this is wrong or this is right," but also to hear you. Something I've also been contemplating in the past few years is this quote from a disability rights activist from South Africa, "Nothing about us without us is for us."



I'm going to say that again. Nothing about us without us is for us. All right.

People did not ask to be in public housing projects where there's cops going up and down stairwells. They didn't ask for cops kicking them out from Washington Square Park just a few minutes walk away at 10pm. They're not asking for these things that don't actually make them feel safe.

In 2014, we had a man named Akai Gurley who was killed in a stairwell of his apartment building in the Pink Houses in Brooklyn. He was killed by a cop who was patrolling that stairwell, an Asian American cop named Peter Liang, who was startled in that dark stairwell because lights aren't fixed in NYCHA housing, of course. Elevators weren't working, so Akai Gurley had to use the stairs. Peter Liang shot a bullet which bounced off a wall and straight into Akai Gurley's heart. CAAAV, which I have worked with as a Chinatown Tenants Union member and Asian Tenants Union member, said straight up in 2014: We support Akai Gurley. Black

Lives Matter. This was not a popular statement from our community. In 2016 when Peter Liang was found guilty of manslaughter, 10,000 Asian Americans who look like me, including some of my cousins, went to Prospect Park to say this is one tragedy and two victims. That Peter Liang was alive, but he shouldn't go to jail for killing someone. Akai Gurley's family was devastated. And I know that devastation because my family also lost someone in 1982.

I'm related to a man named Vincent Chin who was murdered by two white men who thought he was Japanese during an auto crisis. Vincent was Chinese, of course, and they beat him to death a week before he was supposed to get married. My relatives were supposed to be at the wedding, and my family went to his funeral instead. And those two white men were told by a white judge who was a prisoner of war during World War II in Japan, "These weren't the kinds of men you sent to jail." Judge Charles Kaufman said these two men will never kill again. They're going to be out in public and they never served time for the murder of my cousin Vincent Chin, who was murdered June 19, 39 years ago. And so when those 10,000 Asian Americans in 2016 said, "We support Peter Liang," I was crushed. A lot of us were crushed because I saw Jesse Jackson in footage hugging my great Auntie Lily Chin, the mother of Vincent Chin, knowing that it was racial solidarity and racial justice campaigns that get our names known.

Not enough people know Vincent Chin's name today, but Jesse Jackson and all of the other racial justice coalitions that existed in Michigan and across the nation said we want justice for Vincent Chin and we will not tolerate racial violence. CAAAV was actually founded because of the murder of my cousin Vincent Chin. I say all that because CAAAV had me take a stance because members of CAAAV were doxxed by our own community. Our own members said, "We don't trust you." Hundreds and hundreds of Facebook reviews of CAAAV gave CAAAV one-star ratings saying, "You don't support us. You don't support Asian-American communities

because you sided with Black lives.” Do we believe that? No! Who keeps us safe? We keep us safe! And that means believing that Black lives matter as well as Asian lives. Because all lives don’t matter if Black lives don’t matter.

So I spoke up publicly. They were trying to compare Peter Liang to my cousin Vincent Chin. They said: Peter Liang, this Asian American cop who was alive, was similar in injustice to my cousin Vincent. And I said: No, it is those racial justice campaigns and solidarity that said Vincent Chin’s name mattered. And we have to say Black Lives Matter and say that proudly.

And my family was not happy. They said, “Don’t conflate Vincent’s name, our family’s name with Black Lives Matter” in 2016. This was two years after the murders of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. And there was a lot of education we had to do. Another campaign that happened after the murders of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling came out called Letters for Black Lives, which translated letters in 26 Asian languages so that we could actually start talking about this.

We have to stand here and we have to make sure that we remember that history, that this position that we say out loud right now, Black Lives Matter, was not a popular position in 2014, nor was standing for Palestine or police-free schools. Or all the things we have to stand for in order for change to happen.

Abolition is one of them. I’m a teacher. I have a lot of coworkers who don’t know what abolition means. What I tell them is that we have a bucket. All this money for a police officer to harass people at Washington Square Park at 10 pm at night. Hundreds and hundreds of NYPD officers five days ago swarming people who are just chilling outside that is not going to my students, not going to staff, not going to guidance counselors and school counselors and social workers and public housing. That’s how we keep us safe actually.

No one came in saying, “I want a police officer in my classroom taking a student away.” That’s not how this works. That student wants me to talk to them and hear them and make changes based on what they need. How many of us had a teacher who heard us, who understood us? I hope we have a few. That’s what we have to do as teachers too. We have to hear the people in front of us and say, “What matters to you? What does safety look like to you in this classroom?” That means away from physical harm. That means their mental health is met. That means we give them the resources that the state didn’t give us. Who keeps us safe? We keep us safe! And I hope that really helps us think about what community safety, not just police safety looks like.

SB: Hi everyone. Today I wanted to talk a little bit about an open letter that the Asian American Feminist Collective (AAFC) wrote in September of 2020, where we asked everyone on this stage, all of whom signed, to join us in asking for cop-free communities, asking our community members to imagine what safety would look like without an Anti-Asian Hate Crimes Task Force. To really think about if that would make us feel safe. If what we needed was a more multilingual police force, if that would make us feel safe. And if not, what might actually help? And as we wrote that letter, we called on so much of the research and work that other people on this stage have done.



It’s so beautiful that we are all gathered here today, and it’s such a privilege to get to talk about all of these different intellectual threads coming together. And I also just wanted to note that that letter was written in the aftermath of a lot of attacks against Asian American elders. And our fear was real. But I think that it was also really brave to think about what we might be able to do with that

fear that actually addressed it, rather than putting a different kind of Band-Aid on it.

What we found as we were writing and as we were reading is that the NYPD doesn't make many people feel safe. Our communities stand to face greater harm because of the police. Looking at studies that CAAAV did in the 1990s, they found that almost half of anti-Asian racist violent incidents were actually police-involved incidents. The police were the ones perpetrating the violence. And we started to think a little bit about violence and how we think about it because often when we imagine a violent incident, we think of a moment of rupture or something really traumatic that's happening to someone on the street. We think about a moment where someone is harmed and we think about this kind of dramatic flash point. We wanted to think about all of the other kinds of slower violence that are happening all around us—the violence of street vendors not being able to sell on the street because the police are harassing them, or the violence of the NYPD colluding with ICE and other immigration authorities to make people feel unsafe in their places of work. We wanted to challenge people to think of who counted when they talked about Asian Americans. Did refugees count? Did low-wage workers count? Did sex workers count? Did massage parlor workers count? And if all of those people count in the kind of wild imaginary we have of what Asian America is, then did the cops make them feel safe?

And resoundingly, we found that the answer was really no. At AAFC, we think a lot about the strange and fractured coalition that makes up Asian America, and often if it's still a useful category for us to keep using as a community. And as we were thinking about anti-Asian violence specifically, we kept coming around to the idea that our comrades at DRUM (Desis Rising Up and Moving) and Equality Labs and the Bangladeshi Feminist Collective had put forth after 9/11 that actually violence against Asians can look all sorts of ways. And in the aftermath of 9/11, what kept the South Asian community safe was not the NYPD. It was organizing and

solidarity and showing up for each other and sharing information and often hiding people from the police when they were coming for them unfairly. And so in that kind of moment, we were prompted to think about what we actually do have in common as an Asian American community and how we might be able to tap those resources to keep each other safe.

What would it mean to have a real language justice platform where people had access to the benefits they needed? What would it mean to have a tenants union for every building? What would it mean to have resources for people to make sure that they were fed, they were housed, that they knew who to talk to, that they were going to go to a safe school and felt heard and have a classroom size that worked for them, where there was a sense of abundance?

And I think I just wanted to say really quickly, too, we are all in such debt to the Black feminists in our lives and the Black Lives Matter movement. I know that when AAFC first started thinking this, we hadn't all called ourselves abolitionists. I don't know that we would have defined ourselves that way universally, but we had our wonderful Rachel, who had been organizing against the Chinatown jail and No New Jails, and shared so much with us. And slowly, through a summer of sweaty protests and thinking about all of these things in tandem, we started to realize that abolition was sort of the only way forward for us because it was the only way that our commitments were actually justified. It was the only way that we could think of a society for everyone. And I think a big piece of that was starting to imagine what we would do with all of those billions of dollars that currently fund a military occupying force in our city. And people had great ideas. I remember asking my friends what they would fund instead of the NYPD, and I got answers from luxury A-train to smaller class sizes to community gardens.

We have a huge untapped well of imagination if we think about how we might actually build community intentionally. Thank you to all of you. I've learned so much from everyone on the stage for

years now, so I'm so grateful to be here.

EC: Hi, I'm Esther. I'm an organizer with Red Canary Song and we are a sex workers and allies grassroots collective that does massage parlor outreach. We're also advocating for the full decriminalization of sex work in New York. Before I start, I really want to have a moment of silence to honor the lives lost in March during the Atlanta shooting.



On March 16, eight women were killed in Atlanta during a shooting and six of those were migrant Asian women. Red Canary Song started in 2017 when Yang Song, a massage parlor worker, fell to her death after a police raid at her place of work. It's not sure if she jumped or if she fell or what happened in that instance, but Red Canary sprouted out of that movement to protect migrant Asian women and sex workers.

The reason why we're a sex workers collective that also does massage work outreach is because of this conflation between the two that often appears. And it's also due to the criminalization of the sex industry which creates an opacity within the massage business. So although the majority of Chinese massage businesses are licensed businesses that don't provide sexual services, it is assumed that Asian American women and Asian migrant women would because of the Page Act and because of a long history of the hypersexualization of Asian women.

Sex workers' rights groups have not had a lot of support for the majority of the history of the United States, except for abolitionist groups. In the early 2000s, abolitionist groups were the only allies to sex workers because they knew how deeply ingrained the criminal legal system and criminalization is and how harmful it is to

women, to LGBTQ folks, to people who may not have other avenues for income and turn to sex work as the most lucrative form of employment.

The erasure of sex workers and massage workers from the broader Stop Asian Hate movement has been heartbreaking. Increased policing as a solution to what happened in Atlanta shows how absolutely removed the broader Asian American movement is from what is happening on the ground, to sex workers, to massage workers whose primary fear of violence is not from clients, but from the police, who have historically suffered years and decades of trauma, sexual and non-sexual NYPD harassment. Sometimes there's physical harassment, violence, abuse, manipulation tactics to funnel them into the human trafficking intervention court system, which incentivizes consensual sex workers and massage workers to self-identify as trafficking victims in order to access social services that should be provided by the government in the first place.

When COVID happened in 2020, a lot of the mutual aid work that Red Canary was doing was work that the government should have provided in the first place. We were doing cash drops to pay rent for people because Chinatown businesses were going down and no one was going to massage businesses, on top of the stigma that Asian American women are carriers of disease and viruses. We were doing grocery drops that should have been provided for. We were trying to figure out ways to make sure that these women were not pushed farther into the margins in their origins of work, which would actually lead to conditions of trafficking. The majority of women who work in massage businesses turn to massage work because it is more lucrative, to pay off debts, in order to earn enough money to have to get a massage license in the first place compared to restaurant work and compared to nail salon work.

All of that is to say abolition is absolutely central to sex workers organizing and for massage workers to have rights in the United States. We're here for the full decriminalization of sex work, not

partial criminalization, not the Nordic model, which has been rebranded as the equality model now, which would continue to rely on the police to criminalize everything around the worker, which essentially criminalizes the worker itself.

One more point, I really want to echo what CAAAV was talking about regarding gentrification. The police raid in Flushing that resulted in the death of Yang Song was coordinated with the city to clean up the red light district road that she was on in order for development to happen there. So everything is interconnected. All of our struggles are interconnected. I really want to urge the inclusion of sex workers and massage workers in the conversation because we see what happens when that is not included.

MM: Thanks again to Chinatown Art Brigade and Creative Time for their consistent commitment to abolitionist organizing within New York City, as well as for coordinating this event, among many others. I'm speaking from Lenapehoking, where I live on the land of the Canarsie people. I use she/her pronouns. I'm wearing glasses. I'm Indian and I'll be reading from a statement I wrote for an Asian American Feminist Collective teach-in, but updated for today. I currently participate in various abolitionist fights and my goal today will be to provide my general sense of an understanding of the landscape of PIC abolition in New York City.

On the flip side of New York City's celebrated history as a migration port is one marked by capitalism and anti-Blackness. In the 18th century, the city's slave market was where Wall Street is now. A century later, Central Park was built over Seneca Village, a community founded by free working class Black people in uptown Manhattan. Around the same time, the modern NYPD came into existence to police Irish immigrants



and stifle worker uprisings. It was soon after that that Rikers was built. Jack Norton and Jared Shanahan write, “Welfare Island, known as Blackwell’s Island prior to 1921 and Roosevelt Island today, was home to a cluster of institutions for its prisoners, psychiatric patients, and the city’s destitute. A progressive consensus began to coalesce around the idea that Welfare Island was in serious need of reform. Rikers Island would be that reform.” I wanted to bring up the history of the city a bit to ground the fact that not only has there long been a history of displacement, liberal co-optation of progressive demands and reformism, but that people have been working hard to end criminalization and establish a jail-free NYC for a long time, and to point out that our solidarity has to be rigorous.

Yet the mix of capitalism, land theft, expanded criminalization, and aforementioned co-optation have produced a situation where we now have in the city’s proximity four juvenile detention centers, five ICE facilities, five municipal jails, a federal correctional facility, and one penal colony known as Rikers Island. And I’m sure I’m missing some. This is not even to count the other criminalized spaces, including public housing, psychiatric facilities, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, foster care, and online.

Meanwhile, NYCHA, as people have already said, New York City’s public housing system, has reached new lows and there are upwards of 120,000 unhoused people in New York City. NYC’s unemployment rate rose to 10% in 2020, well past the 6% national average. Instead of making public transit free, the city raises MTA fees by amounts that make the train inaccessible for many. Last summer, NYPD beat and kidnaped protesters in the streets, but demands to defund the police were met with lackluster efforts from City Council as well as outright gaslighting and apathy.

Over 4000 people are held pretrial in New York City adult jails with significant numbers of people on probation. When people are released, the prospects for housing, health care, job training, and

emotional support are limited and often find themselves tied up with police. Despite the existence of the Transgender Housing Unit (THU) for prisoners, many trans women do not get access to the THU and largely New York City jails enact relentless violence on Black survivors and trans women inside.

With the hard won repeal of 50-a, we have an even clearer picture of abuse by corrections officers within the jails towards people inside. Reductions to the jail population made at the beginning of the pandemic have been undone. The appeal said that New York City has people on parole in jails at rates not seen since the early pandemic. Disregarding serious needs for social housing, deinstitutionalization of people in need of mental health care, and non-carceral economic support, the city's past many administrations and councils have been ruthless in their expansion of policing and imprisonment. Most recently, Bill de Blasio's police plan chose to expand criminalization despite massive protest, including increasing headcount and funding for NYPD. Notably, this plan claims to decriminalize sex work while focusing largely on punishing trafficking and not on the safety of survivors, as we just heard.

In response to the white supremacist attacks against Asian people, city leaders like Margaret Chin choose to expand the Asian Hate Crimes Task Force, even as Asian communities demand more resources such as language justice within city services and non-carceral protections. District attorneys and judges continue to request and set high bail amounts and aggressively keep people locked up or actively block organizers getting people out. There is existing evidence that NYPD and ICE cooperate despite laws to prevent this from happening. And in typical fashion, the NYPD lies about increasing crime to obscure the reality that jails and police do not prevent or reduce so-called crime.

Upwards of \$8 billion is still currently allocated to the building of borough based jails that will incarcerate many, many generations of

New Yorkers under the guise of being “better,” more humane jails. Popular demands to close Rikers were manipulated into a plan that puts massive amounts of funding into maintaining incarceration. Renewable Rikers, a bill meant to improve NYC’s environment, greenwashes the jail expansion plan by legitimizing jails as a way to close Rikers. The city continues to move forward with its plan for jail construction with AECOM, a firm known for being chosen to work on the Cop Academy in Chicago. Less than half of the current City Council candidates support closing Rikers without new jails. But abolitionists have held the line that a jail is a jail and that no reform which drives funds towards police and prisons is a viable path towards ending the PIC here in New York City and around the world.

New York City has been home to major rebellions and actions against the PIC, including in honor of Eric Garner, Layleen Polanco, Kalief Browder, and Akai Gurley. A little bit ago, at a rally to free Prakash Churaman, I saw New Yorkers committed to ending incarceration. Participatory defense campaigns like the one to #FreePrakash, #FreeTracy, and #FreeMalcolm—all people from New York City, who have always lived in New York City—are just some that are using community defense to prevent reincarceration of our comrades. Campaigns like CUNY for Abolition and Safety and #AbolishACS are working hard to end police interactions New Yorkers have with police. People are coalescing to say that anti-Asian hate is not solvable through policing and sitting through day-long hearings to demand ICE contracts be ended. In New York City, we must continue to hold the line that expansion of the PIC is never okay, even when major organizations and funders support it.

It is imperative to say close Rikers without new jails and fund housing instead. The creation of new jails is not an effective way to close a penal colony that itself was the consequence of reform. Instead, ending pretrial detention on a state level and passing serious bail reform, ending broken windows policing, and slicing away the power of corrections and police unions while defunding

their institutions by half as soon as possible will drastically reduce the number of people in jail in New York City. When we can decarcerate, why expand? Prisoner solidarity and mutual aid are two steps, but it will take strong, collective, principled actions that are not only limited to political elections and timelines. This is a serious moment to be in solidarity with Black, undocumented, trans, disabled and poor, criminalized communities in the city. And I feel that we can rise to it.

No one else is going to do it. And abolition as a framework insists that we do it ourselves with incredible hope and discipline and care.

BY: One final call to action is that there are 4 jails that folks have mentioned that are being built in New York City. We call bullshit when the city says these jails are more humane because they provide UV light therapy, that it is more humane than Rikers Island. In fact, they bought off tons of criminal justice reform groups, who say, “Yeah, these jails are humane, we’re for it.” But we want to call out one institution in particular. The Museum of Chinese in America is the only nonprofit cultural group in New York City who is taking \$35 million from this city in return for their blessing for this jail that’s going to be built right in Chinatown. And we say that is bullshit. They are getting money. They’re literally profiteering off of the criminalization of Black and brown bodies.

Jonathan Chu, who is the board chair of the Museum of Chinese in America, is a third generation landlord in Chinatown. His grandfather made millions, continues to make millions off of buying and selling and speculation of land since the 1960s. He is also the one trying to evict and union bust and end and close the only unionized restaurant in Chinatown, Jing Fong, right now. So this is this one guy. So labor exploitation, the carceral state, and gentrification all combine in this fight.

So when we say that it is real and it’s palpable and it’s part of our everyday life, we really, really, truly mean it.



Altar to those lost to white supremacist and state sanctioned violence

Further Reading and Resources:



CHINATOWN
ART
BRIGADE
唐人街藝術隊