

Criminal Justice Initiative

A project of the Solidago Foundation

2015-2016 Grants

CJI funds those most affected by mass criminalization and incarceration organizing for justice and real safety.

For the past two years CJI's grants have focused on movement building. This is because we know that in order to dismantle entrenched systems of injustice, you must build a movement. The more diverse the society, the more diverse the movement must be. CJI understands that we must educate communities both directly impacted and simply concerned; we must chip away at the barriers of race, class, age, gender and sexual orientation that keep us apart to connect likely and unlikely allies if we want to achieve success. That is why this year CJI funded organizations from varied communities working to expose and combat the horrifying atrocities and common place indignities committed by our government in the name of safety.

On the streets and reservations, in the schools and in the prisons, CJI grantees are battling the varied manifestations of race- and class-based mass incarceration. They are reaching out to like-minded organizations to build alliances that form one voice, one massive movement for a new social order. Calling for an end to a system of caging, cruelty and killing of human beings, our community members are working to create a society built on justice, not vengeance; on restitution, not retribution; on healing, not brutality. Led by survivors of this inhumane system and those it targets, CJI grantees are working to dismantle constructs of never-ending punishment to shape a society that will honor every life.

Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI) *New York City, Atlanta, Oakland, and Phoenix*
Received a \$20,000 grant from CJI

Black Immigrants in the United States are in the cross hairs at the intersection of racial profiling and racist immigration policies. Led by Opal Tometi, co-founder of #BlackLivesMatter and recently named a leading feminist in *The Washington Post* and a "New Civil Rights Leader" in both *Essence* and *The L.A. Times*, BAJI's critical work lifts up the Black Immigrant experience.¹ BAJI is the first and only national organization bringing together black immigrants and African Americans for racial justice and immigrant rights, strategically building a diverse movement of stakeholders working together to end "Mass Criminalization (i.e. mass incarceration, immigrant detention, and deportation)."² BAJI's work embodies a key analysis of the connections between various forms of state violence and oppression and a transformative vision for change centering the voices most marginalized.



BreakOUT! *New Orleans*

Received a \$20,000 grant from CJI

In their 2014 report *We Deserve Better*, BreakOUT! reports that 59% of transgender survey respondents had been asked by police for sexual favors compared with 12% of cisgender* respondents. This statistic illustrates the unique struggle the hyper-policed lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth community face with the criminal justice system. BreakOUT! has an active membership base aged 13-25 who participate in leadership institutes that include broad coalition work, advocacy for meaningful policy changes, intergenerational healing, arts, documentation and research toward developing critical resources, and even a GED program! BreakOUT! is also an official intake site for reporting complaints against the New Orleans Police Department. BreakOUT! embodies the work of building a movement led from the bottom up by investing in and supporting the leadership of young transgender people of color in their fight for safety for themselves and their communities.

Women on the Rise Telling HerStory (WORTH) *New York City*

Received a \$20,000 grant from CJI

WORTH is a longtime CJI grantee known for winning legislation in New York State that banned the practice of shackling women during maternal labor and delivery and extended the parental rights of incarcerated people. WORTH organizes incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women to become leaders and advocates of policy change in the areas of reproductive justice, reentry, housing, parental rights, employment and trauma. This year, WORTH began two strategic partnerships: in Queens, WORTH partnered with The Child Center to launch the borough's first "tele-visiting" program, designed to maintain parent-child relationships. WORTH will provide orientation and training for Center staff to assist incarcerated parents and their families and child care givers. At the Washington Correctional Center for Women in Seattle, Mommy and Me partnered with WORTH's Incarcerated Mothers Advocacy Project (IMAP) program to facilitate similar "video visits" for incarcerated mothers, including training while still in prison in skills related to parenting and appearing in court. Through work with WORTH, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women experts on the dehumanizing practices of the criminal justice system make change in those practices, build power and grow a movement that centers women's experiences.

American Indian Prison Project Working Group (AIPPWG) *St. Paul, Minnesota*

Received a \$15,000 grant from CJI

The recidivism rate at the juvenile facility on the Pine Ridge Reservation is 99.9%.³ AIPPWG works to address this and other disparities that forestall opportunities for American Indian youth and adults. AIPPWG provides a new model for tribal governments to deal with at-risk youth and juvenile justice programs through cultural and spiritual restorative practices, policy change, and education. The grant from CJI will allow AIPPWG to continue their vital work with detained and incarcerated American Indian youth and adults from pre-incarceration through reentry into the community—including specific programming for women—reducing recidivism and working for policy change in severely underserved and targeted communities. Recently, AIPPWG joined forces with The Innocence Project to collect data on wrongfully convicted American Indians in the U.S. and train legal staff on cultural competency strategies for working with American Indian clients.

Exprisoners and Prisoners Organizing for Community Advancement (EPOCA)

Worcester, Massachusetts

Received a \$15,000 grant from CJI

Known as a leader of successful Massachusetts campaigns to "Ban the Box" and reform CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information), EPOCA is credited with preventing 8,000 youth annually from being introduced into the criminal justice system, and reducing barriers to employment for formerly incarcerated people. EPOCA is a member-led, statewide, base-building organization the majority of whose members are formerly incarcerated. EPOCA fights "to create a society in which every institution builds people up, rather than breaking us down—including institutions of public safety."⁴ With the CJI grant, EPOCA continues their Jobs Not Jails campaign to stop the building of 10,000 new prison units with \$5 billion in state funds by 2023. The goals of the campaign are to freeze prison construction in Massachusetts, pass reforms, and redirect the money saved into a jobs program focused in low-income, high-crime neighborhoods.

Homies Unidos *Los Angeles*

Received a \$15,000 grant from CJI

Responsible for groundbreaking legislation preventing deportations of people facing persecution in their countries of origin and helping to maintain a gang truce between gangs in Los Angeles and EL Salvador, Homies Unidos works across borders

* a person whose self-identity matches the gender assigned them at birth; not transgender.

to promote peace and end violence in Central American communities. Homies has also been a leading voice in the call for humane and compassionate treatment of children and families crossing the U.S. border from Central America. Campaigns and projects include the Epiphany Project, a leadership training institute for gang involved youth; Libertad con Dignidad, a campaign to educate Central American immigrant communities on the legal process related to deportations and criminal justice; and End Solitary Confinement. The grant from CJI will allow them to hire an organizer.

Riverside All of Us or None (RAOUON) Riverside, CA

Received a \$15,000 grant from CJI

Riverside All of Us or None envisions a U.S. in which formerly incarcerated people develop strategy, write legislation, organize, and lead the movement to end failed criminal justice policies that perpetuate mass incarceration in the U.S. and specifically California. RAOUON develops formerly incarcerated leaders to advocate for themselves and their communities on local and state levels and works in collaboration with other All of Us or None chapters and other criminal justice organizations to advocate and change policies related to housing, employment, jail expansion, and re-entry. The grant from CJI will allow RAOUON to build the movement by hiring their first paid organizer, oversee the implementation of Prop 47 (which they helped pass, reducing mandatory minimum sentencing), increase their base, continue their work to challenge prison expansion, and remove barriers faced by formerly incarcerated people.

Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) New Orleans, LA

Received a \$7,500 grant from CJI



Louisiana is the incarceration capital of the world. In the state, one in 14 black men is in prison and one in seven is in prison, on parole or probation.⁵ School suspensions put youth at risk for incarceration, and, increasingly, school policies put students directly into the hands of the criminal justice system over discipline issues. This is the landscape within which FFLIC works, with a clear, anti-racist structural power analysis, to “derail” the School-to-Prison pipeline. A collective of over 3,000 community members including family members and allies of directly affected youth. FFLIC builds power in families and communities to fight for justice for their children and themselves through education, direct action organizing, peer advocacy, leadership development, and outreach. In the past two school years, FFLIC has reduced suspensions by over 10,000 and expulsions by 300.

Freedom Archives San Francisco, CA

Received a \$7,500 grant from CJI

A long time CJI grantee, Freedom Archives partners with community organizations and prisoner-led movements to put their struggles and campaigns into political context by preserving and disseminating historical audio, video and documents. The grant from CJI will allow Freedom Archives to continue supporting the struggle of incarcerated people in California by lifting up their and their families' voices, and promoting their demands in media to change public consciousness about mass incarceration. Freedom Archives collaborates with other prison justice organizations and prisoner-led campaigns for human rights including All of Us or None and the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity coalition. Producing curricula for organizers, Freedom Archives supports struggles against the torture of prolonged isolation and for the release of political prisoners.

The National Jericho Movement

Richmond, Chicago, Baltimore, Cambridge, New York, Omaha, Portland, Washington D.C.

Received a \$7,500 grant from CJI

Political prisoners, targeted specifically for their involvement in liberation struggles, face severe discrimination in parole decisions and are almost always denied even after serving twice the time of other prisoners convicted for the same offense. Jericho is on the forefront of organizations fighting nationally to change this. Jericho was founded by former political prisoners Herman Ferguson and Safiya Burkari at the request of the still incarcerated political prisoner Jamil Al-Amin, to educate the public and illuminate connections between the treatment of political prisoners and the use of mass incarceration to control

masses of domestically colonized people. CJJ values Jericho's vision of political prisoners as leaders of the struggle against mass incarceration and the most vocal members of a community experiencing state repression. Jericho has worked with the Human Rights Network to expose the mistreatment of U.S. political prisoners and present demands for justice at the U.N. A grant from CJJ allows them to continue this work.

Puente Human Rights Movement **Phoenix, AZ**

Received a \$7,500 grant from CJJ

Arizona is a key, strategic frontline for resistance against xenophobic and racist policies in the U.S. Bills passed there often become blueprints for laws all over the country: most famously SB1070—passed in 2010—which legalized racial profiling, and set a precedent for copycat bills in at least 16 other states. Within this context, Puente's work organizing, educating, and building power in migrant communities has been critical to meaningful change in the national movement for migrant justice culminating most recently in deportation relief for an estimated 4 million immigrants. The CJJ grant will allow Puente to continue to build their base among criminalized and incarcerated immigrants in Arizona who are not eligible for executive relief and launch a campaign to lessen charges that most frequently lead to deportation. Critically, Puente also challenges the destructive national discourse of "deserving" immigrants, pitted against others represented as "undeserving," thus counteracting the divide-and-conquer strategy used to separate families and communities and building a strong movement for justice.



Photos:

page 1 – (under text) various chapters of All of Us or None, (bottom of page) Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI)
page 2 – (under text) Homies Unidos
page 3 – Friends and Families of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC)
page 4 – Puente

Endnotes:

- 1) Tam, Ruth, "What leading feminists want to accomplish this year," *The Washington Post Blog*, January 2, 2015.
Armstrong, Lisa, "The New Civil Rights Leaders," *Essence*, October 31, 2014.
Pearce, Matt and Kurtis Lee, "The new civil rights leaders: Emerging voices in the 21st century," *L.A. Times*, March 5, 2015.
- 2) Black Alliance for Just Immigration, Grant Application to CJJ, November 19, 2014.
- 3) This statistic was quoted by the Superintendent of the Kyle Juvenile Detention Center on the Pine Ridge Reservation in conversation to Stephanie Autumn, Executive Director of AIPPWG.
- 4) Exprisoners and Prisoners Organizing for Community Advancement, Grant Application to CJJ, November 18, 2014.
- 5) Chang, Cindy, "Louisiana is the World's Prison Capital," *The Times-Picayune*, May 13, 2012.