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[FEX Funds a Critical Movement:](#)

[An E-News Focus on our Criminal Justice Funding](#)

By Charlene Allen

Black feminist scholars coined the phrase “intersectionality” in the 1960’s, while contemporary activists may refer to the “fabric of oppression.” Name it as you will, progressives increasingly agree that major oppressions, like those based on race, class, and gender, form a web of injustice in which each thread is interwoven with the others. The \$64,000 question: how can we unravel the mess of unearned privilege, entrenched poverty, and unequal access caused by these oppressions? Galvanized by groups like **Critical Resistance**, record numbers of activists are directing their attentions to the prison industrial complex (PIC), because of its role as an institution that promotes multiple oppressions. FEX grantees, supported by diverse FEX funds, have taken on the problems caused by a growing prison industry in all of their complexity. This September, they will come together at the Critical Resistance 10th anniversary gathering to bring fresh energy to a multi-faceted movement on the rise.



The United States incarcerates a higher percentage of its population than any other country; our prisons are disproportionately filled with people of color who are locked up for non-violent crimes; inmates are getting younger and sentences are getting longer even as employment is legally denied based on former incarceration. Given these factors, the PIC seems like a pretty good place to begin the unraveling. Add to this huge numbers of immigrants detained in U.S. prisons without charge, the devastating economic and social impact of incarceration rates on families and communities, and the propagation of gender-based violence behind bars, and we begin to see the ugly reality against which our grantees are working.

FEX funds have supported this work through activist-advised and donor-advised funds that reflect the values and priorities of each grantee’s community, and helps them become part of a larger movement.

Saguaro Examines the Link between Race and Prison Industrial Complex

Author Ellis Cose said it best in his acclaimed book *The Rage of a Privileged Class*: “Whatever difficulties Americans may have thinking of blacks as potential CEOs, no particular imagination is required to visualize crime with an African-American face.” His statement shows a keen understanding of the way in which social perceptions about crime and punishment are at the root of racism aimed at African-Americans and, increasingly, other people of color.

Organizations like **Safe Streets, Strong Communities**, which received a \$40,000 multi-year Saguaro grant in 2007, have built a strong coalition of allies who work together to challenge the entrenched racism they see in the New Orleans criminal justice system. Safe Streets has helped reform the notoriously corrupt Orleans Indigent Defender Board and has gained ground in stopping the Orleans Parish Sheriff’s office from holding children in adult facilities.



Halfway across the country, Direct Action for Rights & Equality, a Saguaro grantee in Providence, RI, works to address the criminalization of youth and adults of color in the Northeast. They have successfully fought to ensure that unemployed workers, including those with prison records, have access to publicly funded jobs. They have also addressed the “schoolhouse-to-jailhouse” pipeline by securing changes to Providence’s school disciplinary policy, which unfairly stopped students from completing their educations.

The Beyond Prisons Fund Redefines Safety

More than a decade ago, Angela Davis coined the phrase “Prison Industrial Complex” to denote the web of profit and oppression that the prison industry has become. “...While the ‘tough on crime’ initiatives of the 1980s did not produce safer communities or a significant drop in crime rates, it led to a remarkable proliferation of prisons,” said Davis in an address at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government. As the private prison industry has boomed over the past few years, community groups have asked: who profits from the proliferation of prisons, and who gets hurt?

The Beyond Prisons Fund, a special project of the Funding Exchange, makes grants to groups working to abolish prisons as instruments of punishment and social control. The Fund’s work is based on the premise that community safety is undermined, rather than supported, by prison and police systems.

Several Beyond Prisons grantees, including **Incite!**, Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA), and



Creative Interventions (CI), address the issue from the perspective of women's safety, asserting that, despite an exponential increase in the number of men in prisons, women are not any safer, and the rates of sexual assault and domestic violence have not decreased. Their work to protect women from violence includes an analysis of the criminal justice system as an institution of violence and control that increases the level of violence in society and is therefore counterproductive as a vehicle for violence intervention.

Beyond Prisons grantee Generation Five has undertaken a long-term strategic plan to help communities address abusive and violent behavior from within, with an eye toward accountability, restitution, healing, and wholeness. Working with grassroots organizations in immigrant, LGBTQ, and other communities, they are developing culturally appropriate models for communities to address family violence, which is largely ignored by the court system.

CJI Connects Immigration, Incarceration, and Profit

The FEX Criminal Justice Initiative (CJI) is a donor/activist grantmaking circle that funds criminal justice organizations that deliberately promote the leadership of formerly incarcerated people, including immigrant detainees. CJI funds groups like Families for Freedom, which organizes immigrants against ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) raids; educates communities about their rights; and works with foreign consulates to advocate for the defense of their nationals in unfair deportation proceedings. As we witness staggering increases in detention in the name of the "war on terror," CJI members have reaffirmed their commitment to work with immigrant community groups, and have engaged in an extensive political education process to learn more about the policies and practices in play.

According to the *New York Times*, "As the Bush Administration gets tougher on illegal immigration and increases its spending on enforcement, some of the biggest beneficiaries may be the companies that have been building and running private prisons around the country." These companies know that it is cheaper to incarcerate immigrant detainees than people who are incarcerated through state or federal criminal prosecution, because traditional prisoners are provided with services, like high school degree programs and recreational activities.

The impact of the expanded immigrant detention on human rights and public safety is, according to activists across the country, devastating. In addition to privately run prisons, high numbers of immigrant detainees are being held in county jails, many of which are also contracted out to private corporations. The ACLU reports that in Maricopa County, AZ, where five people recently sued the County, charging that they were unlawfully stopped and mistreated by law enforcement because they are Latino, residents suffer in many ways. "When local police try to take on the job of being immigration officers, immigrants and their family members often get the message that they should fear coming forward if they are the victim or witness of a crime." Moreover, residents have complained that local law enforcement's obsession with enforcing federal immigration

law has come at the expense of pursuing local crime. The involvement of local police in immigration matters has also led to a rise in complaints of racial profiling across the nation.

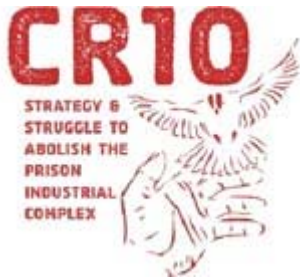
In the coming year, the CJI panel will reach out to groups working on immigration issues with a special emphasis on those working with people detained in military facilities.

The OUT Fund Fights Institutionalized Homophobia

The Stonewall arrests, and countless other examples of police violence against LGBTQ people, have taught us that gender variance is severely punished within our criminal justice systems. A recent study by OUT Fund grantee Transgender, Gender Variant and Intersex Justice Project (TGI-JP) documents another aspect of this state-supported violence, finding that 59 percent of transgender people incarcerated in California prisons in 2006 were sexually assaulted, compared to 4 percent of the general prison population.

To end the abuses and discrimination that TGI people experience in prisons and jails, TGI-JP provides alternative sentencing support, legal advice & referrals for prisoners, human rights advocacy, community organizing, and leadership development. Working with OUT grantee the Sylvia Rivera Law Project and other FEX grantees including Critical Resistance and Justice Now, TGI-JP has played a leadership role in forming the Transgender Justice Coalition, a group of organizations and individuals dedicated to promoting the leadership of former and current TGI prisoners. Following a groundbreaking Transforming Justice conference in 2007, the coalition is building a national movement for short-term and long-term solutions to the human rights crisis facing transgender and gender variant communities today.

CR10 Unites Voices and Invigorates Movement



Thousands will converge from September 26-28, 2008, in Oakland, California, for CR10, a 10th Anniversary Celebration and Strategy Session. Critical Resistance made history in 1998 when Angela Davis inspired activists to launch a new phase of the progressive criminal justice movement, fueled by the vision of a world without prisons. FEX is proud to support Critical Resistance and so many of our grantees as they come together in

Oakland. Conference organizers promise a gathering that will “propel this momentum forward, with united, strategic force.” Members of our Criminal Justice Grantmaking Circle will attend, along with FEX staff and countless grantees. We hope to see you there to celebrate 10 years of Critical Resistance and plan for the decade to come.