

Prison Abolition, Human Rights, and Penal Reform: From the Local to the Global

Mass incarceration and overcriminalization in the United States are subject to critique by some on both the right and the left today. Many critics increasingly talk of prison abolition. At the same time, the international human rights movement continues to rely upon criminal punishment as its primary enforcement tool for many violations, even as it criticizes harsh prison conditions, the use of the death penalty, and lack of due process in criminal proceedings. What would it mean for the human rights movement to take seriously calls for prison abolitionism and the economic and racial inequalities that overcriminalization reproduces and exacerbates? And what might critics of the carceral regime in the United States have to learn from work done by international human rights advocates in a variety of countries?

September 26-28th, 2019, the Rapoport Center will host in Austin an interdisciplinary conference to consider the relationships among the human rights, prison abolition, and penal reform movements. Do they share the same goals? Should they collaborate? If so, in what ways? The conference is co-sponsored by the Frances Tarlton “Sissy” Farenthold Endowed Lecture Series in Peace, Social Justice and Human Rights, Center for European Studies, William Wayne Justice Center for Public Interest Law, LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections, John Warfield Center for African and African American Studies, Center for the Study of Race and Democracy, Department of Sociology, Center for Population Research, and Capital Punishment Center.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore will offer the keynote lecture on September 26. We invite proposals for papers, panels, art, or other forms of presentation from activists, practitioners, and scholars in all disciplines. We are eager to include those who study or advocate around criminal law and human rights in different regions and contexts, those who work on various forms of incarceration (including immigration detention), and those who explore alternatives to current criminal punishment regimes. We encourage discussion of the distributive effects of various constructions of and responses to crime. Topics might include:

- Racial capitalism and prison abolition
- Prison abolition: short- versus long-term goals
- Abolition and efforts to reform/transform conditions of confinement: are they in opposition?
- Capital punishment, human rights, and the goals of death penalty abolition
- Mass incarceration and surveillance
- Gender, sexuality, reproductive rights and the prison system
- Human rights and decriminalization
- The human rights movement and national and international criminal law
- Lessons from transitional and restorative justice
- Incarceration and the intersections of criminal and immigration law
- Immigration detention and the (private) prison industrial complex
- Potential responses to violent crime
- The UN and crime
- Exportation of criminal justice models: good and bad
- The role of victims in carceral regimes and anti-carceral responses
- Reflections on the role human rights courts do and should play in the carceral state
- Black Lives Matter, human rights, and abolition
- Queer politics and abolition

Please send an abstract of your paper, panel, or project in under 500 words to [Sarah Eliason](#) by July 15, 2019. A limited number of need-based travel grants are available to support travel costs for selected participants. If you wish to apply for a travel grant, please complete [this application form](#) by July 15, 2019.