

THE RACIAL STATE WEEK 11

**IMAGINING
ABOLITION**

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Formerly incarcerated women and abolition activists speak



Youth and women's prisons are chronically overcrowded, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are massively over-represented. Nationwide, one third of the women in prison are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women – 1,106 women at the 2017 prisoner census conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. On an average day, over 60 per cent of the girls in youth prisons are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

[Debbie Kilroy, Imagining Abolition](#)

At Queensland's largest women's prison, the state sexually assaulted women 12,170 times in 2016.[ix] On 3,376 occasions, women were sexually assaulted after contact visits with their children, family and friends – the only contraband found was three cotton buds and a non-prison-issued singlet. This is how women pay for being able to hug and kiss their children.

[Debbie Kilroy, Imagining Abolition](#)

Newborn babies are almost always removed directly from the hospital to out-of-home 'care', with ad hoc provision made for breastfeeding and ongoing contact [...] As soon as a child is removed by the department, it is practically impossible for criminalised mothers to prove themselves as a 'willing and able' parent.

[Debbie Kilroy, Imagining Abolition](#)

It doesn't matter how good I am, how 'reformed' I am, how much effort I put in, how many times I reinvent myself, I will always be a criminal, an ex-con (if I'm lucky). My existence in some spaces will always be a problem.

[Tabitha Lean, Why I am an abolitionist](#)

...For so many of my people, and for my community, prison literally sucks the life out of us, it extinguishes life giving oxygen from our lungs, it consumes our communities, our families, our brothers and sisters, aunties and uncles. And god, I was scared. Not just scared of the prison environment, and the people in there. I was scared that I would be killed. Not by fellow prisoners, but by those in the blue shirts. Even today, that fear has not dissipated, I just learnt to live with the fear. I learnt to live with the constant anxiety and panic; and I exist in this hyper aware state constantly scanning for threat. I live with that fear and the ongoing onslaught of sexual violence and abuse at the hands of the state

[Tabitha Lean, Why I am an abolitionist](#)

But I guess what I am asking is if you're happy that this kind of justice is meted out in your name. Because let me tell you that everything that has happened to me, and continues to happen to me, is happening for you. This system is designed to keep people like you safe from people like me. So let me ask you, when do you think my debt to society is considered paid? When should I be free? When I came out of jail? When I finish parole? Is it in ten years' time, when I'm still rejected from workplaces because I can't get a police clearance? Will it be when I'm eighty years old, and have lived seventy-eight good years to my two bad ones? Or is it only when I finally die?

[Tabitha Lean, Why I am an abolitionist](#)

SO YOU'RE THINKING OF BECOMING AN ABOLITIONIST?

Some people may ask, “Does this mean that I can never call the cops if my life is in serious danger?” Abolition does not center that question. Instead, abolition challenges us to ask, “Why do we have no other well-resourced options?” and pushes us to creatively consider how we can grow, build, and try other avenues to reduce harm.

Mariame Kaba, So You're Thinking of Becoming an Abolitionist?



Ask yourself...

As freedom fighter Kwame Ture taught us, “When you see people call themselves revolutionary always talking about destroying, destroying, destroying but never talking about building or creating, they’re not revolutionary. They do not understand the first thing about revolution. It’s creating.” PIC abolition is a positive project that focuses, in part, on building a society where it is possible to address harm without relying on structural forms of oppression or the violent systems that increase it.

Mariame Kaba, So You're of Becoming an Abolitionist?

- What work do prisons and policing actually do?
- The fact is that we haven't always had police. What makes us believe that we always will — or that we always will have to?
- Cops are usually portrayed as heroic. It's hard to think of any other occupation that approaches this type of PR effort. Why does law enforcement need so much advertising?
- If you care about the violence of policing, shouldn't you want as little policing as possible in any form?
- What alternatives can we imagine to using police to address social issues?
- How can we act together to imagine a future in which police would not be necessary?

REFERENCES

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