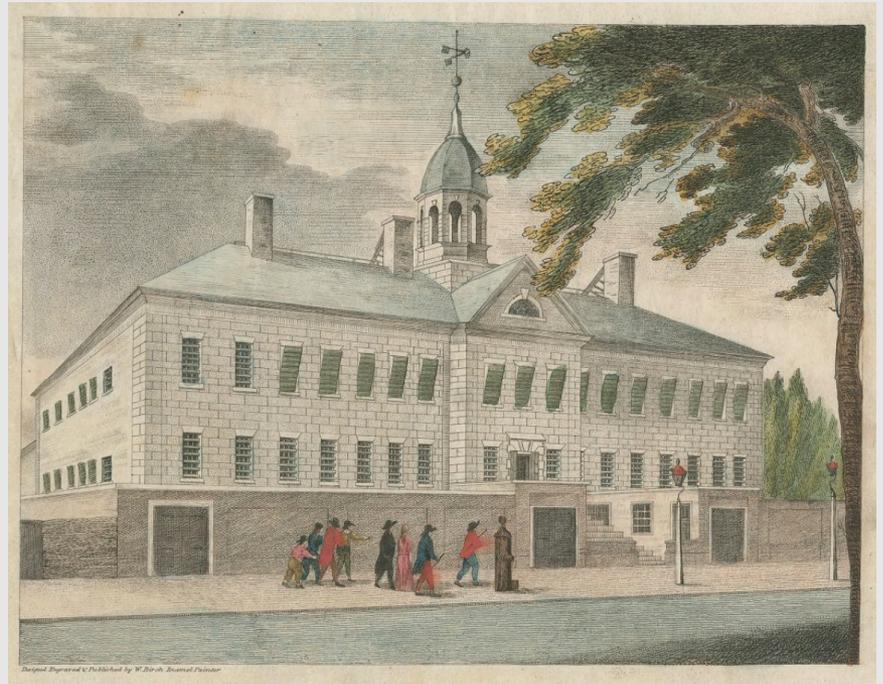


(first order/naïve) definition of prison:

A building in which people are **legally** held as a **punishment** for a **crime** they have committed or while awaiting trial.

# Beginning of prisons

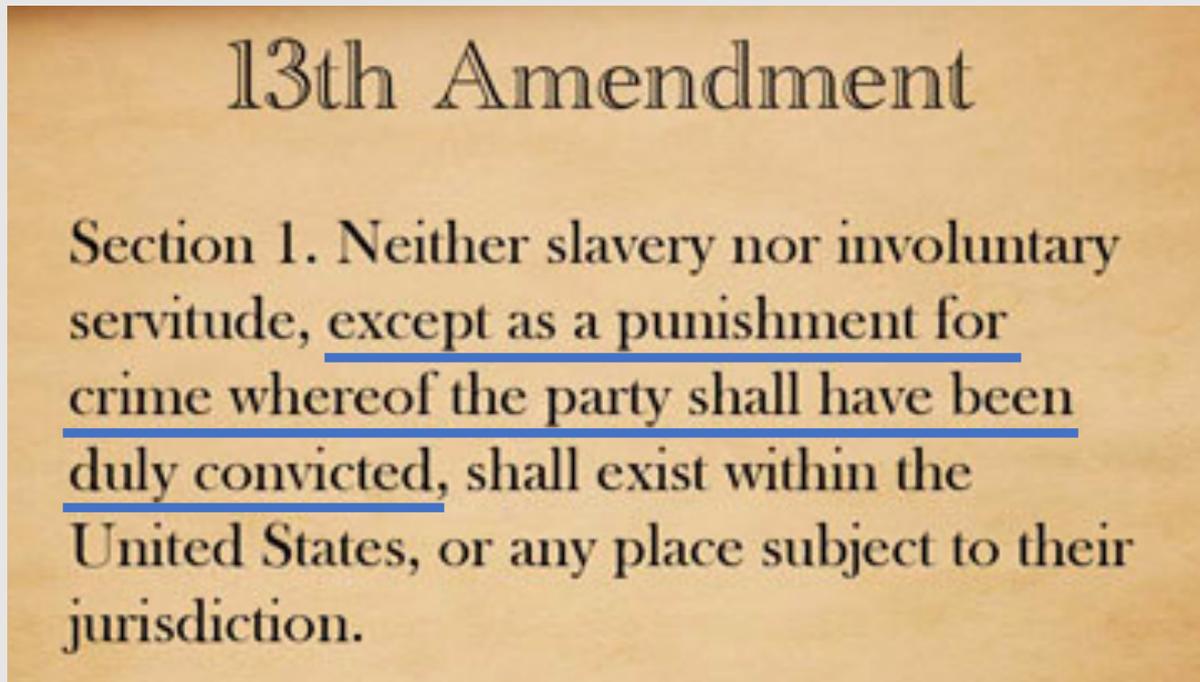
- Walnut Street Prison - accepted first prisoners 1776
- named a “penitentiary” after Pennsylvania Quakers’ belief in **penitence**  
→ goal of solitary confinement
- there were other models
  - e.g. Auburn – involved labor



Source: The Library Company of Philadelphia

Racialization of incarceration took off during Reconstruction Era after the Civil War

Passage of 13<sup>th</sup> amendment (1865):



Slavery could continue through the penal system

## Black codes

Post-Civil War laws passed in formerly Confederate states meant to severely limit the rights of freed Black people



Criminalized Black people for small offenses that led to conviction (e.g. vagrancy)

Conviction led to **convict leasing**:

the reintroduction of many Black people into slavery where both private and state industry could profit.



Source: Equal Justice Initiative



Source: Reimagine! Race Poverty and the Environment

# Civil Rights Era (1960s, 70s)



15 year old attacked by police in Birmingham, AL, 1963



Voter Rights Demonstration in Montgomery, AL, 1965



Desegregation protest in Birmingham, AL, 1963



Black Panther Party meeting with Huey P. Newton, 1970



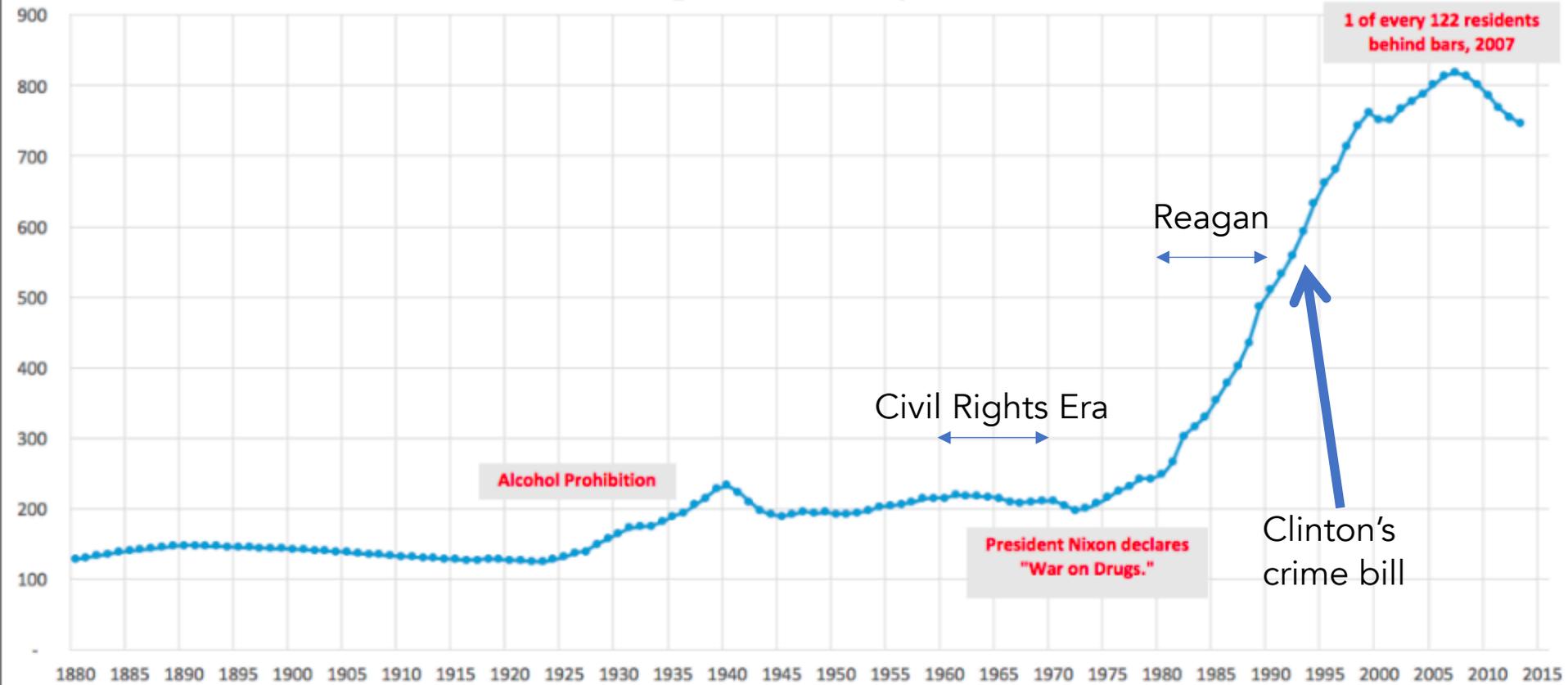
Armed Black student activists at Cornell leaving a 36 hr sit-in to pressure the administration to create an African American Studies Program, 1969



Anti-busing demonstration in Louisville, KY 1975

# U.S. imprisonment rate, 1880-2013

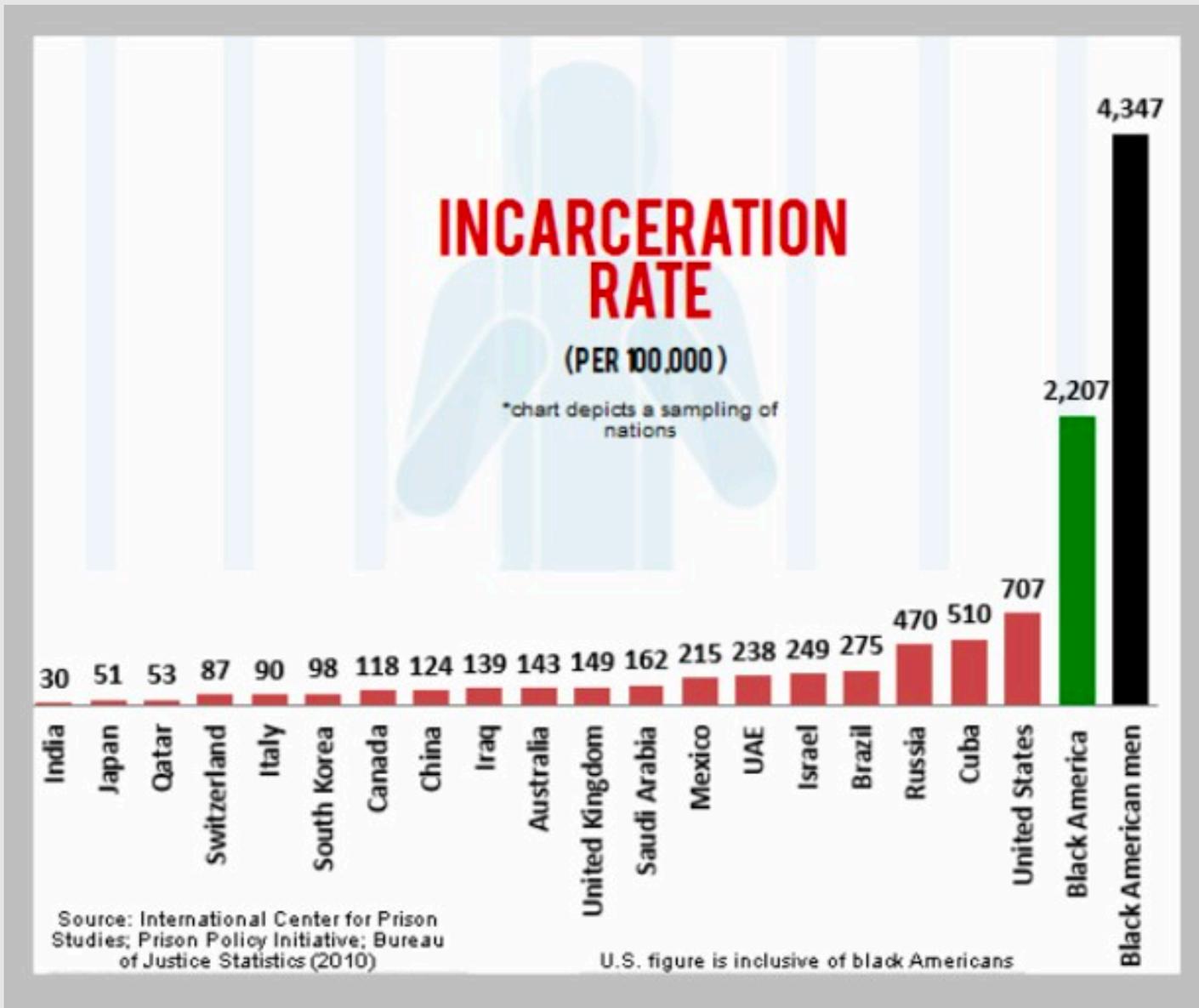
(per 100,000 residents)



Source: [clemencyreport.org](http://clemencyreport.org)

"We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course, we did."

– John Ehrlichman, Nixon's domestic policy chief



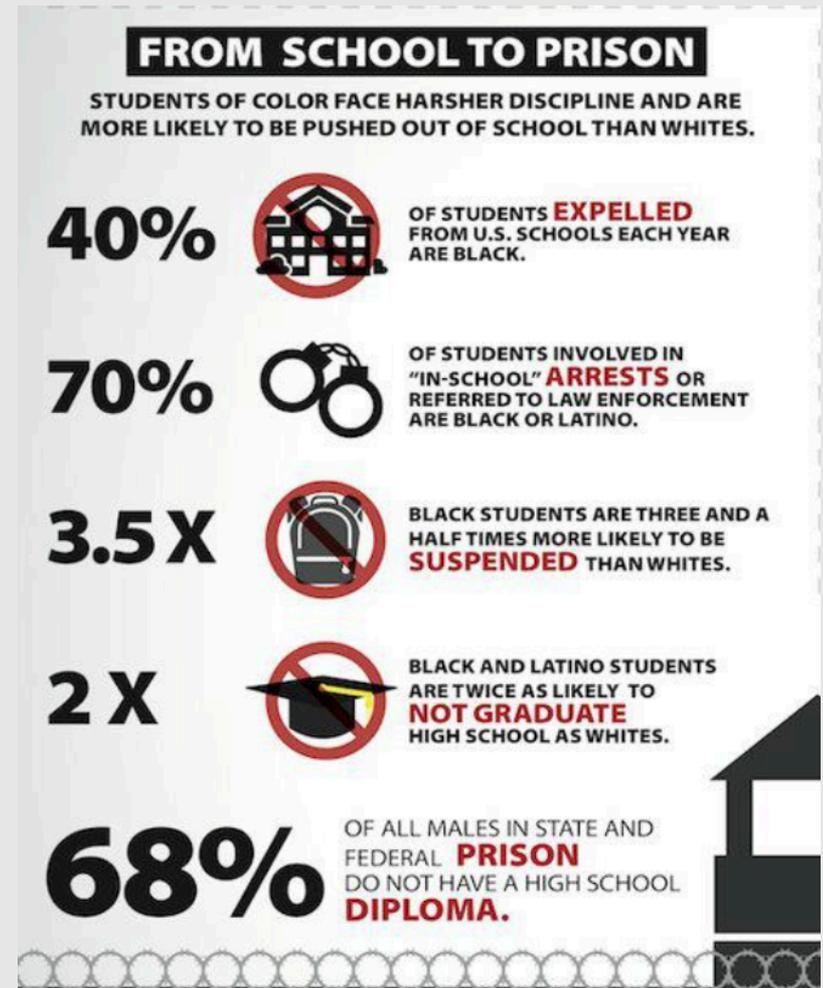
US has 5% of world population and 25% of world's prisons population

# School to Prison Pipeline

-1994 Gun-free Schools Act passed by Clinton → led to harsher punishments in schools

-Number of School Resources Officers (SROs), i.e. police, increased by about a third between 1997 and 2007

-92,000 students were arrested during the 2011-12 school year, most for misdemeanors or civil violations.



# Prison Abolition

A political vision that “seeks to end the use of punitive policing and imprisonment as the primary means of addressing what are essentially social, economic, and political problems. Abolition aims at dramatically reducing reliance on incarceration and building the social institutions and conceptual frameworks that would render incarceration unnecessary.”



Bilphena Yahwon



Angela Davis



Michelle Alexander



Liat Ben-Moshe



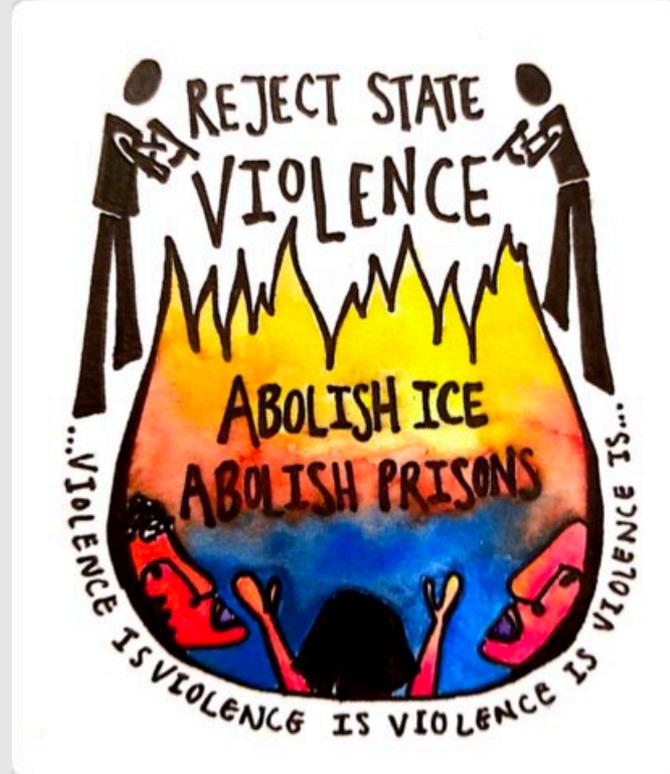
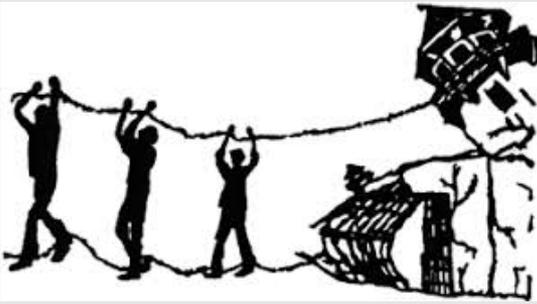
Ruth Wilson Gilmore



**CRITICAL  
RESISTANCE**



# Prison Abolition



# How can we become prison abolitionists?

- push universities (like Harvard) to divest from prisons - often universities and other companies profit off of using prison labor that is compensated at tens of cents per hour of labor.
- support prison uprisings, sit-ins, and hunger strikes that occur as a result of the conditions in prisons (overcrowding, physical and sexual violence, COVID-19 exposure, access to healthcare and resources, etc.)
- avoid calling the police
- push for defunding the police and prisons
- push for government to support historically underserved communities through public health and social work.
- support workers, not capitalists
- decriminalize sex work, drugs, vagrancy, etc and instead provide social support for communities who resort to these means of subsistence
- fight for prisoner's rights during and after their sentences

## Group break out sessions:

- 1) What's a better definition for prisons – or more particularly, the prison industrial complex?
- 2) What do you think about prison abolition and the steps outlined in the previous slide?
- 3) How is it that prisons fail in their disciplinary quest to create a more just society? What parallels exist between the fantasies of meritocracy (e.g. in the university) and penitence (in prison)? What sort of institutional responses/restructurings are needed to reconcile these failures?
- 4) Why might simple reform not be enough? E.g. A reformer's response to overcrowding would be perhaps to build more prisons – why is this problematic?