

Picturing a World Without Prisons

Mariame Kaba

The U.S. is a prison nation. There is no other society in the history of humanity that has imprisoned more people. Over 2.2 million people are incarcerated in this country; representing an over 500% increase since 1970. Yet research and anecdotal evidence show that incarceration makes people worse and does not improve public safety. Instead of spending money on drug treatment programs, meaningful employment initiatives, health care, affordable housing, and public education, our tax dollars funnel the most vulnerable populations into the prison system so that they may languish with little-to-no access to needed resources. This is not justice. Nor is it humane. We believe that this must change.

We must dismantle the prison industrial complex. In order to do so, we have to envision what a world without prison can and should look like so that we can build that world together.

Through this exhibit, which brings together the visions of incarcerated youth and people on the outside, we want to engage the public in imagining a world without prisons with us.

This exhibition was curated by Project NIA and Free Write Jail Arts & Literacy Program.

It ran from November 11th through December 6th, 2013 at the HumanThread Center/Gallery for Nonviolence, Arts & Education, 1200 W. 35th Street (Bridgeport Art Center, 5th floor), Chicago, Illinois.

<https://aworldwithoutprisons.tumblr.com/archive>



Cabrini Coulda Been (2013)

Photo & Statement by Veronica Stein

Found Images: sustainable community design illustration superimposed upon former Cabrini Green site

I experience a visceral reaction in my gut as I pass by the new Target store built upon the site of the former Cabrini Green housing project. I love Target. I get so much satisfaction browsing those spacious, neatly stocked aisles covered in red polka dots, filled with alluring items. I regularly convince myself they are my life's necessities. It's almost as though my conscious mind becomes brainwashed upon entering the store, and the problematic nature of "Made in Vietnam" tags do not influence my willingness to make a purchase. However this new Target is different. This Target I refuse to enter. This Target sparks my imagination of what this site coulda been. If residents were considered privileged community stakeholders, Cabrini Green might have offered affordable housing and included communal establishments such as the Cabrini Freedom School, The Cabrini Peoples Law Office, The Museum of the African Diaspora, The Center for Transformative and Restorative Justice, The Cabrini Center for Youth Advancement, The Cabrini Community Garden, The Cabrini Senior Center, The Cabrini Technology Education Center, The Cabrini Community Food Coop, The Cabrini Public Library, The Cabrini Center of Continuing Education, The Cabrini Center for Medicine and Wellness... This coulda been a site filled with public art, fountains, gardens, a movie theater, independent shopping establishments, sport and exercise facilities; all powered by solar and sustainable energy sources. In a world without prisons, this is what Cabrini Green coulda been. In a world consumed by a prison industrial complex contingent upon the restriction of fundamental human and community resources, this site is now a Target. This time, I refuse to enter.



I Believe, Assata

Photos & Statement by Silvia Inés Gonzalez

Photo 1: Living and Birth

Photo 2: Sweat of Love, Fire of Truth

Photo 3: Seeds grow: Sprouts grow: Trees

I experienced a sensitivity and awareness of light for a fraction of time, as light poetically embodied the concept of hope. The light will never be the exact same as it was that day. Its transformation allows a new narrative. We must continue to redevelop those narratives, believing what light, at a particular moment, can reveal of love, of our existence, of our truths. I believe in a world of vision and hope.

Writing excerpts featured on the photographs are taken from Assata Shakur's poem, "I believe."



"Picturing a World without Prisons"

Photo and statement by Sarah Jane Rhee, Cadence, & Mariame Kaba

It was Victor Hugo who said: "He who opens a school door closes a prison." It is therefore surreal to live in Chicago in 2013 where we just experienced the single largest mass closure of schools in American history. Rahm Emanuel & his hand-picked school board shuttered 49 schools, displacing over 30,000 children, mostly Black. If we believe Hugo, this means that Chicago has opened the door to 50 new prisons.

So when we envision a world without prisons, we think of children reading piles of books for pleasure. We think of them getting lost in imaginary lands, dreaming of all of the adventures they'll have. A world without prisons is one where there is no ceiling placed on children's imaginations... It's a world where we close the doors of prisons and open ones to new schools. Preferably schools near water & sand...

