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Introduction

Struggling for Credibility

One does not have to look far to see that the prison system in California is in a great state of crisis. Television, newspapers, radio programs, and even the Discovery Channel run specials and articles on prison and jail overcrowding, prisoner violence, drug use and other illicit activities among prisoners and guards, healthcare, and the increasing numbers of mentally ill individuals we house in these institutions. For the average taxpayer or voter, these stories remain largely abstract. This was not the case, however, for Pamela Coffey.

On December 2, 2000, forty-six-year old Pamela Coffey died in front of her cellmates at Central California Women's Facility (CCWF) in Chowchilla, California. As written in both the *LA Times* and the *Fresno Bee*, Pamela, an African American woman, had complained for weeks about a large knot in her side, with prison medical technical assistants (MTAs) providing her with little more than Benadryl for her condition.¹ According to the reports, the MTAs, who at this time were prison guards with very little medical training, ignored Pamela's complaints hours before her death. By the time she died, Pamela's stomach had swollen to where it appeared she was in her third trimester of pregnancy. At the same time, her tongue had swollen so large that she could barely speak, nor could she sit up. When an MTA finally arrived at her cell and examined Pamela, he complained that he could not understand what she was saying, told her cellmates, "you can do more

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for her than I can,” laughed, and walked away. Pamela died in the presence of her cellmates, within hours of the MTA flagrantly laughing at her condition.

Pamela’s gruesome death was among nine that occurred in a six-week time span at CCWF. Ironically, these nine deaths occurred less than two months after two legislative hearings that were held at Valley State Prison for Women (VSPW), also located in the remote area of Chowchilla, and the California Institute for Women (CIW), located in Corona. These legislative hearings addressed concerns about medical neglect within both CCWF and other women’s institutions across the state. Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women put forth a range of complaints, from not receiving prescription medication refills in a timely fashion to not being informed that they were HIV and/or hepatitis C infected for sometimes as long as ten years.

While the legislators at the hearings agreed that the healthcare in women’s prisons was in a state of crisis, as the post-hearing deaths of the nine women at CCWF show, the meetings held at VSPW and CIW did little to change the inadequate and life-threatening medical treatment women prisoners are subjected to on a daily basis. In addition to Pamela and the other eight women that died almost immediately after the hearings, women have continued to receive improper medical care that all too frequently results in death. Sherrie Chapman passed away in 2002 due to metastasized breast cancer that was not treated by the prison doctor despite both her complaints and a radiologist’s recommendation for a mammogram and biopsy. Gloria Broxton, who underwent a hysterectomy for cancer, died in 2001 after improper medical treatment. This began with guards dropping her three feet, causing more than one hundred staple sutures to rip open in her abdomen—which then went untreated and developed into a gangrenous abscess. It progressed to where she did not receive successful chemotherapy treatments, as ordered by an oncologist. Finally, Charisse Shumate died in 2001 when guards refused to treat her sickle-cell anemia.²

Amnesty International (1999), in its report titled “Not Part of My Sentence: Violations in the Human Rights of Women in Custody,” described such treatment as constituting violations in human rights and international treaties against torture (Pollock 2002, 14). The report not only focuses on medical neglect and the shackling of women during childbirth, but sexual abuse by male guards and torturous methods of punishment. In addition to male guards watching women showering, undressing, and using the toilet, they verbally assault women with denigrating and sexually charged language, referring to incarcerated

women as bitches, sluts, whores, and prostitutes. What is more, as the Human Rights Watch (1996) report “All Too Familiar: Sexual Abuse of Women in U.S. State Prisons” notes, male guards have been found to subject women to sexual assault, extortion, groping during body searches, rape, and in some cases, impregnation. Punishments can be extreme as well, such as the less-heard-about “four-point restraint chair,” in which women are shackled and immobilized for hours on end. The Amnesty report exposes a case in a Sacramento County jail in which a woman was stripped naked and left in the chair for eight and a half hours in full view of male and female officers and civilian workers (Amnesty International 1999; Pollock 2002, 15).

Pamela Coffey, Sherrie Chapman, Gloria Broxton, and Charisse Shumate, in addition to all of the other women who are sexually abused, punished, and denied medical treatment on a daily basis, embody in a real material way abstract discourses about the state of crisis in California’s carceral system. Like the prison guard who callously laughed at Pamela’s pain and suffering, voters have done the same thing, turning their backs to the systemic pain and suffering of prisoners. Support for laws such as Three Strikes, which was passed in 1994 by 72 percent of the vote in California, highlights the pro-punishment attitude of the citizenry and the lack of concern with prisoners’ well-being. Prisoners are so isolated from the public at large that they remain an abstract headline, at best, that eviscerates them of their humanity.

Indeed, there are a few people that are doing something about the horrendous conditions that exist in our prison system. These people form the basis of the radical women’s prison movement in California. By “radical” I mean social movements and organizations that depart from usual or customary beliefs and practices *and* favor or seek to effect revolutionary changes in current societal practices, conditions, and/or institutions; this frequently means the overthrow of a system and its replacement with another. This differs from movements that are “reformist,” which I use to refer to those that seek to *improve* individuals, systems, modes of thought or institutions that are already in place, not necessarily to remove and replace them. Women’s prison activism has waxed and waned since at least the nineteenth century, with activists in the latter part of this century focusing on the reformation of those women society marked “criminal.” However, contemporary radical women’s prison activism moves away from simplistic arguments for the reform of institutionalized individuals and instead underscores the urgent problems in what scholars and activists increasingly refer to as the prison industrial complex.

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The prison industrial complex is a term used to describe a rapidly expanding penal system. It was derived from “military industrial complex,” a term coined by Dwight D. Eisenhower to describe “the conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry” (Sudbury 2004, 12). The term “prison industrial complex” was first used by Mike Davis to examine the “multibillion-dollar prison-building boom in California” that “rivalled agribusiness as the dominant force in the life of rural California and competes with land developers as the chief seducer of legislators in Sacramento” (Sudbury 2004, 12). It is used to refer to the sheer numbers of people of color and poor people that it incarcerates and the increase in the numbers of prisons, which are built with profit in mind, across the nation. Between 1990 and 1995 alone, the U.S. built 213 new prisons and 280,000 new beds were added to existing prisons (Davis and DiBenedetto 2005). Moreover, a report released in February 2008 by the Pew Center on the States Public Safety Performance Project shows that, as of early 2008, 1 in every 99.1 men and women are incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails, or 2,319,258 adults.

The millions of individuals who are incarcerated across the nation are disproportionately people of color. In a report released by The Sentencing Project, Mauer and King (2007) show that African Americans are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of whites, while Latinos/as are incarcerated at nearly double the rate of whites. Mauer and King (2007) note that African Americans constitute over nine hundred thousand of the total numbers of people who are imprisoned. While the national incarceration rate for whites is 412 per 100,000 residents, the national incarceration rates for blacks and Latinos/as is 2,290 and 742 per 100,000 residents, respectively (Mauer and King 2007). One in six black men, and one in six Latino males, now experience imprisonment sometime during the course of their lives, and one in nine African American males between the ages of twenty-five and twenty-nine are currently incarcerated in prison or jail (Mauer and King 2007). The same racial disparities exist for women. Black and Latina women are disproportionately incarcerated in comparison to white women; some 70 percent of women who are incarcerated are women of color (James 2005).

“Prison industrial complex,” then, reflects this prison boom, the fact that the U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the industrialized world, and importantly, that prisons are now inextricably linked to corporate and economic interests. As an example, prison labor is used in not only private prisons but also state-controlled prisons, as it allows for cheap sources of labor below the minimum wage. In the case of the

intersections between corporate and economic interests and California prisons, Julia Sudbury writes:

As elaborated by California-based scholars and prison intellectuals . . . especially Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Linda Evans, and Angela Davis, [the prison industrial complex] helped to explain why California pursued a hugely expansive prison-building binge throughout the 1990s, despite falling crime rates and relatively low unemployment rates. If, as Angela Davis argues, prisons not only *cost* money but also *generate* large revenues for powerful corporate interests as well as local businesses and real estate owners in the towns where prisons are sited, then the apparently illogical willingness of state legislators to spend billions of dollars on a failing social policy is transformed into a rational—if immoral—economic policy. (2004, 12)

The concept of prison industrial complex helps us to understand that rather than being about rehabilitation, prisons are sites where profit for corporate interests is the bottom line. Prisoners, as a result, become exploitable bodies devoid of any humanity.

As radical activist women fight the policies behind, and practices of, the prison industrial complex, they insist that we need to remember that prisoners are not abstract “x’s and o’s” on a chalkboard, but real material bodies. Although prisoners are out of sight, they play a critical role in the organization of our society. Foucault’s concept of the political technology of the body crystallizes the relationship between the body and the state in such a way that is particularly suggestive for our understanding of the prison industrial complex:

But [*sic*] the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection . . . the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. (1979, 25–26)

In this passage Foucault demonstrates how the relations of power continuously deploy an array of technologies that render bodies productive

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in the service of capital. Foucault's historical materialist formulation of the subjectivization and subjection of the body by the state articulates how radical activists understand incarcerated women's bodies. Bodies become meaningful because the technologies of subjection mark them, discipline them, and correct them, thus placing them into a socioeconomically stratified society.

Joy James makes a notable critique of Foucault in her book *Resisting State Violence* (1996). She observes that Foucault fails to address the fact that racialized and gendered bodies are subjected by the state differently. James observes that Foucault's class-based formulation of the body universalizes the white male body (1996, 30–32). James's observation notes a significant oversight by Foucault, especially given France's own history of colonialism. We can extend his formulation, where he points to the relations of power deploying operative techniques for disciplining bodies for economic exploitation and political domination, to the racialized and gendered incarcerated body. In U.S. society, prisoner bodies emit signs produced and interpreted by society as "criminal," "violent," "drug addicted," "worthless," and "unwanted." The state has consistently disciplined prisoner bodies not to simply exploit their labor, but to consolidate national Anglo-dominant identity. Real bodies are affected by practices and discourses around incarceration. In this way, prisoners' bodies are not abstract signs in the field of representation, but rather they are flesh and blood.

Given the circumstances of inhumane healthcare, guard abuse, torturous forms of punishment, and overcrowding that results from an expanding prison population, why is it that voters consistently approve measures that are designed to put more people in prison without addressing these horrendous conditions? Why is it that whenever a politician states that we need to "get tough on crime" it resonates so strongly with the public at large? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that the public at large, driven by social and political discourses surrounding not just imprisonment but social identity, tends to understand a person's incarceration as an individual moral failing.

In stark contrast, contemporary radical prison activists understand the institution of prison as subjecting prisoners to systemic repression and exploitation. These activists seek to reveal the humanity of those who are confined in the prison industrial complex, and to connect the injustice prisoners experience to larger social, political, and economic processes. Radical activists understand the prison system to be a microcosm of society at large, a space of condensed and concentrated forms of

oppression that originated in the historical and contemporary processes of racial and economic injustice.

Given the present historical moment of the veiled racism found in increasingly harsh sentencing laws such as Three Strikes, which I discuss in Chapter 5, and public and political opinion that those in prison are somehow unworthy of human rights because they “stepped out of bounds” or “broke” the law, radical groups have a particularly difficult time effecting social change and intervening in the political landscape; their understanding of the prison system lies outside of the mainstream and frequently results in hostile reactions from those in the larger social context. Radical groups, therefore, present a particularly interesting and important case study for scholars and activists alike, as we attempt to understand the many challenges that such organizations face in their struggles for progressive social change.

This book shows that radical groups identify that they have a difficult time effecting large-scale social change due to the prevailing conservative political discourse. However, additional issues, rooted in the U.S.’s unequal socioeconomic and racialized structure, appear during the course of organizational life, all of which must be addressed by movement actors in order to propel groups forward. In particular, activists must deal with both intragroup and extragroup issues and politics. In the case at hand, the primary actors working for social justice, on behalf of movement beneficiaries, differ from those beneficiaries in terms of race, socioeconomic status, education, politics, and confinement status. This work, therefore, highlights larger theoretical considerations about the ways in which movement organizations that are comprised primarily of privileged constituents working to represent marginalized populations legitimate organizational work vis-à-vis multiple movement audiences that include fellow activists, beneficiaries, and skeptical wider publics. As I will show, my research has broader implications for other radical social movement organizations and groups that are engaged in antiracist and social justice organizing, which also must contend with internal and external politics that emanate from an unequal and inequitable social structure.

Using an in-depth case study that was conducted from 2002 to early 2005 of a grassroots organization in the radical women’s prison movement, the pages that follow present an analysis of the dilemmas that arise in relation to multiple movement audiences when attempting to resist racial injustice and oppression, and the strategies that women activists use to reconcile those dilemmas on a discursive and

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practical level. I refer to the group under study as Network for Prisoners (NP).

The Rise of Network for Prisoners (NP)

NP was created in the 1990s in California, amidst female prisoner outrage about the atrocious healthcare conditions in the prison industrial complex. The group formed on the outside of prison walls in response to women's complaints about cancer that was never treated, women dying in custody, and general neglectful and abusive treatment by guards. Because women in prison have not historically had an outlet with which to voice themselves, several women activists banded together to become, as activists put it, "a voice and a presence" for women who were confined within prison walls. They set out to raise public consciousness about the abusive prison conditions that incarcerated women were forced to endure, and to make changes in this system. While this activism occurs on the outside of prison through means such as protests, rallies, and educational forums, activists also work on strengthening their connections to women inside and engaging in work that women prisoners feel is necessary, since they are the ones experiencing incarceration directly.

At the time of research the women activists on the outside of prison who came together to form NP, and the women who had joined the group since its inception, were predominantly white, with one woman identifying as Latina, although she did not work with women in prison directly. They all identified as middle class and described themselves as having been formally educated (with most having attended college and/or graduate school) and politically radical. None had been incarcerated. Occupations of these respondents include, but are not limited to, lawyer and teacher. The women in the group ranged in age from early twenties to mid-fifties. The women in the group were involved for various amounts of time. Women in their fifties had been active in this particular group since the 1990s, while the amount of time younger women in the group had been involved ranged considerably, from one year to over five years. They all identified as being anticapitalist, antiracist, and/or anti-imperialist.

The prisoners with whom NP works, however, contrast with activists in terms of race, class, education, and politics, which is hardly surprising given the overwhelming scholarship that shows that jails and prisons are racially and economically biased. Close to 70 percent of

women confined in local jails and state and federal prisons are black, Latina, Native American, and Asian; most are also poor or working class (Diaz Cotto 2006; James 2005; Johnson 2003). Black women are four times as likely to be incarcerated as white women, and more than twice as likely to be incarcerated as Latinas (Talvi 2007, 7). According to the Pew study (2008) cited earlier, one in one hundred black women in their midthirties to late thirties are incarcerated. Moreover, 37 percent of incarcerated women had incomes of less than six hundred dollars per month prior to arrest, and approximately 30 percent reported receiving some form of welfare assistance prior to arrest (Greenfeld and Snell 1999). Nearly 45 percent of women in local jails and state prisons, and 25 percent of women in federal prisons, have not graduated high school, with between 60 and 70 percent never having attended any college (Greenfeld and Snell 1999). What is more, 57 percent of women in state prisons report that they were physically or sexually abused at some time during their lives, with at least 40 percent of women experiencing this abuse from an intimate partner (Greenfeld and Snell 1999). Some scholars and activists who work with women in prison directly, however, put the percentage of women who have experienced abuse closer to 80 percent, as many of the women who have been abused prior to incarceration do not report it to prison officials due to feelings of humiliation, isolation, and fear.

Considering these numbers, the prisoners with whom NP works are predominantly of color, poor or working class, and formally undereducated. Most of them have experienced a variety of forms of abuse. The majority of them, at the time of the study, did not identify as being socialist, politically radical, or anticapitalist and were primarily concerned with reforming prison conditions rather than fighting for structural change.

While healthcare was the impetus for the creation of NP, and continues to be women prisoners' primary concern, most of the women who joined the group arrived with previous activist experience and ideologies that go well beyond the acquisition of adequate medical treatment. The women in the group made connections between the prison system, institutional racism, and capitalism, arguing that global capitalism and imperialism are the underlying conditions responsible for the repression of racialized peoples in prisons and outside of them in the U.S. and around the globe. Prison is an institution in which one can clearly see concentrated forms of racism, classism, and capitalism at work—an institution that represents the oppression that occurs

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in society at large. Joy James aptly captures activist understandings of the prison system when she states that this institution is infused with “economic and ethnic-racial bias,” in that the process of incarceration is “shaped by racial and economic status rather than by criminal or criminalized acts” (2005, xxxvi). She continues:

The most . . . disturbing features of contemporary incarceration are its abuses of humanity and its racially and economically driven punitive characteristics. Poor people comprise the majority of those imprisoned and on death row. Some 70 percent of the more than 2 million incarcerated in U.S. prisons, jails, and detention centers are African American, Latino, Native American, and Asian; approximately 1 million or 50 percent of the incarcerated are African American. The racially driven features of punishment, detention, and imprisonment are documented. The Sentencing Project has noted disparity in sentencing in which blacks convicted of the same crime as whites are much more likely to be sent to prison. The American Bar Association has advanced a moratorium on executions citing the rampant racial bias in determining death sentences given that the race of both defendant and victim is the primary factor in capital punishment. Those convicted of killing a white person are significantly more likely to receive the death penalty, particularly if they are not white themselves. (James 2005, xxxvi)

Armed with such data, NP activists propose a radical intervention in U.S. criminal justice politics (James 2005). During interviews, activists explained that they are individually and ideologically committed to the abolition of the prison system. Like the abolition of slavery, the abolition of the prison system “is a long-range goal that . . . requires an analysis of ‘crime’ that links it with social structures, as opposed to individual pathology, as well as ‘anticrime’ strategies that focus on the provision of social resources” (Davis and Rodriguez 2000, 215). For antiprison activists like those found in NP, “Prison needs to be abolished as the dominant mode of addressing social problems that are better solved by other institutions and other means” (Davis and Rodriguez 2000, 215). Abolitionists make the case that incarcerating people does not necessarily make communities “safe,” and they question why we “have come to associate community safety and personal security with the degree to which the state exercises violence through policing and criminal justice” (Davis and Rodriguez 2000, 216). Those who adhere to a political platform of abolition argue that resources such as

education, food, housing, jobs, healthcare, substance abuse treatment, and mental health services combine to create safe and secure communities. It is important to note that ideally, abolitionists do not engage in any reformist work that may keep the carceral system alive. Sudbury (2000, 140) argues that, “the inherent problem in reformist organizations is that they do not argue against the logic of incarceration, only against its use in certain cases (for women, first time nonviolent offenders, etc.) and against brutalizing prison conditions.” Indeed, Foucault notes that with prison reform comes:

the reintroduction of the invariable principles of penitentiary technique. For over a century and a half the prison has always been offered as its own remedy: the reactivation of the penitentiary techniques as the only means of overcoming their perpetual failure. (1979, 268)

The distinction between prison abolition and prison reform is that prison reform “renders the prison more impermeable to change and has resulted in bigger, and what are considered ‘better,’ prisons” (Davis and Rodriguez 2000, 216), whereas abolition seeks to address the root causes of social problems, make communities whole again, and render the prison industrial complex obsolete (Davis 2003).

While activists are ideologically abolitionist, activists engaged in reformist work to change the inhumane conditions inside of women’s prisons and to provide services to incarcerated women. Activists engaged in reformist work to change the inhumane conditions inside of women’s prisons and to provide services to incarcerated women. Additionally, they worked closely with women prisoners to promote incarcerated women’s leadership, they disseminated information to educate the public on the circumstances of imprisonment, they promoted the understanding of prison as a racialized and class-based institution, and they advocated education over incarceration. As this book will show, the services that activists offered, although necessary for women inside, pulled activists away from their abolitionist goals.

NP Activist Dilemmas

This book is an ethnographic analysis of three prominent dilemmas with which NP activists must contend in order to carry out their social justice work. Given their understanding of race as a fundamental organizing principle of society, it should be of no surprise that the problem of race infuses many of the dilemmas with which NP

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activists struggle. In a clear reflection of how race affects their political work, one activist named Linda explains the challenges of being a white woman working to, as she puts it, give voice to her sisters of color inside of prison:

A white person has a lot more privilege than a person of color, so [race] can be an asset and it can be a defect. Because really the prison system right now, really it's the racial injustice that's going on, and then it's the class issue. And although I understand intellectually and philosophically both, I'll never know what it means to be a woman of color. So that's just when I just have to step back and shut up. And I think it's . . . it's a very complicated issue.

Keeping in mind the privilege that Linda identified, other white NP activists frequently echo her concerns. Striving for social change, these women remain cognizant of their race and class as they work to ultimately abolish the prison industrial complex. Yet in interactions with the women on whose behalf they work—women in prison—activists report that they rarely talk about their privilege or abolitionism, but rather put larger movement goals aside and work to minimize their differences with and “bridge” themselves to women inside of prison. When asked about whether activists talk to women prisoners about their social change and abolitionist goals, one activist states:

When I talk to prisoners, knowing that I am coming from a very different place than them in terms of my race, politics, and not having been incarcerated—I mean, I don't know what it's like to be incarcerated, so I sometimes question what my goals in this work should be, or if I should be doing this work—I don't usually talk about abolitionism. I usually focus on advocacy and what the women want to focus on—writing letters in support of parole, getting the doctor on staff to treat their illnesses.

Similarly, after first talking about her racial privilege another activist identifies that while she believes in abolitionism of the prison system, she does not indiscriminately reveal such an agenda for social change to prisoners or even to the wider public outside of prison. Rather, she connects her work to the interests of the people with whom she talks:

When I talk to different groups of people, I never run up to them and tell them I am an abolitionist, unless I know they are, because

it is very far from most people's understandings of incarceration, far from their realities, and far from what the mainstream media tells us. The media paints this picture that everyone in prison is there because they are violent criminals, or they chose to be a criminal, and it never talks about the structural causes of incarceration, or racism, or poverty. That is a lot to be up against; people are inculcated in those ideas. I think if I went up to people on the street and only talked about abolitionism they would think I was crazy, and it would put them further away from me, and make them resistant to hearing anything about prison. So, I usually will try to find out what they are interested in and link what we do to that, or I will tell them about the abuses in prison that women endure, bring up lots of statistics, and then they begin to get interested.

These quotes point to three prominent dilemmas that NP activists face in their work. In the first instance, Linda refers to the dilemma activists struggle with amongst themselves: How to make sense of their work and feelings of illegitimacy that stem from being white, privileged women who seek to be a voice for confined women of color. In the second instance, another activist explains the dilemma that arises in interactions with women in prison. She refers to the difficulty in connecting to incarcerated women who have quite different backgrounds and experiences from activists, and who are not necessarily politically aligned with the organization. She questions herself as an advocate and questions what her goals should be, revealing some feelings of illegitimacy because she has not experienced incarceration or other similar struggles due to her privilege. Finally, in the third instance an activist reveals the dilemma of having to educate the public on women's incarceration while being a proponent of the abolitionism of the prison system, when such a political stance is far outside of mainstream politics and can delegitimize the group. Taken together, these quotations all point to issues of credibility, and raise an imperative question for scholars and activists alike: How does a radical social movement organization, comprised primarily of privileged constituents that work to represent disadvantaged and disempowered populations, frame group goals in such a way as to establish credibility vis-à-vis fellow activists, beneficiaries, and skeptical wider audiences?

It is important to consider three things when thinking about the research question just posed. First, the idea of privileged constituents working on behalf of disadvantaged populations has been addressed by social movement theorists. In a now classic study, McCarthy and

Zald (1977) argue that constituents tend to be privileged and from dominant groups, whereas beneficiaries tend to be underprivileged and from minority groups. These theorists maintain that tensions erupt in organizations that bring beneficiaries and constituents together, as they are from different “worlds” or backgrounds. How these tensions are reconciled, if at all, is not clear in the social movement literature that has been published thus far. I argue that activists must negotiate the friction that arises in interactions between beneficiaries and constituents if the movement is to move forward. These tensions and this body of literature are referred to more extensively in Chapter 4.

Second, the research question that I pose is one that is common to many radical, social justice, and antiracist organizations. The findings in this book therefore have broad implications for other organizations as well. As Chapter 2 will show, the beneficiary–constituent divide was present in other cycles of prison activism. In the men’s radical prison movement of the 1960s (Cummins 1994), revolutionary, predominantly white, privileged activists worked to connect to prisoners as the vanguard of a social revolution, and sought to gain public support for radical social change. In this movement, issues of race and privilege, and the disconnect between activists on the outside of prison walls and men confined within prisons, were paramount. Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 2, during the 1970s groups of women on the outside of prisons began to organize on behalf of imprisoned women. During this time, issues of race and privilege were at the forefront of women’s prison activity (Center for Community Change 1975).

In contemporary transnational movements, such as those that have organized to prevent child labor in Bangladesh (Hertel 2006), beneficiaries on the receiving end of campaigns conceptualized the problem at hand differently than that which was posed by outsiders. This influenced a shift in goals and discourse around issues of child labor (Hertel 2006).

Moreover, in feminist antiracist organizations within the antiviolence against women (Scott 2000) and reproductive justice movements (Nelson 2003), both white women and women of color have been working for some time to incorporate the needs and perspectives of women of color and poor women. In such movements, more privileged activists were challenged to reconceptualize their goals, in the name of antiracism and social justice. Moreover, they were confronted with the necessity of taking into consideration the needs of marginalized groups, based on the needs and demands of those groups.

It is therefore important to make clear that this book addresses issues that are common to antiracist and social justice organizations.

The research question posed earlier is not isolated to groups within the contemporary radical women's prison movement, or to the organization under study. I seek answers to the research question posed through an analysis of the case of NP.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, while this book focuses on a group that at the time of study was predominantly comprised of white antiprison activists, I would be remiss if I did not bring attention to the important and growing movement of women of color activists who are engaged in antiprison work. Joy James (1999, 5) notes that one area of black women's activist focus, for example, has been prison expansion: "Black women are increasingly becoming active around human rights abuses tied to policing and imprisonment given the destructive impact official and unofficial policies have on their families and themselves." Indeed, the expansion of the prison industrial complex, combined with the racist policies and practices of law enforcement, has disproportionately affected the communities to which women of color belong. Women of color are on the front lines of organizing to demand social justice through decreasing our reliance on incarceration and policing, and to suggest alternatives to imprisonment to make their communities whole again. They are increasingly mobilizing in organizations including but not limited to Critical Resistance, Incite!, Break the Chains, Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA) and Sista II Sista, as well as around the globe (see Sudbury 2005, 2004, 2000).

For example, Critical Resistance is an antiprison organization that "seeks to build an international movement to end the prison industrial complex."³ The organization was created in 1998 after activists, students, scholars, former prisoners and their families came together at a conference in Berkeley, California, called "Critical Resistance: Beyond the Prison Industrial Complex" (Sudbury 2004, 2003). The organizers of the conference included women of color who were active in both the prison abolitionist and domestic violence and sexual assault movements (Sudbury 2004, 2003). The organization, of which women of color play a large part, "calls for sustainable alternatives [to prisons] that generate safety and security, while refusing to rely on law enforcement" (Sudbury 2003, 137).

A related organization to Critical Resistance is Incite! Women of Color Against Violence. Incite! is a "national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and their communities through direct action, critical dialogue and grassroots organizing."⁴ Activists in Incite! ask crucial questions, such as how can we call for "pro-activist responses to

violence against women that do not at the same time fuel the right-wing agenda of 'getting tough on crime' through the proliferation of prisons, unrestrained police brutality, and the mass incarceration of communities of color?"⁵

Break the Chains: Communities of Color and the War on Drugs is a national organization founded by Deborah Peterson Small that is dedicated to helping build a movement in communities of color to support drug policy reform. Under Peterson Small's direction, Break the Chains works to educate and empower communities of color to "replace failed drug policies with alternatives based on science, compassion, public health and human rights." This organization importantly connects the ways that "drug policies disproportionately effect communities of color with such issues as mandatory minimum sentencing, HIV and hepatitis C prevention, racial profiling, immigration policy, civic participation, access to appropriate drug treatment services, crime prevention, and family reunification."⁶

CARA is a community-based antirape organization in Seattle, codirected by two young women of color, that focuses on black communities, people with disabilities, and young people. While rape is a central concern, CARA also prioritizes resistance to prisons and alternatives to incarceration. In fact, CARA states, "As marginalized peoples, our own strategy for undermining rape culture cannot be one that reinforces the prison industrial complex—a system that targets us and only creates more violence and harassment for our communities."⁷ Similarly, Sista II Sista is a grassroots group of "young and adult" black and Latina women in New York, committed to fighting violence against women in their communities without reliance on the police.⁸ As discussed by Ruth Wilson Gilmore (1999, 12), other groups that have been created, such as Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (Mothers ROC), are multiracial organizations that emerged to respond to "the intensity with which the state was locking their children, of all ages, into the criminal justice system."

By focusing my research on an antiprison group that is predominantly white I do not mean to disregard all of the important work in which women of color antiprison activists engage, only a fraction of which is presented here. Nor do I wish to suggest that groups that are predominantly white are representative of the entire movement, or are representative of the leadership of the movement. I am examining a particular segment of antiprison activism to illustrate larger theoretical points. As such, NP should be situated among the rich trajectory of activism in which women of color are also engaging. I chose to focus on this one organization in particular because my involvement

in it, through participant observation and individual interviews, led to interesting questions that revolved around ideas of race, issues of white privilege, and bridging differences to prisoners. While it would be interesting to do a framing theory study of groups to which women of color belong to examine the kinds of struggles that they encounter during the course of their work—and it is my hope that this book will catapult such research—that is beyond the scope of this study.

Given that I am examining a movement organization, I use a social movement approach to understand the dilemmas that activists face. While there are an abundance of theories within this tradition that are useful for exploring the dynamics, successes, and failures of episodes of collective action, I borrow ideas from the framing tradition, which provide an efficacious paradigm that can be applied to my analysis of the various dilemmas activists in NP attempt to sort out. Specifically, I borrow the concepts of framing, multiple audiences, and credibility.

FRAMING

Scholars within the framing tradition view movement actors as agents who are involved in the production and maintenance of meaning for movement audiences. They employ the term “collective action frame” to refer to “action oriented sets of beliefs that inspire meaning and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns” (Benford 1997, 416). Collective action frames are constructed as movement participants negotiate a shared understanding of a situation they define as unjust, make attributions as to who or what to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act collectively to effect change (Benford and Snow 2000, 615). These frames serve to simplify the world, but they do so in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, gain bystander support, and demobilize antagonists (Benford and Snow 2000, 614).

Given the definition provided earlier, frames can generally be considered mechanisms that mediate between the ideologies of social movement organizations and their audiences in the outside world. Adhering to this definition, it is important to understand that ideologies differ from frames, as the two terms are used throughout this book and are sometimes used interchangeably in movement literature. Ideologies are generally defined in movement literature as “fairly broad, coherent, and relatively durable sets of beliefs that affects one’s orientation not only in politics but to everyday life more generally” (Benford and Snow 2000, 613). Ideologies have considerable staying power, as they

are the core norms, values, and beliefs of social movement organizations (Reese and Newcombe 2003). They shape organizational goals, strategies, and framing processes. Collective action frames, in contrast, are rhetorical strategies used to advance ideological claims (Reese and Newcombe 2003). They can be considered lenses through which social movement organizations sharpen and refine their ideological messages, communicating them more effectively to the public at large. Frames package ideologies for movement audiences.

Framing research to date stresses that social movement organizations develop and employ collective action frames to recruit new members, mobilize adherents, and even acquire resources. Much of this research, then, analyzes how frames are created and maintained vis-à-vis external audiences. Far fewer studies have attempted to examine how frames may be used within a group to provide a rationale for members' ongoing adherence to organizational goals. While collective identity receives ongoing attention from movement scholars, as it provides insight into the internal workings and cohesion of an organization, the importance of framing processes to the internal dynamics of a group remains understudied. Specifically, activists' understanding and justification of *their own* collective action has received little consideration. As I will show throughout this book, it is crucial to consider this type of framing activity if we are to understand the struggles and dilemmas that many movement activists encounter.

MULTIPLE AUDIENCES

Subsequent framing research has begun to look at the “dynamic relationship” between social movement actors and audiences, noting that movement organizations attempt to appeal to multiple audiences who vary in terms of their interests, beliefs, values, knowledge bases, and politics (Benford and Snow 2000). Such research is especially useful for this study, as it suggests that the audiences targeted are influential to the creation of collective action frames.

Social movements have an array of targets, including adherents, constituents, bystander publics, the media, potential allies, antagonists, and elite decision makers (Snow and Benford 1988; Evans 1997). But theorists have usually limited their analyses of framing to one particular audience, omitting the possibility that movement organizations use different framing techniques with the various audiences they encounter. John Evans's (1997) research on the religious pro-choice movement is one of the few studies that usefully points out that the

framing needs of organizational targets may change over time. He suggests that social movement organizations can and do transform their collective action frames in order to build alliances or invalidate their opponents' counter-frames. While this work goes far in demonstrating that activists' perceptions of the importance of different targets may result in an organizational frame change, the framing variation that Evans found was over time for a single target, omitting the possibility that organizations may use multiple collective action frames at the same time, for different audiences. Moreover, the frame changes that Evans found were for external targets. Framing to internal audiences, such as activists within the group and beneficiaries, remains under-theorized in movement literature.

Data from my case study reveals that it is just as important for activists to frame organizational work to one another as it is to frame to external targets. Activists must internally make sense of their collective struggle and come to define themselves as agents with credible movement goals. Moreover, once activists come to define themselves as credible, they must present their goals to multiple movement audiences, who often have divergent interests and ideologies from those of the group. My research with NP suggests that rather than employing one organizational "master frame" to communicate group ideologies and goals, activists change frames according to the interests and ideologies of the audience with whom they interact. This process occurs as they attempt to remain viable in a climate that is not particularly receptive or responsive to their goals. I suggest that activists in an organization strategically draw from a repertoire of collective action frames, choosing frames that are aligned with the interests and ideologies of a particular target audience. I argue that both internal framing processes and the strategic decisions that activists make when interacting with multiple audiences must be taken into consideration by movement scholars if we are to understand anything about the microdynamics of organizational life in relation to the larger social context in which activists work.

Related to this is the question of why organizations would use more than one organizational frame. Research by McCammon, Hewitt, and Smith (2004) asserts that movement activists are strategic in their choice of frames, taking into account their audiences and the larger cultural environment. Using the U.S. women's suffrage movement as their research site, the authors argue that audiences have a strong influence on framing and that "effective movements must shape their frames to resonate with potentially sympathetic audiences and to counter potentially damaging claims by the opposition" (2004, 537). They argue that

movements change frames, then, in an effort to attract support. While McCammon, Hewitt, and Smith provide important theoretical insights into why frames change according to external audiences, this focus again omits framing to internal audiences. Moreover, while it makes analytical and practical sense that organizations would change frames in an effort to attract support, I present the possibility that organizations change frames in an effort to establish credibility in relation to their audiences. As I argue throughout this book, the case of NP importantly shows that collective action frames can be used just as much to legitimate group members' goals as to gain outside support.

CREDIBILITY

Notions of credibility appear in framing literature in discussions of resonance, a term used to refer to whether or not frames are effective for mobilizing or influencing audiences (McCarthy, Smith, and Zald 1996). Establishing framing resonance with multiple audiences is in part determined by the creation of organizational credibility, which is central to this study.

Benford and Snow (2000, 619) emphasize that three variables determine the credibility of collective action frames: frame consistency, empirical credibility, and the credibility of frame articulators. Frame consistency is “the congruency between a [social movement organization’s] articulated beliefs, claims, and actions” (Benford and Snow 2000, 620). A social movement organization ideally wants to exhibit consistency between what it says and what it does. Obvious contradictions among beliefs or between what a social movement organization says and does may discredit the organization and jeopardize mobilization.

Empirical credibility, in contrast, refers to the “fit” between frames and events in the world. For a frame to be empirically credible, claims must be verifiable to movement audiences (Benford and Snow 2000). Claims do not have to be verifiable to all of society, but to potential or actual adherents. Of course, this could have the reverse effect of slowing down the growth of a movement organization, if frames are only credible to a small number of people.

The third and final factor that Benford and Snow argue affects the credibility of a collective action frame is the perceived credibility of frame articulators. Benford and Snow note that speakers who are regarded as more credible are more persuasive: “variables such as status and knowledge about the issue in question have been found to be