

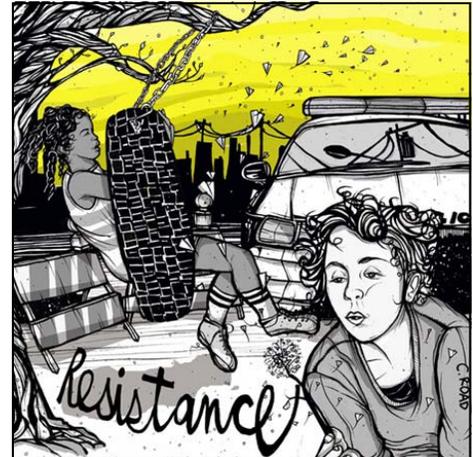
RESISTING LAW ENFORCEMENT VIOLENCE

OK, so what can we do about law enforcement violence against women of color and trans people of color?

⇒ TALK ABOUT IT!

Get together with other anti-violence or anti-police brutality activists and talk about it! Do a workshop based on the fact sheets in this toolkit — a sample workshop is included. Organize a community forum. You'll be surprised how many experiences are voiced which have previously been silenced! **If you would like someone from INCITE! to work with you on having a workshop or forum in your community or organization, contact us at incite_national@yahoo.com.**

Ask yourselves and your allies how you can work to better document and address law enforcement violence against women of color and trans people of color and build for safer communities as part of your organizing!



Art by Cristy C. Road, croadcore.org

⇒ DOCUMENT IT!

There is very little information available on law enforcement violence against women and transgender people of color. Once you've had a few conversations with others about it, you may decide to more intentionally document the experiences of women of color and transgender people of color with law enforcement in your area. **Documentation can be a critical step to raising awareness of the issue — within and beyond our communities — and a tool to reach, organize and support the leadership of people most affected.** Some documentation ideas:

- ⇒ **When the city of Washington, D.C. created “prostitution-free zones”, escalating policing of sex work, Different Avenues decided to do a participatory research project to look at where this policy came from and its impacts on people who are, or are perceived to be, sex workers.** They did a two-day skill-share for members of their constituency around community-based research, data collection, and report writing, as well as issues related to the project such as transgender issues, language and immigration, race and racism, drug use cultures in D.C., know-your-rights with police, and street smarts. Folks also brainstormed around past research efforts and future research directions, looked at research tools used by other community groups, and talked about safe and effective data collection. They later developed a short survey, longer interview questions, and a strategy for observing policing in affected areas, and made a plan to interview public officials, police, and other community-based organizations, and review existing information from media and other reports. They presented the results of their research in a community forum, and based on the feedback and analysis, finalized a report called: “Move Along: Policing Sex Work” in Washington D.C., available at: http://www.differentavenues.org/comm_research.html. The report provides more information about their research and organizing process. They are now developing the next steps for organizing based on the results of their research.
- ⇒ **The National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights is documenting and organizing around abuses of the rights of immigrants, including immigrant women and trans people.** They have created an on-line database where people can enter incidents of immigration enforcement violence and examples of organizing efforts, and produced a report called *Over Raided, Under Siege: U.S. Immigration Laws and Enforcement Destroy the Rights of Immigrants*. More information about the Network's documentation project is available at: <http://www.nnirr.org/hurricane/index.php>.



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- ➔ Creative Interventions has developed a national story-telling project to document ways in which people have intervened without relying on the police in situations involving violence. More information is available at: <http://www.creative-interventions.org/projects.html>.
- ➔ The Young Women's Empowerment Project in Chicago, IL is currently doing a participatory research project around resistance and resilience to different forms of violence experienced by young women with life experience in the sex trade and street economies, including police violence.

Check out the fact sheet on Participatory Action Research and the resources for documentation in this toolkit and on the Resource CD that accompanies this toolkit.

➔ COLLECTIVE COMMUNITY INTERVENTION

COPWATCHES

If police are being observed, they often tend to change their behavior. You can always spontaneously decide to join in a group of people to observe any law enforcement misconduct you come across — just be sure to stay a safe distance away from the officers involved. Take notes of location, car numbers and license plates, badge numbers, officer names, precinct or station, a description of the people involved and any other information which could help organize around the situation at a later date. Use your cell phone to take pictures or video record what is happening if it is safe to do so. While you have a right to observe, photograph, or videotape police activity so long as you are not interfering, sometimes observing police can put your safety at risk. If challenged by the police, assert your right to observe so long as you don't interfere. If the officers threaten you in any way, take a few steps back. If you still feel threatened or unsafe, or see that your presence is making things worse for the people involved, move farther away or leave the area. Memorize as much information about the incident as you can, and write it down as soon as you are somewhere safe. It is better to organize later than put yourself and other people at further risk in the moment.

Another way to observe, document, and prevent law enforcement violence is to organize a “copwatch” — a group of people who regularly go out on the streets to film or otherwise document police behavior. Traditionally, copwatches have primarily captured the experiences of young men of color — either because people see men of color as the primary targets of police brutality, because of where the cop watches are conducted, or both. Be creative in finding ways to do copwatches by and for women and trans people of color, targeting locations where gender-specific law enforcement violence happens. Often, it is better to empower people — through training, provision of video cameras, videophones, or tape recorders, and legal support — to copwatch in their own neighborhoods or for themselves than to have people from outside the community or constituency come in to do it. For instance:

- ➔ FIERCE, a community organization for Transgender, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit, Queer, and Questioning (TLGBTSQQ) youth of color in New York City, organized a copwatch by queer youth of color in the West Village — a visibly queer area in the City. FIERCE says ➔

Check out the FIERCE! copwatch video at <http://www.fierceny.org/index.php?s=117>

Through our Copwatch program, FIERCE is committed to creating a West Village that is safe for everyone, especially LGBT youth of color who are often targeted by the police. We believe in educating our community about knowing our rights. We believe that police need to be held accountable for the harassment brought upon LGBT youth of color.



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- US PROS recently organized their community in the Bay Area to regularly come out and hang out and observe police behavior on a “stroll” or area where street-based sex workers work. **This signaled to the officers that the community valued the women who worked there, and would not tolerate violence against them.** In the early 1990s, the Women in Public Space (WIPS) project organized activists to stand on street corners wearing wireless microphones in areas heavily policed for prostitution as an act of civil disobedience. Other activists would sit in a car nearby with a video camera and document violations of rights by police. Prior to starting this project, the activists involved had spent over a year building relationships with women working in the area, getting to know sex workers on the street, passing out condoms and info, and surveying women about needs for services, opinions about the laws, and information on arrest patterns. By building relationships first, they ensured that the project would empower rather than endanger women working in the area.
- Coalición de Derechos Humanos organized a Migra Patrol in their community in Tucson, Arizona to monitor the activities of ICE and Border Patrol. Migra Patrol members would distribute Know Your Rights pamphlets for Border Patrol and police (they can be found on the Resource CD that accompanies this toolkit), color coded according to language, in bus stations, grocery stores, and at community events. **Patrol members never interacted with police or Border Patrol — instead they would wear bright red t-shirts with a message to call an attorney they worked with if law enforcement officers had any questions.** That way undocumented people and young people (with parental consent) could participate. They also had a buddy system of teams to deal with harassment from cops. Migra Patrol would also make house visits, and go to shelters and hospitals in the community. Sometimes the documentation they gathered was used as evidence in immigration cases, and helped stop deportations.
- Copwatch LA has set up a rapid response network using text messages to alert people to the locations of immigration and police checkpoints in various neighborhoods. The alerts allow people to avoid the area if necessary, and notify documentation teams so that they can monitor law enforcement activities. **As a result of this organizing effort, LAPD and ICE have reduced the number of checkpoints in targeted communities.** They also have an on-line database for people to report instances of police or ICE abuse. For more information, go to <http://www.copwatchla.org>.

PROTESTS & PUBLICITY

Communities have been successful in raising awareness of police brutality, violation of immigrants’ rights, and other forms of law enforcement violence and criminalization through street theater and public protests. For instance:

Latina trans women in Los Angeles organized a protest to demand respect from the officers of the Hollywood precinct of the LAPD, as documented in the video “Transgenderation,” found on the Resource CD that accompanies this toolkit.

Sista II Sista in New York City organized a street fair at which young women performed spoken word and guerilla theatre about street harassment by police officers, and screened a video about sexual harassment and abuse by police on a wall across the street from the local precinct.

Transjustice, a project of the Audre Lorde Project in New York City, organizes an annual Trans Day of Action for Social and Economic Justice - see a video of this year’s action at: <http://outatthecenter.blogspot.com/2008/07/trans-day-of-action-2008.html>



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People have also been successful in organizing around specific cases as a way to raise awareness of law enforcement violence against women of color and trans people of color more generally. For instance, FIERCE! and Bay Area New Jersey 4 Solidarity have organized around the case of the New Jersey 4, a group of women who were subjected to misogynist, homophobic and transphobic violence and then arrested, prosecuted, and sentenced to long prison terms. For more information, see the Left Turn Article about the New Jersey 4 reprinted in this toolkit.



A protest in Rochester to bring attention to the case of a 13 year old Black girl shot by police responding to a request for assistance because the girl was suicidal.

⇒ KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Organize a “know your rights” workshop specific to women & trans people of color. What do we need to know that is not usually covered by know your rights trainings? Can a male officer search me? When are strip searches allowed? Does a cop have to disclose he is a cop before he receives sex in exchange for money? When do I have a right to refuse to get into a cruiser? When do I have a right to keep my hijab on? *For more information, see the “Know Your Rights” fact sheet in this toolkit!*

⇒ FIGHT GENTRIFICATION

Check out FIERCE's anti-gentrification work:

FIERCE founded the Save Our Space campaign to counter the displacement and criminalization of LGBT youth of color and homeless youth at the Christopher Street Pier and in Manhattan's West Village. The Pier, located on the fringe of the West Village, has historically been the only safe public space for many homeless and low-income LGBT youth of color to find each other and build community. In the summer of 2000, FIERCE members began organizing a response to increased policing and mass arrests of youth of color on the Christopher Street Pier. When the Pier was closed for construction in 2001, many West Village merchants, residents and political leaders expressed that they hoped the re-development of the Pier and the beefed-up police presence in the area would improve their quality of life. FIERCE's position, however, is that this concept of quality of life not only ignores, but adversely affects the quality of life of LGBT youth, especially those who are of color.

Youth who make use of the Pier as a public space have reported sharp increases in police harassment, false arrest and racial and gender profiling—usually for just being in the neighborhood. FIERCE has focused its campaign on the oppressive “Quality of Life Policies,” which were put into place by former Mayor Giuliani. Through a mix of youth-led organizing and activist strategies — including direct action, media advocacy, street visibility through art/activism, and testifying at public forums — FIERCE! has been able to change the terms of the public debate about quality of life and public safety in the West Village so that the voices of merchants and residents, politicians and police, are not the only ones that are heard.

⇒ KEEPIN' THE COPS OUT THE 'HOOD - ALTERNATIVE RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE

Many of us have come to the conclusion that we can't fight to reform an inherently racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, classist, and anti-immigrant paramilitary institution like the police to meet our needs, and are working to create a world without cops - where all of us are safe and accountable for our actions. For instance:

Students, teachers and communities are challenging the system of law enforcement violence in schools across the country, and working towards models of transformative justice. These are only a few examples:



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The Youth Power! Project of DRUM (Desis Rising Up and Moving) has used the results of its participatory research project, published in *Education Not Deportation*, available at http://www.urbanjustice.org/pdf/publications/Education_Not_Deportation_Report_06jun06.pdf to advocate for the creation of “Immigrant Safe Zones” in New York City public schools. They recently won the creation of the first zone at a high school in Queens New York.

LAMP (The Live Arts Media Project), Detroit, MI. LAMP is a youth-led initiative to transform education in Detroit through creativity and critical thinking. In 2006, youth used participatory research, hip hop and sound collages to build a hip hop audio documentary called “Rising Up From the Ashes: Chronicles of A Drop-out,” which is available for sale at <http://www.detroitsummer.org>. Currently, they lead workshops in schools and community centers using the documentary to spark dialogue around the root causes of the city's over 60% drop-out rate and envision concrete solutions to those problems. Through their ongoing research they are finding that implementing transformative justice policies, a cooperative economics curriculum and a “RESPECT” curriculum, centered around understanding and valuing marginalized identities, would significantly reduce the drop-out rate. For more information, email: info@detroitsummer.org or visit www.detroitsummer.org.

For more information and ideas, check out the materials on organizing for community accountability in this toolkit!



Meeting at a Colorado anti-violence agency to talk about how to resist and organize around arrests of domestic violence survivors under mandatory arrest policies.



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