

Creating a Common Language - our Glossary

7.4 million people in the U.S. live under the control of the prison industrial complex with more than 1 in 100 adults in U.S. prisons or jails, 1 in 9 black “men” ages 20 to 34, and 1 in 36 "hispanic" adults behind bars.

capitalism

an economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and distribution of goods, characterized by a free competitive market and motivation by profit.

felony

a crime for which the penalty is incarceration for one year or more. in Illinois, felonies are class 4, 3, 2, 1, X.

harm reduction

an approach to risky or harmful behavior that attempts to reduce the harm for the individual as opposed to addressing risky behaviors from an abstinence-only perspective. oftentimes harm reduction is used as an empowerment tool for individuals to be experts in their own lives and make their own best decisions about choices they make.

institutionalized racism

a system of behavior and beliefs by which a group defined as a race is oppressed, controlled, and exploited that is rooted in society's structure, not simply individual prejudices.

jail

generally a county facility where detainees are held pre-trial when they cannot afford to post bond and/or are serving a sentence for a misdemeanor conviction (less than one year). cook county jails are located around 26th and california.

misdemeanor

a crime for which the penalty is less than one year of incarceration. in Illinois, misdemeanors are class C, B, A.

neoliberalism

refers to the ideals and principles that current capitalistic governments (especially the United States government) use when determining legislation and policies that will best support the expansion of capitalism in a city, state, or country. Neoliberal practices are most easily seen in urban centers, like U.S. cities, where the focus of policy and legislation is to "clean up the city" by use of a police state and massive incarceration tactics, eliminating public benefits such as welfare and unemployment, and spending tax dollars on amenities such as parks and sporting arenas.

plea agreement or “taking a plea”

most people in the united states who have been convicted of a crime have not had a criminal trial, but have plead guilty. a plea agreement is generally a bargain offered by the state where a defendant is given the “deal” of a lesser sentence (jail/prison time and/or a fine) in exchange for pleading guilty to the crime or a lesser crime, thus waiving the right to a trial and thus to confront the evidence against them.

prison

a state, federal, or privately-run facility that detains people convicted of felony crimes who are serving their sentence (over one year).

prison industrial complex (PIC)

the use of prisons and policing in the U.S. as a "solution" to social, political, and economic problems such as racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. the PIC encompasses human rights violations, the death penalty, privatization, policing, courts, media, community powerlessness, imprisonment of political prisoners, and the elimination of dissent.

transphobia

the individual fear and systemic oppression of people whose gender identity and/or expression does not conform with cultural gender roles assigned at birth based on anatomical sex.