

BEYOND THE BARS CONFERENCE



**THROUGHOUT
THE YEARS**



About the Beyond the Bars Conference

The Beyond the Bars Conference is an annual student-driven interdisciplinary conference on mass incarceration held at Columbia University. Each year the conference brings together students, faculty, activists, advocates, practitioners, those who have experienced and/or been impacted by incarceration, community members and more to connect, galvanize, and deepen the work of building justice and equity and ending mass incarceration.

The idea for the conference first came from Tanisha “Wakumi” Douglas while she was a student at Columbia School of Social Work and a leader in the Criminal Justice Caucus (now known as the Abolition Caucus). Wakumi, whose father had been incarcerated for decades, worked with Kathy Boudin and Cheryl Wilkins, co-founders of The Center for Justice to develop the first conference which took place on January 29th, 2011.

Originally called Removing the Bars, the conference was a one-day event focused primarily on supporting social workers in developing skills to address the ripple effects of incarceration. Since then, Beyond the Bars has grown into a four-day conference and a hub for connecting academics, activists, organizers, and people directly impacted by incarceration. Beyond the Bars is committed to building a national and international movement for safety, equity, and justice beyond punishment and prisons.



Wakumi (second from right) with other Criminal Justice Caucus leaders and volunteers at the first conference

Removing the Bars 2011



DATE: January 29, 2011

The student-led conference was focused on skill building and educating social workers

to better respond to the impact of incarceration on individuals, families, and communities.

Scan QR Code to see the very first conference program



Photos from Removing the Bars 2011



Scan QR Code to see more photos:



Removing the Bars 2012

REMOVING THE BARS
TAKE ACTION



**DATE: March
23 & 24, 2012**

**This year's
conference
expanded to
two days and
collaborated
with students**

& faculty from the Law School, School of Public Health, School of Arts, and Teachers College. The goal was to develop a collaborative conference that would address incarceration issues from an interdisciplinary perspective, incorporate community, and inspire action.

***Scan to watch Angela Davis'
first ever Beyond the Bars
Conference keynote speech***



Photos from Removing the Bars 2012



Scan QR Code to see more photos:



Beyond the Bars 2013: Moving Forward

DATE: April 5 & 6, 2013

This year, the conference name officially changed to Beyond the Bars and featured guest speakers Marc Lamont Hill, Angela Davis, and Soffiyah Elijah.

Plenaries focused on imagining a world beyond punishment and workshops covered topics like ending solitary confinement, aging in prison, restorative justice, juvenile justice, supporting families impacted by incarceration, and more.

***Scan to read more about
the plenaries and
workshops***



Photos from Beyond the Bars 2013



Scan QR Code to see more photos:



Beyond the Bars 2014: Breaking Through

DATE: March 7 & 8, 2014

This year's conference featured a wide variety of topics including immigration and mass deportation, how to support incarcerated trans people, education and incarceration, international incarceration issues, and more.

***Scan to view the
whole program***



Beyond the Bars 2015: Transforming (In)Justice

DATE: March 6–8, 2015

This year's conference focused on the idea of transformation. The questions posed were:

- **How do we work towards lasting transformative change?**
- **How do we develop a framework for changing the way our country seeks justice that does not perpetuate the roots of the problems that have led us here?**
- **How do we create change that addresses the systemic marginalization while also addressing the need for individual accountability and the safety of our communities and our society?**
- **What is a transformative agenda for changing the way we seek justice?**

***Scan to watch Michelle
Alexander's keynote speech***



Photos from Beyond the Bars 2015



Scan QR Code to see more photos:



Beyond the Bars 2016: Connecting the Struggles

DATE: March 4–6, 2016

This year's conference focused on intersectionality and aimed to connect the many ways in which mass incarceration has impacted individuals, families and communities across the U.S, and beyond, as well as build connections across diverse struggles for social justice.

***Scan to watch videos
from the conference***



Photos from Beyond the Bars 2016



Scan QR Code to see more photos:



Beyond the Bars 2017: Transcending the Punishment Paradigm

DATE: March 2–5, 2017

This year's conference, focused on the criminal justice system's responses to violence, asking the following questions:

- What are the root causes of violence within communities? What are the root causes of state violence? How do the two intersect?
- What is needed to makes communities safe?
- What are the existing narratives about people who have committed violent acts? How do we change those narratives?
- When violence happens in the community, what are responses that decrease mass criminalization and incarceration and do not rely on the punishment paradigm?

***Scan to watch videos from
the conference***



Photos from Beyond the Bars 2017



Scan QR Code to see more photos:



Beyond the Bars 2018: Closing Jails and Prisons

DATE: March 1–4, 2018

This year's conference focused on elevating the growing movement to close jails and prisons. The goal was to:

- **Convene and support a national network of people and organizations working to close jails and prisons across the country**
- **Help articulate a vision and analysis for closing jails and prisons and envisioning what comes next**
- **Address and examine some of the difficult issues and questions that arise when people are calling for closing jails and prisons**
- **Further catalyze university involvement in ending mass incarceration**

***Scan to watch videos from
the conference***



Photos from Beyond the Bars 2018



Scan QR Code to see more photos:



Beyond the Bars 2019: Until She's Free

DATE: March 7–10, 2019

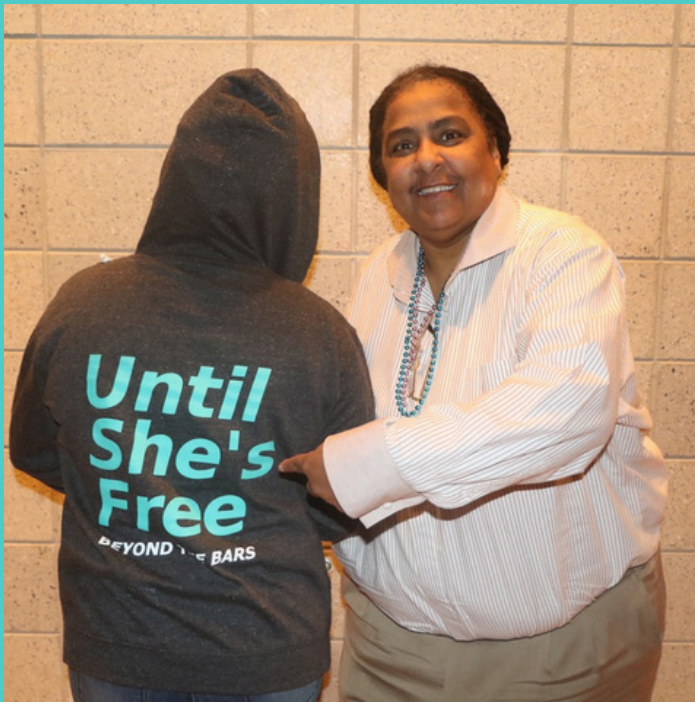
This conference focused on the incarceration and criminalization of women and girls themselves, as well as their families and communities.

Our focus was inclusive of transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people. The many struggles for justice, equity, and safety led by women and girls directly impacted by the criminal legal system was at the heart of the conference as we aimed to create a space to further strengthen and advance change.

***Scan to watch videos from
the conference***



Photos from Beyond the Bars 2019



Scan QR Code to see more photos:



Beyond the Bars 2020: Freedom Plans: Strategies for Challenging a Carceral Society

DATE: March 5–8, 2020

This year's theme aimed to explore strategies for challenging a carceral society. In 2020, our conference was 10 years old. In the previous 10 years the movement challenging incarceration and criminalization had grown significantly - in part due to the role of currently and formerly incarcerated and directly impacted people. On the other hand, the total number of people in jails and prisons in the U.S. had decreased very little, incarceration of people who are undocumented had increased, and criminalization of activism was on the rise. We were at a time when the movement against mass incarceration was one of many social movements mobilizing for justice and liberation, both in the United States and throughout the world. These movements birthed many possibilities as well as many challenges. Beyond the Bars 2020 provided a generative space to surface and explore strategic issues and further our freedom plans towards transforming the society in which we live.

***Scan to watch videos from
the conference***



Photos from Beyond the Bars 2020



Scan QR Code to see more photos:



Beyond the Bars 2021: Towards Freedom: Violence, Safety, and Abolition in 2021

DATE: Various Dates in May 2021

This year's conference took place virtually in collaboration with Haymarket Books. It was initially scheduled for April but was postponed in solidarity with student workers at Columbia striking. It marked the 11th annual Beyond the Bars Conference, coming one year after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in which multiple crises had unfolded, and the growth of social movements struggling for a more just and safe world had increased significantly. Given this, we hoped to create deep and thoughtful conversations about the many forms of violence that our society has experienced; to surface and examine the ways in which movements are pushing for community and public safety in ways that do not reenforce the carceral state; and to explore why abolition has become so prevalent in the conversations. In addition, we took time to honor and celebrate the leadership of women impacted by incarceration, and the leadership of Black women, and all that we have and can learn from their work.

***Scan to watch the videos
from the conference***



Beyond the Bars 2022: Movement Building in A World on Fire

DATE: April 9, 2022

Because of Covid, Beyond the Bars 2022 was a single day event at Riverside Church and brought together movements for decarceration, abolition, and climate and environmental justice to develop solidarity, share analysis, exchange strategies and build power. This conference aimed to not only confront the dire, intersecting realities of climate catastrophe, mass punishment, criminalization and incarceration, but to explore how we are working towards good relations, with each other, our communities and the earth we want and deserve.

With three panels over the course of the day, scholars, organizers, healers, and artists explored these questions in the hopes of strengthening our collective work:

- What are the connections between the struggles for decarceration, abolition and environmental and climate justice?
- How does the work of making communities safer intersect with the protection of our environment and earth?
- What are the organizing strategies and concrete practices that confront the intersections of these struggles and advance our collective work?
- How can our respective movements collaborate and build together to transform our communities and develop stronger and more cohesive relations?

***Scan to watch the videos from
the conference***



Photos from Beyond the Bars 2022



Beyond the Bars 2023: Seeding Justice

DATE: March 24–26, 2023

Beyond the Bars 2023 brought together organizations and movements working on indigenous peacemaking, and restorative, transformative, healing and reparative justice to develop solidarity, share analysis, exchange strategies and practices, and together build power to create the world we need. BTB 2023 was an opportunity to learn about how people and communities are taking up these approaches in their own communities, the tensions and possibilities of working in relationship to systems, and to build connections between and among those already doing this work.

The conference focused on these guiding questions in the hopes of strengthening our collective work:

- How do we understand the similarities and differences between indigenous peacemaking, restorative, transformative, healing and reparative justice?
- How do we ensure that these approaches to justice between people and communities are connected to movements for broader social transformation?
- What are the tensions, limitations and possibilities in working in relationship to systems?
- How can we think about the question of scale? Should we be scaling up these approaches? Or is there another way to think about this?
- How do these approaches help us to address conflict and harm within movements?

*Scan to watch videos from
the conference*



Photos from Beyond the Bars 2023



Beyond the Bars 2023 was the first Conference after our beloved Kathy Boudin passed

Beyond the Bars 2024: Justice Beyond Punishment

DATE: April 4–7, 2024

Justice Beyond Punishment, explored the struggles to challenge carceral punishment while highlighting and advancing non-punitive approaches to interpersonal and community violence that offer us ways out of the punishment paradigm. Changing how we respond to interpersonal and community violence includes challenging and ending the violence of the state while building up community-based and community-specific approaches. It requires reckoning with the historic and current harms of carceral systems, and how the racialized punishment of the carceral state has done more to cause violence than prevent it. It means learning from and with impacted communities including Indigenous, Black, Brown, queer, trans, and poor folks, and building a movement rooted in solidarity, self-determination, and dignity for all peoples.

Last year's conference focused on the following questions:

- What strategies have been effective in challenging and dismantling state violence?
- What non-punitive approaches to interpersonal violence already exist that we can learn from, and grow?
- What are the underlying values and principles that can guide more just approaches to interpersonal violence and community violence?
- How do we build more solidarity across communities and movements around issues of violence?
- What conversations need to happen in our movements to build stronger and more cohesive efforts to end state and interpersonal violence?

*Scan to watch videos from
the conference*



Photos from Beyond the Bars 2024



Beyond the Bars 2025: Sankofa

DATE: March 6–9, 2024



2025 marked 15 years of the Beyond the Bars Conference! As we are celebrated 15 years, the theme was Sankofa, depicted by the bird to the left and meaning:

San (to return)

Ko (to go)

Fa (to look, seek, take)

In our current times, it is so important that we preserve our histories and how our ancestors and those who have come before us have succeeded in organizing, advocating, and taking care of their community when systems of oppression seemed too overpowering.

Sankofa is about remembering our past to protect our future! There must be movement and new learning as time passes. Our past provides the knowledge, lessons, and strategies gained through our fight for freedom and full-citizenship which enables us to develop stronger strategies and tactics in our current movement.

Scan to watch videos from the conference



Photos from Beyond the Bars 2025



Beyond the Bars Globally

Over the years, partners of the Center for Justice have hosted their own Beyond the Bars Conference across the world including in Kenya, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Maine.

