INTRODUCTION

In this piece, we’d like to present a creative tool for international organizing: The Practical Resistance Alliance X (Prax-is). The broad goal of Prax-is is to be an avenue to connect theory to practice. It does so through a website (Prax-is.org) that aims to build collaboration, be a source of information, and offer space for a creative outlet to share experiences. The website includes a section for blog posts, a page for longer articles, a gallery, and a discussion forum.

Prax-is uses a problem-solving framework to pursue social justice projects, which involves: (1) identifying the issue you want to tackle, (2) setting an achievable goal within that general issue, and (3) making a plan for attaining that specific goal. This is the framework in which we situate this article. We will apply the Prax-is formula to an ongoing problem in order to propose different ways of addressing it.

Here, the issue we tackle is the lack of effective mechanisms to respond to social crises. The achievable goal is to propose ways to respond to a current crisis: family separations at the border. Our plan is to engage with resources on the Prax-is website and spread awareness using this platform. We will go through each step to demonstrate how this framework works in practice.

I. ARTICULATING AN ISSUE

In the wake of the Trump election, progressive communities have often found themselves at a loss when facing the ongoing attacks on marginalized communities and on the constitutional rights of minorities like immigrants, trans people, and people of color. Halfway through the tenure of a federal administration that embraces fragmented policies and regularly contradicts itself, what can a concerted response from civil society look like? In this piece, we explore our tool, Prax-is, as a mechanism to find actionable solutions that we can implement in our own communities. We intend to provide guidance not only for those in the progressive left, but for anyone—domestically and abroad—who identifies with the struggles of oppressed and underrepresented communities and is seeking ways to meaningfully contribute to change.

This essay frames the separation of families at the border as a learning moment.
that highlights our issue: **there is a lack of effective mechanisms to respond to and organize effectively around social emergencies.** In order to connect theory to practice, Prax-is facilitates organizing in ways that have proven effective in many social justice movements. It is in this context that we propose a critical analysis of the role of organizing as a tool for structural change. In Part I, we explore some of the conditions that have led to this problem. By looking at different examples of social movements and successful activism, we seek to diagnose the issues that our organizing communities currently face. Prax-is was built to follow these models of successful organizing.

Organizing can be described as community involvement in a fight for power and radical change, and it can take on many strategies that involve a disruption of the status quo.¹ The goal of organizers may be to raise awareness, address structural sources of inequality, build a movement, educate and inform, or strengthen voices of reform.² Whatever goal the organizers seek, it fits within a larger vision of societal change. Organizing uses the power of the people to make up for a lack of other sources of privilege and power, such as social or financial capital. Organizing must involve communication and transparency among members, inclusiveness and diversity, vision, energy, and radical imagination. While some countries, cultures, and communities have a history and practice of organizing to respond to social emergencies, the political crisis we currently face has evinced the need for streamlined mechanisms to contribute to lasting change.

Organizing is more than seeking policy change, since policies can be symptoms of a greater problem of systemic subordination.³ Rather, it is a method of enforcing a new societal system, one that is centered on uplifting subordinated communities, being inclusive of different identities, and acknowledging how different issues intersect with each other. A glaring example of how these issues manifest is the intersection between criminal justice and the immigration system—by criminalizing immigration, the state justifies labeling immigrants as criminals and perpetuating a harmful narrative about the danger they pose to society.

Organizing is creative, constantly changing, and may sometimes require violent tactics in response to the pervasive and dominating power of the state. It works by either interfering with the operations of injustice or embodying a more just alternative.⁴ Gene Sharp described 198 methods of nonviolent organizing, including formal statements, symbolic public arts, pressures on individuals, drama and music, withdrawal and renunciation, social noncooperation, economic noncooperation, political noncooperation, and intervention.⁵ In the context of family separations, organizing has involved showing the importance of immigrants to the country by having one-day strikes, occupying spaces of detention, and even coordinating mariachi

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bands and huge festivals outside of government offices. The ultimate vision of immigration organizing is usually at least an alternative to current inhumane border enforcement, if not abolition of border enforcement or borders altogether.

There are countless examples of effective international community organizing. By exploring them, we would like to highlight some ways in which current organizing efforts can borrow from these past victories. Ivan Marcovic, for example, organized other students and founded the organization Otpor (“Resistance”) in response to election fraud in Serbia in 1998. He implemented a hybrid model of organizing, combining the mass participation of protests with the structure and sustainability of organizations like the youth wing of political parties. He started recruiting people through humorous street theatre to get them engaged in ordinary public places. Otpor called a National Congress outside the official political parties and proclaimed themselves a national movement. Shortly after, Otpor blanketed the country with posters, T-shirts, and slogans showing Otpor’s logo. It also circulated resistance manuals and coordinated nationwide strikes, rapid reaction teams, and pressure escalation tactics. Eventually, the nonviolent demonstrators surrounded key occupied buildings and forced the dictator to resign.

We have a myriad examples of countries where the population has effectively joined arms to respond to widespread injustices much like those we face under the Trump administration. The Arab Spring, for example, was the product of many collaborative forces. Mohammed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor, catalyzed the movement by protesting the unreasonable seizure of his goods. Ten days after his death, public outrage was so intense that the protests overwhelmed the country’s security forces, compelling Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali to step down and flee the country. Massive protests broke out in Egypt just days later, and after the military announced it would refuse to use force against the protesters, Hosni Mubarak left office. Other countries, including Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria soon followed suit in social movements, though not all ended in the ousting of their rulers.

The examples above highlight the experiences of countries, often in the Global South, where the population stayed organized and politically involved. They were connected partly by using social media, particularly Twitter, and partly with the help of strategists like Iyad el Baghdadi, who articulated a narrative to unite the various countries, known as the Arab Spring Manifesto. He described the social dynamics prevalent in the Middle East, where competing stories of terrorists, dictators, and Western interventionists form “a stable triangle.” Rather than telling of forces that had been widely understood as opposing each other, he described these forces as mutually reinforcing. Effective movements advance popular narratives that this triangle excludes. The narrative was meant to empower Arab Spring activists in order to overpower highly organized tyrants. It is important to acknowledge the anti-

6. See id.
11. See id.
revolutionary violence that came from military and counter-protestors. However, Arab Spring activists still accomplished their goals of ousting people in power and serve as an example of successful organizing.

The Prax-is online platform combines features used by many different social movements. The website has a highly flexible structure in order to meet the needs of different communities, just like Marcovic’s street theatre recruitment. Everything is coordinated online and accessible to anyone with internet access, just like Twitter in the Arab Spring. In addition, there is a combination of unifying theory and practice, just like with Baghdadi’s Manifesto.

II. IDENTIFYING A GOAL

We have articulated what we see as a pervading social issue that our generation faces: the lack of effective and readily available mechanisms to respond to social crises in an organized way. This second portion focuses on identifying an achievable goal: meaningfully contributing to efforts to alleviate the separation of families at the border. We use family separation as an example of a specific problem that Prax-is can help alleviate—in Part III, we will describe in more detail actionable ways to get there. In order to achieve this goal, we must look at history to understand the nature of the problem.

Immigration in the U.S.: A historical overview

In order to fully understand the nuances of current immigration trends, it is imperative to contextualize the history of immigration in the U.S. and trace a connection with trends at an international level. The immigration “crisis” is often framed as a current phenomenon of historic proportions, implying both unprecedented numbers of incoming migrants and a modern pattern of human movement. This analysis tends to negate the historical roots of immigration from the time of the country’s founding and the country’s complicity in producing today’s state of affairs. Yet, U.S. immigration policy has remained mostly consistent for over fifty years, and the current flow of people into the country is neither historic nor a break from precedent.

The great immigration wave that characterized an influx of manual labor from 1830 to roughly 1940 represented, for the most part, manual workers that had no designs or interest in remaining permanently in the U.S. The Gold Rush drew people from both Asia and Europe, while The Great Hunger drove 4.5 million from Ireland across the Atlantic. Over a whole century, around forty million workers traveled to the U.S. to find seasonal employment and take their earnings home. The pro-immigrant sentiment of the mid-nineteenth century saw newcomers as welcome sources of wealth. This pattern has not been unique to the U.S., but it has existed within a wider context of international movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From domestic urban migration to international cross-border exchanges, the U.S. is but one in a list of magnet countries that share a common history of economic reordering.

The rapid economic changes that “exporting” countries faced over this period of mass migration allowed for semi-skilled laborers to make the journey into global industrial centers. Most of these immigrants had little access to education and came from countries that are today characterized as white, but were racialized as non-white as far back as 1880. Irish, German, Polish, and Italian workers made up the bulk of these numbers and were five times as likely to be unskilled workers as their native-
born neighbors. How did this narrative change, and more importantly, how has our narrative over the last century interlinked race and migration into seemingly inseparable concepts?

The Intersection of Race and Migration

The separation of families at the border at the hands of the Trump administration provides an invaluable lens to analyze the intersectional nature of the immigration crisis. While racism has fueled immigration policies in the U.S. for much of modern history, the transparent rhetoric deployed by Trump and his cabinet provides critical insight into the anti-immigrant racism that surrounds immigration politics today. The dog-whistling of Trump’s immigration narrative often clouds anti-immigrant racism in the language of national security and domestic employment policies. A clear example are attempts to provoke fear that immigrants are taking jobs from citizens or will commit crimes once they are in the U.S. However, from the first naturalization laws of 1790 (which excluded from citizenship everyone but free white people of good character) to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, our immigration policies are fraught with language that produces and perpetuates racial notions of belonging while criminalizing specific bodies. At the center of dog-whistle politics is race-neutral language that is nevertheless driven by an agenda of racial exclusion.

Racist immigration codes transverse the history of both our policies and our popular attitudes, culminating in an administration that is often overt in pursuing a racially-motivated agenda. From the Muslim travel ban to the national emergency declaration and Trump’s references to “shithole” countries, the separation of families at the border is part of a string of policies that seek to prevent people in the Global South from having access to vital resources for survival. One of the underlying questions to explore, therefore, is the extent to which the U.S. and other developed countries are complicit in reproducing patterns of global inequality, often drawn along racial lines. How do we distinguish between allies and foes, between those who belong and those we exclude? Prax-is provides a space to have these conversations and take action accordingly.

An Organized Response to Family Separations

This racially coded history brings us to the present moment. The federal administration has so far identified 2,737 immigrant children in custody who have been potentially separated from their families at the border.13 On July 19, 2018, officials said that about 60 percent of them were eligible to be reunited with their parents, a list that was still under revision as late as mid-December 2018. At least 250 children were still separated from their families by October, months after the federal injunction to reunite families.14 As federal agencies attempt to follow the mandate to

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12. “That any Alien being a free white person, who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for the term of two years, may be admitted to become a citizen thereof.” Accessible at Library of Congress: https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=001/llsl001.db&recNum=226.
bring together these families, we consider whether there’s a role to play for the population at large. While grassroots efforts have metastasized domestically and fundraising campaigns have garnered international attention, these efforts are often disconnected, insufficient, or inaccessible to many. Prax-is centralizes resources, information, and communications on a platform to facilitate collaboration for similar movements happening across the world.

The amount of inaccurate mediatic attention and confusion that the separation of immigrant families garnered is indicative of how little the average person knows about the subject. To begin with, there was no official Trump policy mandating the separation of families—rather, the so-called “zero tolerance” policy required that all adults crossing the border illegally be criminally prosecuted instead of contained at a detention center pending a hearing. This, in turn, led to parents being sent to jail and becoming forcibly separated from their children. Since these children cannot follow their parents to jail, they become “unaccompanied alien children” and are sent into federal custody. While the Office of Refugee Resettlement is required to identify a child’s closest relative living in the U.S., this does not always happen. Consequently, the overloaded agency continues to hold the children past their allotted detention time or releases them to someone other than their relative.

The immigrant children crisis has called into question the ability of institutions and the population at large to contribute meaningfully to alleviating the issue. While human rights organizations have argued that the practice violates international law, the Trump administration has used the impasse as leverage to negotiate a more stringent immigration reform and has managed to secure a fraction of Trump’s requested budget to build a border wall. Although federal courts have called the federal government to reunite families, the ability for the different agencies involved to actually comply with this requirement is doubtful. The erratic nature of the Trump administration adds further uncertainty about the indefinite end to these practices. In light of this complexity, it is of little surprise to find that civil society’s response has been, at best, disjointed and delayed. We propose Prax-is as a way of bridging this gap and connecting people with resources, communities, and other people.

The level of domestic and international public scrutiny that has followed this problem shows that people are actively looking for ways to become involved and collaborate. One example is the enormous support that the organization RAICES has received. They managed to raise over $20 million from donations, exceeding by an exorbitant amount the $1,500 original goal it had set for bonds. This is but one sign that interest, attention, and support are present. On the other hand, an organized mechanism to channel people’s time, resources, and skills into making meaningful contributions is still lacking. Accordingly, how do we connect people to existing efforts to provide actual support for affected communities? Beyond attending protests and donating money online, we need to think critically about building bridges for people to show solidarity. Having identified the goal of finding effective ways for people to alleviate the separation of families at the border, we now turn to the third section, where we seek to provide actionable steps to achieve this goal through our platform, Prax-is.
III. ACTIONABLE STEPS

Our goal can be generalized across many different social issues beyond family separations at the border. Responding effectively to social crises is an issue in every cause that seeks to advance social justice, and we propose a platform and a straightforward framework: identifying an issue, an attainable goal, and a plan. In Part I, we identified our issue as the **lack of an effective mechanism** to respond to social emergencies, and highlighted what effective movements look like and how Prax-is parallels them. In Part II, we identified our achievable goal as **contributing meaningfully** to alleviating the separation of families at the border, and described the background on this issue in order to fully comprehend it. In Part III, we will describe many different ways to **achieve this goal through a plan**, and how these efforts can be coordinated using the Prax-is website. We will demonstrate how each of our website’s features can be used to support its goals in the context of family separations at the border.

The article section of Prax-is serves as a source of information to support users in taking informed action. We described in Part II the lack of public knowledge about the immigration system, and which aspects of the system are actually changing, as opposed to aspects that have been failing for as long as the system has existed. In the articles section, folks can write about what is happening in the news, executive orders and their opinions on them, updates on immigration law, and highlight other articles that have been framing the rhetoric on the issue. For example, Trump signed an executive order that may have declared an end to the separation of families on the border, but still allows families to be detained together indefinitely, and families within the country are still separated through regular processes of deportation that have been happening for years. Even as the administration purports to be reuniting families, hundreds of children still remain in detention centers without a guardian. Furthermore, former Attorney General Jeff Sessions overturned an important case that now makes survivors of domestic violence and gang violence ineligible for asylum, further limiting options for legal status in the U.S. Particularly important articles that frame the rhetoric are those that focus on children’s experiences in detention, and representing themselves in court.

People can also blog about actions their organization or local groups are supporting in order to document current efforts, and provide others the chance to join, replicate, improve, and build on these methods of direct service to help those who suffer immediate impacts. Conferences, webinars, and other trainings can help users

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learn what others are doing and how to best support those efforts. Namati, for example, trains folks internationally on how to advise clients on citizenship without being a lawyer. The Immigration Justice Campaign also hosted a webinar about what to do in response to family separations. Al Otro Lado and Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center are binational organizations that provide direct legal services to indigent deportees, migrants, and refugees. No matter where people are in the world, they can volunteer remotely with organizations doing work at the border. CARA and Karnes need volunteers to do administrative tasks, translation, and other work to help process families in detention centers at the border. Our hope is that Prax-is serves as an accessible online platform to those outside of predominantly white institutions, and to the affected community itself. We welcome contributions in other languages, so that immigrants or other affected communities be able to meaningfully engage with the website as well.

The forum space is meant to encourage collaboration across cities, organizations, and movements, in order to coordinate energy into specific actions that will overwhelm the system and catalyze change. Family separations have been happening for a long time through regular deportations, and the current situation presents an opportunity to change this. The narrative of family separations at the border can be used to uplift specific stories and be a central issue to organize around through typical tactics. This includes public campaigns and rallies, occupation of spaces like detention centers, strikes, phone banking, petitions, and more. In this space, folks can formulate statements that their organizations (whether it be school, work, or other institutions) can issue to condemn these practices and commit to instituting change in support of affected communities. These letters can also be sent to government personnel who are affiliated with the institutions. Many schools have already sent out such letters. The forum space can also facilitate the creation of coalitions that work together to keep their communities or institutions supportive and safe for immigrants. Examples of these are the National Immigration Law Student Initiative, FreeSF, ACUDIR, and Refugees and Migrants.

Activists can use the platform to make specific asks, pitch ideas for projects they are working on, and request support to complete their projects. The forum space can be a place of conversation. Folks can brainstorm actions together, reflect on what they have done so far, and discuss the barriers to supporting movements that they have

22. Id.
23. Id.
24. Letter to DHS from Faculty, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1B3plkGi0TYWgLU9FcDLdZT49vMcp7MDAielgKW7dSg/edit. *I think that because this is an online only source, it requires a “last visited” (see BB R.18.1(a))
encountered while providing advice for overcoming obstacles. This leads to creative solutions, like planning small fundraisers or local outings to events together. Anyone, for example, can host a know-your-rights screening, since there are online videos readily accessible.28 Even one person learning their rights means one less person in detention, one less person coerced by the state to be unnecessarily detained.

Activism can also be creative by using the gallery section on Prax-is, just as Optor used creative methods of recruiting a wide audience. If users would like to submit pieces of artwork or photography to convey messages, they can upload creative content to be posted. If folks have a passion for video-making, podcasts, spoken-word, or auditory arts, these pieces can also be posted online. We also intend for the space to provide a creative outlet as activists work on other projects.

CONCLUSION

The separation of families at the border is but one example in a long line of concerted attacks upon marginalized communities. Yet, avenues for change exist. We invite you to participate in the future of social movements, and be a part of the creation of a shared world vision where oppressed communities and their allies can almost instantaneously organize, accumulate power, fight back, and change the system. You can start by clicking this link and sharing your thoughts: www.prax-is.org.

28. We Know Our Rights, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHfEOcGDbVj_sWaNMT5JDxw (last visited Mar. 3, 2019).