

TIME/CUT

Indiana Prison Newsletter

Issue 12 • Fall 2023

Prisoner Resistance in
Minnesota, Georgia,
and Arizona

The Meaning of Black
August

Perspectives on
Abolition

Harm Reduction &
Book Clubs Inside

Presented by



TIME/CUT

is a publication for Indiana prisoners and their family and friends. It includes news, thoughts, and helpful resources from inside and outside the walls and around the world. The articles in the publication do not necessarily reflect on its contributors, creators, or distributors. Its contents are for informational purposes only. Time/Cut does not provide legal assistance or romantic arrangements.

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Please write to us for a catalogue of other articles and texts related to surviving prison. This publication is free to friends and family of prisoners in Indiana. If you do not already receive it but want to, please write us and we will add you to our mailing list. If you wish to stop receiving it, write us and we'll take you off. If your incarcerated loved ones would like to receive the inside version, please send us their address. Thanks for reading!

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Civil Disobedience Inside Minnesota's Stillwater Prison

by Niko Georgiades

from UnicornRiot.Ninja

Sept 2023

In the midst of a near-record heat-streak, around 100 people incarcerated in Minnesota Correctional Facility-Stillwater staged an act of civil disobedience by refusing to go back to their cells for a staff-induced lockdown on Sunday, Sept. 3. Men housed in B East expressed grievances over no air conditioning, no clean or cold water, and whole units intentionally being locked down with no recreation time nor showers. Authorities say a modified cell release schedule over the Labor Day holiday weekend was from a staffing shortage and Department of Corrections (DOC) Commissioner Paul Schnell said he knows it's "exceedingly hot."

During the incident, which started Sunday morning, no officers were hurt or taken hostage and they were free to move around. The inmates, workers in the prison's factories who had worked all week, peacefully refused to go back to their cells after not getting showers or rec. Although it's unknown what led to the inmates ultimately choosing to go back into their cells later in the day, two inmates were sent to segregation after refusing; at least one was reportedly written up for riot. The lockdown in B East, which has about 230 people living in it, and had a white tarp covering the cellblock for two days, continued until at least Wednesday, Sept. 7.

Audio of a phone call from an unnamed inmate in Stillwater recorded by Twin Cities Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (TC-IWOC) on Sept. 7 provides updates from B East. The inmate said three people in the unit were now charged with "kidnapping" and "threatening staff" and that 30 others were sent to segregation as a consequence for their participation in Sunday's protest. "They telling y'all out there in the world that it was a peaceful process but they in here giving these guys all this time and trying to keep them in prison even longer just because of this."

Hearing news of Sunday's prison protest, family members of inmates, community advocates, and press appeared outside the prison. Marvin Haynes, the sister of Marvin Haynes and Alissa Washington, the fiancé of Cornelius Jackson, spoke to Unicorn Riot on Sunday. Both Haynes and Jackson claim innocent of the charges against them and are housed in Stillwater. See our investigative series and film on Marvin Haynes' case.

Marvina was able to get a recording of Phillip Vance, who gave a testimonial from inside B East as to why people were protesting. He said it was the continual lockdowns after working all week, among other issues like not having access to showers and clean water.

Stillwater prison has a long history of rebellions, uprisings, and

activism dating back to the 1960s and beyond. Notorious for its old structures and being built in 1914, the state's largest prison, MCF-Stillwater, is regularly overcrowded and understaffed. Stillwater houses up to 1,600 people and has factories where inmates work for state's scandal-plagued prison industry company, Minncor.

The facilities replaced the Minnesota Territorial Prison in Stillwater, which preceded Minnesota becoming a U.S. state. The Prison Mirror, a prisoner newspaper, has been published since 1887 at the Stillwater prison. A twine manufacturing plant preceded Minncor in 1890.

Five years ago in Stillwater, corrections officer Joseph Gomm was killed by an inmate. All prisons in Minnesota went on lockdown which persisted for weeks before getting lifted, except in Stillwater, where it continued for over a month. The act of collective punishment against over 1,000 inmates led to a humanitarian crisis. Inmates reported having mildew growing on their clothes after being denied laundry and showers during the lockdown.

The recent protests didn't stop after Monday. On Tuesday night, prisoner advocates protested in front of the current residence of Governor Tim Walz. David Boehnke, an organizer with TC-IWOC, presented a phone call with Amani Fardan, who's serving a life sentence and currently housed in Stillwater.

Fardan's cell is in A East, across the hall from B East. He said his unit was not on full lockdown at that point but were earlier in the day presented with a limited time out of their cell and an option whether to eat or shower.

Lockdowns force those housed in facilities to stay in their cells for extended periods of time. While each prison is different, programs and services are suspended during lockdowns and inmates regularly miss out on showers, recreational time, phone calls, and more.

Fardan gave an update on B East, stating that the unit of model workers was still on lockdown. He said that a white tarp had been placed over the front of the unit, preventing others from seeing in. The tarp remained for a couple of days until it had been pushed aside. "I don't know if that was for the tactical team, for them to go in there and do whatever. Or just to cut them off from the rest of the building."

He said he worried how it was affecting the inmates in B East and their families. Regarding all of the consistent lockdowns, he said, "locking us in our rooms is having an effect psychologically on our mental health and not helping no one. It's harming us, our families and the staff up in here."

After the audio chimed in noting the inmate had "one minute left" on the call, he said "Marvin Haynes said 'hey' and thank you for having us on your mind and advocating for us."

The organization Minnesota Wrongfully Convicted Judicial Reform, founded by Marvinna Haynes, posted four demands for the DOC commissioner on their Facebook page in reference to the Tuesday rally:

Mn Wrongfully Convicted judicial reform

Whether you were able to be at the rally Tuesday night or not, we need your CONTINUED ACTION now!

Contact Commissioner of Corrections Paul Schnell and make these demands.

Twin Cities Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee
Communities United Against Police Brutality (CUAPB)

DEMAND

COMMISSIONER OF CORRECTIONS

PAUL SCHNELL

- IMMEDIATELY RELEASE **DOMENICO NEWTON** AND **LINCOLN CALDWELL** FROM AD SEG (SOLITARY)
- PROVIDE **HUMANE** ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER, ICE, SHOWERS, PHONE CALLS, AND VISITATION RIGHTS
- CONDUCT AN IMMEDIATE **SAFETY INVESTIGATION** OF THE WATER IN CELLS, PLUMBING & WATER SOURCE
- BRING HOME THE **1,400** LOW RISK PEOPLE ON WORK RELEASE PER STATUTE 244.065 AND SHARE THE D.O.C.'S DRAFT MRRA POLICIES

651-755-1520 | 651-361-7226
PAUL.SCHNELL@STATE.MN.US

Advocates state that Domenico Newton and Lincoln Caldwell were the two people sent to segregation after the Sunday protest. Caldwell’s mother Kathy said during Tuesday’s protest that Caldwell was written up for rioting for the Sunday protest. She said she heard through an intermediary that the corrections officer that was in the bubble locked her son’s cell so he couldn’t get in and when they came around, they grabbed him because he was the only one standing outside.

One of the main thing activists have been keen to advocate for is clean water. “The water is brown and comes from a well,” said Lovell Oates, the executive director of Justice Impacted Individuals Voting Effectively (JIIVE), who was housed in Stillwater for 12 years. “All the water that goes and gets polluted comes back in there.”

Another man formerly housed in Stillwater, Tommy Powell, said “some people get rashes from the water.” “At times it’s really heavy. It’s like a soup. But other times, it’s fine.” The water is browner in cells that are near the end of the cellblocks or on the bottom of the tier, said Powell.

“This building is 109 years old, so where does that water come from? This same water has been sitting there” in the well, said Oates.

During the Sept. 4 press conference, Marvinna Haynes said, “a lot of inmates come to jail with their natural long dreads and braids. Being in here, they have scalp conditions from washing their hair with the water and consuming the water and it gives them stomach conditions.”

Studies at Stillwater prison from 2014-2019 found six cancer-causing contaminants in the water, at levels far exceeding those recommended by the nonprofit Environmental Working Group. The level of carcinogenic radium detected is 37 times higher than EWG’s guideline.

However, the tap water provided at Stillwater is still purportedly in compliance with more lenient “federal health-based drinking water standards,” meaning that they pass EPA water quality compliance status without violation.

Oates noted that asbestos in the buildings has also caused stomach issues in other people once housed in Stillwater, which is known to have asbestos. Asbestos can increase the risk of cancers of the digestive system, mesothelioma, and other serious diseases.

Also causing issues is the heat in the summer. “The walls sweat” is a common three word answer to how hot it can get in the cellblocks in Stillwater. No air conditioning exists in the cellblocks where people are housed. However, some do exist in certain rooms where corrections officers frequent.

On the issue of staffing, Boehnke from TC-IWOC called on the DOC to simply utilize their early-release program rolled out on August 1. The Minnesota Rehabilitation & Reinvestment Act (MRRA) allows people to reduce their prison time. Boehnke says 1,400 people could be released right now.

Over the Summer, Kashaun Pierce, Sr. sent a statement to Unicorn Riot from inside MCF-Faribault calling for inmates to be humanized. He said the lack of staff or funding isn’t the key, its the “dehumanization of the incarcerated men and women.”



Organized Political Defamation Crossing All Professional Lines

by *Khalfani Malik Khaldun*
Aug 2023

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in the moment of comfort and convenience... but where he stands during times of chaos and great strife.”

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Thirty-five years after being incarcerated, I have lost much of my immediate family, which now includes my son King Dion, my pride and joy. Forced to live in a cold world, raised by a mother who loved him, she did for with him what I could not,

since I become a ward of the Department of Corrections at age 17. My son and I never got to spend one day together in the free world. He was born on May 19, 1987 while I was in a Lake County Court House preparing to come to prison. It was a special day—the day Malcolm X Malik El-Shabazz was born.

I have by the loving Grace of Allah endured many loses in my family tree. I have overcome many setbacks and fought through roadblocks that were intentionally placed before me to stop or interfere with building my campaign for freedom. Some 15 years ago, while housed at Pendleton Correctional Facility, a group of officers located a website in which young activists from the Black Student Union at several local college campuses were calling for people to support the freedom of Bro. Khalfani Malik Khaldun. They began to receive emails from these officers threatening to call their colleges and universities if they didn't stop supporting "a murderous thug." We copied the emails and started sending them to the commissioner's office and the office of the Governor of Indiana. Many of these officers were terminated. They felt since I was convicted in the 1994 murder of Officer Phillip Curry—a crime I continue to openly state I did not commit—they didn't want me being supported; they wanted me put to death by electrocution or lethal injection. That incident occurred on Dec. 13, 1994.

Still to this day there are officers and staff persons employed in the Indiana Department of Corrections who resent the fact that people are promoting for me to finally be freed from these modern-day slave plantations. Recently, staff at my current facility found out that my struggle is being displayed all over the internet through a host of political statements in the form of essays, press releases, poetry, and podcast interviews trying to tell my story. By speaking truth to power, the reality of my universal struggle can be heard directly from me. Officers at the Westville Control Unit often speak of these outlets. I release my words to the world knowing I have been building a team now for over 25 long years. We have a movement now.

Some members of my team from time to time may get hate mail from the peanut gallery, namely from officers trying to discourage them from loving and supporting someone who they have embraced for years as part of their extended family. This only convinces us to mobilize and build a tighter and more effective team. If these people continue to try to defame me or disrupt our efforts to free a devoted and dedicated 53-years old man who has been put away since he was 17 years old, the team will be pursuing a request under the Freedom of Information Act to expose the unprofessional actions of a select few. The findings will be turned over to the Commissioner's Office and the Office of the Governor of Indiana, seeking the full termination of all individuals involved, I seek no vengeance against those who on your own accord have sought to defame my name or cast doubt in the minds and hearts of those who stand beside me. They know that I love and respect my supporters for their years of ensuring that I have everything I need until the gates of freedom are opened to me. The support has been a blessing.

My current primary objective is now to recover my health and be immediately released from WCU-Disciplinary Segregation when my time is up in 6 to 8 months and return to general prison population. This way I can get my available time cut, with the sincere hope of transitioning to a lower level of incarceration and prepare myself for a long-awaited release from prison. I haven't been able to enjoy a contact visit since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic wreaked havoc upon us. So, once I'm back in population I will be trying to have one with my female companion and our beloved grandchildren. I have 6 granddaughters and one grandson who are my son's children, all of whom live in Minnesota. They were all born since I was sent to prison, I am dying to meet them all. They are my reason for living.

I'm asking all prison officials to keep it professional. You can feel and think what you want, but when you start crossing the line of policy, procedure, and violate state and federal laws, you have invaded my space. When you contact my family, friends, or supporters with malicious intent, you place your job in jeopardy and has your employer, the IDOC, be seen in a negative light. I can state in an affirmative voice that I have not done any of you wrong. All I am guilty of at the moment is wanting to be free.

I thank every one of my supporters, friends, and extended family for never giving up on me. My struggle and fight is real. All of you have gotten me through what was meant to be hell on earth.

If you want to hear my political interviews, go to infoprisonradio.org. If you want to read up on my struggle for freedom and my observations on political and theoretical issues, go to IDOCWatch.org/blog-1. I cofounded this group with a comrade we recently lost. If you are interested in a documentary I was in on MSNBC, "Extended Stay—Wabash Valley Correctional Facility," go to https://archive.org/details/msnbc_20120107_050000_msbc_documentary/start/3540/end/3600.

All Power to the People! When We Fight we Win! Together We Are Strong—Divided We Are Not!

A Luta Continua! Vita Wa Watu—Free All Political Prisoners! Free the Pendleton Two!



The Birth, Meaning, and Practice Of Black August

by Kevin "Rashid" Johnson

from *LeftWingBooks.net*

Black August is a month designated to pay tribute to the true heroes, martyrs, and history of New Afrikan (Black) people in our struggle for liberation against the over 400 years of violent

repression, suffering, and exploitation that we've endured under the systems of bondage here in the Western hemisphere. Many important events and the lives of people that occurred and contributed to our struggles fell within the month of August, and coincide with our need to know, remember, and commemorate the people and events that have fed the flames of our struggle to yet be free.

The concept of Black August began in the California prison system in response to the assassinations of political prisoners and prisoners of war held there, such as George L. Jackson, W.L. Nolen, Jeffrey "Joka Khatari" Gaulden, and others. Joka Khatari, a torch-bearer of Comrade George Jackson, died on August 1, 1978. He died at the hands of California prison officials at San Quentin, who refused him medical care for head injuries sustained while playing football.

It was Joka Khatari's death that first inspired the concept of Black August among New Afrikans imprisoned in California. Initially it commemorated the lives and deaths of George L. Jackson, who was murdered by California prison guards on August 21, 1971; his brother Jonathan Jackson, and James D. McClain and William Christmas, who died during an armed action to free Comrade George and others staged at the Marin County Courthouse on August 7, 1970; and W.L. Nolen, Alvin "Fig" Miller, and Cleveland Miller who were assassinated by prison guards during a racial melee that was instigated by the pigs at Soledad Prison on January 13, 1970.

Since its early beginnings, Black August has grown to embrace many significant events and people in our history of struggle in Amerika, especially those that have occurred during the month of August.

Black August is now celebrated each year by our people across the Diaspora.

Commemorating Black August is not simply a holiday observance, but a time of reflection, recognition, fortification, consciousness-building, and inspiration. The events and people it pays tribute to demonstrated the greatest sacrifices and commitment, and represent a higher awareness of and ongoing service to New Afrikans as a collective people, as a distinct nationality and community of people. But for these struggles and people and their sacrifices, we would not have survived until today. Black August cannot be looked upon lightly.

Our economic practices during Black August embrace community socialist values of mutual aid and support, not individual profit and exploitation of others that is the very basis of the suffering we have endured for centuries, and are the values that the U.S. capitalist imperialist system works to indoctrinate us with, to make us predatory against ourselves and others in its own image.

During the month of Black August, we practice fasting,

exercise (twice daily or as our health permits), political education (educating us in New Afrikan history and the values of revolutionary theory and practice), and refrain from prison commissary purchases as much as possible, and instead rely on mutual support.

Black August serves to instill practice and values in us that will develop our ways of thinking and being 365 days per year, and to become the people of the liberated future that we are fighting to create for ourselves, for all oppressed peoples, and especially for those that will come after us!

Dare to Struggle Dare to Win!
All Power to the People!



Black August: Jalil Muntaqim on the Black liberation struggle inside and outside prison walls

by Natalia Marques

from PeoplesDispatch.org

Aug 2022

Black August is a recognition of former political prisoners such as Jalil Muntaqim, who spent 49 years behind bars in US prisons.



Revolutionary activists in the US, particularly those involved in struggles to free political prisoners and to end mass incarceration, celebrate and honor the tradition of Black August. According to these activists, Black August is a month to remember those who have died or been imprisoned in the fight for Black liberation in the United States, and a reminder that despite grave setbacks, this struggle lives on.

To illuminate the history and importance of this month, Peoples Dispatch spoke to former political prisoner Jalil Muntaqim. Muntaqim was first imprisoned in 1971, when he was only 19 years old, after being involved in revolutionary Black liberation groups the Black Panther Party (BPP) and the Black Liberation Army (BLA). Jalil spent 49 years behind bars before himself and his supporters won his freedom in October 2020.

Like other political prisoners, such as Mumia Abu-Jamal, Jalil was convicted of killing a police officer in a trial that supporters

and activists maintain was unjust. And also like other political prisoners, his struggle against “white supremacy and capitalist imperialism”, in his words, did not end with his conviction. Muntaqim elaborated on his rich history and experience in the fight for Black liberation, both inside and outside prison walls.

Origins of Black August

“Black August began primarily in 1978 by prisoners in the San Quentin, California prison system,” Jalil told Peoples Dispatch. “[The prisoners] are known as the Black Guerilla Family (BGF). BGF came into existence...as a result of the murders of several black activists who were in prison, by prison guards.”

“[The activists] were being attacked by Aryan Brotherhood, white supremacists and were murdered by prison guards,” Jalil said. On January 13, 1970, respected Black militant and prisoner W.L. Nolen was murdered by a “notoriously racist” prison guard in what some view as an attack staged by prison authorities between racist neo-Nazi prisoners and Black prisoners. As a result, celebrated incarcerated revolutionary George Jackson and other prisoners founded the Black Guerrilla Family, a group which was closely allied with the Black Panther Party, and a critical part of the emerging Black Power movement behind prison walls.

“[T]he California prisoners began to organize themselves... in a group they called the Black Guerrilla Family. It was a self-defense organization, to defend themselves against white supremacist guards and other prisoners,” Jalil elaborated.

Not too long after Nolen’s death, on August 21, 1971, Jackson himself was assassinated by prison guards. “1971, Comrade George Jackson...allegedly made an effort to escape, and he was murdered in San Quentin prison. He was the field marshal for the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. He was a major writer, author and revolutionary inside the prison system,” said Jalil.

Shortly after Jackson’s death, Black California prisoners began the tradition of celebrating Black August, to honor those who fought and are fighting for Black freedom. August was chosen for the many historic moments in the Black liberation struggle that occurred during that month: the assassination of George Jackson, the indirect assassination of BGF leader Khatari Golden (August 1, 1978) by prison authorities, Nat Turner’s slave rebellion, the start of the Haitian revolution, the arrival of the first kidnapped African slaves in the Jamestown colony, as well as many other events.

Prisoners of War

Jalil Muntaqim, alongside others in the Black liberation struggle who have at one point been incarcerated, call themselves not only political prisoners, but prisoners of war. This is carefully chosen language.

“We are in opposition to a system of capitalist imperialism and

racist exploitation, of white supremacy. And as a result, we are oftentimes targeted for annihilation, for termination. Or as it says in the COINTELPRO documents, for neutralization. And so by virtue of our being captured by what we consider to be our enemies, a system of governing that in and of itself is illegal, illegitimate...we identify ourselves, having been captured, as political prisoners, according to the Geneva Accords: Political prisoners and prisoners of war.”

The United States champions itself as a bastion of freedom, often juxtaposing itself with governments that it deems “undemocratic”. While the US will often parade the cause of political prisoners in nations that it is hostile towards, such as China or Venezuela, it refuses to recognize that it detains people for political reasons, and especially has never acknowledged the incarceration of any “prisoners of war” domestically. Jalil himself has worked to shatter this narrative, starting from when he was still behind prison walls.

“Back in [1978], I initiated the first UN prisoners petition campaign to the United Nations, raising the question about political prisoners. In [1979], international jurists had a conference here in the United States. They did a tour to investigate whether political prisoners exist in the United States. They...ruled that the United States had political prisoners,” Jalil told Peoples Dispatch.

“1981 I had the opportunity to raise a question with then-Ambassador to the United Nations, Andrew Young...I had [a] journalist ask him a question, ‘do political prisoners exist in the United States?’ He answered in the affirmative. ‘Yes, perhaps thousands.’ And for having answered that question truthfully, he was called to the carpet in the White House by Jimmy Carter, who was president at that time.” For his stunning admission that the US indeed had “thousands” of political prisoners, President Carter subsequently fired Andrew Young from his post.

According to Black revolutionaries like Jalil, the US government not only incarcerates political prisoners, but also is in an active state of war against Black people.

“We’re in a state of genocidal war...we identify those who have been captured by our enemy, as political prisoners. And some identify themselves as prisoners of war.”

Prison activists argue that the idea of the US engaging in a “genocidal war” is validated in the ways that the state represses political prisoners.

Much like a trophy of war, the gun that killed George Jackson is mounted on a wall display at the San Quentin prison “museum”, alongside a bronze plaque memorializing the name of the guard that shot the rifle.

The Black Guerrilla Family is currently classified as a gang by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

(CDCR). In fact, it is the only Black “prison gang” that will lead to placement in solitary confinement for any prisoner thought to be “affiliated”. Solitary confinement is defined as torture by the United Nations.

Prisoners testify that CDCR represses political dissent by falsely classifying prisoners who struggle for Black liberation as members of BGF. Prisoner Mutope Duguma wrote to Solitary Watch in 2012, from behind bars in Corcoran State Prison solitary confinement (SHU), claiming he had been in solitary for over a decade as a result of being misclassified as BGF. “My cell has a concrete slab bed, the cell is white with a concrete brick slab for TV holding...No trees. No animals. No sun. No life. Just prisoners isolated from the world,” he wrote. Duguma describes himself as a “New Afrikan Nationalist Revolutionary Man”, New Afrikan being a political current that advocates for nationhood and self-determination for Black people.

In 1998, while still behind bars, Jalil founded the Jericho Movement, “the premier organization in the United States... speaks on behalf of US political prisoners and prisoners of war,” in his own words. Jalil founded the organization alongside fellow political prisoners Safiya Bukhari and “Baba” Herman Ferguson, both of whom are now deceased.

Jericho aims to gain recognition of the fact that there are indeed political prisoners in the US, something that most people in the country are not aware of. Jericho also fights to free all political prisoners.

“We charge genocide!”

Jalil’s organizing did not end with his release in 2020. In 2021, Jalil, alongside a coalition which Jericho is a part of, the Spirit of Mandela Coalition, organized an International Tribunal which convened on October 22 through 25. This Tribunal, held at the Shabazz Center, the same building in which Malcolm X was assassinated, convened international jurists to rule on whether or not the United States was guilty of human rights abuses against Black, Brown, and Indigenous people.

This jurists found the United States guilty on five counts, which, according to Spirit of Mandela, are:

- Racist police killings of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people.
- Hyper incarcerations of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people.
- Political incarceration of Civil Rights/National Liberation era revolutionaries and activists, as well as present day activists.
- Environmental racism and its impact on Black, Brown, and Indigenous people.
- Public Health racism and disparities and its impact on Black, Brown, and Indigenous people.
- Genocide of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people as a result of the historic and systemic charges of all the above.

This last charge has enormous historical implications. In 1951,

Paul Robeson, W.E.B. Dubois, William Patterson, and others compiled a petition to the United Nations, charging the US with genocide against Black people. “We Charge Genocide” cited lynchings, legal discrimination and disenfranchisement, and police brutality against Black people, as well as other injustices, as being part of a United States genocide against Black people. The petition left a powerful legacy, with many around the world following in its footsteps (recently in May 2022 the Brazilian Black Coalition for Rights charged the Brazilian state with genocide).

However, due to the Cold War context, the UN did not acknowledge that it received the 1951 petition. The US also suppressed the petition, barring Robeson from obtaining a passport to deliver it and forcing Patterson to surrender his passport after presenting the document to the UN in Paris.

The 2021 tribunal was, according to Jalil, was the “first time in the history of the United States, that the United States has been found guilty by international jurists of the charge of genocide.” The victory was critically important, says Jalil, based on the fact that Malcolm X himself advocated for taking “the civil-rights struggle to a higher level — to the level of human rights.”

“As long as we keep our struggle confined within the parameters of civil rights, then anyone will be able to dictate the terms of that struggle,” Jalil said. “When we take our struggles into the international community...then it’s an international issue, and the United States has no way of controlling or dictating how to respond to it.”

“We have the control. The international community has the control. And so for us, it’s extremely important to bring to the international community these five charges, that [the US has] been found guilty of genocide, because the United States continues to honor itself as being the police of human rights around the world.”

—

Jalil is currently involved in building decolonization programs, which are modeled after Black Panther Party survival programs, providing direct aid as well as political education to the masses. “People are organizing themselves to try to alleviate some of the immediate issues like housing, education, homelessness, hunger, medical neglect, those kinds of things that we can address immediately when we organize ourselves,” Jalil said. These include the People’s Programs in Oakland, California and the People’s Liberation Program in Rochester, New York.

Jalil is also involved in building a “People’s Senate”, which, in his words, is “a tool in which we can organize ourselves and build a consensus amongst those who really, sincerely, authentically, genuinely want real change.”

“I’m talking about solutions, we know what the problem is, the problem is capitalist imperialism, white supremacy,” Jalil

continued.

“We understand that the system in and of itself cannot be redeemed. It has to be destroyed.”



33 Years After the ADA, Our Legal System Still Victimizes Disabled People

by Megan Schuller

from Truthout.org

Aug 2023

When police officers found Daniel Prude naked and wandering the streets of Rochester, New York, as snow was falling the evening of March 23, 2020, they did not call for social workers or mental health experts. They pointed a Taser at him and demanded he lie on the ground. Prude had run out of his brother’s house during a mental health crisis, and after a few minutes of sitting handcuffed on the cold, wet street, grew agitated.

The officers placed a mesh hood over his head to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19, increasing his distress. Three officers pinned him to the ground, with one pressing his knee on Prude’s back and another pushing his face into the pavement. After two minutes, he stopped breathing. Between gasps of air and prayers, he said, “You’re trying to kill me.” Prude was pronounced brain dead upon arriving at the hospital and died a week later.

Prude’s story is not an anomaly. As we celebrate the 33rd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), we also mark another year in which people with disabilities are trapped in the criminal legal system instead of receiving the support they need.

Without safe and affordable housing and supportive community-based services, people with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty, be unemployed or be unhoused. These factors make it more likely that people with disabilities will interact with law enforcement — often for misunderstood behavior related to their disabilities — and become ensnared in the criminal legal system. Once in the system, people with disabilities suffer more discrimination and trauma, and are denied housing and community-based services like supported employment and peer services that could change — and save — their lives.

While roughly 15 percent of the United States population has a physical or mental disability, 40 percent of people in state prisons have a disability. About one-quarter of incarcerated people have cognitive disabilities such as autism, Down Syndrome and learning disorders, while many others have visual, hearing and ambulatory disabilities. Although people with mental health disabilities comprise only 4-5 percent of the U.S. population, they make up about 15 percent of prison

and 20 percent of jail populations. Not because they are more violent or engage in more criminal conduct; because they are set up to fail and unduly put in harm’s way.

Law enforcement officers are generally the first and only responders to be dispatched when people with mental disabilities experience a crisis or otherwise need help, when they should receive the same type of health-centered response provided to someone experiencing a physical health emergency, such as a heart attack. In mental health emergencies, mental health experts and peers with lived experience should take the lead, not law enforcement.

Similarly, a deaf person may need a sign language interpreter to help facilitate communication and avoid being attacked or punished for perceived noncompliance. A person with a cognitive or other mental disability may need a companion to explain proceedings to them so they can defend themselves. In all these scenarios, to do otherwise violates the ADA and puts lives at risk.

It doesn’t have to be this way. All actors in the criminal legal system should understand the civil rights of people with disabilities and confront implicit biases and assumptions. They also must be trained to recognize that manifestations of disability, such as inability to speak or noncomprehension due to a hearing or mental disability, do not equal noncompliance or hostility.

Public safety requires reforming the systems that serve people with disabilities. People with disabilities can live successfully in their own homes and communities and avoid law enforcement contact when they receive the services they need — and that are mandated by the ADA. Community-based assistance with housing, employment and needed treatment improves the lives of people with disabilities, and helps them avoid harmful law enforcement contacts and subsequent incarceration or hospitalization.

We need alternatives to police responses for people with behavioral health disabilities. Some communities like Eugene, Oregon, are already doing this with proven success. In their CAHOOTS program, a medic and social worker, both unarmed, are dispatched to most behavioral health calls, instead of the police. The program reports that each year it saves the city \$8.5 million in public safety costs and \$14 million in ambulance and emergency room costs. San Francisco, California, has adapted the CAHOOTS model so that it includes a peer responder on the team. An even greater number of communities are investing in mental health crisis teams, which include a clinician and often a peer, and can be dispatched by 911, law enforcement or the mental health system.

Individuals with disabilities — and their neighbors — are far better served when public safety systems help them avoid unnecessary and traumatizing interactions with police in the

first place.

Fulfilling the ADA's promise of equal opportunity, full participation, independent living and economic self-sufficiency for people with disabilities requires more than making society's physical spaces accessible. It also means providing full and equal access to all aspects of daily life so people with disabilities can live successfully in their own homes and communities, instead of cycling through courts and carceral settings with harmful consequences.



What Is the Bigger Issue?

an essay from a reader

by Ryan Griffith #114236

Oct 2022

I pose this question to both the people who publish RM News, and those who read it.

I've been incarcerated now for 22 years. I began my bit at 15, and sadly will most likely not return to society until I'm 41 years old at this point. Allah knows best. There's no doubt that I could take this time to regale you and your readers with the many civil rights violations and injustices that I have either witnessed or personally experienced while incarcerated in IDOC. I could share experiences of being assaulted by staff as a kid in the county jail, or framed by staff in one prison for conduct that I never did so he could justify three day paid vacation, or witnessing correction officers assault inmates while in handcuffs, blah, blah, blah. However there is something that I hope you and your readers understand prison has blessed me with, that I feel is sadly lost on most who are not incarcerated. That is "perspective".

Being locked up I've had the benefit of being able to witness the issues going on in society while at the same time having no real dog in the fight. I believe most people miss the whole truth being attached to only their version of it. People caught up in crazy cannot see how crazy they themselves have become. It is this "perspective" that leads me to pose my opening question. Naturally after reading the various issues in the last two newsletters, and even following the media about crime, prison and the law I can't argue that the current incarnation of "prison" and "justice" is deeply flawed. There's so much about what goes on in prison people out there that people do not know, but how do we compete with brainwashing devices like MSNBC's "Lock-Up", or "60 day's In", etc. Even so, I still feel that there is a bigger issue Abolitionists and Anarchists, and indeed Conservatives and Liberals as whole need to focus more attention on, and issue that is entirely ignored by everyone. I can sum this issue up in a single word-hypocrisy.

Believe me, I've been on the side of Modern Abolitionists and Anarchists since I was in my early 20's. I became moved the writings of great thinkers like Peter Kropotkin, Bakunin,

Goldman, and Godwin. I would commonly listen to lectures by Noam Chomsky. I also used to write the Prison Activist Research Center (PARC) and detail them my experiences with the idea of justice we learn as inmates or "incarcerated individuals" through the DOC disciplinary Boards, etc. I was for the destruction of if not the re-purposing of prisons in all nations. In many ways I still am, only now I have stepped back and feel I have now what I did not then-perspective. Say we destroy prison. What do we do when people kill, rape, rob, steal, kidnap, or hurt others in any other way? What do we do with those who deny another their life, liberty or their property unjustly? Americans don't want Shari'a law, so amputations and executions aren't the answer. Without a "time out", how do we keep the rest of society who obey laws safe from those who don't?

Then there is the question of re-purposing. I was always for turning the Industrial Complex we use today into centers of rehabilitation instead of punishment. I still am. But in my time in I've noticed that rehabilitation may be offered in prison, but it isn't encouraged. In fact the vast majority of programs IDOC had that promoted rehabilitation are gone now. Furthermore, even if I find I am rehabilitated, that doesn't change my sentence. So instead I am stuck serving time and the longer I stay in, the greater the risk that I will violate rules as I begin to lower security levels and encounter inmates who have short sentences and therefore less to lose. If I manage to skate through without issues where do I return to when released? The same neighborhood. The same community. The same situation I was in when I committed my crime. So is it enough to simply change prison? In my own humble opinion the answer is no, This brings me back to my point: we must pay more attention to the bigger issue before us-that as a society we profess to dislike crime, wrong-doing, injustice, oppression and other forms of immorality. At the same time, however, we also applaud these behaviors and support them. We as a society celebrate the very things we claim that we cannot stand, and are willing to deny freedom to those who choose to act on such behaviors.

In "Anarchism and other Essays", Emma Goldman quotes Havelock Ellis (who quoted Quetelet and Lacassagne) who said: "Every society has the criminal it deserves". I agree with these thinkers. As much as we as a society want to say we have no hand in the criminality of any other person, this simply isn't true. This returns us to the issue of hypocrisy.

Pop culture proves my point-and for that matter Ellis' point. We need only step back and examine what we watch on t.v. or in the movies, what we hear in music and view online to see the truth: we celebrate crime, and then condemn it at the same time. It's not a Left problem or a Right problem. This hypocrisy is an US problem.

How is this true? Think of what we watch or stream today. Show like Breaking Bad or Power, Ghost, or any spin-off series connected to Power. The main character in Breaking Bad was a

drug manufacturer and dealer, a killer and a leader of a criminal enterprise. Who can tell me that when they watched the show-the award winning series-they were hoping Walter White would go to prison or finally get killed by the police and then “justice would be served”? Nobody did that! I can say with assurity that any politician or Law enforcement Agent who watched it were not rooting against the character. Same for Power, or any other similar series. These characters commit the crimes we claim to hate seeing, and we applaud them-we pay the actors millions to portray the character-and we turn them into social icons. How is this not confusing?

Freddy, Jason, Michael Meyers etc. Serial Killers and child predators. How many people dress up like them for Halloween or have their posters or tattoos? How many of us let our kids dress up as them or wear their image on t-shirts, etc? I know several child predators. Some live in cells near mine. Who would tattoo their faces on their body, or put them on a t-shirt? What’s the difference between Freddy and the sex offender cells down from me? If we argue that the difference is these characters are fictional and such-and-such cells away is a real person; then that argument is weak. Pop culture glorifies real criminals and crime also.

A couple who are devoted to one another to the very end are seen as “Bonnie and Clyde”. How is that a good thing? What were they but murderers, cop-killers and bank robbers. Was their fate something to idolize. They ended their career shot to death in an ambush by the police. Charles Manson’s face is stamped on t-shirts and posters which even teenagers wear. Drug dealers, gangs, mafia, and other criminals are real, but they are also honored in pop culture. This is what the youth see. They see their favorite artist make music about gang ties, and see him sport gang colors. They watch Snoop Dog “Crip Walk” on stage at the super bowl. Their favorite artists name themselves after notorious criminals, and in turn so do so many of the youth. Conservatives are not any better. They follow a president who, when campaigning, called on supporters to assault protesters, and the police to “not be too gentle” when arresting them at his rallies-among countless other immoral behaviors.

Crime is real. People today are complaining about the crime in their streets. They want to blame the Defund Movement, claiming this gave criminals an excuse to ignore the law. Others argue the rise in crime to to due to lack of respect to a repressive legal system. How do we expect people to not value immorality when we as a society feel the need to entertain ourselves with immorality? People commit crimes, post it on social media sites, and others view it by the thousands-by the millions even. The next person hopes to get just as many hits with his next posted criminal behavior. Why watch this stuff if we don’t like it so much as we claim we do? Hypocrisy.

It goes beyond the question of movies and music though. When I came to prison my own friends would joke “don’t drop the

soap”. How is rape both funny and wrong? I even see cop shows where the police threaten the target with a future of rape if he doesn’t cooperate. You want a person to be raped? Then how can we expect people to not do so? We play games which allow a person to shoot and kill people, beat up prostitutes, steal cars, rob banks and blow things up. This is all hypocrisy. Same goes for stories we tell out children. What’s the story of Goldilocks? A little girl breaks into a house, eats their food and sleeps in their bed with no backlash or lesson to learn? How is that not a tradition honoring phrogging? Or Robin Hood...if I believe the government is corrupt and greedy can I steal from the 1% to give to the poor? Why not? Isn’t Robin Hood a hero?

Even sex offenses can be linked to social influence. We hate “child molesters”, but our culture says otherwise. I recall when I was younger collecting porn magazines such as Barely Legal, Asian 18, Lolipop, Girl-Next-Door, etc. Those magazines chose models who were young and looked underage. Later when I purchased sexy pics from companies I would buy images of Lil Lupe, Lil Such-and-such, Teen Angel or whoever. Lupe Fuentes made her career as a porn star who resembled a young-girl: pig-tails, school-girl outfit, a child. What about the baby-doll outfits women wore even in the 90’s, or the catholic school girl and cheerleader dress-up/role-play fetish? How many 20+ year olds are school girls? Women aren’t dressing up as Colts cheerleaders and role-playing. They dress up as high school girls. What about underage beauty pageants? Or movies in which adults portray teenagers being sexually active, getting naked, etc. We pay attention to the actress and the role. And the role is that of a sexually active kid. Even musicians are role-models to little girls who hear them brag about making money and performing sex acts, see them dancing provocatively, and in many cases do those things themselves. How are we not confused?

Abolish prisons, rehabilitate criminals. Give harsher punishments. The truth is we will never fix the problem of crime without first addressing the issue of what helps create it. We can’t just keep crying about poverty and want, lack of education or proper parenting, like we’ve been doing. These are all factors to crime. This is true, but these alone still allow us to only point a finger at someone else-the rich, the privileged, whites, parents, police, etc. It allows us to ignore how we help cultivate a culture of crime by subscribing to criminality and glorifying wrong doing in what we watch and find entertaining. If something is wrong, it must be kept as wrong and avoided, not celebrated. “Fixing” prison doesn’t fix the problem. Give us all the wealth in the world and people will still do wrong. Rehabilitate us all you want, but subject that person to incarceration after his/her rehabilitation and you risk recidivism. Return that person to the same condition he was in before prison, and you risk recidivism. If you take a meatball off your plate, wash it and then put it back in the spaghetti it won’t be long before its covered in sauce again. So rehabilitation alone is not the answer.

Believe me, I agree with conditions in prison need to be improved. There are a lot of issues with the legal system and penal system. I also hope to see prison abolished. But at the same time everything I read from Anarchism and Abolitionists in this area ignores their own responsibility in the question of crime. Prison is like any other machine. You don't have to smash it with tools to shut it down. The most effective way to keep it from functioning is to rob it of its energy source. If you stop putting gas in your car, it will eventually stop running. Same for prison, if we stop allowing people to fuel the system, the machine will dry up and stop running. We can only do this by drastically changing our values in society. What is wrong, is wrong. Its not entertaining. We have to accept this truth. Furthermore, we have to question who it really is that benefits from our intoxication on crime and vice? Again, this is only my humble opinion. Allah knows best.

Wa Salam,
Sincerely,
Ryan Griffith.



Ruchell Magee wins his freedom after 67 years in prison

by Judy Greenspan
from Workers.org
Aug 2023



Black August events this year will no doubt celebrate the release of Ruchell Magee, the longest-held political prisoner in the U.S. and perhaps the world. Magee is a hero of the Black liberation struggle, the fight to release all U.S. political prisoners and, were it not for this racist, colonialist system, would never have spent one day incarcerated.

The Coalition to Free Ruchell Magee recently announced the imminent freedom of Magee from the California Medical Facility at Vacaville.

Magee, now 84 years old, was imprisoned in the racist South at the age of 16 for an alleged attempted rape charge against

a white woman, the same year that Emmett Till was brutally lynched for allegedly whistling at a white woman. Upon release, he headed to Los Angeles, where he was arrested and sentenced to 10 years in prison for a dispute involving \$10 worth of marijuana.

But Magee was not only a victim of this racist system; he emerged as a freedom fighter. While in prison, Magee became a jailhouse lawyer, helping others with writs and legal cases. He also took on the name of Cinqué, an African freedom fighter who led a rebellion on the Amistad, a ship transporting enslaved people.

It was Magee's heroic actions in August 1970, when an armed Jonathan Jackson burst into the Marin County Courthouse to demand the freedom of his brother, George Jackson, that won the admiration of the worldwide movement for freedom and prison abolition.

Magee, without hesitation, joined Jonathan Jackson's bold attempt to free his brother, which ended in a murderous hail of gunfire by deputy sheriffs, killing young Jackson, a judge, two prisoners and three jurors. Magee, badly wounded, survived and was held in prison for the next 53 years for his selfless act of solidarity.

Magee and his supporters have worked tirelessly over many decades to win his release. The Coalition to Free Ruchell Magee, which formed in 2019, has gathered over 37,700 signatures and over 2,600 letters, organized many demonstrations and made countless calls to Governor Gavin Newsom. The Coalition notes, however, that Magee has been the main organizer of his release effort.



"We must be clear that Ruchell has been the main driver of his own release. This release will allow him to spend the rest of his life outside of prison walls, with his loved ones," the Coalition announced. (#ruchellmageeisfree)

After his announced release from CMF-Vacaville, the Coalition launched a "reentry" fundraising effort for Magee to help with his living expenses. According to the initiator of the fundraiser, Charlie Hinton, a prisoners' rights activist, the goal is to raise \$500 for each of the 67 years suffered by Magee inside prison.

The Coalition hopes that his release will inspire renewed efforts by the human rights, progressive and prison abolitionist movements to free all U.S.-held political prisoners, many of

whom are elderly and suffering from decades of brutality and medical neglect behind the walls. Mumia Abu-Jamal, Leonard Peltier, and Imam Jamil Al-Amin are only a few examples of elderly political prisoners who must be released immediately. Go to tinyurl.com/54ttusks to donate to the reentry fundraiser.



The Lonely Work of HIV Harm Reduction in Prison

by Jonathan Kirkpatrick

from FilterMag.org

April 2023

Many people living with HIV who pass through Washington Corrections Center (WCC) tell me their status, because I'm known as the guy to ask: How do I get through my prison sentence with HIV? I answer them as best I can, while wishing there was someone I could ask the same thing.

When I first became incarcerated during the AIDS epidemic, it was a time when everyone told you that having HIV meant you were going to die; often they were right. Over the past 28 years, I've learned that my status is not a death sentence. But without internet access or any connection to anyone else willing to talk openly about their status, I've learned almost nothing about what the HIV harm reduction movement looks like on the outside.

Washington Corrections Center tests new prisoners for HIV during intake—frequently without telling them. I believe an “opt-out” approach is more effective in these situations than “opt-in,” but I also believe in informed consent. I still recall the conversation I had some years back with a man reeling from having just been told he had HIV, when he hadn't even known he'd been tested.

The Washington State Department of Corrections staff who provide comment to journalists are not accessible from prison-issue tablets. WDOC did not respond to a Filter editor's request for comment.

Antiretroviral medications are available to us in prison, and the confidentiality around getting them has improved somewhat over the years. Treatment is accessible; it's prevention that's illegal.

Safer injection in prison is a different concept than on the outside. Here it has little to do with sterile syringes, because there are none. I see on the news that syringes are often criminalized in the free world. Condoms and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) are not legal for us, because legally we can't consent to sex. Safer sex resources would be invaluable to many prisoners, especially those who do sex work, but you can't exactly go to administration and say, I'm breaking the rules—can you help me do it safely? Washington is one of the only four states to allow prisoners conjugal visits, and of course for these rare

visits the state finds it appropriate to offer condoms.

People who've been sexually assaulted are eligible to receive post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), but getting it is not a low-threshold process. You can't just discreetly tell medical staff you were assaulted and ask for PEP, you have to formally report it. The administrative burden alone discourages people from pursuing PEP, on top of which they may fear retaliation for reporting the assault.

As a concept, PrEP is stigmatized for the same reasons as booty bumping—the fear of being associated with being gay, which can make someone a target for violence regardless of their actual orientation or their ideology. In my early days of incarceration, when AZT was still the standard, people would decline it because it broadcast to the world that you had HIV, and on top of that that everyone would assume you were gay, too.

Multiple queer men have told me, unequivocally, that if they could take PrEP in prison they would. Many had been taking it in the free world. The system cuts off access at the same moment it locks them in an environment where HIV prevalence is disproportionately high.

When people are sharing a syringe, I suggest privately that anyone with HIV or hep C should go last.

When I know someone is at high risk, whether due to shared needles or sex work or being targeted for assault, I counsel them to request an appointment through the infectious disease department, which is free. Going through medical requires a \$4 copay, and many wouldn't access for this reason.

Often a few people will gather to share one syringe between them, and I can find ways to suggest privately that anyone with HIV or hepatitis C should perhaps go last. Not the greatest options, but I've been there, too. I encourage people to flush their syringes with water multiple times in addition to using bleach, which people sometimes presume is more effective at killing viruses than it actually is.

I've spoken about HIV stigma repeatedly at prison events over the years. The only opportunity I had to speak publicly was in a 2015 training video for medical providers. I told the interviewers that prisoners with HIV didn't have any kind of community support, and that we'd benefit from being able to talk to other people with shared lived experience. Not much has changed since then.

This is the at-risk population, here. It's us. All the same people who get outreach on the street, who inject drugs and engage in sex work, they all pass through here. That's our prison-industrial complex. We lock people in the environments where the tools to prevent blood-borne disease transmission are taken away, and then we cycle them in and out of the general

population indefinitely. If prisons and jails are the holding pens for people living with HIV, why doesn't the HIV harm reduction movement reach us?

I'm nearly three decades into my sentence, and in that time I've only had two friends who were also living with HIV. Both were in the free world; one is dead now. I'm glad to have harm reduction knowledge I can share with people here, but it's lonely work. I wouldn't do it alone if I had the choice.



Arizona prison officials investigating disturbance at Perryville prison in Goodyear

by Miguel Torres

from azcentral.com

Aug 2023

Arizona prison officials said Sunday they are investigating the causes and consequences of a disturbance that broke out in a section of Perryville women's prison in Goodyear on Friday.

At least four women inside the prison, as well as civil rights advocates on their behalf, said in emails and interviews that a violent disturbance unfolded after women complained about sweltering temperatures inside their cells.

Initial, unconfirmed reports from those sources suggested prison authorities used pepper spray to quell the situation, which, they said, involved fires and a lockdown.

A spokesperson for the Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation & Reentry confirmed there was a disturbance, but disputed that account, saying there were no injuries and heat concerns did not prompt the incident.

"Yesterday evening, an incident occurred at the Lumley Unit, a close custody housing unit at ASPC Perryville, in which a group of approximately 50 women refused to return to their cells at yard closure time despite staff's attempts to communicate with them. After additional staff responded, the women eventually complied and returned to their housing area as directed," a prison system spokesperson said in an emailed statement on Saturday.

The disruption came after months of complaints about cooling failures at Perryville.

An organizer for the American Civil Liberties Union, Kara Williams, started getting emails about heat complaints from women in the prison that the Lumley unit had been put on lockdown after a fight had broken out and that temperatures inside the cells were over 90 degrees.

Some women asked to have temperatures checked in their cells, claiming they should not be forced into them when

temperatures are excessive, but correction officers refused, according to emails from women detained.

Lola N'sangou, executive director at Mass Liberation AZ, also received phone calls and emails from women in the unit and their families.

N'sangou, who spent two years detained at Lumley, explained that women had been placed back in their cells after the fight, but it was when correction officers wanted to close their doors that women began to protest.

That led to one woman being pepper-sprayed and left in a seizure, as one woman detained in Perryville explained in her email.

But Judy Keane, a spokesperson for the prison system, on Sunday denied that there were any injuries sustained by staff or incarcerated women.

After the standoff and pepper spraying, some women began breaking things and lighting trash cans on fire, which led to 30-40 women being "fogged" with tear gas and handcuffed, according to emails from women detained.

Women in the emails said that a correctional officer started yelling at the women, which escalated their reaction.

Keane declined to confirm whether the incident stemmed from heat concerns or whether any damage had been done to prison property, citing that the "incident is under investigation, therefore the ADCRR is unable to provide further information."

N'sangou explained that Arizona's corrections department has conducted studies showing how heat leads to fights and had been warned for months about the heat issues at the prison.

They should have evacuated those women into cooler cells until cooling system issues at Lumley were fixed, she said.

"In order for them to avoid any more fallout for the fact that they're putting these people whose unbelievably inhumane heat conditions they need to evacuate those rooms until they can install adequate air conditioning," N'sangou said.

According to prison data as of Friday night, 3,141 women were housed at Perryville prison, including convicted murderer Jodi Arias. There are 254 women inside the high-security Lumley Unit.

By lunchtime Saturday, all women had been returned to the same cells. Williams, who has been formerly incarcerated in Arizona state prisons, said temperatures in the cells commonly reach the mid to high 90s in the summer.

The Corrections Department downplayed the concern.

“The incident was not related to any heat concerns and ASPC Perryville is operating under normal conditions today,” the department’s spokesperson wrote.

The disturbance comes after reports of cooling system failures plaguing the prison in July. Arizona’s prison director, Ryan Thornell, called the failures “blips” that “might happen for an hour” in an interview with 12 News last month.

Issues with cooling have come up yearly in states in the South and Southwest, according to ACLU attorney Corene Kendrick.

“It’s something that we do see across the country, where as part of this punitive mentality that officials don’t want to put any sort of cooling system in prisons and jails because they say that it’s some sort of luxury,” she said.

She explained that units like Lumley don’t have air conditioning installed, which is dangerous as temperatures continue to rise.

The cells at Lumley open up right to the desert, and they use swamp coolers to ventilate the cells, she added.

These conditions can be especially dangerous for those on medication.

“In Arizona, in a separate case that the ACLU brought against Maricopa County Jail, the court also issued an order telling Maricopa County jail when Sheriff Joe Arpaio ran it, that they had to move people on psych meds to cooler areas,” she said.

Kendrick represents plaintiffs in the suit against the Corrections Department for issues with providing care for the people detained in prison. The court filed a permanent injunction in April and Perryville houses a piloting unit where court monitors are studying the changes mandated by the court.

The state prison agency said it triggered its Excessive Heat Safety and Relief Strategy Plan at the Perryville complex in response to the extreme temperature warnings. It “allows for individual cell doors to remain open at affected complexes” to relieve the effects of high outdoor temperatures. “At any time, the doors may be secured ... to ensure safety and security are maintained,” the prison system spokesperson added.

Arizona’s prison system is not immune to violence, although Williams and others familiar with Perryville say violence like that reported on Friday is unheard of there. Williams explained that protests at women’s prisons are rare, especially ones that end with pepper spray and seizures.

The most recent outbreak in a men’s unit was in 2020 in the Eyman prison in Florence, in which hundreds of detained people were involved in a riot. No injuries were reported. In

2018, violence broke out in a Yuma prison. A riot there injured 37 people and left one prisoner dead. In 2015, a three-day riot in Kingman sent 13 people to the hospital and resulted in the prison system relocating 1,000 people housed there. In 2004, the Lewis prison in Buckeye was the scene of what was at the time described as the longest prison standoff in U.S. history. The two-week ordeal began when two detained people took two guards hostage.



Haiti, Hunger, and US Prison Imperialism

by James Patrick Jordan

from BlackAgendaReport.com

April 2023

Imposing coups, forcing fake elections, denying asylum claims, and kidnapping a president aren’t enough subjugation for the US to carry out against Haiti. US built prisons are a death trap for thousands of people in that country.

Three prisoners in the US-built prison in Petit-Goâve, Haiti starved to death between August 23 and September 27, 2022. The website Haiti Libre reports, “...one of the deceased prisoners was from Léogâne imprisoned for having stolen an electric wire and... [another] from the 5th communal section of Petit-Goâve, was serving a prison sentence for having stole a rooster.” The vast majority of those imprisoned at Petit-Goâve and throughout the Haitian prison system have not yet been tried and convicted of a crime. In fact, of a prison population of 11,580 persons as of May, 2021, only 2,071 had been sentenced. Across Haiti, there were an estimated 80 to 100 prisoners who died of malnutrition and lack of medical care nationwide last year.

The United States has funded the construction of four prisons in Haiti since 2013. However, given its dominant influence over and funding of the Haitian National Police and its prison system, the US bears responsibility for the deplorable conditions that characterize all of Haitian jails today. Besides Petit-Goâve, the US-built prisons include Port Liberté for a cost of as much as \$8 million , Hinche, at \$1.34 million , and Cabaret, which, together with Petit Goâve, cost between \$5 and \$10 million . With 83% of the incarcerated awaiting trials that rarely come, and people lost in overcrowded cells for years, even the most minor offense can be a de facto death sentence.

It comes as no surprise that Haiti’s jails are connected to US Prison Imperialism, the spread of the US mass incarceration model across the Global South. The funding for US involvement in foreign prison systems is mainly funneled through the INL. The US State Department Bureau of International Narcotics Law Enforcement (INL) has programs that provide direct input and oversight in the police and national prison systems, including embedding INL personnel in some cases. The INL is the main funding source even when the US is involved in

prisons in places like Saudi Arabia , which the State Department claims has no major role in narco-trafficking.

Though the patterns of abuse we see are all too typical, the levels at which they occur in Haiti are shocking. In Haiti, as in other countries, jail construction is justified on humanitarian concerns and the alleviation of overcrowding. Yet time after time, we see that the construction of more prisons just leads to more overcrowding, worsened conditions, and a spike in politically motivated arrests. Modern Prison Imperialism began in 2000 , with an agreement between the US and Colombian governments to restructure their entire system on a US model. In the aftermath, political imprisonment reached the highest levels in the Americas, and overcrowding surged, rather than being alleviated. Throughout the system, the denial of access to potable water, sufficient and decent quality food, and basic healthcare was endemic.

Nevertheless, misery in jails can be lucrative for some. Somebody has to build those jails—and those somebodies are rarely if ever actual Haitian companies or workers. Among those who profit off US jail construction in Haiti is the firm Hollingsworth Pack , with its headquarters in Williamsburg, Virginia, and offices in Austin and San Antonio, Texas, and Copenhagen, Denmark. The corporation designed three of the four prisons built in Haiti since 2013, as well as three police stations and one police academy. The firm takes a special pride in cutting costs and keeping expenses down:

Regarding Fort Liberté:

“Through a cooperative effort with the local team members led by local architect Eduardo Castellon, local INL staff, and the Hollingsworth Pack US-based team, the design was refined to reduce costs and still provide the basic functions required.”

And Cabaret :

“The prison is designed under a very restrictive budget. The original target budget was \$16,000 per bed, or a total construction cost excluding the site of under \$5,000,000. Through a cooperative effort with the local team members led by architect Eduardo Castellon, local INL staff, and the Hollingsworth Pack US-based team, the design was refined to reduce costs and still provide the basic functions required.”

And Goâve , where the three inmates died last year from starvation:

“High security compound on a budget....”

Hollingsworth Pack participates in much more than prison construction in Haiti. For instance, it constructed the Niamey Prison in Niger, known for its political incarcerations and miserable conditions that would sound all too familiar to the inmates of Haitian prisons. The Department of State notes that “The prisons of Niamey and Diffa were respectively designed to hold 445 and 100 persons, but in 2020 held 1,451 and 432 inmates, respectively.... Prison deaths occurred regularly, some from malaria, meningitis, tuberculosis, and COVID-19,

but no statistics were available. Heavy rains and flash floods exacerbated a nationwide cholera outbreak suspected of causing a number of prison deaths.”

Haiti is a prime example of the endless circle of misery and profit characterized by the military-police-prison-charity-industrial complex. When it comes to hunger in US built Haitian prisons, the role played by the charity industry has a special irony. It bears to remember that through the 1980s, Haiti was able to provide for most of its own nutritional needs. However, the US government flooded Haiti with charity rice, from subsidized US farmers, crippling Haitian agriculture and forcing the country into dependency.

Fast forward to today. Health Through Walls is the main NGO asking for our contributions to help provide food and medical care to Haitian prisons. Among its major funders are the INL , the very organization most responsible for prison construction and police funding and direction in Haiti, and the American Correctional Association (ACA), which accredits prisons all over the world. The President of Health Through Walls is Dr. John P. May, MD , who “...is Chair of the International Corrections Committee of the American Correctional Association.” The ACA receives funding from the US as well as Saudi Arabian and other governments. (According to a report by Sen. Elizabeth Warren , “The ACA also received funding from foreign governments for accreditation and training outside of the U.S. In fact, two of its top clients are the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which respectively paid the ACA over \$300,000 and \$150,000 combined in the last five years.”)

It was the ACA that, after the US sponsored overthrow of Haiti’s President Jean Bertrand Aristide, “...assisted Haiti’s National Penitentiary Administration... during a period of political instability in 2004.... ACA’s first steps toward aiding the Haitian correctional system began... in a U.S. Government program that involved American correctional professionals working in Haiti.”

The reality is that the US has spent millions funding invasions, occupations, police militarization, and jail oversight and construction in Haiti, and throughout the world. Just in October, 2022, the US and Royal Canadian Air Forces shipped armored and tactical vehicles to the Haitian National Police. The US builds jail after jail in country after country, justified by promises of improved conditions; but the prison populations keep rising, and the conditions keep plummeting, setting up the vicious circle of calls for more prison construction to ease overcrowding, only to see the overcrowding worsen. If that is not enough, the Biden administration is considering sending Haitian detainees to Guantánamo .

Beyond the horror of starvation, how are prison conditions in Haiti? A 2022 State Department report states that:

“The DAP [Penitentiary Administration Department] reported most prisoners did not have two meals a day 83 prisoners died between January and September. Most deaths were caused by starvation and poor living conditions.

Medical care for prisoners was provided nearly exclusively by the NGO Health Through Walls.... There was inadequate medical care to stop the spread of infections such as tuberculosis or scabies. A cholera outbreak that began in September was especially dangerous....

Prisoners in many prisons and detention centers, including the National Penitentiary in Port-au-Prince, did not have regular access to sanitary facilities and were required to relieve themselves in plastic bags that they had to purchase....

In some cases, detainees spent years in detention without appearing before a judge. According to estimates in September from BINUH, 83 percent of detainees were in unlawful pretrial detention....”

Henry Shuldiner, writing for Insight Crime , reports that, “Overcrowded prisons have worsened the food shortage. Those arrested are routinely imprisoned for several years before trial. They are “vulnerable to being lost in the system, being held without files of any kind to signal their presence in prison,” according to the National Network for the Defense of Human Rights....

As of May 2021, Haiti’s prison population was approximately 11,580, with just 2,071 prisoners sentenced for crimes, according to the brief submitted to the UNHCR... Prisons are holding more than three times their intended capacity.”

Given its role in creating these conditions, the US should be well aware of them; yet it continues to deport Haitian refugees, where upon arrival, many are immediately incarcerated. Between September 2021 and 2022, the Biden administration deported over 20,000 Haitians .

Shuldiner also tells us, “Recently, the Haitian government has been increasingly detaining criminal deportees from the United States upon arrival in Haiti. Haitian police have demanded thousands of dollars from prisoners’ families for their release....

Patrick Julney, who has lived in the United States since he was a toddler, is one such prisoner. He was deported to Haiti in June 2022 and after his arrival, guards demanded \$6,000 from his wife for his release, according to local news website NorthJersey.com. As of September 17, Julney is still detained in the National Penitentiary in Port-au-Prince.”

An article published in The Nation by Tanvi Misra elaborates further on the case:

“With roughly 40 men packed into the small space, he had

no room to lie down. The men shared one toilet that lacked proper plumbing. Some of them would defecate into plastic bags and throw them out the window, right into the yard. The place reeked of sewage and human refuse and crawled with rats and bugs. The drinking water was filthy and made Julney sick. His body broke out with bumps and rashes, and his feet swelled up because of an untreated injury. The prison offered only a measly breakfast—anything else had to be bought from the commissary—so Julney kept on losing weight. It was almost inevitable, then, that as cholera cases started to surge across Haiti at the start of October, the national penitentiary became ground zero for the disease.... Julney could only watch as prison guards carried out the bodies of people who had died—including another US deportee, Roody Fogg.... In the months since, Julney has counted between 20 and 30 other US deportees inside, most of whom—like him—have not been formally charged with a crime in Haiti....”

The US government would have us believe that Haiti is a failed state and that the current crisis is a result of lawlessness and “gangs,” rather than have us see the more obvious truth: that the crisis in Haiti is a direct result of US imperialism. In February 2024, the world will mark the 20th anniversary of the US directed overthrow of the elected government of Jean Bertrand Aristide. Before that intervention, under Aristide, more schools had been built than in all of Haiti’s history, combined. He oversaw the building of the country’s first medical school and an unprecedented project to build social housing. The minimum wage was doubled while he was in office. Those accused of crimes were processed quickly, usually appearing before a judge within two days. These are just a few of the things that Haiti accomplished under its elected Pres. Aristide.

Dady Chery explains in the News Junkie Post that, “Haiti’s incarceration rate of roughly 100 prisoners per 100,000 citizens in 2016 was the lowest in the Caribbean. Nevertheless, there is a systematic campaign underway for more prisons. Canada and Norway have each given one prison to Haiti. Thanks to prison aid from the United States, three additional prisons have been inaugurated since 2016, and another is under construction.

... the large majority of Haiti’s prison population are pre-trial detainees If Haiti were to release them, the incarceration rate would drop to about 30 per 100,000, which is lower than in Norway, Sweden, or Japan. Furthermore, if we consider the fact that another group of incarcerated people are Haitian nationals who have lived as legal residents of the United States or Canada nearly all of their lives and committed crimes abroad, then the real incarceration rate of Haitians drops to one of the lowest in the world....

Haiti does not need more prisons, however, but fewer prisoners...

More and more, however, Cabaret Prison is taking on the aspect of a captive slave-labor camp.... More than 230 young Haitian women are already incarcerated there, several of whom had

been arrested on UN bases merely for smoking marijuana

... why should the US, with half a million homeless people, 10 percent of whom are veterans, care more for Haiti's homelessness than for its own?The US incarceration rate in 2016 was a whopping 693 per 100,000: higher than any other country and more than four times that of any European country. The devastation on the Black population, where one in three newborn males may expect to become imprisoned, has been unspeakable....”

In 2013 Glen Ford of the Black Agenda Report clarified further, “The new penitentiaries will be constructed under the auspices of none other than the Narcotics Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy to Haiti.... The U.S. embassy says it wants... [Haitian prisons] up to international standards.

The United States, itself, has never paid much attention to international standards when it comes to prisons.... On any given day, 50,000 to 80,000 U.S. prison inmates are held in solitary confinement... a form of torture according to most international standards. Violence in U.S. prisons is endemic, especially rape. Through its sheer size, alone – encompassing one out of every four prison inmates on the planet – the U.S. prison Gulag contains the greatest concentrations of prison evils in the world. The U.S. serves as an example of how not to treat prisoners, and how not to treat Black people, who are far more likely to wind up in U.S. prisons at some point in their lives. But, the United States somehow thinks it has something to teach Black people in Haiti about prisons.”

Indeed, we hear that in September 2022, even as three Black individuals were dying of hunger in Haiti, in a jail in Fulton County Georgia, Lashawn Thompson, a 35 year old Black man arrested on misdemeanor charges was, according to Michael Harper, the lawyer representing his family, “eaten alive by insects and bed bugs.” Thompson was in the jail's psychiatric facility where he was supposed to be checked on every two hours. Harper maintains, “There is no way that this man was being monitored every two hours. It seems like he wasn't monitored for months. His body was riddled with insect bites and his whole body was filled with these sores. It's just a despicable display.

The US is playing by an old playbook. It is a playbook honed by years of racist and classist repression at home and sharpened even further by military adventurism abroad. It is the playbook of intervention, sanctions, occupations, transnational corporate theft and exploitation, misery-for-profit construction companies and charities, militarized police, jails, dependency—domination.

Even now, what is being dismissed as gang-fueled chaos might be more correctly described as the resultant chaos of a country torn apart by foreign interventions, as well as, at least in part, a spontaneous uprising of anger in a country that is constantly

broken and undermined and denied democratic development and self-determination by the US and its allies in Canada, France, and elsewhere. They want to maintain Haiti permanently under the imperial boot heel. As far as the US is concerned, Haiti will never be free. But truly, Haiti will never be subjugated. As poor and besieged as the island may be, its people have never given up, never surrendered, and every attempt by foreign powers to dominate Haiti has been either thrown off or disintegrated into chaos.



Human Rights Held Hostage

by Shaka Shakur #996207

from IDOCWatch.org

July 2023

I want to begin this piece with a few definitions in hopes of providing some context for the overall essay. (1)

Human: Of relating to, or characteristic of man or mankind; Having or manifesting the form, nature, or qualities characteristic of man. Pertaining to or being a man distinguished as distinguished from a lower animal, intellectually and morally superior.

Humane: Having the good qualities of human beings as kindness, mercy and compassion. 2) Tending to promote these qualities, refining, civilizing....

Human Right: A right that is believed to belong justifiably to every person.

The right to be free from oppression should be something that you're born with, an inalienable right.

The right to be treated like a human being and free from processes and systems of systemic dehumanization, and human destruction. To be free of this warped authority should be a human right, the same as the right to be treated humanely.

To most civilians, people free of/from incarceration/captivity, this is something that is often taken for granted until one find themselves trapped behind the walls of the iron curtain of prison.

In most prison systems, Human Rights is a rare commodity. People can be desensitized to see you as non human, as a 'thing', as the 'other', as a fixture and persona of whatever State propaganda or reactionary narrative is being pushed at the time by prisoncrats, some opportunistic politician or the media. What did bill clinton call us “Super Predators”, “The Worst of the Worst”, etc.

The United Nations, and although it is not a democratic institution, have established guidelines, treaties, convnants, resolutions, etc that most civilized countries have either agreed

upon or is a part of.

For example; The Human Rights Charter establishes certain rules and guide lines for systems of govt to follow as a guide. The Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, now known as the Mandela Rules, establishes the same guidelines , laws based on International Law and Treaties that so called civilized 'Nations' suppose to be bound by.

As someone that have did multiple tours in Supermax & Control Unit Prisons in different States, as someone who have been tortured in prison and held in Solitary Confinement for 13 consecutive years (2005-2018), iam here to tell you that these rules are not being followed and that the criminal justice system and its Prison Industrial Complex is rife with Human Rights Violations.

You do not have to go to some 3rd world country to look for these. You do not have to look to Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Israel, North Korea, etc. You can look right here, as close as down the street or in your city and do something. Create an Oversight Comte. Reach out to the prisoners and communicate with them about their reality. Do your own investigation into the conditions of confinement and operating procedures of the jails and Prison System in your state or area.

For e.g. i am currently in domestic exile in the Commonwealth of Va., a 'former' Confederate State. How is it in the 21st century in a so call former confederate state that you have k-9 officers with attack dogs releasing them on prisoners (the majority of whom are black or suffer from some kind of mental health condition) in non lethal situations, e.g. for mere fist fights. Literally chewed up and maimed for a fist fight , a non lethal situation. Is this not a Human Rgts violation?

In some of the higher security prisons on all of the walkways, k-9 Units on foot are posted with attack dogs, straining, snarling, barking while on a leash and less than 3 ft away from you. Now imagine that every morning between between 5am and 6:30 am you have to walk the gauntlet of barking, snarling dogs straining at the leash to attack you all the while some sadistic guard intentionally allows to much slack in the leash and as you exit the kitchen door unaware a dog lashes out at you just inches away from your body, startling you. Now let's say you go through 15 or 20 yrs of this because if you have a lengthy sentence you have to remain at a high security level for at least 20 yrs before you can drop down to a lower security level.

What happens to a person that goes home and walks in the neighborhood, comes across a pet that begins to bark and snarl. It will be a trigger. A trigger to what extent is the question.

It is these types of acts and systemic systems of micro and macro expressions of abuse that violate Our Human Rights, that violate International Law and both Our Civil and Human Rights .It is also these acts and system that contribute to the recidivist rate and the catch and release and recatch again

practices of the Prison Industrial Complex.

(1) All definitions are from The Oxford Dictionary

Dare to Struggle - Dare to Win



'I Can't Take This Shit No More': Alabama Prisoner Takes a Stand

by *Ryan Fatica*

from *UnicornRiot.Ninja*

Aug 2023

Bessemer, Alabama — At around 2 a.m. on Sunday morning, August 13, Derrol Shaw took an opportunity to get free. Sentenced to life without the possibility of parole for murders he committed when he was 18, caged in some of the worst prison conditions in the country, subjected to levels of violence he said are akin to a “war zone,” Shaw was fed up.

“All us got a limit. Shit. Everything do,” said Shaw, in a Facebook live video he recorded during the incident on a smuggled cell phone. “I can't take this shit no more. For real.”

Shaw, who was incarcerated at the William E. Donaldson Correctional Facility in Bessemer, Alabama, got his hands on a gun. It is currently unclear how Shaw obtained the gun, but sources within the prison say guards sometimes carry guns on their shifts in clear violation of Department of Corrections policy.

While the exact timeline of what happened next is blurry, Shaw described in the Facebook video telling a group of officers to lie down on the ground in an office. “All y'all police that was laying on the floor in that office, y'all ass better tell the story right... I made it clear multiple times that I wasn't trying to hurt none of y'all as long as y'all didn't buck, you know, and try no goofy shit.”

According to a source who spoke with Shaw three days after the incident, Shaw described taking a vest from a female officer, locking her in the guard station, and taking off across the prison grounds—scaling razor wire fences, sliding down the pole for a basketball hoop, jumping off a roof, and getting cut up so bad on razor wire he thought he'd “bleed out.”

“I was just trying to go,” said Shaw in the Facebook video, apparently meaning he was trying to escape the prison. “You know? But that wasn't in the cards.”

At this point, law enforcement from multiple agencies had begun arriving at the facility and Shaw realized he was more likely to be shot than to successfully escape. Bleeding profusely, desperate, believing he was about to die, Shaw called 911 for medical help. Finally, he was able to make it back to the dorms

where he knew he'd be safe, for the time being.

Antonio Nichols, who is incarcerated at Donaldson, told Unicorn Riot that when Shaw got back to the dorms, he went around and opened all the doors. "He said whatever he had going on, it went bad," recounted Nichols. Shaw also told Nichols that nobody got hurt but him.

Videos Shaw recorded from within the dorm show him bleeding from his forearm, drinking a sports drink, and smoking marijuana while his friends and comrades congratulate him. "The realest ni**a on the motherfucking planet," says one.

"About an hour after that, he was over there bleeding out," said Nichols. "So I went over there to check on him, and he was laying on the bed. So, the best idea was to take the gun and put it in the garbage can and take it out to the cops."

"The only way he was going to get medical help was the gun had to come out first," Nichols explained.

Nichols put the gun into a garbage can and dragged the garbage can out of the dorm and signaled to the guard in the tower that they wanted to turn the gun over. "I pointed in the garbage can, like hey the gun's in the garbage can, where you want me to put it?" Nichols recounted.

The guard told Nichols to drag the garbage can over to the fence, where a group of armed officers were waiting. The officers pointed their guns at Nichols before handcuffing him. He was released shortly thereafter without charges.

The officers then shook down the dorms and extracted Shaw, who other prisoners had helped into a wheelchair. Shaw was in handcuffs by around 11 a.m. or noon, according to the source who spoke with him.

After being taken into custody, Shaw was transferred to the infirmary at Kilby Correctional Facility. Shaw said he was beaten by officers twice during the transfer—once by a captain in the transport van and once by an unknown number of officers in a small room at Kilby.

Shaw said he no longer knows which injuries are from his attempted escape and which are from the beatings, according to the source who spoke with him.

Shaw has been charged with first-degree escape, prohibited possession of a firearm, promoting prison contraband, and making a terrorist threat.

When Unicorn Riot spoke with Nichols four days after the incident, prisoners at Donaldson remained on lock down.

Although Shaw's action was particularly dramatic, rebellion on the part of prisoners and detainees in the face of inhumane

conditions is not rare. In prisons, jails, and detention centers all across the country, prisoners and detainees are consistently participating in a mostly spontaneous, decentralized, and often leaderless social movement against the United States' massive, and historically unprecedented, carceral archipelago. Most of those actions pass largely unnoticed as law enforcement agencies and departments of correction work to minimize their social impact.

One of the things that makes Shaw's action unique, however, is the opportunity he had to explain himself and his motivations for acting. Very few prisoners in history have had such an opportunity.

"I've been trying to pray to be a lot more peaceful and everything," said Shaw in his Facebook live recording. "But it's just chaos, it's just absolute chaos...Every single day. Chaos, violence, and death every single day, all day."

As Shaw spoke, supporters and loved ones spoke back, in the comment section on Facebook Live, sending messages of love and solidarity.

"I feel you brother. No matter what you have done. You still have the right to be treated with respect," commented Ray Johnson on Facebook. "I did 25 years in [the] Alabama system. I have been all over the world fighting for this country, been homeless and I have never seen anything like the prison system in Alabama, filthy, corruption and nothing but death, physically, mentally and spiritually."

The incident, as well as the more than half an hour of testimony Shaw recorded in the midst of it, add to the increasingly overwhelming evidence that the Alabama prison system is out of control.

"They've created an environment of basically hopelessness," said Nikki Davenport, an outside supporter and member of the Free Alabama Movement Queen Team.

Prisoners in Alabama have continually tried to get attention to their grievances through nonviolent means, said Davenport, such as the statewide labor stoppage that shut down the prison system in September, 2022. But after years of effort, nothing has changed.

Shaw and three other prisoners were beaten by guards during a month-long labor strike in the Alabama prison system in January 2021.

"Since 2016, the [prisoner protests] that [have] happened in Alabama have been peaceful," said Davenport. "It's been shutdowns, to try to get attention and draw attention to what goes on. At some point there had to be a stance taken to really bring attention to what goes on inside these prisons."

A lawsuit brought by the U.S. Department of Justice against the Alabama Department of Corrections, filed in 2020, documents a long list of prison conditions that the Department says violate the U.S. Constitution, including rampant sexual and physical abuse by guards, high levels of prisoner-on-prisoner violence, and unsafe and unsanitary living conditions.

The State of Alabama has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world and as of January, the state's prisons were operating at 168% capacity.

"The State of Alabama is deliberately indifferent to the serious and systematic constitutional problems present in Alabama's prisons for men," attorneys for the Department of Justice alleged in their Complaint. The lawsuit is on track to go to trial sometime next year.

But prisoners in Alabama say the federal intervention hasn't changed much. "They got a lawsuit on them but they ain't paying no attention, like it don't mean nothing," said Nichols.

Faced with the suit, as well as rampant overcrowding in the prison system throughout the state, Alabama Governor Kay Ivey has announced her plan to spend more than \$1.6 billion to build two new prisons by 2026. The plan, however, will not end the overcrowding.

According to Davenport, no matter what anyone does, those in power in the state of Alabama just keep doubling down on the state's brutal incarceration system.

"Her solution is to build more prisons," said Davenport. "She's not talking about true rehabilitation or changing the parole guidelines so people can actually make parole, or giving back good time. They continuously are making more laws to keep more people locked up for longer periods of time."

Given the state of the Alabama prison system, and the rest of the country's unwillingness to take it seriously, Nichols said, he and his fellow prisoners understand and support Shaw's action.

"A lot of people was scared, but a lot of people was like, 'he's right,'" said Nichols. "We in a bad situation and they ain't trying to make it no better. Like modern day slavery. They don't care."

In his video testimony, Shaw highlights a number of specific conditions at Donaldson that pushed him over the edge, including the high rates of death and constant state of chaos and violence. But Shaw also described the "psychological torture" of knowing that you have been sentenced to live your entire adult life in a prison until you die.

"Told y'all I'm leaving this bitch one way or another bro. I got to leave here. Shit. This shit be feeling like it be closing in on a ni**a," said Shaw. "They just want me to die a slow and horrible death. In a cage. Fuck that. No."

More immediately, Shaw said that people around him continue to die, and that three of his friends died in the previous week. Nichols confirmed that three of Shaw's friends, at three different prisons, died of fentanyl overdoses in the week prior to the incident.

"In Alabama, where we at, ni**as is dying. Fucked up. Right here at Donaldson," said Shaw in the video. "Ni**as is dying all the time bro. Fucked up. Check the record. They killing us. They create the conditions so that we die, all the time. Investigate it. Hypocrites man, but you supposed to be enforcing the law on me though. And I'm just supposed to go for that forever, all the way until I die. Not me. Not I."

An incarcerated person dies every other day in the Alabama prison system, according to Alabama Appleseed Center for Law & Justice. A total of at least 270 people died in the prison system in 2022, out of a total of about 19,000 prisoners. So far this year, that number is at least 110.

The actual numbers, the group says, are likely much higher. The Alabama Department of Corrections has stopped releasing reports on deaths in the prison system.

"You have more people leaving in body bags than you have making parole, ending their sentence or leaving on good time," said Davenport. "They even denied parole to a dead man earlier this year."

The rate of parole in Alabama is now about 6%, an historic low, with just 116 individuals granted parole in the first three months of 2023 out of a total of 2,040 who were eligible.

Davenport says his action followed a logical path of gradual escalation in the face of increasingly dire circumstances. Nonetheless, given the opportunity to inflict violence on his captors, Shaw chose to lock them in an office and try to get away.

"Shaw never had any intention of hurting anyone," said Davenport.

"Don't let these people control the narrative. Don't let these people tell the same story that they tell every time, all the time..." said Shaw to his viewers on Facebook. "OK I'm one person with one incident, but this is a system that these people operate every day, all day, that these people been running for so many years. Real talk man. Fuck 12."

Derrol Shaw: They be talking all of that: they enforcing laws. Shit they ain't enforcing no goddam law man. All they doing is beating the people out of tax money. They telling people, "oh you need prisons for these prisoners," and then they create the conditions for crime, and then you empower the police...

These conditions bro, even with all that. They create the conditions to justify the means, you know what I'm saying? They beating the tax payers, man. Because they say it costs so much amount of money to keep us in these prisons, but then they take that same money and stick it to themselves. And they ain't even hiding it. They're like "man you know you can work all of this overtime and it's gonna go to your pension fund." But they're taking all that money and talking about they're gonna build a new prison. But there aint no money in it...it's a scheme man. And the people at the top, the folks that I told you are trying to continue white supremacy, these is the folks that is making all the money.

In Alabama, where we at, ni**as is dying. Fucked up. Right here at Donaldson. Ni**as is dying all the time bro. Fucked up. Check the record. They killing us. They create the conditions so that we die, all the time. Investigate it. Hypocrites man, but you supposed to be enforcing the law on me though. And I'm just supposed to go for that forever, all the way until I die. Not me. Not I. Shit ridiculous man. It's crazy because I know they gonna be saying I was ranting and all that, but all us get fed up bro. All us get fed up. And we respond differently. Just be honest with yourself. I mean, I got life without parole and under these conditions here in Alabama. And I honestly do what I want to do in this prison man, doesn't matter what prison I'm at, I do what I want to do. I like to smoke weed, I'm gonna have weed all the time. That's a big flaw of mine. I've been trying to pray, y'all know I'm a Muslim. You know I'm depressed all the time, my ni**as dying all the time. Three of my ni**as just died in the past week. So I be smoking weed. And I've been trying to pray to be a lot more peaceful and everything. But it's just chaos, it's just absolute chaos. Every single day. Every single day. Chaos, violence, and death every single day, all day. You know what I'm saying?

And people don't look like, we live under a war zone. They don't think about it like that. But when you add up the deaths. Like in an actual war zone, between like in Afghanistan... When you add up the percentage, ni**as are really dying like that in here bro, and killing...And even if they don't die, there's still enough violence and killing, to where he damn near die. He paralyzed. Ni**a maimed. Just like war. They had to amputate his arm, all this type shit. We just supposed to be alright with this. We just supposed to goddam...Come on man, I woulda went crazy. I can't take it bro, Real shit. I can't take this shit no more. I can't take this shit no more. For real.

I was just trying to go. You know? But that wasn't in the cards. [laughs]

[prays in Arabic]

Man, I ain't perfect man, none of us are. I be striving though. And then all us got a limit. Shit. Everything do. Hey man I manipulated a lot of people to get to this point right here. And I know they gonna go back and they gonna be like shit, you

know, you was helping them and you was helping them and you was helping them. But.

I'll tell this shit right. Don't let these people control the narrative. Don't let these people tell the same story that they tell every time, all the time...OK I'm one person with one incident, but this is a system that these people operate every day all day that these people been running for so many years. Real talk man...fuck 12. A whole lotta fuck 12.

Stand up, rise up. You know what I'm saying? The best thing I say we can do, us within the structure of actual voting, you know because there's nothing wrong with the actual structure itself. Alabama, they just do what they want, they break all the rules, there ain't nobody that can regulate it. Alabama politics, Alabama solutions to Alabama problems. That's what the governor say.

If we were to do anything within the voting structure, we'd have to form our own voting block. There's a whole lot of us, we unified, we dealing with each other as we are.

Another prisoner: They got two snipers...[inaudible]

Shaw: They got snipers. Where they at?

[inaudible]

Yeah, form y'all own voting block y'all. Check this out. Of course, us in prison we can't vote. But you know your mama can, your sister can, your son can, your daughter can. All these people right here they can vote. So you know, develop some kind of form, some type of online form...there's a whole lot of good ones. Like collecting signatures, of registered voters. Y'all can develop your own list of registered voters in Alabama. There's something like 20,000 inmates in Alabama, if 1,000 inmates would do that, they got 5 family members, that's 5,000 registered voters willing to vote for the same person. That type of voting power could really give us a voice in Alabama politics, a real political voice in politics and then when guys see that you know more people would sign on and so forth.

But that would be corrupt. These folks are just corrupt. That would be corrupt. You know what I'm saying. Here in Alabama boy, they ain't playing the radio. You know what I'm saying they gonna railroad me.

And I cut myself on the razor wire. I thought I was gonna bleed out...I'm like, "well this is it right here." But then that wasn't it. And then I made it back around back inside of the dorm. The guys running from me...

I love y'all man.

This shit gonna kill my mama. But I been telling you though mama, I'm gonna go out in a blaze of glory. I'm gonna go out

life Queen Latifah, in Set it Off. I'm gonna go out like Johnathan Jackson...Shout out to Assata Shakur man...

Would y'all believe when I thought I was gonna bleed out, I called 911. I was like shit, I'm gonna bleed out. I'm like shit, it would be better...on my iPhone. I was like, it would be better...I don't know what the fuck I was thinking. I was trying to get some help. I was trying to survive I guess.

But when I started walking, it was like I got some strength. Well after I prayed, for real for real...it was like I got some strength.

Then I walked down to the door and I seen the cops and they calling me sergeant because I got the uniform on, they think I'm a sergeant. I'm like, open up the gate, they're like, you got the key don't you?

I just wanted to tell y'all I love you man. I was destined to die in here. They just want me to die a slow and horrible death. In a cage. Fuck that. No. But all y'all police that was laying on the floor in that office y'all ass better tell the story right. And y'all ass better tell it that I made it clear multiple times that I wasn't trying to hurt none of y'all as long as y'all didn't buck, you know, and try no goofy shit...he had to get physical. His eyes as big as golf balls. And then they try to get all nice and shit. Like "don't do that." Man sit your ass down. Funny as hell.

I was gonna burn this bitch down. On god. I still might. I was thinking of taking all that white lighting, all that goddamn, moonshine that ni**a got and setting that bitch on fire. And they can't even think about putting that bitch out. But I ain't with all that man, plus I'm high now and I don't really give a fuck like that.

Y'all know it's all love man.

I don't know why in the hell I put this damn vest on. I guess it's just for the picture cuz it look cool. Cuz this bitch ain't bulletproof. Man I'm gonna take this old corny shit off.

Told y'all I'm leaving this bitch one way or another bro. I got to leave here. Shit. This shit be feeling like it be closing in on a ni**a. Real passive torture. Psychological torture. True enough there's a lot of physical violence, but the source of it is really incarceration. America, the land of the free, but it incarcerate over half the world's prison population even though it makes up such a small portion of the worlds actual population. That shit's crazy. But you the land of the free.

If they stood on anything. If these people weren't some hypocrites. If these people actually stood on the constitution. Some of that shit fucked up. You know like the 13th amendment that say that slavery and involuntary servitude shall not exist except wherefore one has been duly convicted of a crime or something to that effect. If they actually stood on that shit, that would be great, that would be lovely. But they pick and choose

who they want to give justice to.

I can't do it bro. I can't do it no more. And it's crazy because it's clear as day. All of the evidence in the world...

I love y'all. Y'all brothers and sisters. Hold it down. Get your spirit right. Whatever it is you believe in. The people and the stuff, the things, the people that you encounter, try to leave it better than it was before you encountered it. Eiether that or don't fuck with it. We all gonna go off from time to time, but we try to minimize that. Be in our high self. That's what I'm encouraging everybody. But stand on something. Whatever it is you believe in stand on that shit. Don't be no hypocrite man. Stand on that shit. Be real. One thing they gonna say that I was boy, I wasn't never on no fuck shit, I wasn't never on no lame shit, wasn't never on no scared shit...

We gotta try and get more in our high self. We gotta come together man...the positive principles that they live by, if everybody stood on that. More of us just gotta do it. In more situations. You know what I'm saying?

As-salamu alaykum. [Arabic: peace be upon you]



Copaganda: What It Is and How to Recognize It

by Palika Makam

from TeenVogue.com

Aug 2020

I'd like to start with an exercise. First, take a deep breath in and out to help ground yourself. Think about a time when you felt safe. Where are you? Who do you see? Can you hear anything? Smell anything? Paint the details stroke by stroke until the picture becomes clear in your mind. Maybe you see a friend, teacher, or a family member; perhaps you see a place, like your bedroom or homeland. Through my work as a media activist, for years I have facilitated and participated in this exercise many times, in many places, with people of varying ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Not once has anyone ever included a police officer in their image of safety.

I don't offer up this exercise as a perfect abolitionist; I'm still very much a student of abolition, learning from Black revolutionary women, like Mariame Kaba and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who have helped develop abolition as a practice, framework, and tangible goal for our shared liberation. I offer this exercise as someone who is deeply invested in how visuals and narratives inform the policies, practices, and behaviors that shape oppressive systems, and how they can instead lead us toward a more just and empathetic future. I hope you can hold onto your image of safety as you read this piece.

As the U.S. program manager at the human rights organization WITNESS, part of my job involves training communities to

document abuses by state actors like police and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to use for evidence and advocacy. We're seeing in real time how critical that documentation is in exposing law enforcement abuses at both the state and federal level, galvanizing people to pour into the streets in support of Black lives, and combating false reports about protesters and victims of police violence. But in the same way that we're using cell phone cameras, storytelling, and social media to share the truth and keep ourselves safe, many police departments are also using these tools to depict themselves as kind, heroic, fun-loving community members whose niceness can outweigh the actions of a few "bad apples." This is called copaganda.

Sometimes copaganda is created by police officers themselves, like this country music video released by the Metro Nashville Police Department that features Sergeant Henry Particelli singing with his guitar as people held signs that read "Peace" and "United We Stand, Divided We Fall." That police department and many others around the country are turning to social media posts to help counter negative narratives and boost images, like this one, where white police officers pose with a Black child holding a Black Lives Matter sign, or this one from Austin, which shows police officers with all the thank-you mail they claimed to have received from members of the community. Other times, social media videos of police officers kneeling, hugging protesters, or posts of them offering snacks and their tears to little Black girls and boys, as the fearful children shake and cry, are promoted by the general public, and even allies and activists. The focus of these videos is supposed to be on the kind nature of individual police officers, but it's important to remember that each friendly officer also has a gun on their hip and holds qualified immunity, a legal doctrine that, as explained by *The Appeal*, can effectively shield officials like police from accountability for misconduct, such as when they use excessive force. Take, for example, the Ohio "dancing cop," a white police officer who went viral in 2015 for a video in which he danced outside with Black children. That officer was investigated and eventually cleared, in 2019, after body camera footage surfaced of him punching a Black man in the face.

We've also seen numerous examples from around the country where police officers kneel with protesters one minute and abuse and disregard their constitutional rights the next. A demonstrator in Orlando shared an image of officers praying with protesters, with the text: "Literally 45 minutes later [members of the department] maced us in the face for the crime of standing in their vicinity." Another protester in New York City tweeted a video of police officers taking a knee, with the text: "They beat the living shit out of us one hour after this." And after the highest-ranking uniformed NYPD officer was filmed on his knees linking arms with protesters in the street, reports continued of his department kettling crowds, beating them with batons, and pepper-spraying demonstrators across the city. This pattern raises the question: Are these police officers really standing in solidarity with Black lives or are they engaging in performative displays that subdue the public?

As copaganda continues to circulate and resurface, as it always does after any high-profile police violence case, I ask those who are interested in supporting Black lives to think critically, and be skeptical of what you're viewing before you share or internalize it. Cops don't need your help promoting their image; they already have the funding, power, and protective policies on their side to do it themselves. Instead of uniting us, copaganda serves to undermine the movement for Black lives, advance the narrative that police violence is an issue of individual bad cops as opposed to a systemic one, and minimize the very real violence and trauma police cause to Black communities.

Niceness is neither an antidote to police violence nor the reason people are taking to the streets in the middle of a global pandemic. They're in the streets because according to a 2017 report, the U.S. spends more than \$100 billion annually on policing. They're angry that so many healthcare workers were forced to work without adequate supplies of protective gear at the start of the pandemic; that teachers are being asked to risk their lives to return to work, while spending money out of their pockets for basic school supplies; and that evictions are expected to soar as tenants struggle to make rent. People are disturbed by qualified immunity, and the fact that we live in a country where police officers can kill a woman while she sleeps and face no consequences. They are hurting from years of being over-policed, surveilled, and verbally and physically abused. So until police officers also advocate to defund their budgets, invest in Black communities, support transparency with disciplinary records, urge their unions to retract endorsements for Trump, provide body camera footage to the public, and break the code of silence, they are not a part of the solution and should not be glorified as such.

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I understand why people gravitate toward copaganda. Between a racial crisis and a pandemic, we're tired. It's in our nature to be hopeful, but it's important to understand when that need for positivity becomes toxic. For some, copaganda videos provide comfort that not all cops are killers, but no revolution has ever been won comfortably. Social justice change is painful, messy, and slow. Just as I see people gravitate toward copaganda, I also hear them repeat the same question to preface any difficult conversation about police and privilege: "But aren't there good cops?" That question is not productive or relevant to the very real issue of Black people being killed by police officers with impunity. No number of videos showing officers conveying basic human decency can address systemic police violence. The better question to ask is, "Why aren't those good cops doing anything to support Black lives?"

Instead of sharing copaganda videos to foster hope, what if we reframed what hope looks like? What if we shared images of volunteer street medics treating and supporting injured protesters? Or the wall of moms who formed a human chain to block federal agents in Portland? What if we shared

photos and videos of the various mutual aid groups across the country handing out water, snacks, masks, and other supplies to protesters on the streets? The videos and images that get shared during protests shape how history is told and our futures are imagined. So, before you post, remember the movement is not fighting for more cops, even nice ones, but rather real investment and community-led/centered solutions to support Black lives. Think back to that image of safety you painted in your mind at the beginning of this piece, and look around you to see that we're really the ones who are serving and protecting. That's something to be hopeful about.



To Build an Abolitionist Future, We Must Look to Indigenous Pasts

*by Cherise Morris
from Truthout.org
Sept 2023*

The movement to abolish systems of policing and prisons is often discredited as an unfeasible, utopian notion that is not possible in the context of human “nature.” We live in a violent society built from the violence of settler colonialism, slavery and patriarchy. The violence of this system and its origins make the violence of police and prisons seem necessary to many.

When I talk about abolishing the police and prisons, I'm often met with the same question: How is abolition possible in a world where people enact harm and violence on one another all the time? I understand how the notion of busting open the prison doors tomorrow and dismantling police forces seems like a tall order, but as Angela Davis reminds us, “Abolition is not primarily a negative strategy. It's not primarily about dismantling, getting rid of, but it's about re-envisioning. It's about building anew.”

To abolish prisons would mean shifting the carceral paradigms, frameworks and ideologies that operate in the world around us, and take root within us and our individual actions. It means reflecting on the ways we, as individuals and communities, perpetuate punishment and exclusion in our daily interactions and redefining what safety and security means to us beyond the parameters of systems steeped in violence. To abolish police would mean shifting our culture and our society in a way that prioritizes addressing the root causes of violence, rather than waiting until violence has occurred to punish it. It would mean funding programs and structures that support our collective well-being so that violence no longer happens in the same ways. There can be no abolition without land sovereignty. Abolition is not possible without racial or economic justice. To begin the process of building anew, abolition requires established structures of communal care, support, mutual aid and holistic approaches to healing. Indigenous cosmologies and practices can help guide our processes of reenvisioning a future without prisons and policing in theory and in practice. Abolition is not

only a future possibility, it is a lineage of ancestral practices. Worlds without police and without prisons have already existed, predating colonization and slavery.

Prisons and Police Are Not Solutions

In her book, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Davis writes, “Prisons do not disappear social problems, they disappear human beings. Homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness, illiteracy are only a few of the problems that disappear from public view when the only human beings contending with them are relegated to cages.” In the same way that prisons do not disappear the problems they perpetuate, police may arrest people, but they do not stop crime. The system of policing works in tandem with the structures of incarceration to disappear people, but neither the police nor prisons disrupt the cycles of violence and trauma that create these issues in the first place.

A report published last year by Catalyst California and the ACLU of Southern California found that despite annual budgetary increases, police departments don't actually solve the majority of violent crimes. The data showed that police often spend the majority of their time “conducting racially biased stops and searches of minority drivers, often without reasonable suspicion, rather than ‘fighting crime.’” In *The Condemnation of Blackness*, Khalil Gibran Muhammad traces the origins of modern policing as a strategy to criminalize newly emancipated Black people. And today, the U.S. carceral system continues to function primarily as a way to criminalize people at the intersections of marginalized identities of race, class and gender.

Frameworks of abolition show us how prisons and police don't actually solve, or even prevent, our most pressing issues. When we shift our understanding to reflect this, we see how obsolete prisons and policing already are. But creating a future without prisons and policing requires a complete reconceptualization of ourselves, our relationships to one another, our individual complicity in upholding violent systems and our collective responsibility to build systems that promote the healing and well-being of our communities. Returning to the wisdoms and practices of our ancestors can hold powerful clues to our own process of reconceptualizing and re-envisioning society.

Ancestral Constellations of Abolition

In the same way that so many of my realities were the wildest dreams of my ancestors who were enslaved, many of my ancestors who predated slavery and colonization experienced my wildest dreams as their realities. I used to imagine a future without prisons or police as a sort of Afrofuturist fiction, until I stumbled upon the book that would show me not only how realistic and possible this sort of world was, but that it had, in fact, existed before.

In *African Cosmology of the Bantu-Kôngo: Tying the*

Spiritual Knot, Principles of Life and Living, Kimwandende Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau explores many of the abolitionist and anti-capitalist ideas I saw as an elusive future horizon. The frameworks and ideas of abolition were integral to many Indigenous cosmologies and precolonial societies and the ways people understood themselves and their communities. Within the belief systems of the Bantu-Kongo, “crime” was not considered an individual act but a symptom of a failing system and a product of the collective social, cultural, economic and environmental shortcomings of a society and its values. Fu-Kiau describes his earliest understanding of his community’s Indigenous cosmologies and the ways they shaped his daily reality:

I grew up in a village of at least 1,000 inhabitants.... There was not a single policeman, the jail was unknown, no secret agent, i.e., a people’s watchdog. It did not have a bureau of investigation, no sentry to watch on people’s goods.... Everybody felt responsible for everyone else in the community and its neighborhood. When a community member suffered, it was the community as a whole who suffered.

The Bantu-Kongo were able to exist without the presence of prisons or policing by integrating systems of collective care into their communities which addressed the root cause of any potential transgressions. Fu-Kiau describes “crime,” from the perspective of the Bantu-Kongo, as something that “is possible to eradicate ... from human society.” Contrast that with our current carceral system, which places the impetus for crime on the individual. The Indigenous, ancestral cosmologies of the Bantu-Kongo accepted the responsibility for crimes committed as evidence of a failure in how their society cared for and affirmed the well-being of the individuals who committed the crimes. Fu-Kiau juxtaposes these precolonial cosmologies with the implementation of Western systems of law and punishment across Africa. He critiques the Eurocentric policy shifts of larger cities in the region, but notes that in many rural communities, like the one he grew up in, precolonial concepts, and abolitionist principles, were still visible practices throughout the 20th century.

Bantu cosmologies regarded private land ownership and excessive wealth at “[a] level of accumulation [that] cannot come without exploitation” as the most serious crime. To the Bantu-Kongo, “land was inalienable” and the property of the community to be used “in service of all community members.” Because land was considered a collective asset and not the property of any one individual, the private ownership and sale of land was forbidden. It was the community’s responsibility to support the economic, social, mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being of all community members, to engender a sense of belonging and being that opposed the sort of systemic violence and exploitation which creates crime in the first place. By doing this, cycles of harm could be avoided.

Shifting the paradigm from Western concepts of “crime” as

an individual act, which emerged directly from the violence of colonization and slavery, to more ancestral understandings of transgression as a symptom of a society’s collective shortcomings repositions the abolition of prisons and policing as a tangible possibility in the future we will build together.

In the Indigenous practices of the Ogu (or Egun) people of Benin, Togo and Nigeria, the Zangbeto was a spiritual force that took up the task of protecting individuals and communities. Within this spiritual framework, there was no need for formalized prisons or police. In precolonial social systems, the Zangbeto functioned as a spiritual force of protection, community accountability and mutual aid. Despite the expansion of Westernized carceral systems, the Zangbeto still maintains a cultural presence in many of the region’s rural communities today. Of course, the reliance on a sort of spiritual safety team depends on shared practices, and we live in a diverse tapestry of spiritual ideas and perspectives. I’m not advocating for adopting such practices, but the legacy of the Zangbeto is another example of the ways Indigenous cosmologies and societies reenvisioned community, safety and harm-reduction from a perspective that supported the collective well-being and integrative care necessary to prevent harm instead of focusing on carceral logics of punishment which encourage violence.

Shifting Culture Towards Abolition

We should blame the patriarchy for sexual assault as much as any individual. We should blame structures of economic oppression and exploitation for any theft as much as any individual. We should blame a culture that lauds guns and promotes images of violence in the media while ignoring the mental health of its citizens for any mass shooting as much as any individual. The crimes we fear the most are direct consequences of a society that perpetuates violent ideologies and hierarchies. This system and the ideals and culture it perpetuates are complicit in all the crimes it condemns.

We make systems like prisons and policing obsolete by making the conditions of the violence those systems uphold and perpetuate unimaginable. These Indigenous cosmologies didn’t rely on prisons as a punitive reaction to harm or the violence of policing to induce a logic of fear. Instead, they emphasized building societal structures that supported the well-being of individuals so that there was no need or desire to perpetuate harm on others or to replicate harm perpetuated on oneself.

Reenvisioning and co-creating a society where individuals had the support to not replicate harm and trauma was a collective responsibility and spiritual imperative. In our present context, there’s an immensity of trauma and harm to heal from in this process of eradicating violence from our society. Abolition is not just a political idea; it requires a process of cosmological transformation that is both individual and collective. If we shifted our perspectives to recognize crime, harm and violence as evidence of a system’s failings, and created systems that

support our well-being, healing and care, what reenvisioning could we do? What new systems could we build? What “constellation of alternative strategies and institutions,” as Davis describes it, might be possible?

Many of our ancestors have already lived versions of our liberated futures. When we remember this, we understand no matter how far away they may seem now, our present dreams are inherited wisdoms. It becomes that much easier to imagine a future without prisons or police once we realize the pasts that have already existed. Abolition requires dismantling systems of oppression in their entirety. It also requires a community that is willing to address harm at its root causes, not merely penalize it after it happens. Abolition depends on a collective sense of accountability and responsibility. Abolition pushes us to transform our relationships to one another and return the Kimuntu, “the state of being human.” From the perspective of Bântu-Kôngo cosmologies, a society without prisons and policing is not an impossibly utopic future dream, it is a tangible preexisting reality and ancestral wisdom which has been practiced for centuries.

An abolitionist future is not a utopia where issues or conflicts never arise. It is a paradigm where communities come together to address any harm that has occurred from the root cause to ensure that it does not happen again. It may be a long and arduous road to creating an abolitionist society in practice, and accepting and embracing the transformations it requires of us as individuals and collectives. But don’t think for one minute it isn’t possible when it has already existed before.



Touching My Prison Yard’s Grass Radicalized Me to Take Action Behind Bars

by Tony D. Vick
from Truthout.org
Sept 2023

I’ve been writing about my experiences in prison during my 27 years of incarceration at nine different Tennessee prisons, trying to paint word-pictures for the community outside the razor wire. Perhaps, in some way, that is a form of activism toward ideological change about the prison system.

For most of my years in prison, I’ve been ashamedly afraid to speak out too loudly against the system for fear of retribution. Through the years, I’ve witnessed many outspoken peers who filed grievances or voiced injustices get sent to harsher prisons, physically abused or placed in segregation. So, I’ve mostly stayed at the edge of such controversy, only sending out essays, writing books and poetry, and contributing to other people’s anthologies about prison conditions.

More recently, I’ve had the opportunity to engage with radical activists on various issues and have been inspired by the final-

straw moments that pushed them to action. I met these fine people after forming a prison book club several years ago as a means to build community and provide a safe space for the men around me to be vulnerable and express their emotions, and where thought-provoking consideration of new ideas and ways of thinking could be explored.

Discussing the virtues of Atticus Finch in Harper Lee’s *To Kill A Mockingbird* or Napoleon’s evil descent in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* takes on a new perspective when the book club is behind bars. Incarcerated readers see parallels with the United States’s criminal legal system and spiritedly debated the novels’ flawed characters and whether “justice” was truly delivered in their scenarios.

I look around the room and I see 20 amazing men who I’ve come to call friends. In the mix are those who have murder charges, drug charges, and everything in between. If someone only looked at a book club member’s rap sheet, they may conclude that they’re a hopeless, ignorant criminal without any hope of redemption. But without the scarlet letter declaring each one a felon, a person sitting in the room with these intelligent, compassionate and helpful men may reach a totally different conclusion.

In 2022, we read an essay that Janet Wolf wrote in the book *And The Criminals With Him*, where the author and others explore the concepts set into motion by Baptist minister and radical civil rights activist Will Campbell. In fact, Wolf reached out to us with an incredible offer to come and talk with our group. It was amazing sitting around a table, asking her questions about the material she wrote and experiencing the humanity she brought to our book club.

Turns out that Wolf is much more than an author of books, she is also an intriguing radical activist in her own right. She starts vigils outside of prisons, conducts “think tanks” in prison workshops and on death row, and puts feet to pavement organizing folks to speak their minds and use their votes to change legislation. Wolf recounts in her book how, on Christmas Eve in 1976 as part of a small group of people standing outside of an old state prison, the lights of activism came on for her, literally and figuratively.

The huddled group lit candles and sang carols in hopes prisoners would feel their presence — but Wolf wasn’t feeling like what they were doing really mattered. Then, her small son tugged on her coat and pointed to the cell windows. She writes that she “turned to look where he was pointing and saw, in cell after cell, the glow of matches and lighters being held up to the windows, spilling through the bars.” That was Wolf’s radicalization moment. Since that time, Wolf has visited death row prisoners and advocated on their behalf. She became a radical activist.

Our book club also got to meet author Lindsey Krinks, who wrote *Praying with Our Feet*. She told us how during her

college years she was introduced to information, statistics and facts that she couldn't just sit on. "I was learning that I wasn't called merely to pray for city leaders to do the right thing about people experiencing homelessness. I was also called to act in tangible ways," she told us.

Krinks went on to cofound Open Table Nashville, an interfaith homeless outreach nonprofit, and has been ordained as a street chaplain. She organizes marches and protests to push for legislative changes that benefit those experiencing homelessness. She told us about her book, "It's a story of falling in love with a people, with a struggle, with this world and all its madness. It's a story of a seeker searching for belonging, for some spark, some horizon of hope." Krinks, too, is a radical activist.

This brings me to my own final-straw moment, the one that moved me from the sidelines to the center. The prison where I'm housed sits on pristine acres of rolling hills with beautiful trees, where deer and wild turkeys roam without fear just beyond the razor wire, where we can see from our small cell windows. The prison yard is manicured to perfection with a full staff of incarcerated landscapers working on it daily. Ironically, the prisoners are not allowed to walk on the grass, just the walkways and stairs. So, unless you're a landscaper working on the lawn, feet don't touch grass. The prison guards are constantly screaming, "Get off my grass," if even a hint of a shoe hits the soil. Prisoners have been handcuffed and taken to segregation for not immediately adhering to this command.

I have often looked outside my window and imagined feeling that lush grass on the bottom of my feet, tickling my toes. Still, I obeyed the rules — it didn't seem worth risking my prison job, housing unit, and any small privilege I may have earned during these 27 years of good behavior.

One average Tuesday afternoon, as we were lined up on the concrete walk to go to chow, I saw one prisoner, Lucas, take his shoes off, then his socks. Lucas is 72 years old, has been incarcerated for 38 years and was just diagnosed with cancer. His days are numbered. As we began moving to chow, Lucas walked on the grass. "Inmate, get off my grass," the yard sergeant yelled. Lucas paid him no mind and continued walking. Soon several officers came running and sprayed Lucas with pepper spray, knocking him to the ground.

Most prisoners kept walking, heads down, just as they are taught to do, minding their own business. But when my book club friends saw me stop, they also stopped. When I stepped my feet onto the grass, they all followed suit. My heart was racing but my gut told me I was doing the right thing. No words were spoken for a while. Soon though, the guards approached us, and commanded, "Get off my grass inmates."

By that time, the captain came running out seeing a disturbance developing. He saw how quickly this could get ugly, pulled

his guards away and told us to go on to chow. After months of turmoil between the prison administration and the grass protesters, we were finally allowed a space in front of our unit where we can touch grass — even with bare feet. Lucas is now part of our book club.

Since that day, our book club has sent hundreds of letters to politicians, organized writing campaigns for causes related to treatment of prisoners and filed multiple grievances when injustices occur at our site. When I read articles or watch news reports about prisons, they're usually devoid of any incarcerated voices. As insiders, we must insist that stories about us include our perspectives when possible. Contacting news media through letters is our newest mission. This can only happen if we band together and advocate for causes that surround our captivity.

This is my life. Reading and touching grass radicalized me.



Hundreds Set to Launch Hunger Strike Inside Stewart Detention Center

by Sean Summers

from UnicornRiot.org

Sept 2023

Lumpkin, GA — Last weekend, hundreds of people detained at the Stewart Detention Center announced plans for a hunger strike in response to inedible food and inhumane conditions inside the notorious Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in rural southwest Georgia. Though detainees have continued to eat while they negotiate with the facility's staff, as many as 800 people are set to refuse food starting this week if their demands are not met.

On the morning of Saturday, Aug. 26, roughly 300 people held inside the Stewart Detention Center were brought out of their holding cells for their morning meal. But when they were presented with the standard meal trays containing "disgusting" food in small quantities, the detainees refused to eat and returned to their cells, Victor Puertas, who's currently being held at Stewart Detention Center (SDC), told Unicorn Riot.

For two days, detainees refused to eat the food served to them in protest of what current and former detainees have described as inedible meals made with rotten ingredients and served without any fresh produce. But inadequate food is just one issue detainees face inside of the notoriously inhumane detention center, and those planning to strike hope to compel the facility to address their concerns, starting with the food they provide.

After refusing food all weekend, detainees asked to speak with the warden on Monday, Aug. 28, to explain their grievances, according to Puertas, who is among those who refused food last weekend. Though warden Russell Washburn did not meet with

the hunger strikers, detainees spoke with an SDC employee and issued their demands, he said.

To start, people inside Stewart are asking the center to honor its menu and serve palatable food in larger portions. Though the facility's menu boasts dishes such as country stew, jambalaya and vegetable sides, detainees are served starch-based meals with no fruits or vegetables to speak of, Puertas said. Additionally, the portions are too small and the food that's provided is often moldy.

When the hunger striking detainees spoke with an SDC employee on August 28, they were assured the facility would take steps to address their concerns, Puertas said. Those who refused meals over the weekend opted to continue eating for the rest of the week while waiting to see if SDC makes good on its promise to improve the food.

If the facility doesn't meet their demands, or show signs of good-faith efforts to improve the conditions detainees are subjected to, as many as 800 people across multiple cell blocks in SDC are set to join in a hunger strike, Puertas said.

While the strike was announced last weekend, tension has been building inside Stewart for weeks.

According to Puertas, tensions boiled over when a group of about 36 people detained at Stewart – a facility known for its lengthy detention periods – were set to be deported. The deportation process, which is a source of relief for many inside SDC, began and the detainees were transferred to an airport. But after being transported, the group was brought back to the center later the same day without explanation, Puertas said.

Once back inside Stewart, the detainees refused to return to their cells, leading to a confrontational standoff with center staff and state police. The detainees were ultimately sent to segregation units, and word of the event spread throughout the facility, Puertas said.

The frustration at the failed deportation process added to the already tense atmosphere. Detainees commiserated and shared their frustrations, and roughly three weeks after the confrontation, they decided to take action to push for more dignified treatment.

Advocates, immigration rights organizers and former detainees describe the atmosphere at Stewart as heavy and often hopeless. As a facility, Stewart has a reputation for being something of a dead end for people without immigration cases, Xavier T. da Janon, an attorney who regularly visits detainees in SDC, told Unicorn Riot. As a result, people without cases often spend months locked up without a clear timeline of when they might be released or deported.

"It's like a no-man's land," de Janon said. "If you end up in

Stewart, it's because you're going to have difficulty getting out."

Stewart's long detention periods are compounded by a culture of medical neglect, inadequate staffing practices and inhumane treatment at the hands of a for-profit prison contracting company, Nilson Barahona-Marriaga, a former detainee at SDC, told Unicorn Riot.

Barahona, who was transferred to SDC from the Irwin County Detention Center after participating in a hunger strike there in 2020, described Stewart as a place of despair designed to punish immigrants. Medical neglect, unhealthy meals and language barriers between staff and detainees all add to the heaviness felt inside Stewart, Barahona-Marriaga said.

Stewart is owned and operated by CoreCivic, formerly the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), a multi-billion dollar for-profit prison contractor. It's not only one of the largest ICE detention facilities in the country, but also among the deadliest. Since 2017, nine people held at Stewart have died – some from medical neglect and COVID-19, others by suicide. Hundreds of inmates have also reported "a systemic pattern of sexual abuse by detention officers, contractual guards, and ICE employees," the majority of which aren't investigated.

Since its inception in 2004, public criticism against the facility and calls for its closure have grown, but Stewart County and Georgia state have, so far, resisted these calls mainly on the excuse that it acts as a "essential moneymaker for the area." Like many prisons across the U.S. the Stewart Detention Center also uses prison labor to turn a profit, where detainees have said that they were paid as low as "\$1 and \$4 per day." Barahona said his experience inside Stewart left him feeling mistreated by a company profiting from the detention of thousands of people like him.

"It's a business. They're making money off of everything they can," Barahona-Marriaga said.

The only way people were able to be heard, he said, was through agitating and organizing against the conditions they faced inside the detention centers. In 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Barahona-Marriaga participated in a hunger strike at Irwin County Detention Center. For at least nine days, Barahona went without food, water, or medicine to demand the facility take measures to stem the spread of the virus.

Speaking from his experience, Barahona said that what detainees are doing inside Stewart right now is the perfect way to get the attention of people who can affect change.

Puertas told Unicorn Riot that while the pending hunger strike is one example of resistance, people regularly agitate for humane treatment inside Stewart. From small acts including refusing

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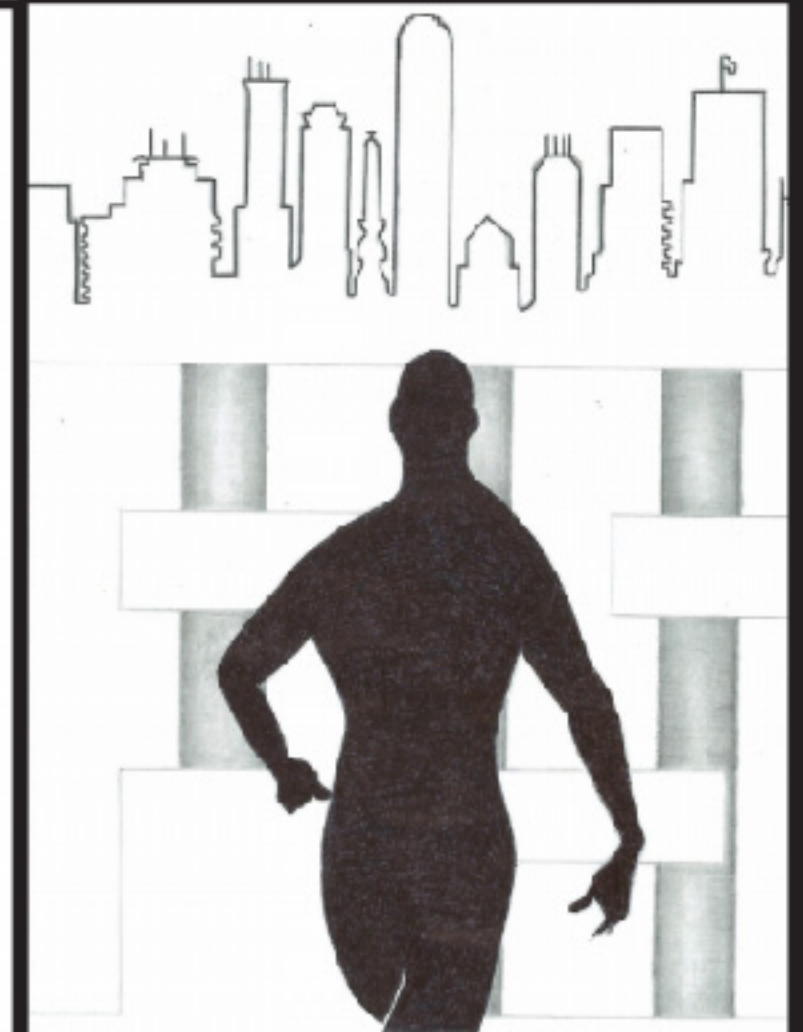
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meals and sabotaging infrastructure, to larger confrontations like the standoff a few weeks back, detainees are constantly rebelling against the conditions they face in Stewart, he said.

With a larger, organized push, Puertas and other hunger strikers are hopeful to find some lasting relief from the conditions they're subjected to inside SDC.



“Comrade Don’t Forget About Me”

a poem

by *Khalfani Malik Khaldun*

Comrades dont forget about me in these
trenches

Because we are a team and a brother feel me

So many of us a fighting to get free

Before its two late, No money to secure food
on our plate

Comrades dont forget about me in these
trenches. Our struggle

Is one and the same, without Money to posi-
tion ourselves.

Comrade we must never surrender our love of
the struggle

Because we are the vanguard who will de-
mand justice freedom and equality . for we
will be challging all forms of imperialism,
Capitalism, sexism, homophobia, and all of
the other isms of this world.....

Comrades dont forget about me ... Becsuse i
would not forget you or our struggle....

Because we have to be the quality players
who bring home the example...be a excellent
examples of revolutionary motivation.

Comrades dont forget about khal in these
plantations.

We are all one big family.....

Writing to Prisoners

Since prisoners are often transferred between facilities, we won't print addresses that can quickly become outdated. Instead, we'll direct you to the Indiana DOC "Offender Database" on their website. You can look up their current location with their DOC# (listed on Table of Contents). We use the number because the names they use are often not the state name that the DOC lists them under. And then look up the mailing address for that facility. Correspondence and engagement with what they've written here is welcome.

Some tips for writing to prisoners: Be clear about your intentions. Share something of yourself and also be curious to learn more about them. If you're not sure where to start, reference ideas they have written about. Don't say anything sketchy or incriminating for yourself or others. Assume that everything you write is being copied and read by prison administrators. Use only blue or black ink on white, lined paper in plain, white envelopes. Keep in mind that prison is, in many ways, the epitome of toxic masculinity and saturated with problematic and harmful ideas and social norms. Prisoners often will not have the latest language or frameworks for social justice. Be generous and seek to understand their different experiences, but also don't be afraid to engage and share your own experiences.

If you prefer to correspond online, you can set up an account at web.connectnetwork.com

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