

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights

Newsletter

Vol. 40-ww, No. 2

PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504

February 2015

Survivors of The System of Class and Color

The vast majority of poor people and people of color whose lives have been damaged by the inhumane U.S. system that monitors, arrests, prosecutes and incarcerates based on class and color are not shot or even necessarily beaten by police. They are not victims of unlawful abuse that can be caught on camera or ferreted out through federal investigation. They are victims of our lawful system of mass incarceration.

Tens of thousands of lives are destroyed by a legal process that wreaks even more havoc on the most vulnerable communities and their individual members than does the illegal use of excessive force by police. Poor communities and those of color are presumed dangerous. Roughly 80% of people caught directly in the U.S. police, court and penal system are processed from arrest to conviction with only an overwhelmed and under resourced public defender--often inexperienced besides--to represent them. At some level, everyone knows that those clients cannot expect equal treatment.

We have been successfully propagandized to accept that hundreds of thousands of individuals and their families are routinely destroyed by institutional and personal indifference. We accept the routine dehumanization of marginalized people at every state of the legal proceedings against them.

It remains at least as true now as it was in 1994: "For the prison system to warehouse human beings, prisoners must cease, in the minds of the dominant sub-groups of the public, to be human beings. The system works best when no one directly involved in it -- judge, prosecutor or even defense lawyer, not to mention jurors -- can imagine their child, sibling or other relative, friend or acquaintance -- as the defendant."

Resource:

Gideon's Promise--which works with public defenders to provide quality defense representation, 34 Peachtree St. NW, Suite 2460, Atlanta GA 30303.

The example of California, as discussed in its *Little Hoover Commission Report* of February 2014, which referred to the state's prison system as a "slow-motion disaster" further illustrates these points. From 1984 to 2005, California enacted hundreds of laws increasing sentence length, adding sentence enhancements and creating new sentencing laws. There were 21 new incarceration facilities added during those 20 years.

In California, approximately 20% of those incarcerated, about 25,000 people, are doing term-to-life sentences. Nearly a third of those with life terms with the possibility of parole--more than 8,000 people, are 50 or older. Almost half of those doing 25 years to life as a result of a third strike, nearly 4,200 people, are also older than 50. Prison system data shows that less than 5% of lifers released from imprisonment are returned for a new crime, compared to 51% of others who are released.

Another example: between 1980 and 2013, the number of federal prisoners locked up for street drug convictions skyrocketed from 4,749 to 100,026--more than half of all federal prisoners. And 40% of them are reported to be either couriers or street-level dealers. At the state level, the number of those imprisoned for drug convictions jumped from 5,587 in 1980 out of a total of 31,537, to more than 219,000 in 30 years.

And when we read between the lines about the October 2014 settlement in the federal class action lawsuit, *Parsons v. Ryan*, we realize again just how desperate the situation is for so many. This case specifically targeted health care--or more accurately the lack of it--in the Arizona prison system. The state agreed to meet more than "100 performance measures" including health care for prisoners with chronic medical conditions, specialty care, care and conditions for mentally ill prisoners and dental care. It calls for ongoing monitoring by prisoners' lawyers.

WHAT HAVE THEY EVER DONE TO US? What needs to be changed between the U.S. and Cuba

The U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba is both a reality and a symbol of a number of horrifying U.S. government behaviors. For years, our readers have commented on how much the treatment of prisoners there reflects authorities' behaviors in many U.S. run facilities located in the U.S.

That prison is also a symbol of the U.S. treatment of the government and people of Cuba. It is located in the country of Cuba. The U.S. refuses to return jurisdiction of that location to Cuba. What gives the U.S. the right to maintain control of land in and of another country against its wishes? The U.S. has been waging a constant battle against the right of Cuba to manage its own affairs for more than 100 years--at least since what we call the Spanish-American War in the 1890s.

A Coalition staff member had the opportunity to travel to Cuba this month, as part of a 150 person group sponsored by the organization Code Pink. This was an unparalleled learning opportunity, and a time to realize the lack of accurate and complete information about Cuba and about U.S./Cuban relations, especially economic.

The U.S. appears to treat that whole country the way it treats many of us in the U.S. itself: by promoting vast inequality and control there. This is over people in another country--largely poor and of color. Sound familiar?

END THE U.S. BLOCKADE OF CUBA NOW!

To receive our Newsletter by postal mail each month, send us self-addressed, stamped envelopes (with the CPR return address) -- up to 12 at one time.

Please continue to send us address changes and renewal requests. We are currently reevaluating how to keep our annual January mailing list for holiday calendar cards as up-to-date as possible.

Also, please note that the only address to use to be sure to reach us continues to be: PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504. Some resource lists, unfortunately, use an incorrect address. Remember: NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS. Please do not mark any envelopes as "legal mail."

**Many, many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons Project for making our monthly Newsletter available on-line for free downloading and distribution. It is at: <http://www.realcostofprisonsproject>
We depend on our readers' donations & thank you for your support. ¡Mil Gracias!**

Un fallo emitido por un juez de derecha demora el indulto a millones de inmigrantes indocumentados

Estaba previsto que el plan del presidente Obama de impedir la deportación de cerca de cinco millones de inmigrantes empezara a recibir las primeras solicitudes la semana del 16 de febrero. Pero, a últimas horas de ese lunes, el juez de distrito Andrew Hanen de Brownsville TX, emitió una medida cautelar a partir de un pedido presentado por Texas y otros 25 estados. Ahora el gobierno afirma que se acogerá al fallo y aplazará la aceptación de solicitudes de permisos de trabajo e indultos de deportaciones.

VOICES IN SOLIDARITY

"Incarceration's Witnesses: American Prison Writing" free on-line course

It will offer a history of the American prison through the writing produced by incarcerated people. There are no costs to participants. Only the imprisoned know the full human cost of incarceration. It will begin March 2, 2015. dlarson@hamilton.edu

Alliance of Incarcerated Canadians/Foreigners in American Prisons

If you write to AICAP/AIFAP for legal help, please include your:
> country of birth and citizenship
> if you have been denied a prisoner treaty transfer
> if you have an immigration detainer
> and please, to receive a response, provide an e-mail address and/or an international money order to cover the cost of postage and handling.
Send to: AICAP/AIFAP, c/o NMB Inc.,
131 Bloor St W, Suite 200
Toronto Canada M5S 1R8 (postage:\$1.15/oz.)

SHARE OF WORLD'S WEALTH

The richest 1% of the population will own more than half of the world's wealth within the next year according to a recent report by Oxfam International. Its executive director stated: "The scale of global inequality is quite simply staggering, and the gap between the richest and the rest is widening fast."

Majority of U.S. Public School Students are in Poverty

Of students from pre-K through 12th grade, 51% were eligible for free and reduced-price lunches in the 2012-13 school year. This is the first time this has been the case in at least 50 years.