

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

Vol. 46-C, No. 2

PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504

February 2021

IS IT LIFE OR DEATH?

BEHIND BARS

The current pandemic has starkly exposed the realities of U.S. incarceration. Imprisoned people are five times more likely to be exposed to the covid virus than those not behind bars. As of February 2, there have been more than 2,357 COVID related deaths of those imprisoned. And the pandemic is projected to continue for months to come.

The recent spate of federal executions has added to this ugly and avoidable tragedy. Nearly 70% of federal Death Row prisoners were sick with COVID-19. Guards too were ill. Traveling prison staff involved with the executions had the virus. Media witnesses, who were never told about the extent of the spread of cases, may have unknowingly infected others when they returned home.

Employees at the site of the executions, the federal prison at Terre Haute Indiana, had contact with both staff and prisoners who were infected. These employees were able to refuse testing and not participate in contact tracing efforts and they were permitted to return to their work assignments. Others, including those brought in to assist with executions, also spread tips to their colleagues about how they could avoid quarantines and public health guidance from both federal and state health officials.

In sum, the behaviors resulting from these executions likely acted as a "super spreader" event.

So, we continue to push to decarcerate. One example of many around the country is a prisoner led effort, court focussed, out of Nevada to reduce prison populations further. In addition to health and safety, community based treatment and rehabilitation are the goal. Accurate and up to date information is crucial.

Resources:

#cagingCOVID - at: 910-604-6519
Nation Inside, P.O. Box 448, Wilmington NC 28402;
Bright Starz, T. Hazel, 1184717, PO Box 7000, Carson City NV 89702; 614-772-8313.

NO SENSE

The most recent number we could find is that one in seven people in prison, that is 203,865 human beings, is doing a sentence of LWOP (Life WithOut Parole), life with parole or a virtual life sentence of at least 50 years. We must ask: Who does that serve?! What does it really do?

One in five Black men in prison today is doing a life sentence. What does that tell us? In addition, of those with life sentences, 30% are 55 or older. Yet, this age group makes up but 12% of state prison populations. Additionally, more than two-thirds of those subjected to life sentences are people of color.

Between 2008 and 2020, the number of women doing LWOP increased 43%, compared to a 29% increase among men.

Over 10,000 people with life sentences were convicted of a crime committed when they were less than 18. Yet statistics reflect that, with age, people "age out" of such age-related unsafe behavior. There are 3,972 people with life sentences who have been convicted for street-drug related behavior and 38% of these are in the federal prison system.

From recent statistics: in these six states, all life sentences are LWOP: Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana (the state with the highest rate of LWOP prisoners), Maine, Pennsylvania (the state with the second highest rate) and South Dakota. The following seven states have more than 1,000 imprisoned people each with LWOP sentences: Alabama, California, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

On the other hand, four states: Alaska, Kansas, New Mexico and Texas have no one doing LWOP. Texas has the second largest number of people of death row in the nation-California, with a current moratorium on executions has the highest.

Resources:

The Sentencing Project, 1705 DeSales St NW 8th Fl, Washington DC 20036;
Coalition to Abolish Death By Incarceration (CADBI), P.O. Box 40764, Philadelphia PA 19107; 267-606-0324.

Free Newsletter

The Minimum Wager, to be published bi-monthly, will include: a classical text excerpt, a Supreme Court decision analysis, a natural science article, a poem, a book review, a film review, an article on humor. Contact the CPR at PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504, to request it.

THE LEAST READ PART OF THE NEWSLETTER:

To receive the *CPR Newsletter* by postal mail monthly, send us a self-addressed, stamped envelope for every month's issue you are requesting, up to 12 at one time. Put the CPR return address in the upper left-hand corner of each envelope you send.

Continue to send us address changes to help us keep our annual calendar mailing list as accurate as possible.

NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS. Letters to us marked "Legal Mail" can lose our access to the prison they come from.

Many, many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons project, which posts our Newsletter on-line monthly for free downloading and distribution. All issues since 2009 are at: realcostofprisons.org – a great site!

“La Colina Escalamos”

—por Amanda Gorman en la inauguración de Biden:

.... Ya desafiamos el vientre de la bestia.

Aprendimos que la calma no está

siempre al borde de la paz,

y que las normas y nociones

de lo que es justicia

no son siempre justas.

Pero aun antes de enterarnos,

ya era nuestro el amanecer,

y de alguna forma lo logramos.

De alguna forma resistimos, presenciamos,

una nación que no esta rota,

sino simplemente inacabada....

Mas aunque puedan periódicamente

retrasar la democracia,

nunca podrán derrotarla

de manera permanente....

No marcharemos hacia lo que fue,

sino en dirección a lo que ha de ser....

si combinamos misericordia con poder,

y el ploder con lo correcto,

entonces el amor seria nuestro legado

y el cambio,

el derecho innato de nuestro hijos.

Así que entreguemos al futuro un país

mejor que el que nos dejaron....

El nuevo amanecer florece

a medida que lo liberamos,

pues la luz siempre existirá

si tan solo nos arriesgamos a verla.

Si tan solo nos arriesgamos a serla.

RESOURCES & INFORMATION

from *The Fire Inside*, Newsletter of the CA Coalition for Women Prisoners, 4400 Market St., Oakland CA 94608

> The CA Racial Justice Act, AB 2542, prohibits the state from seeking or obtaining a criminal conviction, or imposing a sentence, based upon race, ethnicity or national origin.

> Prop 17, "Free the Vote" restores voting rights to people who have completed a prison sentence, even if still on parole.

> Study group open to people at CCWF/CIW sharing readings calling people to action, demanding justice, sharing love, building solidarity, and creating collective care. If interested, send contact information to: Benjamin Weber, Department of African American Studies, 2223 Hart Hall, UC Davis, One Shields Ave, Davis CA 95616.

from the *Education Justice Project (EJP)*, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 1001 S. Wright St, Champaign IL 61820

> Congress has restored Pell Grants to provide support for low-income incarcerated students; EJP believes that prison higher education can serve prison abolition.

> MOVING FORWARD: A comprehensive statewide resource to support Tennesseans transitioning from incarceration, a new reentry guide from Tennessee, produced with support from EJP, will be available in early 2021.

> Starting in 2021, EJP academic scholarships will be available to formerly incarcerated people in Mexico and their families. There will be one to someone formerly incarcerated in a Mexican prison and one to someone who has been deported.

from the *San Quentin News*, San Quentin News 1 Main St., San Quentin CA 94964

> extensive "Incarcerated Reentry Resource Directory", in *January 2021 issue* (pp. 11-12). There are 51 entries, ranging from *Buddhist Prison Ministry*, to *La Familia Re-Entry Program (REP)*, to *Contra Costa Reentry Network*, to *Central Valley Indian Health*, to *Sacramento LGBT Community Center*, to the *Time for Change Foundation (Women)*, San Bernardino.

#####

WE WILL REMEMBER.

WITH HOPE BECAUSE HOPELESSNESS IS THE ENEMY OF JUSTICE.

WITH COURAGE BECAUSE PEACE REQUIRES BRAVERY.

WITH PERSISTENCE BECAUSE JUSTICE IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE.

WITH FAITH BECAUSE WE SHALL OVERCOME.

—The National Memorial for Peace and Justice