

# EASTERN REGION

# REVIEW

A PROJECT OF CRITICAL RESISTANCE NYC  
ICOPA, JULY 2017

## *A Note from Critical Resistance New York City*

This project wouldn't have been possible without the many activists and supporters of Critical Resistance who generously donated their work. We began by asking the question, "Why must we abolish the prison industrial complex?" and ended up with the vast knowledge that fills these pages. We offer our sincerest thanks to all of the contributors.

In Solidarity,  
CR-NYC

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by Jason, Maryland

I am a Puerto Rican man of 33 years of age. I was born and raised in Puerto Rico and came to the U.S. to visit in the year 2000. I got incarcerated in 2002 for defending my life and that of a friend, and was given a sentence of 15 to 30 years. Without family in the U.S., I have only received one visit from my cousin and that was in 2008.

Because of expensive charges for phone calls and being housed in the R.H.U. (Restrictive Housing Unit, or hole), I have never been able to call my family in PR since the day of my incarceration.

At some point in time the C.O.s took my address book and threw it in the trash, for they call me a problematic inmate, and for about 10 years now I haven't heard from my family and my family does not even know if I am alive.

Now I am in a Special Management Unit (S.M.U. program), which is supposed to house the worst inmates, in terms of behavior.

I am currently being failed out of the S.M.U. program and I will be placed on the "Restrictive Release List" (R.R.L.), which prevents prisoners from getting out of the R.H.U. and into a general prison population at any State Correctional Institution in PA. Now let me explain to you why I am being failed out of the program and will be placed in R.R.L.

The S.M.U. program has been designed to break a human being and transform it into an obedient submission slave through thought reformation and modified behavior, to which I don't abide. The rules of the program are very simple for anybody to follow, in fact, everybody follow them but me and another prisoner at the present moment.

The simplicity of the S.M.U. program rules are as follows: (1)

Have your bed made. This means that the mattress must be dressed at all times with the sheet and "blanket"—failure to have your bed made will get you burned for yard, showers, meals, etc... (2) Stand up for count. Failure to stand for count will get you burned for yard. (3) Be properly dressed. This means that you must have your jumpsuit "on" with "all buttons" fastened to the top and your shoes "on" inside of your R.H.U./S.M.U. living quarters. Failure to be "Properly Dressed" will result in denial of yard, meals, razors, cleaning supplies, etc... (4) Loud noise is prohibited. If you are being loud on your cell—the CO's get to determine what is and what is not loud—you will be denied yard, showers, razors, cleaning supplies, linen exchange, laundry, etc...

So, in order for one to receive meals, you will need to "have your bed made, be properly dressed, be quiet when the meals are being served, and be standing all the way at the back of your cell with your hands up and visible to the COs, facing the cell door." Failure to have your bed made, be properly dressed, not being loud when the meals are being served will be looked at by the COs as refusal of your meal (the COs determine what is not loud). If you are not standing all the way at the back of your cell, no worry, you will not eat.

If you do not have your hands up in the air and visible to the COs when they stop at your cell with the meals, no worry, you will not eat. Did I mention that sometimes the COs purposely forget to grab cups or utensils and they leave a person standing at the back of the cell with their hands up and visible while they go and grab it? And if you put your hands down without being told, you will not eat? Don't worry, one guard will keep watch at the door!

By Gabriel AKA Mafia, Pennsylvania

So, what is to be abolished? The mass incarceration of individuals based upon their race; their status as impoverished, poor, or lower class; their histories of abuse or addiction to substances. Prisons are massive storage warehouses for the poor, abused, and neglected citizens of our country.

Why are they targeted?

What does it do to these individuals and their families?

There need to be more community awareness campaigns that teach citizens about what is happening to these men and women both on the outside and on the inside. There needs to be more awareness of alternatives with proven track records of helping us without incarceration, as well as the rehabilitation centers and community organizations that provide these alternatives. Once we show that there are several organizations out there that care about us and want to see us succeed and reintegrated back into society successfully, then there will be less need for incarceration. This is where we need to put our focus. This is how abolition can be achieved.

We also achieve abolition by creating public campaigns and social media campaigns to teach our communities and our country about what mass incarceration is, what it does physically, mentally, and emotionally to these targeted men and women and their families and communities, making the public aware of the atrocities that us prisoners face each and every day inside these walls and cages. The inadequate and innutritious food that is given to us; the lack of quality medical care and treatment; the rampant racism and human rights abuses that occur.

We should also continue to gather support from our communities to approach our local council members and congressmen about our cause; bringing awareness to the living conditions inside these walls; and continuing to push our agenda to show the public why there needs to be more transparency from prison administrations to our council members and to our communities.

Abolition is achieved when alternatives to incarceration are implemented. Alternatives can include community services

and resources; systems designed to target each individual's needs in order to solve their issues; counseling and rehabilitation services for the addicted, afflicted, and mentally challenged individuals; community based organizations created by ex-offenders who will work with individuals to help develop personalized skills to be taught and shown to each unique individual. Other examples can include: job training and apprenticeship programs; affordable and quality housing; transportation packages that can be provided by probation and parole centers for bus passes so that we can get back and forth to work or to scheduled appointments; spiritual guidance initiatives pre and post release; mentoring and coaching positions for men and women who want to give back to their communities by helping our youth; building and funding businesses and organizations that are created by ex-offenders for ex-offenders; establishing a resource guide to implement in each jail, prison, or rehabilitation center on who and what organizations and employers would be willing to provide their love, care, and assistance to each ex-offender to help them transition back into our communities successfully.

We should look into designing a social media platform where we can all go to offer advice, help, or opportunities to build relationships with each other to tackle these common problems each of us face after a life of incarceration and enslavement by the prison industrial complex. Only we can help each other. We know the struggles we have faced. We know what it's like to be treated inhumanely. We know the challenges we each face. But we need to stand together against these inhumane and barbaric treatments by forming a network of likeminded groups all throughout this country that raise awareness about what happens to us that are considered unworthy of second chances. What are we going to do together to stand up for our rights and have our voices heard? We have to help each other. This is the only way to achieve abolition. Successful alternatives need to be presented to our communities, courts, and government.

By Devin Mergenthaler, Virginia

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## SOCIETY'S BLIND EYE

By Farmer John, Pennsylvania

When a convicted offender enters prison he is physically separated from society. He is no longer a threat to law-abiding citizens and his criminal activity has been halted; his liberty has been suspended and he can no longer enjoy free movement. These aspects of incarceration are obvious, and superficial. More importantly, what happens to the mind of the prisoner?

The moment a prisoner steps inside the prison walls a process of dehumanization begins. He is stripped of his meager personal property, stripped of his clothing, stripped of his dignity, his belief of justice, his hope, love, his mental stability, and he is stripped of every other attribute that makes up his humanity. Even the one thing he believes he will keep, his name, is taken away. He is no longer John or Joe or George, but has become a number. In an instant he goes from being a somebody to being a something, a non-entity. This number will haunt him for the rest of his life!

I have witnessed prisoners endure incredible degrees of physical punishment and maintain their health. On the other hand, I have seen physically strong men crack under the slightest psychological pressure.

Torture is defined as the act of inflicting pain as punishment or revenge. Psychological torture creates psychosis and a breed of permanently damaged prisoners who eventually become immune to pain and punishment. This immunity robs the prisoner of his natural human attributes of compassion, trust and forgiveness. Why, then, does the prison system continue to engage in such torturous behavior?

A lack of professionalism pervades the prison environment. Guards, the lowest rung in the ladder of command, usually have no more than a high school diploma or GED. Many have had brief military careers, which also only required minimal education qualifications. What is shocking is that the most educated staff members behave just as unprofessionally as the least educated. Medical doctors, wardens, psychologists, psychiatrists and counselors can be regularly observed participating in childish name-calling incidents with prisoners, committing flagrant breaches of duty, failing to respond to legitimate prisoner complaints, and so forth.

Consequently, it amazes me when prison staff members inform the parole board that prisoners have no respect

for authority, do not follow instructions, or have unsatisfactory institutional records—records that often are purposely falsified, extending prisoner's stays in prison, merely to satisfy some depraved obsession that their job is to punish rather than rehabilitate.

Prison is a place of punishment. Only the approval of misinformed citizens, who believe it serves their interests to treat prisoners harshly, allows prison officials to get away with employing the various forms of brutal and illegal punishment that, in many cases, reach or exceed the 'cruel and unusual' level prohibited by the US Constitution's Eighth Amendment.

Since society is obviously uninterested in the workings of the prison system that it has blindly supported, this prison drama is visible only within the prison environment. Change will occur only when transparency, oversight, accountability, and a desire by the prison system itself to rehabilitate rather than punish their charges is affected. Until that happens our prisons will continue to do nothing more than warehouse human beings, change them into angry, mentally damaged goods, then release them back upon society!

## SELECTIVE JUSTICE

By Michael 'Scientific' Rivera, Pennsylvania

As a matter of universal principle, I see justice as the 'Supreme Law of Nature', which is either the reward or penalty resulting from my own thoughts and actions. However, as a convicted murderer, I have learned that the actual application of social justice is an illusive, abstract ideal that is often sensationalized by politicians for their own professional gain; all the while, selective justice continues to be skewed unfairly against the economically disadvantaged by the very same governmental agencies responsible for interpreting and dispensing the laws of society as they see fit. Again, as a matter of principle, the Natural Law of Justice requires a certain measure of self-accountability on a personal level, in order for us to each fulfill our individual responsibilities to ourselves first, and to society in general secondly. However, as a matter of social law and order, selective justice is being arbitrarily doled out by the impersonal judicial constructs that formulate the amoral basis of the mass incarceration of marginalized minorities, which must be abolished if we are to fulfill our interpersonal responsibilities to the whole of humanity.

For example, here in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania where I pled guilty to third degree murder back in January of 2002, Justice is being selectively meted out by the 'Post-Conviction Relief Act' (PCRA, herein), codified at 42 Pa C S section section 9541 et seq. This statutory black hole has become the proverbial stopwatch that records the exact number of days, weeks, and months that a criminal defendant has to properly present and preserve their appellate claims to the courts for review before the expiration date of all their constitutional rights. In short, the PCRA requires that all claims for appellate review must be presented within one year from the date of sentencing, or those claims are then time-barred from being heard by any court, regardless of their constitutional merit. Which basically gives us one year to learn what usually takes law students an average of three years, and then we must translate our minimal knowledge of the law into an understandable—and hopefully successful—legal petition to the court, all in the name of constitutionally guaranteed equity.

Unfortunately, the bias inherent to the PCRA is not exclusive to the Pennsylvania appellate system alone, as its one-year time limitation parallels the federal 'Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act' (AEDPA, herein), codified at 28 U.S.C. section section 2241 et seq. This federal statute also limits the amount of time that criminal defendants, both state and federal, have to challenge the validity of their convictions. However, unlike the PCRA, the AEDPA allows for the possibility of statutory and/or equitable tolling, giving appellants a discretionary leeway to exhaust their state court remedies before it too prevents any 'untimely' claims from being heard by the court, regardless of their constitutional merit.

Nevertheless, both the PCRA and the AEDPA exist to put an end to the appellate process for fiscal reasons, at the cost of the freedom and rights of those of us who cannot afford to

pay the high price of selective justice. This is the venal reality of the broken appellate system as it exists today, which cannot be repaired, reformed, or replaced without first being abolished from the root to the fruit. Then, and only then, can the statutes of social law and order be rewritten and reinterpreted to fully serve a healthy, functional purpose for a society rooted in rehabilitation and reentry, rather than discriminatory punishment and the bottom dollar.

Ultimately, the fiscal need for the finality of criminal appeal seems to outweigh the call for social justice, which the general public is currently demanding, even in this present political climate that is rife with racism, sexism, and classism. The legislative intent of the statutory construction of all appellate boundaries, like the PCRA and the AEDPA, is being misconstrued and misinterpreted to keep poor people, who are ignorant of the law and cannot afford to purchase proper representation, from asserting our rights and receiving the constitutionally guaranteed equal protection fo the law. This has been the case in Pennsylvania since 1995!

A cursory review of the PCRA statute and its subsequent precedent will show that since 1995 that it was enacted, the PCRA has subsumed all other post-conviction remedies for appellate review, including the constitutionally guaranteed writ of habeas corpus. And with the AEDPA mirroring the PCRA's time-bar limitations on the federal level, the context of all appellate claims has become more important than the content of my appeals, which in essence nullifies the very same values and principals they claim to represent and uphold. Where is the fairness for unrepresented appellants with constitutional violations that are considered to be 'untimely?' Where is the justice for those of us being discriminated against because of our economic station?

By now it is evident that this unjust disservice affects me personally, as I am currently serving an illegal sentence as a result of a plea agreement that was breached by the commonwealth at the time of my original sentencing hearing. However, because I could not afford to pay a professional advocate to properly present my appellate claims in a timely fashion, my constitutional rights have now expired, and my illegal sentence must be served in its entirety, regardless of the commonwealth's contractual obligations to uphold my negotiated plea agreement as it was originally written, agreed upon, and then accepted by the court. Therefore, I highlight the selective justice I and countless others are being subjected to, in hopes that some meaningful dialogue and discourse can jump-start the process of abolishing such an obviously broken system, so that the voiceless and forgotten can be heard and remembered as equal members of the same society we are paying our dues to. As Archbishop William Temple once said, "No man is a prisoner and nothing else."

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Many people are outraged—and rightfully so—about president Trump's pledge to build a wall between the U.S. and Mexico. Yet some of those same people support building many walls within the U.S. I am speaking of prison walls, which exclude a large number of people from society, disproportionately those who are already downtrodden and marginalized. Doing so adds insult to injury, stripping away even the small chance of success from people who have been dealt a bad hand right from the start. Instead of more Band-Aid fixes, how about addressing the bad policies that are the primary cause of the problem: Social, educational, and employment inequalities that lead to hunger, homelessness, joblessness and the like. If government is serious about public welfare, it needs to refocus its efforts to improve people's lives and eliminate the despair that puts them on the road to incarceration. Each incarcerated member of society is an indictment of ineffective governance.

John, Massachusetts

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# DREAMKILLERS

By Timothy Johnson, Pennsylvania

I was born into a world of turmoil. Both of my parents were casualties of the U.S. government's assault on inner cities via the crack epidemic. My father was killed in a bank robbery before my second birthday. The trauma was so devastating to my mother, she sank to unspeakable lows in her free-fall into drug addiction.

As a toddler, I had constant dental problems, because in order to make sure my little sister and I could eat, I would store food on the roof of my mouth and share it with her when we would be without a meal for a day or two. The problems were so unbearable, my grandmother kidnapped us from my mom. Eva Johnson, my grandmother, was the best human being to walk this earth in my eyes. She was all the mother I could ever ask for. She taught me the meaning of unconditional love, and in turn I blossomed into an honor roll student as a child.

In fifth grade, while I was in private school preparing my grandmother for Christmas holiday, my sister and I were called to see our counselors, who informed us on the day before Christmas Eve that our grandmother had died. My life was shattered. Completely and utterly destroyed. I can't explain in words the effect this had on me, but I will say this: After all the pain I'd experienced so early in my life, the love that my grandmother gave me, sacrificing her golden years to provide a sense of stability for her dead son's children, birthed a fire inside me. A desire to live up to a standard that would make her proud of me. A desire to be the best person I could be; to leave a mark on this world and be an example of positivity overcoming all obstacles.

Despite all I had been through and all I would go through afterwards, that fire would never be extinguished... Until I entered the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. I am currently serving my 8th year upstate for delivery of six hundredths of a gram of crack cocaine, which is smaller than a sunflower seed. Add to that the fact that I was not supposed to be convicted of the crime by law because the chain of custody on the drugs used as evidence was broken and the drugs were shown in court to be compromised. Yet, here in prison I sit, eight years later. Imagine sitting in your cell watching CNN as they discuss a teenage drunk driver, whose third DUI results in four deaths, who gets off completely because his defense is that he is too wealthy to know between right or wrong or be punished because of it. How would you feel about the system?

Here's the facts: the system is irreparably broken; the US Government is aware of meaningful alternatives to mass incarceration that are cost-effective and is intentionally refusing to explore these options or even engage in dialogue on the subject. This is not about crime prevention. It's about population control. In the U.S. Constitution, American citizens have the right to change the way government works, to the extent that we even have the right to form militias to make our voices heard. These are the guarantees our forefathers made to ensure that our government would remain "for the people, by the people."

What better way to combat this, than to criminalize the populace, and strip them of their aforementioned rights upon conviction? Again, this is not about money, race, or rehabilitation.

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Being a 57-year-old man, imprisoned the first time in 1975, in and out of prisons, jails, and rehabs all my life, almost 33 years, prison was like my second home. You would think I am insane. No violence, just crimes of theft. Drugs have always been the reason for these crimes. I think there's insanity inside of us all, doing the same things over and over again, expecting a different result. The most common one: Your job you are working 7 days a week, 9 to 5, eating and doing the same thing 7 days a week, and complaining about how everything is the same, that you're not getting ahead. Is that insanity? Who is to say? For one person it's normal, to others it's an act of insanity.

Timothy Mark Dodge, Pennsylvania

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This is all about power! The power to bend legislation to favor a minute portion of our society to the detriment of everyone else.

Think about economics. Economics is the science of distributing limited resources in the face of unlimited need. Think about that, and then think about what happens when you lock away a significant portion of society, people who no longer have the purchase power to drain the worlds' limited surplus of resources. They are now placed on an allowance of resources, a rather insignificant one at that. To make matters worse, these prisoners are required to work in the prisons, to maintain the stability of the institution, for slave wages, and they do it. One may assume that this would have a positive effect on the economy, but the effect couldn't be more negative.

Not only are you locking away people who may or may not drain certain resources, you're locking away potential taxpayers. Trillions of tax dollars unrealized, while my country drowns in delinquency. This shows the blatant disregard for fiscal responsibility in favor of population control/power and I want no part of it.

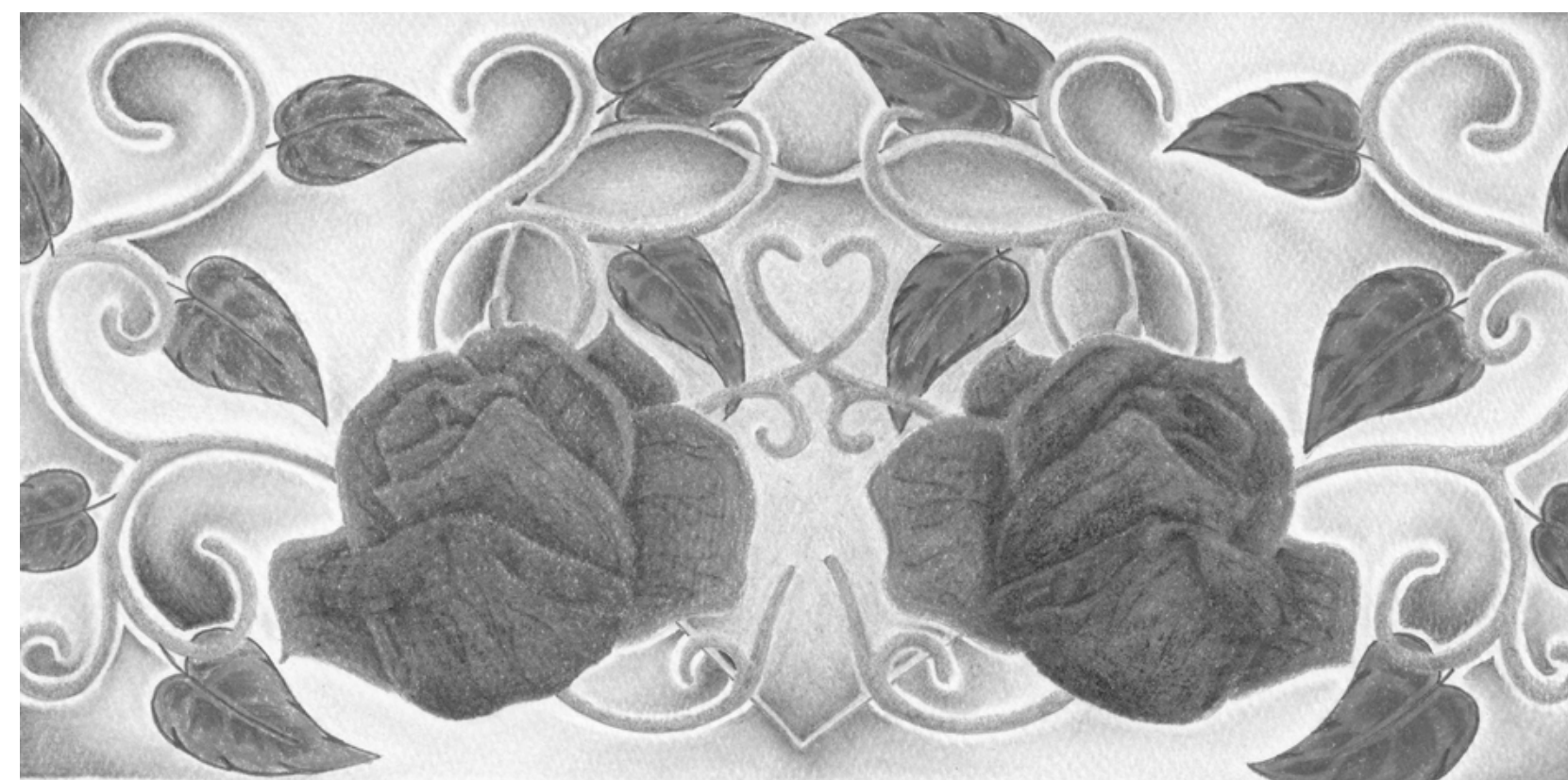
I come from a big city. Growing up with no parents, after my grandma died, I moved from family member to family member, enduring verbal and physical abuse. I remember vividly the beatings I took to keep my aunt's husband from molesting my little sister, but through it all, I remained determined to do good, to contribute to society and be a positive role model.

As a teen, I worked for Y.O.A.C.A.P. (Youth Outreach Adolescent Community AIDS Program) touring the east coast, talking to kids my age about the dangers of drug use, violence, and unprotected sex. None of this was considered at my sentencing. I remember coming home after talking to kids, and getting beaten bloody by my legal guardian, who only kept me for my SSI check.

Through it all, the fire still blazed within me. The desire to be a positive example for people... Until the prison system became my home. Until I was railroaded by my own court-appointed attorney. Until I was forced to be governed and harassed by guards who wouldn't have the courage to look me in my eyes on the street. Until I was told when to sleep, where to sit, when to eat, when to wash, when to stand for count.

I've been subjected to many injustices by the prison system, I've come to the realization that I've been completely stripped of my humanity. I'm nothing more than biological fuel. As long as I'm alive in prison, I'm fueling the very system that enslaves and degrades me. Needless to say, I've had numerous suicide attempts and I'll always be able to look at the scar across my wrist as a reminder of how close I came to allowing the system to kill me... because that's what the system does to you: It kills you bit by bit, day by day, and those who choose to live with life sentences become the walking dead.

I should finally be released in February or March, but I will never forget the experience or the people I'll be leaving behind. Standing by and doing nothing isn't an option for me. Resistance is everything.



by Timothy Mark Dodge, Pennsylvania

## DESTINED TO BE

By Kevin Marinelli, Pennsylvania

The face of death  
is a joy to behold  
after living in  
a world so cold

I am a monster  
you created  
and yet the one  
you've so hated

How else can I be  
than how you made me  
you get what you see  
as I've always been me

Making mistakes, as we all do  
I've hurt others, it's true  
for this I heartily say  
I'm very sorry

But it was fated to be  
by circumstances beyond me  
and my flawed personality  
a ruin for all to see

No love was to be had  
for one destined to be bad  
raised up for "evil"  
made the world's devil

Though mercy I seek  
and love I desire  
It's me you forsake  
and cast into the fire

Innocent into the world I came  
but surely couldn't remain  
remember who's to blame  
the world that caused this pain.

## FROM POVERTY TO POWER

By Daniel Porter, Pennsylvania

Surrounded by the enemy,  
like a wounded lion lying and dying in  
the frying sun, with vultures flying above  
waiting for my last breath to rise up and out  
of my lungs, lying in the blood soaked grass  
waiting for death to come...

I could surrender and close my  
eyes forever, slipping into the world behind  
the lids of darkness one last time

But I refuse to be remembered as  
a slave for that forever,  
so surrender shall I never...

I've gotta dig deep and rise  
to my feet before the oppressed  
sinks his teeth into my flesh and  
starts to eat, like a ravenous wolf devours  
the sheep; I must survive and rise  
to my feet, and become a shepherd  
amongst the sheep...

Once we rise unto our feet and  
build a fleet, a troop and seat  
within the house of crooked creeps we'll  
bring it down and close its gates,  
we'll make it right the wrongs of this disgrace  
and make the world a better place.

# PRISON LIVES MATTER

By George Hopkins, Pennsylvania

Ask the question: Do prison lives matter? While some may shake their heads in agreement, there is another group of people that would adamantly disagree. Even the 13th amendment condemns a person that once was a citizen to active slavery if they are ever convicted of a crime. And more times than not, this amendment is what keeps a person's mind clouded from ever seeing the truth. However, I intend to lay some things out that will hopefully compel one to see it from a different light. If we ascertain the meaning of slavery (or slave) we'll all concur that a slave could never be a citizen and vice-versa. To show and prove this, we know that a citizen can vote, but a person convicted of a crime cannot exercise that right.

So again I ask: Do prison lives matter? If so, why are we so easily regarded as nothing? In prison, we are no longer a name, but instead a number (or walking dollar signs), and subjected to inhumane acts so frequently. No matter how strong a person claims to be our sanity is far from impervious. After going from Grade-A food, to B and C, which barely keeps us upright—as the nutrients, protein and vitamins are non-existent. With little to no energy it's virtually impossible to activate your mental faculty for fear of draining the little life you have in you completely out. The water

we are afforded to drink—the color and stench—proves to be of no luxury whatsoever!

To have your freedom stripped from you isn't enough. No, not to them! Guards come in here with the pure intent to usurp the happiness we find by exercising the misplaced authority that comes along with their job title. Whether it's looking down their nose at us, belligerence, constant verbal abuse, unnecessary random and rigorous shakedowns, strip searches and a myriad of other things that would beat a dead horse until it was alive.

Communication is a necessity of the universe that all walks of life (even the sun, moon, and stars) employ to further their existence in the future. However, we are deprived of this natural ability to converse with our families and loved ones except for how they see fit. And that alone will perpetuate a revolving door of savagery. It's no wonder the recidivism rate is 60 plus percent. Especially when you know the educational system is just a hoax placed within to make it seem as if they are advocating rehabilitation. So inmates obtain GEDs as easily as breathing because the teachers that work here could care less whether or not a person is actually successful once they are integrated back into society. The programs that are fur-

nished here do everything except teach a person a job trade or how to search for one, how to conduct themselves in an interview or how to accept failure when we are not afforded the job that we need to survive in the real world. And why would they? Wouldn't that spell disaster for their livelihood to school us in the proper training of civilization, which would ultimately diminish the prison population, and then where would they work?

So again I ask the question: Do prison lives matter? If so, why are we treated worse than animals? How is that so? How can prisoners become better fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, workers, managers and bosses, and the most exigent productive citizens in society without the proper programs and assistance from the people that work in these facilities? It would be sheer idiocy to assume that one would, could, and should elevate to higher planes of humanity if for nothing more than the fact that we're handled like the scum of the planet earth. But I once read that you can tell the civilization of a country by its prisoners, and if that's the truth, wouldn't it be wise to uplift said people?

Prison, for me, was seen as a minor roadblock when I thought that I would not be getting a lot of time and I did not know the full ramifications of my breaking the law. Once I saw, however, that I was condemned to decades upon decades of incarceration, I planned to amputate a foot in order to get a sentence modification and protest my sentence. A lawyer talked me out of it, though, saying it would not work. I was also taking medication at the time and mental health doctors and staff say that that had something to do with the change of mind.

There seems to be no point in our incarceration, except to keep us off the street temporarily. Every day is a taking away, a crippling and embittering experience. There is generally no healing and virtually no rehabilitation, or education. Most of us leave here worse than we came in.

Prison often tends to institutionalize people and make them more dependent rather than independent. Not only can work skills or training be lacking, but after living for years with having every aspect of our lives micromanaged, having to make our own decisions can be overwhelming. Many—terrified of being on the outside again, quickly reoffend—coming back to the world that they know. Some commit suicide.

I know this sounds counterintuitive and even unbelievable to people who not only have never been sent to prison, but have always been taught that the system is “corrective” and purposely made to be unpleasant so offenders won't return. The PIC, however, is not corrective and treating people like garbage tends to make them believe they are garbage and worthy of more of the same treatment.

Now I realize that prison, the penal system, and government's

enforcement of the lifelong status of sub citizens are all antithetical to what is just and humane. These systems usually do not make allowance for a person's changing for the better. It is only human to change, but the PIC mostly acknowledges the worst in us.

The “criminal justice system” can be likened to a bear trap—disfiguring and merciless. It is built mostly to convict and incarcerate no matter the circumstances or mitigating factors. Some of the “win and imprison at any cost” mindset this system espouses is illustrated in its egregious handling of the mentally ill. The “insanity defense” also known as the Affirmative Defense of Mental Illness or Defect in trial, is not like it is often depicted on TV. On TV, the defendants are, many times, smug and clearly faking a mental illness. The prosecutor rails against this misuse of the justice system but, in the end, is triumphant, vindicated, and proudly justified in the defense and pursuit of the truth. In my situation, the prosecutor also won his argument at trial—claiming that I had faked a mental illness, however, in the real world his office plays a dual role that you might find ironic.

After successfully getting the jury to ignore two doctors who testified as professional witnesses, and a paper trail of mental health records since the age of six, the prosecutors office is now, conversely, prepared to defend the prison doctor's declaration that I am so psychotic, I must be medicated against my will. Such perversity in law cannot be made up, but is emblematic of what goes on in the so-called criminal justice system.

By Azazel, Connecticut

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Abolition of life without parole, of long prison sentences, and of solitary confinement (I was kept in solitary confinement for 37 years, and had to file a costly lawsuit to convince the federal court to order my release). That'll help abolish the prison industrial complex, because it won't be as profitable anymore! And it's achievable.

CeTewayo, Pennsylvania

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The prison system should be abolished because it creates harm rather than correcting problems or issues. The point of having prisons is to resolve the issues that lead to the crimes being committed, not to make them worse or to capitalize off of them. Those employed in the “Security Development Field” have often, by their actions, proven themselves to be more corrupt than those who are actually incarcerated. This is why, for example, the DOJ is investigating the Virginia Department of Corrections.

Most open minded people want to change for the better, but not everyone has the communication skills to verbally express themselves. As a result, some act out for help or attention, in order not to end up dead or worse. Prisons and correctional centers should be converted over to Mental Health Facilities, Counseling Centers, Educational Buildings, committed to finding the roots of why crimes are occurring and preventing them from reoccurring or from happening period.

We need mental health facilities designed for individuals who are proven to not be able to think for themselves, or do not comprehend as well as expected. We need spaces for people who need twenty-four hour care including medical attention with programming to assist with transitioning or just staying as mentally active as possible.

We need counseling centers, not only for the youth, but for teens, and for adults who have some sort of problem that may lead to something more. Centers to assist broken families or

homes without positive role models and guidance.

We need educational buildings, to help those less fortunate to attend college and get out of this system. We need multi level programs that teach different trades, for example auto repair, maintenance repairs (buildings, warehouses, houses, apartments, and so forth), computer software or engineering, and so on. This would certify them to be able to obtain employment once the program is complete and the program pays for the labor done as it will be hands on.

As for punishment, there are other forms that may be pursued that aren't inhumane or cruel, forms of punishment that also allow individuals to understand why: House arrest, community service, and others that communities may themselves see as fit. Options should be provided that help struggling families and people and support the new generation, providing the opportunity to contribute to society, to inspire each other and not keep on knocking people down when already down. We must show the injustice system that not only is their way unjust, but it is not needed in this new form of life and for this new generation.

Our choices now will not only determine our own lives, but also the lives of others and the generations to come!

By Edward, Virginia



by Darrell Hann, New Jersey

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I think that what prisons perpetuate ultimately has a far more negative impact on society than the crime for which one is sentenced. The inhumane treatment of prisoners by their jailers is proof that all men are transgressors; getting caught acting on that opportunity is the separator. Far too many people derive their income from the criminal justice system, courts, cops, jailers, infrastructure and supplies, etc. Until we move from the 17th century Pentecostal philosophy of punishment, we will be stuck in this cyclical social rut.

Francis, Virginia

# WHY MIGHT WE ABOLISH THE PIC

By J-Kayne AKA John M. Kosmestatos, New York

For countless years, the prison industrial complex has capitalized off of slave produced goods. They continue to generate a profit by sabotaging our revolutionary movements and attacking our poverty stricken communities. All in an effort to fill positions in their multi-billion dollar industry. Children go without their parents, leaving them less likely to ever successfully break the chain. A seemingly never ending cycle is taking place. This is the most prominent reason we have to continue our work at abolishing the prison industrial complex.

The PIC operates by keeping our communities oppressed and in a state of abject poverty. This is executed by fascist style police forces masquerading under the fictitious motto: protect and serve. What is closer to the truth would be, persecute and swindle. Through policing, they harvest our soldiers, providers, and family members to work their 'plantations' for the 'slave masters' that have become our government. With slaves to generate product and the state footing the bill for raw materials, the PIC prospers. Through inhumane, degrading, harsh penalties for refusing to work, and psychological abuse the 'slave masters' attempt to train the 'slaves' in the same way that took place

during the colonial days. No rehabilitation takes place and inmates' needs are never actually addressed in a real effort to reintegrate and reform.

By abolishing the PIC, we have the opportunity to become more focused on community based alternatives and learning to solve our own problems. Centered on this foundation, we can rebuild the neighborhoods that our oppressor has allowed to deteriorate and rot around our feet. John Africa's MOVE movement was famous for this form of self governance. However, it led to police forces, capitalist swine, and the PIC destroying their entire organization. All because they feared the unity shown by these men and women. Their movement threatened the very power structure of the PIC and its cohorts. These are the terrorist style tactics being employed to keep the atrocity of slavery alive and well. Prison has become America's slave trade as bonds are traded on inmates' 'straw man' to generate capital for the state. On top of that, the slave labor produces marketable goods that are then sold at an inflated rate via Corcraft in NYS and other industries nationwide. This is the reason why the PIC must be abolished and torn down brick by brick. While it continues to operate, our progress will remain stagnated. Our

communities will continue to lack the male and female 'role model' figures that the PIC is designed to enslave and capitalize off of. Only we can make the decision to fight.

As a whole, we must unite and set aside our petty differences. There is no other way for us to take action against these monsters operating in our midst. Prisoners need to become more informed and more involved with pro-abolition movements. Stop being afraid of the PIC and it's retaliation! Advise your loved ones to volunteer for protests, rallies, and marches. Orchestrate revolution and lead the people in this war against oppression and the PIC. We, inmates, are on the front lines and in the trenches. No one can see the situation more clearly. So I ask my incarcerated enslaves brothers and sisters to open their eyes. Stop being blinded by their lies, deception, and manipulation, and unite. Society, our urban communities have to do the same! Share my vision and maybe, we can abolish slavery once and for all. To abolish the PIC, there can be no retreat, no submission, no surrender. All those who claim you are a soldier, I say this: Fight the power. Fight the PIC. Because Freedom is a must.

I am a juvenile lifer in Pennsylvania. I have 32 years on record. They say slavery was abolished on paper in 1868 by the 13th amendment. But if this is true then why are there so many prisons and prisoners across our so beloved country? Who is getting paid for the millions in prison? Justice isn't in the proper form when you consider state spending on their prisons. The state's financial system and the state's prisons are one. To speak of one without the other is like going in the yard to take a shower in the dirt to clean yourself. The Pennsylvania prison system is corrupt and throws everything on to prisoners when something goes wrong. Take the violence reduction program: They tell us, "if you don't fight or stab each other in the winter months, we'll let you have a choice between lockout and yard." However, in the summertime they don't actually let you choose yard. Last summer, when this happened, seven inmates were stabbed within three months with four staff assaults. This is why the new form of slavery is top of the line. Mental shackles! Why? Because no one wants to believe the truth.

Kenneth Bryant Bey, Pennsylvania

## THE STRUGGLE WE'RE FACING TODAY

By Righteous Arvel, Virginia

Frederick Douglas once said, "Without struggle there's no progress." However, Black people always seem to make struggle an excuse to be lethargic and irresponsible. Take a good look at the Black man today. He no longer represents the man of the house or provider, because he doesn't even believe in himself. Why is that? Well, maybe it's because of the constant failure due to discrimination and vocational opposition.

We will never be free as long as we keep falling victim by supporting their Prison Industrial Complex. If we continue to allow the system to treat us with injustice, we will continue to be slaves. Read the 13th Amendment thoroughly and ask yourself what does the word "except" represent? In fact, just look at the Prison Industrial Complex and how they monopolized the free labor market once again.

There's nothing free about this country when it comes to minorities. We are victims of inequality, because whatever we do, say, or try will always have a higher consequence than anyone else. This is their house and their rules which can also be recognized as "Social Indifferences." S.I. is when the larger group sets the standard, or laws, for the smaller group based on majority, status, class, gender, or race. So it's safe to say that our hate and greed comes from a long

discriminating process of separation and economical deprivation.

No wonder crime is so high in most low income communities. Being deprived of opportunities forced us to find other ways to create our own opportunities regardless of whether it's productive or destructive. Criminal behavior is learned behavior which means it became a skill rather than survival. Therefore the consequences of going to prison or death are not so different than living in poverty. I know that sounds crazy, but to those who are living in this reality every day it's completely normal.

This kind of behavior is what causes dissatisfaction and dissatisfaction causes anger. Anger causes us to react instead of thinking due to constant deprivation. Deprivation causes desperation and desperation causes criminalization. In other words, insufficient circumstances forced us to adapt to impoverished conditions, because projects, or the hood, are designed to cause disappointment. However, to accept this reality is to accept slavery. It's time for the youth to STEP UP, because we need their energy to keep the revolution alive.

Just because oppression is no longer in your face physically does not mean it's over. Indirect oppression is just as brutal, because mental abuse assassinates your character and intelligence forever. We have to stand now to avoid defeat

later. The youth need to study their ancestors' mistakes and successes so that they can be victorious in the future.

Hatred will always exist in this country, because everyone envies how gifted and intelligent we are when we apply ourselves. We can overcome anything as long as we come together. We got a Black president in office, but it still didn't stop the hate. Trump woke us up from that dream when he said, "Let's make America great again." Eight years could never change 462 years of subjugation.

The revolution is in our blood, because we've been genetically trained to struggle for generation after generation. Therefore it's our nature to overcome adversity and adapt to any civilization known to man. We've been kidnapped, sold, beaten, and killed yet we still found a way to express our originality through music, dance, writing, and culture. How can you detest something as beautiful as the Original People? When you truly love yourself for who you are, you will love your brothers and sisters for those same reasons. We have to put an end to fratricide which is indirect suicide on ourselves. Love and education frees the mind to liberate itself from fear, which is the essence of slavery. Therefore, to know thyself is to learn who you are no matter where you're at in life. So the real question is, WHO ARE YOU?

Countless reasons exist but the fundamental truth is that the prison's existence is counterproductive on every level. First and foremost, the human level. Prisons are a swamp of dehumanization. Actively stripping people of their identities, making them no more than a "criminal" with a number and lifelong stigma. Haven't we learned from Abu Ghraib, Full Metal Jacket, My Lai, and Zimbardo's Stanford prison experiment what total institutions unleash? Without humanity, people become merely empty bodies, so easily used as tools of destruction and devoid of all joy. No wonder gang activity increases rather than decreases behind bars. When cast out so fully and offered so little hope, belonging anywhere becomes appealing.

No one is but one role, one dimension. Even the most incorrigible folks here are also sons, fathers, husbands, friends, artists, dreamers, and so much more. And all Americans are "criminals" because all have broken laws many times. The distinction is arbitrary and the laws written by those intending to criminalize precisely the behaviors common to those groups without power that they may never get it. Is this national ideal of individual freedom for all truly to be so easily and permanently subsumed by the miasma of institutionalism? Additionally, no one should ever profit from misery, from pain, from locking humans in cages.

The way that so many governments, agencies, organizations, and worst of all, corporations stay bloated on the blood of millions makes them ticks and leeches of this bog. Have you ever seen the profit margins for private companies in the prison industry, taking advantage of the least privileged, gouging a literally captive market place? Those companies have enough to successfully lobby for state laws that guarantee their private prisons stay full.

Should we ever legislate mandatory levels of incarceration even before a crime has been committed? It is not a coincidence that when the "drug war" and manufactured moral panics about poor "super predators" provided cultural justification for mass incarceration, that was the end of balanced budgets, well-funded schools, and efficient social programs. If you have ever been inside, you know that the vast majority of "rehabilitative programming" is lip service, an excuse to milk coffers by simply checking administrative boxes.

The reality is human warehousing that makes many people money and wins many votes (also lucrative) but just costs taxpayers and the families of those behind bars. It amounts to a financial matrix, bodies being sucked dry of their fiscal potential by a parasitic species that produces nothing but its own continuation. Plus, with a thriving system of incarceration, the biggest losers are the rest of us. No matter how much anyone wants to believe otherwise, it does not ever strengthen a community to take so many people away from it. And how could it benefit the masses to saddle for life so many young men and women with onerous burdens, foreshortened chances, and limited rights? What do we expect to happen to so many children who grow up with their best chance to see their fathers and mothers is by joining them behind bars?

I've seen penitentiary family reunions. They are coated in bitter, only a hint of sweet. In these circumstances, everyone else in society is forced to take up the slack, financially, familiarly, and educationally. When you disrupt communities and create a large class of shamed, shadowed "them" it is "us" who end up paying the price.

By Alex M., Virginia

We are talking about a system that has made law and justice a business. Ruin whole families lives so that another segment of the population can have a paycheck! Human lives and suffering on the scale of millions. We are a divided population, everyone with their own list of societal ills. And everybody's list is most important. When will people realize a unified society is what is needed. We have to identify, collectively, the most pressing problems. Do I have a solution? All I got is hope.

Harold, New Hampshire

## REBIRTH OF REVOLUTION

By J-Kayne AKA John M. Kosmestatos, New York

Revolution and rebellion beginneth  
with dissent among the mass,  
Patriots loyal to the ideologies a nation is founded upon,  
uprise in tragic class

Bastards with no fatherland to lead,  
lead themselves in unification  
Before all ends, the din of battle sounds;  
bringing death; putrification

Or possibly purification, a nation reborn; REBIRTH!

While corrupt tyrannical demons sell their souls,  
with the devil they do choose to flirt  
Snickering snidely, they knoweth not of their own demise

For destruction had bred contempt;  
revolution had chosen to RISE  
Groping, clawing, filth ridden; it crawls out from rotted grave  
Coffin shattered, splintered board

and blood soaked slivers for political knives  
Born again, rebellion birthed;  
suckled upon the breasts of liberty and justice

Lies, moldy, corroded, and charred;  
spewing hate they whisper, "Trust Us."  
Never again will we fall victim to blind obedience,  
nor coddle these venomous impudent whelps

Nor shall they continue to degrade our nation  
for it is a personification of self  
Nay, we choose to fight  
as the warriors of ancient Rome, Sparta and Egypt  
Revolting, no longer in darkness,  
for we've conquered this government's eclipse.

To those who stand for naught,  
your soul shall shatter and be decimated  
For traitors and cowards die a 1,000 deaths  
and their resting places are desecrated.  
Freedom... Fought and died for...  
the blood of martyr's brings Empires to heel.  
"Give me liberty or give me death,"  
a concept I refuse to conceal.  
Revered, I revel in honor; Our sons, the dawn is close.  
Time for patriots to rise: to the beckon call...  
Of Revolution's Ghost.

## UNTITLED

By De'Vontae, New York

On future's key,  
My mind obsessed.  
In quiet determination  
To fulfill my quest.

A quest of freedom  
Is my hearts desire.  
Away from reality  
In the prison world of liars.

Away from here,  
In the world of hate and greed.

Where humans are reduced  
To the lowest, and off each  
Others choose to feed.

A treasure of memories  
From yesterday, and fut-  
Ure dreams held dear is  
The very thing that keeps  
Me sane, in this prison  
Cell year after year. The  
Pain and skeet cannot  
Be explained.

The depth is far too great.  
In knowing within yourself,  
There's many years to wait.  
Within each man he hides the hurt,  
That slowly eats inside.  
Painted smiles on sorrows face,  
Each one they try to hide.  
Be strong they must in reality's mist,  
Or themselves they do destroy.  
For the future is not clear by any means,  
With so much time to toy.



Rebirth of Revolution  
by J-Kayne, New York

## SPIRALLING ARROWS

By Ms. Pat's Son, New York

If every one of cupid's spiraling arrows  
were to hit their targets  
whenever Donald Trump tells a lie, trust and believe –  
the whole world would be in love!

Sweet but shameful.  
Sick, twisted, and deliberate.  
He lies without effort;  
And with the ease it takes a toad to leap  
from one lily pad to the next.

Yet he was "duly elected."  
The President of the United States,  
high-stepped "his way" to the  
highest office in the land;  
while at the expense of the handi-cap,  
and extolling the debauchery of a wayward hand!

Damn...

As a nation what have we become?  
Insensitive accomplices, perhaps.  
Or maybe we're "monsters."

Friends who just couldn't resist the release of that  
vicious, pernicious, inner-beast!

For it showed in the polls, when we elected that troll.  
Over sixty-million votes for a white hood, and a rope.  
Yet all could've been saved, including the day;  
Had cupid's spiraling arrows just all fell astray.

## CAGED

By Bryan Weaver, Pennsylvania

I want people to know how it feels to be caged  
Where everyday I am oppressed and I see rage  
Never thought I would be a book or even part of its page  
Being in prison your image part of it fades  
Far away from the man I once was made  
Trapped in a place your family can't come to save  
Blood wash over the grounds I once played  
If I had to choose I will choose a grave  
Than to be confined even for one second in this cage



by Azazel, Connecticut

Slavery never was abolished, it was merely reformed. In 1865, the billion dollar industrial empire known as the American prison system was born, thanks to the passage of the 13th Amendment. This amendment is viewed by history as a great step forward for our nation, especially for African Americans, however the 13th Amendment was not intended to liberate the African American people from bondage, it's purpose was merely to destroy the economic power of the south and the confederacy. The freeing of slaves was merely, simply, a result and effect of the amendment, not its primary objective. Within that amendment it states that slavery was to be abolished except in the case of prisoners, at which time slavery can be used as a form of punishment.

Basically, it states that it is no longer legal to own another individual "unless they've committed a crime". As a result, slavery became more pow-

erful and profitable than ever before. The boundaries of slavery were expanded, not destroyed. It was no longer limited to the south, or to African Americans. It was no longer black and white, it was green, gold, and silver... Slavery became an all-american industry. The wardens of prisons became the new slave masters, leasing out the labor of their prisoners, or slaves, to manufacture products in the name of the almighty dollar. More and more laws were passed, to funnel more and more slaves, or criminals, into their labor camps. We were given numbers, to which we were to identify by, just like the victims of World War II.

I am not a proponent of absolute lawlessness and chaos, for even as an individual labeled a "career criminal", I willfully admit that there must be a scale in which to weigh justice. Some believe that anarchy means absolute lawless society without structure. However, the very defini-

tion of anarchy states "social structure without government". Therefore, even in anarchy, there must be structure. We as a society can not let our loved ones be murdered without appropriate reprisal. However, turning our "wrongdoers", people with mental illness, the poor, etc. into slaves to make a buck off of is not justice and it must be abolished.

We must demobilize and decentralize the prison system and expose it for the money making corrupt cesspool of injustice that it is. But in order for our voices to be heard, and our alternative methods to be taken into account, we must be able to present a "replacement" and reasonable substitute for that in which we wish to rectify. We need all of our voices, all of our collective creative juices, to come together to make our dream a conscious reality. There is no power like the power of the people.

By Daniel Porter, Pennsylvania

# WHY MUST WE ABOLISH THE PIC?

By Supreme (Craig Saunders), Pennsylvania

The failure to develop a clear and precise answer to this question has resulted in our inability to make substantial progress towards the abolition of the PIC. Without an answer, there can be no agenda or strategy to accomplish the desired goal. The question brought to mind the movie 'The Matrix', when the Merovingian said to Neo and his comrades something to the effect of: Beneath our poised appearance, the truth is we are completely out of control. Causality: There is no escape from it, we are forever slaves to it. Our only hope, our only peace is to understand it, to understand the 'why'. 'Why' is what separates us from them, you from me. 'Why' is the only real social power, without it you are powerless.

Without any serious discussion of why the PIC should be abolished, it will not be abolished—we won't have the power to abolish it. The reason, the cause, the why will be the motivating factor necessary to overcome all the obstacles that will be encountered in the process. There may be many people working to abolish the PIC, claiming they want to abolish it, but beneath their posed appearance, the truth is that much of the work being done will not be a means to the end of the long established, well-funded institutions that make up the PIC. I suspect that if the discussion is actually undertaken, 'we' will find out there is more than one 'we' that wants to abolish it and the various groups likely have different 'whys'. Liberals, progressives, conservatives, Republicans, Democrats, capitalists, socialists, communists, different races, and different classes, those that have been through the PIC and those that haven't, will likely all have different 'whys'. Some people will have political 'whys', and some will have economic, charitable, legal, or moral 'whys'. This should not preclude us or them from working together. But, it will impact and inform how to work together and how the goal will actually be accomplished.

Someone once said that he who has a strong enough why can bear almost any how. In this light, the more appropriate question would have been, 'do we have a strong enough why to do what it will take to abolish the PIC?'

From my own point of view, as a Black man subject to the PIC, I see the reason why as a continuation, an extension, of the same struggle that began on the continent of Afrika and continues to this day. It is the manifestation, and emergence, of

what Vincent Harding called 'the river of our struggle in this land.' He explained, and demonstrated, the metaphor that Black people's struggle in Amerika is a 'long, continuous movement, flowing like a river, sometimes powerful, tumultuous, and roiling with life; at other times meandering and turgid, covered with the ice and snow of seemingly endless winters, all too often streaked and running with blood.'

With this in mind, the struggle to abolish the PIC is a tribute to, and in honor of, our ancestors that came before us fighting on the continent of Afrika to avoid becoming slaves, who fought to destroy slavery here, and then to end the era of Jim Crow. At the same time, the struggle now is in recognition of the generations to come—our children and grandchildren. It is a responsibility to work towards the abolishment of the PIC in order to make life better for them, as others did for us. It is an obligation to the next generation to make sure they are not subject to the PIC and the damage it causes.

The PIC must be abolished because, understanding the history and legacy of the Thirteenth Amendment, it is obviously an extension of slavery; it is a reformulation of the slave mode; it is a reconstruction of the slave state. There are more people subject to the PIC today, than were on plantations going into the Civil War—this includes those on probation and parole. The PIC destroys families, communities, and prevents people from self-realization and self-actualization in ways similar to chattel slavery before the Civil War. The PIC ensures the continuation of the economic exploitation and political subjugation that began during chattel slavery. The PIC must be abolished to bring about any possibility of real freedom, justice, and equality. As long as it continues to exist, Black and Brown people will continue to be disproportionately the targets and victims of the PIC.

The fact that the struggle to abolish the PIC exists is a good sign that the river is still flowing, still powerful, and still roiling with life. The obligation to see to it the river never stops flowing is a strong enough why to bear almost any how.

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I wish to be seen, I demand to be heard, I call for the masses to unite with one word: *NO*. Until the public has a solution to their fears and believes in their power to bring change and to hold those responsible liable, prisons will never cease to exist. I have been raped, assaulted, and continually sexually harassed by correctional officers while in the Virginia Department of Corrections super maximum unit. I have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria by two psychiatrists but am being denied treatment (hormone therapy, sex reassignment surgery, or feminine clothing, etc.). I am forcibly subject to a cavity search by a male every time I leave my cell! This is the cancer society is so proud of!

Ja-Qui' Tha Earth Camellia

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## GET IN TOUCH

We appreciate any comments or feedback on this paper. If you're interested in submitting work for a future paper, including letters to the editors, articles, creative writing, poetry, or art, please feel welcome to write to us.

Please address your letter to:  
Eastern Region c/o CRNYC  
PO Box 2282  
New York, NY 10163

## ABOUT US

Critical Resistance seeks to build an international movement to end the prison industrial complex by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe. We believe that basic necessities such as food, shelter, and freedom are what really make our communities secure. As such, our work is part of global struggles against inequality and powerlessness. Because we seek to abolish the PIC, we cannot support any work that extends its life or scope.