

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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NATIONAL MEMORIAL FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

In April 2018, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, a monument to victims of white supremacy, and the Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration opened in Montgomery, Alabama, a stellar project of the Equal Justice Initiative. (Executive Director Bryan Stevenson, 122 Commerce St., Montgomery AL 36104.)

After the Civil War and the end of legal slavery, white southerners lynched nearly 4,400 black women, men and children between 1877 and 1950. The museum is located on the site of a former warehouse where enslaved black people were imprisoned. It's midway between a historic slave market and the dock and train station where tens of thousands of enslaved people were trafficked during the height of the U.S. domestic slave trade.

As Bryan Stevenson laid out in a recent interview, to create justice for those who are disempowered, we must create a commitment to equality. The U.S. history of racial inequality has made those in power in our country tolerant of bigotry and discrimination. Stevenson labels our challenge to "change the narrative." That talking about lynching, talking about segregation, talking about our history of racial inequality is critical to creating a consciousness that will make it possible to move toward justice and equality.

Stevenson continues: The great evil of U.S. slavery was the narrative of racial difference, which began when Europeans came to this continent. We are a post-genocide society because of what was done to the Native people, that is a dominant belief in white supremacy. Which also resulted in slavery flourishing here for so long.

So what had been called "slavery" turned into decades of terrorism. And what happened to African Americans between Reconstruction and World War II was racial terror. Six million black people fled the U.S. south during the 20th century. And the black people in Cleveland, in Chicago, in Detroit, in Los Angeles, in Oakland didn't go to those communities as immigrants; they went to those communities as refugees and exiles from terror.

Without slavery, without the legacy of slavery, without this ideology of white supremacy, black women and men would not have been lynched as they have been. There are 4,000 victims of racial terror lynchings commemorated in the new Peace & Justice Monument. The death penalty is lynching's stepson.

Also at the opening of the Legacy Museum was the notable film director Ava Duvernay. Her remarks pointed out that what was always really the issue was profit and money--including jobs and land. That to really oppress and to prevent, you have to have a reason for despising your victim. Racism was always a con game that sucked all the strength from the victim.

For Stevenson, talking about our history is the way we liberate our country. That "You can't get the repair, you can't get the conciliation, until you first tell the truth."

The final section of the Legacy Museum deals with the millions of people who have been incarcerated in this country. The wrongful conviction, unfair sentencing, conditions of confinement our prisons are full of, an era where black and brown people are so often presumed dangerous and guilty. Where one in three black male babies is expected to go to jail or prison.

Stevenson continues: The places that we have to work on are our courts and our elected spaces, our schools, where black children are often victims and suspended and expelled. We have jails and prisons that are filled with folks who are not a threat to public safety. We have black and brown people being menaced and targeted by the police. He says: "We have tried to romanticize our history." And we have seen the results: more of same.

Women in Prison

The number of women in the U.S. prison system has grown by over 700% since 1980. The overall prison population has risen by around 500% during this period. In Texas there are now 12,000 women in the state prison system, a 908% increase since 1980--compared to a 396% increase for men.

Primero de Mayo en Puerto Rico

Alla miles de personas celebraron el Día de los Trabajadores con una huelga general realizada en San Juan, la ciudad capital, para protestar contra las medidas de austeridad que van desde el cierre de escuelas públicas hasta los aumentos de las matriculas universitarias. Cuando los manifestantes trataron de juntarse en el edificio donde la junta de control fiscal tiene sus oficinas, la policía disparó gas pimienta y gas lacrimógeno. La junta pidió la implementación de un recorte de diez por ciento a las jubilaciones, la eliminación de los bonos obligatorios de Navidad, la reducción del período de vacaciones y delicencia por enfermedad y el permiso a las empresas para despedir a los empleados sin tener que probar primero una causa justa. Esto se produce en momentos que, al menos, treinta mil personas siguen sin energía eléctrica, casi ocho meses después que el huracán María devastara la isla.

To receive the CPR Newsletter by postal mail monthly, send us up to 12 self-addressed, stamped envelopes (with the CPR return address).

Keep sending us address changes and renewal requests in order for us to maintain our only permanent mailing list--the one for our January holiday card/new calendar--as accurately as possible.

Also, note that the correct address to be sure to reach us at is: PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504. Some resource address listings are incorrect in this regard.

And still: NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS; for our protection, please do not mark envelopes addressed to us as "Legal Mail."

Many, many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons Project for posting our Newsletter on-line for free downloading and distribution. It is at:

www.realcostofprisonsproject.org--this is a GREAT site! Thank you for all your support!

A REMINDER

The incarceration rate in the U.S. is roughly 666 imprisoned per 100,000 people. Among "whites" the rate is 450 imprisoned per 100,000. The incarceration rate for African Americans is over five times higher at 2,306 imprisoned per 100,000 people.

In addition, African American men who are convicted of the same crimes as "white" men receive federal prison sentences that are, on average, nearly 20% longer. These disparities have been increasing in recent years, following the 2005 decision in the Booker case, which gave federal judges more sentencing discretion.

Program to Pay Bail for the Poor

In 2007, Robin Steinberg co-founded the Bronx Defenders Freedom Fund and has now launched the *Bail Project*, a new nonprofit organization that will work with local partners to pay bail for tens of thousands of low-income people around the U.S. Steinberg is now working in the Criminal Justice Program at UCLA School of Law in Los Angeles.

Steinberg has an impressive track record --during her two-decades at the Bronx Defenders, the organization grew from a team of eight advocates to a staff of more than 300 serving over 35,000 low-income New Yorkers. She exported their defense model to Oklahoma, the state with the highest per capita number of incarcerated women, and founded *Still She Rises*, the nation's first public defender office dedicated to representing mothers into the court system.

The *Bail Project* will start with offices in St. Louis MO and Tulsa OK and the plan is to spread to more than three dozen cities in the next five years. The *Project* is designed to post bail for more than 150,000 indigent defendants being jailed across the country.

There are currently community funds helping to bail out indigent pretrial defendants in at least 10 cities, including Seattle, Boston and Baltimore. However, on any given night almost 450,000 un-convicted defendants are locked up in jails.

A handful of states, including Georgia, New Jersey, New Mexico and Texas have moved to curtail money bail, but are experiencing heavy pushback from the powerful bail industry. And it is no surprise that more than 90% of those who cannot pay bail end up pleading guilty.

DEMOCRACY

...I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

...No necesito libertad cuando me muera.
No puedo vivir con el pan de mañana.

...I live here, too.
I want freedom
Just as you.

...Yo vivo aqui tambien
Yo quiero libertad
Asi como tu.

--Langston Hughes

* * * **BLACK LIVES MATTER** * * *