

# Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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## WHY FILL THE PRISONS?

The police are a big part of it.

Approximately 10.5 million people are arrested each year in this country. Nearly half of the people who the police arrest multiple times have incomes below \$10,000 a year. Being arrested, as we know-- whatever the outcome--can jeopardize a person's employment, housing, physical and mental health and parental rights. In the U.S. the institution of policing originated to patrol against those enslaved and to prevent labor organizing. Modern policing continues this punishment.

The passage of the "Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act" in 1994, signed by then-president Bill Clinton, was a major driver of mass incarceration. It was a disaster for poor people and people of color. It used a stated belief in punishment as a cure-all for social and economic inequality. And so the police system worked to fill prisons.

The 1994 legislation provided funding for 100,000 new police officers, \$14 billion for so-called "community oriented policing", \$9.7 billion for prisons and \$6.1 billion for so-called "crime prevention" programs. There are presently over one million law enforcement officers in the U.S.--approximately one for every two people imprisoned.

Obviously police cannot solve the underlying causes social and economic problems caused by extreme inequality. And, they do not help vulnerable populations. Instead, they make populations vulnerable. Excessive force is the most common investigated complaint against cops. Sexual violence is the second. Police kill an average of nearly 1,000 people annually and sexually assault, physically assault, harass and surveil hundreds of thousands more.

Those, inside and out, who work from an understanding of what's really wrong in the distribution of power and resources in our communities, are a step toward a more just society in the U.S. as a whole.

Police, as they function today, are a major part of the problem.

Resource: Derecka Purnell & Marbre Stahly-Butts, *New York Times*, 9/26/2019

## THE D.N.A.

There is another false and dangerous solution to complex U.S. social challenges and injustices coming our way from the feds. It is an immense expansion of the use of technology to enforce our country's increasingly cruel and unjust immigration policies and practices. *The trump administration will begin collecting DNA samples from hundreds of thousands of people booked into federal immigration custody each year for entry into a national criminal database.* U.S. detention facilities currently hold more than 40,000 people.

This law was originally passed in 2005, and the purpose was said to be part of criminal investigation. An exemption was then included to protect immigrants. No more.

The new rules would allow the government to collect DNA from *children*, as well as those who seek asylum at ports of entry and have broken no law. This will doubtless also include U.S. citizens, who are sometimes "accidentally" booked into immigration custody. Because genetic material carries family connections, this sampling could also affect family members, who might well be citizens or documented U.S. residents. Results would be entered into the F.B.I.'s national DNA data base and would be shared with other law enforcement agencies.

The ACLU correctly identifies such practices at "population surveillance."

And, this is happening at the same time that at least 62 U.S. Border Patrol employees are under internal investigation for their connections to a secret facebook group that mocks lawmakers and migrants.

Also, this is happening at the same time as we learn that the president of this country has suggested the construction of a southern border moat/trench stocked with alligators and snakes, with an electrified fence and sharp spikes on the top. And that U.S. forces stationed at that border should have bayonets and also could open fire on migrants as they attempt to enter the country--shooting our legs as to wound, but not kill. These remarks were later denied....

**Muestras de ADN de todos los inmigrantes**

El Departamento de Seguridad Nacional de Estados Unidos dijo el 2 de octubre que pronto comenzará a recolectar muestras de ADN de los cientos de miles de migrantes arrestados cada año por las autoridades de inmigración de Estados Unidos. Los datos se almacenarían en el Sistema Indexado Combinado de ADN del FBI, una enorme base de datos penales nacional accesible para las agencias del orden público estatales y federales. Entre las personas a las que se les tomaría y secuenciaría muestras de su ADN según el plan del Gobierno de Trump se encuentran niños y solicitantes de asilo que no han quebrantado ninguna ley de Estados Unidos. La Unión Estadounidense por las Libertades Civiles criticó el plan así: "Este tipo de recolección masiva cambia el propósito de la recolección de ADN, que es realizar investigaciones penales, para que pase a ser vigilar a la población, lo cual contradice nuestras nociones básicas de libertad y autonomía."

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**To receive the CPR Newsletter by postal mail monthly, send us up to 12 self-addressed, stamped envelopes--with the CPR return address in the upper left-hand corner.**

**Keep sending us address changes and renewal requests in order for us to have our only permanent mailing list--the one for our January holiday/new calendar (see above)--be as accurate as possible.**

**NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS; to maintain our best possible access to all of our prison-based readers, 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. All issues since 2009 are at: [www.realcostofprisons.org](http://www.realcostofprisons.org)--this is a GREAT site! To all: Thank you for your support!**

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**SEND US: HOLIDAY/CALENDAR CARD DESIGNS**

Imprisoned Readers: Please send us a black and white drawing for our 2020 New Year's card/calendar sent to all on our mailing list and correspondents as long as supplies last. All designs must be respectful of our diversity: We cannot use those with racist, sexist, or religious symbolism. The deadline is *December 15*. Submission of a drawing serves as your permission for our use as described above and will be credited. Prize: If at all possible, book(s) of your choice by postal mail.

**ORGANIZE**

**"These death tombs are no different from slave plantations--everything about prison is symbolic of slavery."**

**-- K.R., SC**

**WE MUST DOWNSIZE MORE**

If we continue at this recent rate of cutting back on prison populations, it will take 72 years to reduce it just 50%. Even the planned reduction for the number of people held in the jails at Rikers Island NY is set to take "only" 10 years.

As to prison population decreases to date, 39 states and the federal government have downsized their prison population as of 2017. The five states with the biggest declines are: Alaska (by 39%--although it has a substantial number of prisoners being held in Arizona, and we don't know how those people are being counted), New Jersey (at 38%), Vermont (at 35%), Connecticut (at 33%) and New York State (at 32%) from their peak levels. Some southern states have also achieved significant population reductions since their peaks: Alabama (at 25%), South Carolina (at 17%), Louisiana (at 16%) and Mississippi (at 15%). And, 14 states reduced their prison populations by less than 5%.

The 11 states that had their highest ever prison populations in 2017 are: Arkansas (with an increase of 23%), Washington State (with an increase of 13%), Wyoming (with an increase of 12%), Wisconsin (with an increase of 11%), Kentucky (with an increase of 10%), New Mexico (with an increase of 9%), South Dakota (with an increase of 9%), Nevada (with an increase of 7%), Missouri (with an increase of 4%), Kansas (with an increase of 3%) and Tennessee (with an increase of 2%). Alaska has repealed several aspects of its major penal reform initiatives in 2019 although it has been among the states leading until now in decarceration.

**HOW SOME CHURCHES SAVE MONEY**

Every state (except Alaska, where it went bankrupt in 2010) has a prison industry. The average wage is 87 cents/hour. Iowa (Iowa prison industries = IPI) is the only state whose prisoners make pews and pulpits for churches. The Department of Corrections there takes 80 to 90% of the minimum state wage, \$7.25/hour, that IPI pays. In 2017, the state claimed that IPI's program had reduced recidivism by 8%, which worked out to 36 releases not returning. The national unemployment rate in 2018 was 4%; for releases: 27%...and on it goes