

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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SOLIDARITY NOT SOLITARY: Contradictions Sharpen

Well, at least we don't blatantly talk about how to improve slavery as a system. But we do talk about it, consistently. All discussion about racism and the police, court and penal system, is based on the unspoken belief that it is necessary and proper to treat different groups of people differently, according to their existing status and wealth. And we who don't agree with this unspoken assumption endlessly battle to expose and to change the worst examples of this reality.

Some current, painful examples:

Souza-Baranowski maximum security prison in Shirley MA. People imprisoned there have endured unprovoked beatings by prison employees, been given half-portions for meals, been confined to their cells and allowed little to no contact with attorneys. Some have been hospitalized. The excuse for this treatment is the attack on three guards early in January. By the end of January, the prison maintained it was "returning to normal operations," with increasing access to such basic programming as showers, phone calls, contact with lawyers and recreational activities.

There have been some changes in Massachusetts law recently around solitary confinement. But the prisoners who attacked the correctional officers were in general population...

The Mississippi Department of Corrections. Reports include five people dead and numerous inhumane living conditions. Brown water from correctional faucets. Dilapidated buildings, inhumanely hot in the summer, inadequate meals. Weeks of systemwide lockdown after what was called "an explosion of gang violence." According to the latest available reports, Parchman is the sole prison remaining locked down. A lawsuit filed by 29 imprisoned people characterized the recent killings as the "culmination of years of severe understaffing and neglect." Plaintiffs lives are reported in peril.

Mississippi is the state which recently upheld a 12 year sentence for possession of a cell phone. It is easy to see why those who experience it often consider

"law enforcement" as a surrogate for slavery.

But it is increasingly difficult to find positive examples of our learning from our increasing inequality as a society. For example, the recent 40th anniversary of the New Mexico prison uprising at the beginning of February, 1980, was covered extensively by the two largest newspapers in the state. We saw no mention of the dramatic increase in the number of prisoners in New Mexico, as in the country as a whole, during this time. Nor was there any evidence of how this increase had improved the lives of those who live, not imprisoned, in New Mexico. The responses considered seemed to be only some minor changes in prison conditions and the construction of more. Where are the questions asking: who is in prison? How can we keep everyone OUT?

No voice has more expertise about the experience and impact of incarceration than the voice of prisoners. A powerful example of this is the recent update by the leadership of California Prison Hunger Strikes against indefinite solitary confinement and other mistreatment. Their third non-violent hunger strike in 2013, drew 30,000 participants, the largest prison hunger strike in history. In 2015, the landmark Ashker v. Brown settlement ended indeterminate solitary confinement in California prisons. The five points of the leadership update follow:

>Prison in the United States is based on punishment, not rehabilitation.

>Sentencing in California is among the harshest in the nation.

>The trauma we experience in overcrowded institutions with a culture of aggressive oppression is harmful and breeds violence. We need to stand with each other.

>We are entitled to respect and safety. Institutionalized racism and promotion of beliefs of each other as less than human, can cause us to fear and hate each other.

>The guards get extra pay when there is violence. The guards' union leaders consider prisoners less than human. We need our communities to build allies.

El número de menores de edad sin hogar

El número de menores en edad escolar sin hogar en Estados Unidos llega a su punto más alto en una década. Durante el año lectivo 2017-2018 el número de estudiantes de escuelas públicas sin hogar superó el millón y medio. Esta cifra es más doble de los estudiantes que no tenían hogar hace más de una década. La falta de vivienda puede tener efectos a largo plazo en la salud y el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes.

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--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--this is a GREAT site! To all: THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!!

Mas acceso a licencias de conducir

En Nueva York miles de personas indocumentadas hicieron filas durante horas para pedir su licencia de conducir--utilizando formas de identificación alternativas al número de Seguridad Social--seis meses después de que el gobernador la firmara.

El gobernador de Nueva Jersey, el estado vecino, ya ha anunciado que firmará esta ley rápidamente, beneficiando así a las casi 500.000 personas indocumentadas. Hay otros catorce estados, entre ellos Delaware, California y Nuevo Mexico, que ya permiten que las personas indocumentadas soliciten licencias de conducir.

"STRIVING FOR REDEMPTION"

And other books on the culture of California prisons and related topics by Tio MacDonald, author, and Dortell Williams, editor, of Lancaster CA, are recommended for those with access to amazon

Some Limits on Solitary Confinement

In the year after release, homicide or suicide mortality rates overall were higher in the solitary confinement population. There was also a high rate of recidivism--of returning people to the environment that traumatized them in the first place. Studies show that most people are placed in solitary for disciplinary segregation. And, as we are painfully aware, people of color and those with mental health issues are extremely disproportionately represented there.

Although still far from the United Nations promoted limit of 15 consecutive days for prisoners in solitary, there is some movement towards lessening of its use in U.S. prisons. There is a long way to go. In 2011 for example, nearly all of the 1,100 men in the segregation unit at Pelican Bay State Prison in California had been in solitary for five years or more--some for as many as 20 years.

States where there are reductions in the use of solitary include New Jersey, Washington, Texas, Nebraska and Arkansas. New Jersey recently passed a law--applying to both prisons and jails--that restricts the use of "isolated confinement" to no more than 20 days, for people between the ages of 21 and 65. It bans its use for those who are pregnant, postpartum, LGBTQ, or deemed to have a serious medical or psychological condition. Prisons are supposed to provide "recreational and rehabilitative interventions" during the short times when people in solitary are allowed out of their cells.

Nebraska also passed a law last year that restricts the use of solitary for "vulnerable populations," including minors in adult prisons. Campaigns for further types of solitary restrictions are underway.

In addition, two federal bills have been introduced to make more rigorous the standards for solitary confinement. It states "a prisoner may be placed in solitary confinement only under extreme emergency circumstances, as a last resort, for as short a time as possible, subject to independent review" and would apply to both state and federal prisons.

And then there is the sentence of Life Without the Possibility of Parole. Which is now being endured by over 53,000 people. And 56% of those people are African-American. This is a sentence that at least some of the current presidential candidates support.

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