

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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VOTE LOSS COMMON FOR INCARCERATED

Advocating and inflicting punishment to produce positive behavior changes remains an outstanding contradiction in the United States that falls especially harshly on people of color.

Yet another example of this is the common, although not universal, situation of convicted felons losing their right to vote. In both Florida and Alabama, over 30% of the African American men are barred from voting. One-third of disenfranchised felons live in Florida alone. A bill has been introduced in the Florida state legislature that would allow convicted felons to regain their voting rights one year after completing their sentences and probation.

In 10 states, more than 1 in 5 (over 20%) of African American men are barred from voting because of

their criminal records. In Texas, 4 1/2% of the adult population and 21% of the African American male population have lost their right to vote. Texas has now eliminated the 2 year waiting period previously required before a convicted felon could apply for restoration of voting rights.

On the other hand, in Virginia, over the last 2 years, of 200,000 formerly incarcerated, only 404 were able to obtain a pardon from the governor to restore their right to vote. Only four states currently permit those imprisoned to vote: Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. Prisoners lost that right in Utah last fall. There are efforts to eliminate it in Massachusetts. Mississippi disenfranchises those convicted of a number of crimes, but not all.

(continued on next page)

VOTE LOSS cont.

Many other countries permit those imprisoned to vote. By law they are encouraged to do so in Germany. A Canadian Supreme Court decision in February 1996 stated, "The electorate chooses the government; the government does not choose the electorate."

U.S. disenfranchisement laws contradict international agreements we have signed. Examples: the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which maintains that every citizen has the right to vote and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination ratified by the U.S. in 1994.

The rate of African American voting right loss is 7 times the national average. African Americans make up 36% -- more than one-third of the approximately 3.9 million people nationwide who are currently unable to vote because of felony convictions. Approximately 1.4 million African American men, 13% of all African American men in the U.S., are being denied their right to vote with this excuse.

This loss of the right to vote is largely due to racially disproportionate outcomes in drug cases, which are reflected in law enforcement policies, particularly in the concentration of policing in the inner cities. For example, a 1992 study in the Rochester NY area found that drug use was equivalent between African Americans and whites. However, it also found that the arrest rate

for African Americans was 18 times that for whites. In New York state, with approximately 70,000 prisoners, 92% of those sent to state prison for sale or possession are African American or Hispanic.

In March 1999, U.S. Representative John Conyers (D-MI) and 26 co-sponsors introduced the "Civic Participation and Rehabilitation Act of 1999," H.R. 906. Its purpose is to: "Secure the Federal voting rights of persons who have been released from incarceration." Among those organizations supporting the reinstatement of voting rights are the NAACP, the Rainbow/Push Coalition, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, the National Council of Churches, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the American Friends Service Committee.

As the recent report "Losing the Vote" states: "In the late twentieth century, the laws have no discernible legitimate purpose Indeed, defenders of these laws have been hard pressed to justify them."

RESOURCES

"Losing the Vote: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement Law in the U.S.," Oct. 1998, 26 pages. Copies available free from: The Sentencing Project
918 F. Street, Suite 501
Washington D.C. 20004
(202) 528-0871
www.sentencingproject.org

TEXAS MESSES WITH DEATH PENALTY

We all know that Texas is unique. For those of us who oppose all forms of capital punishment, we know that Texas kills one-third of the U.S. victims of the death penalty. To date, that is almost 200 executions in Texas since 1982.

In the first half of August 1999, Texas found it necessary and proper to kill five people. In 1998, 27 of the 74 juveniles on death row were in Texas. And Texas killed 2 of them. Those executions violated international standards prohibiting the death penalty for the underaged as well as for the mentally ill and mentally incompetent. As of April 1, 1999, there were 437 people under sentence of death in Texas, second only to California, at 536.

What if the U.S. as a whole did what Texas does with the death penalty? The current population of the state of Texas is approximately 20,000,000 people. The current population of the U.S. is approximately 270,000,000. That makes the population of Texas about seven and a half percent of the population of the country as a whole. If the U.S. as a whole killed people at the rate that Texas does, we would execute 1,600 people per year, or 4 persons every day.

Why is Texas' rate of state killing so much higher than the rest of the country? It is especially important to ask this since

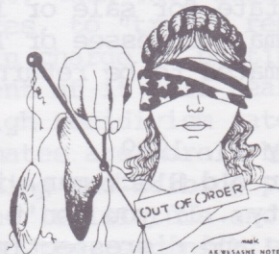
the leading Republican candidate for president in the next election, George W. Bush, is the current governor of Texas. And in June, Bush signed his 100th death warrant since taking office.

"Bush's addiction to the death cult actually touches every important aspect of what could be described as his politics, and perhaps only the commitment of Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and Bill Bradley (all Democrats) to the same policy prevents it from surfacing as the issue it deserves to be."

RESOURCES

"Killing with Prejudice: Race and the Death Penalty in the USA"
Amnesty International USA
322 Eighth Avenue
New York NY 10001
www.amnesty-usa.org

"Death Row U.S.A. -- A quarterly report by the Capital Punishment Project of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc."
NAACP
99 Hudson St., Suite 1600
New York NY 10013
(212) 965-2200
(regional offices in Washington D C and Los Angeles CA)



FOR A.H.T.



VOICES FROM INSIDE

CHRONIC PAIN

Huntsville TX January 15, 1999

...The policy of medical treatment for Death Row prisoners differs from that of non-Death Row prisoners. For the past 3 years, Death Row prisoners have been denied treatment for conditions which are correctable only with surgery to relieve the often chronic pain associated with various conditions (hernias, acute bunions, knee and back injuries, etc.)...

ICOPA IX UPDATE

Kenedy TX July 19, 1999

The International Conference on Penal Abolition (ICOPA), founded in 1983, encompasses a global movement which challenges contemporary revenge-oriented criminal justice systems, and promotes models of proactive healing justice instead. ICOPA IX is scheduled for May 10-13, 2000 in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. For more information contact: Rittenhouse - A New Vision, 157 Carlton Street, Suite 202, Toronto, Canada M5A 2K3 (46¢ for the 1st ½ oz.), (416) 972-9992.

NOTES FROM CHEESELAND

Plymouth WI July 22, 1999

With the number of Wisconsin inmates under lock and key in the state fast approaching 19,000, state officials are scrambling to provide space for their wards. With a 19% hike in the number of incarcerated individuals from 1996-97...the state legislature is under extreme pressure to build new facilities rather than continue the constant export of prisoners to out-of-state facilities.

Despite four new prisons coming on-line in the next year or two, a private prison venture corporation, Dominion, built a 500 bed facility in the rural town of Stanley WI, without state authorization and then offered it to the state for sale or lease....It will only mean fewer transfers to Oklahoma, Tennessee or Texas in the future, not hope for currently exiled inmates to be returned...

GOOD OL' BOYS

Carlisle IN July 23, 1999

...I'm a 22 year old Black man, incarcerated in the Wabash Valley Correctional Facility...If you don't bow down and accept some racist getting in your face and disrespecting you, then you will end up in

Mailing list additions and address changes should go into effect within two months from their post-marked date. We don't have the resources to acknowledge these requests by letter. Requests for referrals and other correspondence will be answered within four to six weeks. Letters intended for publication must say "Do Print."

The Coalition makes information available on resources and services for prisoners. We strongly urge that readers keep copies of all papers, especially legal papers, sent to those offering assistance, and be careful about sending money. **In most cases we do not have direct experience with the quality or reliability of the services provided by the groups mentioned.**

solitary, with "good time" taken...I'm in a prison where 90%+ of the staff is white. These people never dealt with Black people on a daily basis. The only time they saw Black people was on television, in handcuffs. They think everything dealing with hip-hop culture is gang-related. They have a good ol' boy network and a paper trail of corruption that could probably stretch from Indiana to New Mexico.

These people just killed another brotha' on May 27, 1999. Inmates that said something about the incident are now in solitary. The administration's retaliation is too obvious....These racists feel that since they killed one brotha' that they can intimidate every Black man in this prison...I try to exercise patience and strive to make as many people aware as possible...

PRO SE

Ione CA July 26, 1999

Inmates confined in the Los Angeles County Jail (Central Jail) who were acting as their own attorney during the years 1980 to 1998 and who used the jail's inadequate law libraries...should send in declarations, in motion format, to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, referencing: Michael Taylor v. Sherman Block et al., case no. 98-56009...The Court is deciding the issues based on the totality of the information available to them. Anyone interested in additional updates should contact the National Association of Legislative Review, PO Box 3064, Russellville AR 72801-9998, ref. Taylor, 98-56009.

WHO'S FOOLING WHO - OVERCOMING IGNORANCE

Hobbs NM July 30, 1999

At one point, I thought New Mexican's had learned from past mistakes - after the 1980 Santa Fe prison riot, when they built the new medium facilities in Los Lunas and Las Cruces, to "truly" rehabilitate their convicted residents...Who ever was in charge of putting this rehabilitation plan together only went at it half heartedly. It's no wonder to me that we still have a high recidivism rate and governor Johnson can easily maintain that inmates are merely being spoiled, in order to implement his own money making and bribing plans... When Johnson and his friends are done, the legislature and society will be left with the mess, which they had the responsibility to deal with...



**VOICES
FROM
INSIDE
continued**

ARE YOU INTERESTED?

Gatesville TX August 4, 1999

I am a female Texas inmate wishing to file a class action lawsuit on the care TDC does not give to us with AIDS/Hep C. If you are interested and would like to be part of this suit, please send an affidavit on what TDC has not done for you. Cindy McAlister, 830883, 1210 Coryell City Rd, Gatesville TX 76528.

NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

Calipatria CA August 9, 1999

There is a growing coalition called "Families to Amend California's Three Strikes" (FACTS) working on ways to change the injustices of this law. We currently hold statewide meetings, rallies, candle light vigils and collect signatures to influence lawmakers to vote for legislation which amends the "three strikes" law to serious and violent felonies only.

For more information about us, or for information on how to start a chapter in your area, please contact our Los Angeles office: FACTS, 4167 S Normandie Ave, Los Angeles CA 90037, (323) 298-0510 (No collect calls.) Meetings every Monday at 7 p.m.

NEW CONTRACT

Concord NH August 14, 1999

Am enclosing an article from the Concord Monitor of July 23, 1999. We prisoners have won another small victory, on reduced telephone rates: "Telephone charges from state prison pay phones were cut by more than half this week, seven months after an inmate began fighting the high costs hitting the families and friends of those behind bars.

"...the Executive Council unanimously approved a contract that knocks the initial surcharge on out-of-state calls from \$3.28 down to \$1.50 and the per-minute fee from 55¢ to 20¢ - the typical bill callers from regular pay phones face...

"In May the state began renegotiating its prison phone contracts with Sprint and WorldCom, after inmate Michael Guglielmo threatened a lawsuit...the rates are good until at least August 2000, when the contract will be up for negotiation...Guglielmo filed a Right to Know Law request with the warden to get the phone contracts...The 1997 WorldCom deal returned 40% of its phone collections to the state and 35% of what Sprint collected on in-state long-distance calls..." ("Prisoners get lower phone bills, New contract cuts pay phone rates by half")



VOICES IN SOLIDARITY

ATTICA UPRISING ANNIVERSARY

September 13th is the 28th anniversary of the Attic Prison Rebellion. In 1971, 43 people were killed by governor Rockefeller's order to seize control of the prison. We remember Attica because it demonstrates how far the state will go to legitimize its power. We remember Attica because prisoners there showed the power and unity of oppressed people fighting for their lives.

We observe September 13th in the U.S. as National Day of Solidarity with Prisoners. IN UNITY THERE IS STRENGTH!

CAMPAIGN TO PROMOTE EQUITABLE TELEPHONE CHARGES (ETC CAMPAIGN)

For the past 6 months we have conducted a campaign in Michigan to address the high cost of prisoner telephone calls. We are now beginning planning for a national campaign. We will send campaign materials to individuals who contact us; please do so before September 30: **ETC CAMPAIGN**, c/o MI-CURE, PO Box 2736, Kalamazoo MI 49003, (616) 383-0028.

NATIONAL WEEKEND OF FAITH IN ACTION ON THE DEATH PENALTY, OCTOBER 8-10

Encourage your community of faith and others in your region to join by expressing the need to halt executions. Let us know of your interest in brochures and educational materials on the death penalty. Consider how you might form a coalition with your co-religionists to repeal death penalty statutes. Consider hosting a public forum to educate the general public. **National Weekend of Faith in Action**, Amnesty International USA, 600 Pennsylvania Avenue SE, 5th Floor, Washington DC 20003, 1-800-AMNESTY, ext. 508, www.amnesty-usa.org/abolish

PRISONERS' GUERRILLA HANDBOOK TO CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAMS

This valuable resource lists 212 program outlines, including high school, vocational, paralegal and college courses, as well as free programs for the blind. \$21.95 each, plus shipping (\$2 1st book) - prisoners ordering directly receive \$3 off. Biddle Publishing/Audenreed Press, PMB 103, PO Box 1305, Brunswick ME 04011.

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Crime of the Month

aka Crimetoppers

When Al Gore was fending off protesters for trying to force South Africa into prohibiting the production of cheap generic drugs to treat its huge HIV and AIDS population, we thought his motivation was the delicious thought of big bucks from the drug moguls. But, for the moment, the pharmaceutical giants don't really need Big Al because they have USTR, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. USTR's job is to promote U.S. businesses abroad -- and what dedicated public servants they are. The USTR has threatened other coun-

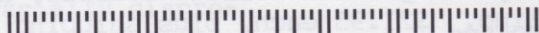
tries with limiting business or increasing import taxes for using generic substitutes for U.S. pharmaceutical concoctions.

In addition, the U.S. is trying to outlaw "parallel imports" of drugs, a practice by other countries of shopping the world for the best price instead of buying only from local distributors of U.S. drugs. "In the old days, the government made the world safe for Standard Oil . . . now it's making the world safe for the drug companies." And that is our Crime of the Month.



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