

# Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

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July 2007

## EQUAL JUSTICE?

The Management Control Unit was established at the Marion Federal Penitentiary in 1972. It held 60 prisoners and was one of a handful of such units around the country. By 1985 there were approximately half a dozen such units. By 1997, 45 states, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and the District of Columbia were operating control units.

Between 1995 and 2000 there was a dramatic increase in the use of such long-term isolation units in the US. By 2002, over 20,000 imprisoned human beings, almost 2% of the US prison population, were being held in this type of solitary confinement.

Such solitary confinement units employ a sensory deprivation environment and severe restrictions to conditions of confinement, such as lack of access to phones, showers, and outdoor recreation. And most

people are kept there for more than five years at a time. Because confinement in a control unit is an administrative decision made by prison authorities rather than the courts, prisoners' constitutional rights to due process hardly exist.

United Nations (UN) committees have specifically cited US supermax prison units for violations of established international human rights law. In 1995, a UN report criticized the US for operating "inhuman and degrading" prisons and specifically cited detention facilities such as California's Pelican Bay State Prison. In May 2002, the UN Committee Against Torture labelled as widespread the "excessively harsh regime" of supermax prisons in the US and considered them a violation of the UN Convention Against

(continued on next page)



Torture.

Prisoners in supermax units have higher rates of mental illness than other prisoners. Supermax conditions not only bring on mental illnesses, but people with mental illnesses are more likely to be placed in supermax conditions because their symptoms cause them to be seen as repeatedly breaking prison rules, resulting in increases in their security classifications. For example a study has found that mentally ill Washington state prisoners were five times more likely to be placed in supermax than other prisoners.

In addition, there is a lack of evidence to show that supermax imprisonment decreases recidivism. This strongly implies that supermax treatment has no or a negative effect on community safety, one theoretical reason for imprisonment in the first place. And, above all, there is no evidence that supermax units reduce prison violence, which is often claimed by those who work in prison systems.

It is clear that many forms of inhumane treatment are used against those caged at every security level throughout US prisons and jails, not only in official supermax units.

The use of long-term isolation is not only a violation of international human rights standards, but a thoroughly ineffective behavior-management tool that actually exacerbates and produces mental illness, frequently resulting in increased behavioral problems.

So, as its use becomes more common, it becomes increasingly clear that supermax confinement,

in addition to all its other evil, mean and negative characteristics, creates more problems and hardships than it resolves.

And yet, neither the policy nor the practice of those operating the prison system could never be accused of consistency. For comic relief, we turn now to "pay-to-stay" jail programs--which have existed for years, most prevalent in the Los Angeles area. CSI runs three in Orange County. As the *New York Times* said in an April article, they operate "like secret velvet-roped nightclubs of the corrections world. You have to be in the know to even apply for entry, and even if the court approves your sentence there, jail administrators can operate like bouncers, rejecting anyone they wish."

Prices per day start at about \$70, and privileges include work furloughs, daily visits, iPods, cellphones, and food delivery. The training manager of the National Sheriff's Association was quoted as saying: "It seems to be a little unfair." No kidding.

[Much of the information in this article came from the **American Friends Service Committee-AZ** report *BURIED ALIVE: Solitary Confinement in Arizona's Prisons and Jails*, 103 N Park Ave, Suite 109, Tucson AZ 85719.] Other **Resources** include: "The State of the World's Human Rights", **Amnesty International** Report 2007, 5 Penn Plaza, NY NY 10001 **Human Rights Watch**, 350 5th Ave--34th Fl, New York NY 10118 **Commission on Safety and Abuse**, 601 Thirteenth St, Suite 1150 South, Washington DC 20005



# How Can Punishment Fit the Crime?

There are few among us who would insist that they don't believe in punishment. But many of us consistently shy away from what punishments are acceptable to us, what we believe they achieve and what, in fact, the reality of punishment is in this country (and in others, where it is administered by U.S. agencies). This helps to hide a lot of contradictions and inconsistencies between what those in power say and what they do.

According to a recent poll, only 38% of people say they believe that executions are a deterrent to murder. Yet politicians continue to support executions as a panacea to fear of crime. This is so even though both execution sentences and executions themselves have been declining during this new century.

Studies of the fiscal cost of execution sentencing have been done for the last 20 years. In Florida, in 1988, executions were found to cost \$3.2 million each. By 2005 in California, the cost was found to be \$250 million each. And what were we buying for these enormous sums of money? No one is saying that public safety has increased.

People cite their belief that innocent people have been executed for no longer supporting execution sentences (27%). Almost as many say they no longer do because the process takes too long and too few are killed (26%). The high cost of executions and the relationship between those receiving execution sentences and ethnicity, economic status and geography were each given as the reason for lack of support of such sentences by 22% of those asked.

And it is important to note that 200 people have had their convictions dismissed because of DNA testing since 1989. Over 120 people have been freed from death row since 1973 after their convictions were overturned.

But through it all, let us be very aware that, while 45.3% of death row prisoners are white, 41.7% are Black (African Americans are 12% of the U.S. population), and 10.7% are Hispanic. Even more sinister however is that since 1976, in cases involving cross-ethnic group murder, a total of 15 whites have been executed for the murder of Blacks, yet 216 Blacks have been executed for being convicted of murdering whites.

What does this tell us about what we really believe about punishment?

## Resource

### **"A Crisis of Confidence: Americans' Doubts About the Death Penalty"**

A Death Penalty Information Center Report, 1101 Vermont Ave NW, Suite 701, Washington DC 20005

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## **Los precios de los tramites con inmigración.**

Subirá el precio de los trámites a partir del 30 de julio del 2007. El trámite para pedir a un pariente (I-130) costará \$335. "La mica" (I-90) va a subir a \$290, la solicitud de la residencia legal (I-485) va a subir hasta \$930. El trámite de la solicitud para la naturalización (N-400), subirá de \$330, que cuesta actualmente, a \$595. Si está pensando en iniciar algún trámite migratorio para usted o algún miembro de su familia, sería bueno que lo hiciera antes del 30 de julio





VOICES  
FROM  
INSIDE  
since 1976

### **NEVER SAY NEVER**

Stormville NY

April 3, 2007

Is a novel based on the lives of three women who married three incarcerated men in New York State. They share with us all the details of how they met, the process of their marriages and how they have maintained their lives with these men behind the walls. It is a great book and recommended for all. To order: send \$12.95 per book plus \$2.19 shipping and handling to A5 Books, PO Box 220, Stony Point NY 10980.

### **THUNDERHORSE/BRASFIELD CASE**

Iowa Park TX

April 15, 2007

I have referred a number of Texas prisoners to cases in law books/the law library where most, if not all of the same issues Ohio attorney Sirak has filed in the Thunderhorse/Brasfield case have already been litigated in federal courts, and lost. They want Sirak to be a hero so bad that they dare not face the reality that prisoners waiting in county jails are affecting the parole process in Texas. The pro se Gross case brought the plight of Texas prisoners to the attention of legislators, the media, and the public; Sirak's interest is in money, not parole.

### **SET OF SUITS**

Rush City MN

April 16, 2007

The Minnesota Dept of Corruption is facing a set of lawsuits that will total over \$150 million in damages. Civil rights violations, health care violations, mail tampering and destruction. Some staff also will face charges of willful and deliberate actions to cause bodily harm. Doctors and witnesses in hospitals will co-operate in the charges being filed in three federal courts. Any prisoner with information who wishes to join in a class action should contact: Rick Richardson, 205403, 7600 525 St, Rush City MN 55069, for attorneys' address that concerns this matter. Prisoner mail accepted.

C.P.R. Eds.' Disclaimer: None of us are lawyers.

### **GOOD TIME CREDITS**

Bridgeport TX

April 23, 2007

The *Gross v. Quarterman*, Civil Action H-04-136, "Good Time Reform Writ" was remanded back to the 5th Circuit by the Supreme Court in November 2005, ruling that it was not frivolous. The 5th Circuit remanded it back to the Federal District Court in October 2006, ruling that it was not frivolous. But it has not been certified as a class action!



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Mailing list additions and address changes should go into effect within two months from their postmarked date. Our goal is to answer requests for referrals and other correspondence within six weeks. Letters intended for publication must say "Do Print." If requesting responses, state if you can receive mail directly from those imprisoned. The Coalition makes information available on resources and services for prisoners. We strongly urge readers to 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. NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS.

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That means that when it is ruled on favorably in this final step (the Federal District Court), that those not on the Gross writ will have to file a new, separate writ identical to the Gross writ to have it applied to them individually. Six months before a person files such an identical writ, a CL-147 must be filed to exhaust Administrative Remedies. Send a S.A.S.E. for more detailed info to: Columba Ramirez, PO Box 242, Garden City, Kansas 67846.

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### **BETTER CONDITIONS**

Westover MD

April 27, 2007

Five Eastern Correctional Institution (ECI) prisoners organized a protest against conditions at ECI, and obtained the signatures of some 492 fellow prisoners in support of: 1) properly addressing medical needs, 2) adequate toilet brushes to clean toilets, 3) clean, dry food trays in the dining room, 4) provision of an adequate number of jobs and programs, 5) purchase of plastic tubs to replace foot lockers removed a year ago, 6) provision of adequate library and legal reference services, 7) ending acts of disrespect by officers to inmates, and 8) additional tier newspapers, among other issues.

The prison administration learned of the petition on March 14, 2007, during a lockdown and transfer of 163 prisoners from the Maryland House of Correction. The organizers were placed on administrative segregation on March 19, 2007. It appeared that the placement on segregation was retaliatory for a peaceful, lawful protest...

### **RESTOCKING**

Marion VA

Keefe charges a \$5 restocking fee in Virginia. From the "Kiss Guide to Microsoft Windows" at page 84: *The Evil Restocking Charge*. "It may be the most insidious scam ever promulgated on unsuspecting consumers. It's illegal, immoral, downright unethical, and out to bite you." According to the U.S. Uniform Commercial code and the Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act, restocking charges are illegal.

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## A YEAR-LONG INQUIRY

Bonne Terre MO

May 17, 2007

"The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons conducted a year-long inquiry that featured four public hearings in cities around the country, visits to jails and prisons, and consultations with corrections officials and a wide range of experts. Their report, 'Confronting Confinement,' reflects a considerable degree of consensus among those experts about both the problems and their solutions." This is a tool for all of us behind walls and fences. To order a free copy of the report, write: Commission of Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, 601 Thirteenth Street NW, Suite 1150 South, Washington DC 20005.

## ABIDE BY THE LAW

Tennessee Colony TX

May 16, 2007

Norman Sirak did not file a lawsuit (case no. A-05-CA-1009-55) against the Texas parole board in order to vacate the prisons. This lawsuit is intended to force the law abiding citizens of the parole board to abide by the law! It's to order them to follow their own rules and guidelines. Stand up for what's right!

## MILK THISTLE

Memphis TN

May 21, 2007

I am looking for any information concerning Milk Thistle being sold in prison commissaries. It is used as an alternative treatment for Hepatitis C. Even a commissary form would be great. Please send all information to me at: Delecia Hammock, 143330, 3881 Stewart Ln 4B3-1, Nashville TN 37218.

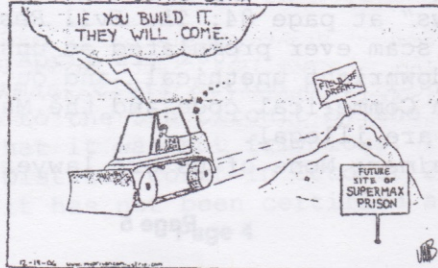
## APPEARING FIRST AT EVERYTHING

Santa Rosa NM

May 23, 2007

America is always attempting to appear first at everything regardless of the financial or moral cost. The private prison system whose motto is "a cell is a terrible thing to waste," has practically taken over the running of states through lobbying legislators and other so-called public servants, who no longer serve the needs of the public but use the public to serve their needs and egos by waving blank checks. The money has to come from somewhere. So for all you people in prison, be warned: "The light at the end of the tunnel has been switched off."

### MY PRISON COMIC STRIP™







## VOICES IN SOLIDARITY

### **FIRST EVER PRISON MUSIC VIDEO**

Over the last year, six inmates in the Montana State Prison system have been hard at work writing and composing a 14-song CD to try to get the public to better understand the life and perspective of an individual inside the ever-growing prison system. The laid-back message of Down Time, a mix of the Blues, Rock & Roll, Alternative and Pop music gets the message across with a sense of reality you won't find anywhere else. A percentage of the profits will go toward a non-profit organization aimed at helping released prisoners find employment and housing called MOUNTAIN ([www.montanamountain.org](http://www.montanamountain.org)). The members of Down Time put this package together for every prisoner and every family out there that has someone behind bars. If you are interested in a sample CD/DVD Combo, contact: [www.downtimeprisonmusic.com](http://www.downtimeprisonmusic.com)

### **INMATEMAILPALS.COM**

Is a pen pal experience developed by a former prisoner to offer those behind bars: lower prices, prompt attention, affiliation with other groups, attractive graphics, color copy, writing assistance if requested, extra copies of your photo, stamps accepted as payment. You will have your own web page--you decide on the content of your ad. Prices vary by services included. Contact: [Inmatemailpals.com](http://Inmatemailpals.com) (c/o Brian Rooney), PO Box 264, Fairfax VA 22038

### **U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS--CATALOG OF PUBLICATIONS**

The Commission is an independent, bipartisan agency established by Congress in 1957 to: investigate allegations of deprivation of voting rights, study and collect information relating to discrimination or denial of equal protection of the law, appraise Federal laws and policies with respect to discrimination or denial of equal protection of the law in the administration of justice, serve as a national clearinghouse for information, submit reports to the President and Congress, and issue public service announcements to discourage discrimination or denial of equal protection of the law. Address: 624 Ninth Street NW, Washington DC 20425.

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# Crime of the Month

aka Crimetoppers

Imagine being surrounded by walls and fences. Guard towers watch over you 24 hours a day. Sound like a prison? Acutally, it's the Gaza Strip in Palestine, the world's largest open-air detention facility.

This 146 square miles of land, home to 1.5 million Palestinians, is the most densely populated place on earth. Since withdrawing their illegal settlements there (although still having 450,000 other unauthorized settlers), Israel has intermittently shelled Gaza. Entry points for food and medical supplies are closed 80% of the time. The power plant was bombed, leaving half of the population without electricity, necessary, among other things, to pump and to purify water. Planes fly over Gaza at night, creating sonic booms to

terrorize people and create sleep deprivation.

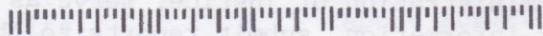
A significant historic parallel is the tragedy of Poland's Warsaw Ghetto during the 1940s. Germany walled in almost half a million Jews and Gypsies and in less than 3 years had systematically destroyed the entire community.

The results of the last Palestinian elections have been widely criticized and punished both by Israel and other countries, which have withheld most of the humanitarian aid on which civilians rely. Israel has imprisoned without charge or trial more than half of the Palestinian Parliament.

The Crime of the Month is the escalating threat to the survival and decent treatment of the people of Gaza.



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7/07

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