

THE JOURNAL OF WOMEN AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE



**WINTER 2021
EDITION**
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ELECTED WOMEN LEADERS IN THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY IN 2020-2021

Thank you to the strong and powerful women, who serve in the United States Congress and in New Jersey State Government for your compassionate and valuable advocacy of imprisoned women, reentering women, and those suffering from addiction, sexual violence, and domestic abuse. This report provides a road map to begin addressing the necessary changes required to improve the historic deficiencies in the care and treatment of incarcerated women and those returning to society.

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WOMEN ADVOCATES FOR REFORM AND REENTRY SERVICES

As we grapple with the systemic challenges of women in prison and those returning home, we need to call upon the expertise, resources, and skills of leaders in the fields of addiction treatment, medicine particularly obstetrician-gynecologist, mental healthcare, anxiety, depression, trauma, sexual abuse, domestic violence, criminal justice system, housing, training and employment, and family reunification.

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FOREWORD

In June of 2021, the New Jersey Reentry Corporation (NJRC), in conjunction with New Jersey's Commission on Reentry Services for Women, launched *The Journal of Women and Criminal Justice*. Inspired by the leadership of Women's Reentry Commission Chairs Dr. Tanya Pagán Raggio-Ashley and Linda Baraka, as well as Women's Reentry Commission members Dr. Gloria Bachmann (who also serves as NJRC's Medical Director) and Heather Turock, *The Journal* provides a platform for justice-involved persons and advocates. The first edition grappled with the medical and behavioral health care challenges justice-involved women face before, during, and after incarceration, and engaged policymakers, public health experts, and physicians to brainstorm innovative solutions.

Notably, *The Journal* was released during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has posed an even greater risk to incarcerated people than it has to the general population.¹ In New Jersey, the COVID-19 infection rate in prisons was 3.8 times higher than the state COVID-19 infection rate (42% vs. 11%).² The COVID-19 mortality rate in New Jersey prisons was nearly double the statewide coronavirus mortality rate (0.48% vs. 0.28%).³

Thanks in part to the advocacy of legislators and community activists, New Jersey implemented several policies to mitigate the spread of coronavirus in correctional facilities, including releasing approximately 3,000 incarcerated people from state prisons early, suspending co-pays for COVID-19 symptoms, and making COVID-19 vaccines widely available in jails and prisons.⁴ The Prison Policy

Initiative rated New Jersey higher than any other prison system in the U.S. for its coronavirus response, acknowledging a vaccination rate of 89% among incarcerated people and a 42% reduction in the prison population, in part thanks to large-scale release programs.⁵

NJRC and the Women's Reentry Commission have incorporated lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, research, and the testimonies of justice-impacted people to advocate for additional healthcare reforms. This fall, Women's Reentry Commission members presented at the National Conference on Correctional Health Care in Chicago as to the work of the Commission, prenatal care, nutrition, and menopause. Additionally, through a new partnership with the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC), a team of NJRC Health Navigators will work with women incarcerated at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women who are within six months of release to coordinate reentry health care services.

As an organization with a wraparound model, NJRC understands that court-involved people's access to health care is related to other fundamental needs – such as housing and employment – and social, historical, and political factors – such as race, class, and gender. For the Winter 2021 edition, we asked artists and writers across the country to explore the broad, overarching issue of mass incarceration. What does it look like? How does it feel, both to justice-involved and to justice-impacted people? What are the causes and effects of mass incarceration, as demonstrated by research and lived experience?

The following art and written submissions reflect the perspectives, views, and research of the individual artists and authors. These submissions do not necessarily reflect the view of New Jersey Reentry Corporation (NJRC) or the New Jersey Women's Reentry Commission as entities.

¹ Martha Hurley Professor and Director of Criminal Justice Studies, "Why Prisoners Are at Higher Risk for the Coronavirus: 5 Questions Answered," *The Conversation*, October 14, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/why-prisoners-are-at-higher-risk-for-the-coronavirus-5-questions-answered-136111>.

² Prison Policy Initiative, "States of Emergency: The Failure of Prison System Responses to Covid-19," Prison Policy Initiative, accessed January 3, 2022, https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/states_of_emergency.html.

³ Prison Policy Initiative, "States of Emergency: The Failure of Prison System Responses to Covid-19."

⁴ Prison Policy Initiative, "Criminal Justice Responses to the Coronavirus Pandemic," *Criminal justice responses to the coronavirus pandemic* | Prison Policy Initiative, accessed January 3, 2022, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/virus/virusresponse.html>.

⁵ Prison Policy Initiative, "States of Emergency: The Failure of Prison System Responses to Covid-19."

The response was so fantastic that we have decided to distribute the submissions across multiple editions. This edition will serve as the first installment. Please note that the submissions may be difficult for some readers, as they are often sensitive

in nature, dealing with issues such as sexual assault, mental illness, and domestic violence. We hope that you are as moved by the pieces as we are.

OUR VOICES - BECOMING LOUDER

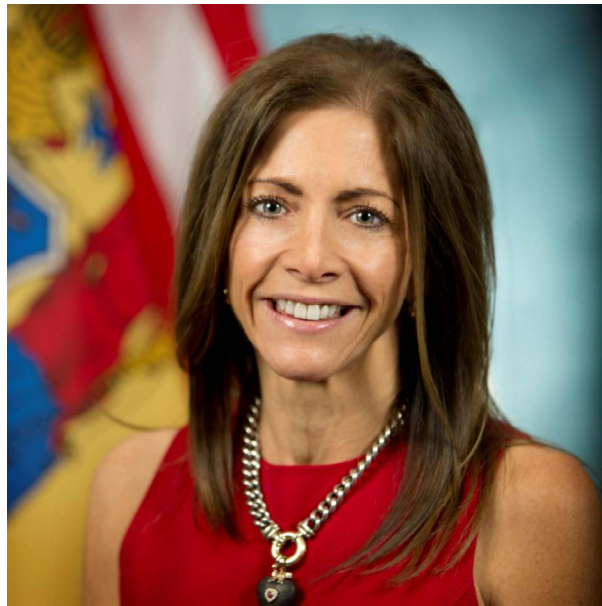
Dr. Gloria Bachmann, Editor

Since the first edition of *The Journal of Women and Criminal Justice*, the voices of those incarcerated, the voices of women, the voices of those of us who are advocates are becoming stronger. This is clearly noted by the ever growing number of contributions the journal is receiving. Our vision... Our mission... Our goal... To give everyone a voice through the journal is becoming a reality.

As we set out on the road to this second edition, we again sent out the message that submissions are welcome. That we want to hear YOUR voice. That we want to hear YOUR opinions. That we want to hear everything YOU want to express – On life. On incarceration. On moving back to a welcoming (or not so welcoming) community. On finding your passion. On displaying your unique gifts. On displaying your unique talents. And, what is most gratifying, we are hearing YOUR voices. For this edition of the journal, we received over 250 submissions. And, these submissions have come from all parts of the US. In fact, many of them, because of space constraints, will be a part of future journal editions.

Most importantly, we will, without deviation, continue to reach out and give everyone, regardless of who you are, where you reside, and what hurdles you have experienced, a voice in the journal. Under the leadership of Governor James McGreevey, the journal is just one of the many initiatives and programs that make up the NJ Commission of Women's Reentry. And, thankfully, the journal truly is becoming the voice of those incarcerated and their advocates.

I want to personally thank all who have contributed to the journal and invite you to continue to send in your submissions. For those who have not yet contributed, please consider doing so with our next edition. As I expressed in my reflections written in the journal's first edition, the stories, the reflections and the perspectives of those who have been or who currently are incarcerated, encourages all of us to join hands and be a united voice for continued positive and necessary change.



MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH: ELIMINATING RACIAL DISPARITIES AND ADVOCATING FOR INCARCERATED WOMEN

By First Lady Tammy Murphy

Currently, New Jersey is ranked 47th in the nation for maternal deaths and has one of the widest racial disparities for both maternal and infant mortality. A Black mother in New Jersey is over seven times more likely than a white mother to die from maternity-related complications, and a Black baby is over three times more likely than a white baby to die before his or her first birthday.

As First Lady of the State of New Jersey and a mother of four children, these statistics weigh heavily on my heart and have driven my maternal and infant health advocacy.

On Maternal Health Awareness Day 2019, I launched Nurture NJ, a statewide awareness campaign committed to reducing maternal and

infant mortality by fifty percent over five years and eliminating racial disparities in outcomes. This campaign focuses on improving collaboration and programming between all departments, agencies and stakeholders across the state to make New Jersey the safest and most equitable place in the nation to give birth and raise a baby.

To this end, in January 2021, I unveiled the Nurture NJ Maternal and Infant Health Strategic Plan. This plan is the culmination of over a year of in-person and virtual meetings with hundreds of concerned and invested parties, including national public health experts, representatives from New Jersey state departments and agencies, health systems, physicians, doulas, community organizations, and mothers and families.

In addition to the Strategic Plan, Nurture NJ's additional ongoing efforts include over 39 pieces of maternal and infant health legislation signed by Governor Murphy, funding for groundbreaking programs and policies, a maternal and infant health research and innovation center, an annual Black Maternal and Infant Health Leadership Summit and a Family Festival event series that brings essential state, county and local resources directly to the communities in need.

To achieve our goal, our work must take into account every mother in the state – including in correctional facilities.

The 2016-2017 "Pregnancy in Prison Statistics Project" conducted by the Advocacy and Research on Reproductive Wellness of Incarcerated People found that four percent of females entering state prison and three percent of females entering jail were pregnant. Of the 1,044 women whose

pregnancies ended while incarcerated, 87 ended in miscarriages, six ended in stillbirths, six ended in ectopic pregnancies, and four ended in newborn deaths. Additionally, 167 of the pregnant people studied were admitted to jail or prison with an opioid use disorder.

Given that incarcerated pregnant persons and their babies face a unique set of challenges, correctional facilities must provide necessary, quality, and individually-tailored health care services to meet maternal and infant needs. In fact, the Nurture NJ Strategic Plan makes several specific recommendations to support incarcerated pregnant women, which were developed in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Corrections.

We are determined to make sure every New Jersey mother and baby gets off to a healthy start. Together, we will solve this crisis and make New Jersey the safest, most equitable place in the nation to deliver and raise a baby.



IMPACTS AND SOLUTIONS FOR REDUCING INCARCERATION IN NEW JERSEY

Lt. Governor Sheila Y. Oliver
Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs

The pandemic has presented extremely trying times for people. We know that this virus has affected every age, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic group, but some of the challenges and conditions associated with the pandemic have placed an even greater amount of stress and financial hardship on women and moms, making them more susceptible to becoming involved with the courts or incarcerated.

The issue of mass incarceration is a topic of conversation that has repeatedly forced our country and state to rethink and re-imagine our current approach to criminal justice. The U.S. is the world's leader in incarceration, with over 2 million people in prisons and jails, which is a 500% increase over the last 40 years, according to the Sentencing Project. These are troubling trends, with higher frequencies of arrest and longer sentences plaguing our system.

To work toward ending mass incarceration in New Jersey, we have been placing emphasis

on criminal justice and policing reforms that are designed to advance social justice and reduce the number of people who enter our prison system.

One of the issues that Governor Murphy and the State Legislature identified as a contributing factor to the problem was the existing marijuana prohibition laws in place, which had been failing every test for social justice for decades. Before decriminalization took effect, every day 100 people were being arrested for marijuana possession in New Jersey amounting to tens of thousands of arrests every year. In 2020, New Jerseyans voted to decriminalize and legalize marijuana possession and in February, Governor Murphy officially signed adult-use cannabis reform bills into law, thereby setting a path to legalizing and regulating cannabis use and possession for adults 21 years and older. The laws will help to promote social justice for the Black and Brown communities that have been disproportionately impacted for generations and it will help to reduce the number of incarcerations in New Jersey.

CYCLICAL

Allison Flanigan and Rebecca Cromwell



The New Jersey Office of the Attorney General has also been implementing new policies to protect historically marginalized communities that limit when officers may use force, overhaul police training and culture, ensure greater accountability, and build trust with more vulnerable populations in our communities such as immigrants, LGBTQ+ people, at-risk youth, and victims of sexual abuse.

In addition to the State's ongoing criminal justice reforms, we must continue to invest in our mothers and our youth – our human infrastructure. There is no person who comes into this world without the ability to reach their full potential. But there are far too many people who come into this world without the socio-emotional and physical supports they need to reach that potential.

There are many barriers that can stand in their way – food or housing insecurity, a lack of access to quality education, sustained poverty, abuse or neglect, and physical and environmental challenges. All of these factors can result in adverse

trauma that endangers a person's welfare and puts them on the wrong trajectory in life.

These are systemic failures in our society that we must respond to if we want to end mass incarcerations in this country. The cost of incarcerating an individual is great in comparison to the amount that we spend on funding community programs that help children and families thrive.

And this isn't just an issue of inadequate funds, it's an issue of racial inequities. Despite the fact that research shows that Black and white people commit most offenses at similar rates, New Jersey has the highest Black to white youth incarceration racial disparity in the country.

The goal can't just be to change the dialogue about persons who have endured challenges and put them on a better path. It is to change the dialogue AND put those words into action.

In August, I signed a bill establishing a Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths and Communities pilot program in New Jersey's Juvenile Justice Commission. The pilot program will help to create a safe, caring environment for our youth to help address their physical and mental challenges. It will help facilitate health for youth, their families, and the communities in which they live. And it will help heal the challenges they have endured by using trauma-informed practices, violence reduction, and peacemaking supports and tools to address the harmful patterns of behavior.

The Juvenile Justice Commission will also work with community stakeholders to create community-based public safety systems to help juveniles who return home from facilities continue to be supported. These systems will also serve to divert youth from entering and re-entering the juvenile justice system.

Additionally, women who become incarcerated have frequently suffered adverse trauma during their childhood. This trauma has been

known to impact their decision-making skills, their learning processes, and the way they cope with stressful situations.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have caused generational and even inter-generational damage to a person as a result of sustained exposure in the household to emotional and physical abuse, economic hardship and poverty, mental illness, substance abuse, and poor health.

To help address this issue, in February, Governor Murphy and First Lady Tammy Murphy launched the first Adverse Childhood Experiences Action Plan, a statewide strategy to prevent and reduce childhood trauma and adversity. The action plan outlines several initiatives to identify, coordinate, and advance programs and services across state government to reduce and prevent adverse childhood experiences that negatively impact the developing brain and lead to lifelong social, physical, emotional, and economic challenges.

In the last issue of the Journal, I recall a passage from a poem by contributing writer Janice M. McElhiney. She wrote, "If I could get it together. If only there was a place. Somewhere I could heal. A safe house with some space."

Janice's words remind me of why I do what I do to help others. I serve as the Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, which is a pivotal partner in helping ensure that everyone lives in good conditions with the supportive services they need – whether it be housing, healthcare, or behavioral.

Safe and stable housing is one of the most important determinants of overall health and stability for everyone and we are working tirelessly through our Rental Assistance and Eviction Prevention Programs to help ensure that everyone stays stably housed, including those who face mental and behavioral health challenges. To learn more about these programs, visit nj.gov/dca.

We all must be active participants and take responsibility for our own destiny. But we also must support the most vulnerable in our society, and that includes court-involved women who are facing some of the hardest days of their lives. Supporting these women, not just upon reentry but from the day they come into this world, is the clear path forward to helping our communities thrive while reducing the number of incarcerations.

NEW JERSEY REENTRY CORPORATION & HORIZON BLUE CROSS & BLUE SHIELD OF NEW JERSEY PARTNERSHIP COLLABORATION

Partnership Summary:

Horizon Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Jersey (Horizon BCBSNJ) mission is fulcrum on empowering our members to achieve their best health. Horizon BCBSNJ's vision is to remain New Jersey's health solutions leader, driving innovations to improve health care quality, affordability, and member experience in the markets we serve. Our member-focused values are to strive for a culture of excellence and think innovatively. We accomplish this through implementation of evidence-based best practices, building collaborative community stakeholder partnerships and making data driven informed decisions. Proven strategies, which promote improved health outcomes and address disparities amongst the most vulnerable populations.

Horizon BCBSNJ has made a firm commitment to ongoing learning and long-term transformation in support of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, known as the Pledge. The Horizon BCBSNJ Pledge promises to continue being a leader in this space, building upon our past efforts and advancing meaningful change. It reflects a renewed emphasis in the evolution of the culture of the Company. The Pledge is not a one-time initiative, but speaks to the core of who we are and what we strive for at Horizon – a Culture of Excellence.

Horizon BCBSNJ's Pledge is to:

- Hold ourselves accountable, we have built a plan to work towards Horizon's future-state vision across each of the five commitments laid out in the Pledge.
- Incorporate gap analysis and path forward as a way to examine current activities, future goals and proposed actions to achieve our objectives for each element of the Pledge.
- Fully achieve success, by focusing efforts across multiple constituencies – both internal and external facing, throughout the organization.

Horizon BCBSNJ's Gap Closure Actions:

- Ongoing engagement with outside organizations to better understand our community
- Ongoing dialogue with key community stakeholders to understand the experiences of our members in healthcare
- Continued support of community health efforts focused on the Social Determinants of Health
- Continued support of the federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting program
- Development of a signature initiative, in partnership with other organizations, focused on a high-priority NJ healthcare disparity area (e.g., maternal health and infant mortality)
- Grant investments that provide more opportunities for minorities in the areas of education, work force development and community programs
- Sponsor minority organizations, events and activities that promote equity, inclusion and awareness, through the Foundation

- Inclusion of minority entrepreneurs/companies in our strategic investments led by Corporate Development.

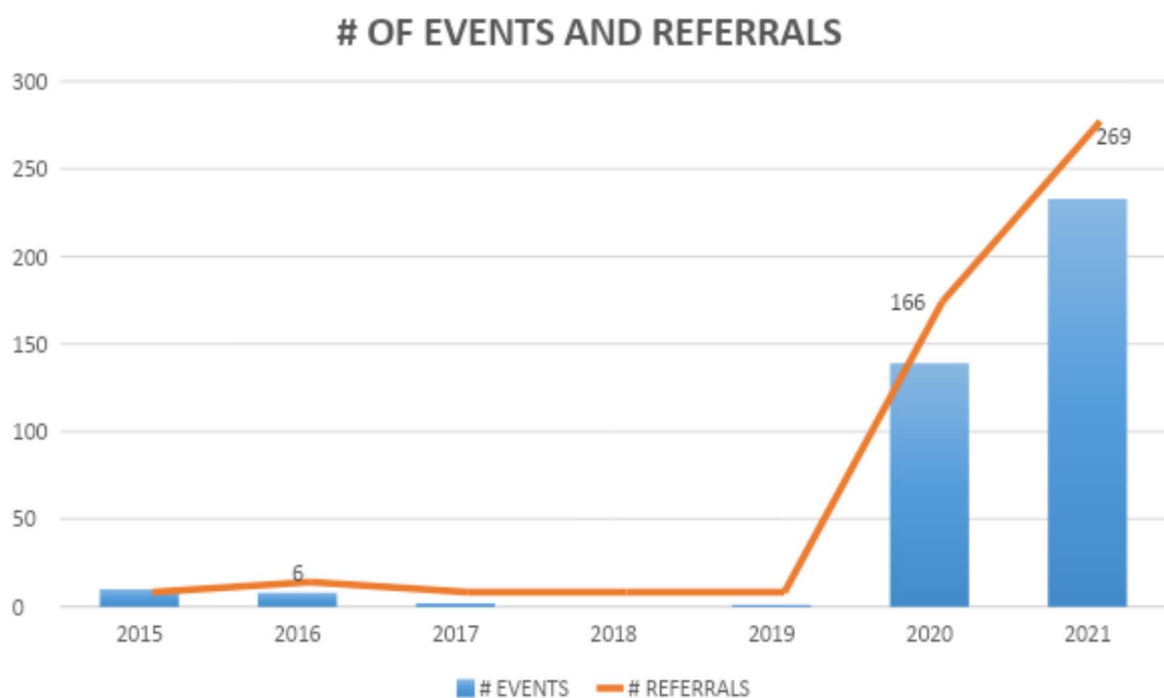
The partnership between Horizon BCBSNJ, Department of Member Advocacy & Community Outreach Transformation and New Jersey Reentry Corporation (NJRC), fulfills the health component within the NJRC model. Collaboration between NJRC and Horizon BCBSNJ initiated in 2015, and continues to evolve as NJRC services expand throughout the state of New Jersey. Currently, Horizon BCBSNJ provides:

- Programs for all NJRC county sites (9 sites) Prevention Health & Medicaid Literacy presentations weekly.
- Workshop presentations by the Health Education team provide preventive health services, chronic illness management/prevention, behavioral health/wellness, Medicaid related member support services available and COVID 19 public health recommendations.
- Medicaid Literacy presentation and direct Medicaid Enrollment assistance by the Community Health Representative (Medicaid Enrollment Representatives).
- Referrals of NJRC-Horizon clients, to internal and external support services. ie: Care Management, Mental/Behavioral Health services, Food Insecurities, etc
- Strategic sponsorship support for large NJRC initiatives, specifically addressing Women's Health disparities.

NJRC Annual Conference, "From Trauma To Triumph"

NJRC, Women's Project-Nurse Navigator position funding

NJRC & Horizon BCBSNJ community events: NJRC-Kearny Community Resource Center Grand Opening, NJRC-Union Site, Hurricane Ida Victims Back Pack & Food Distribution



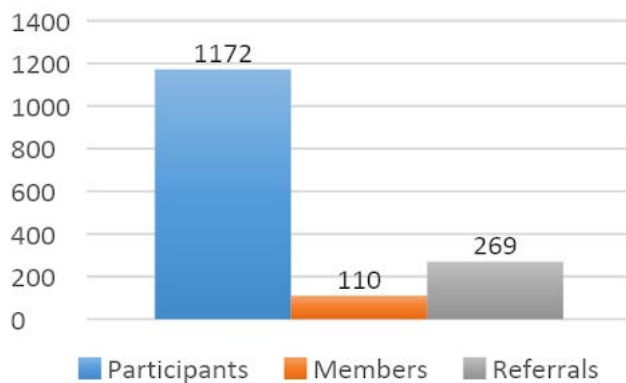
****Events are workshop presentations provided****

****Referrals represent referral services derived from workshops****

2020 Participants, Members, Referrals



2021 Participants, Members, Referrals

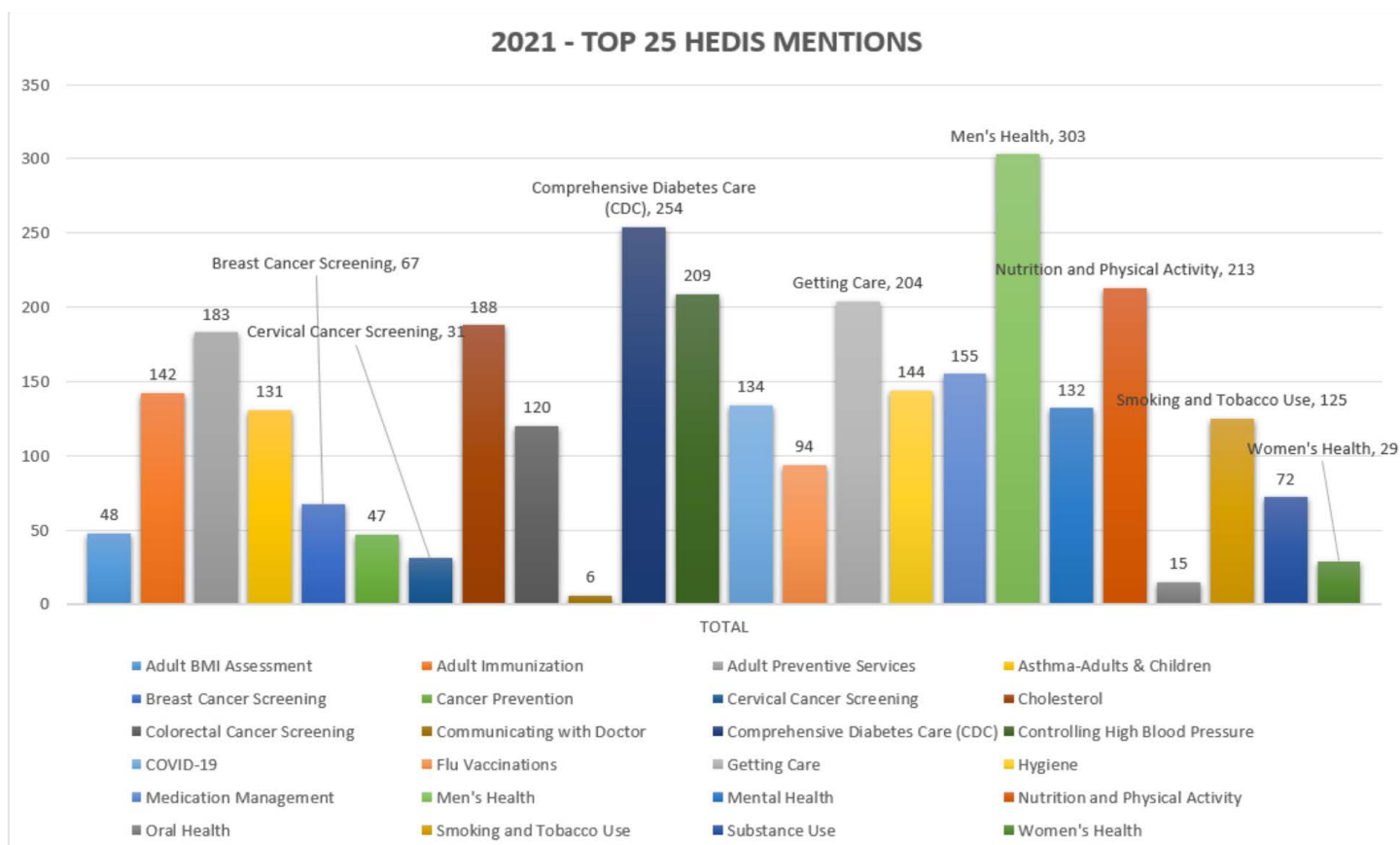


Unmet health and psychosocial needs, including health care coverage, health services access/ utilization, increasing health literacy, disease prevention/management, poverty, crime, and high rates of both chronic illness and infectious disease, contribute to recidivism, devastating communities. Factors that can contribute to the recidivism rate include unmet health and psychosocial needs. Some examples are barriers to health care coverage and access, underutilization of benefits, limited health literacy, poor disease prevention/management and poverty. The partnership between Horizon's Medicaid Advocacy & Outreach team and the New Jersey Reentry Corporation (NJRC) addresses these needs through weekly Preventive Health and Medicaid Literacy presentations.

The Prevention Health/Medicaid Literacy presentations focuses on specific Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS) addressing health gaps, improving health literacy, optimizing health services utilization, identifying a medical home, improving patient/provider communications, connecting Horizon members to member support programs, providing proper health care access/utilization, and sharing local social resources specific to food insecurities, behavioral health support services.

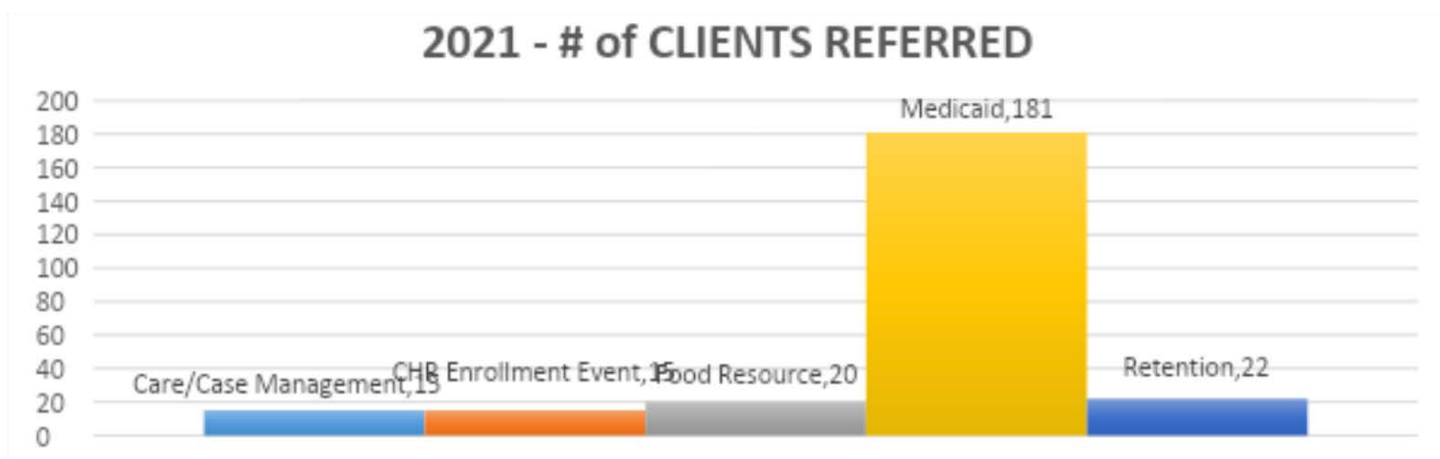
The Prevention Health & Medicaid Literacy presentations focus on specific Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS), which include:

- Addressing health gaps
- Improving health literacy
- Optimizing health services utilization
- Identifying a medical home
- Improving patient/provider communications
- Connecting Horizon members to member support programs
- Proper health care access/utilization
- Sharing local social resources specific to food insecurities, behavioral health support services



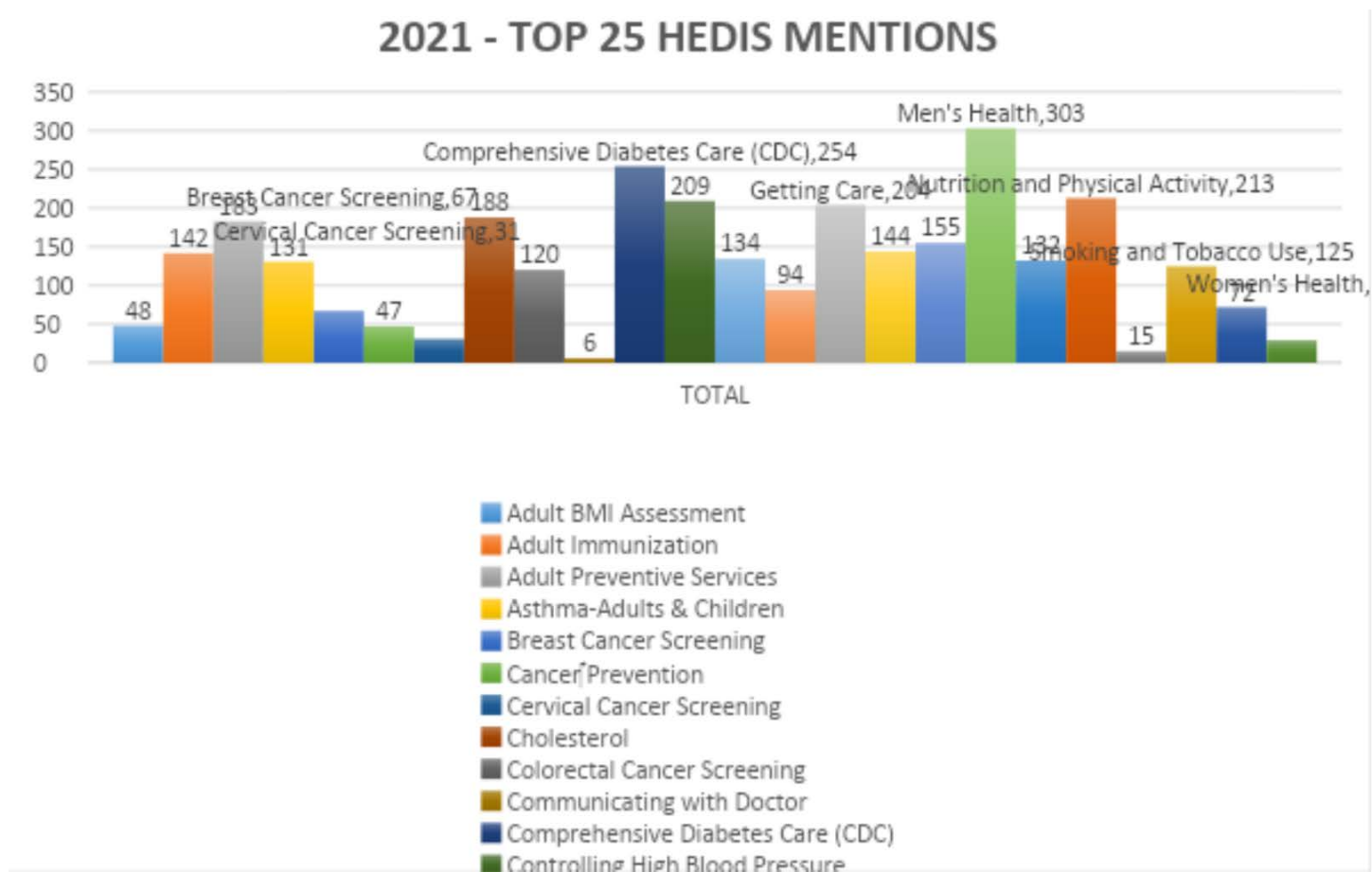
A primary component of health education workshops is to connect uninsured NJRC clients identified and referred by the NJRC Chapter lead, to a Horizon Medicaid Representative to assist with the NJ Family Care (NJFC) application. Medicaid Representative provides enrollment assistance telephonically, private virtual platform or in person enrollment assistance. With Medicaid enrollee client consent, the new member/NJRC client is connected to support programs like Care Management or Neighbors In Health Program, a Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) based program, for additional member assistance. Services include identifying a medical home/PCP, specialized providers for chronic illness management and additional member support programs.

Other supportive service departments like Quality and Behavioral Health to address housing stability, substance use recovery and member programs like Education Works Program to aid in achieving their High School Equivalency (HSE) or General Educational Development (GED).



NJRC Women’s Health Project, Circle of Care group has additional curtailed support as part of mutual ongoing focus to addressing women’s health disparities in vulnerable populations. The Women’s Project provides excellence in coordinated and integrated medical and behavioral healthcare, including mental health and addiction treatment. Medical challenges include access to OBGYN services, diabetes, hepatitis B/C, and HIV/AIDS. Mental health concerns include depression, anxiety—along with their linkage to reproductive cycles—and the legacy of trauma. Addiction treatment in response to Opiate Use Disorder (OUD) requires detoxification, residential treatment, intensive IOP (intensive outpatient), and Medication Assisted Treatment. Horizon BCBSNJ sponsored \$40,764 for NJRC Women’s Project, Nurse Navigator Position. The Advocacy & Outreach, Health Education team has provided focused Medicaid Literacy and Women’s Health Education. These presentations are designed to educate women in reentry Circle of Care, Women in Reentry group on women related health issues ie: Period Poverty, Women’s Reproductive Health/Prevention, mental and behavioral health services, Medicaid benefit literacy/utilization and non-medical related and basic needs resources ie: food resources, educational training, health literature.

ORIGINAL GRAPH FOR HEDIS MENTIONS:



Health Care Navigation: Linking Incarcerated Women to Post-Release Health Care

Tanya Pagán Raggio-Ashley, MD, MPH, FAAP

When women are released from prison, they are oftentimes forced to navigate unfamiliar technologies and systems in order to access needs and services. This sometimes transpires after decades of incarceration. A critical need is health, defined in its broadest sense as, “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”⁶ Impacted by non-medical factors such as the social determinants of health⁷ of food, shelter, education, jobs... The process of post-release health care needs to begin before discharge in order to prevent gaps and provide comprehensive, continuous care in an inclusive manner.

As Chair of New Jersey’s Commission on Reentry Services for Women, I am committed along with my colleagues to linking justice-involved women to quality, culturally and linguistically appropriate health care in a continuous manner in order to prevent gaps in needed services as well as perhaps newly identified needs for them as well as their children.

Like so many of you, I have witnessed first-hand how social determinants of health impact health and health outcomes. Because of various factors, including systemic racial, ethnic (including language and country of origin) and socioeconomic inequities, many justice-involved women are at increased risk for a plethora of medical, behavioral and oral health conditions, from the time they are born! Most have received little or inadequate health care. Most are unsure how to access health care post-release. Through the Commission and NJRC’s Women’s Project initiatives, we have and continue to work to bridge health care gaps and connect

currently and formerly incarcerated women to health care and other services which, positively impact their health and that of their children and partners.

Our [Health Resource Guide](#) catalogs providers across eight counties in northern and central New Jersey, delineating services and listing contact information. By minimizing the amount of research required by NJRC women program participants and offering printed versions of the guide at our sites, The Women’s Project is also responding to the digital divide through computer literacy and access barriers.

Through our nurse navigation program, NJRC has connected over 400 women program participants to quality and culturally and linguistically appropriate, inclusive, preventive, public and health care services to address the whole person such as: Screening, testing and vaccination, care, and treatment for COVID19; OB GYN, primary care, oral health, behavioral health and substance use services; Conditions addressed include but are not limited to obesity, diabetes, hypertension, asthma, COPD, cancer, arthritis, missing, filled, decayed teeth and periodontal disease...; Well women health and preventive health services including sexually transmitted illnesses, HIV, hepatitis B and C; Post traumatic stress disorder, adverse childhood experiences, depression, anxiety....; Addiction treatment such as detox, residential, Intensive Out-Patient, Medication-Assisted Treatment services.⁸ In addition, women have been enrolled and or reinstated into insurance plans including prescription services, mostly Medicaid, through NJ Family Care, Get Covered NJ.⁹

⁶ “Constitution of the World Health Organization,” World Health Organization (World Health Organization), accessed January 7, 2022, <https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution>.

⁷ “Social Determinants of Health,” World Health Organization (World Health Organization), accessed January 7, 2022, https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_1.

⁸ “Well-Woman Health Care,” ACOG, accessed January 7, 2022, <https://www.acog.org/topics/well-woman-health-care>.

⁹ Welcome to NJ Familycare, accessed January 7, 2022, <http://www.njfamilycare.org/default.aspx>.

In our “Circle of Care” initiative, healthcare providers/professionals and others assist NJRC women program participants in a small support group format with primary care, specialty care (endocrinology, cardiology, pulmonary), sexual and reproductive health, behavioral health, trauma, substance use, depression, anxiety, and resignation, children, family, and intimate relationships, and reunification. It is important to note that approximately 60% of incarcerated women have children.¹⁰

The Health Committee of the Women’s Reentry Committee has supplemented our direct health care linkage with evidence-based research, which increases awareness of justice-involved women’s needs within the medical (health, public health and behavioral health) and academic spheres.

[“Pregnancy in incarcerated women: need for national legislation to standardize care,”](#) published in *Journal of Perinatal Medicine*, and [“Symptomatic menopause: Additional challenges for incarcerated women,”](#) published in *Maturitas*, examine the

specific barriers faced by incarcerated women, and propose possible solutions.

Additionally, the Health Committee led four presentations and panel discussions at the 2021 National Conference on Correctional Health Care in Chicago: [“How the New Jersey Commission on Reentry Services for Women Addresses Client Needs: A Case Study,”](#) [“Prenatal Care for Incarcerated Women: Need for Standardized Templates,”](#) [“Nutritional Challenges of Incarcerated Women,”](#) and [“Addressing The Needs of Menopausal Incarcerated Women.”](#)

All of The Women’s Project and Commission’s initiatives work in harmony to ensure that NJRC women program participants are provided with inclusive, synchronized, individualized continuity of care, to address the whole person, mind, body and soul. We look forward to continuing and expanding these initiatives, prioritizing women’s health before, during, and after incarceration.

Employment and Training: Preparing Justice-Involved Women for the Workforce

Linda Baraka

When you reflect on your first job, you might remember the nervousness you felt when applying and the adjustment that accompanied a new role.

Now, imagine going through the same process after being incarcerated. Worrying how potential employers might perceive your record. Navigating new technologies. Enrolling in vocational or academic programs to “catch up.”

As Vice Chair of New Jersey’s Commission on Reentry Services for Women and the Chair of the Employment Committee, I am committed to helping justice-involved women enter or reenter the workforce. I hope to level the playing field so that when a formerly incarcerated woman applies for a job, the butterflies in her stomach are the same ones we all feel when applying for a job – not related to her incarceration.

Through the Women's Reentry Commission, I have facilitated resume building and LinkedIn workshops in collaboration with Jheryn Kenney, LinkedIn Key Accounts Manager, and Dr. Lauren Wells, Cofounder and Executive Director of 211 Community Impact. We hope that these sessions empower women to confidently pursue employment, education, and training.

I have also worked collaboratively with New Jersey employers, encouraging them to hire court-involved persons. The more "reentry friendly" companies there are, the greater the number of opportunities for second chances.

The above initiatives build upon the groundbreaking opening of [The Governor's Reentry Training and Employment Center](#). At the

25,000 square foot, state-of-the-art Training Center, NJRC program participants receive training and certification in solar panel installation, mechanics, Certified Clinical Medical Assistant, electrical assistant, Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC), Cisco, General Education Development (GED), solar panel sales associate, and Certified Peer Recovery Specialist.

The Training Center courses are fantastic opportunities for NJRC women program participants. We hope that, as we link justice-involved persons to training and education, the workforce receives them with an open mind and a firm belief in second chances.

MASS INCARCERATION REDEFINED: LAYMAN'S TERMS

By Maria Montalvo,

Currently incarcerated at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women

When a person is incarcerated, they are given a number and a new standing in society – the forever labeled. They become members of the machinery of mass incarceration and part of the outcasts of society. Mass incarceration has deep roots that are embedded in every part of our society: its laws, policies, and public opinion all designed to keep its members entangled and connected. The individual who identifies as an ex-offender joins a secret society of the lawfully banned; it is all about racial injustice, sadly.

The phrase "mass incarceration" has a history of its own and if we understand the meaning we can gain a new perspective on its power. At first, it operated almost as well as Jim Crow laws of the past

in confining individuals black or brown as being perpetually ranked not first in society. Then, in 1941, the phrase was used to recount the historic event when Japanese-Americans were imprisoned throughout the Second World War, a result of the strike on Pearl Harbor.

President Ford in 1976 proclaimed that this incarceration was "an example of our nation's misjudgement," resulting in eventual compensation for those who were incarcerated. The phrase "mass incarceration" has its origin and history as being used in connection with the disenfranchisement of a group of people based on race – African American. This system is compared to the Jim Crow codes that caused freed blacks to become slaves

⁸"Constitution "Well-Woman Health Care," ACOG, accessed January 7, 2022, <https://www.acog.org/topics/well-woman-health-care>.

⁹Welcome to NJ Familycare, accessed January 7, 2022, <http://www.njfamilycare.org/default.aspx>.

¹⁰Marcy Mistrett and Mariana Espinoza, "Incarcerated Women and Girls," The Sentencing Project, December 9, 2020, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/incarcerated-women-and-girls/>.

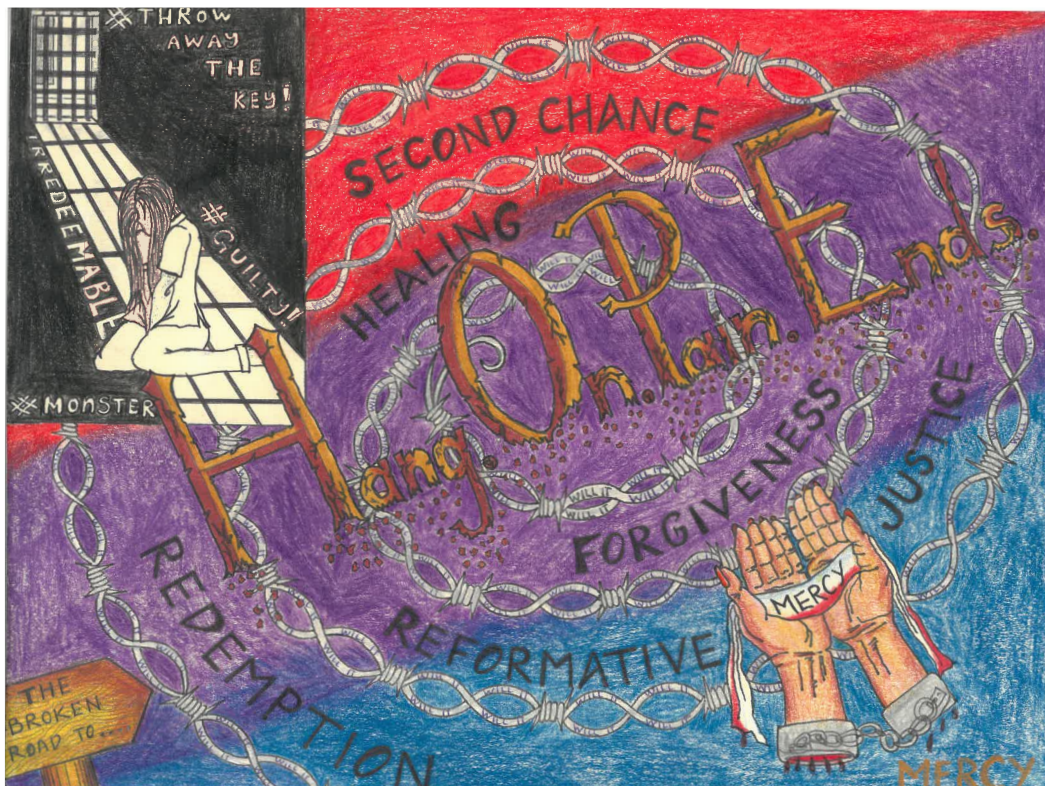
again as a result of minor infractions, such as not having proof of employment.

It has evolved into mass incarceration that includes the politics behind the laws and policies. This causes the ripple effect – collateral consequences that disenfranchise people other than the dominant culture, turning them into second class citizens. Individuals returning to society today face challenges because, once freed from confinement, ex-offenders are usually overwhelmed with great amounts of fines that are like monetary chains that trip them as they fight to maintain a livelihood. Owed fines are the conviction default that ensure re-incarceration.

The label of being formerly incarcerated makes it difficult to secure good employment that provides

adequate compensation for a comfortable lifestyle near the job – finding that policies are created in a certain manner that does not allow survival in society without illegal finances.

For previously incarcerated persons to lose years of their lives and experiences as a result of a conviction is punishment – the revenge and cruelty of being stuck in the invisible chains of mass incarceration, the neverending punishment. The debt to society should be the punishment of the term of incarceration. However, this turns into revenge because of the collateral consequences and fines that restrict successful reentry leading to reincarceration. The inability to fully return to society as a member and law-abiding citizen in society is the cruelty ingrained into the system of mass incarceration.



My Name is Antionette Stephen. Im 37 years old.

I was incarcerated since 2011 and entered Edna Mahan Correctional Facility in 2015 for murder.

Let's turn to the politics behind mass incarceration, which are the crime policies created by three presidential administrations. The first is the Nixon administration, which targeted violent and nonviolent crimes. The second is the Reagan administration, which was very impactful through policy and language – the War on Drugs caused a huge growth in mass incarceration of black and brown people. The third is the Clinton administration, which focused on violent crime and repeat offenders.

These administrations led to mass incarceration as it is today because of their rhetoric. The power to sentence offenders based on their individual circumstances was taken away from judges to allow the laws to mandate what sentencing ranges should be – mandatory minimums. The rhetoric used has evolved from not just the War on Drugs, but to the War on Sex Offenders, the War on Immigrants. The War on the Worst of Society, and the War Against Women. It never ends and no one is thinking about the collateral consequences: the casualties of the wars.

Society assumes that a prison sentence is fair, that justice has been served, and just deserts. However, the system fails to follow the lives of those convicted. Prison is not safe; it is another world with its own society. A society that mimics the free world, but without the same freedoms and protections from crime. A person sentenced to a mandatory minimum suffers many consequences besides the loss of freedom. They are placed at risk to be bullied and abused, physically and/or sexually. This is not limited to prisoner-on-prisoner either. This inside world is just like the outside world with its share of "bad apples." That does not mean the whole bunch is rotten – inmates, custody, or civilians.

There is a lot of fear, anxiety, and insecurity attached to the individual's prison experience. It is a collateral consequence rarely considered by outsiders. The offender is not the only one

incarcerated; their family is too. A person sentenced to 30 years to life or a life sentence for felony murder and/or murder suffers many consequences besides the loss of freedom.

Prisoners suffer the loss of family and friends, but are not allowed to grieve as a free person would. There is no closure. A choice must be made beside a bedside visit in a hospital or a visit to the funeral home alone, under heavy supervision if permitted to attend. If any emotion is demonstrated, the person is placed on watch – losing their freedom within the prison, degraded and humiliated under a paper gown, naked with constant observation of custody.

Female prisoners suffer greatly under the penalties of the law more than males because of disparities in sentencing. A lifer with children misses the many firsts of their children, becoming an observer and commentator as opposed to being a participant in their progress and maturation. Many incarcerated women have experienced trauma – physical, emotional, mental, or sexual abuses and/or are victims of domestic violence or abuse, more so than their male counterparts. The consequence is higher rates of incarceration of women with histories of mental illness and substance abuse.

The incarcerated are not truly rehabilitated because there is no hope of freedom for a lifer. It's all payback, just desertion. Their families suffer the consequences of their loved ones' incarceration. Many women have children who are now the responsibility of their loved ones. Many women have children who are now the responsibility of other family members. It is difficult to visit because of long travel times to prison. Sometimes visitors are discouraged by the way they are treated by staff and the difficulties they face trying to visit the incarcerated. The system makes it difficult to maintain familial relationships. When individuals are incarcerated for long lengths of time and still have family members alive to receive them, it places a burden on the family when the inmate returns

elderly with health problems and is unemployable.

For long-timers, the event that brought them to prison never escapes their thoughts. Society needs to know that when a death occurs, the offender, the offender's family, and the victim's family suffer as well – deeply. The offender suffers and does for the rest of their life, no matter where they are, unless they have pathological psychological issues.

Keeping people incarcerated for long sentences undermines the maturity and aging out process. It is nonviolent offenders that make up the majority of the prison population. Each time there is a reform, violent offenders are always excluded. For example, when COVID-19 credits were awarded for short-timers, eight months' worth of time, violent offenders and long-timers were excluded. Despite having to endure the uncertainty and fear of contracting this deadly disease, the rest of the population who did the same time faced day-to-day, were not given credit.

Empirical research has consistently found that long periods of incarceration do little to nothing to combat crime and may actually lead to more crime as people spend more time in prison. Basically, for a good number of women, the circumstances surrounding their crimes oftentimes have a common denominator – men. These events surrounding violent crimes and women statistically are not likely to reoccur.

There are instances of miscarriages of justice resulting in wrongful convictions that the machinery of mass incarceration is slow to correct. The process from crime to incarceration is a fast track. Society loves swift and harsh justice, but the correction of injustice is low and not prioritized. The effect of mandatory minimums is that years turn to decades quickly and no one in power seems to care.

Perhaps putting an end to mass incarceration can be done mindfully with consideration of the

implementation of a "Second Look" program on a case-by-case basis. The main focus is to bring first-time violent offenders to the forefront for a change. These women do not have long histories of disciplinary infractions. Usually, there is an adjustment period following commitment to prison. Once settled, the woman begins to take charge of her prison journey. For long-timers and those with virtual life sentences, they have records of being charge-free for the majority of their time – this can be 10 to 20 to 30 years infraction-free in some instances. There are many who have completed the NJ STEP's AA and BA programs, while some are near completion, with a whole new group working towards their degrees.

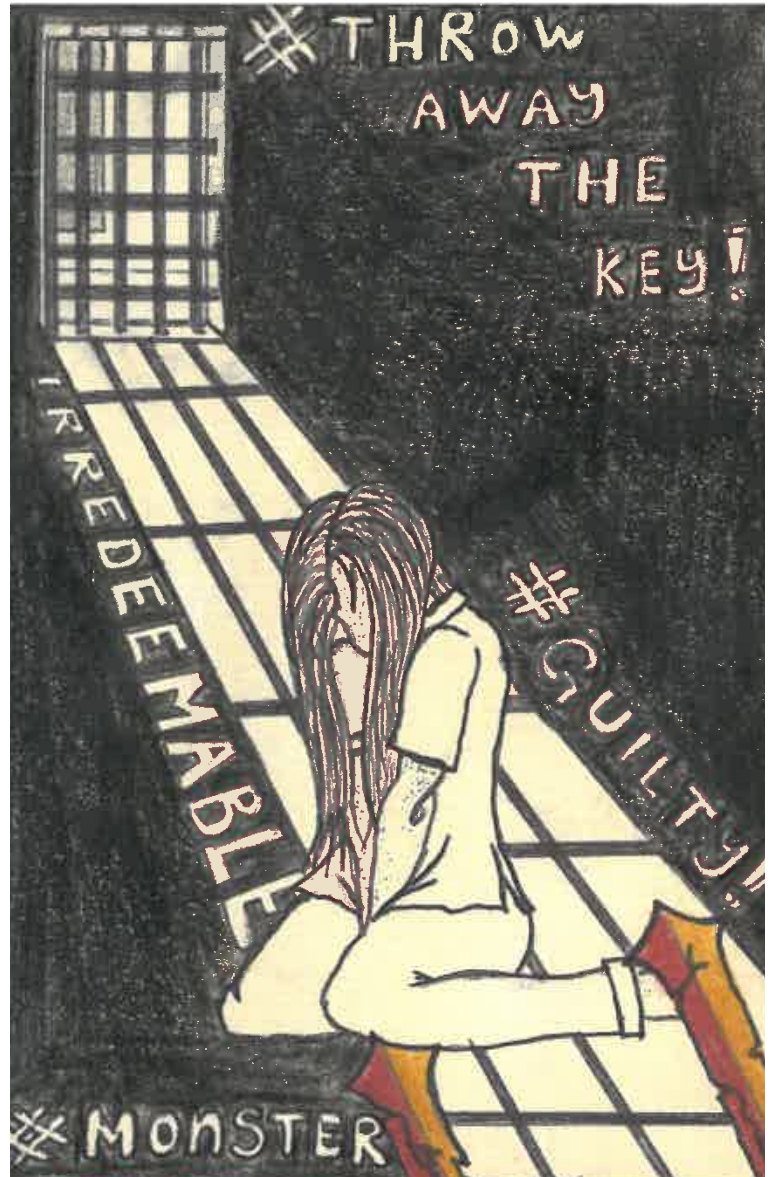
If researchers conducted a review of first-time violent offenders, they would find past trauma and/or incarceration at a young age. It is possible that evidence would either mitigate guilt or exculpate the women based on science or elements of the crime itself. Sadly, many women accept pleas because they cannot afford representation or the representation assigned to them does not adequately research and present their case. The other issue is the women who do not speak English, the Spanish speakers. This group is often excluded and not offered translators to explain the implications of a plea bargain or even of how to navigate their cases if taken to trial. The women lack advocates to vigorously challenge their cases on all levels. The farther a person gets from their direct appeal, the more difficult it becomes to challenge the case with any success.

Interestingly, the women convicted of the most "serious" violent crimes are the ones who lack a disciplinary history for violence and are the ones who work hardest towards rehabilitation. These are the individuals who suffer the most discrimination and unequal treatment in the system. A true indicator of violence would be a review of an individual's disciplinary history and what efforts they made to prepare for their futures.

The concept of mass incarceration and its effect is best summarized by Todd R. Clear and his co-author:

When looked at in the broadest sense, the Punishment Imperative had this main result: the criminal justice system now operates as a self-sustaining cycle of gathering increasing numbers of poor people, mostly men and mostly black, into its clutches, profoundly damaging their life chances, and returning them to communities bereft of the capacity to absorb them. It has been politically cancerous, privileging rhetoric that baits the more base public emotions rather than encouraging sound policymaking and strategic thinking. It has been a vast fiscal dark hole, guaranteeing that for generations public money must be moved from public goods such as schools, health care, and infrastructure to instead support and maintain a quasi-permanent, separate community of the incarcerated and controlled. And it has been empirically wrong, doing shockingly little about the problem it was originally designed to address.¹¹

Our society needs to allow the pendulum to swing towards compassion and rehabilitation, preparing prisoners to become law-abiding citizens who are productive and contribute to society. There are instances when the only solution for the safety of society warrants long-term incarceration; however, there must be a way to assess when this is not the case. A progressive society that is evolved should move towards transformation through accountability and healing – restorative justice leaning towards reduced instances of recidivism.



¹¹ Clear, Todd, R. and Frost, Natasha A. The Punishment Imperative: The Rise and Failure of Mass Incarceration in America, New York University Press, 2013.

COVID Sketch

Bekka Hess



Covid Sketch

Brief Bio:

My name is Bekka Hess, but my married name is Shellhammer. I intend to lose his name as soon as possible. The name is a constant reminder of the broken girl that he created.

I'm currently serving a quarter of my life (20-25) for Second Degree Murder. I was 19 when I was arrested. I sat in jail (Onslow County) for 731 days until pleading out. Forced to make the harsh decision of pleading guilty in order to secure a release date rather than risk Life Without Parole, I tucked my proverbial tail between my legs and took the plea. I tried to find solace in the fact that I'd be out at age 39, but where is the justice in that? The husband abused me until I was broken. I was so broken I hadn't even attempted to fight the charge, when I knew I didn't do it. I pay that price and face that decision every day.

I'm currently trying to seek out some options available to me. Whenever I'm finally free, I want to help those who

the (in)justice system fails. There are far too many who have similar stories to mine. I want them to know they aren't forgotten.

BEKKA HESS

ARTIST STATEMENT

Life After Life in Prison: The Bedroom Project

The women depicted here are some of the 27 women I have photographed for an ongoing series, Life After Life in Prison: The Bedroom Project. All the women in that series were convicted of serious crimes — mostly homicide — and spent anywhere from fifteen to thirty-seven years in a maximum-security prison. By the time they came up for parole they were all profoundly changed, yet most of them were repeatedly denied release because of the

crimes they had committed decades earlier. These women were open and trusting enough to allow me into their most private spaces — their bedrooms — and to share the comments that accompany the photos. Like me, they hope this work will shed light on the pointlessness of extremely long sentences and arbitrary parole denials, and thus help their friends still in prison: women (and men) like them who deserve a chance at freedom.



SARA BENNETT

BIO

After spending 18 years as a [public defender](#), SARA BENNETT turned her attention to photographing women with life sentences, both inside and outside prison. Her work has been widely exhibited in solo shows, including at the [Blue Sky Gallery](#) in Portland, OR, and in group shows, including [MoMA PS1's](#) Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration. Her work has been featured in such publications as [The New York Times](#), [The New Yorker Photo Booth](#), and [Variety & Rolling Stone's "American \(In\)Justice."](#)



Photographed by Sara Bennett

LEAH, 45, in her bedroom in her mother's house, 9 months after her release, Brooklyn, NY (2019)

Sentence: 21 years to life
Served: 21 years
Released: January 2019

When I am in this space, I am able to find the mental strength I need to tackle the daily obstacles I am met with because of my crime.
When I am in this space I am able to reflect on me, how I have transitioned from a weed trapped beneath the surface, into a beautiful sunflower, free and tall reaching for the stars.
In this space I know that no matter what I may endure outside of it, when I return to it, I am safe and free to be me.

SLAVE PATROL BY ANOTHER NAME

Ella Washington

They lock you up, throw away the key,
you become a liability to family.

you've been taken away, this justice
system is degrading, this community
isn't fading, cause it's a business, then
people get paid in

They get paid to destroy families, they
separate parents from their kids, gladly
then go home, kiss their kids, ~~and~~
+ put them to bed happily, it saddens me

there is no real help for this condition
upon release, a system designed to
hinder the growth of fellow men + women

after you've locked us all up in
shackles, families affected in this
hassle

Mental, physical, emotional damage
inflicted, sometimes being locked up
~~for~~ to line their pockets when you
ain't even did it. Don't be the
wrong color cause in their eyes you're
already guilty.

inside Not having a voice, putting stress on

on your family... a choice you're willing
to make... to get your needs met

Slave Patrol then, now still slave patrol
by another name, you get ~~off~~ patrolled +
tuck your kids in at night with no shame

Blood lies deep in the discovery, they're out
for blood... yours there is blood in every
beastain from all injustices... No love

You have policies that are only amended
to appear indiscriminate in the eyes of the
law, those same laws lock up people
of color in scores, leaving scars

PLEASE SIR, CAN I HAVE MORE THAN THIS?

BIO

My name is Jamie Farthing. I am serving a life sentence at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility in New Jersey. I've been incarcerated since 1994, but tragically maintain an optimistic hope for prison reform. :) I am originally from Georgia. I am a writer and enjoy writing about my prison experience as a form of catharsis.

—

Today I woke up and looked in the mirror. Let me tell you, the mirror has become my enemy. Some days more so than others. This wasn't always the case. I used to love looking at myself, and not in an "I think I look good" kind of way. I've always had glaring flaws, but I never minded seeing myself. Finding zits to pop, eyebrows to pluck, and just routine perimeter checks. Now though, now I don't know who's looking back at me. I tilt my head left, then to the right, and I see my reflection moving. I know it's me, but it's not me. I don't know this image I see reflected back. I know you change as you grow older, but is it so drastic for everyone? I look and try to see the "me" I remember, but I'm not there anymore. Somewhere along the way, I've lost sight of myself within this life sentence.

I've been locked up since 1994 and I don't recognize myself anymore. When, during this life sentence, did it happen? What year between the ages of 18 and 45 did the drastic transformation occur? For the life of me, I can't remember. It terrifies me to think it will continue to just get worse as the years keep marching on and I disappear more and more here. One minute I was fine with myself... then I wasn't.

I've never really cared so much about my looks before, but now I'm almost crippled by them. It's a very uncomfortable feeling I don't like, and I don't

know if this is just what regular getting old is? I wish I didn't care, I never did before. I always just felt like regular ol' Jamie, no more, no less. All I keep thinking is... that reflection, in that mirror, is that what people see when they look at me? That stranger that looks nothing like me any more? I don't know. I don't know what they see when they look at me. I don't know what I see when I look at me.

I've been trying to figure out what defines an identity? Our life experiences? I was locked up when I had just turned 18, what life experiences did I have? I'm not a mother. I've never been in love or married. I've never had more than a summer job. No career, no house, no first apartment, nothing. I have a criminal conviction and a heavy prison sentence because I was a dumb kid who followed the wrong people into a horrific situation a million miles from everything I knew. A situation that turned out to be far worse than the one I was running from. I didn't know how to stop it, how to turn around, to pull up, to do anything. Now all I have are memories of the most horrific time in my life that devastated so many lives like only capital crimes can. All I have are prison experiences, because I can barely remember my life before prison. This is becoming all I know, and I hate it. I want more, who in their right mind wouldn't?!

I can't stand looking at the stranger in the mirror – this adult I've become as the years keep passing by in the prison system. Nor can I stop looking, ever so briefly, to try to find something I remember. I don't know if it's all in my head. Like the Lord of the Rings, Gollum. Living in his cave, twisting yet surviving desperate for his "precious." In my case, "freedom." Then the mirrors I'm looking in are so tiny, 3 ½ x 6 inches. Even if you line four mirrors up and down the wall like a full-length mirror, they never line up. It's like a set of fun house

mirrors, each a different size and shape. Which is real? You turn it one way and you look narrow. You flip it sideways, you look like a bloated tick. You never get a clear picture. There are no full mirrors here where I am, so you can't see yourself fully. You only see a tiny distorted section at a time.

The same thing happens when you only hear bad things about yourself. When you're never allowed to be more than your worst mistake, your crime. I've gotten two college degrees while here, both with honors. I've done intensive one-on-one counseling to work on my inner self. It was brutal and hard and more painful than I thought I could endure sometimes. Nothing worth having comes easy though. I also have a stack of certificates and certifications from taking everything that taught a needed life skill or a vocational training skill. I'm here because I had no clue how to function in the real world on my own. I had no life skills when I found myself alone for the first time in a world I wasn't ready for. I panicked and met the wrong people at the right time. So I need, and try, to learn everything, because I went from my parents' home to a prison cell.

I even ask people who had functioning households, "How do you do this?" or "How do you do that?" I try diligently to learn everything I can. I also try hard not to get disheartened because I know that even if I do everything right and perfect for the rest of my life, it doesn't really matter what I do, does it? What could I do to ever be seen as anything more than a murderer and a thief? Nothing. Not even for a lot of people who advocate for prisoners and prison reform. They collect the lifers' stories and pluck heart strings with those stories, only to help the people with drug crimes or nonviolent crimes.

THE INDIGENOUS INDIGENT

Mary b. LaVallie



You ever heard the term "revolving door" of prison? This is the very prison population that has always kept the revolving door of prison revolving. This is the population that gets time cuts after time cuts and second chance after second chance and in most cases they don't have the life-ending sentences that need time cuts. They aren't doing the life-ending sentences that are sometimes greater than the person's life expectancy, that touch people's hearts to care to begin with. Advocates see the Worth of the lifers' stories to help others, but not the lifers themselves. We are never allowed to be more than our crimes, even around people who say they care, because that's all anyone will ever see.

Prison is not a healthy environment and the longer the term, the more detrimental it is. When I was arrested, I was taken out of the horrible situation I found myself in with my co-defendants.

I was never meant to be a criminal, and had I never met them... But prison gave me a firm foundation to get my mind back right, and I did. I'm not praising prison for saving me, because had the services that should have helped at-risk kids like me been more widely known and better able to help, all this tragedy WOULD have been avoided. Of that I have no doubt. But the good I managed to glean from being in a stationary environment is now being slowly chipped away by the dead years that keep stretching on and on with no end in sight and I'm becoming a shell of who I could be if just given the chance that no one wants to give me.

Public opinion is so wrong about violent crimes. Yes, they're horrible; yes, they're heinous, but what crime isn't? Violent crimes do not equal violent irredeemable people. All people are flawed in their own way, but we are still people. See me, just me.

Never being able to see your whole self makes you lose sight of yourself and I did. I have. Years and years and decades of it only make it worse. I ask girls with short time in and long time in if they recognize themselves in the mirror when they look at themselves. The girls that haven't been here long don't know what I'm talking about. The girls with ten or better years in know exactly what I mean. They all say the same thing, "I remember what I looked like when I got locked up, but no, I don't see her when I look in the mirror anymore." The slow graying of your hair. The lines that slowly appear and deepen. The ten pounds that used to come and go are now the twenty or thirty pounds that mostly stay more than go. Everything constantly changes until you've changed completely and you're a stranger to yourself. I've been here so long, have I let the negative opinions others have about me taint how I see me? Has prison even corrupted what I see when I look at myself in the mirror?

I look around me and I wonder: what is this place supposed to be doing? What do prisons do? I bettered myself because I desperately wanted it. No

one made me, or even cared, if I ever did anything in here. In fact, it's so much easier to do the wrong thing in here, more accepted. So what are prisons supposed to be doing? If you ask 100 people "What is prison for?" you will get 100 different answers. If you ask them "What does prison do?" you'll get 800 different answers.

Reader, what is prison for and what does it do? Compare your answer to anyone else's and see how different it is. What does society hope to accomplish by having people sit stagnant for decades in these prison systems? Because, if you scratch the surface, there is the same unhealthy ugliness and abuse in any prison system. What types of person is prison making when it's so riddled with physical, psychological, drug, and sexual abuse? What could anyone hope to achieve while within an environment so toxic? Does locking people up for decades and life times really make society better? Is it actually doing whatever you believe it's designed to do for the betterment of society? If you really do believe in the prison system, would you be okay if your child was here for a year, ten, thirty, sixty, if this was their punishment? Is that a just sentence for your child? So do you really believe in the prison system as it is? Funny how things are okay for other people.

The weight of each year in prison is crushing. Everyone you know and everyone you love slowly vanishes one by one. It's like trying to hold water in your hands. Time doesn't stop, not even to let you say goodbye. You can't even hold onto yourself, because you vanish with time too. You lose everything, everything, here, even yourself. That is why today when I woke up and looked in the mirror, I wished that more than my appearance would change...

Tamie Farthing


JULY 5, 2018



BIO

Abigail Cook is a formerly incarcerated artist and advocate based in Atlanta, Georgia. She was convicted of a felony when she was 18 for a mistake she made as a minor. After serving time and seeing injustices behind bars, she vowed to change the system. Since her release, she has been published in *The ReSentencing Journal* by Tufts University, received an advocacy fellowship from the Georgia Coalition of Higher Education in Prison, and co-founded Georgia's Beyond the Box campaign.

July 5, 2018 – This was the day I was arrested. This is a deeply personal piece that superimposes the reality of the trauma I faced and still cope with to this day. I believe most people can relate to this idea of wearing a mask for the world to see, especially on social media.





BIO

I am Alec Balica, a 17-year-old high school student from Hunterdon County. I go to Hunterdon Central where I am in numerous honors societies. I work at a local restaurant, Matt's Red Rooster, where I am learning skills for the future. I also volunteer at Chabad of Flemington, where I tutor in the organization named Homework Helpers.

IMAGINING MYSELF AS THE MOTHER

As a male high school student, the incarceration of women makes me think about my mom and my sister. Life would be much harder without these important people in my life. There are many events in a young person's life that you need or want to have your mom there for. When going to school for the first time and saying goodbye to your mom, her making you feel safe and excited for school would be lost if she were to be in prison. Moms are supposed to be your rock and the person that you can rely on the most out of anyone in the world. Someone that you can talk to when you are having a bad day or a person that can give you some of their advice from their experiences.

Kids need their moms when going through life. I needed my mom to help me through many things in my life. She gives me the motivation to do my schoolwork when I am feeling down. Even in early

childhood, moms are the ones that help with emotional support. This would leave children unable to explain their emotions and how to have the confidence to share those emotions. Not only would the kids be missing their moms during important milestones in development, but the mother wouldn't even be able to see them. Imagining myself as the mother in this situation must be heartbreaking. You may not be able to even have physical contact with your own child but you only see them once in a while. This means that the mom has to see their child growing up in front of her eyes, but will be unable to help them through life. Which I would believe would cause deep depression. Incarceration is not just bad for the women that have to deal with the conditions of prison, but also for their children who are able to learn and have emotional support from their mom.

MY MOTHER'S FOOTSTEPS



BIO

@HeatherCjarvisSPEAKS

My name is Heather Jarvis. I am 29 years old. I have previously been published by *The Crime Report*, *The Iowa Review PWP*, and won PEN America's Fielding A. Dawson Prize in Non-Fiction in 2019. One of my works was staged and read at an official PEN: Breakout event at the Brooklyn Book Festival.

I previously studied memoir under Piper Kerman for three years through a prison initiative program. One of my stories will be published by Random House in a companion book to her next memoir. I frequently do commentary on Prisonradio.org and produced a spotify mini episode entitled "Lives Worthy of Progress" on their channel.

Currently, I am a Public Service major at Sinclair Community College. I am a part of Ohio State's OPEEP program. I am also a participant in the BE THE CHANGE grant, funded by The Women's Fund, which is to empower women through the Horizon

Program to gain civic education and challenge policy. I recently attended an Emerging Leaders training through Just Leadership USA. I have very strong beliefs on a lot of issues within the justice system. I truly believe in courageous self-change and believe redemption should have a place in the court system.

I have a 10-year sentence, but am currently left with only 23 months! My plans upon release are to advocate and be the voice of violent offenders.

Women's incarceration has grown at twice the pace of men's incarceration in recent decades.¹² 80% of women in jail are mothers most of them are primary caretakers of their children upon arrest.

I am a mother stuck in the masses but first I was one of the 5 million children¹³ left behind as mass incarceration began to rock the nation. 7% of all minor children in the United States has a parent who is or was incarcerated. 36.5 million children have at least one parent who has a criminal record.¹⁴ That is nearly half the total population of U.S. Children.

My earliest memory is crying for my mom. I remember being dropped off by a social worker at my dad's house; my mom was headed to prison. I remember the visiting hall, I remember the long wait and the stairs. The stairs that took me to her. I have always had to step up from an early age. Lots of children are stepping up. Parental incarceration is indirectly costly for families as well as tax payers.¹⁵ Some can't afford the visits, some can't afford the connections leaving bonds severed.

¹² Aleks Kajstura, "Women's Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie," Prison Policy Initiative, 2019, www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2019women.html.

¹³ Sara Wakefield, PhD., and Christopher Wildeman, PhD., National Council on Family Relations Brief. Volume 3, Issue 1, January 2018, pages 1-6.

¹⁴ Amy Alexander, "Why Children with Parents in Prison are Especially Burdened," contributor National Journal, December 2015, Next America: Criminal Justice Project.

¹⁵ Wakefield and Wildeman, National Council on Family Relations Brief.

I remember when my mom went up for parole shoving all my toys under the bed and attempting to clean to get ready for her to come home. I wanted a mom but she didn't get out that day. It would be years and mounds of resentments later before she would get to me. In some ways she is still trying to get to me. Tables have turned and we have spent the majority of our lives separated by razor wire. First her in a cage - now me. Dictated by our decisions and the consequences of control. Hers, mine, the systems all of us fighting to rein.

I blamed every problem I got into, every suspension on the fact she was gone.
"Heather if the truth hurts, change it!"
She pounded that phrase in my head when she was finally released. Now I embody my truth, I'm not ashamed of who I am. But now I wonder if my daughters will blame me for their mistakes. Will they thrive through it or will history repeat itself yet again?

It is suggested parental incarceration increases internalized problems by 5 to 60%, external problems by 4 to 60% and

aggression by 18-33%.¹⁶ It is known to increase mental health problems and reduces school performance.¹⁷

I would know... For my children it has already started. Last week my daughter was suspended. I don't want that. I want them to find their voice. I want them to know we are more than this cycle we are trapped in. They are potential and true casualties. I never meant to leave them in such a vulnerable state. I didn't know about ripple effects and that my actions would cause such a threat to their well being. I was addicted and selfish.

The children of incarcerated mothers are an extraordinary high risk group.¹⁸ Discussions of U.S. Correction policies do not often consider children wrote P. Mae Cooper and David Murphey, Researchers at Child Trends.¹⁹

I want them to know everyday I wake up now and do everything I can but the cycle can only be broken by them.

The children and families of

¹⁶ Wakefield and Wildeman, National Council on Family Relations Brief.

¹⁷ Wakefield and Wildeman, National Council on Family Relations Brief.

¹⁸ Alexander, "Why Children with Parents in Prison are Especially Burdened."

imprisoned are not receiving crucial support.¹⁹ How can I be mad when my daughter gets suspended? A study indicates that children of incarcerated parents are 10x more likely to become incarcerated themselves. I have stacked the odds against them just as they were stacked against me. Some research shows some of these children developed resilience and beat the odds.

Unfortunately not all do.

I am calling to America to change the conversation. Lessen the shame, lessen the stigma,²⁰ and lessen the sentence. Explore alternative sentencing for primary care takers. Prioritize family connections. These children are not benefiting from the justice system. I am proof of that. Policies that address underlying problems as an alternative is what this country needs. It is what I needed and it is what my children need today.

¹⁹ Alexander, "Why Children with Parents in Prison are Especially Burdened."

²⁰ Alexander, "Why Children with Parents in Prison are Especially Burdened."

Selora, My Sunshine

Only God could know, the perfect way
To encourage me, after a really bad day
Through a tiny beauty,
My hope restored
Just a silver lining,
During a nightmare storm
Selora's light shines so bright
She is my Sunshine
And I thank God for His significant sign
That one day, it will all be fine

By Sarah Webber



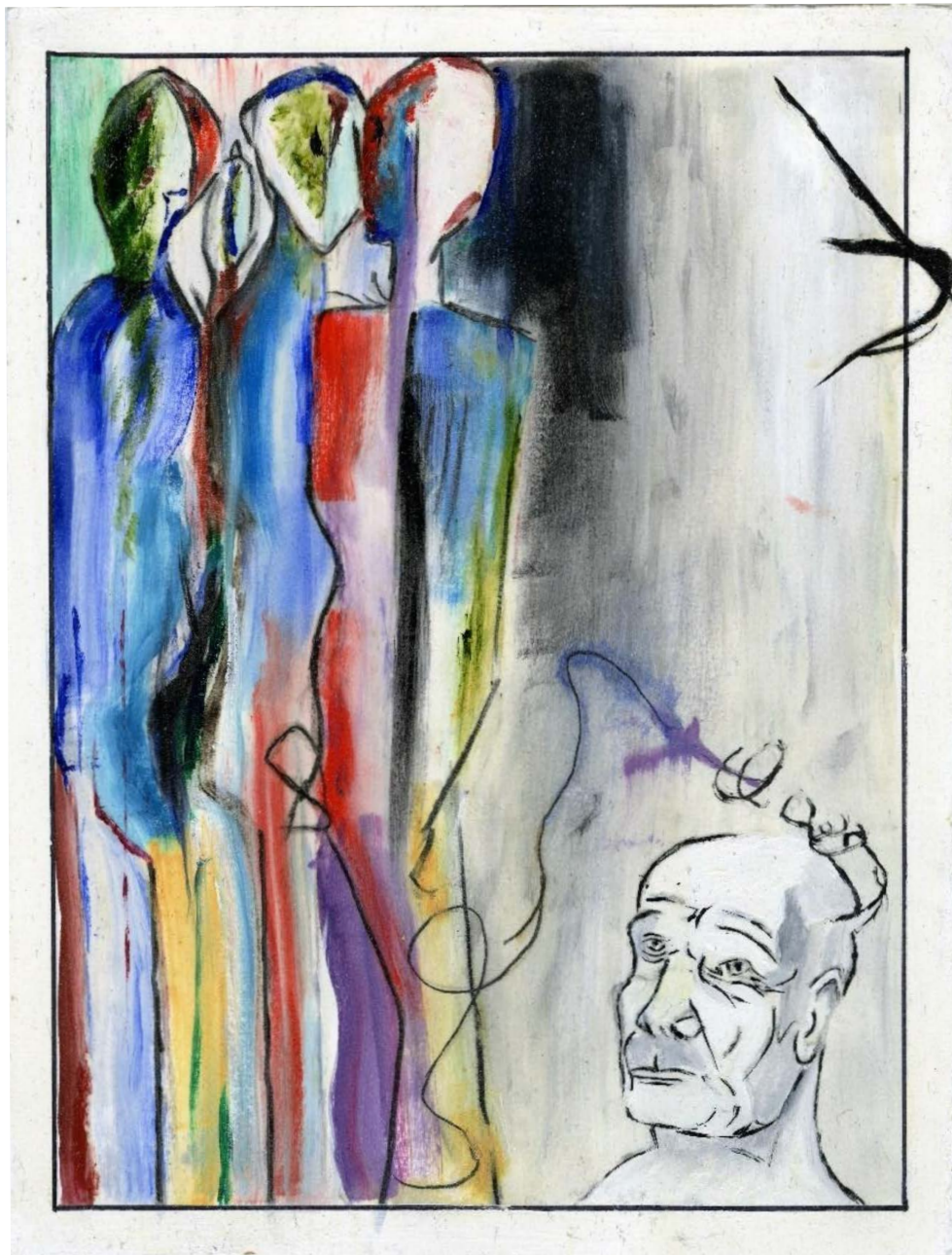
MASS INCARCERATION TODAY AND YESTERDAY

Art and writing by Carey Francis

My life was saved by just five days. On August 1st of 1996, new laws to fight the "War on Drugs" were put in place. It was a bad time for me and a lot of other single mothers of color like me in Texas and throughout the country. In my hood, single mothers were losing their food stamps, getting fired from their jobs and losing the FASFA money that had previously gone to their education. I managed to be slipped through the cracks of life by a mighty fine thin line. I had been convicted on drug paraphernalia charges on July 26, 1996. Convicted due to a Drug Paraphernalia charge, I was labeled as a felon on July 26th, 1996. I did not really understand what was really going on until one day my friend Donna called me and said "Girl I need some food to feed these girls. The government took everything from me. My rights to employment, affordable housing, education opportunities, the right to vote, access to SNAP, and other public benefits are forcefully ripped away. Girl it's sad! We just want to feed our kids."

Our lives became dominated by poverty and crime vary rapidly because of these new restrictions. There were lots of men and women who began to use drugs and alcohol as a way out, my self-included. This use had a trickle down effect on our children and our families. Children were thrown out in the streets, little girls sold and raped in their own communities, crack babies were born. Just living in the community took a toll

on your mental health. This way of living haunted me for years to come. I was forced to raise my children in a cruel and evil environment. I struggled every day to keep my children safe. I developed methods of survival that would help to keep my kids out of trouble. I would give them money and teach them to keep money in their pockets at all times. I knew that would keep them from stealing and robbing people.





I stood in poverty lines for food and did a whole lot of praying. I told my children the truth about everything. I forced them to go to church. I kept them busy as bees while I was a functional addict.

During this time, I became incarcerated. While I was locked up, I learned how to strengthen my conversation manipulation tactic and I learned more criminalistic activities than I ever knew existed. I remember when I first went to jail, a corrections officer told me "Your children will be in here with you within the next 10 years." I looked at that officer and spat on the ground, and she shoved me into the fence. As I was being shoved into that fence, the transparent image that ran across my mind was that I had given birth to sons that would grow up and go to jail because of the system of things. Those words from that correctional officer stuck with me like glue. I was scared for my sons, with me behind

bars and them being young black African American males in a changed society of crime and poverty, that was terrifying to me. I also wept for my four sons.

Rehabilitation was hard to come by in prison, so I set out on a forced course of action to save my life while incarcerated. I started connecting and networking with people to set myself apart from the criteria of being locked up. I began to write to my children all the time and by the grace of all grace I did give them a good foundation and set the stage for them not to follow my bad behaviors. They did go through a lot of pain. Mothering and fathering themselves, they had to take care of each other the best they knew how.

It has been a long time since then. Today, my sons are all grown, never been incarcerated, two of

them are serving in the active-duty military, and I got an education. A BFA and an MFA. I'm currently teaching in the public school system/judicial system type of education, and a recent graduate of the Community Family Life Services Speakers Bureau 2020. I know back in the 90s those lawmakers were trying to make things better, but things got worse. Though things are better for me now, there are a lot of parents and children out there still struggling like I was.

I work as a substitute teacher for justice-involved students now. I have worked in the judicial system for the last five and a half years with juveniles.

During this time, I have been through rigorous training and explorations on the most effective ways to reach justice-involved kids. I have learned a lot through training and exploring my own experiences. I have had intensive conversations with kids aged 12 to 17 years about how they got caught up in the judicial system.

When I asked one of my kids about his experience he told me, "Ms. Francis you do not understand! I have three baby sisters and a three-month-old baby brother, and when there is no food in the house, I got to get out there and get it. I cannot go to the Human Resources or Catholic



Charities, I'm not old enough. People always want to know where my mom is and I don't know. My siblings are crying hungry and scared, so yeah I go rob and steal to get food." There was a quiet pause in the room. I asked him, "Have you been worried about your siblings since you have been incarcerated?" He said, "I'm good Ms. Francis, I taught my little sisters how to do the same thing to get food."

I sat there in awe. The correctional officer called him for count time. I watched him blend into the jail cells. And I cried. He was in the same position my hood and I have been in all those years ago. It is very important that the policy makers stop implementing and drafting laws that keep our young adolescent black males criminalized as racial targets for mass incarceration.

The children that I have taught in the judicial system have seen a lot of criminal behavior in the environment in which they lived throughout their childhood. Today it's all about setting a good foundation for kids. I see the same type of life repeated with young teenagers raising themselves and their siblings, struggling for food, shelter, and clothes. These children are not allowed to advocate for their family, they are not able to go into charities in the city to get assistance. The judicial system is a melting pot for criminals' minds, and it is not a rehabilitation center, instead it's a breeding ground for developing criminal behaviors. From my experience working in juvenile adolescents' services, children are becoming statistics of studies and nothing more than numbers on paper. There is a solution: delete the poverty, delete old fashioned education, and create a recurring development educational system for law that parents can comprehend both in the household and in the environment. Create a welfare for adolescent children to take care of their siblings as well.



THE CHEMISTRY OF RACISM

Bridgette Mabry is currently at North Carolina Correctional Institute for Women in Raleigh North Carolina after a wrongful and unjust conviction in 2007. She is working to be an advocate of change throughout each stage of the judicial system, concentrating on prison conditions, personal interactions within the prison system, and lack of opportunities and reformation for women in the North Carolina system. She is looking for individuals and organizations to connect with to make greater changes.



THE CHEMISTRY OF RACISM

Oxygen. Hydrogen. Basic earth elements. Oxygen is needed for all of humanity to breathe. Hydrogen is also necessary for survival and is found in many different forms and combinations. However, when oxygen and hydrogen are separated and concentrated, these two elements can create very volatile situations. Oxygen can explode with the smallest of sparks. A hydrogen explosion could wipe humanity from the face of the earth entirely. But when oxygen and hydrogen come together in a balanced partnership, water is formed. H_2O . WATER, the universal solvent. Water, the basis of all life on earth.

An element exists on earth that closely resembles the characteristics of oxygen and hydrogen. It can be explosively volatile or it can be harmonious and enriching. This element, however, does not come from the earth. Nor has it fallen from space. The element is entirely man-made. This element is **RACE**.

RACE is a man-made term. Webster's Dictionary defines **RACE** as:

- ◆ A family, tribe, people, or nation belonging to the same stock.
- ◆ A class of kind of people unified by community of interests, habits, or characteristics.
- ◆ A division of man-kind possessing traits that are transmissible by descent and sufficient to characterize it as a distinct human type.
- ◆ A distinctive flavor, taste, or strength.

When contributing to humanity, **RACE** can define a smaller portion within the larger group and glorify the beautiful elements of the subgroup. Like the varying colors of a rainbow, **RACE** can direct attention to a certain area of particular attributes and characteristics. And as with the color spectrum of the rainbow, there are no defining lines. They merely merge slowly into the next color band. The same is true of the "races" of humanity.

Unfortunately, when a particular color becomes exalted over the others, when it is labeled "more important" and all other colors become "less than", **RACE** – turns into *racism*. Some of Webster's definitions can be viewed as unsettling. Man has distributed definitions that humiliate, tear down, and cause **WAR!** *Racism* causes humanity to become separated and concentrated. This happens through segregations, governmental policy, and individual attitudes.

Racism has all of the negative characteristics of oxygen and hydrogen when it is separated and under pressure. The smallest spark can ignite a tragedy that rids the earth of life, liberty, and the pursuit of harmony and happiness—for **EVERY** individual. On the other hand, if energy is invested to restore a balanced bond, like the bond found in water – life will abound on earth for all of humanity. *LIFE.....FLOWS*.

The effects of *racism* are felt by every individual whether it is realized or not. It can be illustrated by the destruction of a chemical explosion, such as oxygen or hydrogen under pressure. The beauty of **RACE** can also be seen, just like when harmoniously balanced water droplets display the various colored spectrum of a rainbow. Ironically, in this array, physics do not allow the presence of BLACK nor WHITE. There is no friction of differences.

The *Chemistry of Racism* calls for humanity to decide which state it will exist in.

Separate and volatile? Or bonded, unified, and prosperous.

THE CHOICE IS YOURS.

◆ Bridgette Mabry

LEGACY

Alondra Aragon and Xochtil Larios

*Note: originally published in *Reclaiming the Lens**

Our lived experiences and traumas are different but our struggle unites us as one. As melanated folks who continue to live the oppression of white amerikkka, our stories of resilience carry our legacy forward. We are planting seeds of Love, Forgiveness, Power, Peace, and Worthiness, so our children can taste the resiliency of the fruits of our labor and they may also walk with the gift of sharing these seeds and continue the legacy they have inherited to the generations to come.

We are co-creating our narrative. We are here to thrive against all odds, to share our voices, to love so our children can walk with peace and dignity in a world that once had us locked in cages and killed for simply being. They say what you do today will affect the seven generations to come. This is who We do it for. We struggle so they don't have to. Now We may heal and thrive collectively like We are meant to be. A reminder that We are the cosmos.

Alondra Aragon

I reminded myself every day to see beyond what is in front of me, to turn my struggles into hustles. As a youth then I didn't care about anything. Why should I? Why should I have felt as though you could tell me anything? Who were you? Who was I? Those things made me who I am, they made me tangible. I was holding in a lot of energy. What was I holding in? My voice, my smiles, my beauty.

As a young adult now I remind myself we have a duty* to the next generation to fight systems of oppression and find new ways to co-write our collective and individual legacy. This is our purpose. This is our calling.

Xochtil Larios

* It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains. -Assata Shakur

LUCERO HERRERA



MURAL ARTS PHILADELPHIA

Mural Arts Philadelphia is the nation's largest public art program, dedicated to the belief that art ignites change.

For over 35 years, Mural Arts has united artists and communities through a collaborative process, rooted in the traditions of mural-making, to create art that transforms public spaces and individual lives. Mural Arts engages communities in 50–100 public art projects each year, and maintains its growing collection through a restoration initiative. Our core program areas—Art Education, Restorative Justice, and Porch Light—yield unique, project-based learning opportunities for thousands of youth and adults.

Each year, 15,000 residents and visitors tour Mural Arts' outdoor art gallery, which has become part of the city's civic landscape and a source of pride and inspiration, earning Philadelphia international recognition as the "City of Murals."

Our Mission

Through participatory public art, Mural Arts Philadelphia inspires change in people, place, and practice, creating opportunity for a more just and equitable Philadelphia.

Our Vision

Mural Arts Philadelphia envisions a world where all people have a say in the future of their lives and communities; where art and creative practice are respected as critical to sense of self and place; and where cultural vibrancy reflects and honors all human identities and experiences.

Our Values

We value the essential humanity, dignity, and potential of all people.

We respect the knowledge and experience of all individuals and embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion.

We are committed to inquiry-based learning, respectful communication, and mindful collaboration.

We believe in the transformative power of creativity.

Mural Arts Philadelphia: Restorative Justice department

Art education, paired with personal and professional development, and hands-on assistance on mural projects forge the growth of strong, positive bonds between returning citizens and justice-impacted communities. We place a strong emphasis on work readiness within our Guild program and give creative voice to people who have been disconnected from society.

Restorative Justice participants feel empowered by their accomplishments and emerge with a newfound sense of pride in their own abilities and enhanced employment readiness skills. The Restorative Justice program cultivates resilience in individuals as they transition from incarceration back into civilian life.

Through programs like our inaugural District Attorney's Artist in Residency and our Reimagining Reentry Fellowship, we combine art with criminal justice reform advocacy including Art for Justice and Fair and Justice Prosecution. Mural Arts' Restorative Justice department has received significant Anti-Violence Community grants from the City of Philadelphia and State of Pennsylvania to support the impact of our Guild program.

- Since founding The Guild program in 2009, we have consistently maintained a one-year recidivism* rate below 15%.

*Recidivism: the rate at which someone who was formerly incarcerated is reimprisoned

- 85% of Guild graduates are employed or enrolled in education programs or vocational training one year after graduation.

Philadelphia's one-year unified recidivism rate is 35%.

- We serve 100 participants per year.
- We pay our Guild participants a living wage, more than 150% above the federal minimum wage.

In 2021, Mural Arts Philadelphia's Restorative Justice Program, whose mission is to transform individuals, victims, and communities divided by the criminal justice system, launched a new Women's Reentry Pilot Program. This arts and wellness-focused paid reentry program, modeled after The Guild, serves the unique needs of returning women and their families, including both personal and professional

development, supportive services, resource-sharing, mentorship, relationship-building, and entrepreneurship – with a focus on job readiness.

This program was structured with the support of justice-impacted women to create a holistic and safe environment for program participants.

Through mural making, carpentry, and other creative projects, program participants are guided by artists and other skilled professionals to transform their neighborhoods and themselves. Job readiness, through the development of life skills and mentorship, is an essential element of the curriculum. Participants have also built personal and professional growth plans, which include communications, teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, digital etiquette, and essential job entry skills like résumé-building and interview preparation to help participants secure future employment.

DECLARATION

Declaration was conceived by Dwayne Reginald Betts and Titus Kaphar as part of Mural Arts Philadelphia's Reimagining Re-Entry Fellowship. The artists worked with members of Mural Arts' Guild Program, a re-entry program for men and women returning from prison, as well as men from MAP's mural program at SCI Phoenix.

The Declaration of Independence is both a revolutionary document and evidence of many contradictions in the history of the United States. The redaction of this document reveals the truths and contradictions as seen by current American citizens, many of whom are people of color. For example, while the Declaration states that "all men are created equal," the Three-fifths Compromise determined enslaved African Americans would be counted as 3/5 of the number of white inhabitants of each state for the purposes of representation in Congress. This ratio has been guiding the United States for nearly 250 years, and has begun to be critiqued more closely in light of the recent civil upheaval brought about by the deaths of Black men and women by police brutality.

Sponsors:

Art for Justice Fund
City of Philadelphia
National Endowment for the Arts
The Estate of Pearl M. Carpel
David and Julia Fleischner
An Anonymous donor

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

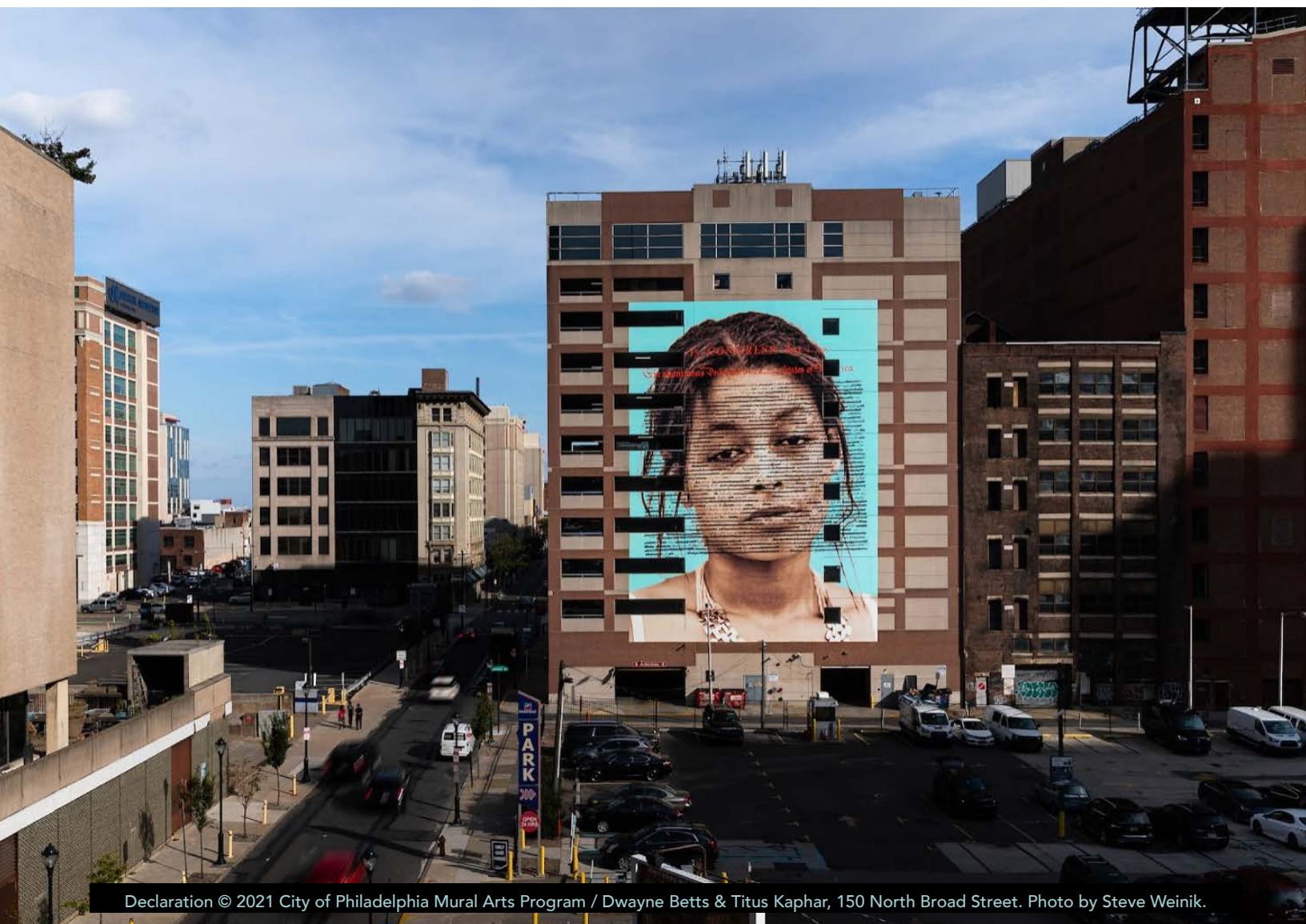
The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of Nature, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, in such a case, dictates that慎重 guard be taken against the repetition of such evils.

History attests, that such a course has been pursued by successive people in all ages and all parts of the world. In the most barbarous as well as in the most civilized nations, the sense of justice and right has been too strong to permit them to sink under the heavy yoke of tyrannical and unbecoming oppression.

And we, the undersigned, do hereby declare, that the thirteen united States of America, have declared their independence, and that they are now free, sovereign and independent States, absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the Kingdom of Great Britain, is hereby totally dissolved; that the Union, now being, between them and the Kingdom of Great Britain, is hereby totally dissolved; that the thirteen united States of America, are now free, sovereign and independent States, absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the Kingdom of Great Britain, is hereby totally dissolved.



Declaration © 2021 City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program / Dwayne Betts & Titus Kaphar, 150 North Broad Street. Photo by Steve Weinik.

OPERATION RESTORATION

Syrita Steib

The effects of mass incarceration go beyond prison walls. There is an assumption that people can easily transition back to a life that is completely different from the way they left it and gain access to social and economic opportunities. But what people fail to realize about the effects of mass incarceration is that people are discriminated against by systems, institutions and employers. Not due to their capability or drive but because of their interaction with incarceration.

Unfortunately, mass incarceration is a system that does exactly what it was founded to do. Black, brown and poor communities are disproportionately incarcerated at higher rates than white people. Yet, overshadowed by those statistics is that women are also one of the fastest-growing state prison populations, growing over 834 percent in the past 40 years.²¹ Some 80 percent of women are the sole caregivers for their children. Removing them from their home affects their families in more

²¹ Prison Policy Initiative, "The Gender Divide: Tracking Women's State Prison Growth," https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/women_overtime.html.

ways than not. What people fail to acknowledge, though, is that these women will return to their families and communities, often assuming their roles and responsibilities as caregivers once again.

This is one of the reasons why I started Operation Restoration. The mission of this non-profit is to support women and girls impacted by incarceration to recognize their full potential, restore their lives and discover new possibilities. I shared dreams and aspirations with the women I met, and I knew when given access to education, social services and economic opportunities, there was nothing that any of us could not do. In 2017, I learned that although I believed in our collective ability to change the world as we saw it, this was not the case for the systems, institutions and employers of today.

When advocates and policymakers discuss access and equity in higher education, they fail to consider access for students who have been impacted by incarceration. I know this from personal experience and success in navigating the college application process. In 2017, I decided to continue my education upon my release and enroll at the University of New Orleans (UNO). I was denied admission the first time around, because I “checked the box” asking about a person’s history with incarceration. When I decided to apply again two

years later, I did not check the box and, unsurprisingly, was offered admission and scholarships to attend UNO. Though this could be considered a victory, for me it shed light on the barriers and inequities that women like myself faced in returning to their communities and working to improve their lives.

That same year, I worked with partners to advocate banning the box on college applications. We brought women and men with similar experiences to testify and won the support of conservative legislators who had never voted for criminal justice reform in the past. The bill passed the Louisiana House of Representatives unanimously and went on to be signed into law, making Louisiana—my home state—the first in the nation to pass this legislation. Since then, I have worked with people impacted by incarceration to pass similar legislation in six other states—Maryland, Washington, Colorado, California, Virginia and Oregon.

We started a movement, and it is encouraging to see the momentum continuously grow across states. Yet, even in the midst of all of the victories, I keep the dreams and aspirations I shared with the women I met at the center of my work.

¹⁶ Prison Policy Initiative, “The Gender Divide: Tracking Women’s State Prison Growth,” https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/women_overtime.html.



SYRITA STEIB

**FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
OPERATION RESTORATION**

BIO

A native of Vacherie, Louisiana, Syrita Steib graduated from Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center as a licensed and certified clinical laboratory scientist. In 2016, Syrita founded Operation Restoration, a New Orleans-based nonprofit that works to support women and girls impacted by incarceration to recognize their full potential, restore their lives and discover new possibilities.

Syrita is recognized nationally for her work on dismantling the legal system and removing barriers for women and girls impacted by incarceration while transitioning back into the community. She serves on numerous local and national boards and appears regularly as a keynote speaker and panelist on topics of incarceration and injustice. Syrita was one of 73

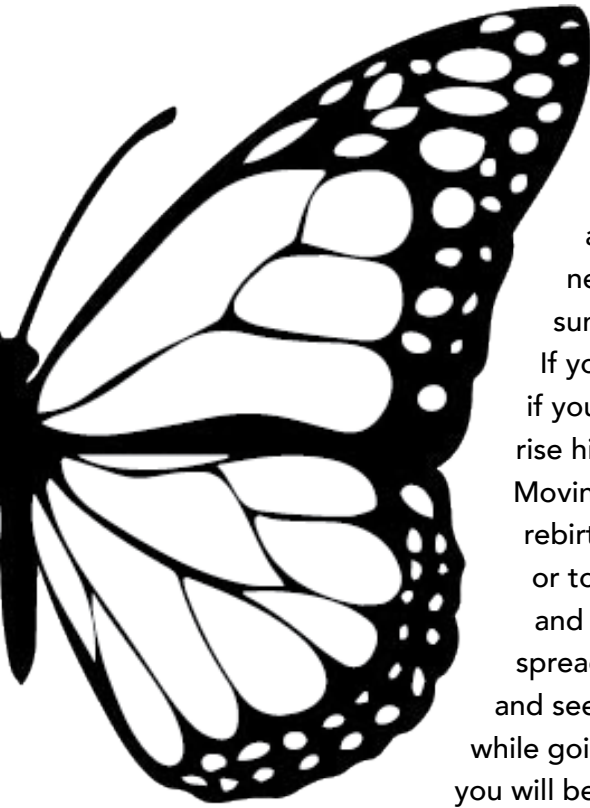
people granted a full and unconditional presidential pardon in January 2021.

With her science background, Syrita was named by 500 Women Scientists as one of five Fellowship for the Future fellows. Her fellowship project is to train incarcerated women as lab assistants for healthcare facilities. In 2021, she was recognized as one of the New Orleans 500, New Orleans Women of the Year and a Young Leadership Council Role Model.

Syrita was also a 2020 recipient of the Rubinger Fellowship; 2020 Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana Angel Award Honoree; and recipient of the Black Voices for Black Justice Fund. In addition, she is serving a three-year term on the Bureau of Governmental Research board of directors and was named a Culture of Health leader by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

BUTTERFLY

By the Women's Reentry Pilot Program of
Mural Arts Philadelphia, led by artist Serena Saunders



Designed and destined for greatness
soaring high and beautifully
through life while moving forward with no regrets
shedding the old
your only obligation is to be better than yesterday
perfection is unrealistic, reflection is mandatory
and brings self-worth and growth
never dwell on the past, tomorrow will bring hope love and happiness
sunshine, gentle and vibrant
If you are not willing to learn, no one can help you,
if you are determined to learn, no one can stop you!
rise high, fly free and show us with your colorful wings of life
Moving with style and grace
rebirth, only thing left is my cocoon to trace
or to fly high and far
and show my beauty to the world
spread my wings and rise above
and see things from a different perspective
while going somewhere new -
you will be amazed at the possibility you will achieve
never give up
and continue to grow
embrace the free life
and free yourself from everything that weighs you down
you're brilliant and beautiful and full of flight



BUTTERFLY LAKES

Butterfly Lakes © 2021 City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program / Serena Saunders, FDR Park Welcome Center, 20th Street and Pattison Avenue. Photo by Steve Weinik.



MASS INCARCERATION AND THE AMERICAN JUSTICE SYSTEM

Joe H. Furr

People's opinion and/or indifference toward "criminals"
The bad guys, right? The worst of the worst,
Scum of the Earth. It doesn't matter the
reason, the only thing that matters is the
punishment. Even then, the punishment isn't good
enough. They just get sent on an all expenses
paid vacation where they can hang out and
be lazy. No wonder crime is so bad. They deserve
all that happens to them. They deserve much
worse. It's their own fault. They made their
choices. Who cares? Prison reform is unimportant.
They're there for a reason.

(A Few) Reasons People are involved with crime and the justice systems

- Some are products of poor upbringing
- * Extreme poverty
- * Media that glorifies crime
- Some simply have a difference of opinion of right and wrong
- * Some are ~~not~~ guilty at all but are falsely accused.

The point being: There are many reasons that someone can end up with a criminal mentality. Most are not that the person in question is inherently bad or evil. Things such as abuse and social standards can cause such a confusing mix of thoughts and emotions that can lead down this path.

Then, there is American history and the treatment of minority ethnic groups. There are many in these groups that believe America is not meant for them and that music, sports and crime are their only opportunities to have things in their lives.

Society's glorification of money and inanimate objects. Capitalism, with all of its benefits, that promotes the idea of the possibility to get extremely rich off of the backs ~~and~~ of their fellow men and the poverty of other countries.

Things one must endure inside of jail/prison

- Hunger to the point of temptation of crime
- Sickness and severely inadequate health care
- Unchecked mental health issues
- Disease from inability to access safe sex precautions, such as condoms
- A cesspool of disease due to unsanitary living conditions
- Lawyers and D.A.'s who do not care of truth or justice. Only money, plea deals and convictions
- Being victimized by facility staff as well as inmates

In jail, you are treated as if you are guilty. You have no access to the outside world other than snail mail unless you have money and even then it is very expensive and very limited. You only receive emergency health care, yet, if you have an emergency, you have no way to get attention other than wait on a guard to walk by. They have to call for other officers who all have to decide to call a nurse who has to decide to call an ambulance which will arrive some time later and now you are dead. I've seen someone have a heart attack, the entire block bangs on the doors and it takes 45 minutes to get help.

Then, with a justice system which the only purpose is to incarcerate people who violate the law, you end up in prisons. The government has deemed it unnecessary for them to run prisons, therefore, we have the private industrial prison complex.

Here, private citizens work and "oversee" the prisons. Allowing for various gang members to become guards. (This is possible no matter what but much easier in this situation.) Mentally unstable people to become guards. Guards who will take prisoners into non-surveillance areas and break their bones or murder them without consequence.

Here, the gangs control the block. People are beaten. Robbed. Killed. Raped. Many atrocities someone may endure for years and, in some cases, a life time. A life time of pain, anguish and turmoil. Things no human should have to endure and no one cares.

People are victim and/or witness to things that cause severe mental disorders that go unchecked and are simply released back into public with no form of rehabilitative therapy. Greatly reducing their ability to function with their families and the outside world. All but insuring that they will end up right back in the system.

This causes children to lose parents, putting them at risk of falling into the same hopeless loops. Causes people to commit other crimes because they can no longer find gainful employment. Mental break downs and acts of violence. The list can go on and on.

This all points to a truth. Mass incarceration ~~can~~ simply creates far more problems than it ~~can~~ solves. Something has to change. Like it or not. The vast majority of imprisoned people ~~will~~ be released back into the public.

You can think it is not your problem if you want but we are all in this society together. It is our problem as a whole. What happens if your child is going to a store which happens to get held up by a person just out of a 30 year sentence who is very mentally disturbed and feeling hopeless and they are killed?

Will you still be so blind as to only see and demonized the hand that pulled the trigger? Or by the pain and loss of someone dear to you be the catalyst for you to question what was the deeper cause for such devastation in the world? These are only a few problems with the system. These are very complex issues which many care nothing about.

Possible Solutions Cor beginnings to solutions

Unfortunately^{now}, the issues presented are not so simple as black and white. The only hope of solving issues of prisons is to solve the issues of society as a whole. It will take much time as well as the cooperation of many. Here are a few of my ideas/thoughts.

1. Apathy and ignorance and misinformation are all killers. We need to get society aware of the true nature and causes of these problems. Raising children to not celebrate but shun media that promotes exclusive cultures and crimes. To accept and interact with peoples who are different than they are. To understand that they can use capitalist society to their benefit and in turn, that we can, together, work toward the inclusive, hopefully, utopian future that eliminates poverty, inequality and inequity.

To not put so much trust in the people currently in government positions. (Not meaning those now in office, though, they are included none the less.) To value education and humanity and that, presently, we are still a democratic republic which our constitution states our government to be 'of us, by us, for us.'

We need to stop simply electing officials and trusting they will fix it all. We need to be much more involved with our government.

Then, we should pass laws banning the private prison industry. State governments should be responsible for them and thus, responsible for the issues there in. Redesign to make the spaces much more manageable and reduce the possibility of crime and abuse inside.

Place social workers whose responsibilities include things such as staying in touch with family members. Help accessing research materials. Mental health. Just being someone who genuinely cares and to talk to.

Change the ultimate goal from punishment to rehabilitation. Re-education. Give people tools of hope. Therapy to keep track of mental issues and attempt to resolve them. Anything to try to give them the best chances of becoming happy and successful human beings.

Make sure that the people working in these places are not people who seek to abuse their fellow humans. This is a huge one. People can work in a jail/prison and speak to/treat the inmates without dignity and in some cases any cruel way they please, and there is no consequence. That is wrong. We all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.

To stop depending on inmates, who may not care to clean living spaces. Have people hired for that position to truly sanitize these spaces while unoccupied. No more decades old drain and ventilation build up so Black mold every where. Surfaces with untold bacterias and viral organisms waiting to be picked up.

Give access to more than "emergency" health care in jails. Some of us can not get out to see a doctor and fix issues ourselves. Nurses never believe us or play favorites. I had an ear infection for weeks before I talked them into bringing the Dr. They all said I was lying but the Dr. proved I was right, and not the first time.

I had a badly infected tooth they said was not infected, told me I couldn't have antibiotic and that there was no care they offered for teeth. I had to pull it myself. It's in my property.

Then, the courts. Compell D.A.'s to not be biased in their prosecutions. It is not their place. I understand they are human and that, certain cases may evoke strong emotion. But, they should first and, foremost, be seekers of the TRUTH - not convictions. They should simply use facts to portray the truth. Nothing more.

Provide lawyers (court appointed) who also care about their clients, not plea bargains. Give people who can't afford it access to tools that will TRULY help them obtain evidence and other resources to mount real defenses. ~~I want~~ Then, for individuals who can't understand how to utilize these tools, provide help, such as the aforementioned social workers.

I'm trying to stay positive from the tiny amount I've been told, they are missing key pieces of evidence that helps to prove my story. I've told them everything. I thought I was on camera but I guess it wasn't working. Unless, they're truly ~~desire~~ decided I'm an undesirable and just want to use my mistreatment to score a conviction and put me away no matter the truth. It's crazy to think about. Depressing. As if I am to be punished for being a survivor. As if I've survived one death only to suffer a death much worse. Out of the frying pan into the fire.

Then, there's the mental health. I have to relive it all over and over everyday. The weight of ~~it~~ I killed that guy. Took him away from his family. His hopes and ambitions ended with me. Caused who knows what kind of pain to the family. The way they look at me. Hearing how people who don't know me or the details of the situation speak of me on Facebook.

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It's depressing. I feel it might have been better had I let him kill me. Perhaps. I would be mourned instead of hated. The worse part is knowing I failed the people depending on me. The ones I loved. That makes it unbearable sometimes. I want to kill myself.

But, I can't. I have to see this through. I have to have faith that the jury will agree that I had no other choice and let me go. Then, I can fix everything.

I know I have the ability to be more than this. I have a real career opportunity. I know I have something to give.

Sincerely,
Joe Doe

D.R.O.N.E.

Part II

Democracy Remains Opaque & Nihilism Exist

BY:

TYREISE D. SWAIN

AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

ARTICLE VIII. Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

Year 2020 feels like twenty shots fired from twenty police-standard Glocks. The pandemic rocked our world and the hourglass suddenly stopped. Prior to all of this, something lingered amidst the fog; probably, the same fog that caused Kobe's chopper to drop. Lord, the Devil and its minions been busy. Evil reared its hideous face and sent the world into a frenzy. Unarmed black men and women being murdered became the haunting imagery. HANDS UP!! DON'T SHOOT!! the sound of combat boots worn by militarized troops, storm our domiciles with bullshit "No-Knocks" — thirty-two shots rang out — this isn't a movie trailer... make sure you say Her name... Breonna Taylor.

Alexa, please turn the T.V. on to the Evening News... tick, tock, tick. All I'm hearing is the same 'ole rhe-tor-ic. Everyone VYING TO TALK — cutting each other off just to get their point across. Every night is Fight Night — CNN versus FOX. Rioters throw bricks and clash with the cops. Cities become shell-shocked as unemployment soars against topsyturvy stocks. And the Tweets don't stop. Emperor Trump is angered and half-cocked. The target is Asians, and all things Chinese is mocked. Those thumbs never sleep, chirp-chirp, another tweet as Donald struts in his hundred dollar socks. Media crews stated, Corona was gestated in the DNA of a bat. The other half believe it was engineered in a Wuhan lab; albeit, these speculations are still up for grabs. Clearly, the virus used its real wings to transfer from its host, and traveled like Azazel over oceans, just to hit our coast. A silent mass killer devastated loving families, emptied entire cities, and snatched all hope. It feels like nothing else remains,

except displaced wraiths, and wandering homeless ghosts.

Lo and behold, civil unrest once more arose, as Officer Chauvin posed on video while stealing Mr. Floyd's soul. Masses took to the streets in droves. Then, the entire globe, it glowed, as fires burned bright in a united pyre of old. The energy and pain is so palpable it flowed, from country to country, where injustice and discrimination also had an overreaching hold. What? You still don't believe this planet is cold? Nah, it's froze. And as chaos ensues, fentanyl is sold for a twenty note extracted from your billfold. Market Street is the dope spot in San Fran to cop; but, I almost forgot, scientists are urging us to not, pay in paper currency, 'cause the cash may be contaminated — this shit is scary. Got me questionin', can I use debit or credit at my local street apothecary?

This whole conspectus got me feelin' like I'm trapped in a COVID-dream nexus. I can't breathe and I'm sick to my solar plexus. Lives lost each second is the National theme, beset by deathly screams from the other side as we, flirt with depressed thoughts of suicide, because life's a mess for you and I. So I'ma get high, hoping to remain unconscious, knowing that I've relapsed against my conscience — I'm praying for peace! Realistically, I'm praying I overdose in my sleep, and surcease. At least, I won't take up space on a ventilator from someone who's more honest than me. I guess we've made it to the end of times. Short-handed on First Responders and no medical supplies — who's left to save lives? Cars are queued up for miles at all the food drives, loaded with proud families who now struggle to survive as they cry; and tears pelt their N-95s.

The government reiterates that Democracy is still alive, as it implements Operation Iron Fist to hunt down Black Lives Activists like insurgents, using A.I. drones dubbed: Hivemind. Surveillance of our movements commenced long before Ed Snowden proved it, smuggled through a Rubik's — hello NSA software. Reminds me of Enoch who scribed with the Watchers over God's creation, to report on all human affairs. Are you gaining clarity? This reconnaissance is really about absolute control; and National Insecurity. Presidential Press Conferences leaves us with less confidence, sounding like fresh nonsense and bullish tyranny. They might as well send us all to face the Executioner's axes. Is it any different than facing hunger, prison, slow death, and

taxes?

Rise of the Socialist status... Cancel Culture de-platforms non-conforming masses; adroitly exposing these dumb-asses. Just like these dumb-asses throwing Covid parties, later to post videos crying 'cause they've contracted it. These Black Swans are real and the improbable events can be tragic. But the Swan Song of armed militias is lilting, to them, their assault rifles' ballad sounds like magic. Shifting gears from tiptronic to automatic. My doppleganger was the one driving the Benz on the night they thought I crashed it. Emerging from the wreckage, he looked around with pure anger. Took a defensive stance and said: 'What up danger? Your presence darkened my doorstep — I know you lurk. Your sadistic game hurts. Why do you shapeshift amongst the sea of faces just to share your Reaper's Curse?' After being infected with high doses of disinformation, we began coughing up the virus' inflammation. So I clasped hands with Lolita — the closest doxy — and we danced to the legato of global inflation. We made it to the thirteenth excerpt. But rabble-rousers caused matters to get worse. They sparked a hurricane to form out the Cytokine storm, which sent us deeper into the Spider-Verse.

We're the Thespians with no need to rehearse. This life is political theater and the Phantom of the Opera drives the hearse. Our souls will walk through the decadent Valley of Set, and we shall see great evil. The dark triad of autonomous machines will rise, as the moon's gravitational pull causes the ocean's upheaval. So stay woke and don't snooze. Or rather just remove Dr. Suess and Pepe Le'Pew, instead of removing the noose that the court galleries use — to strategically abuse — under the guise of justice served, when it's overtly a ruse. Hail the Roman arena-like sport. Spectators await the blood spill within the federal gladiator courts. Draconian sentences for crimes with no evidences to support !!BREAKING NEWS!! Another Active Shooter Report!

Christmas bombing attack on Tennessee streets, from 5G paranoia freaks in wired RVs; due to non-facts. Red versus blue — ReTrumplings versus Demon rats — gangs of colors have been at war since the Redcoats attacked. America was recusant; demanding liberty, to be exact. This wasn't the first time the Nation's Capitol was sacked; the French burned that place down and reduced

it to ash. This is all history kids, you can learn these lessons in class... well, April's fools were cruel and they shut down all the schools; now, most in a state of penury, won't pass.

Alas, just when it seems Satan had no more schemes up its sleeve, Karens became social-media memes, forests began to burn as stagnant smoke filled skies from West to East. Indeed, the Sun was eclipsed and the Nihilistic beasts emerged to feed. We should all succeed, since we were all told to quarantine. Then the looting started and we all fell victim to our greed. The wishful humans hunkered down and quietly whispered absit omens — just for a moment — we felt chosen, as *The Hill We Climb* was recited by Amanda Gorman. God, this shelter in place order still feels like torment. All the Houses of Worship have been shuttered, but all the liquor stores are still open. Forget Covid! Our freedom and normalcy has been stolen; in this sick twisted horror flick, with ominous synth notes playing at every moment.

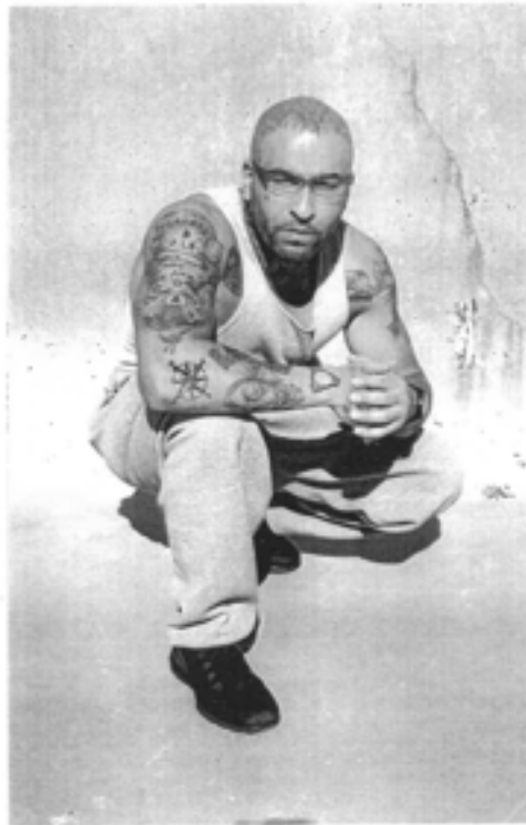
Tipper Gore should of placed 2020's movie premier on hold; restricted every point of entry to this Theater of Death, with a revised version of the Hays Code. This cineme-verite is our reel life versus real life. We can't fast forward past adversity's plight, 'cause it's far too easier to build over the burial site of our past life.

Somehow I still can't fathom this. But it's only us humans who manufacture our own unhappiness... let us pray in our final hour. All the stars are burning out, and the Eye of Ra is depleting in power. The Earth's axis has broken, and humanity's legacy will freeze in time. There will be no more dregs of society, nor felons boasting degrees in the Arts of Crime. America's haunted house was built with racism embedded in its infrastructure — its facade begins to crumble — its arteries have been punctured. We will watch as it bleeds out because this has been fated. No more devious intitatives to springboard evil agendas — all will be expurgated. No more accidental shots fired or corrupt cops to be investigated. No more Boarder Crises, caravans, or families to be seperated. No more King Sooper's or Academic grounds labeled "Crime Scenes" because they were desecrated. And no more overly righteous or overly pious people to disperse; who think all revolves around them, that this is their Youniverse.

No... When the Last Trumpet is blown and The Grand Architect of ALL Design decides to repossess that which was given — recalling all His Drones Home — where will our Democracy be then? Because, at that very moment, no heart, or soul, will be opaque. As we race to vaccinate, we race to erase the hate; better now or maybe it's too late.

For The Creator is Omniscient ∴

Tyrese J. Rain
Author,
Screenwriter,
Activist,
So Love



WHEN I WALK INTO THE ROOM

When I walk into the room, I notice you sitting on the examination table.
You're looking down at your hands, fidgeting with your gown.
I ask, "What brings you in today?"

You tuck a piece of hair behind your ear and take a deep breath.
"I haven't been to the doctor in over 10 years. I need to get checked."

"Do you have any particular concerns that you would like me to address today?"

You are a 45-year-old woman.
My mind races through screening tests that you need.
Pap smear, breast exam, colonoscopy. Are there more?

You finally look up at me and say, "I was incarcerated. I just need to be checked."

Immediately my mind is racing again.
There are so many questions that instinctively come to mind.

Why was she incarcerated? What did she do? I wonder if it was drug-related...
But... I push those thoughts to the side.

There is only one question that I want to ask.

One question that I feel will tell me what I need to know to best take care of you.

I make eye contact and say, "What was that like for you?"

Reentry and integration of incarcerated individuals is a delicate process that should be a societal effort. With the current judicial system, there are many limitations put in place, making reentry much harder. The types of jobs that are available are limited. Accessibility to government assistance is limited. Housing options, limited. There is no excuse for incarcerated people's healthcare to be limited. Healthcare is a basic human right and ought to be accessible to everyone.

One of the most important roles of a physician is to be a patient advocate. In order for that to happen effectively, the patient's story has to be addressed. For those who were incarcerated, tackling trauma or mental health issues should be a priority.

When physicians listen, patients are able to set clear goals and expectations of care. Holistic care and patient-centered medicine are two of the biggest takeaways of medical school that I will carry into my career.



Sabrina Alexander is a third-year medical student at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. She graduated from Cornell University in 2016 and majored in Human Development. She dedicates her free time to serving the New Brunswick and Plainfield communities through her role as the Outreach Coordinator of HIPHOP. She hopes to pursue training in OB/GYN after completing her medical degree in 2022.



CONFRONTING TRAUMA THROUGH CARCERAL ALTERNATIVES

Bio

My name is Latonia Bellamy. I was incarcerated since the age of 19. Despite my incarceration I take pride in empowering myself through education. I am a proud NJSTEP (New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prison) Student at Rutgers University. I am 31 years old and am currently incarcerated at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for women. I take pride in grasping hold of every opportunity that is positive and productive for my own rehabilitation.

Confronting Trauma through Carceral Alternatives

At the age of six I was sexually assaulted by a Familial Figure. What was viewed as gaurdian protection later revealed the relics of childhood molestation. For decades I consoled this secret and remained silent. I forged ahead supressing every incident of sexual abuse that fell upon me. I never attended any therapy or seen a psychologist for the trauma that I endured. Thus my trauma went ignored and unaddressed. Incarceration itself can be traumatizing and it also retraumatizes women with a history of victimization. I am only one of thousands of women whose trauma went unaddressed.

Before the #METOO movement went viral sexual abuse reflected a culture of secrecy and silence. This still hold true to the countless women who are incarcerated at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for women, who have endured sexual abuse in their lives. Can you imagine if women's state identification number stated #metoo instead of a numerical set of numbers? Then, How can and would we respond to this population of women? As Bloom et al point out "the criminal justice system was created to deal with male

offenders and therefore does not consider the aspects of the system that can retraumatize survivors who are incarcerated" (Hayes & Lorenz, p.110).

What would be done different to stop emotional, physical, and mental triggers from re-occurring? How can we stop secondary victimization from reoccurring?

Over 60% of women incarcerated have experienced some form of trauma and that trauma has gone unaddressed. What do we do to and for the women who have undergone unaddressed trauma after they have been criminalized for their reactions to trauma. The criminal justice system fail to acknowledge the impact of trauma on girls and women, thus reinforcing the perpetuation of mass incarceration for women. Change will not occur until the criminal justice system acknowledge that men and women are different, and should be treated differently. Hayes and Lorenz stated:

Women who are incarcerated who have experienced victimization have unique and complex treatment needs and recognize their need for treatment to overcome these experiences. Yet, the screening and treatment of prior victimization experiences are lacking in women's correctional facilities despite the overwhelming evidence of the negative impacts of trauma (pg 113).

Trauma impacts women differently than men, hence

²² Hayes, M. Rebecca and Lorenz, Katherine, "Intersectional Pathways: The Role Victimization Plays in Women's Offending and in Prisons," Chapter 8, p. 110.

²³ Hayes, M. Rebecca, and Lorenz, Katherine, "Intersectional Pathways: The Role Victimization Plays in Women's Offending and in Prisons," p. 113.

the Criminal Justice System should implement and include trauma induced programming that are gender specific and gender responsive, as well as offer gendered opportunities for alternatives to prison for women.

Trauma has a lingering effect, wherefore trauma is conducive to substance and alcohol abuse. Programs have been set in place to combat the overwhelming flow of substance and alcohol abuse. Thus the same can be done to help trauma impacted women. What if ISP (Intensive Supervision Programming) and EMP (Electronic Monitoring Program) were offered as an alternative to incarceration? Through these restrictive programmings a curriculum can be set in place wherein it address the effects and impact of trauma using gender specific and gender responsive programs to combat and heal women of trauma. Women who are first time violent and non violent offenders and have a history of trauma can benefit from this alternative. What if the Criminal Justice System acknowledge and addressed women's trauma histories and considered providing adequate treatment through carceral alternatives?

Latonia Bellamy



TRANS HEALTH CARE IN PRISONS

*Note: Originally published in Prison Health News

Bio: Jennifer Rose is a 52 years old incarcerated trans woman, student, and writer at Salinas Valley State Prison in California where she works as a Transgender Rep on the Inmate Advisory Council. She's co-founder of Fire Ant: Anarchist Prisoner Solidarity and Inside Organizer for Inmate Justice & TGI Justice Project and Jailhouse Lawyers for National Lawyers Guild.

The first step in navigating prison health care systems to get treatment as a transgender person is to request a mental health evaluation, and more specifically, a diagnosis for Gender Dysphoria (GD). In this process, you may run into roadblocks and obstacles, such as an unsympathetic psychologist or psychiatrist. Just be persistent and continue to request follow-up care until you see different doctors.

You must insist that you are not comfortable with your sex assigned at birth, and wish to change your gender. Once you get a GD diagnosis, this will in most states today qualify you for transition-related medical care such as hormone therapy and other things.

If you hit a brick wall, which is not overcome by informal requests, you may need to pursue the inmate appeal system and exhaust administrative remedies before contemplating filing a federal civil rights lawsuit.

I have been incarcerated for 31 years and did not have the education or determination to seek transgender care until about 18 years ago in 2003. Once I obtained a GD diagnosis, it took four more years to eventually convince a physician to provide hormone therapy in 2007. At that time, I came out publicly as a trans woman and underwent a full gender transition. I'm continuing to pursue sex-reassignment surgery (SRS), but only recently in

2016 did the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) adopt guidelines for SRS evaluations, as a result of legal settlement in the case of Shiloh Quine. SRS is still routinely denied in spite of the policy change.

In 2012, the policy allowing bras to be issued to trans women in men's facilities in California was implemented. It took a couple more years to gain compliance with that policy in most prisons statewide.

In 2017, all of us trans women at Salinas Valley State Prison were called out of our housing units and issued all allowable laundry items that women prisoners are issued, that includes panties, blouses, slacks, and mumus!

So, my advice to all trans inmates to be consistent and persistent in requesting basic rights to medical and mental health care. Keep your composure and be dignified in your interactions with staff, in spite of adversity or hostility on their part. Don't let them provoke you into a war of words or physical confrontation, which you are sure to lose.

It always helps to contact an outside prisoner support group such as Black & Pink or TGI Justice Project. You can find their addresses in any prisoner resource guide – I wish you the best of luck!

ONE OF A KIND



BIO

My name is Susan Brown. I am 48 years young. As of 12/08/21, I have been away from society for 6,747 days, which equates to a little over 18 years. I am serving a mandatory life sentence after being convicted of first degree murder. I have been creating various forms of art since approximately 2008, but in a more professional fashion since 2015. My children are my motivation and my loved ones are the wind beneath my wings. Let us all soar into our greatness with all that we do. Please feel free to enjoy some of my artistic accomplishments at www.artbysusanbrown.com or Google "redeemedbysusanbrown."

This artwork started as a challenge from my oldest daughter, Samantha. She wanted this created in relation to me being One of a Kind, rare, unique, and exquisite, my personal Destiny. I am beyond grateful to my daughter for this challenge that ultimately turned into a much more profound understanding of my truth. This artwork started as a challenge, yet evolved into me finding my worth to speak. Being born into an unknown was a challenge unexpected to circumvent my entire life. Wishing I knew where I came from had an impact on my life that filtered into a dysfunction that would take decades to transform from. When all I really had to do was look at what was looking back at me.

As my artistry developed within the cement that incapacitates me, I developed a self love in which I learned to heal my brokenness, to address my embedded pain, and strive for a true greatness unfiltered by my own doing of past dismays. Only learning from those experiences as I tackle whatever the future holds.

I am in prison? Prison isn't a word or a place... it's a system. Systems need structure, yet instead of structure you find tormenting chaos. One leaves one system (society) to enter another system (prison) that there is no preparation for. All you have is the dismayed feelings that you are left with after fighting, struggling to keep a freedom that you thought you had, only to be stripped away because of your own irrational actions. In this new system, you aren't provided anything to strive for better, and barely are you given anything to survive. One finds a routine in prison and waking up to hope is dangerous. This system is unsystematic. One just figures out how to get things done by those around. Learning from a body of confused, lost, hurt, broken, beaten down, damaged spirits that know no other

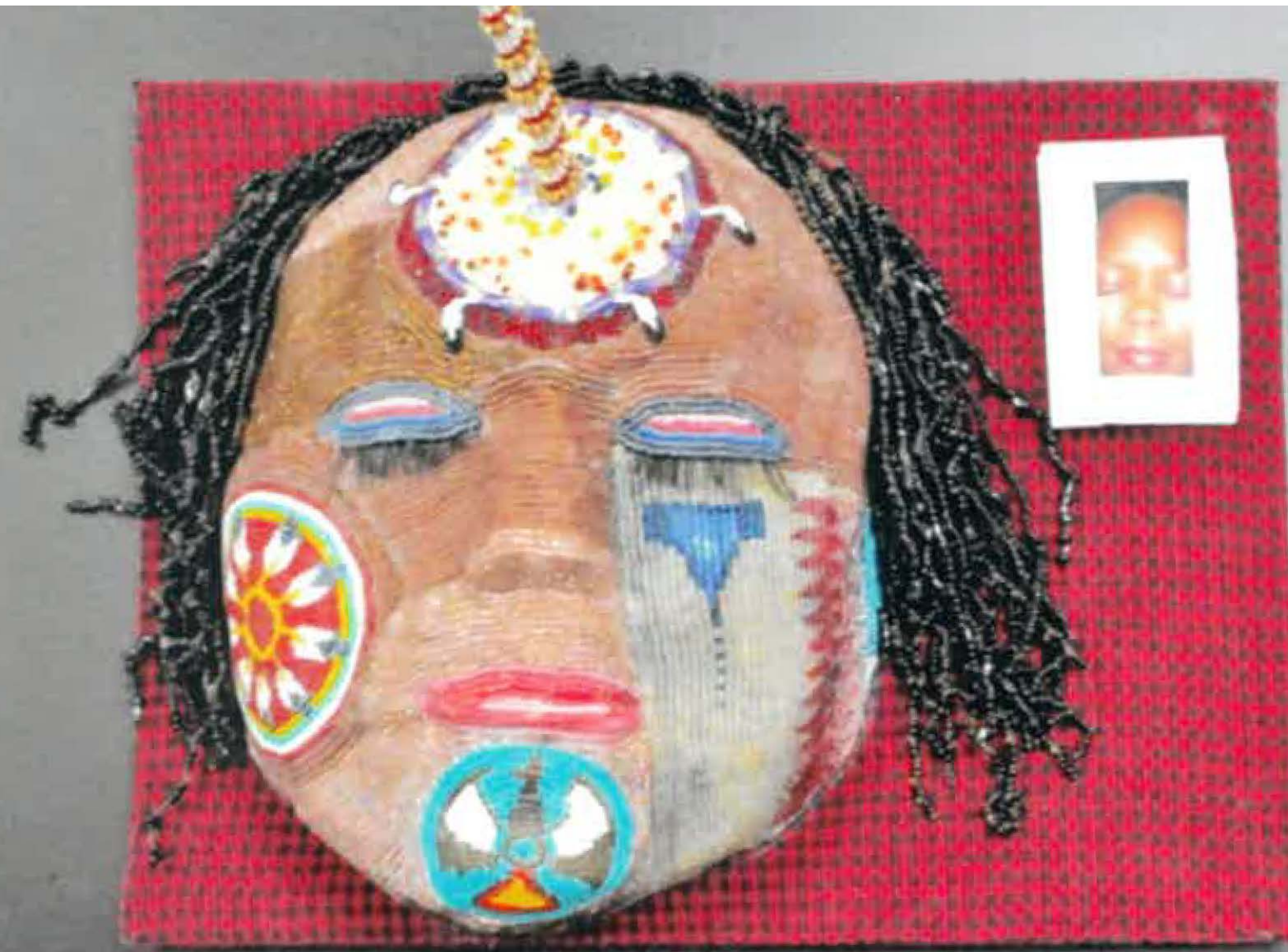
way but to express that damnifying frustration out on anyone who is before them. Hurt people hurt people! So where does the help come from?

For me, help came in the creation of art. With my art, I am lifted out of the sea of mass incarceration. Pieces like this allow me to no longer be a spawned inmate of the masses. No longer lost in a sea of systematic torment only designed to cage, not change any of the behaviors that warrant forgiveness from the singular altercation that led to a sentence of life in a cell of MDOC.

Layer by layer, I have been building a bridge to freedom, a freedom that no one can take from me. The accolades of first place awards and acceptances to international exhibitions help validate that I am greater than my poorest choice.

Most of all, the efforts are strikingly satisfying to show my children that they too can surpass anything, including barbwire. Standing in my artistic truth is liberating!

I ask as you look into this piece of work, search your heart for your own truth – truth of who you are and how many times you have refined that person. Consider how many times you have had an additional chance to do better at an experience, project, or opportunity. It is my prayer that you seek this out on a more profound level, think of all the other faces unique, rare, and exquisite, and take into consideration how many second chances you have been given. It is plausible that we deserve a second chance too. Hear our cry for freedom for A Second Chance.



TIME

Lalisha

Time is limited
limiting time
in a cold cell
cry for the
lord knowing
time only has
a end time

DEATH SENTENCE TO HEALTHY TOUCH JENEVIEVE

I wrote this poem after one of the women that I met in here, who I had become pretty good friends with was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. I'll never forget that moment. We were in our living unit, sitting at a table across from each other crying. She was obviously in shock and devastated. It's very difficult to find the words when someone has just been given their death sentence. I wish I could have hugged her or put my arm around her to console her but we were considered a "no touch" facility, so that was out of the question. It was a very unnatural and inhumane feeling to not be able to comfort my friend and like indelible marker it will be forever etched into my soul. The person has since implemented "healthy touch" which is better than nothing but you still have to get permission from staff in order to hug each other and they have to monitor the hug.

Death Sentence to Healthy Touch

What is a handshake when someone gets their diploma? Healthy Touch

What is a pat on the back to tell someone good job? Healthy Touch

What is a high five when you cross the finish line? Healthy Touch

What is a brief embrace when a loved one passes? Healthy Touch

What is an invisible shoulder to cry on when a friend gets a terminal diagnosis?
Cruel

What is a double hug with my son who I hadn't physically seen in almost 2 years?
a rule violation

What is a bedside memorial for my grandma, aunt or uncle who died during my incarceration?
out of the question

What is braiding someone's hair in your living unit?
Segregation

I am incarcerated due to own actions,
this I won't deny, but I am still human,
I am still alive and without touch

Somedays I want to die,

JENEVIEVE 2019

FAMILIES AGAINST SOLITARY CONFINEMENT



My name is Demi Minor I'm 26 years old & I have been incarcerated since the age of 16. I'm serving a 30 year sentence for Murder.

I am a transgender woman, currently working in EMCF Law Library & a unit representative. I have been advocating for change within EMCF since I walked through the door.

I hereby give you permission to share these writings with whom ever you please. The culture & forms of abuse are still occurring & until we as women & survivors of abuse get the seat that we deserve at the table, no real reforms may ever occur.

I am Demi Minor the founder of
Justice4Demi.org

A Young Person in Solitary Confinement

In February 2016, just weeks after I turned 21 years old, I was placed in solitary confinement for writing grievances within the prison system and getting positive results. To silence me and thwart my ability to inform the public of corruption and abuse within the prison, officials interrogated me, placed me in a Management Control Unit (MCU), and filed institutional charges against me to justify my confinement. I was sanctioned to more than 600 days in solitary.

State prison officials claim that New Jersey does not use solitary confinement at all, only “restrictive housing units.” The ACLU has called this a distinction without a difference, and I can personally confirm that from what I have experienced.

Once the prison administration filed institutional charges against me, my communications with the public were restricted. I was not allowed to use the phone, and I was not allowed to send mail; when I tried, envelopes would come back to me without the letter inside. As I continued to write about these violations, correctional officers planted a jailhouse knife in my cell, and I was subject to bogus charges for an alleged note about drug trafficking. Eventually, the sergeants who set me up were the only ones allowed to have contact with me. They forced me to strip naked in front of other inmates and officers of the opposite sex.

When I asked these officers why they were treating me this way, their response was: “Because you are a worthless piece of shit ... who thinks that you can win ... this is our house, and if I tell you to strip you fucking do it.” This type of mindset is instilled in officers, an “us vs. them” mentality that allows them to assault inmates and engage in misconduct that is contrary to the Department of Corrections’ mission.

I spent more than a month in a cage where I was exposed to constant illumination. The cage was specifically built for inmates who were gang affiliated and found with contraband like cell phones. It had no electrical switches inside of it, and there was no switch to turn the light off. It was the size of a bathroom, with no ventilation. There were steel plates on the door to prevent me from speaking to anyone, and there was a caged fence with a pad lock on it. At one point, I thought I was no longer in America.

While in this unit, I watched officers sadistically beat up inmates and deprive them of food and other necessities. I saw mentally ill inmates throw feces and other bodily fluids on each other. I saw officers spray mace on inmates and let them soak in the chemicals. Once I watched them take a young black man and force medication into him. His screams were gut-wrenching; they brought tears to my eyes.

While in solitary, inmates’ right to communicate with their families and loved ones becomes a privilege, and this privilege is restricted severely. At times it is

impossible for those who are indigent to stay in contact with their families. There are no programs or rehabilitative services offered to inmates in solitary, and those who are under the age of 21 lose their right to be educated by a teacher. I was not allowed to have contact visits with my family; to attend school; to participate in any programs; or to get mental health services in a confidential setting. I was only permitted to go outside every five days and to shower every three days.

The level of mental health care inmates receive in solitary is inadequate, flawed, and deserves the attention of the public. It consists of a mental health clinician coming about once a month to the inmate's door and saying things like: "Hey, how are you?" "Do you want to kill yourself?" "Okay, have a nice day." The only time the mental health department seems to care about someone is when they have them on medication or when it is too late and the person has taken his life. Mental health deterioration within solitary has become an epidemic, requiring emergent intervention or resulting in over-prescribed medication.

If this is not solitary confinement, please tell me what is! I have never felt so emotionally drained and disturbed as in this foul, oppressive environment. Of course there is a need for some kind of segregation for those who break the rules of the prison. But when solitary confinement becomes so harsh and inhumane, any possibility of correcting an inmate's behavior or rehabilitating him becomes impossible.

The Effects of Solitary

I was released from solitary confinement on November 18, 2016, almost a year earlier than expected. I did not realize the effects of solitary until I was released. In less than a day, I experienced a panic attack, and I still find myself panicking when there is too much movement going on. Sometimes I find myself staring into the air at nothing, just trying to stay calm and not focus on the movement around me. I have also found myself confining myself to my cell; sometimes I do not want to come out because I feel like I look too scruffy. Now that I am not in solitary, I can finally look in a mirror, and I am around people ... and it is weird. In solitary, there are no mirrors, so you don't see yourself. Now that I see myself, I am just like: wow, is that me? It feels very odd being close to officers without handcuffs restraining me, and I still have flashbacks to the incidents when inmates threw feces, and when officers savagely beat an inmate with batons.

When I came out of solitary, I asked the administration for some clothes and cosmetics. They told me I would have to pay for them: inmates are charged \$17.99 for underclothes, and a dollar per soap.

But when inmates are in solitary, they are not paid wages. Thus, the only way to get soap, clothes, and other necessities is if family members and loved ones place money

on their accounts. This places a burden on inmates and their support systems, and it feels like the prison system wants to profit off of prisoners and those who do not have anything.

I suggested to the administrator that they provide inmates with a courtesy bag or some underclothes and necessities when they are first released from solitary. His response was: “Oh, just borrow it from somebody.” One thing anyone who has a mind does not do in prison is borrow things! It can lead to conflicts ... to say the least.

The Future: Ending Solitary Confinement


On October 20, 2016, the New Jersey State Assembly passed a bill strictly limiting the use of solitary confinement in the state’s prisons. On December 5, 2016, Governor Chris Christie vetoed the bill and attacked its key sponsors in his veto message, agreeing with the Department of Corrections’ claim that the state does not use solitary confinement, and thus a bill to limit it is not needed.

Despite the veto, my hope is that this bill is just the beginning of a movement to end solitary confinement for all inmates. The bill, as passed by the Assembly, required prisons and jails to use solitary confinement only as a last resort and restricted its use to 15 consecutive days or 20 days in a 2-month period. It also banned the practice for inmates who are mentally ill, pregnant, who are 21 or younger and 65 or older, or have special needs, and it required daily medical evaluations for those in solitary.

While in solitary, I was commonly told to just stop with the litigious behavior, and I would be released. One officer told me: “Minor, you’re never going to win while you’re here advocating; those people on the street are home not caring about you or the issues you care about.” It was this comment that made me realize why I must advocate.

I have written very little about what’s happening in solitary until now. Part of the reason is because of threats of retaliation and embarrassment. But I realize that the threats and embarrassment is what allows this type of torture to thrive and remain out of public view. Thus I am speaking out. I am speaking out about the recurring panic attacks I suffer when I hear officers approaching; just the sound of keys causes me anxiety. I’m speaking out about the thoughts I had at the age of 19 about giving up on my life.


I write this today because I am not “a worthless piece of shit” that the officers call me. I write this because as a 22-year-old incarcerated youth, I don’t know what else to do. I write this because I have been told “There is nothing we can do” too much. As an advocate, I believe that when the public becomes concerned, then reform can begin to happen. I find myself wondering: how is it possible that a human-rights crisis of this magnitude can carry on year after year, with impunity? Does anyone realize that solitary is destroying youth and producing its own monsters? A month ago a young man was



released straight from solitary, and two weeks later he killed someone ... so the thousands of dollars to keep him in solitary was used for what? And how do you tell a former inmate to respect and trust law enforcement in the community when he has just spent months, years, or decades in an environment being abused and oppressed by members of law enforcement?

Many people may not care or think that this is not important. Let me remind them that more than 80% of incarcerated men and women will someday return to society. Treating them like cattle and abusing them while they are in prison does not help them return to society. In addition to being inhumane, the conditions in prison and particularly in solitary confinement are counterproductive.

Although I was only 16 when I came to prison, I was told: “You are a man now, and you will be treated as such.” The truth is that psychologically I am a child, a child who has been hurt and is hurting, a child who deserves to be rehabilitated, not to sit in solitary confinement and be thrown away. And the further truth is that, in solitary confinement, I was not even treated as a man: I was treated as less than a human being. Solitary confinement is destroying youth, families, and communities, and as youth, families, and communities, we must demand an end to it.

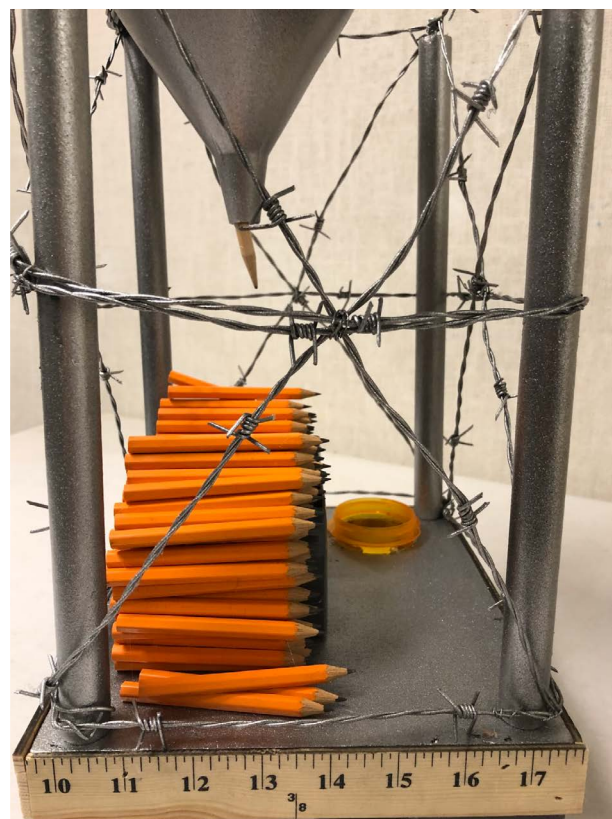


NO SMOKE

BIO

Kristi Arias spent over two decades in and out of the criminal justice system as a direct result of her erratic lifestyle choices. She has a passion for a lifestyle in recovery and has personal interest in Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM). Using multiple creative art options, her individual education, and artistic skills, she encourages the creation of safe places for self-expression to assist in communication of possible suppressed feelings and emotions. Kristi has progressive experience in project management and staff leadership and is a certified Recovery Coach Academy Facilitator. She earned her Recovery Coach Professional (RCP) certification in 2018 and is a state Certified Peer Recovery Coach through The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS).





ESSENCE OF LOVE



To: Whom this may Concern ✨

My name is Jesse Mocha Scroggins, I'm from Dallas, Texas my friends called me Mocha K. I was born to Christian Loving, devoted parents. I'm currently working toward receiving my Master Degree. A Former Army militant on Honorable discharge after serving 4-years. I love reading, writing poetry, and drawing to past time here in prison. I'm very Compassionate, loyal, & caring person. I look forward to getting release back out to society to help others and to be a motivated speaker to young adults to not go down the same road I went. I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to show you guys my work.

X *Sincerely, Jesse Scroggins*

You must understand that a pearl is only produced where there is a tear in the flesh of the oyster. It is the injury to the oyster that we prize most. The true Beauty of the mother lay behind her injury.

But even with her selfishness, she still desires to be loved in return. In so many ways, we in prison are just like this woman: we expect to be loved despite our scarred condition and situation. It is a natural inclination for many of us to see other people as mere reflections of our own desires and values. As a consequence, we inadvertently place unjustified expectations on people every day; we assume they will act, think, and respond to situations we would. In doing so, we fail to acknowledge the simple truth that they are not us. When they do not respond to a certain situation as we believed they should have, we are angry, or shaken, or hurt. Our unreasonable expectations only led to let down, disappointment, and heartache. The pain we experience leads us to feel that we must work our way inside his or her thinking and make it more like ours – not as an exercise in insensitivity, but as a safety precaution. It makes it so much easier to guard our hearts from the pain resulting from our unmet false expectations.

We expect people to anchor us, support us, and be there for us. Yet, because of our inability to accept them as they are, we unconsciously offend and alienate people, manipulate them, then blame them for the damage that is done. We want to be loved unconditionally and to be extensions of our families, but we don't know the first thing about unconditional love. These false expectations continually breed what seems to be unexplainable heartache that leaves you crying on the inside. Although many of us hate to admit it, we do cry on the inside. This is partly because we have been led to believe the stereotype that men are stoic beings who are capable of dealing with heartache and pain without complaining, while women are emotional, irrational creatures. The other reason for this is that you do not understand the process of what is going

on with a man when he is crying inside. When you are crying inside, it is the spirit submitting to the original you. It is the real you trying to resurface: you before the gangbanging, you before the negative influence, and you before the convictions. The spirit is reacquainting itself with you before it all went wrong.

The spirit is familiarizing itself with the pains you have been suppressing throughout the years. The tears are trying to sterilize the wounds you neglected to attend to, which have now gotten infected. It is the infection of these wounds that is producing the negative, twisted, abnormal behavior. Now your soul is sick and weak with fever. This is why others see you as defensive, vindictive, angry, hostile, foul, opinionated, selfish, greedy, and unreachable... because your spirit is sick!

There is only one medicine, one antidote, and one serum for this type of illness, which would lead you to ask the million dollar question: where does such a potent medicine exist? Well, when I was a kid, the medicine cabinet was always located in the bathroom behind the mirror. But if you were to look beside you, and I don't care which side you choose, you will find a person whose pains mirror your own. And if you were capable of opening his or her chest, you would find a very fragile bottle that could be easily broken if handled improperly. It would have only one word on the label because there are no side effects to warn you of and too many ingredients to list on such a small bottle. This bottle would be filled to the brim; its label would simply read: "LOVE." Love is the only medicine that can cure a broken spirit. Love wasn't placed there for you to possess, but for you to give it away. Listen, love doesn't belong to you. Give it away! Remember, the lighter the bottle, the lighter your burden.

So instead of praying for lighter burdens, you should be praying for stronger shoulders to carry them on. Love has been given to you in abundance, so you can give away as much as you want without

the charity. It is not the soup and chips you give away at boarding school that is charity. It is not the \$25,000 that you send to Africa to feed the poor that is charity. It is the love you are giving: that is charity, God wouldn't have made it obligatory for you to give charity if he hadn't given you the means to do so.

Even with all this being said, I know a person whose love has been abused is not just going to go around and entrust his heart to just anyone. He is not going to trust so easily. In any relationship, trust is usually a factor. But allow me to reverse the roles while giving an example: usually a healthy relationship will begin with a full glass of trust. Now, the glass is full because of them and not you. But every time you do something wrong or hurtful, trust spills from the glass. There are some things that you can do that will empty this glass all at once and it will

usually take you 10 times longer to refill the glass than it took you to empty it, without effort, this glass will never be filled.

Actually, you won't be able to refill it, and obviously it won't refill itself. It has to be refilled by the one who filled it in the first place. But that can happen only if this person understands the nature of mercy. Mercy means clemency, compassion, understanding, and forgiveness. Forgiving is so much easier to bestow when others are shown love so poignant that the sincerity of this love cannot be ignored. This is why God has placed love and mercy in our hearts. He knows first that we will make mistakes that need to be forgiven. Although love can be prescribed for us, it is not a prescription that you will find over the counter at your local Walgreens' pharmaceutical. Only we can search within to find the essence of love...



Photographed by Sara Bennett

Veronica - I feel totally free, free to be all and anything I chose
in this space I am able to fill it with anything I want and the
only person who say anything is my husband.
Vernon - This space is all about love and for me that's Veronica being
here with me

VERONICA, 53, in her apartment with her husband of 29 years, 21 months after her release.
Jamaica, NY (2021)

Sentence: 25 years to life
Served: 27 years
Released: September 2019

WOMEN SUPPORTING WOMEN, BY WOMEN AND FOR WOMEN



A message from GOODWorks Inc.
Executive Director and Founder, Theresa Goode:

My organization, GOODWorks Inc., holds its mission in empowering women in recovery from the criminal justice system. We assist in making positive behavioral and lifestyle changes that foster personal growth and create a safe and stable environment for women and their children.

At its core, GOODWorks Inc. is a supportive community of women. We host weekly workshops where facilitators prompt relevant discussion and distribute useful information and training. Additionally, our New Beginnings Mentoring Program formulates one on one relationships

between women to create bonds of stability and communication through which women can develop feelings of trust and feel empowered to achieve and grow.

Before the onset of COVID-19, I met with the incarcerated population of women at York Correctional Institution in Niantic, CT on a weekly basis, holding individual counseling sessions and providing a space where women felt they could safely share their trauma and experience empathy and support. These one-on-one counseling sessions have continued for mentees who are in re-entry into the community, but it is my hope to return to York soon so I may continue my work there, building relationships and facilitating change.

It is my overall vision and goal which I share with all my supporters and the GOODWorks Inc. community: to provide the skills imperative to building self-acceptance, self-worth, and pride, in addition to promoting values surrounding putting forth positive behavior in the community.

AMY

I am a 54-year-old woman. I am a wife, mother, a daughter in law and a sister-in-law. I am also a recovering addict and felon.

For 35ish years, my main goal in life was to be a mom and wife. But with that dream, there were mental health and abuse issues. I **WANTED** to change my life, I **WANTED** to be happy, but instead I ran. I ran both physically and mentally.

Come 2016, I had been in prison for 8 months. I embezzled money from my former employer to

fund my addiction. I lost custody of my youngest child. My husband was home alone trying to keep up on rent and bills and still take care of me. I knew I wanted to stop destroying my life, but had no clue how. I had been in therapy in the past, but it never "clicked." I was given the opportunity to work with Ms. Goode with GOODWorks while I was in the re-entry program in Niantic (York Correctional).

We met weekly for months. Slowly, through both "homework" and our talks, I began realizing that it was ok to forgive the things I did. It did not excuse them, but it was ok to acknowledge what I did, why I did it, and find ways to deal with my issues in healthier ways. Most women in prison that I met, have some kind of abuse in their background. Speaking for myself, that caused severe self-esteem issues I still deal with today. Learning how to make that be part of my story and not my whole story, took time and guidance. A great deal of that guidance came from Ms. Goode. Accountability with compassion goes a long way, and I received that each session. I discovered more and more that with each negative I had a positive.

To learn to accept that and focus on the good and not the bad took time, but it happened. Slowly it happened. It still happens today.

I was paroled in June of 2016. I took what I

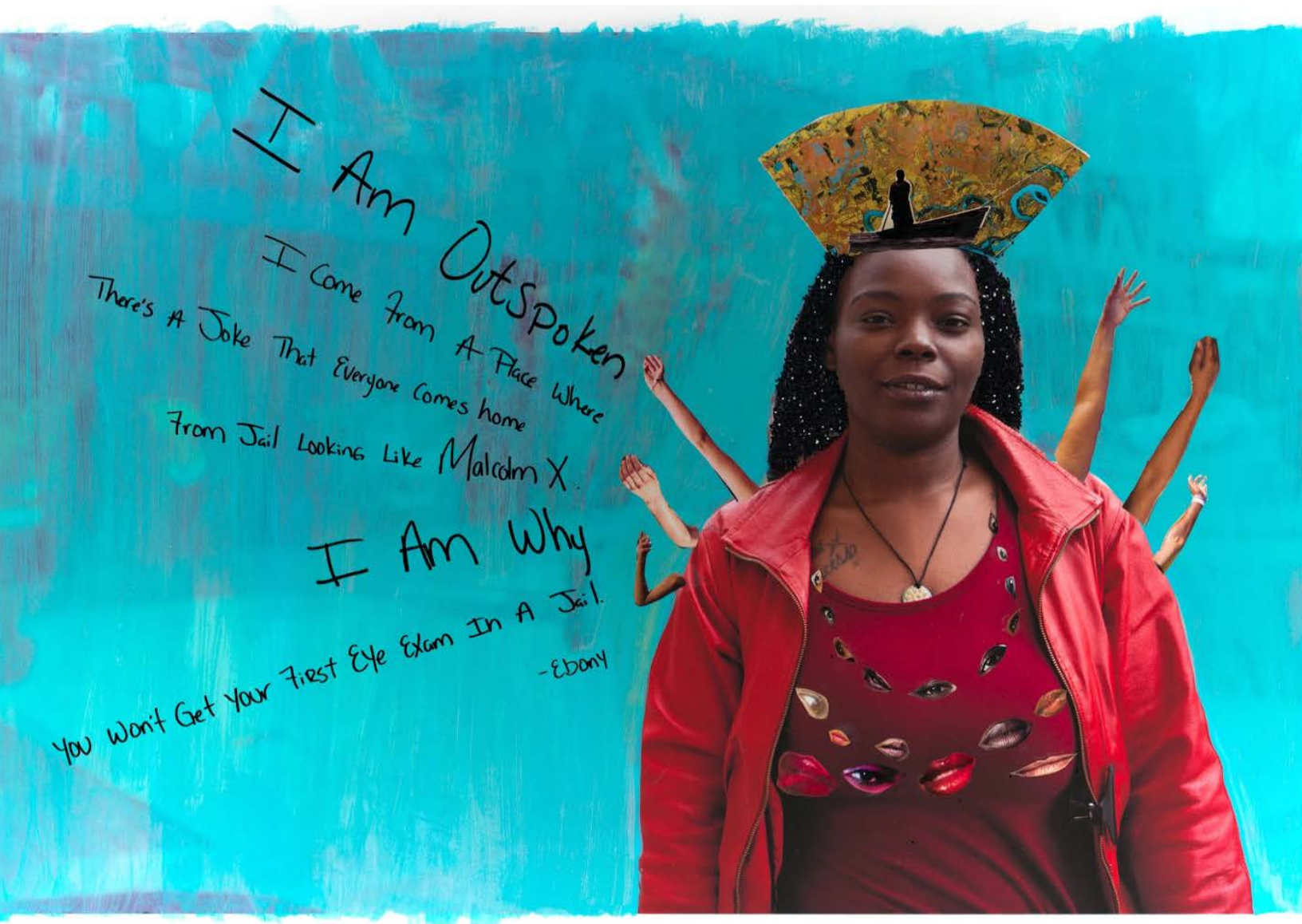
learned in GOODWorks and began rebuilding my life. My crime was in 2014, as we enter into 2022, I have not reoffended, nor have I used any type of substance.

It took me 9 months to find a job. Not many options for felons out there, especially not for women felons. I was given an opportunity with my current employer and I ran with it. I have been here almost 5 years; I worked my way up to a Territory Supervisor. I am in charge of 6 teams, approximately 50 people and 35 grocery stores.

I do not see my youngest, but I do have a relationship with my other 3 children. I am still married (20 years!) and today, while life is not perfect, it's good. Good is great after where I've been.

I fully believe had I not met Ms. Goode and the GOODWorks program, I would not have built a strong enough foundation to start rebuilding a life based in healing and integrity. She still reaches out to check on me and I don't think Ms. Goode realizes a small gesture like that still helps. I have continued with therapy the last 5 ½ years, but the foundation was built in weekly sessions in a conference room where I was a number not a name. Ms. Goode however knew my name. She still knows my name.

EBONY WALCOTT



RECLAIM

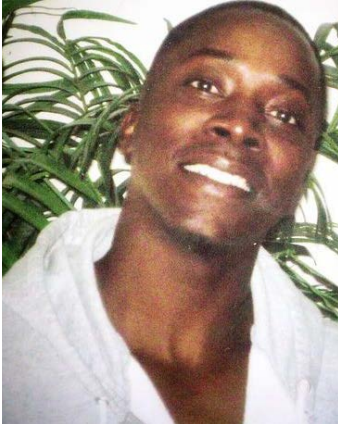
Ebony Walcott and Kazani Finao

*Note: originally published in and pulled from *Reclaiming the Lens**

Why are we being targeted?
What have we done wrong?
Is it because I am a Woman?
Is it because I am Black?
Is it sexual orientation?
Is it gender expression?
Why is it that a system created to protect has constantly excluded us?
Is the system broken?
...or is it well-oiled and well-designed to do exactly what it's doing?
Can it be its real purpose is to break spirits and grieve souls?
What is the purpose of separate systems if they are working in tandem to hold us back?
Given nowhere to turn, how are we to maintain hope?
What is really our critical consciousness of "broken" systems?
How do we draw away from our toxic co-dependency on government systems?
How are we to pursue higher education with little to no support?
It's not only me I'm fighting on behalf of but everyone I care about
The systems see no individualism so a target on me is a target on us
Your future suppressed is my future suppressed
We didn't create this system but can't seem to find our way out of it
We are caught in an infinite circle of revolving doors of disappointment
But NO MORE!
It's time to fly
Soar into positions of power
Reclaim the seats of our oppressors
Reclaim the standard of care that we are entitled to
Reclaim the lens which we are seen through
We are not crying for help we are roaring for our liberation
One life choked out was one too many
Sadly there have been millions physically and figuratively and that stops with us
THE TIME IS NOW
They WILL SIT THE FUCK BACK

"LYING DOWN AND WAKING UP A SLAVE IN TEXAS"

"Bio"



My Name is Robert Cooper.
My Pen Name is Pariah,
I'm From Louisiana.
I'm Currently incarcerated in TX.
My earliest release date is 2023.
My latest 2028.
My B-Day is Oct 1968.

It's Poetic...

In Texas, we're trapped in Pits with small windows.
Inside these cells, we're Funding our own Imprisonment;
the chains are encrypted inside the chips and soup sales.
We're inside of an identity crisis believing our souls out of Favors,
So we accept the chains;
believing a greater change will come save us...
"Can you dig that?!?!"
I guess the Willie Lynch Syndrome dies hard in some Places.
Since I'm older now,
In these younger guys I see my own reflection.
It seems as if the hate for ourselves is baked in.
Perhaps it takes breaking one down,
In order to build one up and to make a man.

I used to beat up on myself!
The Whipping took away my strength...
Then i killed my bad habits and drug'em to a ditch!
I Changed From a threat to a Promise;
But in Texas I'll Always Be a Number.
Everyday it's the same old Song...
In doubt; Our systematic-scars Found a home.
In Texas: It's death before Parole.
In Unity: we can Overcome!
But we won't...
Because by the throat we're holding our resolve under the water.
Christians and Muslims accept this torture.

The trauma cemented the bangers in a corner;
Set-tripping, cooking drink and getting stoned.
I ENvision us standing up for ourselves,
And not being exploited with little to no health care
But tomorrow we'll be back in the
"Fields;"—
Under a sun giving off heat like hell!
There ain't a night i don't look beyond these walls with cataracts
And Pull in the stars.
Today's a blessing...
Every good one I'll record them.
Tomorrow I'll wake up a slave behind
these bars.

Written By: Robert Cooper/Pariah

The need for attention

My name is Shella Coadwick. I am a 32 year old mother of 2 aspiring advocate for interested women.

I was 26 when I participated in a robbery in which someone was tragically killed. I then spent 4 years in San Juan county jail. During that time my eyes were opened towards an overlooked but no less devastating condition within our society.

The justice system convicts people, sentences them to some form of correction and expects their rehabilitation. In theory this should work. In reality it is failing fast. The quality & efficiency of the rehabilitation process is currently overly neglected.

In my county it is common to serve a one year sentence in the jail. It is also common to wait up to 9 months for a court date. It's like time stands still and stagnant. There is no class or program to introduce new perspective or skills to cope. Time stands still for us while the free world races forward. It is devastating being released into the future when the brain is living in the past.

I was sentenced to serve 15 years in New Mexico state Correctional Facility expecting more ^{and} found not enough. The conditions here do little to correct much of anything. The current prison culture encourages hate and discontent. There is a mentality of disrespect ^{and} entitlement. It's all fueled by an ignorance that would disapear if there were adequate access to awareness.

The women I have come into contact during this time are wonderful, amazing individuals with dreams & aspirations. Women full of potential ^{and} ideas that could impact the world in awesome ways. But we all have been broken down in some ~~way~~ form or another.

Mental, emotional, physical, drug abuse along with the image of disgrace society is quick to apply to any woman product of or responsible for distasteful situations fragment the mind which result in self-disturbing behaviors that affect everyone.

Whether it is recent or life long situations that have exposed us to emotional abuse, physical ~~abuse~~ violence, sexual assault or drug use these force the mind to create morals and values that work well justifying our life styles. Being developed under flight or fight circumstances these concepts are more often than not delusional.

Too many of us believe we are worthless, that we are a lost cause, there is no hope for change, that we are alone. Unfortunately these thoughts are only beliefs because they are enforced by our environment. The lack of attentiveness and compassion towards our situation only validates "if no one cares what's the use?"

As a nation we are journeying the frontier of mental health and the necessity in psychological healing. The deteriorated condition within the prison system is a territory that extends into the borders of free society. Therefore it is among the most important to cultivate and nurture mature maternal instincts, create programs that promote respect & influence healthy relationships and develop classes that heal the mind. We need support groups that assure one does not struggle alone.

An incarcerated individual does not represent only themselves but everyone they know suffers along with them. Friends, family and affected most of all, their children. If more attention were focused to ensure the outcome of a healthy mind the effect will ripple benefits into all facets of society. Recidivism would end within prison. I know once mental health comes first and is integrated into prison curriculum the results will resonate healing through many, if not all, aspects of day to day life.

I have done 6 years of my 15. While I have grown much I have further to go. I write this in hopes that others will see the need. We need so much more positive reinforcement to believe change is possible so that we will be encouraged to succeed.

11-20-21

12:06 pm.

ENDING VICTIM-BLAMING SYNDROME TO CENTER SURVIVORS:

A feminist disability call to create criminalized abuse survivor-advocates

By Cathy Marston, PhD

LINA TO



A recent *Mother Jones* article attempted to humanize women who kill their abusive mates and are now in halfway houses in California. Unfortunately, the reporter ruined a well-done piece by insisting on giving credence to “battered women’s syndrome.”

I have a PhD in mass communication and have worked for 2 major newspapers in Texas: the *Austin American-Statesman* and the now-defunct *San Antonio Light*. After acquiring computer-related, repetitive strain injuries (RSI) from that work, I served as an elected officer in the Media and Disability Interest Group of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication from 1996 to 1999 and won a research award for my critique of the injurious nature of academic and professional journalistic work culture. I am also a formerly incarcerated woman who had to bite an abusive ex-boyfriend’s arm when it was wrapped around my neck in a stranglehold.

I did not bite his arm because I had some mythic mental malady. I was under imminent harm and exercised my RIGHT to self-defense. If I had not done so, I WOULD BE DEAD.

When men defend themselves or others, they are lauded as heroes. When women do so, we are labeled some flavor of “crazy” – even by our own advocates.

I have noted otherwise that labeling women “crazy” who’ve been abused, raped and/or harassed, is an ancient tool of patriarchal victim-blaming dating back to the Inquisition/Burning Times.^{24 25} The psychopharmaceutical industry was birthed to continue incarcerating and torturing women after hanging and burning them fell out of favor. Feminist Canadian art historian Candace Savage (2000) shows how the gender violence of the Inquisition moved into the new asylums with its torturous ovarian compressors and uterus fumigators.²⁶

²⁴ Marston, Cathy. (2011). Stopping the real “cycle of violence:” A feminist critique of patriarchal battering and the criminalization of women by American police. *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, 20(1), 72-78, 82-83.

²⁵ Marston, Cathy. (2015). *The gender of crime and the normalization of male violence* by North American justice systems. *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, 24(2), 39-68.

²⁶ Savage, Candace. (2000). *Witch: The wild ride from wicked to Wicca*. Vancouver: Greystone Books.

Liat Ben-Moshe (2020) firmly locates the psychopharmaceutical industry as one of the co-creators of our current worldviews and our prison industrial complex: an impediment to a true justice system.²⁷ Prof. Courtney Cross of the Domestic Violence Clinic at the University of Alabama Law School (2018) argues that “battered women’s syndrome” trial strategies don’t work and harm criminalized abuse survivors.²⁸ Toby Myers, who cofounded the Texas Council on Family Violence, says this label harms legal cases for battered women with its implicit suggestion that, because of some exotic malady, survivors are time bombs waiting to go off.

Such myths shore up patriarchal violence – and suck energy out of the wraparound efforts needed to prevent violence from happening in the first place. It’s also quite lucrative to the psychopharmaceutical industry and “advocates” who make money off of “treating” us for nonexistent pathologies.

Indeed, Canadian feminist disability scholar Susan Wendell (1996) defines a disability as a social construction based on a biological reality.²⁹ “Mental illness” itself is pure social construction with no biological reality: groups like Mind Freedom and the Citizens Commission on Human Rights have shown that there is no neurochemical test, brain scan, or objective scientific measure to diagnose “mental illness.” There is simply no there.

I met Myers while working on my book about the history of clemency efforts for abuse survivors here in Texas. She was one of the leaders of such an effort in the late 1980s and early 1990s: 120 women were backed by clemency applications by the TCFV. The Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles recommended only one of those women for a pardon. No governor has signed that pardon. Then the effort was

forgotten about so that women like myself could deal with this nightmare.

I founded Free Battered Texas Women from prison; and we helped spearhead our now 2-year-old clemency process for survivors of abuse and/or sex trafficking. Five survivors were granted pardons by the governor in December 2020: all misdemeanor cases. We continue to link arms with our statewide clemency coalition, the Survivors’ Project, and the national clemency coalition, #ClemencyWorks, at the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls.

I always tell my incarcerated survivor-sisters: “You are strong for surviving your abuser and TDCJ.” We focus on their assets as healing-centered engagement.

We are STRONG as survivors – we do NOT have a disorder. And those of us who defended ourselves or children exercised a RIGHT – we do not have a syndrome. FBTW centers survivors with mutual aid to educate and organize the ladies on the inside and outside as we gather their stories and crunch data for policy efforts. In this way, FBTW creates what I call “survivor-advocates.”³⁰

If we could get other “advocates” to put us at the center, listen to us, and let us lead in telling our own stories, we would still have to face misogynists who want to veto unanimously passed bills – like one in the 2021 session here that would’ve mandated age-appropriate education to schoolchildren about abuse, sexual assault, and sexual harassment.

Let us lead!

And let us put “syndromes” and “disorders” in the history books that clarify ableist, racist, misogynist, classist worldviews that have shaped our society, so we can end oppression.

²⁷ Ben-Moshe, Liat. (2020) *Decarcerating disability: Deinstitutionalization and prison abolition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

²⁸ Cross, Courtney. (2018). *Remarks made at panel on New York’s Domestic Violence Survivors’ Justice Act*. First annual FreeHer Conference, National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls, Tulsa, OK. September 2018.

²⁹ Wendell, Susan. (1996). *The rejected body: Feminist philosophical reflections on disability*. New York: Routledge.

³⁰ Marston, Marston, Cathy. (2020). *Free Battered Texas Women: Survivor-Advocates Organizing at the Crossroads of Gendered Violence, Disability, and Incarceration*. *Verbum Incarnatum: An Academic Journal of Social Justice*, 7(1), Article 3, 20 pages. <https://athenaeum.uiw.edu/cgi/preview.cgi?article=1071&context=verbumincarnatum>.

CATHY MARSTON



BIO

Cathy Marston, PhD, is a San Antonio-based author, holistic health consultant/practitioner, and social justice worker. She published the *Worthy Women Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry* guide as the 2020 Equity and Justice Scholar for the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation. She is founding Executive Director of Free Battered Texas Women and Grant Coordinator for Mano Amiga San Marcos. She has published poetry and prose from the Pagan to the political in *We'Moon*, *SageWoman*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *La Voz de Esperanza*, *The Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *The Journal of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity*, *The Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, and *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Feminism*.





KAREN THOMAS

who served 35 years, the day before her release from Taconic Correctional Facility. Bedford Hills, NY (April 2017)

My name is Karen Thomas. I am currently living in New York City.

In 1982, I committed a domestic violence homicide, killing my ex-husband after years of physical and emotional abuse. In 1983, I was sentenced to life with a minimum of 25 years. With that sentence, there was a possibility that I would never be released from prison at all. Ever. I had five appearance interviews before the parole board, five denials of release, two more years of time added with each denial. Finally, in 2017, I convinced the board that I was not a danger to society.

When I was released from prison after doing 34 ½ years, I was 69 years old and disabled. I didn't know what I would be coming home to. My parents both passed away while I was in prison. The rest of my family had all moved out of New York State. I had never used the internet, an ATM or a metro card. I had never seen a cell phone. However, I have strong faith, and I had a strong belief that I would be successful. I was blessed to come home to a job working as a paralegal for an attorney I have known for over 20 years. I also work for the Women's Prison Association, as a residential aide in the shelter, working with women who have just come home from prison.

I joined Trinity church and was blessed to be embraced by the clergy and parishioners. My support network of friends has grown with the addition of my Trinity family. I am a lay reader in the church, and I am an active member in the Trinity Art program, painting candles that are used in the services.

Art is something that helped me cope with my time in prison. I realized early on in my sentence that I needed beauty around me. I began hand sewing appliqued wall hangings, using pieces of cloth that I repurposed. Eventually, the Bedford Hills Superintendent issued me a permit for scissors, cloth, quilt batting, sewing needles and thread that I needed to make the wall hangings. I call them Yearnsapes, because each one depicts a scene that I yearn to have as my reality. These pictures evoke memories of times from my youth that sustained me and gave me hope during the long years of my incarceration. Since my release, I have exhibited my quilted art at Escaping Time, and at various venues in New York City.

Daily I am blessed to be free. Even though I face challenges because of my age, my disability, and my felony record, I continue to move forward, not letting any of those things hold me back. I can never change the fact that I committed a crime, but I am not my crime. I am much more than the worst thing I've ever done.

Many people have asked me what I am afraid of. I always tell them that when the judge sentenced me to life in prison, there was nothing left to fear.



Photographed by Sara Bennett

KAREN

in McCarren Park.

Brooklyn, NY (May 2021)

MINDFULNESS PROGRAMS IN PRISON

Khadija Alshowaikh, MD.

Incarcerated individuals are often perceived as perpetrators of violence rather than victims of traumatic circumstances. Incarcerated women are disproportionately affected by mental health disorders before incarceration, which is further exacerbated upon imprisonment.³¹ Mindfulness programs, including mediation and yoga programs for inmates, might be effective interventions to improve quality of life, alleviate mental health disorders, and reduce recidivism.³²

Correctional facilities' residents are exposed to heightened stress levels compared to the general population, attributed to increased exposure to trauma and violence, including rape.³³ Many victims are burdened with chronic humiliation, guilt, and depression.³⁴ Therefore, suboptimal stress management due to inability in accessing health care or rehabilitation

³¹ Cooley C. Escaping the Prison of Mind: Meditation as Violence Prevention for the Incarcerated. *Health Promot Pract.* 2019;20(6):798-800.

³² Cooley C. Escaping the Prison of Mind: Meditation as Violence Prevention for the Incarcerated.

³³ Nidich S, O'Connor T, Rutledge T, et al. Reduced Trauma Symptoms and Perceived Stress in Male Prison Inmates through the Transcendental Meditation Program: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *Perm J.* 2016;20(4):16-17.

³⁴ Cooley C. Escaping the Prison of Mind: Meditation as Violence Prevention for the Incarcerated.

programs may contribute to increased mental and somatic disorders, commonly prevalent in the incarcerated population. Practicing meditation and yoga regularly may alleviate trauma symptoms by reducing the sympathetic nervous system and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis hyperarousal.³⁵ Repeated meditation appears to reduce stress markers (including cortisol and testosterone levels), normalize the neuroendocrine systems, and reverse the effects of chronic stress.³⁶

Limited studies are evaluating the effects of meditation and yoga on incarcerated women in US prisons. However, a randomized control trial conducted by Nidich et al. showed promising outcomes of using transcendental meditation programs in Oregon state male prisons.³⁷ The study group was trained to achieve a state of “restful alertness” by certified professionals over five sessions.³⁸ Participants were encouraged to practice this technique twice daily for twenty minutes and attend follow-up training and group medication sessions during the study period.³⁹ The transcendental meditation technique led to significant reductions in total trauma symptoms, including anxiety, depression, dissociation, and sleep disturbances.⁴⁰ The results also indicate that mindfulness programs might be more beneficial for those with severe trauma symptoms.⁴¹ Auty et al. suggest that mindfulness programs positively affect prisoners’ wellbeing and behavioral functioning if implemented for at least ten weeks.⁴² In addition to the numerous mental health benefits, participating individuals reported increased flexibility and pain reduction.⁴³ These data suggest that mindfulness programs and their beneficial outcomes are transferable to the imprisoned women population in US prisons.⁴⁴

Prison can serve as a critical rehabilitative institution for a predominantly marginalized population. Correctional facilities offer healthcare, public health, and criminal justice professionals the opportunity to develop and implement comprehensive programs for incarcerated women,

especially those with post-traumatic stress disorders. Implementing standardized interventions might help alleviate physical and mental illnesses to promote a higher quality of living for incarcerated individuals and the community. Incarcerated women deserve the chance to lead a healthy life comparable to their non-incarcerated counterparts.

³⁵ Nidich S, O’connor T, Rutledge T, et al. Reduced Trauma Symptoms and Perceived Stress in Male Prison Inmates through the Transcendental Meditation Program.

³⁶ Bartels L, Oxman LN, Hopkins A. “I Would Just Feel Really Relaxed and at Peace”: Findings From a Pilot Prison Yoga Program in Australia. *Int J Offender Ther Comp Criminol*. 2019;63(15-16):2531-2549.

³⁷ Nidich S, O’connor T, Rutledge T, et al. Reduced Trauma Symptoms and Perceived Stress in Male Prison Inmates through the Transcendental Meditation Program.

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Auty KM, Cope A, Liebling A. A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Yoga and Mindfulness Meditation in Prison. *Int J Offender Ther Comp Criminol*. 2017;61(6):689-710.

⁴³ Auty KM, Cope A, Liebling A. A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Yoga and Mindfulness Meditation in Prison.

⁴⁴ Cooley C. Escaping the Prison of Mind: Meditation as Violence Prevention for the Incarcerated.

“Lake Champlain, Dock at Dawn”

Fabric wall hanging hand-sewn by Karen L. Thomas

My family vacationed at Willsboro Bay on Lake Champlain. The best times of my vacation were watching the sun come up and being alone and quiet while the ducks took off in flight from the lake.



STRIDULATION

By Elizabeth Hawes

my first cicada
summer spent barefoot
in matching short sets & seersucker
sundresses singing Broadway tunes
an Ed Aames album played
in my basement

I didn't know they were stage
songs —

I thought
the sound of cicada wings
to be hot electricity
wires communion between
telephone poles. I didn't know
their language but felt
its importance because
it was loud

during cicada's second
& third return, I think
I was inside, acting in plays.
I did not hear them.

my fourth cicada
summer spent in state-given shoes,
grey t-shirts & sweats as
black beetles all over
evening news — I see
President Biden slaps one on TV
off his suit at the airport before he leaves
for summit in Brussels

scientists remark how
the creatures surface
every seventeen years.

as if they are
lazy or on holiday.
No one talks
about what cicadas
do when they are
underground
frantically avoiding
moles, eating God only
knows & digging.
Perhaps listening
to Ed Aames' LPs

they are freaking
busy. survive in
invisibility

I walk the prison
courtyard every day
unless it rains.
This morning a dead
cicada lay in my path
on his back, body
iridescent sun shiny

within fifteen minutes
ants dissect & carry
him off leaving
nothing but specks of
shimmer husk & silence

BURIED ALIVE

BIO

My name is Lucretia Stone. I am currently housed within the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women. I entered the facility in January of 2000 and to date I continue the legal fight to obtain my freedom. I am a proud pioneer of the NJ STEP college program here at EMCFW. In 2016, I graduated Magna Cum Laude with my Associates Degree (AA) in Liberal Arts from Raritan Valley Community College. Three years later, I graduated Summa Cum Laude with my Bachelors Degree (BA) in Justice Studies from Rutgers University - Newark.

I am a minority woman who was born for advocacy. I look forward to being able to change the policies necessary in order to create effective change within a world that is finally ready to begin to embrace such people, and change.

The feeling of being suffocated. That is what mass incarceration feels like to me. As if to perceive to be dead, yet existing within a comatose state while my mind, my spirit, my insides are yelling constant pleas for help. Constant pleas for someone to HEAR ME, SEE ME... to HELP ME!

A part of what feels like a forgotten population of women offenders who are housed inside of the only female prison within the state of New Jersey, Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women. A population of women sentenced to aggregate and indeterminate sentences. Whom, to date, have all served decades of imprisonment.

My name is Lucretia Stone. I am a first-time, violent offender housed within EMCFW. I entered into the system at the young age of twenty-four-years-old. I am currently twenty-four years, nine months into a mandatory minimum sentence. It's still mind-blowing at times whenever I stop moving long enough to think, and to come to grips with the fact of being incarcerated literally longer than I have been alive within the outside world. I now merely exist amid a state of suffocation while feeling as if I am buried alive.

Readers of this journal and people throughout society who are made aware of this population of human beings may attempt to rationalize our plight. They may think or even say, "Well, they committed crimes and therefore should be punished," or, "There is no such thing as a free crime."

I agree with this rationale. However, prison was not destined to cause harm upon offenders but to rehabilitate, as well as to help develop offenders into productive members of society. Whereas the current and outdated methodology of punishment without an end, that ultimately becomes a severe detriment upon the physical and mental durability of an offender. The intended effect of punishment can never be ascertained if the punishment never ends. For example, a modernized and effective technique of discipline of children is to place the child into a

“time out” period for an allotted amount of time. Once the allotment of time is up, the child is then taken out of time out in hopes that he/she will not repeat the same behavior. If the child is never taken out of time out, the parents will never know if the time out was effective. The same is true of offenders and imprisonment.

Numerous scientific studies have long ago concluded that most violent offenses are the result of heat of the moment incidents between spouses, family members, or friends. Basically, these are crimes of passion. Secondly, most violent offenders phase out of committing crimes and are less likely to reoffend. Despite expert conclusions such as these and a host of others, this population of offenders remains incarcerated after decades.

Nevertheless, we exist throughout this prison and we remain resilient and hopeful. We take advantage of opportunities such as this to one to raise awareness of this forgotten population of offenders, as well as to allow our voices to be heard.

We hold onto high hopes that a law will soon be enacted for first-time, violent offenders – a law which calls for all first-time, violent offenders sentenced to aggregate and indeterminate sentences to have an opportunity to be individually re-evaluated every five to ten years. The enactment of a law such as this will allow the offenders’ institutional record, academic achievements, and program participation to speak volumes towards their rehabilitation.

People change, grow, and mature from day to day, week to week, year to year, and decade to decade. However, if we could never move beyond our past mistakes, then our present or future will never stand a chance.

FEEL LIKE I'M BURIED ALIVE IN A TOMB

Bro. Truth



BIOGRAPHY: I'M A FREEDOM FIGHTER MOBILIZING MY VISUAL ART AND LYRICS TO COMBAT RACISM, MISOGYNY AND PREJUDICE FOR ALL AMERICANS. I AM A CONTRIBUTOR ARTIST TO A.B.O. COMIX. I PARTICIPATED IN BETWEEN THE LINES, A SERIES OF COLLABORATIVE ART WORKSHOPS BY CORRESPONDENCE. MY CONTRIBUTIONS WILL BE EXHIBITED IN THE POWER OF WE, A LARGE SCALE PUBLIC ART EXHIBITION, SUPPORTED BY WE, WOMEN PHOTO

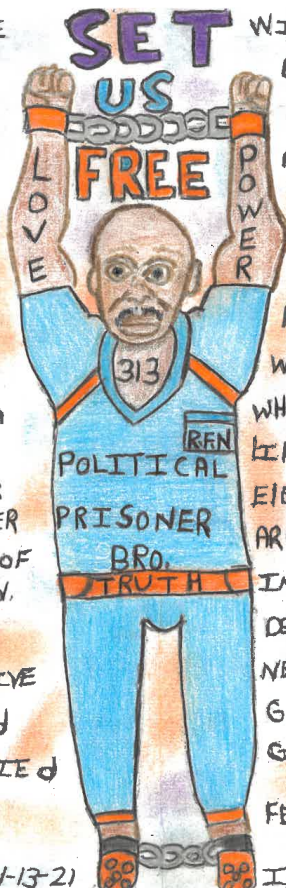
FREEDOM-N-CAPTIVITY SPACE 508.ORG. I'M TRYING TO CREATE A SUPPORT NETWORK WHERE MY ART WILL HELP ME RAISE FUNDS FOR A LAWYER TO ADVOCATE FOR MY EXONERATION. PLEASE, SEND FEEDBACK TO BRO. HERNANDEZ WILEY

FEEL LIKE I'M BURIED ALIVE
IN A Tomb. OPPRESSION AND
GLOOM,

POLITICAL PRISONER, DEAD
2 THE WORLD, NO FAMILY NO
GIRL, MIGHT BE FINISH, THE
SYSTEM, THE REAL MENACE,
SENTENCE 2 A SLOW DEATH
SENTENCE, THIS IS MY WILL,
YOU CAN'T HAVE 2 BE LOCKED UP
2 KNOW HOW I FEEL, POLICE
GOT A LICENSE 2 KILL, IT'S A
SILENT WAR, BORN WITH OUR
UNIFORM ON, THE COLOR OF OUR
SKIN, THE SYSTEM WON'T NEVER
BE OUR FRIEND, PRISONER'S OF
WAR, TRUMP, THE REAL OUTLAW.

FEEL LIKE I'M BURIED ALIVE
IN A Tomb. OPPRESSION AND
GLOOM. FEEL LIKE I'M BURIED
ALIVE IN A Tomb.

BY Bro. Hernandez Wiley 11-13-21



WITHOUT UNITY WE'LL NEVER
BE FREE, THE SYSTEM THE
REAL ENEMY, LISTEN 2
MY SOUL CRY, GHETTO CHILD
TIL I DIE, FIE UP THE
BLUNT LET'S GET HIGH, I
CAN'T CHOOSE THE WAY I
LIVE, BUT I CAN CHOOSE THE
WAY I DIE, REAL FREEDOM IS
WHAT I'M YEARNING, MY WHOLE
LIFE I BEEN BURNING, FROM
ELEMENTARY 2 A JAIL CELL,
ARE YOU SURE WE AIN'T ALREADY
IN HELL, OUR BIRTH, IS ALSO OUR
DEATH, EVERY BODY FOR SELF,
NEVER KNEW MY FATHER, MAMA
GONE, IT'S A SHAME I'M
GOING 2 DIE ALONE,
FEEL LIKE I'M BURIED ALIVE

IN A Tomb.

The Road To Nowhere-No Lands

It's hard to stay focused and in touch with my dreams. To block out the voices and misguided screams. They echo in my head and tell me to escape...attracting me to a world where everything is fake!

Including my feelings and dreams that I chased. Now I'll always have memories of years gone to waste!

I buried my feelings and blocked out all pain. Acknowledging the sunshine while ignoring the rain.

I'm fooled into believing things are just fine and everybody's life is as carefree as mine

Actually the pain just gets bottled inside and it eats at my morals and pride

I can see what I'm doing and the need to change, yet stopping is both scary and strange

I know its for the best and needs to be done. That life is more than partying and hustling under the sun!

These things are fine at the right time and place, but I never seem able to stop giving the chase.

I lose all control and keep one thing in mind as I rise and grind. And from the direction I travel you'll swear I was blind.

This life isn't nice or even kind!

I've repeated this pattern more times than you know, and the price I keep paying is starting to show

I am certainly not proud of the road I took, I labled myself as a "liar and crook"

My future means nothing.

I lived for each day, rebelling against "authority" and all they "say"

I thought I knew it all and I was so "boss" but "looking" back on my past

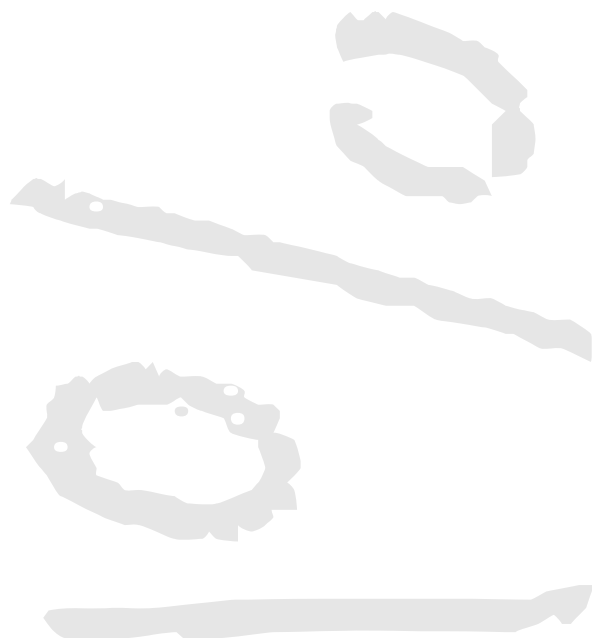
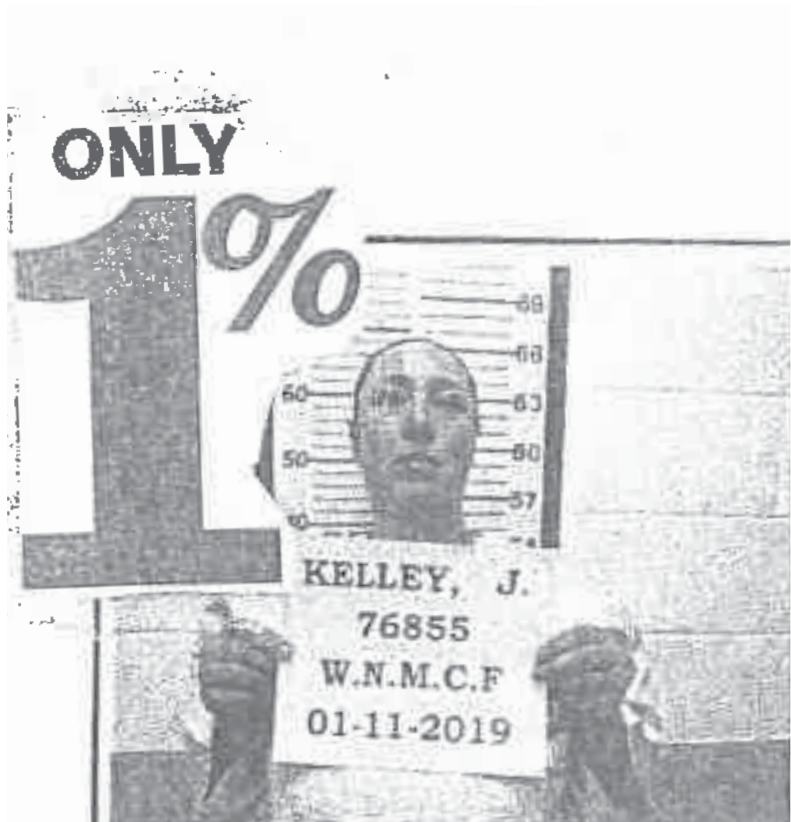
I see a life I've lost.

I'm older now but I still hear that voice. The difference is I can see there's a choice.

I've learned first hand and can't be found in a book and that's to stay off the road I took.

It leads to NO Where in NO lands.

-By J.R. Kelley #76855



WHERE ARE ALL THE IMPACTED WOMEN LEADERS?

Helen 'Skip' Skipper



My name is Skip – formal name Helen Skipper. However, I prefer to be called Skip and address myself accordingly. I am a formerly impacted – wait...no – that's not right. I am personally impacted by the Criminal Justice system and to be intentionally honest here – there is no "formerly" included anywhere. I am personally impacted by the number of years I cycled in and out – and I cannot truthfully say that is a "former" situation because I am still impacted as I still suffer through the collateral consequences. Today I am an actor in the criminal justice space through several avenues:

- A. I am employed directly within the system – I am a practitioner – I am the Senior Manager of Peer Services at The New York City Criminal Justice Agency where I manage a team of peers working directly with clients ensnared within the system.
- B. I am also a student of the Criminal Justice system and am a card-carrying member of several "Higher Education in Prison" entities where I am very prolific and outspoken about the set up for failure that occurs when the door to Higher Education is opened for those

of us with lived experiences – but the support we need to stay in the room are not proffered as well – which reads we fail – i.e.,...this is where the "set up for failure" terminology comes in.

- C. I am part of the Academia component centering on those of us with lived experiences – I am a member of the American Society of Criminology's – Division of Convict Criminology (yes, I realize the language used is a bit much? That is a subject for an entirely different journal article and trust – I Am On It!)

I write this article as I move through all these spaces. Suffice it to say that "I Live and Breathe Criminal Justice Reform." But as I move through these spaces, I see a dearth of what I feel I should see! Simply put – where are my "Directly Impacted Women Leaders"? In Academia, in politics – in public policy!!!! The Prison Policy Initiative states and I quote "Women's incarceration has grown at twice the pace of men's incarceration in recent decades."⁴⁵ A fact sheet issued by the National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women in 2016 did a deep data-dive using resources from The Sentencing Project and had this to say "Women Offenders is a Growing Population in American Criminal Justice System. Women are a fast-growing criminal justice population according to trends over the past 30 years. Since 1980 the number of women in U.S. prisons has increased by more than 700% and has outpaced men by more than 50%."⁴⁶ So needless to say, the data supports and is out there through numerous sources! So, my question is – with women incarceration growing astronomically – at the speed of light - **WHERE ARE ALL THE IMPACTED WOMEN LEADERS?** Where are my sisters in the struggle? Where are we showing up and showing out? Academia????? No not really – spaces and mechanisms for us to ascend to those lofty realms have not really been identified, fleshed out and supported! Why? Among a few reasons I would say archaic practices and policies still exist like

⁴⁵ Kajstura, "Women's Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie."

⁴⁶ "Fact Sheet on Justice Involved Women in 2016," <https://www.cjinvolvedwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

that ever-present degrading and stigmatizing box on applications asking us if we have ever been convicted of a crime! Are you kidding me? What are we in the subservient 60's?? Or better yet the patriarchal 50's where women were seen and not heard and really only existed in the household cooking and cleaning! My sisters – did we not break away from that mentality years ago??? So, while women leaders do exist in Academia – they basically draw the line at those with lived experience – a history! Do we exist in Politics? Hmmmm – good question – here or there I see mention that someone has ascended – mainly in local politics but that is truly a start I must say. And I also must ask where are those of us who are impacted on a Federal level? In the Department of Education? Speaking specifically to Higher Education in Prison programs, speaking specifically to the re-enactment of Pell? Where are we at the Correctional facility level – speaking specifically to those very same things? And carrying the conversation beyond incarceration to the reentry process. Where are we in the community supervision process? The probation and parole process? Our lived experiences are invaluable, vital, and beneficial to those still caught up in systems – because we get them in ways no one else can? You know where I do see my leaders at? In the grassroots, boots-on-the-ground Community-based Organizations!!!! Yes!!!! We are prolific, and proficient in these spaces – we have made them our own – we have conquered!!!! But where are we as we look at policy? Are we sitting at the table as Policy is crafted and implemented? Nooooo not – or better yet - as I put it – don't invite me to the table – I am the table – you need to come sit with me! But are we fully, intentionally, and realistically present there – in that space – where we make a difference and history as we craft something – some law or edict that is for us-by us????? Hmmmmmm that would be a big fat “NO” as well. So, my question remains – my good people – as you read this – ‘WHERE ARE MY DIRECTLY IMPACTED WOMEN LEADERS’ And I answer, loud, proud, and unapologetically me – HERE! HERE I AM!!! My name is Skip, and I am – A Directly Impacted Woman Leader!!!!



BIO

Helen Skipper, or Skip as she prefers to be called, has been working in peer support since her release from incarceration in 2007. In her professional persona – she is the Senior Manager of Peer Services at the New York City Criminal Justice Agency where she is intentional in creating space for individuals with lived experiences. A Beyond-the Bars 20/21 Fellow – she is also a Columbia University Justice-in-Education scholar while also maintaining a 3.9 GPA @ St. Francis College – where she is the first Justice Initiatives (formerly Post-Prison) program participant to be invited to join the Honor classes and a Student Representative. The inaugural Executive Chair of the NYC Peer Workforce Coalition and an executive leadership team member of the NYC Justice Peer Initiative – Skip was also the first Peer Supervisor employed by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in her role in the groundbreaking – media acclaimed Friendship Benches NYC. She lives by her mantra – “I’ve been around the block a time or two on my tricycle and use those lived experiences to color my world while assisting, supporting, advocating and navigating for those still caught up in the oppressive and broken Criminal Justice System!”

PASSION TURNED PROGRAM

By Sharon Jones, Founder of Paroled2pride



Born in St. Albans, NY and lived in South Jamaica, NY. Mother and father moved from Mississippi to NYC and that is when the domestic violence began. The mental and physical abuse led to the demise of my loving brother

My experience with the judicial system began with my brothers and nephew. My brother, John Milton Cameron, aka Fiberglass, saw himself as the provider and protector of his family (mother and six siblings) after our parents' divorce. Single mother trying to provide for seven children by cleaning houses and going to school at night. No resources for the domestic violence she endured were available to her during that time and if so, she had no knowledge of them. She was stabbed and shot at by my father while the older siblings were present, and it was my brother that hit my dad's hand to keep the shot from hitting my mother. My brother took on the responsibility to help by selling drugs. He would give us money and say get clothes, food, and school supplies if needed. My mother would not, because her dream was for him to go to school and become productive. I remember going back and forth to court with my mom and siblings because she wanted the judge to know that he had a loving family. Back and forth to Rikers Island and eventually ending up in Attica, NY facility.

Because of the adverse childhood experiences, my brother began to use heroin to deal with the

pain endured from my father. Each time entering prison and coming home, there were no resources that would provide economic support that would strengthen the family, no assurance of a strong start for him or children in the community, no promotion of social norms that protect against violence and adversity. There were NO interventions available to lessen long-term harms that, if available, would have prevented prison from becoming a revolving door.

I remember riding the train and bus with my sisters to Manhattan and taking another bus about six hours or more to Attica. My mom said "Don't cry" because she wanted my brother to know we were fine and that he would eventually come home. I cried and I almost never forgave myself because he kept assuring me he was good and that he would be home and not to worry. This was the most devastating experience I had. I then conditioned myself not to cry. Because of that, I did not cry at his funeral after he was murdered by a correctional officer. I blamed my dad and the judicial system for the death of my loving brother.

After moving to Mississippi, I didn't talk about my brother until I met a gentleman that got out of prison and needed a job. Advised by my in-laws not to risk my job, but encouraged by my mom to remember my brother and help the gentlemen, I did and he became my model employee. Then came others, and they kept coming until the passion birthed Paroled2pride. Curriculum created by a mother that understood the need of those returning home and the structure of love and compassions have been the foundation of Paroled2pride.

I started helping in 1999 and established the program in 2007, and then my loving mother passed to be with her son. I put the program on hold because it was very painful to continue. Through prayer and others, I started back in 2016. Paroled2pride is reducing recidivism one person at a time, the motto given by a loving mother.

“Living Room”

Fabric wall hanging hand-sewn by Karen L. Thomas

I spent a lot of incarcerated afternoons, imagining the ideal living room I would go home to. I don't have that living room. But, I recreated it in fabric for now.



ANNA BROOKS



My name is Anna Brooks. I went to prison for the first time as a pregnant juvenile. At the time when I caught the charge that led me to incarceration, I was in DHS custody. I had been moved around from home to home and placement to placement. There were a lot

of family issues I was dealing with since young adolescence.

When I arrived in prison for the first time, I had a five-year sentence. While incarcerated, I had my son, whom I had to leave at the hospital and go back to prison. That was one of the hardest things I think I ever had to do. While incarcerated in Mississippi Department Corrections, I was jumped on by officers on several occasions, once while being pregnant,

and denied medical attention when I started spotting afterwards.

I was a child in a very dark place. I'll never forget asking my first bunky why was she there and she told me second degree murder. From then on, I decided it best not to ask questions like that. While being gone, I did attend the alcohol and drug program and completed that, but as far as prerelease services or preparing me to go back into society, I was unprepared. Leaving prison, I was 18 years old and at the time of release I did have the support of my mother.

After getting out, the same issues I was dealing with before were still there and I ended up being homeless with no job. Forced to stay with people I shouldn't have. I couldn't find a job anywhere due to my record. I ended up getting into a relationship that was more abusive than any abuse I had already endured at a young age, but I felt stuck and dependent upon him because I had nothing or no one at this point. I ended up falling victim to my environment and got back on drugs.

Eventually I did leave, but I ended up going back to prison again, this time I was given seven years with five suspended. This time, I made up my mind that I couldn't do this anymore, and I stayed clean my entire incarceration on my own. One thing that anyone that's been to prison knows is that it's easier to get drugs in there than a pack of noodles from someone. That incarceration period was

different. I couldn't adapt to my environment, and I had changed. Same as last time no services or preparation for release.

Once I got out, I stayed clean and searched and searched for employment, and our local McDonald's wouldn't even hire me. This time I talked to my probation officer because I was falling into noncompliance for not being employed. He referred me to Paroled2pride, where I met Mrs. Sharon Jones. She gave me a chance and an opportunity when no one else would. She didn't just train me and give me a job, but she helped me mentally and spiritually. She gave me hope when I had none left in me.

Today, I have followed the career path she put me on and was even a general manager of a hotel in Texas. All this was possible because she gave me a chance. We need more people like Ms. Sharon in this world and more programs that help people find employment that is sustainable upon release. Prison is a totally different world and transitioning back and trying to be a productive citizen after prison is a very hard process, but I have been able to beat every obstacle that has been set before me. I am still sustainably employed full time in the hospitality industry. I am no longer homeless. I recently purchased my own home. I am no longer on any type of supervision. All this is due to Paroled2Pride giving me a chance and an opportunity to make it!

REDEEMED



2020, beadwork, dimensions: 21 in x 26 in x 12 in

**Note: selected as part of the Prison Creative Art Project's 25th Annual Exhibition of Art by Michigan Prisoners (postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic)*

Over the course of six months' time, some of which she spent in segregation, Susan Brown created Redeemed. The armature and structure are constructed out of toilet paper and glue, common materials for incarcerated artists to work with. Brown placed each of the work's 347,929 beads individually. She originally began honing her craft with two-dimensional, small-scale, intricate beadwork, and then began creating more structural pieces like this one. Of its significance, Brown says, "This piece started out as a symbolic reference to how often society discards things by removing life, as it does with deer that are taken and hunted for sport or pleasure, and how often individuals are taken or removed, whether by their own actions or others', from society by harsh sentencing. Both are discarded, and the numbers of each, each year, are greatly increasing with little or no positive change. I have been blessed to create this piece. It was above and beyond my wildest dreams."

"This is my 17th year incarcerated. Until I can physically be free, I am ever so grateful for the opportunity to express my personal freedom of art with all of you. Each piece that gets selected gives me hope that someone will be touched by my creations. I hope my work represents just how honored I am to be a participant of art exhibits."

-Susan Brown

YOUR NEXT BEST HIRE MIGHT HAVE A CRIMINAL RECORD

By Abigail Lucy Terry

Humor me for a moment, let's pretend we are hiring managers in HR, and we're looking at our final two applicants for a job opening. Candidate A seems to generally be what we are looking for, maybe they meet our qualifications and then some, but besides being qualified nothing else really stands out about this candidate. Candidate B has made it as far as they have in this hiring process because of their unique background and résumé. Candidate B has had a long and varied work history, but there are some year-long gaps between jobs. We find out in interviews that candidate B comes with priceless life experience that can't be measured on paper, however, their background check came back with some less-than-stellar information that explains the gaps in their résumé.

When questioned about this, candidate B is upfront and honest about all parts of their history, the good and the not-so-good. They seem to be confidently unashamed of their life's narrative, which initially comes off as a surprise to you, seeing as you assumed that a spotty criminal record is something that would elicit feelings of shame and embarrassment. The story they tell is about the challenging position from which they began their life, and how over the years they defied the odds at every turn. Their harrowing tale reminds you that some people take their first breath on this planet with the cards already stacked against them, and what do they often receive from the world in response? Zero empathy. Candidate B concludes their turbulent narrative with what they have learned along the way about not only themselves, but the world at large and smarter strategies to navigate it. Their compelling authenticity is impossible to ignore and you're impressed by the way candidate B has taken advantage of every opportunity available

to them to grow, learn, and develop new skills—it shows a clear commitment to the betterment of their future and demonstrates a particular, unique work ethic that candidate A (with no criminal record) does not seem to have.

So what do you do? Do you play it safe and hire candidate A who is "perfect" on paper but lacks the unique, character-building experiences of candidate B? Or do you hire candidate B with a criminal record and a non-traditional education journey, but enough perseverance, grit, charisma, and life experience to share with the whole organization? There is no single correct answer, but personally, I would hire candidate B. Seeing as one in three American adults have a criminal record,⁴⁷ I would wager there are incredible benefits to gain from building a staff that reflects the diversity of life experience that our customers or clients may very well have themselves. Never mind the benefits that the rest of my personnel and I stand to enjoy from being a part of a group containing such a multitude of perspectives, opinions, and backgrounds. Washington State University even asserts these benefits can include increased productivity, creativity, cultural awareness, and an improved reputation as an organization.⁴⁸

In my home state of Rhode Island, the law mandates that all public and private employers with more than four employees must inform a job applicant that they are looking into their criminal history; and they may only do so during the applicant's first interview or later. Additionally, if an employer rejects an applicant based on this background check, they must provide the name and address of the company that provided the background check. Failure to abide by these

⁴⁷ Friedman, Matthew. "Just Facts: As Many Americans Have Criminal Records as College Diplomas." Brennan Center for Justice, 17 Nov. 2015, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/just-facts-many-americans-have-criminal-records-college-diplomas>.

⁴⁸ Washington State University. "10 Benefits of Diversity in the Workplace." *WSU Online MBA*, 14 Jan. 2021, <https://onlinemba.wsu.edu/blog/10-benefits-of-diversity-in-the-workplace/>.

CRYSTALLIZED



Izuo-Ere "Mimi" Digifa

regulations may result in punishment, including steep fines. These laws are in place to protect job seekers from companies that provide potential employers with incorrect criminal history information, as well as affording job seekers some level of protection from being rejected before given a fair chance.⁴⁹ However, ultimately, employers may still reject an applicant because of their criminal record. So it is the opinion of those who work closely with the previously incarcerated that these Rhode Island laws— while better than nothing— realistically don't do nearly enough to level the playing field for job seekers with a criminal record.

Perhaps with all those previously described laws and hiring procedures, you're still not convinced that hiring candidate B would be your best option in my proposed hypothetical situation. Fair enough. When it comes down to it, employers' "bottom line" is often their primary concern. If that sounds like where you're coming from, then surely the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) will be of interest to you. The WOTC is a federal tax

credit made available to employers who hire individuals that come from groups experiencing great barriers to gaining consistent employment. These eligible individuals include but are not limited to: veterans, SNAP (food stamp) recipients, and of course, the previously incarcerated (within one year of release). After a simple application process that requires very little paperwork, employers stand to reduce anywhere from \$1,200 to \$9,600 in federal income tax liability, per person hired.

⁴⁹ Matthew J. Rodgers "Rhode Island Background Check: A Complete Guide [2021]." *Iprospectcheck*, 14 Aug. 2021, <https://iprospectcheck.com/rhode-island-background-check/>.



BIO

Abigail is the Data and Communications Manager for the Reentry Campus Program (RCP) in Providence, Rhode Island. The mission of RCP is to provide currently and formerly incarcerated individuals with an affordable pathway to accredited post secondary education and certification programs, infused within the reentry process. Abigail has never been incarcerated, however she has been a proud advocate for the interests of those who have long before her work with RCP.

Employers are not only allowed to, but encouraged to multiply this benefit by hiring an unlimited number of eligible employees.⁵⁰ If additional security to insure this choice is important to you, then you will probably be pleased to hear that Rhode Island employers are able to access federal bonds to insure losses at zero cost, these federal bonds are purchased by the state and can go into effect on a new hire's first day.⁵¹

With these no-brainer benefits available to Rhode Island employers, advocates for the previously incarcerated are left pondering one important question: why don't more employers take advantage of this opportunity? The first potential answer is that they're simply unaware of its existence, an easily avoidable problem I hope to have begun to dismantle with this piece. The second potential answer is the more insidious and onerous of the two: some people are simply not ready to challenge their own prejudice. They discover anything other than a squeaky clean background check, and suddenly, whatever potential they saw that brought the applicant to this round of interviews

is instantaneously dead on arrival. Ironically, this widespread fear and skepticism of the previously incarcerated as quality employees is a significant contributing factor to their inability to secure a legal way to support themselves and their families. These choices leave previously incarcerated job seekers exponentially more likely to make decisions that land them back in prison.⁵² In other words, closed-minded and resistant employers' prejudice creates the exact problem they think they're avoiding by not hiring someone with a criminal record.

So, now equipped with this knowledge, I'll leave you to ask yourself if you will be a part of the problem, or a part of the solution. Ask yourself: would you hire candidate A, or candidate B?

⁵⁰ U.S. Dept. of Labor and Training. "What Is the Work Opportunity Tax Credit?" *Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training*, RI Gov, Feb. 2003, <https://dlt.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur571/files/documents/pdf/wc/SelfInsureApplication.pdf>.

⁵¹ OpenDoors. "Strengthening Your Business." *OpenDoors*, OpenDoors, <http://www.opendoorsri.org/anemployer>.

⁵² Rhode Island Family Life Center. "Employment & Prisoner Reentry in Rhode Island." *Issue Brief on the Impact of Incarceration & Reentry*, Rhode Island Family Life Center, May 2004, <http://www.opendoorsri.org/sites/default/files/employmentbrief.pdf>.

LIFE AFTER INCARCERATION



BIO

Ashley Bender graduated from Stanford University with Bachelor degrees in International Relations and Art. She does freelance graphic design and photography work as well as serving as the Digital Communications Associate for Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform. Though she has not been incarcerated herself, she has been able to connect with many justice-involved individuals through the work of Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform. Through

listening to their experiences and insights she created her latest piece titled, "Life after Incarceration." She states, "All the justice-involved individuals I have been able to learn from and listen to describe what it's like to be drowning in life after incarceration; drowning in fines and fees after going through the legal system, drowning within their mental health needs due to incarceration, or even drowning in all of the responsibilities thrust back on to them after incarceration such as school, caring for children and loved ones, maintaining employment and gaining things such as a driver's license and so much more. Finally, the image represents drowning in constant fear of re-entering the carceral system for the slightest errors in terms of probation and parole or missed fines and fees payments."

GUARANTEED

Katie Anderson (she/her) is a middle-aged, White woman recovering from substance use addiction. She served time for a felony hanging over her head in the state of North Carolina. Ultimately, she is striving to establish a non-profit organization that serves broken people in building a successful life.

Kristen Powers (she/her/ella) is the director of Benevolence Farm, a non-profit social enterprise working alongside formerly incarcerated women. Kristen is a passionate prison abolitionist, fueled by her best friend's experience with the intersection of both the criminal punishment system and awful immigration policies. She lives in rural North Carolina with her therapy Corgi, Colbert.

Part I: Stability

My name is Katie. I am a middle-aged, White woman recovering from substance abuse addiction. I also have a time-served felony hanging over my head. With this kind of history, it is very difficult to find employment that offers financial stability or housing of any kind, let alone a place not in the Lion's den of crime and addiction. Ultimately, I am striving to establish a non-profit organization that serves broken people in building a successful life.

My economic situation has burdened my recovery and my reentry from prison. Without the help of a local non-profit organization, I would still be going through system after system, trying to figure out how to get back on track. It wasn't always this way for me. As a young adult, I had it made for a while. However, I wasn't mature enough to know how or what to do with the money. In my eyes, I was rich. I didn't realize that soon, very soon, I would walk myself right into a ton of debt that I didn't fully understand. The financial barriers are the system's only way to keep good people down.

Economic stability will play a major role in stabilizing my mental health as well as my physical health. Lack of economic stability has caused major barriers during my reentry from prison, as well as increased my risk of relapses to substance abuse addiction. With financial stability, I would be better able to manage my mental health with a physician's care and proper medication, meaning that I would be able to function in my sobriety without reverting back to illegal substances.

If everyone had what they needed, the world would be the classic definition of stability. This stability would increase opportunities for improvement and growth. I see decreasing crime rates and focus on family and community. I see, clearly, a peaceful, equal world where wealth is distributed rather than hoarded. It's us, the human race, that can make the vision obtainable. If guaranteed income was implemented across the entire system, then I see a brighter future for myself. I, myself, enjoy working towards stability step-by-step, reaching for my goals. If I did not have to struggle to meet my basic needs, then I could move forward with increased confidence and self-worth. It would be amazingly awesome to be surrounded by people who are confident in their self-worth.

As I write this entry, I imagine you, reader, considering the drastic situations I have struggled through and am slowly overcoming. I have a vision of you, reader, racing off to your communities and finding programs that support people like myself who are struggling. It's simple to get involved with your community. I could sit here all day and come up with ideas of what I think you could do to support other people who are struggling like myself. Each person has their own role to play.

I am a firm believer that it is my responsibility to help others when I can. We were all taught the

Golden Rule when we were children. Treat others as you would like to be treated. Give someone a ride to work, find someone to give a warm coat to this winter, take a plate of leftovers to someone that is obviously starving. I encourage you to find something you enjoy doing to serve others in your community. Tragedy does not discriminate. You never know when you could be that homeless person walking aimlessly down the street at 3:00 in the morning because you have nowhere else to go.

Part II: Follow the money

When a woman walks out of a North Carolina prison, she is handed \$40 from the State to “get back on her feet.” Within four weeks, that same State will demand the \$40 back in the form of a monthly probation fee. The State then expects you to secure a job, find a place to live, pay your fines and fees, get a car, and more. And if you don’t, you risk returning right back to the State that spends \$30,000 per incarcerated individual per year and charges you for coming home. Somehow, after years of financial exploitation, no work, no credit, and a criminal record, you’re supposed to turn forty dollars into thousands.

At Benevolence Farm, we know the carceral system is cruel, unrealistic, and makes our communities unsafe. As a non-profit social enterprise that works with formerly incarcerated women in rural North Carolina, we’re all about building a system where our needs are met outside of the criminal punishment system. At present, we offer stable housing and employment immediately after one’s return home. Women work part-time on our farm and receive a guarantee of \$1,000 per month as we build ourselves back up from the trauma of incarceration and everything that came before. Our organization fundraises to dissolve burdensome legal fines & fees, fights for people’s driver’s licenses back, and argues for employers to end their poor business practices that prevent them from hiring the best person for the job. And while we have tested out a guaranteed income to some degree with our

employment program, the experience of receiving stimulus in the last year accelerated our thinking of what is possible.

In our small little community, as women finally received their stimulus checks and community members pledged theirs, we saw a dramatic shift in economic circumstances. One woman paid off their probation fees in full. Another woman enrolled in a workforce development program at a local community college. Someone put all their checks into a CD and is planning on purchasing a home. Another paid off her driver’s license debt so she can finally get a car that can get her to work. The dramatic benefits of a cash infusion had us thinking: What effect could a statewide guaranteed income project for formerly incarcerated people have on our communities and loved ones?

It wouldn’t be that radical of an investment to see the outcomes we witnessed on the Farm statewide. North Carolina already spends \$30,000 per incarcerated person per year. And, not surprisingly, after years of financial exploitation, the return to prison rate is 40%. At Benevolence Farm, where we invest between \$5,000 and \$15,000 per individual, we see a return rate of 5%. If we had more money to invest, we believe we’d get that rate closer to 0.

So let’s say the State of North Carolina prioritizes the basic needs of formerly incarcerated people returning home. Let’s start with what the initial investment could look like: \$1,500 to secure a place to live; \$1,000 for the first month’s utilities; \$2,000 for a vehicle that actually works; \$200 for food while SNAP benefits are processed; \$200 for clothes and essentials; and, another \$100 to secure basic documents such as birth certificates, social security cards, and licenses. Less than \$5,000 allows someone a dignified first month home.

If we continued to invest another \$1,000 in each individual per month for up to a year, these funds would allow an individual the opportunity to find

meaningful employment with an employer that accepts one's criminal record. In this system, the work to find that kind of work takes time. The \$1,000 could pay for a class or program that would help one reach their dream job, something untenable when you're just trying to keep your extended stay hotel for another week.

As Katie mentioned, the peace of mind that financial stability brings would also help her focus on her substance use recovery and mental health. As most returning people either cannot qualify or don't have Medicare or health insurance, the opportunity to pay for such care is often impossible. But considering that nearly two-thirds of formerly incarcerated people have a history of substance use and nearly every incarcerated person has at least one mental health diagnosis, would it not make our communities a whole lot healthier, calmer, and, yes, safer, to provide these resources? If Katie had that extra \$1,000 each month, she might be able to navigate our broken healthcare system just enough to get what she needs to stay well.

In one year, less than \$17,000 could radically shift the reentry experience. That is half of what we spend as a State on incarceration for that same person's well-being at home. We know that this investment will make us safer, happier, healthier, and more self-confident. A healthier, happier, safer community brings us one step closer to ending the grips of the criminal punishment system and pursuing what we are meant to do on this planet.

We write this essay to challenge you, reader, to fight for this world. Do you enjoy research? Find out what your local government spends on the jail versus the local health department. Do you enjoy talking to your neighbors? Hold weekly community events. Do you love data? Map out a visual of the costs our current system charges to our well-being. And while you're doing all of this, remember to include those of us with records, those of us with incarcerated loved ones. The movement to meet our basic needs will only succeed if we center the people society has tried so hard to disappear. To return home, you need a home. And that means a community that wants us here too.

Africa

the beauty of feminine-non-oppressive-souls
the essence of bondage minus captivity of minds
Now a drumroll please to the music notes
where all lives can rise
Ashes brave and bold.

Ivié D., 5/21/21

♫ THE WHOLE WORLD NEEDS LOVE/SO LOVE ONE
ANOTHER AS I HAVE...

AFRICA

Ivié DeMolina

5' x 5' CANVAS.



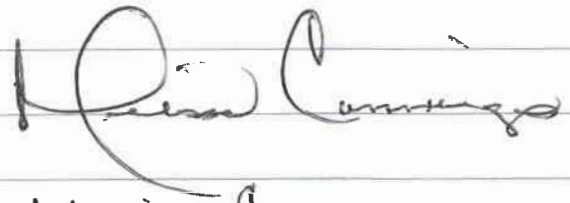
FREE

I thank You Lord for setting me free,
I once was blind, but now I see. I pray
that others will see You when they look at me.

I'll do my best to teach, love, and guide
them as You've instructed me. You know that I'm
not perfect, but I'll be all that I can be. You
already knew this, because long ago You chose me.

The funny part is that I had to get locked up
to get free, free from all the things that wasn't
needed in me. You sent the Holy Spirit to clean
out my heart to remove all the things that set
me apart. This amazing love that You've given to
me, and Your Son You sent to set me free.

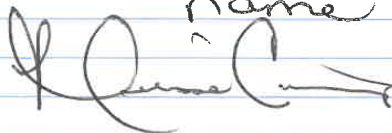
I love You, and I thank You once again
for choosing me!



Melissa Cummings

Doc # 456015

This is my first poem
I've ever written
Hope it reaches
many in Jesus
name



A PASTORAL REFLECTION ON JESUS'S MOTHERHOOD AND STATE VIOLENCE

BIO

Conor Q. Foley, M.Div is the pastor of First Congregational Church of Woodbridge, an organizer with Firelight Community, a state coordinator for Abolition Apostles, and an ambassador for NJRC.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" Luke 13:34 (NRSV)

This is Jesus speaking. Quoting Ruth, he recalls her words to describe his own experience of an impossible maternal desire. The children of Israel need care, they need direction, they need comfort. How he would love to gather them to himself like a hen gathers her brood... but instead he faces the violence of the state—violence carried out through incarceration and even execution. If Jerusalem is the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, denying the possibility of motherhood even for Christ himself, so too does our own criminal-legal system.

In her book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Christina Sharpe tells the story of Aereile Jackson, a houseless Black woman identified as a "former mother" in the documentary in which she appears. She couldn't make it to a court date without transportation and the state took her children. In the film, Jackson holds dolls in her arms as stand-ins: "This is the only thing that I have to hold on to for me to remember my children." Sharpe grounds this moment in the history of the Atlantic slave trade. She considers life "in the wake" of slavery, the wake of the slave ship, the wake that precedes the funeral, locating subjects who are racialized as Black inside the "nonevent of

emancipation" as fugitives still fleeing White terror. The plantation prefigures the prison. "I am the afterlife of slavery," says theorist Saidiya Hartman.

If Black women were separated from their children, from the role of mother, through the violent practices of slavery, so too are they still. Black women make up the majority of incarcerated women, and over half of them are mothers (Prison Policy Initiative; The Sentencing Project). The material conditions that subject people to criminalization are concentrated on Black women, including economic precarity and juridical bias among many others. This is the afterlife of slavery, or simply its most recent rearrangement.

Sabrina Dunigan was charged with the deaths of her five children in November. A Black mother of five, she lived with her children and parents in a one-bedroom apartment in St. Louis. When going to pick up her boyfriend from work at 3 a.m., an electrical fire took her children. She sustained serious burns trying to get inside her apartment and rescue them. Instead of approaching this tragedy with understanding and care, the state is holding her responsible for these deaths and throwing her in a cage. She did not receive the sympathy one would imagine should be extended to a mother who is trying to provide for so many, who is juggling multiple responsibilities, and has demonstrated selfless care for her children. She is not legible as mother in the anti-Black eyes of the state. Her father said, "Why are they trying to do this to her? She done lost all she can lose already. Why they want to take the rest away, meaning herself? She don't have nothing left."

As a pastor, I am drawn to this passage in which Jesus feels his own motherhood is being denied. His desire is simply to care for his children, but the state

will not allow him to do so. The state will incarcerate and kill him instead. This is not the end of the story though! Jesus is raised from the dead, from the tomb which is a cell—an expression of the state’s total control over the body of the criminalized one. He is set free. He preaches to the captives (indeed, he came to set the prisoner free! Luke 4:18) and as the disciples are so often incarcerated, the Spirit breaks them free, opening all the doors to the prison (Acts 16). Jesus says that he is the widow, the orphan, and the prisoner (Matthew 25), and they will be set free like he was. Jesus’s motherhood will not be denied by the state that tries to confine and kill. He gathers all his children to himself through the Spirit which sets the prisoner free, mind and body.

A CALL TO ACTION: QUALITY OF PRENATAL CARE IN THE PRISON SYSTEM

Ngozi Anaemejeh, Pamela Brug, MD

The rate of female incarceration in the United States remains at a historic and global high. According to the Bureau of Justice, in 2020, over 1.2 million individuals were under the jurisdiction of federal and state prisons. Women comprised over 70,000, with Black and Hispanic females imprisoned at higher rates than their white counterparts.⁵³ In a recent study by Johns Hopkins, approximately 1400 pregnant women were admitted to 22 US state and all federal prisons in a given year (2016-2017).⁵⁴

It is no secret that adequate and quality prenatal care is essential for reducing the risk of complications during pregnancy, delivery, and even in the postpartum period. Health care organizations such as the National Commission on Correctional

Health Care (NCCHC), the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), and the American Public Health Association (APHA) have published guidelines and recommendations for providing comprehensive prenatal care for pregnant incarcerated individuals. However, only a few correctional facilities (e.g., NJ, PA ,etc.) across the nation have policies that mirror these recommendations.⁵⁵

A recent study has shown a need for standardizing prenatal care for incarcerated women.⁵⁶ Incarcerated women are at increased risk of mental health problems, physical and sexual abuse, opioid abuse/treatment, poor nutritional intake, and many other factors that could potentially make them classified as high-risk pregnancies. Thus, they require closer prenatal care and monitoring.

The Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act of 2021 was recently introduced to tackle the maternal health crisis in America. Included in this act is a series of bills that seek to address key aspects of maternal health.⁵⁷ The Justice for Incarcerated Mom’s act, included in the bill, will address the lack of data on maternal health outcomes among incarcerated pregnant women, provide funding to improve quality of care in state and local prisons and jails, and evaluate the health impact of termination of Medicaid coverage for incarcerated mothers; an issue that has not been adequately studied.

The NJ administrative code for pregnant inmates (section 10A:31-13.10) provides laws on medical and social services that should be provided to incarcerated individuals. Prenatal care, nutritional supplements and diets, and non-directive counseling related to pregnancy are some of the few items included in this code. However, there are no specific committees or departments that ensure

⁵³ Carson, E. A. Prisoners in 2020 – statistical tables - bjs.ojp.gov. Retrieved December 15, 2021, from <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/p20st.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Carolyn Sufrin, Lauren Beal, Jennifer Clarke, Rachel Jones, William D. Mosher, “Pregnancy Outcomes in US Prisons, 2016–2017”, American Journal of Public Health 109, no. 5 (May 1, 2019): pp. 799-805.

⁵⁵ State standards for pregnancy-related health care and abortion for women in prison. American Civil Liberties Union. (n.d.). Retrieved December 17, 2021, from <https://www.aclu.org/state-standards-pregnancy-related-health-care-and-abortion-women-prison-0#hd1>.

⁵⁶ Nair, S., McGreevy, J., Hutchinson-Colas, J., Turock, H., Chervenak, F., Bachmann, G. & NJ on Women’s Reentry-Health Subcommittee (2021). Pregnancy in incarcerated women: need for national legislation to standardize care. *Journal of Perinatal Medicine*, 49(7), 830-836. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jpm-2021-0145>.

⁵⁷ “Black Maternal Health Momnibus,” Black Maternal Health Caucus, December 5, 2021, <https://blackmaternalhealthcaucus-underwood.house.gov/Momnibus>.

these services are enforced to the highest quality in these facilities. Nurture NJ Strategic Plan 2021 is an initiative to reduce maternal and infant mortality and morbidity, and promote access to quality and equitable care for all mothers in NJ. The strategic plan provides recommendations for specific issues affecting court-involved women. The plan calls on the Department of Corrections and County Jails to provide pregnancy and childbearing education to all incarcerated women, partner with organizations to provide counseling for incarcerated women with conditions such as substance use disorder mental health, etc. that puts them at increased risk of pregnancy complications, and increased training for correctional officers and health care providers

on providing quality care for incarcerated pregnant women.⁵⁸

We need policies in clear and concise language that mandate the reporting of pregnancy, outcomes, and prenatal care. We are calling on the health service division or similar governing body for health-related issues at correctional facilities to collaborate with health care providers to determine quality of care measures for prenatal care and establish a database that contains this information which will be assessed on a biannual basis to ensure adequate measures are in place and continuously improving.



Justice for Incarcerated Moms Act

Representative Ayanna Pressley

Senator Cory Booker



Ends the practice of shackling pregnant people once and for all, in all jails and prisons in the United States



Funds programs to ensure pregnant and postpartum incarcerated people have access to optimal maternal health care and support



Comprehensively studies the maternal health crisis among incarcerated people and develops solutions to end disparities

Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act

Learn more: @BMHCaucus | bmhc-underwood.house.gov

⁵⁸ "Government of New Jersey," <https://nurturenj.nj.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/20210120-Nurture-NJ-Strategic-Plan.pdf>.

BEYOND THE SENTENCE

Sheryl Martin

What is the purpose of prison? Most would agree that prison is a place for individuals who have broken laws and, as a result, must pay a penalty. Punishment equals the time an offender is required to spend in prison, causing a loss of liberty. Although the sentence is the means of punishment, too often circumstances within the prison will create an extended form of penance. This analysis examines one of the most critical problems faced by many offenders serving time in prison. The loss of freedom is unquestionably the principal punishment; however, more detrimental is the loss of communication with one's own family, causing an extended form of punishment.

Many unforeseen circumstances result in incarceration and many individuals struggle to mend, needing the love and support of family. Guilt, shame, and depression are often the consequences of crimes that ultimately lead one to prison. Family support and encouragement is commonly the difference between people rehabilitating or reoffending. The great entrepreneur, Henry Ford, said, "Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently." Reformation begins with restoration; therefore, the loss of communication decreases chances of restoring healthy relationships within the family.

Even when faced with lengthy prison terms, family should be the center of one's life and his or her child's life. Being a part of one's own family or parenting a child should never stop because a person enters the prison system. Children should be aware of the choice their parent has made that caused the separation. In the book, *Family First*, Dr. Phil states, "Whenever something happens to a family member, whether it is cancer, substance abuse, illness, or failures in life's pursuits, no family member can avoid being touched by it."⁵⁹

Family remains the most sacred institution, and the breakdown of communication creates a vicious cycle of unhealthy relationships in families.

The implications of having a parent in prison upset the family. Additionally, when a parent cannot provide healthy nurturing to their child, the effects can be more devastating than just the absence of the parent. In his book, *Gilligan's Notes*, David W. Earle states, "Compounding the lack of communications is the hole-in-the-gut feeling of alienation. Children experiencing this separation develop parental wounds they take into adulthood."⁶⁰ Effective parenting can take place from prison, and while there are communication options available, policymakers within the prison system do not consider the financial burden that purchasing communication places upon families and offenders. The repercussion is an extenuation of not only a loss of freedom, but also the breakdown of the family unit.

One of the primary reasons a person serving time in prison may have a breakdown in communication is due to financial strain placed on the family. With the cost of sending money and steep phone rates, the family of an offender may not be economically able to support an incarcerated family member. Therefore, the insufficiencies of financial support from family members will often leave an offender isolated with a diminished chance of building ongoing familial relationships. The consequences of incarceration are not only loss of freedom and communication, but also loss of financial security, resulting in many impoverished offenders.

Compounding these problems within the Louisiana Department of Corrections is the cost of sending money to incarcerated loved ones. Most

⁵⁹ Phil McGraw, *Family First Your Step-by-Step Plan for Creating a Phenomenal Family* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 7.

⁶⁰ David E. Earle, *Gilligan's Notes: Simple Communication for Complicated People* (Charleston: Publishing, 2015), 91.

monetary transactions from family members in the penal system are received through a company called J-Pay. J-Pay accepts payments by phone or via Internet with debit, credit, prepaid cards, or Money Gram. These transfers come with a cost, which have, not surprisingly, recently increased. At the beginning of 2017, rates to send money were \$6.50 for \$20 to \$100, \$8.50 for \$100 to \$200, and \$10.50 for \$200 to \$300. Unfortunately, once again the cost has risen by two dollars respectively since February of 2017.

While there is a way to send money at no cost, this requires sending a money order payable to J-Pay and a separate form with offender information to Florida. Not many families are comfortable with this method, for fear that a loved one would receive the money extremely delayed, or worse, not at all. Therefore, the problem remains for some families that cannot afford to offer even a little support due to the high rates the companies are extorting from another's misfortune.

Communication costs money. While this may be the proper procedure for the prison system and deemed a necessary responsibility for the family, are the costs exceeding the family's ability to pay? The leading phone provider for the Louisiana Department of Corrections and local parish jails is a company called Securus. Payments for calls out of the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women are the responsibility of families. In addition, Securus phone minutes are available for purchase from the prison. However, the rates were \$1.74 for the initial minute and \$0.05 cents for the additional minutes, amounting to \$2.44 for a fifteen-minute call. Since 2017, rates have changed and currently cost \$0.21 per minute, plus a \$0.13 service charge, bringing the cost to \$3.28 for a fifteen-minute call. When an incarcerated mother calls her child each day to talk for fifteen minutes, the total monthly bill exceeds \$100 per month. That amount is greater than many families spend on electricity. The average monthly residential electricity bill in Louisiana is \$105.⁶¹ The

cost phone companies impose makes it difficult for poor families to escape poverty as long as they have a loved one in the prison system.

Mailing letters, cards, and other written communications is a great way to stay in contact with family members. However, there are many bans and regulations regarding materials that are accepted at Louisiana Correctional Institution for Women, creating yet another barrier for communication. One unfortunate situation is a ban on receiving greeting cards. For family members who do not have the money or the time to connect, greeting cards offered an effective way to communicate, offering support and encouragement. Additionally, prohibitions on receiving homemade crafts, constructed with crayons, markers, glitter glue, and stickers from children, create obstacles in connecting. Due to various bans on mail, how can rehabilitation take place when the institution is preventing family members from reconnecting and restoring wounded or broken relationships?

Another issue related to the lack of family communication is stiff visitation rules imposed at Louisiana Correctional Institution for Women. LCIW requires offenders to list no more than ten adult visitors on their approved list at any time. When an offender has large or extended families, she is obligated to pick and choose which loved ones visit. In contrast, there is the offender who cannot have any visitors because their family members failed background checks or are on probation or parole. As of December 31, 2015, the Louisiana prison population was 36,377, with 41,000 on probation and 31,000 on parole.⁶² In the Metro section of *The Advocate*, Lapeyre and Finan remarked, "Louisiana has long been the nation's incarceration leader, imprisoning more of its citizens per capita than any other state, and at a rate nearly twice the national average."⁶³ With so many people incarcerated in Louisiana, the chances of having a family member in prison, on probation, or on parole

⁶¹ Louisiana Electricity Rates & Consumptions <http://www.electricitylocal.com/states/louisiana/> accessed on March 3, 2017.

⁶² "National Institute of Corrections" *Corrections Statistics by State* Last modified 2016, accessed March 29, 2017.

⁶³ James M. Lapeyre Jr. and John Finan, "Justice Reform Would Save Money," *Advocate*, March 20, 2017.

are astronomical. These issues undoubtedly create a problem in trying to reconnect with family when stiff visitation rules do not allow it.

Understandably, the objective of prison is to segregate individuals who have broken laws from the rest of society, but many pay higher penalties than just their prison sentence. A family's lack of finances should not create a barrier to communication. This is an unfair penalty against those less fortunate. Offenders serving time in prison deserve love and support from their families, no matter what their economic status may be. Justice means fairness. Is it fair to the family or the children of an incarcerated person that cannot afford communication? The loss of freedom is a price one must accept if demanded by the prison system, but the highest price remains hidden. The greatest cost of all is lack of communication with family, especially innocent children.



WOMAN WAITING

Jean Walker
Oil on linen, 30" x19"

BIO

Jean Walker's work is in many private and corporate collections ranging from, among others, the Readers Digest, the Community Foundation of NJ, Johnson & Johnson, and the Bergan Museum to The National Academy of Sciences, The National Institute of Health, and Fairfield University.

I called this painting "Woman Waiting" because the word waiting implies hope--that hope for help will come. I didn't realize it at the time, but I see now the iron bars of the staircase railing suggest, in the broadest sense, not only imprisonment but also the bitter-sweet limitations women's aspirations.

THOUGHTS AND EXPRESSIONS OF MS. P

Hello, my Name is Ms Eddie (Precious) Hood #1169038. I'm 34 yr. old. (9-23-87) TRANSGENDER WOMAN IN THE MISSOURI DEPT. OF CORRECTIONS SUFFERING ALL FORMS OF ABUSE.

I am a loyal activist advocating for our community inside and outside of prison and learn to all advocating resources to aid me in my grievances and to help me create a better community for those that withhold their potentials to do so for themselves. Allowing circumstances and identity to compel them to allow themselves to be dominated, degraded etc.

As I'm submitting a proposal to the Director of Missouri Department of Corrections to grant us the right to have a weekly LGBTQ+ callout in all Missouri Department of Corrections. As we struggle with so many different things and only really able to feel comfortable confiding in ones that can relate.

I'm trying to have a go-fund-me set up to help fund this call-out (materials and etc.)

Your help is directly needed

Love And Respect,
Ms. Eddie (Precious) Hood
#1169038

Thoughts and Expressions of Mr. B.

ONE WHO MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH THEIR FAMILY WHILE INCARCERATED ARE LESS LIKELY TO REOFFEND AFTER THEY'RE RELEASED AND HAVE LOWER RECIDIVISM RATES. ~~According to~~

Majority of people who exit THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE CENTER END UP RESIDING WITH A RELATIVE OR SPOUSE AFTER THEY'RE RELEASED AND STAYING CONNECTED WITH FAMILY WHILE INCARCERATED HELPS MAINTAIN THESE IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS.

THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL AND FISCAL BENEFITS ASSOCIATED WITH EXPANDING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN INCARCERATED PEOPLE AND THEIR SUPPORT NETWORK. YET, MORE IMPORTANT THAN UTILITY IS HUMANITY. FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS SHOULD NEVER BE EXPLOITED, BUT RATHER PROTECTED AND ENCOURAGED.

Because Time is Essential, and Life is

Precious

MARTINA

To a regular person with no lived experience or exposure to drugs or being a mother, one might think incarceration is the right solution to a very big problem our world faces.

The positive I can come up with is sobriety. Whether it is forced sobriety or wanted sobriety. I can see others benefiting from an addict's poor choices.

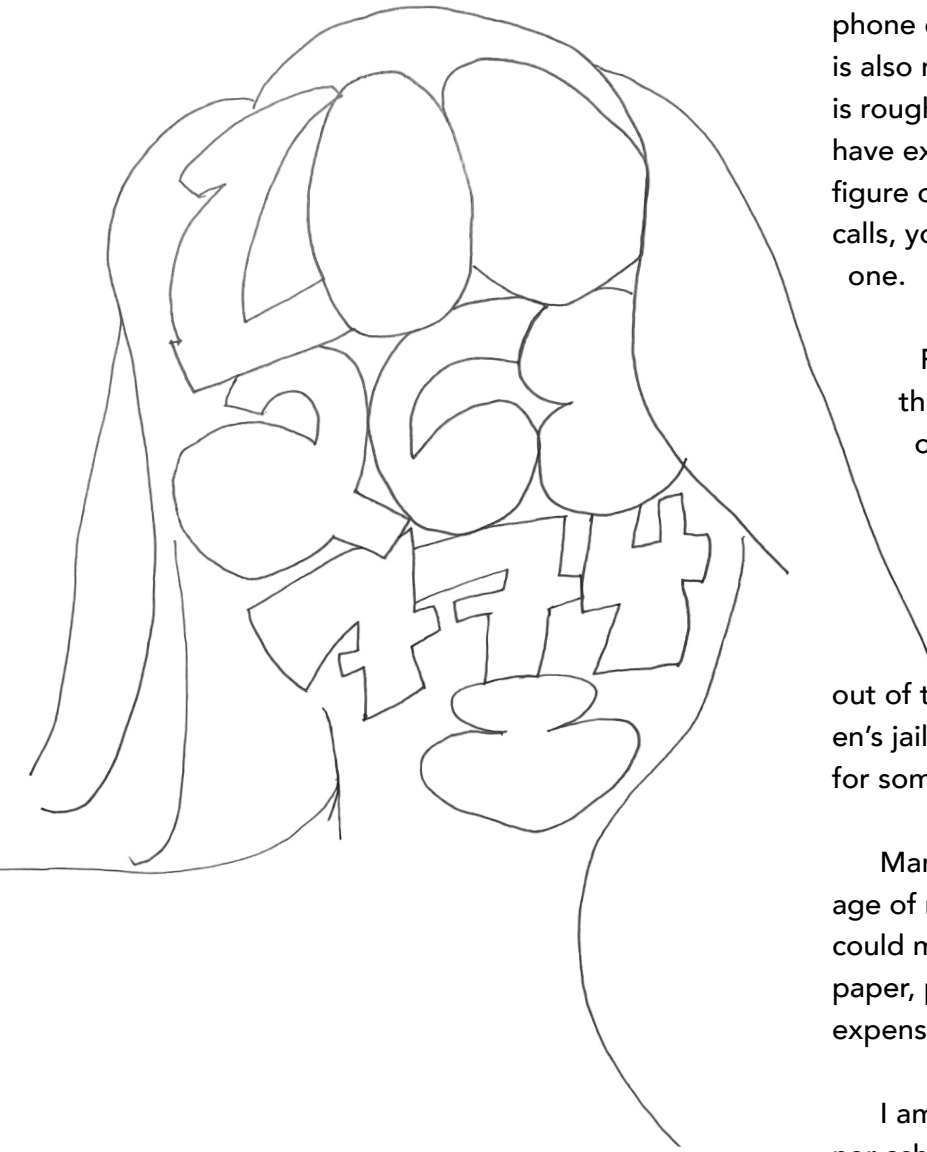
State agencies are ones that I see benefiting from pregnant women/mothers' incarceration. The

biggest benefit I personally can come up with is the Dept. of Corrections. These people are making a fortune off the loved ones of incarcerated women.

In jail, the most that I know a female inmate making was 90 cents an hour. Just like people in the free world, these incarcerated mothers and women need food and clothes and personal hygiene products. Most of the everyday items we take for granted, and cherished in jail. Many things we need to use in our everyday lives are sold to inmates at up to three times the regular rate.

TO YOU, I'M JUST A NUMBER

Abigail Cook



This is an image of me in which my face is made up of my GDC identification number rather than identifying features like how one would typically approach or create a self-portrait. It comments on the dehumanization of the system.

A good example of this is the inflation that we are currently witnessing during the pandemic. The phone company that is in charge of the inmate calls is also making a killer. Three 15-minute phone calls is roughly ten dollars. So, if your loved ones do not have extra money or they are elderly and cannot figure out how to set up the account to receive calls, you will not talk to your incarcerated loved one.

For a child this could be detrimental. I can think of times when I missed my mother staying over at my grandparents' house, I can only imagine missing my mom for lengthy periods of time and not even being able to hear her voice.

Many times, visiting one's mother is out of the question. In Connecticut, the only women's jail is in Niantic. Imagine how hard it would be for someone to visit if they do not own a vehicle.

Many people do not write letters in this day and age of new technology. To someone in jail, a letter could mean the world. Simple products such as paper, pens, and stamped envelopes are also sold at expensive prices.

I am at a point in my life where I am not afraid nor ashamed to tell anyone that I am an addict and I have struggled with this since I was 15 years old. I have gone through a lot and thankfully I have made it through and I am still here. I have been involved with the criminal justice system and have been a convicted felon since I was 19 years old. For the most part, all the times I have remained sober have been because I have been forced to. I birthed 2 children and thankfully they were born healthy and not addicted to any substances.

In the year 2012, I woke up one morning and decided to get high before going to a court hearing. Granted, I never made it to the court for that case, but I sure got another case and went straight to jail. I had a 3-bedroom apartment, I had a 3-year-old and a 10-year-old. I had employment, and I had a Pitbull as the family pet. My dog was put in his cage and my children were at my mother's house so I had to "get my fix" before court.

So, I leave to go to court, and no one hears from me until the following day. I vividly remember the state trooper allowing me to talk to my mother on speaker phone from his cell phone. I had to let her know that the dog was in the cage and I was going to jail. I broke many people's hearts that day.

I ended up serving 23 months in state prison. I was convicted of my 4th Driving under the influence charge. I was not intoxicated by alcohol, I was high. So, I was incarcerated and even though I was not pregnant at the time, I was a mother to 2 little girls who I love with all my heart. This was very very hard on me as a mother, so I can only imagine how hard this was on my 2 babies. Our family was broken in so many ways. When mothers are out in jail, it tears families apart.

At the end of the day, kids are the ones that matter, they are innocent. Ultimately, as a mother, it is my fault because I am the cause of the involvement with the Department of Corrections and the Department of Children and Families. Luckily, my mother was able and willing to care for my children while I paid my debt to society for ultimately struggling with unaddressed childhood trauma in the form of me suppressing my feelings with an illicit substance.

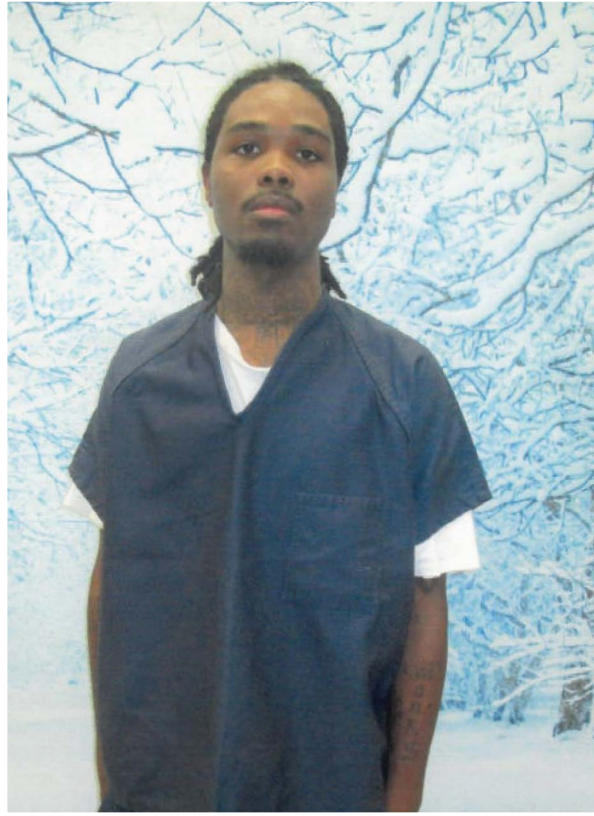
Many women are not as lucky as I was, if you consider me lucky. When women have to go to jail for whatever reason, more times than not children end up in foster homes or state facilities. Many kids are unfortunately separated from siblings and loved ones. I know women like myself who are now living a

good clean life, and do not have their kids and have to fight in so many ways to get the family they once had back. I am sure I am not alone when I say that once we "hit rock bottom," it seems as if we are always negatively judged and looked down on for many years to come.

The kid is the one who is left to suffer at the end of the day. A child should never be kept apart from their parents unless something terribly wrong is happening to the child. Addiction is said to be hereditary. So, by me struggling with addiction, it makes it quite likely that my children will also struggle with the same issues. Making it ever more important to address issues as they occur. If the hurt and suffering is swept under the rug, there comes a time when a child will experiment with drugs, and just like I did, fall in love with the feeling it gives because they are longing for that feeling and no one else can provide it but the substance. We are creating a cycle that will take a lot of force to break.

I feel that instead of locking up addicted mothers and throwing away the key, help them. Some things are not as serious as society makes them out to be. Punishing someone for an addiction is wrong in my eyes for so many reasons, yet it happens so often. Even in therapy, one can feel punished or judged for having a relapse. Same goes for parole or probation. Using drugs is so frowned upon, yet seems like no one wants to address it, so put the people in jail. Out of sight, out of mind.





My name is Terry Dumas and I am a young black man from the eastside of Detroit, MI. I was convicted of first degree felony Murder Aiding and Abetting. I was 19 years old at the time and I strongly feel like I was manipulated out of my life, but at the same time take full responsibility for my actions. I stop focusing on who I was and start becoming who I am. The man I've become is of greatness and would give my life to save another's. Knowledge of self, life and the resiliency to overcome what was meant to destroy me mentally, physically and emotionally. The hate I once had deep down in my heart for myself was replaced with an abundance of love. I look forward to being a part of the solution that helps this world be a better place of peace and love. Thank you for your time.

Resilient Flower

Royal blood flows through her veins pumping A Royal heart beat to A women of ultimate excellence. Powerful yet so powerless to her King, Even when her thoughts and Actions Are superior. Her true beauty within defines her outward Appearance. A smile that glows even in the depths of A heart of complete darkness. She elevates her King to greatness and conjoins her heart with his to cultivate love into life's purpose. Underestimated and under appreciated, the perfect blessing to An undeserving King. Painful emotions that left scars on her mentally and physically, Yet she still ~~the~~ deflects hate and reflects love into the world from A pure heart. Risen from A Great flame of torment Like A phoenix she propels into divinity, and redefines herself in life As the powerful Queen she was destined to be.

POINT OF TRIANGULATION: INTERSECTION OF IDENTITY





Point of Triangulation: Intersection of Identity © 2021 City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program / Michelle Jones & Deborah Willis, 21st Street & JFK Boulevard. Photo by Steve Weinik.

Point of Triangulation: Intersection of Identity murals are designed to visually depict a choice that an observer has to make. The choice is whether or not to stigmatize a person based on the fact that they are formerly incarcerated. It is a visual examination of how stigma may be weaponized. The medium of photography and the platform of the public mural are used to investigate and interrogate the production of stigma upon the justice-involved, by juxtaposing the perception of the formerly

incarcerated person with the individual's greater identity. The viewer should complete the point of triangulation and understand how the imputation and weaponization of carceral stigma require their participation. The artists, Michelle Jones and Deborah Willis, were part of the 2019 cohort of Reimagining Reentry, a 20-month fellowship designed to support formerly incarcerated artists who are applying their creative practices to address critical issues of mass incarceration in Philadelphia. The project was funded by the Art for Justice Fund, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, The Estate of Pearl M. Carpel, and the National Endowment for the Arts.



WOMEN AGING IN PRISON

BIO

Tara R. Lyle, 53, has been incarcerated at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility in Pearl, Mississippi for eighteen years. She is currently a seminary student and works part-time as a chapel clerk. She is also a published devotional writer, playwright, and author. Her goal is to continue her schooling as well as to allow God to lead, guide, and direct her each day.

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Aging in prison is a reality with often little to no solutions. Women more often than men have been programmed to be more concerned with the aging process. Prisons have not been equipped to address specifically the needs of women that will help promote better and healthier choices. Special consideration regarding housing, wellness, and release should be considered when addressing the aging female prison population.

For the sake of argument in this essay, I will use age fifty and over to define an aging offender. Women who meet this criteria and have served a significant amount of time (ten years or more) should be given housing that can accommodate their specific population. All aging offenders should have access to single bunks in their housing areas because their risk for falls and other incidents increase with age. No woman offender age fifty or older should still be climbing to reach

a top bunk. Bathroom areas should also have more privacy that would not compromise security, yet respect the dignity of aging women. Finally, it would be beneficial for women to be housed (as much as can be accommodated) with the same age group. Because older women usually prefer to go to bed early versus young women, being housed with like-minded individuals works better for both groups.

Aging women, especially, should be able to engage in preventable measures that would be beneficial as well as promote overall wellness. Activities that promote physical, mental, and emotional health are activities that women need in order to combat challenges during incarceration. Holistic care is the best way to treat the varied issues that women encounter daily, such as depression, hypertension, diabetes, mental disorders, dental problems, dermatology issues, and other challenges. As incarcerated populations have navigated the COVID era, new challenges have complicated the previous trouble spots. Treating the aging female population should be a step towards preparing them for departure, not an interminable incarceration.

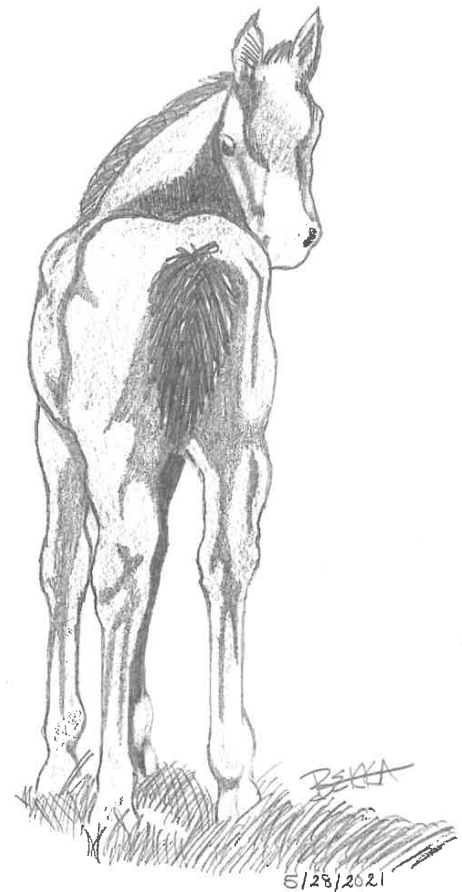
POOHIE AND LOOKING BACK

Bekka Hess

Poohie



Looking Back



Drawing Exercise

A realistic release plan should be constructed for every aging female offender who qualifies. At some point, it becomes not only financially responsible, but also compassionately responsible to allow women who no longer present a threat to society to spend their last years with family or friends. Releasing aging female offenders does not decrease or ignore the seriousness of their offense, but it provides a pathway to demonstrate mercy and compassion toward women who have been locked away for decades. Incarceration is the designated place for rehabilitation. Part of that process is preparing offenders to depart successfully. With planning and community support, women can make the adjustment to reintegrate into their communities.

From a personal perspective, I have been incarcerated for eighteen years. I was thirty-four when I came to prison, and I am now fifty-three. It has not been easy navigating things beyond my control; nevertheless, I have tried to be proactive in the things I could control. Having access to more preventative measures such as better diets (fruits and vegetables), exercise, and dietary supplements, etc. would go a long way in maintaining adequate health until my release. The aging population will continue to age. We must find real solutions to help with this aging challenge.

Why Not Me Too

If you go back to review tabloid headlines
Of decades ago
Then I'm the most evil thing still breathing our world
But if you get to know me and who I am today
It will be hard for you to harmonize
With what you've read of me of yesterday.

A repressed child incest
Grew Poison Ivy stems
No one grew interests
Her life and story didn't matter to any of them
In God We Trust didn't & still doesn't exist in the system.

Coming face to face with my abuser twenty years later
Childhood attacks boomeranged back
In a real bad and heinous way
Drugs, alcohol, sex trade and cocaine came after that
A real badass dominatrix I became
Something broke in me.

A little-brown-Latina-girl
From Brooklyn, East New York
Living her dream now lost in our unjust world
No one of her color stepping forward for support
Had she been blue-eyed and blonde
No railroading around
A code of professional conduct
Would have been diamond-crowned
Perhaps if she had some cash
She could have passed
Perhaps if they had been black or brown
She would have been let go a long time ago.

Twenty-seven years ago, no one cared I was legally earning six-figures-plus by 21 years old. No one cared I landed my dream job as a broker at 25. No one cared I had no criminal chronicle. And no one cared it was the recollection of a repressed childhood trauma that caused my decline. Hindsight astronomical. All they cared about and saw was a little-brown-Latina-girl from the Brooklyn streets of crime.

Feels like a modeling gig with hundreds of polite declines
Twenty-seven years now still doing time
Still facing another three dimes
Still no excuses for the enormity of it all
No one should have died
But let's get out the emotion & let's get to the facts
It's been hard not to give back an attack
Try to paint a picture of me
Beyond headlines & rap sheets of decades ago
If you believe in second chances
Here's an inspiring story untold
Still holding onto hope
Still hoping for real freedom, soon
Take a second look
Why Not Me Too...

Ivié DeMolina, September 17, 2021

HIGH, STRANGE ALBUQUERQUE

L.T. Henning

BIO

I am a life-sentenced prisoner in the State of New Mexico, currently serving a 12-year sentence for four felonies dismissed by the New Mexico State Supreme Court in 2006. No state court, nor federal court, will resentence me and no lawyer will help me regarding this issue. My life sentence begins in 2028. I have several hearings in court with my new lawyer – we expect to win.

My professional writing experience includes writing legal pleadings for the state courts and the United States District Court, the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeal (USCA), and the United States Supreme Court for seven cases, including my own. I have successfully secured a habeas hearing in a California Superior Court for one inmate, and another inmate was granted early release due to my pleadings. I have, with another inmate, in daily law court saved the custodial rights for a fellow female inmate at the prison.

I have published one short humorous story for the *Alibi* weekly in Albuquerque, NM under the name of *Anonymous* in 2002. A true life story of jailhouse cuisine, "*Bon Appetit*," was heavily promoted in the newspaper. I have attended *Southwest Writer's Group* at the women's prison in Grants and have enrolled in creative writing classes.

- Albuquerque, New Mexico, was named after the Portuguese Viceroy and the conqueror of India, "Alfonso de Alburquerque,"⁶⁴ 1453-1515 A.D. Made a *Duke* before his death, the city is also referred to as *The Duke City*, after its founder and his last title.

Birthered between the fires and the lava and the tectonic plate movement resulting in the creation of the Rocky Mountains, the City is a jewel sitting in

the crown of the Southwest. The City's Museum of Natural History's display of fossilized remains of the great thunder beasts from tens of million years ago in this region, reminds us of the evolutionary path of life on this planet. And humans are only a recent occurrence, standing upright on the linear timeline of history.

Sitting at the base of the majestic Rockies, the Duke City abuts the Sandia Mountains, what the Spanish call the *watermelon-colored mountains*, at sunset. The City sprawls across the Rio Grande River Basin, extending its influence of civilization, tradition, and culture as far west as the Petroglyphs National Monument Park and the extinct volcanoes.

Monsters roamed what had been a tropical landscape filled with great inland seas a hundred million or more years ago. Indigenous people, for centuries, have used the remaining sea shells and coral to create necklaces of great beauty and ceremony, passed down through the generations. The area surrounding the City has been honed and tempered by these cataclysmic changes through the ages.

It's a *hardscrabble* city of mostly blue collar workers scattered between the academic professionals, federal government employees, lab scientists, Kirtland Air Force Base personnel, and medical providers and clinicians – some of whom are the best in the United States. The Duke City boasts the University of New Mexico and its favored sons and daughters, the UNM Lobos. UNM reigns over a large swath of land that curls around the Sandias and the downtown area as well. The sandias are the *ancestral* home of the Native American pueblo tribe of the same name. The tribe has built one of the most successful entertainment, art, and industrial centers in the country through their diligent efforts – that cannot be overlooked, providing value,

⁶⁴ The original spelling of the name included an extra R, however the City dropped the R to provide an easier pronunciation. The City is also referred to as "Burqué."

excitement, as well as higher paying jobs to the area.

In recent years, the City has seen its fair share of computer and software application companies as well as communications, high-tech security, and surveillance companies crop up along the Interstate 25 corridor connecting Albuquerque to its sister city, the capital of the State of New Mexico, Santa Fe. The Duke City has been also known as the *first* Microsoft office of Bill Gates. The connection between the cities is made possible by a commuter train, the Road Runner, whose splashy, red-painted logo can be seen for miles.

Citizens of the Duke City have deep family roots, some of which go back to the *fifteenth* century King of Spain. So, tradition and culture are embedded in the DNA of the local residents.

Unfortunately, drug abuse is also deeply entrenched in the local culture. Generation after generation of New Mexicans begin drug use early, some as young as pre-adolescents. Parents teach the youngsters how to shoot up and use a rig. Drug use is ingrained in the culture of many New Mexican *familias*. We have grandmothers, their daughters, and their granddaughters incarcerated together at the Metro Detention Center in Albuquerque and in the state prison system, cycling and recycling through the system. It's tragic. If New Mexico is the *Narcolita* state, with tens of millions of black tar and china white heroin, cocaine, ice, ecstasy, and weed flowing through the diaphanous borders along the Mexican side of Nuevo México, then Duke City is the *capital* of *opioid* addiction and overdose.

The last time I was able to access data from online sources in prison was in 2015 with KOAT Channel 7 (ABC) report site⁶⁵ gave me the following chilling stats (comments inside the brackets are my own):

(a) Ranked 44th in income inequality (drives up the crime rates; results in higher incarceration rates)

- (b) Ranked 34th in unemployment (ditto)
- (c) Ranked 48th in high school graduates from 2012 - 2013 (ditto)
- (d) Ranked 49th in higher education attainment
- (e) Ranked 50th in teen birth rate (ditto)
- (f) Ranked 29th in affordable housing (ditto)
- (g) Ranked 45th in assets and savings (ditto)
- (h) Ranked 45th in disconnected youth who are neither employed, nor in school (ditto)

The survey did not address the drug problem, endemic among middle-schoolers and high-schoolers. Yet, on August 19, 2016, the director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, Michael Botticelli, in Albuquerque addressed a forum about the state's second highest opiate overdose rate in the United States. Albuquerque is now rated as **No. 1** in the country as of 2021.

Front pages of the Journal *scream* with the latest youth fatality. The crisis has reached the middle schools. It's the trickle down effect, as kids see their older siblings, parents, and even grandparents snort drugs and shoot up.

The City takes pride in its diversity of culture and ethnic population. The Duke City ignores the infestation of prostitutes, pimps, and drug traffickers on its downtown streets and its "seedy crumblin" motels hunched along Central Avenue, like a row of beaten prisoners. Street peddlers sell "black tar" heroin, "China white" ecstasy, ketamine (an animal tranquilizer), meth, or ice and crack – along with females of every size, color, and ethnicity – along the historic Route 66. Diversity is in abundance – for the right price.

Burque' has approximately 600,000 or more residents, as of several years ago. Residents of gated country clubs with armed patrols rub elbows in the luxury shopping areas with other residents – who also have exclusive memberships – in some of the most violent and bloodiest gangs in the South-west and the North American continent. Gangs such as "M.S. 13," "The Sureños," "The Mexican Mafia,"

⁶⁵ Angela Brauer, "New Mexico Ranks Worst in U.S. for Poverty," KOAT (KOAT, December 7, 2020), <https://www.koat.com/article/new-mexico-ranks-worst-in-u-s-for-poverty/5059182>.

"The Syndicato," "The 18th Street Gang," "The Bloods," "The Crips," "The Aryan Brotherhood," "The Eastsiders," "The Westsiders," and upstarts such as "505" and "Burqué" roam freely across the city wreaking death and destruction in their path. Recruiting for positions in these elite clubs is relatively easy in the impoverished mean streets of the Southside, in the *Narcolita* state, these are Rites of Passage – with children as young as nine years old shooting up for the first time, under the tutelage of the father. Kids have trouble concentrating in school, they get into trouble, they drop out of school; they're easily recruited into the gangs, which ultimately leads directly to prison; just another rite of passage like their fathers or uncles or mothers.

Corruption can be found at every level in the city as well as the state. From rapist judges, to drug-dealing judges, to corrections officials who distribute drugs from within the prison walls while stealing from food services while inmates go hungry, *corruption is everywhere* (the Albuquerque Police Department has been under the oversight of the U.S. Department of Justice due to the high numbers of killings of unarmed citizens by police).

The main areas needed to reduce crime and make society less violent are simple:

1. Vote out all incumbents, urge prominent defense attorneys to run for judgeship.
2. Begin early childhood development and parenting skills in middle school. Make completion of these classes mandatory for graduation purposes (New Mexico has some of the worst textbook cases of child crime in the country).
3. Invest all the time, effort, and money that can be mustered for early pre-K through high school, provide nutrition, mental health services, friendship, and a positive curriculum and environment for a child who wants to learn, grow, and lead his or her community. Consider money for good grades.
4. Support gun control and buy-back programs for weapons.
5. Open the community's mind to the successful prison reforms in Europe and the Scandinavian countries. Bring back community service rather than expanding the prison-industrial complex, which only serves to enrich the prison profiteers and vendors, creating "super criminals."
6. Give prisoners who deserve a second chance that opportunity. Life sentenced prisoners often have the cleanest offender history backgrounds.
7. Enact policies and live by a zero-tolerance for all drugs except medical marijuana; replace the draconian sentences with effective rehabs and education for all violent offenders should be mandatory.
8. Look closely at the lives and promises career politicians and judges are making to the community in re-election campaigns. A successful democracy is a well-educated populace.
9. Create one hour a night for the family – without phones or distractions.
10. Provide free community college tuition (trade schools as well). Encourage attendance of classes online. Only education pays back \$4.00 for every \$1.00 spent in prisons.

ON SILENCE

Deb Nicholls

~ In Silence ~

The silence is all around

The silence makes the only sound

In silence is the meaning

In silence is the key

Sometimes it is the loudest

Sometimes it is what speaks

Sometimes the answer is in the silence

In silence, is the key.

You can listen to the silence

You can hear ~~without~~ the words

You can feel the serenity and peace

You can touch Grace

In silence, is the key.

Open your mind, Unlock your future -

Leave the past behind

It isn't hard, It isn't easy

In silence is the key.

Go ahead and dream, Go ahead and scream

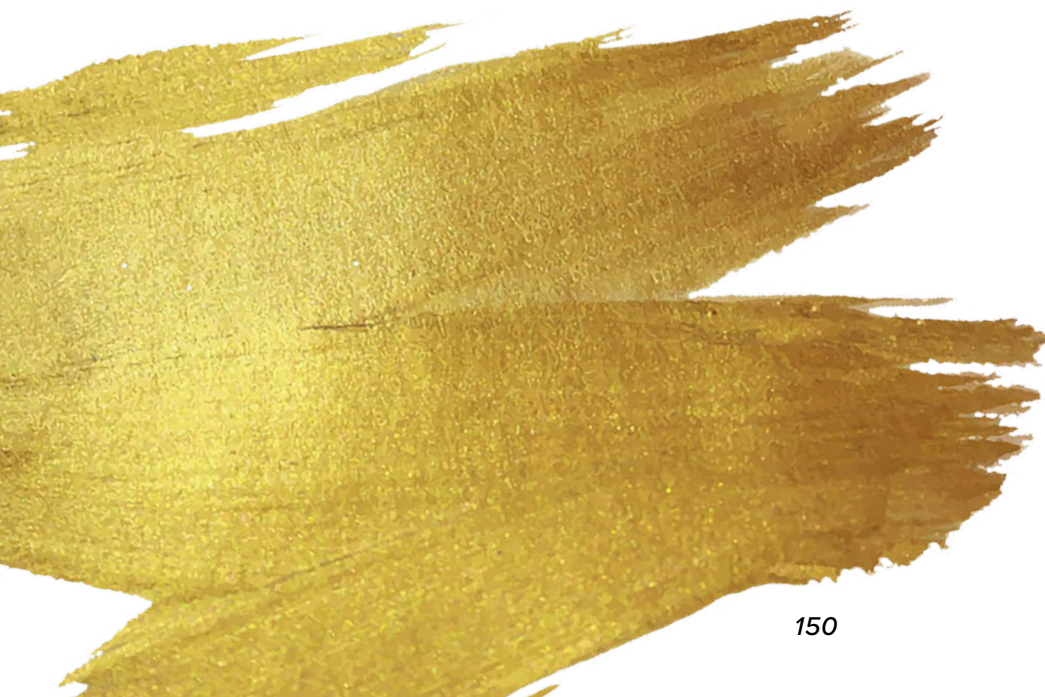
Make a wish upon a star, figure out who you are

In silence is the key

JUSTICE REIMAGINED

Reda A. Taleb

If all women were safe and could step into their power
It would look like an eagle soaring to new heights over vast open fields of diverse flora,
harmoniously flourishing
If all women were safe and could step into their power
It would smell like the aroma of jasmine oil infused with the crisp air of the mountains
If all women were safe and could step into their power
It would taste like iftar after fasting from dusk to sunset - yes, that good!
If all women were safe and could step into their power
It would sound like the waves of the Pacific Ocean, boldly uniting with the sand, but
gently receding towards the moon's gravitational pull on a beautiful summer night
If all women were safe and could step into their power
It would feel like Mama's warm, affirming embrace that can be traced all the way back to
my ancestors
Peace



EFFECT OF MASS INCARCERATION ON MENTAL HEALTH AND REENTRY OF INCARCERATED WOMEN

Sun Ho Kim

Mass incarceration is a major women's health issue due to its large influence on the deterioration of women's health, particularly the mental health of incarcerated women. Care for incarcerated women is a unique challenge due to the disadvantaged life most incarcerated women are exposed to before incarceration. Their negative experiences encompass trauma, racism, domestic violence, personal and family drug abuse, sexual abuse, poverty, violence, and policing.⁶⁶

Trauma experienced by incarcerated women is further explored by study findings of three forms of trauma exposure among incarcerated women: family dysfunction (FD), interpersonal violence (IPV), and external events (EE). Exposure to FD and IPV was found to contribute to the odds of having four mental health disorders and all three forms of trauma contribute to the development of bipolar disorder.⁶⁷ These personal traumas women experience before incarceration cause them to be trapped within the criminal system from an early age and reflect the need for proper health evaluation and treatment to prevent exacerbating mental health conditions.

Although there is a dire need for mental health care, the criminal justice system and prison facilities lack proper health care and safe environments for

women. Incarcerated women face harsh treatment such as sexual assault, invasive strip searches, and barriers to female hygiene products (i.e. sanitary products) and necessary gynecological health care.⁶⁸ The harsh environment, treatment, and lack of care during imprisonment are additional challenges incarcerated women face, preventing incarcerated women from living a quality life once released.

The impact lack of proper health care services has on mental health and re-entry is reflected in various studies. First, a study exploring the prevalence of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among 387 incarcerated women in the US found that 44 percent of the women met the criteria to be diagnosed with PTSD. Women with extreme PTSD reported receiving mental health treatment in prison; however, women with moderate to severe PTSD reported not receiving such mental health treatment. This shows how there is a clear issue in all incarcerated women being provided the necessary health care services and treatment.⁶⁹

Another study reflects the lack of mental health care treatment present in prison and its impact on re-entry. The study examined 142 incarcerated women in Texas and found, after a year of reentry, women with mental health conditions had an increased difficulty obtaining stable housing,

⁶⁶ Sam, Topeka K. "Mass Incarceration Is a Women's Issue." Edited by Inimai Chettiar, Priya Raghavan, and Adureh Onyekwere. *Ending Mass Incarceration: Ideas from Today's Leaders*. Brennan Center for Justice, 2019. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep28417.21>.

⁶⁷ Green, Bonnie L, Priscilla Dass-Brailsford, Alejandra Hurtado de Mendoza, Mihriye Mete, Shannon M Lynch, Dana D DeHart, and Joanne Belknap. "Trauma Experiences and Mental Health Among Incarcerated Women." *Psychological Trauma* 8, no. 4 (2016): 455–63. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000113>

⁶⁸ Green, Bonnie L, Priscilla Dass-Brailsford, Alejandra Hurtado de Mendoza, Mihriye Mete, Shannon M Lynch, Dana D DeHart, and Joanne Belknap. "Trauma Experiences and Mental Health Among Incarcerated Women."

⁶⁹ Harner, Holly M, Mia Budescu, Seth J Gillihan, Suzanne Riley, and Edna B Foa. "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Incarcerated Women: A Call for Evidence-Based Treatment." *Psychological Trauma* 7, no. 1 (2015): 58–66. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032508>.

MEL HARRIS



were less likely to obtain jobs and be provided financial support, and were 3.33 times more likely to be involved in criminal behavior after reentry.⁷⁰

Lastly, the study analyzing the impact of severe mental health on women's re-entry for 2,311 women eight years after being released from prison further examined the role mental health disorders have on women's re-entry. The study found that 20 percent of the women met the criteria for severe mental disorders and revealed an association between severe mental disorders and recidivism. Women with severe mental disorders were more likely to return to prison after eight years of release than women without severe mental disorders.⁷¹

These studies indicate the need to advocate and provide necessary gender-responsive effective mental health services for incarcerated women to return to society and live a healthy quality of life. It is important to focus on providing mental health services because of the influence mental health has on well-being and incarcerated women's ability to have safe and long-lasting re-entry. The studies' findings demonstrate how mental health impacts

women's re-entry in that women with untreated mental health conditions are more likely to struggle to assimilate into their community. Furthermore, released women with untreated severe mental health conditions have been shown to re-offend, leading to an endless cycle within the criminal justice system.

Psychological well-being is part of the pathway to healing and there are various effective mental health programs that can be provided, such as meditation therapy, Canine-Assisted Therapy, group art therapy, and other traditional cognitive behavioral therapy programs. There is a need to call attention to such programs and for the US government to focus on funding mental health services in correctional facilities. Through increased funding and provision of services, incarcerated women can live healthier and safer.

Sun Ho Kim is a recent graduate of Rutgers University with a B.S. in Public Health, a minor in Health and Society, and a Certificate in Health Disparities. Currently, she is pursuing her MPH at Rutgers School of Public Health concentrating in Social and Behavioral Health Sciences. She plans to become a Health Educator and is committed to tackling the various layers that contribute to health inequity and taking the steps to change the quality of life and improve quality/access to healthcare services for those who are underserved and in need of advocacy.

⁷⁰ Visher, Christy A, and Nicholas W Bakken. "Reentry Challenges Facing Women with Mental Health Problems." *Women & Health* 54, no. 8 (2014): 768-80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03630242.2014.932889>.

⁷¹ King, Erin A, Stephen J Tripodi, and Christopher A Veeh. "The Relationship Between Severe Mental Disorders and Recidivism in a Sample of Women Released from Prison." *Psychiatric Quarterly* 89, no. 3 (2018): 717-31. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11126-018-9572-9>



I got my freedom That's true! But it's not the same as being free free. I like to travel. I used to go to VA, to PA, and the Casinos and the boardwalk in Atlantic City. I love the beach. But I can't go anywhere without my PO permission. If I want to go to a play or a concert. I need my PO's permission. Until I get off Parole, my life is messed up. I can't do what I want.

VALERIE, 62, in an apartment she shares with a roommate. Bronx, NY (2018)

Sentence: 19 years to life
Served: 17 years (granted clemency by Governor Andrew Cuomo)
Released: January 2017

And they call this justice ...???

poem by Kimberly Davis 11/28/21

Behind locked doors
and behind a cold heart
With variegated seams I come unbound
On the verge of screaming tears, shed without a sound
As I pick up the phone, will I get ~~an~~ answer
on the other end?

Yes, but it was no you can't speak to your
child once again.

Can anyone see me

Does anyone care

This was not my destiny to impart
I did not aspire to be here from the start
I was trying to numb the pain
and transformed into the addicted and insane
Committing careless thieving crimes to get a kick
On that well off man to give a sick
Just one more fix is all I need

And then I know I'd be free indeed

And I was freed from that self-inflicted prison
and placed in another

Far away from any love and support, like my mother
So the violence I saw from a baby on up

→

Or maybe even ^{now} my step dad's sexual abuse
really screwed me up

But how quickly I became the "offender"
the animal, the bad

How did that get misconstrued and flipped,
how pathetic, how sad.

I was a mother, a registered nurse, a poet
a real human life

But once in the system none of that is acknowledged
etc, "You only deserve strife"

Just do your bid, shut your mouth, ~~and~~ and let
us demean you, you stupid girl

After awhile you can return to your hell of a
life and give it another whirl.

No job, no more education, no reformation and
no real rehabs

Only loss of reputation, an opis #, a vicious
cycle and plenty of emotional scars

We will be here waiting to see you again, you blind
puppet, you dumb trick

Cause, don't you see you aren't worthy of good and
it would never stick.

So off you go, back to your hell, as we will always be here
with an available cell.

But never a kind or encouraging word or help to reform... Only war of injustice to ~~confirm~~ ^{to conform}

A REAL HIDDEN MONSTER

Minister Khalil Muhammad

A Real Hidden monster

Within me lies dormant, a Sleeping beast. When awakened it can Slither or Jump, Crawl with talons or Claws with nails.

this beast, monster of the id is Jealousy. it is an alien living inside me taking up residence where love, Compassion, and tolerance should be. it is a rent less tenant, free loading, Squatting and and thieving my life.

this monster awakens when my eyes look through a television or pages of a Book to see Happy black people living with Comforts denied to me. that Car, I want it. Those nice fitting clothes, I want them.

that Smile of a pretty black woman meant only for me, I want that. then this creature reveals a face only I can see. my own ugliness reveals itself as needy. immature, wanting, grasping for things to make them mine... my precious. I become, within, a greasy little Sneak.

be you gone, evil one. I rail at myself in Shame, at my vile Character, my hidden Side of the love Chilly Willie. Aha! I knew I was evil, defective, wrong, and Corrupted. the world is right to beat me down and punish me by enslavement. yes; I tell myself I deserve all this.

then, one day after decades of self hate, of hiding my inner demons from others, I find a circle of

Black men willingly revealing the secret monster's humanity these inner sanctums.

my understanding of my tormentor grows, and I see the illusory mask fade away to reveal unexpected: a wounded little black boy feelings unloved and unwanted trying to protect himself in a dangerous world. I discover that I am not a defect unworthy of my parents, that those are lies I've told myself because mom and Dad can't be wrong so I must be, the reasoning of a child.

Now, the monster's fate is clear, its lies are known. the power has been given into my hands. the Jealousy of wanting is not so shameful as I understood that little black boy still wants to fill this world with pretty, precious things, but I can talk to him, now. the boy Chilly Willie listens and settles back knowing that I love him, and that is enough.

THE DANDELION BREEZES

Yvonne Bradley

"Cattails"

Fabric wall hanging hand-sewn by Karen L. Thomas

I rode horseback early every Saturday morning as a child, enjoying the time spent by the stream with cattails and dragonflies buzzing around.

Ke: Short bio

Y. Jean B. is a representative of the New "Minority." The "Ex-Offender." Inspired by the likes of Maya Angelou and Nikki Giovanni, she believes in pushing forward after adversity.



They swayed with me
my petal friends,
in the cool breeze
of a summer's eve.

They shined with me
my petal friends,
on the gentle morn
when spring is born.

They flowed with me
my petal friends,
as the leaves fall
with autumn's call.

They left me alone
before winter came 'round,
scattered with the wind –
my so-called petal friends.

As a child, I was taught police officers follow the laws and protect because it is their civic duty. My father worked in the Newark Police Department for over nineteen years; my family worked side-by-side with the Police Department, from administrative duties all the way to sergeants. I looked up to law enforcement with admiration and respect. In the mid 70s, the City of Newark had stables at the precincts. Officers would patrol on horseback throughout the streets. I would visit the stables, have lunch at the precinct where my father worked. These officers were our friends and family.

I am not a writer, nor do I consider myself a writer, but I have a voice that I want to be heard – what I have experienced while being incarcerated. For no one to listen or believe my cries has left me feeling forgotten. I will never forget the tactics law enforcement used to get a conviction. These moments are embedded in my mind and heart.

Can the justice system ever break free from this deafening silence when the Blue Culture of loyalty is so ingrained in law enforcement? At what or whose expense does this loyalty help or hinder? It harms all the individuals entering the justice system, but especially the mentally impaired. The dictionary version of Blue Wall of Silence is “adherence to a code of conduct that places loyalty to fellow officers above all other values.” The conduct of loyalty is to each fellow officer and not the vulnerable individuals entering the justice system, such as the mentally disabled. Law enforcement takes an oath of obligation to serve and protect the community in which they work.

How many incarcerated men and women are victims of the Blue Wall of Silence? This

wall comes in so many different forms and variations in the Justice System. A common practice in law enforcement is they order their fellow officers to take certain actions in each arrest, even if these actions constitute misconduct. Law enforcement officers will fabricate the truth for the benefit of the department’s conviction ratio.

As the old saying states, “One Bad Apple Spoils the Whole Bunch.” Does this hold true in the Justice System? Does it trickle down the chain of command? YES, tactics and strategies are followed by each officer in a division in order for promotions and quotas to happen. Once an officer closes a case and has their suspect in jail, it shows the public and their superiors the department is doing a good job. Arrests and convictions all look good on paper at the public and defendant’s expense. What lengths do law enforcement officers go to cover up evidence, coerce witnesses, falsify documents, and commit perjury to close a case? All ranks of officers are allowed to coordinate how reports are written, even though the facts are twisted to conform to their version of truth. Misconduct runs rampant in law enforcement. Their unethical tactics provide satisfaction for their own shallow benefits from superiors. Officers are fully aware of their unethical actions, but their morals and consciences are outweighed by their loyalty to the Blue Wall of Conduct embedded in law enforcement.

One facet of the devastating harm of the Blue Wall involves mentally ill individuals who are oppressed in the justice system. Law enforcement capitalizes on mental illness by taking advantage of someone that has no cognitive understanding. Mentally ill individuals are a high portion of the oppressed found in our justice system. When juveniles are arrested they are required to have a guardian present.

The same standard should be held for someone experiencing a psychotic break. Advocates need to intervene for individuals experiencing a psychosis or psychological experience when arrested. Homelessness is not always a choice, but it is the only choice for the individuals who have a mental impairment. The majority of arrests of homeless individuals stem from psychological disorders and the individuals need mental counseling, not a jail cell.

Currently on the table is defunding the police, which would allow social workers and psychologists to intervene on behalf of individuals suffering from a mental illness during their arrest. Law enforcement officers are not experts in the medical field and should not be allowed to make the determination of who is suffering from psychosis or mental impairment. The justice system relies on officers to tell the facts and decide who's coherent when arrested. This is not justice! They are not experts!

I am writing to shed more light on law enforcement practices to encourage lawmakers, doctors, and judges to realize the struggles in our system. The cracks need mending to make the system go forward for the vulnerable individuals entering the system. I envision this topic to be brought to brighter light and in greater volume to policymakers. My passion is to let the world know that The Blue Wall of Silence outweighs the conscience and morals of law enforcement. What safeguards are taken for the vulnerable that are incarcerated? How can these individuals enter the justice system and not have an understanding of what is going on around them? How do they understand their rights without being taken advantage of while in a diminished state at the time of arrest?

Society says "How do these murderers and criminals sleep at night?" I ask "How does Blue sleep at night knowing the lives they took physically and metaphorically?" Friends and family won't believe a word you say because Blue has told their story. It opened my eyes to the reality that they

are human also, but if you can't trust the men and women Blue, who can you trust? Is this story worth telling? Does anyone want to know or am I just another voice screaming in the wind against the Blue Wall of Silence? Silence is deafening. These are the unspoken words.

ENDLESS DAYS

Christina Clayton #74480, Western New Mexico Correctional Facility

My name is Christina, im 32 years old, Ive been in & out of the system since I turned 18. I grew up with a Big extended family. I love spending my time outdoors, laughing, AND writting. Ive been in foster care, striggled with Depression AND trying to find myself. Im the mother of a beautiful little boy AND Im in the process of graduating so I CAN Continue my education AND get my Degree. I got sentenced to 18 years, but im waiting for the judge to ADJUST my sentence. So I just stay positive until that time Comes AND try to make the best of every DAY.

ChCh #74480

Endless days spent having cold showers
Many nights ended with having no power
Now the only one
Looking down on me is the tower
Locked down on the compound
The world goes round and round
Suppressing the sound
The gate makes
Makes the chain link shake
IF your mind frame is weak
It's guaranteed to break
So I stay strong
For my son's sake

Padlocks restricting access
Only place I wanna go
Is somewhere with a different address
You know, sleep on a BETTER mattress.
Back and forth. What a mission.
These police stay steady trippin'
Camera's recording, in case I start slippin'
Motion detectors, aye but I'll get through it
Just another dream and I pursue it
I speak the truth
And yea I'm fluent
I make a point
Just to prove it.

Why We Need...

Prison Reform

The latest news, views and statistics



Mass Incarceration: Its Economic Barriers & Exploitation

"Some county jails rely on the economies of scale created by overcrowding including the extra revenue that comes from holding people in state and federal custody and from charging fees to those who are incarcerated."

- prisonpolicy.org (kypolicy.org)

"Through its 'surcharges', 'kickbacks', and denial of basic necessities, the IDOC is effectively siphoning millions of dollars from largely low income communities by preying on people's love for their incarcerated friend or family member."

- prisonpolicy.org (paroleillinois.org)

"Percent of formerly incarcerated people who are unemployed: 27% +"

- prisonpolicy.org

"Average daily wage of incarcerated workers: \$0.86 +"

- prisonpolicy.org



Bottom of a Barrel

by: Sharia Legette (Pure Justice)

Eyes wide open still she cannot see.
Enclosed in darkness not because it's night.
Consumed in unpredictability.
Withering faith and hope with no foresight.

Quenched in duress. She's longing for the earth.
Subjected to hardened authorities.
Belittling taunts. Grasping toward self worth.
A strange place, pads rationed as luxuries.

She had not known the weight of emptiness.
Sunken in the blackest hole. Fruitless. Sterile.
No peace. No privacy. Bittered mass. No bliss.
She's lost in the bottom of a barrel.



Thoughts from a former Michigan Dept. Of Corrections resident.

After interviewing Glynis Hardin, who was incarcerated multiple times in 1989, 1990 and 1991, we were left with a few powerful quotes that aligns with current injustices and disparities entrenched in the criminal justice system that we continue to advocate against today! These are her views....

"Prison was designed with black people in mind."

"Each county has a quota to fill to keep the prisons profitable and in business."

"I worked an 8 hour shift and made \$2.50/ a day. Which added up to \$55/ a month!"

The state of California are taking steps in the direction towards prison reform.

According to usnews.com, California is set to fully roll out and put into effect all new policy and procedures aiming to hold prison guards accountable for misconduct and abuse by 2023. A recent and previous inspector in 2019 found that California wardens cleared 97-98% of employees of policy violations. "It's a revamping of the whole internal affairs process," Don Specter, director of the nonprofit Prison Law Office said. "The larger plan is devoted to fixing the process for how the department deals with complaints about guard brutality, abuse, discrimination against incarcerated people — otherwise known generally as staff misconduct complaints."





Photographed by Sara Bennett

I imagined coming home, living in a one or two bedroom apartment where one was my master and an extra room for guests. Here I have that. I call this room my "Doll House," my safe haven. I feel at peace. I've finally unpacked. I spend a lot of time in here. I take pride in everything. I put more into this room than into the kitchen. I know I need to eat, but my room is my nourishment.

TRACY, 51, in her own apartment, three-and-a-half years after her release. Jamaica, NY (2017)

Sentence: 22 years to life
Served: 24 years
Released: February 2014

SAN QUENTIN CASTLE



BIO

Sandra Fish is a writer/actor/advocate for prison reform and is a co-founder of [Humane Prison Hospice Project](#). Over 30 years ago, Sandra was in the play, "Getting Out" about the extreme challenges of reentry, where she and the cast did extensive research which opened her eyes so that she could never shut them to the inhumanity in our prisons ever again. She has taught in Rikers, helped get ex-inmates work, sat in on classrooms and parole hearings, in SingSing, Folsom, San Quentin, as well as assisted training in end of life care and crisis counseling in San Quentin. Sandra is advocating for end of life care for Death Row prisoners, she is currently supporting/visiting/communicating with a condemned prisoner in the infirmary in San Quentin as well as seeking policy changes for all incarcerated people at the end of life.

-

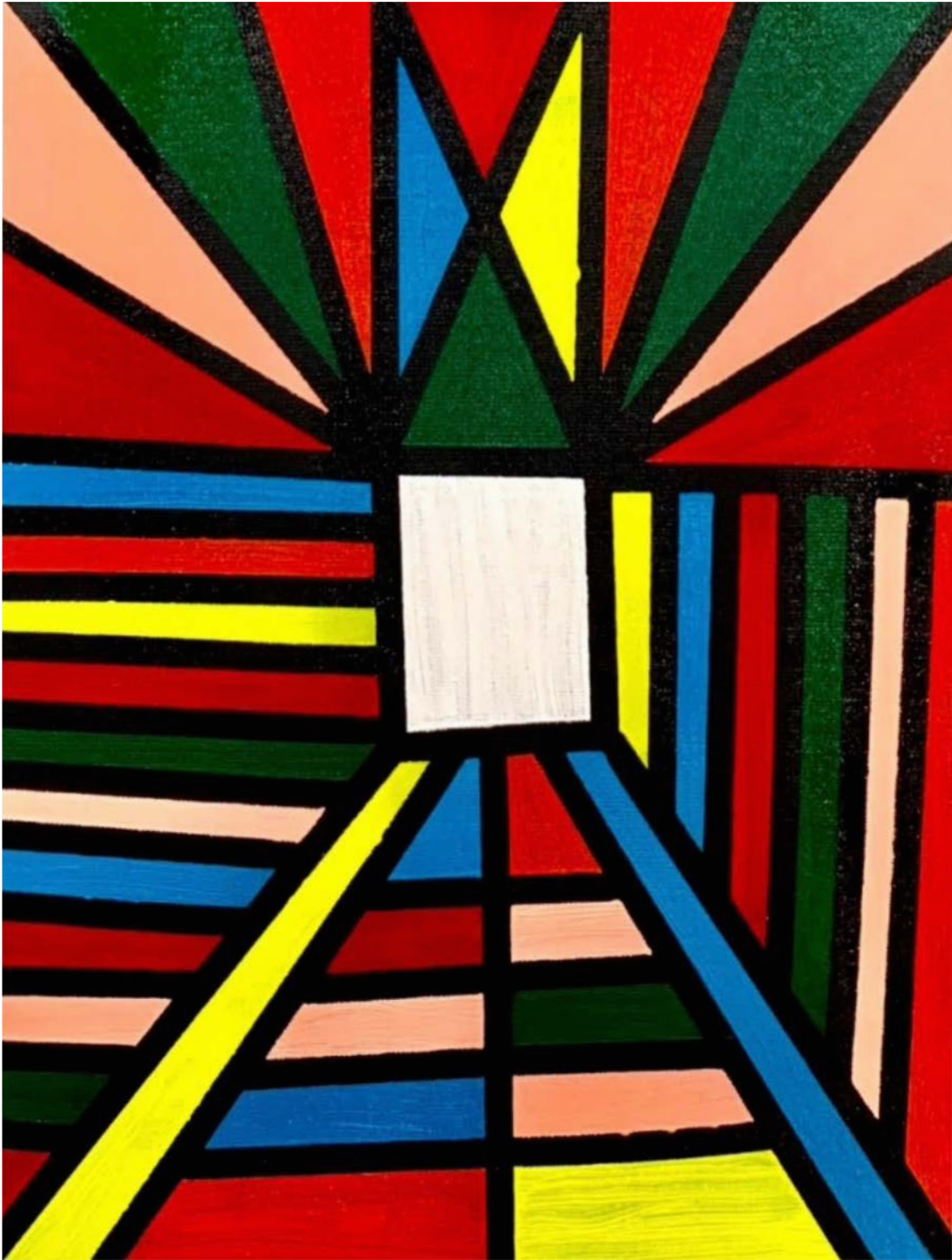
Because I was writing in this cabin owned by this landlord in this tiny beach community, I met his best friend, who came by after he was surfing, who is a defense attorney. We talked a moment, and another moment, and the timing was such that soon I was going inside San Quentin to sit in on his clients' parole hearings.

The wire in my bra is dangerous. Well, it set off alarms, but they let me pass through when they saw me struggling to take it off then and there.

Two gates...the third gate, 12 feet tall, pointed like a Dr. Seuss door, latticed with wide black straps of iron and bolts like a great door on a castle from the days of shining knights in armor. Who would have thought man would become so less than. And I'm not talking of the prisoners.

STAGES

Izuo-Ere "Mimi" Digifa



I wait in the narrow hallway on a plastic scoop of chair. Others wait...and wait. One sleeps and snores. Guards mill in and out.

Finally, I'm called into the board room. It's messy. The tape recorder doesn't work. There's a large

TV with a pasty sour face on the screen, frowning towards us; he wears a sweater; he looks like a mean relative at the holiday table; sitting there disgusted with all of us. He gets up and walks away a lot.

I take a seat in the corner to observe. There are

two commissioners: one soft-bellied, indoorsy-looking tall white man and one short, wheezing, nasal black man. They sit on one side of the table. On my side of the table is the defense attorney. He is more fit, more tanned, more alive, but there is something worn about him. He has taken some beatings, yet stoically steadily moves ahead, firm in his role as defender and what that means in this parole hearing room, where a scarce few parole dates are ever granted and those that are granted are soon after vetoed by the Governor of California, who has literally vetoed every single one except two women who were battered. And so it seems the time spent by the defense attorney in these rooms is a kind of rehearsal to be ready when real justice returns one day, so he is playing his role with as much sincerity and belief in our system as he can muster.

The defendant sits next to him. In his prison overalls, the drab bluish metal colored clothing, a white long underwear shirt underneath for warmth. His hair is neatly pressed against his head, not a hair out of place, not a smudge on him, his pressed attire, his neat demeanor his own conviction, the conviction of a convict, believing wholeheartedly in his parole, this hour he has prepared for these past 25 years. I am sitting straight-backed in some sort of prayerful pose; wanting to be unseen, but so present I nearly faint with the strain of it.

Oh...there are two silent guards in the room as well. One glances at me now and then; he even sees my wet eyes. And later...I see his. The prisoner is now 52 years old; he has been imprisoned for 35 years. He is extremely well-spoken, soulful, and clear-minded, but when he was 17 he was different.

When he was 17, he burglarized a home and raped the victim. He escaped from a dangerous prison. Later, he shot a cab driver he was robbing. At some point in his history, he shot a man and woman, motel clerks, whom he was robbing. No one was killed, but they could have been.

He was a dangerous man thinking only of himself. He was not the man we see today, sitting there after 25 years of reflection and movement in a cell, in dark spaces in a society where hell dominates hope, unless you have the power to not only change yourself but those near you. The man before us was breaking my heart with his hope.

But the more I sit there, and watch him, the more hopeful I become. We spend more time than usual, which irritates the commissioners. One munches loudly on popcorn and slurps his Coca Cola out of a plastic bottle.

The D.A. on the television becomes more disgusted by the minute and denies the man parole, reiterates his crime of 35 years ago as if it were yesterday and no time has passed at all. The tears, silent and unstoppable, slide down my face. I wipe them quickly. More come, I wipe them and wipe them. The defense speaks.

There is a stack of letters from policemen, guards, counselors, pastors, family—praising this man's contributions and behavior. They plead for his release; they offer him work. He saved a guard's life while inside. He started programs for the convicts. He helped supervise and counsel prisoners and programs and has a wife and 28-year-old step-daughter with down syndrome. The daughter's name is Natasha and that is the only time the prisoner smiles. It is a smile pumping up from his chest. He beams, but quickly forces it to subside. He is my knight in shining armor; he loves Natasha so.

He loves purity and the lack of any judgment he gets from her. That's what I see: a man so tired of being judged, so used to proving himself, and this we know since he was a child, to prove to society that yes, you bet, I am that. I am that scary black boy. I am your worst nightmare. I am fulfilling your prophecy of my "badness," you glad now? Mother Fucker?

And inside with hour after hour after day after

year of reflection, his self knowledge tells him:

"You're good."

"Oh wow, I'm good?"

"Yeah man, all men are good."

"Really?"

His heart, his Natasha, proves this to him and now he vows for nearly 35 years to prove it to everyone else—his goodness, his manness, his truth.

He explains some things he has learned like: relationships are what matter, and helping people -- doing good. This man is one of the rare ones and is being kept from us, from our society.

The commissioners look bored and blank. The defense starts reading all the letters and the commissioners roll their eyes and one walks away. The TV D.A. has not been in front of the camera the entire time the attorney speaks. I'm too present. I'm going to implode or explode or simply curl up and die.

The prisoner hears them deny him. He tries with all his might, all the goodness, all the power and strength his change has given him, but alas...a muffled breath escapes, a sob of a breath, a quick inhale...a shudder.

Shoulders round as he works to control the sobs; the shoulders round like a nine-year-old's. 52 year old man, back into the cell: chains on his wrists.

I am not breathing as I think of the men I worked with who were paroled in New York, who run programs for youths at risk, who see 400 juveniles a day—affecting them, changing them with the goodnesses they found inside.

The attorney, the defeated defender; has sadness inside him so deep and so constant he

doesn't blink. He doesn't have time to. He has others to see. There's work to be done.

I walk into the hall and say to a different commissioner, "They were wrong, they are wrong, this is wrong."

"But nobody asked you, did they?" He chuckles and turns away.

The anger in me is a raging fear of who we have become. It consumes me—it eats my goodness, it wakes me up and says, BOO. It makes my head hurt and my heart shut down. It makes me sick, this anger – to witness something unjust and horrifying, as life itself must witness daily. But, forgive us, over and over without a hearing. The commissioners are not Gods, know naught how to be Christlike or Buddha or even humane, but they will be forgiven to begin anew each day in a free world?

But no...a different kind of prison, one day they will learn that they are good too and don't need to behave like frightened beasts; and they will learn to understand when a man is changed and needed back into our society to guide others, to prevent yet new rapes and murders and thefts. And they will know that when one of us is chained none of us are free, and when one of us changes we all do. Life itself is our only judge. So we can learn that we are good and here to help each other, living like knights and princesses and dragons. Maybe it's true, what Rilke said, "...perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave. Perhaps everything terrible is in its deepest being something helpless that wants help from us." And methinks San Quentin is really a castle with noble knights tucked away here and there, helping the legions of dragons surrounding them inside and out.

-

MENDED

Tracy Leigh

Tracy Leigh is a singer, writer and sees herself as a fine arts junkie. Art is also important to her. She began writing in Jr. High and has taken many college classes to improve her craft. Her first love is to use her gifts in ministry and has already been published in five states. Tracy's favorites are writing songs, flash fiction, fiction, non-fiction and children's literature. She is grateful God has blessed her with the ability to do these forms of art.

My wounds, scabbed by
the hardest spikes that
held the sacrifice for my
death penalty in place.
I will not speak of my
scar as the public's view
is so perfectly tainted,
they've no desire for truth.
How dare I crave humane
treatment or dignity? In
their eyes I am horrendous,
worthless. In God's eyes
I am beloved! Nothing
else matters, meaning
there is no wound of
which I should speak.

THE ROAD TO REDEMPTION.....

ONLY THE DESERVING

Antionette Stephen

Redemption...Recovery...Salvation...Second chances...H.O.P.E.

To some, they are words of encouragement. To others, a call to courage and wisdom on a journey of self-discovery – the Road. For women incarcerated under the designation: ‘violent crimes,’ it is a question mark. How do the reviled earn redemption? Do the pariahs ‘deserve’ a second chance? Can the debt to society be paid without a path - a road - for a payment plan? Are they deserving?

I was not born and raised in America. Instead, a child of traditional extremes from Asia and the Middle East. Silence and submission – the woman’s unwilling creed. Seen and not heard. Capable of independent speech and thought, but irrelevant by gender alone. A woman who broke ranks from centuries of traditional code written by the omniscient gender of men. I brought humiliation, dishonor, and death to my family when I should have stayed home, raised a family, and surrendered to the will of my betters. I brought this retribution on myself. I made an abhorrent and tragic mistake. I lost my soul and my humanity. The price must be paid. Second chance...Am I deserving?

I am not a foster child. I was not raised in a broken family dependent on welfare. I grew up “privileged,” educated in the academic sciences, literature, arithmetic, philosophy, and creative arts. Just “lacking” in real world education on sexual predators, childhood molestation, toxic relationships, domestic abuse, and the subsequent dysfunction of nightmare events – sealed in frightened silence and humiliation. They say I grew up sheltered/protected/kept hidden from evil men. So they believe. A gilded cage is still a cage, my friend. The caged bird cannot

spread its wings and fly. But the cats can still get in. Such a bird does not survive the wild. The predators are still the same – in the suburbs, in the skyscrapers, in the projects – evil, always waiting. But I am a foreigner, an outsider, a legal immigrant; not a citizen with protected rights. I am not White. I am not Black. I am not Hispanic. I am the minority among the minority. But I grew up privileged. A second chance, when so many others have been through far, far worse...Am I deserving?

I am not the victim of mind-altering drugs, nor an addiction that controls me. I am, instead, the villain in my own narrative. I am a murderer. The perpetrator of a cruel, heinous, violent crime. The consequence of a cascade of brutal events like dominoes falling. Someone once said, it’s not who you are on the inside that counts, but what you do, that defines you. I am defined by my Sin – the ultimate one. I hear the drug offenders, the other “nonviolent” criminals, subject to repeated reentries, called the victims of recidivism and a broken system set up to make them fail. What does the system intend for women like me? Redemption? Am I Deserving?

Still, they do not have the curse of blood on their hands. Blood that does not wash away. Pieces of a shattered mirror – my soul – that cannot be put together. Innocent blood was spilled. I should have been braver, stronger. I should have fought him, stood up to him. I should have reached for help... If only I had known how. I could have saved her. I could have saved myself. If only... I had. Years of sleepless nights, with decades more in wait. Guilt-ridden torment, and those horror-filled minutes of that fateful day, which play in your head in an endless cycle of that same haunted nightmare. Irreversible. Screaming wails in my mind, begging,

pleading, for a chance to make amends to every life that was ripped by one foolish act. Am I remorseful enough? Do I deserve peaceful sleep? Eleven years later and still waiting for restful sleep that will never come. There are no drugs that can numb blood guilt. Second chance...Am I deserving?

The Correctional Institution has titled me a "model inmate." I have completed almost all the available self-development programs. I am enrolled in college classes showing excellent grades, trade school, and hold a steady job responsibly. I participate actively in religious services not out of boredom, but out of necessity, for my sanity. The only anchor to hope. I have no history of institutional infractions or violence towards others. Because, I have more to prove to society and myself; I am not the monster they perceive me to be. I am not Violent by nature. Still, I have a mandatory minimum sentence. There is no good credit earned, no education credit earned. Not even COVID credits. I cannot earn the gift of transitioning to minimum security or a halfway house despite my "progresses." I cannot earn a second chance behaviorally. I am branded under the seal of violent crimes. I am an immigrant. I am not a person. I am a file number that cannot be redeemed. Lock the cage tight. Throw away the key. Society has no use for me anymore. Second chance... Am I deserving?

There are pathways for drug offenders. Pathways for those with mental health challenges. Pathways for sex offenders. Pathways for gambling and other addictions. Where is the map that shows the pathway for "violent" women like me? Is the map even drawn yet? Will it ever be?

For some, the road to redemption is a path. An open desolate road, albeit with pitfalls and stumbling blocks. With miles to trudge before the end. For others it is a hard mountain to climb: treacherous, slippery, and subject to the whims of the harsh elements. But for Us: the outsiders, the outcasts, the "Violents," it is a gateway secured with an impenetrable door, guarded by shadowy figures

with authority over our lives. We cannot see, hear, or implore for mercy. Who can neither see us nor hear us, but are battle armored with dutiful, righteous indignation, bestowed by Lady Justice, to brand that stamp on us, time and time again.....
REDEMPTION DENIED: UNDESERVING.



SEASONS OF LIFE

ONE LANE ONLY

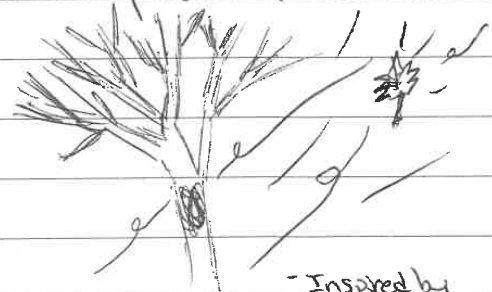
"There is An occasion for everything, and A time
For every Activity under heaven." Ecclesiastes 3:1

November 7th 2021
Sunday

Seasons of Life

Inspired By Jai Budsri
- one LANE ONLY -

Grey Clouds Saturate blue Skies
the Sun rays play hide and seek
the pungent smell unique to rain becomes A Symphony
Sand waiving in a Silent hour glass
Every unique grain a moment imprinted in the Sands of time
I've sat here through the Seasons
Almost drowned in the Sweat of Summer heat
In July the fireworks Sounded off in the distance with no Visual in sight
Now the leaves Are falling with a defining chill dancing in the Air
The Sky is encompassed in a intergrade grey entangled amongst the blue
the Candy Corn has been devoured, Pumpkins made to pre
Even on A Sunny day there's many Shades of winter grey
As the turkey gets Juicy, Plump, and Fat
I realize AS I sit here how many Seasons hold the trees
year after year with every leaf on the winds of existence
How profound to think of All the time these prison trees have done
God is the only Author
As the pen writes in my hand
I love the Changing of the Seasons
The Amazing growth they manifest within
like those Amazing Prison trees
I can clearly see
the peaceful messages rooted deep inside
As the winds of life creates beauty
I become ~~the~~ the leaves in time
Soon enough I'll make like A tree and leave these prison trees behind



- Inspired by
Jai Budsri -

- one LANE ONLY -



Photographed by Sara Bennett

*I feel like I am working on
being free...*

JENNIFER, 40, in her own apartment 15 months after her release. Brooklyn, NY (2021)

Sentence: 18 years to life
Served: 17-1/2 years
Released: February 2020

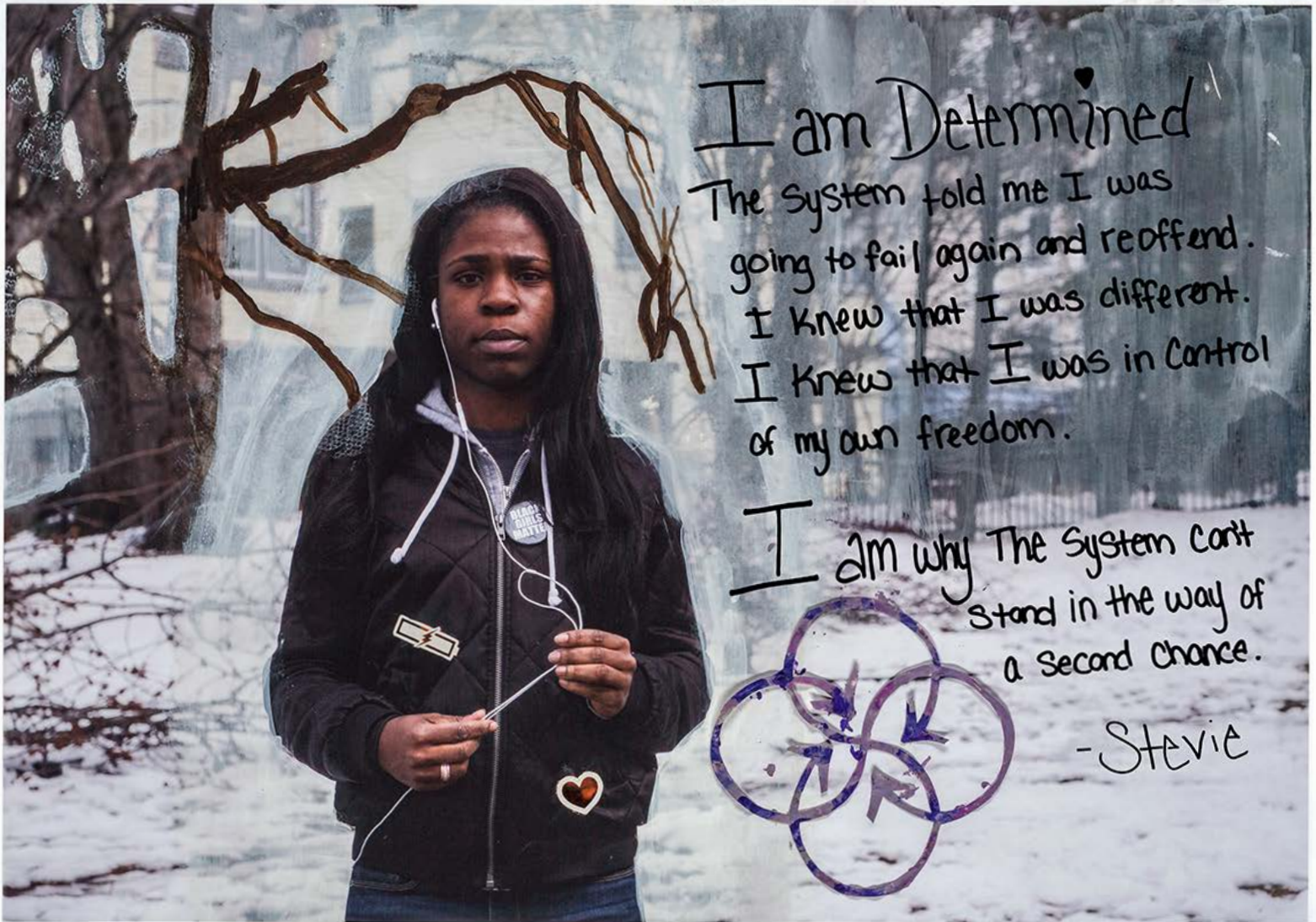
SWEAT

by K.A. Smallwood

My spirit set free
in the smoke rising
to heavens above,
ashes in the wind
borne upon breezes
beyond earthly bounds
breathing life in death.

NMDOC # 67974
WNMCF

STEVONA WILSON



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to everyone who made *The Journal of Women and Criminal Justice* possible, from the editors, Dr. Gloria Bachmann, Heather Turock, and Sofia Lesnewski; to the graphic designer, Nickoy Ellis; to Governor Jim McGreevey and Reverend Bolivar Flores for their leadership; to the Women's Health Institute, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, and Robert Wood Johnson Health System; to the New Jersey State Legislature and members of the Commission on Reentry Services for Women; to NJDOC, Amazon, and Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield for their support of The Women's Project initiatives; to NJRC staff members who assisted with the project, LaceyAnn Francis and Het Dave; to all the organizations that helped facilitate submissions (some of which are listed below); to all NJRC partners who provide NJRC program participants with critically-needed services; and, most importantly, to the justice-involved persons and advocates who shared their work.

A.B.O. Comix

<https://www.abocomix.com>

Abolition Apostles

<https://www.abolitionapostles.com>

ACLU of Arizona

<https://www.acluaz.org>

ACLU of Florida

<https://www.aclufl.org>

ACLU of Minnesota

<https://www.aclu-mn.org>

Adirondack Center for Writing - Prison Writing Program

<https://adirondackcenterforwriting.org/2020/11/24/prison-writing-program/>

Aid to Inmate Mothers

<https://inmatemoms.org>

Alabama Appleseed Center for Law & Justice

<https://www.alabamaappleseed.org>

All of Us or None- Northern NJ

<https://www.allofusornone-northernnj.com>

Anchorage Reentry Coalition

<https://www.anchoragereentry.org/who-we-are>

Appalachian Prison Book Project

<https://appalachianprisonbookproject.org>

Benedict Center

<https://www.benedictcenter.org>

Black and Pink

<https://www.blackandpink.org>

Book 'Em

http://www.bookempgh.org/Home_Page.html

Books to Prisoners

<https://www.bookstoprisoners.net>

Breaking Free

<https://breakingfree.net>

Bridges to Hope

<https://www.bridgestohopene.org>

Bridges To Life

<https://www.bridgestolife.org>

Career Resources, Inc.

<https://careerresources.org>

Center for Prison Education at Wesleyan University

<https://www.wesleyan.edu/cpe/>

Center for Women in Transition

<https://www.cwitstl.org/store/c1/Home>

Centre, Inc.

<https://www.centreinc.org>

Citizens for Prison Reform

<https://www.micpr.org>

Coastal Horizons Center, Inc.

<https://coastalhorizons.org>

Coffee Creek Correctional Facility

<https://www.oregon.gov/doc/about/pages/prison-locations.aspx>

College & Community Fellowship

<https://www.collegeandcommunity.org>

Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice

<https://curyj.org>

Community Family Life Services

<https://www.cflsdc.org>

Compassion Prison Project

<https://compassionprisonproject.org>

CT Reentry Collaborative

<http://ctreentry.org/ct-reentry-collaborative>

Dignity LeadHERship Alliance (DLA)

<https://www.restoreher.us/restoreher-leadership>

Dream Corps

<https://www.thedreamcorps.org>

Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women

NJDOC LAUNCHES HEALTH-FOCUSED REENTRY SERVICES FOR WOMEN

Escaping Time

<https://www.escapingtime.org>

Federal Correctional Complex Tucson

<https://www.bop.gov/locations/institutions/tcn/>

Fresh Coast Alliance

<https://www.freshcoastalliance.org>

Fulton Community Supervision Center

https://doc.mo.gov/programs/fulton_CSC

Georgia Justice Project

<https://www.gjp.org>

Girls Embracing Mothers

<https://girlsembracingmothers.org>

GOODWorks

<https://www.goodworksct.org>

Greater Gwinnett Reentry Alliance

<https://www.gwinnettentry.org>

Healing Broken Circles

<https://www.healingbrokencircles.org>

Her Time

<https://www.hangtimerealtalk.com/hertime>

Hour Children

<https://hourchildren.org>

Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison

<https://hudsonlink.org>

Human Kindness Foundation

<https://humankindness.org>

ID13 Prison Literacy Project

<https://www.id13project.com>

I Am Why

<https://iamwhy.org>

Illinois Department of Corrections

<https://www2.illinois.gov/idoc/Pages/default.aspx>

Incarcerated Writers Initiative

<http://columbiajournal.org/iwi/>

InsideOUT Writers

<https://www.insideoutwriters.org>

Insight Prison Project

<http://www.insightprisonproject.org>

John Howard Association of Illinois

<https://www.thejha.org>

Journey of Hope Utah

<https://journeyofhopeutah.org>

Justice Arts Coalition

<https://thejusticeartscoalition.org>

JustLeadershipUSA

<https://jlusa.org>

Kansas Appleseed

<https://www.kansasappleseed.org>

Lakin Correctional Center and Jail

<https://dcr.wv.gov/facilities/Pages/prisons-and-jails/lccj.aspx>

Lewisburg Prison Project

<https://www.lewisburgprisonproject.org>

**Louisiana Department of Public Safety
& Corrections**

<https://doc.louisiana.gov>

Maine Correctional Center Women's Center

<https://www.maine.gov/corrections/adult-facilities/womens-center>

Michigan Center for Youth Justice

<https://www.miyouthjustice.org>

Mississippi Center for Re-Entry

<https://msreentry.org>

Mural Arts Philadelphia Restorative Justice

<https://www.muralarts.org/program/restorative-justice/>

National Commission on Correctional Health Care

<https://www.ncchc.org>

National Endowment for the Arts

<https://www.arts.gov>

NC Women's Prison Book Project

<https://ncwomensprisonbookproject.wordpress.com>

NeighborCorps Re-Entry Services

<http://neighborcorpsreentry.org>

New Jersey Department of Corrections

<https://www.state.nj.us/corrections/pages/index.shtml>

New Leaf New Life

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Nonprofit-organization/New-Leaf-New-Life-92085766899/>

News & Letters

<https://newsandletters.org>

New Yorkers United for Justice

<https://nyuj.org>

NYC Criminal Justice Agency

<https://www.nycja.org>

Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform

<https://okjusticereform.org>

Operation Restoration

<https://www.or-nola.org>

Oregon CURE

<https://oregoncure.org>

Oregon Department of Corrections

<https://www.oregon.gov/doc/pages/default.aspx>

Paroled2Pride

<https://www.paroled2pride.org>

Partners for Progress

<https://www.partnersforprogressak.org>

Pennsylvania Prison Society

<https://www.prisonsociety.org>

PEN Prison Writing Program

<https://pen.org/prison-writing/>

PREPARE (Prepare for Parole and Reentry)

<https://prepare-parole.org>

Prison Abolition Initiative

<https://www.prisonabolitioninitiative.org>

Prison Activist Resource Center

<https://www.prisonactivist.org>

Prison Books Collective

<https://prisonbooks.info>

Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP)

<https://lsa.umich.edu/pcap>

Prison Fellowship

<https://www.prisonfellowship.org>

Prison Teaching Initiative

<https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/PTI>

Prison Writes

<http://www.newyorkwritersworkshop.com/prison-writes>

Progeny

<https://www.progenyks.com>

Project PAINT

<https://www.projectpaint.org>

Pure Justice

<https://purejustice.org>

Reentry Alliance of Nebraska

<http://re-entrynebraska.org>

Reentry Campus Program

<https://www.reentrycampusprogram.org>

Rehabilitation Through the Arts

<https://www.rta-arts.org>

Religious Coalition for a Nonviolent Durham

<https://nonviolentedurham.org>

RestoreHER

<https://www.restoreher.us>

Sinister Wisdom

<http://sinisterwisdom.org>

Solitary Watch

<https://solitarywatch.org>

Southern Coalition for Social Justice

<https://southerncoalition.org>

Survived and Punished NY

<https://www.survivedandpunishedny.org>

TASC's Center for Health and Justice

https://www.centerforhealthandjustice.org/chjweb/home_chj.aspx

Texas Center for Justice and Equity

<https://texascje.org>

Texas Justice Initiative

<https://texasjusticeinitiative.org>

TGI Justice Project

<http://www.tgijp.org>

The Bail Project

<https://bailproject.org>

The Marshall Project

<https://www.themarshallproject.org>

The Real Cost of Prisons Project

<http://www.realcostofprisons.org>

The Fortune Society

<https://fortunesociety.org>

The HelpKC

<https://www.thehelpkc.org>

The Petey Greene Program

<https://www.peteygreene.org>

The Promise of Justice Initiative

<https://promiseofjustice.org>

Underground Writing

<https://undergroundwriting.org>

University of Iowa Prison Writing Project

<https://writinguniversity.org/teaching-research/prison-writing-project>

UnPrison Project

<https://www.unprisonproject.org>

Until We Are All Free

<https://uwaaf.org>

Utah Prisoner Advocate Network

<https://utahprisoneradvocate.org>

Vermont Department of Corrections

<https://doc.vermont.gov>

Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice and Equality

<https://defendersfje.blogspot.com>

VOTE | Voice of the Experienced

<https://www.vote-nola.org>

Welcome Home Reentry Housing

<https://www.catholiccharitiesdc.org/welcomehome/>

Western New Mexico Correctional Facility

<https://cd.nm.gov/divisions/adult-prison/nmcd-prison-facilities/western-new-mexico-correctional-facility/>

Women In Leadership

<https://www.wilecho.org>

Women's Prison Association

<https://www.wpaonline.org>

Writer's Block

<https://www.newwriters.org/other-programs>

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