



AMC2012

Eliminating Mass Imprisonment

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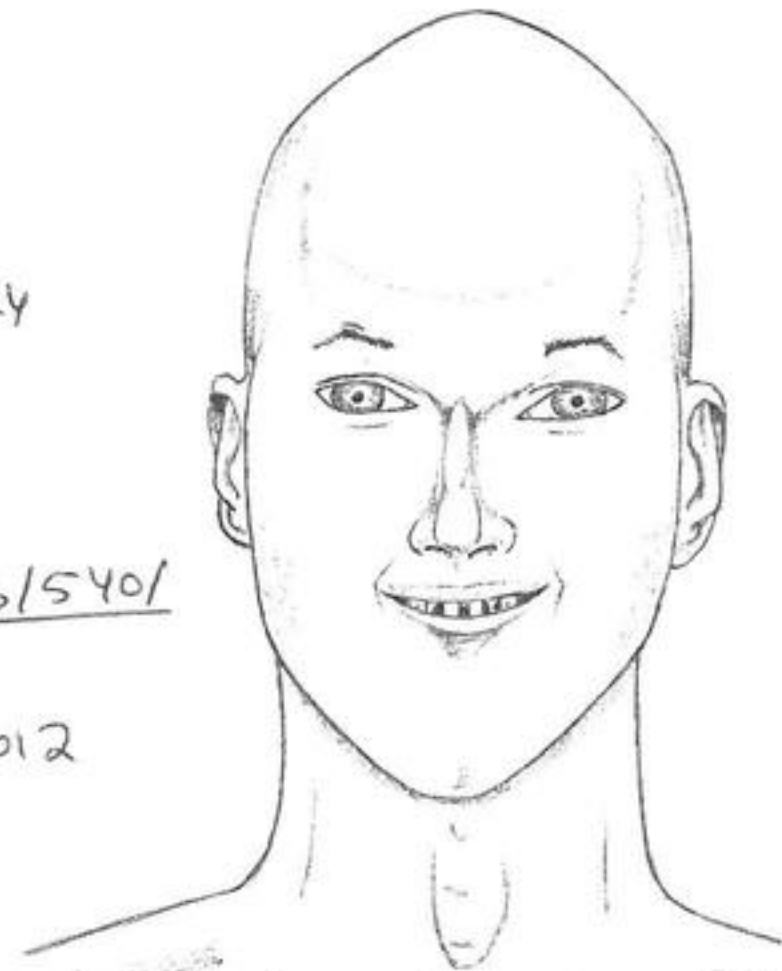
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"Prometheus Writes!" @

<http://betweenthebars.org/blogs/540/>

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Thank you for considering my thoughts on what is becoming a greater & greater crisis in our society. Please keep in mind that I'm a lifer who's spent 14 years in prison, 11 of which have been in my state's supermax prison; I'm a tenacious litigator and jail-house lawyer, a prison journalist/blogger, artist, & poet. My origins are humble, but my will is audacious.

The Most Pressing Issues - These are interrelated, and, because I'm sure others will address some obvious ones, I only bring your attention to these

The silencing of prisoner journalists, which is achieved by

- a) rules allowing wardens to deny media interviews with segregated prisoners, such as myself. Long-term segregation acts to censor our expression, particularly for illiterate, handicapped, and mentally-ill prisoners;

- b) policies denying toll-free phone calls, which prevent prisoners from contacting medias by phone, the best alternative to interviews;

- c) high-cost of phone calls, which discourage local media from interviewing prisoners via phone;

- d) practice of states not facilitating e-mails, which, given e-mail's near replacement of postal mail, further hinders prisoners from communicating with the media;

- e) policies banning visual & audio recording devices to prisoners,

which disables prisoners from creating proof of prison staff, abuse, misconduct, etc.

2) The Impoverishment of Prisoners, which ensures we can't find ways around the barriers between us + the media, achieved by

- a) Keeping prison wages extremely low (highest pay in WI is 48¢/hr. ! + few ever get that!);
- b) deny wages to prisoners in seg. statuses for discipline;
- c) restricting prisoners from soliciting non-family + non-visitors for donations (e.g. we can't ask charities for charity);
- d) prohibiting us from engaging in any business activity of any kind or working for ourselves;
- e) making us pay court costs/fees as soon as we have the funds (my state's version of the Prison Litigation Reform Act - PLRA - requires this) in our account and denying us our court costs even when we win court challenges to baseless prison disciplinary actions (I discuss this in great detail in my post on my blog titled "Fraud + Fiscal Profligacy Within the Wisconsin Department of Corrections..." posted in late June of 2011)

f) overcharging us for canteen items we really need + have no other way to obtain.

This practice of keeping us destitute (I owe 10,000 in filing + legal fees) effectively silences us. How can we buy stamps, pay for e-mailing services, etc.?

3) The Overuse of Segregation Status, the by-products of which are to keep us poor and deny us access to medias.

a) my prison system hands out 360-day terms in seg for such infractions as me asking a pastoral visitor to mail out my poems + having photos of Security-Threat Group (STG) members, getting in a fight or simply defending myself.

b) I, and others here at WSPF, have been kept in the supermax for more than a decade, even though it's been more than ten years since I attacked someone. Not surprisingly, as one guard said, I'm "one of the most stand-up guys in this joint," a litigator + activist - guys like me seem to get welded into this place. And "they" are always looking for a new justification for punishing me or keeping me on Admin. Confinement.

4) Denial of Adequate Care for the Mentally Ill, which creates such a chaotic environment for the less mentally-ill prisoners that it's difficult for anyone to be productive, rehabilitate ourselves, and effectively relate with the media + policy makers.

Others will no doubt address this issue, so I'll just point out that it seems to be so intractable because:

a) Prison staff don't get paid enough to care, nor are they rewarded for better caring for the mentally ill, nor are they effectively punished for refusing to care for the mentally ill;

b) Even if paid more, prison staff have no reason to better care for the mentally ill - we are strangers + "degenerates" to prison staff;

c) Voters + Politicians prefer that prisons be punitive, which will aggravate mental illness + cause it, besides being ineffective at rehabilitating, + despite being against my state's laws;

d) The chaos produced by chronic + untreated mental illness helps prison staff oppress prisoners + keep themselves safe.

Prisoner Justice + Media Groups Can Do Better By

1) Acting Based on Strategy vs. Emotion. Focus, e.g., on working with prisoners (investing your resources, such as time...) who can make change, not necessarily the ones who tug the most at your heart (although maybe the ones who'll get the most sympathy or respect from the public or policy makers)

2) Ditch Idealism, Embrace Pragmatism. It may not be ideal

to settle a lawsuit or accept a practice you don't like, but it may be all you can get & may be enough to help you to later get all that you're aiming for.

Secondly, but related, do not try to spread ideal lies (e.g. all prisoners are, at heart, "good," while all guards, at heart, are "bad"), because the public isn't gonna respect you or trust you when the truth comes out. Plus it's just plain dishonorable.

3) More Aggressively & Effectively "Market" Your "Product" E.g., Pepsi or Coke do this, change the can colors, release variations of the product? Are you just beating the public over the head with the same old story about how there's not enough milk in the governments breast for babies in prison to nurse? How about exposing how the prison systems keep getting more funds yet "suck" at rehabilitating us? How about you expose how the system smashes truly competent prisoners who might, if given the chance, vastly improve the world? Reveal the loving side of infamously violent prisoners... talk about the racism against white prisoners by non-whites... expose how illegal drugs fuel the prison industry... how federal funds are being used & misused.

Get f-ing creative!

4) Adopt/Mentor Prisoner Activists. Like me! Enough said!

Support I Need But Am Not Receiving. Oh, how I wishoooo
1) Financial. Yep. As in debt as I am, I can't buy my own papers, postage, & can't even buy deodorant. Although my skills as an artist & litigator are in demand, it's hard to advertise them from a supermax cell. If ya want to be my hero, you can save me by getting me a classified ad on www.prisoninmates.com and/or 30 stamped envelopes & paper from 1-800-546-6283 www.wisconsinpackages.com

2) Moral/Love. Being surrounded by dirty & deranged staff & inmates wears on me. I'm only human. Friendly letters (with perfume!) or cards, & especially visits or calls help me cope with this hateful, dark place & keep on shining bright.

3) Research. I need help with this to finish exposés, prove scientific or medical facts in lawsuits, etc. My hands are... tied:C

Legal Changes to Advocate For

1) The P.R.L.A.'s Three-Strikes Rule. Under this rule, merely because I lost 3 appeals that I filed (I've won, at least in part, 4), I am barred for life from filing a federal lawsuit without first paying the 350\$ filing fee. This, combined with my litigation debts, means I can't file any lawsuit unless I am in imminent danger of physical harm — I can't sue about getting beat up unless I face "imminent" future beatings; I can't sue about the destruction of my legal books, etc., just because I lost on 3 out of 7 federal appeals.

2) The P.L.R.A.'s Exhaustion of Administrative Remedies Requirement. The U.S. Supreme Court treats this as a procedural bar to any federal litigation. Illiterate and mentally-ill prisoners face closed doors should they be abused and desire to go to court for relief. Same with prisoners who are ignorant of this requirement or their prison's grievance process. Again, very unfair & offensive to any just society.

Allrighty readers, thanks for your consideration. Please feel free to copy, print & publish this elsewhere. Please check my blog out too, as I post cool & intelligent art & writings at least once a month. Don't be shy!

Sincerely,
Nate!