

olsom State Prison is training  
n to be master auto mechanics,  
niring quality job opportunities  
on their release.

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Greg Venegas is helping  
San Quentin prisoners learn  
construction skills qualifying  
them to find excellent jobs when  
released.

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While playing keyboard AJ  
Gonzales sang "Roses Instead,"  
as an audience of prisoners and  
community members made their  
way inside San Quentin's Catholic  
Chapel on Dec. 29 for an open mic  
event.

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Opera singers J'Nai Bridges, Kenneth Overton and Kearstin Piper Brown performing in the Protestant Chapel

See S.F. Opera on page 4

## Racial undertones of America's penal system

By Marcus Henderson  
Journalism Guild Chairman

After the 13th Amendment abolished slavery in the United States, one of the first steps toward the mass incarceration of African-Americans was the creation of Black Codes and Vagrancy Laws.

"Virtually from the moment the Civil War ended, the search began for the legal subordinating of a volatile Black population that regarded economic independence as a corollary (outcome) of free-

dom," wrote Eric Foner in *Reconstruction America's Unfinished Revolution 1833-1877*.

As soon as 1865, former Confederate states passed sweeping vagrancy and labor contract laws to keep Blacks in place for plantation work.

Some laws limited Blacks' freedom of movement, implemented curfews, and established a pass system that effectively put the state in the place of the former slave master.

See Racism on page 5



Life on a slave plantation



File Photo

Kathleen Cleaver, secretary of information for the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense

## FBI report reflects historical similarities

The FBI in 1956 created its secret Counterintelligence Program—COINTELPRO—to take action against Black organizations viewed as subversive. Sixty-one years later, on Aug. 3, 2017, the FBI published an intelligence assessment titled Black Identity Extremists Likely Motivated to Target Law Enforcement Officers.

The two FBI approaches had striking similarities, despite the passage of 50 years.

The "official use only" Black Identity Extremists report follows

the November 2014 Grand Jury decision to exonerate the police officers involved in the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., in August of that year.

"The FBI assesses (that) it is very likely incidents of alleged police abuse against African Americans since then have continued to feed the resurgence in ideologically motivated, violent criminal activity within the BIE movement," the report says.

See FBI Report on page 6



# Veterans' 29<sup>th</sup> annual Toys-for-Tots giveaway



Photo by Eddie Herrera - SQ News

Children enjoying a day in the San Quentin visiting room with their parents and toys

**By Charles David Henry**  
Former Staff Writer

The holiday spirit enriched the Main Visiting Room for five days in December. For two consecutive weekends, the fully decorated seven-foot Christmas tree was the busiest place at San Quentin. Inmates and their families took pictures in front of it.

For the 29th consecutive year, Marines from the San Bruno Recruitment Station

donated toys for children of inmates at the prison. This year, the veterans at San Quentin put out over 500 toys for the kids, the biggest donation received in the last six years, said Gary Cooper, president of the San Quentin Veteran Group.

This annual event was a humbling reminder why San Quentin veterans share Christmas weekends with families. It brings joy and happiness watching children

smile and say "Thank you" after selecting a gift in the toy room, Cooper said.

This year's veteran's group was represented by Cooper, Tony Burch, JoJo Robinson, Benny Werner, Zakee Hutchinson, Carl Raybon and Stan Baer, who all watched the children choose a gift. They had toys for kids of all ages.

While some children waited patiently in line to enter the toy room, others looked

through the window glowing with smiles of excitement waiting for their turn. There were Tonka trucks, plastic cars, construction sets, battery-driven remote control toys, lunch pails, a large variety of stuffed dolls, Barbie dolls, monkeys, trivia and board games, puzzles and elephants. Other favorite selections on display were action heroes, boats, basketballs, soccer balls, baseballs and bats.

Julie Kane drove from San Jose with her two kids, Riley, 8 and Kai, 4, to see her best friend, Nick Bucci. Kai saw the Monster High dolls and got so excited she took the doll off the table and ran over to her mother, radiating with delight, saying, "Mommy, look."

Inmate Sonny Nguyen's 11-year-old nephew, Ethan, came from Colorado to see him for the first time. He was so impressed, all he could say was, "What a variety of toys."

Several younger kids saw toys that captured their imagination, and were too excited to say anything. Four-year-old Kamille likes the Beatles, so when she saw the Beatles doll, all her mother could say was, "She knows all their songs."

Hutchinson said, "The kids bring us so much joy and happiness, it's just so much fun giving something to someone who really appreciates it."



Photo by Eddie Herrera - SQ News

Veterans displaying the various toys for the children

Werner said, "This is my last year participating in the program here at San Quentin. I'll be going to another prison before the next holiday. I'll really miss it. But, this has always been an opportunity for me to give back to kids. I missed out on being a father during these times."

"This is my way of sharing with others, just seeing the smiles on the faces of the kids whose eyes light up when they see the gift they like; what a great feeling," Cooper said.

"This is my 10th year, and it seems to get better every year. It's so encouraging to see the engaging. When asked about the meaning of Christmas, appreciate some-

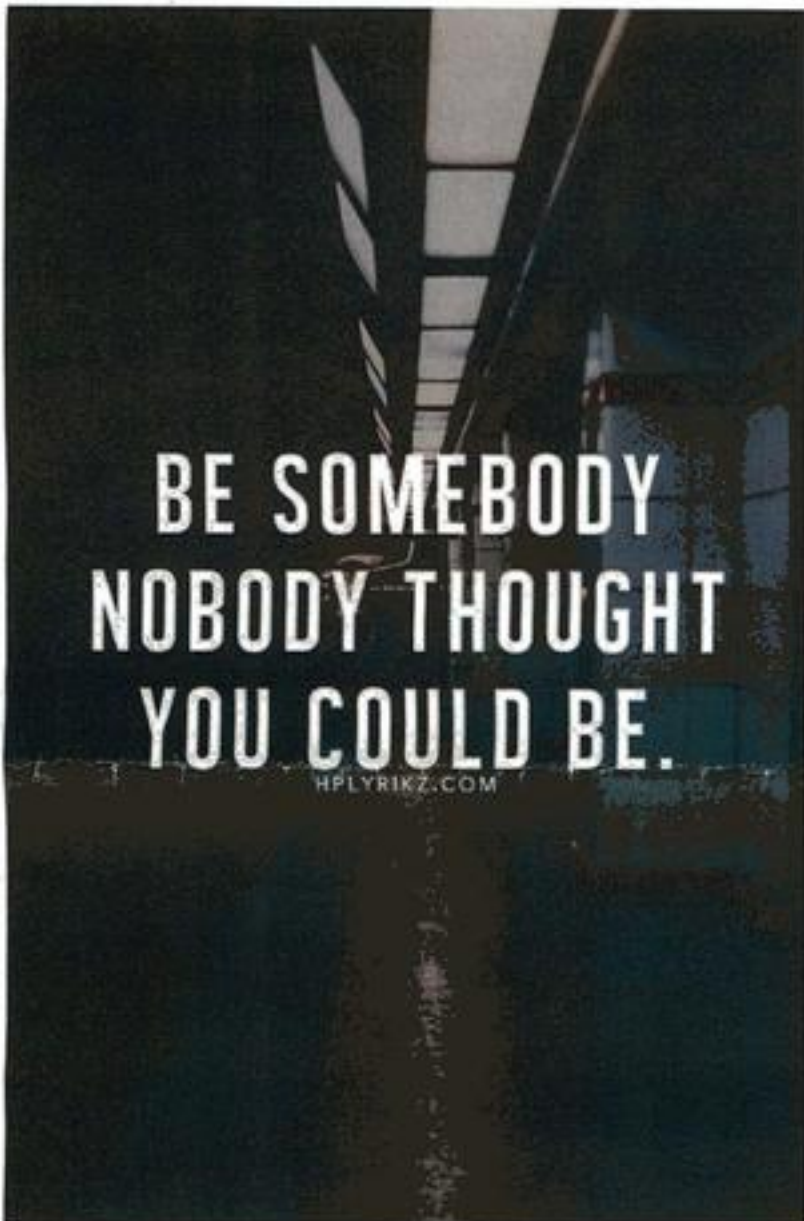
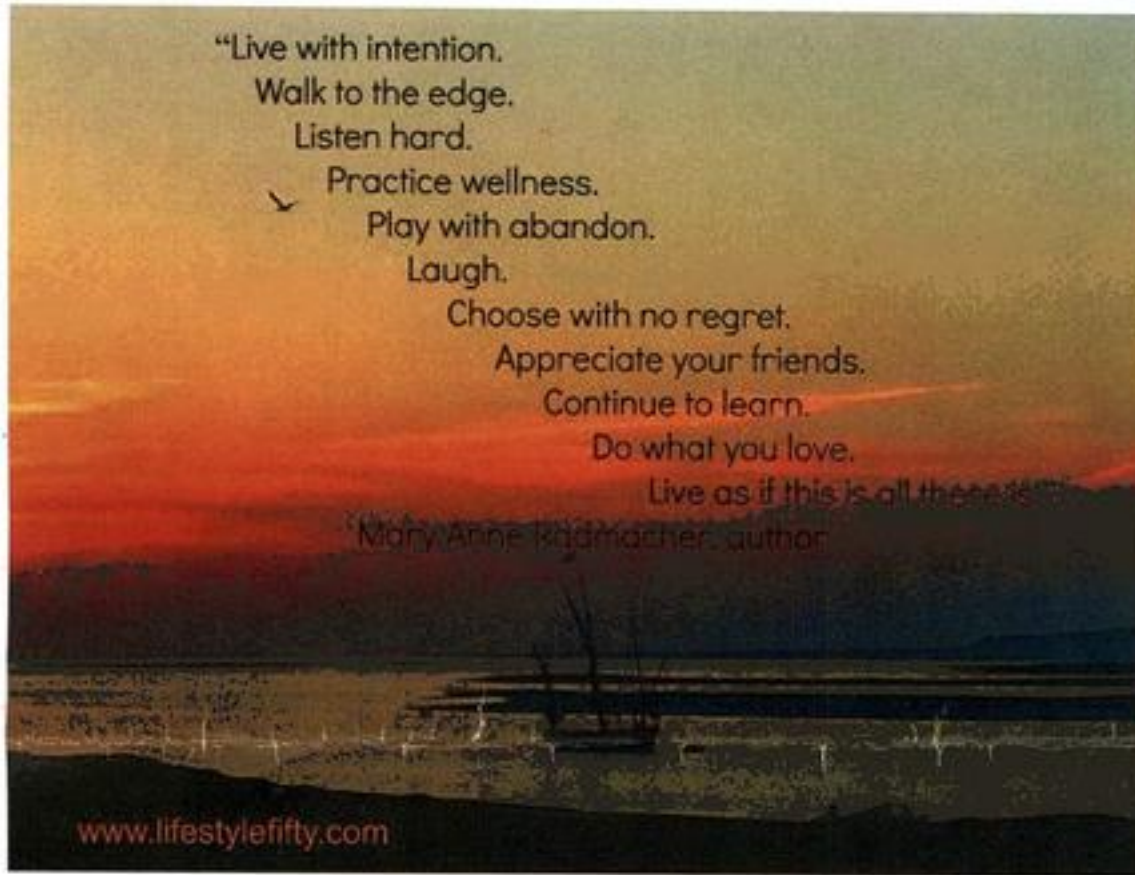
thing so simple as a toy. It's the giving back that I enjoy," said Robinson.

Inmate Ladell Jackson and his wife, Elayne, said they hope that this will be his last Christmas in prison. "I am going to the board next year, and I'm looking forward to celebrating this joy outside of prison."

"Christmas season is always the time to remind ourselves of how important family is," inmate John Lam said.

"Holidays are important times of the year, regardless if you are inside or outside of prison. The best qualities shared during the holiday should be the same qualities we should share all year," inmate Larry White said.





The pessimist sees difficulty in  
every opportunity.

The optimist sees the  
opportunity in every difficulty.

WINSTON CHURCHILL