

OUR CHANCE TO HELP FRACTURE MASS INCARCERATION

PROLOGUE

Besides getting vaccinated, & dealing with the COVID symptoms for a few days, one of the main things I've been working on--with Initiate Justice (IJ)--is trying to garner support for L.A.'s first progressive DA, George Gascon, who is trying to reform the racist justice system that preyed on so many of us for decades (centuries?).

Following is a piece I wrote for our (IJ) newsletter for this purpose. Btw, NEVER in my life would I have imagined being part of a movement to support a DA--TIME CHANGES ALL!!! :)

Peace

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Currently we are at a pivotal moment in our fight to end mass incarceration, because we have a DA as an ally, L.A.'s George Gascon, who's under major attack from our opposition.

To fully understand the hypocrisy of our opponents is to know that mass incarceration is the extreme overrepresentation of people of color in prison, along with their disproportionate sentencing, achieved by denying them fair trials with such tactics as:

coercing, coaching, or threatening witnesses; ... neglecting to turn over exculpatory evidence or actively hiding it altogether; making false representations to the court & to the jury; & committing perjury. (Bazelon, L., Rectify, 2018, p. 24)

I, like most of you, have personally experienced these nefarious tactics. As a matter of fact, the deputy DA used each one of them to convict me. We only know this because after 17 years on death row, a witness was so traumatized by forcibly being made an accomplice in a wrongful conviction that she came forward to reveal the truth. Thereafter, a federal judge stated that the prosecution's actions may have "seriously compromise[d] the fair administration of the criminal justice system & alone could taint an entire criminal proceeding"; so, in 2015, he sent my case back to the state court for redressing. As a jailhouse lawyer, I have come across many capital convictions obtained in this manner.

Accordingly, in an effort to rectify said racial practices, DA Gascon implemented a slew of Special Directives (SD), such as SD 20-11, which calls for reviewing the 215 death sentences out of LA--including mine--with the goal of removing the penalty; SD 20-08, which rolls back sentencing enhancements & special allegations; & SD 20-14, which allows for the review of an estimated 30,000 convictions that his office identifies as inconsistent with his new

policies.

As to be expected, the proponents of mass incarceration--law enforcement, some judges, & the Assoc. of Deputy Dist. Attorneys (ADDA) have rallied to block Gascon's reforms. The ADDA has even filed a lawsuit based on the ironic premise that Gascon's policies are against their "legal & ethical responsibilities," & may cause them to "risk losing [their] CA State Bar Cards." However, there were no such ethical concerns when it came to them denying people of their rights to a fair trial. This irony also wasn't lost on Berkeley School of Law Dean Erwin Chemerinsky & Stanford Law School Profs. David Mills & Michael Romano, who jointly stated that the association's stance "is more reflective of their long standing opposition to reform & the will of millions of Angelenos than it is the legality of DA Gascon's directives."

This is why it is imperative that **WE FULLY BACK DA Gascon** by out organizing & lobbying the opposition. Not only must we provide him with the leeway to continue reforming the system, but also all the other like-minded DAs, like Santa Clara's Jeffrey Rosen, San Joaquin's Tori Verber Salazar, & San Francisco's Chesa Boudin.

In solidarity,

Maurice "Moe" Harris, Inside Organizer-Death Row