



# Why we cannot afford to build any more prisons

## *Putting people before profit and prisons*

By Fred

Building new prisons is just an external symptom of the cancer that is eating away at our society's core. At the root of the issue is the ever-expanding gap between the rich and the poor which has created a class system even as politicians preach equality. The "haves" (rich) are willing to go to great lengths to protect their wealth and maintain the status quo. In this kind of system, the "have-nots" (poor) are seen as a source of danger that must be policed. The solution to the problem, in this view, is to remove and banish it far away so that it does not have to be dealt with. Thus results what Michel Foucault called "le grand renferment," the great lock up. More and more behavior is considered "criminal" and therefore legislation grows endlessly, usually under a thick veneer of "security."

In Pennsylvania, more than half of all prisoners in state prisons are non-violent offenders. The present epidemic of incarceration creates an unsustainable financial cost on the taxpayer. It gets even more worrisome when prison growth is accompanied by failed school systems. A prisoner's biggest nightmare is to see their child join them in prison. This "lock 'em up" mentality has gone to the schools themselves where children are treated as criminal for minor infractions. I was horrified a while back, to see police escort a six-year-old girl in handcuffs! This

country's propensity to lock people up is borne out by the fact that we have 25% of the world's prisoners but only 5% of the world's population. These poor, marginalized, mentally ill and mostly minority populations fare no better once they get out of prison. They are "marked" people. Nobody wants to hire them or live near them. Prisoners are the new lepers. No one wants anything to do with them. America throws its marginalized people away and Pennsylvania is at the very top of that trend.

In the first half of the twentieth century, America isolated tuberculosis patients and left them to die. Today there is the same mentality towards prisons. This prison-building frenzy is profit based and needs to be exposed. The truth of the matter is crime has gone down nationwide while Pennsylvania continues to lock more people up. There is no need to build more prisons. Genuine prison reform can reduce the PA's prison population drastically resulting in the closure of some prisons. But as long as prisons remain moneymakers for a privileged few, politicians will continue to lie to the public and use fear to maintain these society-destroying institutions. The public needs to know the truth; and that is, the majority of us are willing, even determined, to learn from our mistakes and make a difference in the young generation but the system makes it almost impossible. The image of changed prisoners does not augur well for their

lock 'em up worldview, and it definitely does not line their pockets.

*Fred is in the Pennsylvania State Correctional Institution at Graterford. This article was originally published by Decarcerate PA, a RESIST grantee..*



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## *In Their Own Words...*

By Saif Rahman

This is a very special edition of the Newsletter. For the first time, each and every story that you read in these pages was written by individuals currently within the US prison system.

These pieces have only been lightly edited in order to keep the voices of the authors as real and clear as possible.

Not much more needs to be said, other than these stories might make you cry, get

angry, shock you, and move you.

We would like to thank everyone out there that is organizing against the systems of imprisonment at all levels and working for the freedom of all people - especially those bravely organizing on the inside - this Newsletter is dedicated to you.

*Saif Rahman is the director of communications at RESIST and the editor of the Newsletter*

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## That Which Does Not Kill Us...

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I've seen yet others simply cry like unfed, hungry babies all day and all night, and some lash out yelling and screaming all day, all night, banging on walls and cell doors, trying to get some form of acknowledgement from their jailers that they are human beings, only to be sprayed with various forms of chemical agents, left incapacitated in their cells. Only then to be taken and have their cloths cut from their bodies and put nude into a yet more restrictive type of segregation status, called "control status." There, they have nothing in their cell but a concrete slab to sleep on, a stainless steel sink and toilet combo, a surveillance camera and 24 hours a day of bright light cell illumination.

Removal from this status is determined by "a white shirt" [supervisor]. No standards or process is due or available. We only have a potentially mentally and emotionally disturbed prisoner at the mercy of a sadistic and possibly masochistic white shirt, who knows no limits and has no psychiatric training.

While the prisoners mentally and emotionally regress, [a prisoner with mental illness] is often cheered on and encouraged by bored corrections officers to regress even lower. I've witnessed officers...encourage a mentally ill prisoner who had smeared feces all over his control cell window, to lick it off, and they would give him some milk. And this prisoner licked most of the fecal matter off of the window, and was "awarded" by the officer who threw an old milk to the prisoner through a lower trap door to the cell.

This is the jailer who finds this misery excitement from the long boring and mundane hours spent doing nothing, who then goes home and recounts the details of these events at the bar while bragging on how he gets paid for sitting on his ass doing nothing – while his fellow men rot. And there are those prisoners who seek the ultimate out who kill themselves. I have seen this happen as well. I have been awoken from my sleep by a guard...to tell me another prisoner I did not know had committed suicide, an attempt to discombobulate me.

Lastly, there are these few prisoners who observe and bear witness to these injustices and this uncivilized behavior, who develop within themselves an intense disdain for abuse of power by those in a position of authority, a total hatred for injustice and bigotry of any sort. And who desire a change and to that end they dedicate their lives. When these prisoners speak up against these systematic abuses, they are labeled a "threat," "gang leader," or "combative," and are punished with an even longer stay in solitary confinement.

It should be understood that the treatment of these men is at present and will even more in the future have a detrimental effect upon society. Crime becoming more serious, wholesale, random, gruesome, seemingly more animalistic, inhumane and senseless. Having absolutely no rational or reasonable point or purpose. Leaving society's leaders, behavior analysts, psychologists and therapists scratching their heads in bewilderment, asking why human beings are doing these things?

I end this testimony with a fitting quote

from a French philosopher named Albert Camus, from his book, *The Rebel*:

Twenty-seven years in prison do not, in fact, produce a very conciliatory form of intelligence. Such a long period of confinement produces either weaklings or killers and sometimes a combination of both. If the mind is strong enough to construct in a prison cell a moral philosophy that is not one of submission, it will generally be one of domination. Every ethic based on solitude implies the exercise of power.

I salute the conscious mind and impose upon it a responsibility to be accountable.

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*Glenn T. Turner has been held in solitary confinement at the Wisconsin Secure Program Facility since 2010, when he was assigned to the facility's General Segregation Program Process. He can be reached: Glenn T. Turner #244614 A, WSPE, P.O. Box 9900, Boscobel, WI 53805. This piece was originally published by Solitary Watch, a RESIST grantee.*



*Grantee Milk Not Jails in New York organized an action where they "hung letters from hundreds of people in prison about their repeated parole denial" in the New York State Capitol building.*

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# A Call for Support

## *Building a supportive community can be a radical act*

By Sarah Bell

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For most of us serving a long-term (20-plus years) or a life sentence, it is very important for us to maintain positive relationships with our family, friends, and the community we once lived in. However, many of us like myself are lacking the support we so desperately desire in order to make it through each and every day in prison. Some fall hard into the scams, drama, and negativity to cope with the possibility of dying before we are released. While others remain hopeful and use the many educational programs and groups they offer to develop positive life skills. I have been able to do just that and more.

In 2004 I plead guilty to third degree murder and other related charges. I was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. My mother was a drug addict and I never knew my dad. At the tender age of four years old, my mother left me on the corner of my grandmother's block and called my aunt to come pick me up because she was too embarrassed to walk me to my grandmother's door. I spent the next three years there. I felt lonely and sad. I missed my mother. She did not drop me off on the first day of school. When I got all A's on my first report card, I ran home from school excited to show my family but no one cared. At that point I shut down all my emotions and became a loner. A year after moving in with my grandmother, I began to be molested by a teenage female cousin. I continued to be molested by her until 1991 when my grandmother died from breast cancer. I was forced to move back with my mother who at the time was strung out on crack cocaine and had recently been diagnosed as being HIV positive. At seven years old I did not understand what that meant. I was happy and excited to be with my mother. I missed her so much and I thought things were going to get better but they did not. For the first few years we lived in abandoned buildings with her drug addicted friends, in subways, and in shelters. With the help of public assistance my family

and I, which included my two younger siblings and my older sister, eventually moved into an apartment of our own. It was okay until my mother would disappear for days sometimes weeks at a time. It made me feel as if she did not care about us. She did not love us. So of course I built a wall up around me. I did not allow myself to get close to anyone because we were constantly moving and changing schools. How could someone else love me when my own mother did not even love me? Eventually child welfare stepped in and placed my siblings and I in foster homes and group homes. I hated it. The foster families were no different from my own family. They would leave us in the house to fend for ourselves. They were very mean and I never got along with their children. So I ran away in search of my mother who chose drugs over her own children. In 1995, my younger sister passed away while living in a foster home. I was heart broken. I was eleven years old at the time. I blamed my mother for neglecting to be there for us. I loved my mother but for years I held a lot of resentment inside towards her. Soon after I turned twelve years old I began to get into a lot of trouble. I got into fights in school, I smoked marijuana, drank alcohol, and stayed out late. Sometimes I just did not return home. Eventually I joined a gang. The gang gave me a sense of security. I felt loved, something I was lacking from my real family. I just wanted to feel like I belonged to something. For the first time I did. A lot of consequences came with joining a gang. I started selling drugs and I robbed people in order to support myself. Soon after I joined the gang, I found myself in the NY state juvenile justice system. I was in almost every juvenile placement there was. I was angry. I had no guidance, no support, no direction, and no one to encourage me to do the right thing. At the time no one in my family graduated from high school or even had a steady job. I can recall a time when I moved to Long Island to live with my uncle and his wife. I was so bad they just gave up and kicked me out. In

2001, when I was seventeen years old, I left NYC. I hooked up with a few of my friends and we all moved to PA for the sole purpose of selling drugs. Two years later I was in prison for murder.

It is true that I became a product of my environment. However that was my choice. It is easy to blame my parents for their imprisonment. The fact is there are many people who grew up in the same circumstances but they did not become drug dealers or murderers. They persevered and became successful. That is not my story. I can come up with many excuses for why I ended up in prison. A drug addicted mother who neglected me, no father, getting molested by a relative; however, I do not want to be the person with a thousand excuses. In July of 2004, when my mother passed away, I made the decision to never have an excuse for not being better or doing better. So today I do my best to be a better person than I was yesterday. Since my incarceration I have obtained my GED and took several college courses. I have also done many groups to help me deal with my abuse and abandonment issues. I am now in the upholstery apprenticeship program. Everything I do now is to prepare myself for when I do walk out of this prison. I won't allow my past to dictate who I am or the person I choose to become. If I was given the opportunity to reach out to young kids going through what I went through, I would tell them not to give up on themselves. Stay in school and do not be influenced by your peers. It is so easy to get into trouble and end up in prison. I would tell them not to take the easy way out like I did. Maya Angelou once wrote, "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage need not to be lived again." So to all those kids who have been molested, don't have a father and their mother is on drugs, face your future with courage and strength. Do not be afraid to ask for help. Reach out to your teachers. If you want to feel a sense of belonging, don't join a gang like I did. Join a basketball team, a box-

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## A Call for Support

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ing gym, or a church. The only thing no one can take from us is education. Once it is acquired it can never be taken away.

Many of our young men and women are at war with themselves. It is our responsibility to fix this epidemic. They are becoming victims of abuse, neglect, bullying and violence. They are turning to gangs and drugs to escape the pain they are feeling in their own homes. Society focuses solely on the effects and not enough on the cause. As an inmate in a state prison, I am in constant interaction

with many women who were victims themselves. We find ourselves addicted to drugs, money, and unhealthy relationships because we have not dealt with our core issues. When I turn on the news, I only hear about the people who are poisoning our communities. What about the ones who are making a difference? In prison you only hear about the people who are released and continue to do the same things that they were initially in prison for. What about the ones who go home and become productive citizens? There are many of them.

I have plans on applying for commutation within the next ten years. I am going

to be one of many who leave prison and become successful. There is no way I will be able to do it on my own. I am going to need the support of my community. I can get all the tools in prison and take all the groups that are required of me. The fact is if I do not get the help of my community, I will not make it. Please help me on this journey to get out of prison and become successful.

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*Sarah can be reached: Sarah Bell, #OJ-1653, P.O. Box 180, Muncy, PA 17756. This article was originally published in The Movement, the official newsletter of the Human Rights Coalition, a RESIST grantee.*

## Letters to our Family

### *Black and Pink publishes letters from LGBTQ prisoners*

Hey Fam,

First of all, I send my love and respects to everyone in Black & Pink for standing on the front line in this war. My name is Nina, I'm a 42 year old MTF transwoman locked up on a level 4 yard in California. As I navigate my way through these prisons, I remain unbowed. My oppressors as well as those inmates who dislike "my kind" because their minds are unable to process and accept what a new age woman looks and sounds like aren't of real concern to me. My focus remains on a better tomorrow for our family.

It doesn't matter what state you're imprisoned in or the color of your skin, if you are LGBTQ you have an obligation to embrace your family with everything that's good in you. We are a fractured community in most cases behind these walls. I hear so many stories of heartache, loneliness, and abuse that never seem to end with a mention of support. So I challenge any and everyone who is reading this. Find peace and comfort with those who are LGBTQ in your prison, embrace them and help each other with your struggles. Only then will we define the meaning of family. If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. I promise you this, if you decide to rise above, you'll be surprised how transparent and trivial our problems with each other are. It's not a bad thing to love your family.

Holla,  
Nina, California

Dear Black & Pink,

Hello, I'm Ashley, one of several transgender inmates at my institution, a federal prison in Virginia. I am writing to share with everyone a long-awaited victory at our institution. After years of filing, and taking a case to court, four transgender inmates are now beginning hormone therapy, myself included! We consider this huge here because of their several years of repeated denials and stall tactics. I am also currently in litigation as to several issues, including the purchase and retention of female undergarments, purchase and retention of makeup through commissary or on SPO, and a prescription of Finasteride. One of the girls here is also battling for electrolysis. We all got started on 50mg of Spironolactone a day and 0.1 mg estrogen patches (Alora brand) twice a week. A couple of us have also seen victory in legally changing our names, myself included; now we are in the process of making it legal at our sentencing court and the BOP.

We want to publish this story to inspire everyone not to give up-- keep fighting; the war is far from over but this is a major battle won. Keep your heads up!

All my love,  
Ashley, Virginia (Federal prison)

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*These letters were originally published in the Black and Pink Newspaper. Black and Pink is a RESIST grantee and "is an open family of LGBTQ prisoners and 'free world' allies who support each other. Our work toward the abolition of the prison industrial complex is rooted in the experience of currently and formerly incarcerated people. We are outraged by the specific violence of the prison industrial complex against LGBTQ people, and respond through advocacy, education, direct service, and organizing.*

# Real Words from an Inmate

## *Selina's poem from the inside*

**"Real words from a inmate. Not a student. Not a girl. Not a human being but just a number" – #34 (Selina Garcia)**

locked doors, handcuffs, and shackles  
isn't my ideal reason to wake up  
screaming, shouting, cussing  
isn't what I wanna hear all day long

Smiles, open arms and joy  
is what I rather walk into  
I rather hear I am proud of you  
than 10-25-life and the  
sound of the metal doors  
locking you in a cell

I rather have a diploma  
in my hands  
than arms twisted behind  
my back with too tight cuffs

I rather fall asleep from late nights  
of studying for the finals  
than to fall asleep because I'm  
forced to with medications and yelling

I rather eat at a burger joint  
with my colleagues and friends laughing  
than the slop in silent with a old middle  
school bully beside me in orange stripes

I rather hug my brothers and sisters  
than to pull out guns and pepper spray  
because I'm not educated enough  
to know how to talk out differences and be civilized

I rather attend a friend's  
basketball or football game  
than attend their funeral at 17  
with a bundle of flowers for a grieving mother

I rather dance and eat at prom my senior year  
than in a ER in labor  
giving birth to a child  
when I'm not able to take care of myself with a diploma

I rather seek help from  
my guidance counselor  
than to ask a gang to help  
or feel protected behind the trigger of a gun  
I rather say I did it, I graduated

than to say I dropped out  
because I'm a misunderstood student  
or I've fallen behind  
because I keep getting suspended for nothing  
or because I'm too afraid to go to school  
because I get bullied and harassed in the  
faces of administrators who just tell kids to stop  
but don't take action against it

I rather hear Selina Garcia  
Come get your diploma  
than #34  
come sit in the electric chair  
and say your final goodbyes  
instead of give your speech about  
your high school experience

I rather walk on the sidewalks in  
the sun  
than to walk in a courtroom full a people  
in shackles feeling embarrassed and humiliated  
or sitting on a unit fulla 50 something  
other young females – adult women not  
knowing what time it is or if the sun is  
even out

I rather have a team  
pushing me to graduate and go to college  
than administrators against me  
pushing me out of school and  
behind bars with a ransom on my head

I rather let my fellow peers know  
their voices can be heard  
and they can graduate  
than to sit in silence and  
let them lose hope in following  
their dreams and goals

I rather stand up for what I believe in  
than to let somebody poison my head  
with words like "can't" and "won't"

I rather work hard earning money I  
won't have to hide  
than selling drugs because I'm a expelled

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high school student with a baby I have to  
feed because I can't get a job at McDonalds without a  
diploma

I rather see my mom's face smiling in a crowd  
than the crying, brokenhearted face at  
my trial or funeral cause I'm just  
another statistic

I rather know I have people by my side ready  
to make a difference within our schools  
than to let these wicked games of Wake County continue  
and throwing the most loved, respected, and ambitious  
boys and

girls in prisons than letting them carry out their dreams  
of being athletes, hairdressers, lawyers, and one day,  
getting married and having kids and not have to worry  
about our next generation falling into the wrong hands  
and being worse than this one we live in now.

On Thursday, March 27th, the Youth Organizing Insti-  
tute and NC HEAT mobilized approximately 30 of Selina's  
community members to pack the courthouse on her court  
date, wearing green to show our support. It was clear  
that our efforts to uplift Selina's voice and her powerful  
story had the judge, the social workers, and the SRO on  
their toes in the face of a demand for accountability from

the strong community and media presence in the room.  
Selina, in a courageous statement on her own behalf  
before the judge, said she wanted to set a good example  
for other youth in foster care, "especially if I'm preaching  
and fighting for things to be right."

She was released from criminal custody immediately  
after the court date, and NC HEAT members along with  
YOI staff came to the jail to welcome her home with open  
arms. We came to the Division of Social Services building  
and stood behind Selina as she demanded to be housed  
in Raleigh, where she would be able to finish her studies  
without the disruption and displacement of having to  
start over at a new school in a group home environment.

By the end of the day, we had won demands one and  
two from our petition, with Selina released from jail into  
a family-based placement in Raleigh where she can finish  
her senior year at Southeast Raleigh high and graduate  
with her friends! With almost 1,000 signatures on our  
petition pressuring the Wake County School Board, the  
Division of Social Services, and Raleigh PD; we are on  
track to win all nine of our demands. We who believe in  
freedom cannot rest until we have mechanisms for over-  
sight and accountability from SRO's and discipline policy  
that is transformative, and not punitive in our schools.  
We believe that we will win!

*This poem was originally published by Youth Organizing Insti-  
tute, a RESIST Grantee.*

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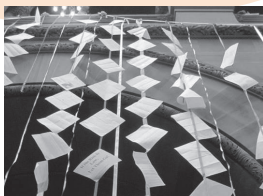
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*Inside: That Which Does Not Kill Us... (does it really make us stronger?)*



Meet RESIST

## GRANT RECIPIENTS

*RESIST awards grants to hundreds of the most critical activist organizations across the United States who are organizing for social, economic and environmental justice. Below are four recent grant recipients who are all new to RESIST.*

*For more information on RESIST's grant program, please visit [www.resistinc.org/grants](http://www.resistinc.org/grants)*

### **Connecticut Students for a DREAM**

*Bridgeport, Connecticut  
[www.ct4adream.org](http://www.ct4adream.org)*

Connecticut Students for a DREAM (C4D) is a statewide organization of DREAMers and allies that seek to empower undocumented youth and their families by advocating for their rights and raising awareness about the issues they face.

C4D promotes equal access to higher education and organizes for a more just society where undocumented immigrants are not discriminated against because of their status. C4D is proud to be "undocumented, unafraid and ready to take action."

### **Queer Detainee Empowerment Project**

*Brooklyn, New York  
[www.qdep.org](http://www.qdep.org)*

The Queer Detainee Empowerment Project (QDEP) is an Alternative-to-Detention program for queer, trans, and HIV+ immigrant detainees, asylees, and their families across the United States. QDEP supports folks in securing housing, food, education, travel, employment, healthcare, legal services, know-your-rights trainings, community organizing, and arts space!

QDEP also advocates around structural barriers our clients face. In short, we are committed to assisting folks in building lives outside of the detention system, and to queering dialog and work on immigration justice.

### **UNIDOS**

*Tucson, Arizona  
[www.unidostucson.wordpress.com/](http://www.unidostucson.wordpress.com/)*

UNIDOS is a new youth coalition of students from local Tucson high schools, alumni and community members, de-

manding our educational human rights. UNIDOS was created in response to H.B. 2281, the ban on Ethnic Studies throughout the state of Arizona, and the growing attacks on our education. UNIDOS seeks to protect and expand Ethnic Studies and promote the values and diversity, justice and equity in our education.

### **Northwest Ecosystem Survey Team Support Network**

*Eugene, Oregon  
[www.nestcascadia.wordpress.com](http://www.nestcascadia.wordpress.com)*

Northwest Ecosystem Survey Team (NEST) Support Network formed out of the Fall Creek tree-sit in 1999 and is now an all-volunteer group of self-organizing, tree-climbing humans that takes on the timber industry in Oregon. Each summer, NEST volunteers take on a role as canopy surveyors, who utilize the Northwest Forest Plan's "Survey and Manage" laws to protect ancient forests threatened by logging.

Timber sales that have been canceled or reduced, largely due to NEST surveys, include the Clark Timber Sale, Straw Devil, Wagon Road Pilot Project and others.