

# Learning the Facts

An Overview of U.S. Prisons



**For Prison Dharma Volunteers**

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# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Statistics .....	4
Prison History & Labor .....	5
Who Are Prisoners? .....	7
The “Supermax” .....	9
Resource List .....	12-16
Documentaries.....	12
Prison Books .....	13
Prisoner’s Writings .....	14
Mental Health and Prison .....	15
Women in Prison .....	15
Films .....	16
Websites .....	16
Endnotes .....	17

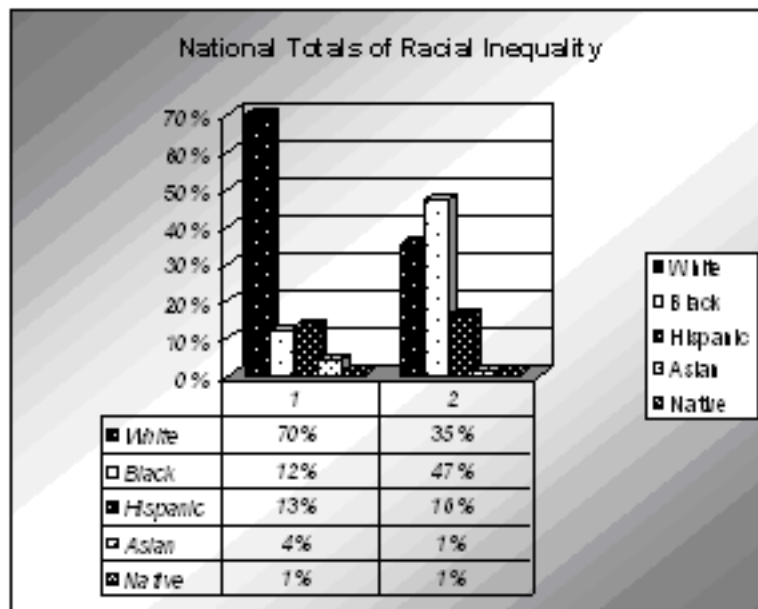
# Introduction

In 2004 PDN Director Kate Crisp co-taught a class at Naropa University entitled “Public Life in the U.S.” The class examined the prison industrial complex in depth. A group of students in the class created the following document as their class project in the hopes of providing PDN volunteers with a basic knowledge of prisons.

Included in this document is a general overview of prison history, the current conditions of prisons, and statistics on who prisoners are. We have made every effort to include information that is both specific and objective. We hope that this will enable you to have a greater understanding of the people you will be working with. In addition, we hope to provide you with a clear picture of the world you are entering.

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## Racial Inequality of Prison Population (column 2) to the General Population (column 1)

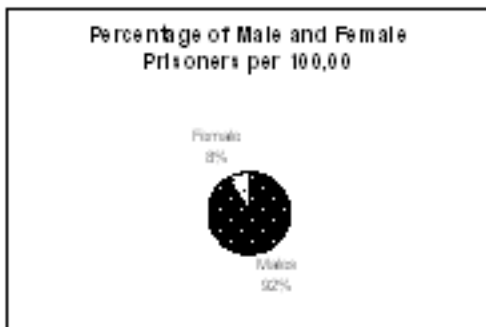
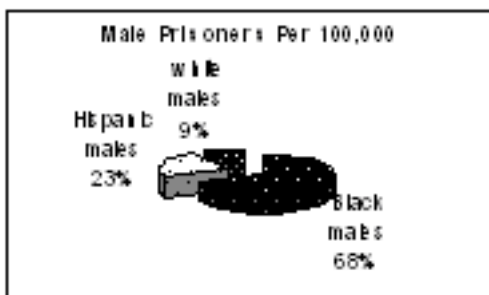
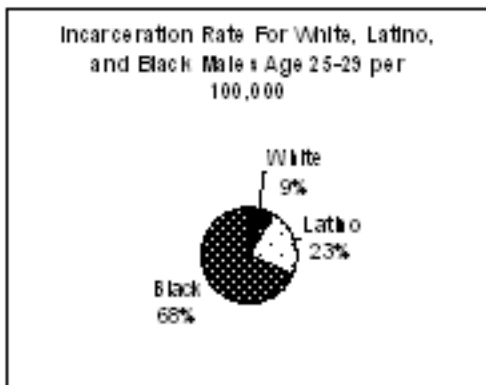


# Statistics

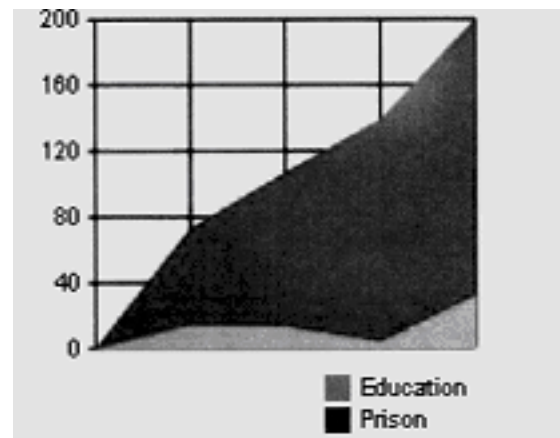
There are currently 2,119,174 people in U.S. prisons.<sup>1</sup>

Crime has fallen significantly since 1994.

## Bureau of Justice Statistics, Summary of Findings 2002



## Spending on Education & Corrections<sup>2</sup>



## Historic Overview

- During the 25-year period from 1945 to 1970 the rate of incarceration averaged 110 per 100,000 citizens.<sup>3</sup>
- The prison population increased 500% from 1970 to 1998 coinciding with a 28% increase in the national population of the U.S.<sup>4</sup>
- The U.S. is second to Russia in incarceration rates per 100,000 population.<sup>5</sup>

# Prison History & Labor

## The First Prison

Prior to the late 1700's, criminal penalties consisted primarily of fines and corporal punishment. Jails held only debtors, suspects awaiting trial, and criminals awaiting punishment. In the late 1700's, however, Pennsylvania Quakers helped pass laws making imprisonment the major form of punishment in that state. The Quakers believed solitude, discipline, and hard labor could reform criminals. They felt prison could be a penance affecting prisoners' salvation.

Reformers altered the existing Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia in order to achieve these ends. The city built more than a dozen cells in the jail to hold prisoners in solitary confinement. It also separated male from female prisoners, and debtors from convicted criminals. The notion that prisoner reform could be affected through solitude, discipline, and hard labor quickly gained popularity, and the model of imprisoning criminals in individual cells spread rapidly throughout the United States and Europe. The system evolved within different locations often using less solitary confinement and less religious notions of reform. The Walnut Street Jail, however, is considered the first modern prison.

## Post-Civil War / Reconstruction Era

Slavery and the abolition of slavery radically changed the prison in the reconstruction era. Imprisonment took different forms in the North and South.

In the North, the idea of the "reformatory" took hold. Criminals were considered "sick" and had to be "cured" through imprisonment. Once "healed", prisoners could return to society. At this time, the Auburn prison system gained popularity. This system, like the Pennsylvania system, isolated prisoners. They worked long days, slept in solitary confinement, and though they could eat together, were not allowed to look at or speak to each other. They were beaten if they broke the rules.

In the South, the convict lease system, or 'chain gang' emerged. Penal institutions leased inmates to private business owners, who used them as cheap manual labor. Thus prison labor, primarily African- American, functioned as a substitute for slavery. Penal farms were the second phase. Prisoners essentially did the work of slaves on plantations. Businesses leasing prisoners were not invested in the health or life of prisoners, so conditions were worse.

Death rates were higher than in Northern prisons as a result of the intense manual labor and poor conditions.

## Evolution of Prison Labor

In the 1800s, prisons began budgeting expenses by leasing prisoners to private companies. By 1885, three-quarters of prisoners were taking part in some kind of labor force, usually for private interests. Prisoners worked in dangerous conditions without pay.

The reemergence of leased prison labor can be traced back to the 1979 Justice System Improvement Act which, allowed businesses to both freely use prison labor, and to use prison labor in interstate commerce by implementing what was called Prison Industry Enhancement programs (PIEs)

# Some Uses of Prison Labor

How many of us think of men in orange jump suits cleaning trash off the interstate medians when we hear the words Prison Labor? This is a minute example of the use of prison labor.

The increased prison population, a strong economy and the tightest labor market in the last thirty years have coincided with a rise in prison privatization and the expanded use of prison labor. Big name corporations compete with each other to underwrite prison construction with private, tax-exempt bonds and without voter approval. More and more states across the country are implementing mandatory labor for inmates, providing more labor pools open prison industry partnerships.

When looking into the American prison-industrial system, we see a situation that closely parallels that of China, - a country that the U.S. has repeatedly questioned for its use of prison labor. One U.S. state constitution was amended in 1994, requiring all inmates to produce a forty-hour workweek. It also required the state to actively market prison labor. One of the products produced in this state was jeans called "Prison Blues", made by prisoners for anywhere between 28 cents and 8 dollars per hour.<sup>1</sup> Federal law prevented these jeans from being shipped out of the state. Prison factories in the Midwest pay inmates, who work in overcrowded basements anywhere between 20 cents to \$1.50 an hour while profits rise well into the million dollar range.<sup>2</sup> Understanding the degree to which industries rely on and profit from this cheap, abundant labor force requires investigation into current prisoner labor uses. Some examples are:<sup>8</sup>

- **Airline flights booked by youth offenders**
- **Data processing for private companies**
- **Manufacturing of shoes and clothing<sup>9</sup>**
- **Manufacturing of air conditioners**
- **Manufacturing of corrective eye wear**
- **Use by major computer companies**
- **Manufacturing of womens undergarments**
- **Automobile manufacturing**
- **Manufacturing metal**
- **Manufacturing sporting goods**
- **Construction of buildings for fast food companies**
- **Corporate restaurant industry**
- **Insurance companies**



## Privatization

The privatized prison industry is a fifty billion dollar business. It has steadily increased since the 90's. The industry's survival depends on a large incarcerated labor pool. The staggering amount of arrests for non-violent, drug related offenses, "get tough on crime" laws and "three strikes" rules provide this labor pool.

When Federal Prison Industries (now known as Unicor) was established in the 1930's, inmate-produced goods were primarily used inside prisons or sold only to Government agencies. Now, prison authorities, along with cost-conscious entrepreneurs, budget-paring politicians, and private prison operators such as Wackenhut and the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), have taken leaps and bounds by replacing the old political consensus with the concept that private companies compete with other businesses by using prison labor.

From 1980 to 1994, while the number of federal and state prisoners increased by 221 percent, the number of inmates employed in prison industries bumped up to 358 percent. During those years, prison industries sales rose from \$392 million to a staggering \$1.31 billion.<sup>10</sup>

# Who Are Prisoners?

- 70% of prisoners are illiterate
- 60-80% have a history of drug addiction
- 200,000 are mentally ill
- 51% sentenced for nonviolent crimes (drugs, property, public order)
- 88% Male
- 12% Female
- 40% African-American
- 15% Hispanic

## Juveniles in the Justice System

Approximately half of all juvenile inmates have a parent who has been incarcerated.<sup>11</sup>

- Average age is 16 years
- Nearly two thirds of these youth are non-violent offenders
- 50 % have had a parent who had been incarcerated
- 14% are female
- 56% are African-American
- 21% are Hispanic
- Over 50% have not been incarcerated before

Each year about 690,000 juveniles enter juvenile correctional facilities, detention centers, reception centers, training schools, ranches, camps and farms. From 1985 to 1997, the population of juveniles in adult prisons doubled to 5,400 youth inmates. They are treated the same as adult offenders. This necessitates that juveniles adjust to accepting violence as a part of everyday life. In adult prisons, they are 500 times more likely to be sexually assaulted and eight times more likely to commit suicide (than in a juvenile institution). Conditions require that they become more violent themselves in order to survive. Juvenile's exposure to prison culture increases their probability of becoming a career prisoner.

## Juveniles and the Death Penalty

Currently, 19 of the states (with the death penalty) do not allow the execution of people whose crimes were committed as juveniles. However, 22 inmates have been executed for crimes committed while under the age of eighteen.

As of December 31, 2003, 73 of the prisoners on death row were ages 16 or 17 at the time of their crimes. Their current ages range from 20 to 42 years. They are all male and two-thirds of them are minorities.<sup>12</sup>

## Women in Prison

- Over 1 million women in criminal justice custody<sup>13</sup>
- Majority incarcerated for non-violent crimes<sup>14</sup>
- Two thirds of women in prison are women of color<sup>15</sup>
- 80% are mothers of minor children<sup>16</sup>
- Majority are primary caregivers<sup>17</sup>
- 22% of minor children are under 5 years old<sup>18</sup>
- Over 70% of mothers lived with their minor children prior to incarceration<sup>19</sup>
- 20% of mothers report being homeless in the year prior to their incarceration<sup>20</sup>
- Two thirds received less than \$6.50 an hour prior to incarceration<sup>21</sup>
- 60% have not completed high school<sup>22</sup>
- 57% have been physically or sexually assaulted, most (69%) before the age of 18 years old<sup>23</sup>

Women represent the fastest growing segment of the prison population. In 1990, there were just over 40,000 women inmates as opposed to the current 1 million. Most women are arrested for non-violent offenses, usually drug or property crimes.

They are disproportionately women of color and most have not finished high school. The Drug War targets women and, in part, explains the huge increase in women's imprisonment. From 1985 to 1996, female drug arrests increased by 95 percent while male drug arrests increased by 55 percent. During this same period, the number of women sentenced to prison for drug-related crimes increased ten fold (from 2,370 to 23,700).<sup>1</sup> Women routinely receive harsher sentences, than men for the same drug-related offenses.

# Elaine's Story

In 1983, Elaine Bartlett, a 26-year welfare mother of four, agreed to transport four ounces of cocaine for a drug dealing friend. She did it for the \$2,500 she was to receive- money that was in part going to go toward a lavish thanksgiving dinner for her family. Unfortunately, her friend turned out to be a police informant. When she arrived, Elaine and her boyfriend, who had come along to protect her, having been unable to dissuade her, were arrested. Though she had no prior record, Elaine was sentenced to 20 years to life; her boyfriend to a minimum of 25 years. The drug dealing informant remains free, putting a kilo of cocaine on the streets every other week, and gets paid by the police to continue his informing.

Ultimately, Elaine got out after sixteen years, thanks to repeated calls by the public to "overturn mandatory minimum [sentences] for low level offenders." Elaine's children grew up in her absence. Though she is hard working and doesn't use hard drugs, she struggles to put her life back together. One of her children has been in trouble with the law, including going to jail, and her two daughters "flit about the edges of the criminal underworld." Elaine lacks many basic life skills, and continues to live hand- to mouth.<sup>25</sup>



The majority of women prisoners are mothers. An estimated 80,000 incarcerated mothers are parent to approximately 200,000 minor children. African American children are nearly nine times more likely to have an incarcerated parent than white children. Latino children are three times more likely than white children, to have an imprisoned parent.<sup>26</sup> Studies show that about a quarter of children remain with their fathers when the mother goes to prison, but nearly 9 out of 10 children remain with their mothers when the father goes to prison.<sup>27</sup> Women are usually the primary caregivers. Their incarceration often breaks up a family.

When no extended family member exists, to raise the children of incarcerated parents, that child ends up in the foster care system. The prevalence of "adoption mandates" opens for adoption any child who has been in foster care for 2 years. Thus, many incarcerated mothers lose their parental rights<sup>28</sup> and it is difficult for women convicts to regain custody of their children.



**"Pelican Bay"**  
Andrew Lichtenstein

Photograph of supermax prisoner about to be handcuffed before being removed from his cell<sup>41</sup>





Photograph of the inside of a supermax cell<sup>29</sup>

## The “Supermax”

In order to address the increased prison violence resulting from overcrowding during the 1970's and 1980's, the Federal Bureau of Prisons developed the Super Maximum Security model, or “supermax.” The underlying belief is that increased isolation of prisoners will help to maintain order within a system increasingly out of control and balance. However, there are concerns surrounding the misuse of such facilities and the effects of long-term isolation on prisoners and their impact on society upon release.

### A Brief History

Alcatraz is considered the “grandfather” of the supermax. Its intent was to house the most volatile offenders of the justice system. In response to public pressure, Alcatraz shut down in 1968. In the 60's, the public demanded that the prison system shift from its focus on punishment to a more progressive system of reform. Reformation sought to prepare prisoners for reentry into society as contributing members. Discontinued program funding, in the 1970's and 80's lead to prisoner discontent. In addition, the political “war on drugs” exploded the prison population beyond capacity. This overcrowding amplified prisoner and guard stress. Prison staff responded to the violence by “locking down” units—or confining prisoners to their cells—for indefinite periods in order to minimize inmate/staff contact. The relative success of this procedure led to the institution of the “security housing unit” (SHU) which served as a separate disciplinary housing unit in which prisoners were

isolated within their cells for extended periods of time. In 1983, after two guards were killed in the SHU at Marion, Illinois, the director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, Norman Carlson, lobbied for the design of an entirely separate high-tech, supermax [Super Maximum Security] prison in which the ‘worst of the worst,’ gang leaders and sociopaths would be incarcerated in permanent lockdown conditions. The Colorado State Administrative Maximum Penitentiary (USP ADX) was the first federally designed supermax. Since its 1994 construction in Florence, Colorado, It has become a prototype. In the last 20 years, the U.S. has built approximately 60 supermax security prisons in 42 states.<sup>30</sup> These are in addition to the SHUs that currently exist within state and federal institutions.

### Conditions<sup>31</sup>

**Prisoners exist in a “steel and concrete world.”**

- They live in concrete cells approximately 8 ft X 12 ft, with a built in concrete bunk, desk, and stool and steel toilet/sink unit (which is remote controlled by staff).
- Most cells have no window; some have a 4 X 42 inch slit which looks out into a concrete exercise area.
- Prisoners are confined in these cells 23/7 (23 hours a day, 7 days a week).
- Inmates are allowed 1 hour of exercise, in a concrete yard three times a week, one inmate at a time. However, this happens only when there is enough staff on duty.
- Lights are remote controlled, by staff, and usually are left on 24/7.
- Meals are shoved through a food slot cut knee high in steel cell doors.
- There are either no educational, religious, mental health or rehabilitative programs provided or those programs are satellited into cells on a black & white, guard-controlled television.
- Telemedicine is widely used.<sup>32</sup>
- There is no human contact between inmates, inmates and staff or inmates and visitors
- Each time an inmate is removed from her cell, a correctional officer places her hands and legs in restraints through a security door.<sup>33</sup>
- Inmates are strip-searched when leaving and returning to cells.

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## “Are we releasing walking time bombs into society?”<sup>34</sup>

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### Psychological Concerns

The effects of long-term solitary confinement, lack of human contact, living conditions and lack of transitional programs for reintroduction into the general prison population and society are paramount concerns. Are we releasing walking time bombs into society?<sup>35</sup>

The pain and psychological damage that supermax confinement inflicts depends in part on each inmate's character and psychological makeup. However, the length of time to which a person is exposed to these conditions indisputably aggravates the suffering. In most instances, confinement to a supermax is for an indefinite period. Long-term confinement can have devastating psychological effects.

In psychological studies on sensory deprivation, Harvard professor Dr. Stuart Grassian coined the term “SHU Syndrome”. Its symptoms are:<sup>36</sup>

- Depression
- Increased paranoia
- Difficulty with concentration and memory
- Manic activity
- Agitation
- Hyper-responsiveness to external stimuli
- Delusions
- Hallucinations
- Florid psychotic illness
- Suicide

Grassian estimates that as many as one-third of all supermax inmates are suffering from some kind of psychiatric trouble. Most of this goes undiagnosed since prisoners are given mental-health attention only if their guards – hardly experts in such matters – deem their behavior strange enough to warrant an examination.

In response to the evidence of the effect of sensory deprivation, supermax prisons have installed television sets in the hallways.

Most of the prisoners, locked in the solitude of supermaxes and SHUs will one day, be released. **They will return to the midst of society – some of them angrier, more impulsive and more unbalanced than ever.**<sup>37</sup>

### Rationale

According to prison officials, isolation of inmates makes prison populations easier to control. Removing the most dangerous prisoners, from the general prison population is an effective method of eliminating violent disruptions and avoiding the influence of “toughing” the overcrowded prison population. Officials also argue that this removal deters gang activity and enhances staff safety.<sup>38</sup> However, there is little or no hard data to support that supermaxes reduce assaults on inmates or staff and there are a great many questions regarding their use.

Due to the absence of a legislative mandated oversight committee, or a civilian review board, there are no established standards of procedure or placement criteria.<sup>1</sup> As a result, supermaxes are currently housing non-violent prisoners such as the:

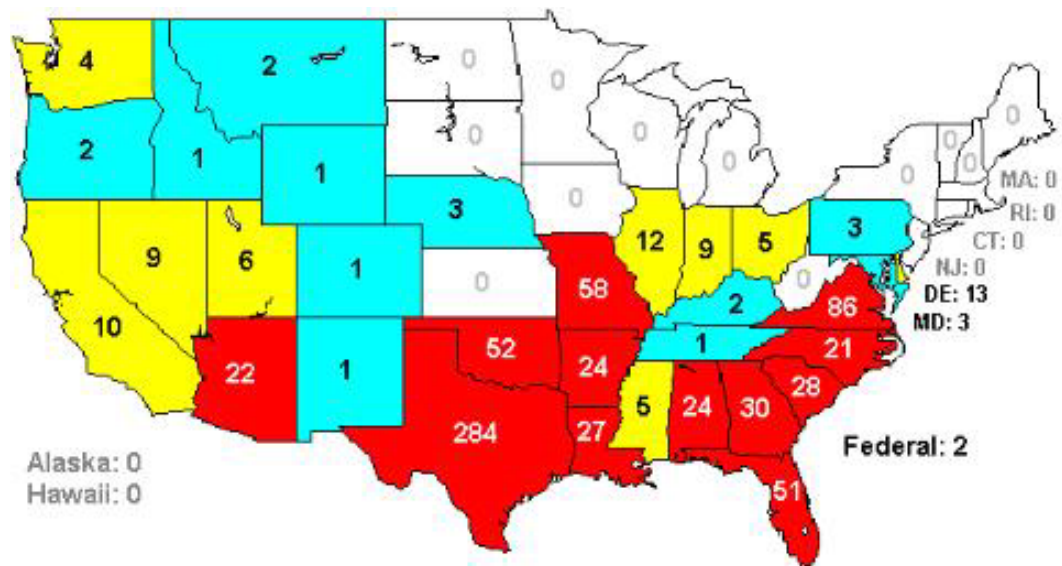
- Mentally ill
- The HIV positive
- Those who have filed suits against the prison system
- Women who have reported rape by guards
- Prisoners who are purely rumored to have gang involvement.
- 85% African-American and Latinos (This is disproportionate to the 65% of African-Americans and Hispanic within the general prison population. These statistics leave open the question of racial segregation within the system.)

In response to recent criticism and lawsuits filed by Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International and the American Civil Liberties Union's National Prison Project, supermaxes have simply closed their doors to outside scrutiny.

In the face of this closed door policy the number of prisoners who are held in supermaxes and SHUs can only be estimated. This number ranges between 25,000 and 100,000 prisoners.<sup>40</sup> The lack of an agreed upon standard for defining exactly what constitutes a supermax or SHU, in addition to official's refusal to open prison records, leaves us with no clear understanding of how many offenders meet the criteria of “the-worst-of-the-worst.”

# Death Penalty

Please see [deathpenaltyinfo.org](http://deathpenaltyinfo.org) for more information



Number of executions by state, from 1977 through September, 2002

# Resource List

## DOCUMENTARIES.

(Documentaries are very important because so many prison 'movies' are not made by people with actual prison experience and therefore don't have much (if any) basis in reality. Watching these documentaries, and/or any others you might get your hands on, is highly recommended.)

### ***Africans in America: America's Journey Through Slavery (1998)***

This documentary series recounts the history of slavery in America. The four episodes — The Terrible Transformation, Revolution, Brotherly Love and Judgment Day — span the years from 1450 to the end of the Civil War. The series explores the paradox at the heart of the American story: that a democracy declared all men equal but enslaved one group to provide prosperity to another. Angela Bassett, William Hurt.

### ***Bowling for Columbine (2002)***

Famed documentarian and left-wing political humorist Michael Moore tackles the issue of America's unique obsession with firearms. Taking off from the Columbine High School massacre in April 1999, Moore visits a Michigan bank that gives new customers a free gun and interviews subjects as diverse as National Rifle Association spokesman Charlton Heston and shock rocker Marilyn Manson.

### ***Gladiator Days: Anatomy of a Prison Murder (2002)***

Intended to be institutions of rehabilitation, American prisons often expose inmates to an even greater degree of violence than they would encounter on the outside. Documentarian Marc Levin (SLAM) studies this phenomenon from behind prison walls, focusing on a specific murder case that took place in a correctional facility and the contributing factors that led to the slaying.

### ***Girlhood (2003)***

Liz Garbus created this powerful documentary film that tells the story of two teenagers, Shanae and Megan, and their dramatic journeys through the juvenile justice system and back out on to the bleak streets of East Baltimore, Maryland. With unprecedented access to the system and to the complex interior lives of the protagonists, the film provides shocking insight into the world of young women struggling just to survive teenhood.

### ***Murder on a Sunday Morning (2001)***

Brenton Butler, a 15-year-old African-American accused of murdering a woman in Florida, was condemned by everyone involved with the case. But Butler's lawyer eventually reopened the investigation and found some crucial evidence to support his client's innocence.

### ***Paradise 2: Revelations (1999)***

Revisits the chilling mystery at the heart of HBO's award-winning hit, *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills*, bringing new insight to the controversial case of a trio of Arkansas teenagers convicted of murdering three 8-year-old boys.

### ***Scared Straight! (1978)***

Peter

Falk hosts this groundbreaking documentary that won an Oscar and eight Emmys in 1978. The film follows 17 juvenile delinquents who are taken inside a maximum-security prison and brought face to face with the "Lifers," a group of hardened convicts who describe their nightmarish prison life in gruesome detail in an attempt to scare the teen lawbreakers into going straight

### ***The Farm: Life Inside Angola Prison***

Excellent documentary exploring life in prison in Louisiana. Winner of Academy Award.

### ***The Weather Underground (2002)***

A sobering documentary about a group of 1960s "committed freedom fighters" known as The Weather Underground. A radical offshoot of the Students for a Democratic Society, the Weathermen rioted and bombed — not to change the American political scene but rather to destroy it. The organization was part of a global trend of revolution that sprang from the belief that not acting against violence is violence.

### ***What I Want My Words to Do to You (2003)***

Female inmates at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for Women try to determine whether redemption is really possible after committing a crime. Proctored by playwright Eve Ensler, the convicts (including two former members of the Weather Underground) perform a series of writing exercises and discussions that could lead to healing. The film culminates in a prison performance of the women's writings by Glenn Close, Marisa Tomei and Rosie Perez.

## Recommended Books

(books are available at PDN's online Bookstore through Amazon. A portion of the proceeds of sales go to PDN. [www.PrisonDharmaNetwork.org](http://www.PrisonDharmaNetwork.org))

### Writings on Prisons and the Prison System, Prison History

#### ***...And the Poor Get PRISON: Economic Bias in American Criminal Justice*, Jeffrey Reiman**

Reiman's suggestions for rehabilitating criminal justice in America offer hope that the system can and will live up to its dual promise – serving justice and protecting the American people from crime.

#### ***Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Angela Davis**

"Angela Davis swings a wrecking ball into the racist and sexist underpinnings of the American prison system...Her arguments are well wrought and restrained, leveling an unflinching critique of how and why more than 2 million Americans are presently behind bars, and the corporations who profit from their suffering – former Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney

#### ***Crime Control as Industry*, Nils Christie**

A prison industrial complex critique by brilliant academic and professor Nils Christie. Christie is a professor of Criminology at the Faculty of Law, University of Oslo.

#### ***Death Watch: A Death Penalty Anthology* by Lane Nelson and Burk Foster.**

Nelson and Foster reveal an in depth overview of the death penalty. How death penalty cases are different in the legal process, selection of offenders, history offender's last words and the questions of ethics regarding the death penalty. Lane Nelson spent 8 years on death row and addresses the issues from first hand experience.

#### ***It's About Time: America's Imprisonment Binge* by James Austin, John Irwin.**

Covers all of the major issues concerning the "Prison Industrial Complex". Who goes to prison, imprisonment of women and children, three strikes policy, super max, doing time and issues of violent offenders versus non-violent offenders

#### ***Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis*, Christian Parenti**

Parenti argues against the increasing militarization of our everyday lives. He believes that prisons today are about everything but individual reform and poses the questions, "at what present and future costs are we enjoying safer streets?"

#### ***The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*, Edited by: Norval Morris and David J. Rothman**

The definitive text on the history of the prison.

#### ***The Perpetual Prisoner Machine: How America Profits from Crime*, Joel Dyer**

America has more than tripled its prison population since 1980. Even though crime rates aren't going up, why is the prison population? Joel Dyer is also one of the better-known critics of the prison system.

#### ***The Race to Incarcerate*, Marc Mauer**

Tells the chilling story of the unprecedented expansion of the American prison population over the last two decades, demonstrating how the dramatic increase of the numbers of prisons and jails has failed to produce any substantial impact on crime.

#### ***Trading Books for Bars*, N. Baun and B. Brooke, Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, 1994.**

Repost on the funding battle between prisons and universities: projected increases in spending on prisons and how they will affect higher education.

#### ***United States of America: Rights for All*, Amnesty International Publications, 1998.**

This report reveals the persistent and widespread pattern of human rights violations in the USA. Focusing on police brutality and physical/sexual abuse of prisoners, treatment of immigrants and how death row operates.

#### ***U.S.: Cold Storage - Supermaximum Security in Indiana*. Human Rights Watch Visiting two supermaximum security prisons in Indiana, the Human Rights Watch examined inhumane treatment prisoners receive.**

#### ***Cages of Steel: The Politics of Imprisonment in the United States*, Edited by Ward Churchill and J. J. Vander Wall**

#### ***Detained: Immigration Laws and the Expanding INS Jail Complex*, Michael Welch**

#### ***Gendered Justice in the American West, Women Prisoners in Men's Penitentiaries***

# Prisoner Writings

## ***ASSATA: An Autobiography*, Assata Shakur**

Black Panther Assata Shakur was long a target of Hoover's campaign to defame, infiltrate, and criminalize Black nationalist organizations and their leaders. She was incarcerated four years prior to her conviction on flimsy evidence in 1977 as an accomplice to murder. Two years after her conviction, Assata Shakur escaped from prison. She was given asylum in Cuba, where she now resides.

## ***The Autobiography of Malcom X, a collaboration between Malcom X and Alex Haley***

If there was ever any one man who articulated the anger, the struggle, and the beliefs of the African Americans in the 1960's, that man was Malcom X.

## ***Behind Bars: Surviving Prison* by Jeffrey Ian Ross and Stephen C. Richards.**

These two criminologists break down how to survive the criminal justice system. It includes how the step by step procedure on what to do after arrest, trial and incarceration. They describe different types of prisons, and how to deal with officers, other inmates and issues of discipline. *Behind Bars* highlights in detail the inner workings of the prison system.

## ***Committing Journalism: The Prison Writings of Red Hog* by Dannie M. Martin and Peter Sussman.**

Convicted bank robber Martin, exposes prison life from the inside. He started out as an editor of the San Francisco Chronicle's "Sunday Punch" section. Martin has been thrown into solitary confinement for writing about such issues as the plight of inmates to AIDS in prisons. *Committing Journalism* is a passionate and funny telling of Martin's prison experience.

## ***Donny, Life of a Lifer: A Prisoner's Odyssey*, Donald Johnson**

"Donald Johnson does a great job bringing the reader face to face with the living experience of a person doing time, in the Pelican Bay Security Housing Unit." Through prose, poetry, and letters, Johnson describes the terror, loneliness, and brutal dehumanization of the people kept at SHU. – Atty. Millard Murphy, Prison Law Office/ Davis

## ***Life in Prison*, Stanley "Tookie" Williams, cofounder of the notorious Crisps gang, AND Nobel Peace Prize nominee**

Williams, a death-row inmate at the infamous San Quentin State Prison, has tried to educate people about gangs and gang violence through his books and his internet education program. His royalties from the sale of *Life in Prison* are donated to the International Street Peace Network, a nonprofit organization.

## ***Live From Death Row*, Mumia Abu-Jamal**

Once a prominent radio reporter, Mumia Abu-Jamal is now in a Pennsylvania prison awaiting his state-sanctioned execution. *Live From Death Row* is a collection of his prison writings – an impassioned yet unflinching account of the brutalities of prison life.

## ***New Jack: Guarding Sing Sing* Ted Conover.**

Conover, a journalist enters New York's notorious maximum security prison as a NY state corrections officer. He shows what it is like to be in prison as a guard. Conover looks at the toll prison takes on both guards and inmates. He manages to capture the underlying sadness of prison life on a whole.

## ***No Safe Haven: Stories of Women in Prison.*, Girshick, Lori B, Northeastern Press, 1999.**

This book examines the life experiences of forty female inmates in Western North Carolina, unearthing the inequalities within a criminal justice system defined by patriarchy. The author argues that prisons are used as a "dumping ground" for women marginalized by a sexist social structure.

## ***The Prison Index: Taking the Pulse of the Crime Control Industry* published by the Western Prison Project and the Prison Policy Initiative.**

This text is a prime resource for prison research and statistics. *The Prison Index* takes a nose dive into every aspect of the prison industrial complex. It contains 611 facts, 17 graphs and charts, containing information about police, public perception of crime, drugs, murder, juveniles, prison economy, race and global comparisons. It is a must have for anyone researching the prison industrial complex.

## ***Prison Writings: My Life as a Sundance*, Leonard Peltier**

Peltier emerged as a Native American leader in the 1960's, was arrested in 1976 in Canada and extradited. He has been in prison ever since and is now confined at Leavenworth. *Prison Writings: My Life as a Sundance* is his first book.

## ***Prison Writings in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America*, edited by H. Bruce Franklin**

An anthology of literature created by American convicts in the last hundred years. Includes writings by Mumia, Jack London, Robert Lowell, Malcom X, Assata Shakur, Donald Lowrie, Patricia McConnel and many more.

## ***We Are Our Own Liberators – selected prison writings of Jalil Muntaqim***

Former member of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, Jalil Muntaqim is one of the world's longest held political prisoners. Imprisoned since 1971 – this collection spans 31 years of his imprisonment.

## Mental Health & Prisons

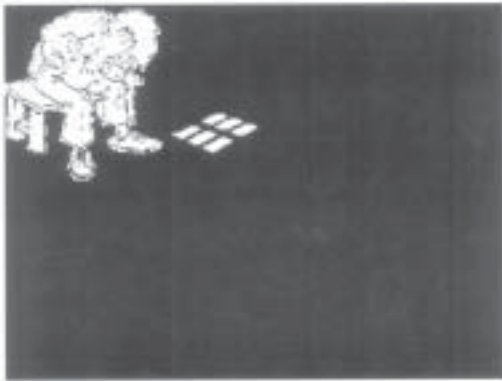
***Prison Madness: The Mental Health Crisis Behind Bars and What We Must Do About It*, Toch, Hans, and Terry Allen Kupers, Jossey-Bass, 1999.** A shocking expose and a cry for specific reforms to prevent the violent and inhumane treatment of mentally ill prisoners

***Prison Masculinities*, Edited by Don Sabo, Terry A. Kupers, and Willie London**

A collection of essays, poems and even a performance piece that analyze such issues as the historical roots and contemporary trends of prison masculinities; the social construction of these masculine roles; sexualities, sexual violence, and intimacy in prison; men's health in prisons; and reforming prison masculinities

***Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*** by James Gilligan.

Gilligan makes the argument that violence should be addressed as a problem of public health and preventative medicine rather than from the standpoint of biological or moral origins. As a prison psychiatrist Gilligan dissects the motives of men who commit horrifying crimes and underlines the role that shame plays in the process.



***Original prisoner's artwork***<sup>42</sup>

## Women in Prison

***Abuse of Women in Custody: Sexual Misconduct and Shackling of Pregnant Women*, Amnesty International, 2001.**

This report is a follow up to Not Part of My Sentence, with a specific focus on the sexual misconduct of guards and the mistreatment of pregnant women in custody.

***All Too Familiar: Sexual Abuse of Women in U.S. State Prisons***. Human rights Watch.

1997 This report contains the findings of studies conducted by the Human Rights Watch in U.S. Prisons from 1994 – 1996, about the sexual abuse of inmates. It advocates for specific policies to eradicate sexual abuse and improve prison conditions.

***"Not Part of My Sentence"- Violations of the Human Rights of Women in Custody***. Amnesty International, 1999. This report is a direct presentation of statistics based on interviews with prisoners in California and outlines the human rights abuses experienced by incarcerated women in the United States. It profiles the female prison population, illuminating the discriminatory practices of the criminal justice system.

# Prison Films (and reviews)

## ***American Me (1992)***

A life of violence is traced from the Zoot Suit riots of the 1940s to the bloody streets of East Los Angeles in the 1990s. Three homeboys, Santana, Mundo and JD, born in a crucible of poverty, create the capitalist dream in their own way as powerful gang members. Jailed in their youth, they still control the streets from the cellblock. But after his release, Santana wavers between his old lifestyle and a fresh beginning with a new love.

## ***Animal Factory (2000)***

After receiving a sentence for drug trafficking, Ron Decker must learn to cope with life on the inside. Luckily, he befriends Earl, an ex-gang leader who protects Ron and shows him the ways of prison life.

## ***Dead Man Walking (1995)***

Scheduled to be put to death for brutally slaying two teens, Matthew Poncet seeks the aid of activist nun Helen Prejean, a death-penalty opponent. She becomes Matthew's spiritual adviser and tries to halt the execution. Academy Award winner.

## ***The Hurricane (1999)***

Denzel Washington lands a knockout punch as Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, who — at the zenith of his boxing career — finds himself wrongly convicted of a triple New Jersey homicide and sentenced to three life terms. While in prison, Carter pens his autobiography, which inspires Brooklyn teen Lesra Martin and a trio of Canadian advocates to help prove Carter's innocence.

## ***Levity (2003)***

Haunted by a newspaper clipping picturing the teenager he killed in a botched robbery 22 years earlier, incarcerated felon Manuel is surprised when he's released from prison after serving 19 years. Thrust back into society, Jordan seeks redemption from a minister and his victim's sister.

## ***Monster's Ball (2001)***

Death row in the Louisiana State Penitentiary is the hothouse backdrop for this drama about racist prison guard Billy Bob Thornton, who falls in love with the wife of a condemned man he helped execute.

## ***Prison Song (2001)***

The American dream is at odds with the justice system in this story about the deterioration of the soul of one inner-city African-American male. Raised primarily in group homes, Elijah lifts himself up through art and education — but when a full college scholarship is revoked, frustration and anger cause him to accidentally kill another teen. Convicted and jailed, Elijah once again attempts to free his broken spirit through art.

## ***Return to Paradise (1998)***

Americans Lewis Sheriff and Tony spend a carefree summer together on the beaches of Malaysia. Two years

later, a lawyer tells Sheriff and Tony that Lewis has been sentenced to death for drug trafficking. If both go back to claim their share of the drugs, each will go to prison for three years; if only one goes, he'll be jailed for six years. If both refuse, Lewis will die.

## ***Slam (1998)***

This is a "coming to life," story about a street pharmacist/ rapper who finds salvation in his rhymes. Ray Joshua gets sucked into the criminal justice system, but finds truth in himself and his craft to rise above his circumstances. Sundance Film Festival Award Winner.

## Prison Websites

[www.witness.org](http://www.witness.org)

[www.prisonactivist.org](http://www.prisonactivist.org): Comprehensive activist resource site

[www.sentencingproject.org](http://www.sentencingproject.org): Prison statistics

[www.spr.org](http://www.spr.org): Stop prison rape

[www.criticalresistance.org](http://www.criticalresistance.org): Angela Davis' org website

[www.albany.edu/sourcebook/](http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook/): Bureau of Justice Statistics Sourcebook

[www.hrw.org/reports/1999/redonion/](http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/redonion/): Human Rights Watch Report

[www.prisonsucks.com](http://www.prisonsucks.com): comprehensive prison website

[www.salon.com/special/1998/prison/](http://www.salon.com/special/1998/prison/): articles

[www.supermaxed.com](http://www.supermaxed.com) Site dedicated to supermaxes



# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://prisonsucks.org> as of April 18, 2004
- <sup>2</sup> [http://www.motherjones.com/news/special\\_reports/prisons/atlas.html](http://www.motherjones.com/news/special_reports/prisons/atlas.html)
- <sup>3</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics, Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, 1996.
- <sup>4</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics, Report on National Prison Population, 1998.
- <sup>5</sup> Marc Mauer, American Behind Bars: U.S. and International Use of Incarceration, 1995.
- <sup>6</sup> <http://www.unix.oit.umass.edu>
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> The famous “Made in the USA” label can include clothing made by prisoner labor.
- <sup>10</sup> <http://prisonactivist.org>
- <sup>11</sup> Bernstein, N. “When the Jailhouse is Far From Home”, <http://dir.salon.com/mwt/feature/2000/03/29/jailed/index.html?pn+2>, March 29, 2000
- <sup>12</sup> all information for this section can be found at <http://www.prisonsucks.com/research.shtml#juveniles>
- <sup>13</sup> Women in Prison Project: Correctional Association of New York, found at website [http://www.correctionalassociation.com/images/Fact\\_Sheets\\_2002.pdf](http://www.correctionalassociation.com/images/Fact_Sheets_2002.pdf)
- <sup>14</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Special Report: Women Offenders* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999, revised 2000).
- <sup>15</sup> Women in Prison Project: Correctional Association of New York
- <sup>16</sup> [http://www.womenprisoners.org/resources/critical\\_statistics.html](http://www.womenprisoners.org/resources/critical_statistics.html)
- <sup>17</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics: *Special Report: Incarcerated Parents and Their Children* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice Statistics, 2002), p.1
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., 4
- <sup>20</sup> Women in Prison Project: Correctional Association of New York
- <sup>21</sup> Women in Prison Project: Correctional Association of New York
- <sup>22</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Special Report: Women Offenders*
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid
- <sup>24</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reports 1985 (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1986) and Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1997 Uniform Crime Report (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1998).
- <sup>25</sup> Dickerson, D. *Locked Out By the System*, Mother Jones Magazine, March/April 2004 (found at [http://www.motherjones.com/arts/books/2004/03/02\\_101.html](http://www.motherjones.com/arts/books/2004/03/02_101.html))
- <sup>26</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Incarcerated Parents and Their Children* (Washington DC: US Department of Justice, August 2000) and Amnesty International, “Not Part of My Sentence: Violations of the Human Rights of women in Custody” (Washington DC: Amnesty International, March 1999).
- <sup>27</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Special Report: Women in Prisons, US Department of Justice, March 1990*.
- <sup>28</sup> “Patterns of Criminal Conviction and Incarceration Among Mothers of Children in Foster Care in New York”, Vera Institute of Justice and Administration for Children’s Services, December 2003, p. 2
- <sup>29</sup> <http://www.prisoncentral.org/Prisoncentral?Supermax?Photos?cell.jpg>
- <sup>30</sup> Angela Davis. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003) p. 49 and Borger, A., *America’s most unwanted turn to the law*, *The Guardian*, January 12, 2002 (can be accessed at: <http://www.gaurdian.co.uk/bush/story/o.7369,631575.00.html>)
- <sup>31</sup> <http://www.gaurdian.co.uk/bush/story/o.7369,631575.00.html>, <http://www.tgorski.com/courses/PICS%20-%20Post%20Incarceration%20Syndrome/PICS%20Reading%20Assignment%2002%20-%20Colorado's%20ADX%20Supermax%20Prison%2010831.htm>