There is so much being said about people who are incarcerated, and you don't hear enough from them.
Being in Prison

Working in a Prison, I Worry About Bringing Coronavirus COVID-19?

Fight Coronavirus Supporting Black Lives Matter Floyd?


A Letter from Lawrence

Hello friends. Since my last letter to you, the world has been shaken in the wake of George Floyd’s on-camera killing by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. All shades of people have taken to the streets demanding that the book, the bookshelf and the whole library be thrown at Chauvin and the other three former officers involved in Floyd’s killing—Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao. They are calling for an end to police brutality and for police officers who kill to receive the justice on par with the kind you and I received from the judicial system. Still, I wonder how much time, if any, they will serve. Will they be held accountable for their part in the fatal choking of Floyd, a choking that lasted eight minutes and 46 seconds as he said he couldn’t breathe and called out for his late mother?

In Issue One, I wrote about serving my 27-year sentence and the crucial value of personal accountability. I don’t believe that value should be exclusive to people doing time. People who work in and around the criminal justice system should also answer for their actions.

Law enforcement accountability is at the center of “Which States Are Taking on Police Reform After George Floyd?” on page 4. In the same vein, on page 12, you’ll also see how petitioners in North Carolina are moving the courts to acknowledge unfairness in “New Hope for People Who Claim Racism Tainted Their Death Sentence.”

Since it’s impossible to forget COVID-19, on page 7 you’ll find “Jails Turn to UVC Robots to Fight Coronavirus.” I’m hoping that one will sate the appetite of all you techies in there.

In “Shining a Light on Life Behind Bars,” a traveling exhibit that projects writings from incarcerated people around the world in places like the United Kingdom, Uganda, Argentina and Brazil. Their message reminds me of a recent letter I was CC’d on from a group of self-described lifers and long-termers to their state’s governor. It reads:

“Jails are the least likely to be forgiven? In most cases, inmates serving decades behind bars have relatively good disciplinary records, have completed all our required programs, earned labor department certificates, and even college diplomas … [yet] pleas for release go unnoticed even at the threat of dying from this horrible virus plaguing our nation. How are we to learn forgiveness, if we are the least likely to be forgiven?”

As a former long-timer myself, I hear them. And through the articles within, I hope you feel heard as well.

Lawrence Bartley

Lawrence Bartley is the Director of News Inside. He served a 27 year-to-life sentence and was released on parole in May 2018.

Letters to the Director

I encourage everyone here to heed your message that’s aired on SQ CCTV as I truly wish we could come together for each other in these times of need. Everyone feels like we are being punished for being sick. We only ask to be treated like patients.

J. Haines, CA

This will make five weeks that we have been locked down over the coronavirus. A lot of [people] have tested positive for it. At first, we would take a 10-minute shower one day and the next day 20-minute phone calls. Now we are locked down 24/7. No showers or phone calls. It’s been 11 days since I have been able to take a shower. No end in sight. A long time for me without exercise or sunshine. So since we are going to be locked down for a long time, I was hoping you can send me some more stuff to read from The Marshall Project.

R. Wynn, CA

I found your magazine lying around so I picked it up and started reading. The information in your magazine has given me hope that society will someday come to an open mind of a true second chance. It is my belief that as an adult having to commit a crime has evolved to doing this in a way that is not the same. It is my belief that as an adult having served years inside prison our propensity to commit a crime has evolved to doing what is right.

McNric, FL

I am writing to request to be a part of your project & movement. There are numerous women who do not have the direction or support to know that there are options & deadlines that need to be met to fight for justice. When those deadlines are not met, individuals get lost in the system. I plan to bring awareness to those issues upon my release.

JK. Horne, MD
By WEIHUA LI and HUMERA LODHI

Eighteen days after George Floyd was killed by a Minneapolis police officer, the Minnesota state legislature introduced 48 bills in a special session on law enforcement. On the same day, Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds signed a new bill restricting police chokeholds, and New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has signed a series of police reform laws into law. LEFT, POOL PHOTO BY CHARLIE NEIBERGALL; RIGHT, LEV RADIN/SIPA USA, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kate Brown of Oregon, have already announced they will call legislatures back into session to address police accountability. "Widgy said the speed at which some of the reform bills are making their way through the chambers is particularly noteworthy. Iowa’s police reform bill passed through the state’s Republican-controlled legislature with unanimous support in just one day and the governor signed it the next. It gives the state attorney general power to prosecute police officers, bans chokeholds and restricts police departments from hiring officers with records of misconduct. Iowa state Rep. Ras Smith, one of the main architects of the new reforms, said it took less than two weeks to craft the legislation. "We don’t get to pick the moment in which we have all the allies who can unite and that we can get something done," Smith said. "This was one of those opportunities in which we could really gain ground by finding the commonality and really addressing something that went beyond politics. But also that also means that we have to be mindful of knowing that they may not feel that way tomorrow. It’s still yet to be seen—this is the first step, the verdict is still out." Some states have not passed legislation, and there are a variety of roadblocks facing legislators. On June 3, Kansas state Rep. Rui Xu proposed a resolution condemning police brutality, racism and use of excessive and militarized force, but it died quickly the next day, when the legislature adjourned its special session. Xu said he never truly expected to get his criminal justice bill passed in the state’s Republican-led House and Senate. "I just wanted to show, at the very least, the people of color in Kansas there are legislative people in power who wanted to do something about this. A resolution doesn’t have the force of law, but we do have ideas," Xu said. Daniel Feldman, a professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, said he is cautiously optimistic that the rush of legislation suggests change will continue to come, even after the daily protests ebb. "The unjustified killing of Black citizens has little by little changed people’s perceptions of the justice system. This change is in large part due to the nationwide protests that have occurred. The protests have brought attention to systemic racism and police brutality, and have led to calls for reform at the local and national levels. However, the effectiveness of these protests is still unclear."

**New Police Bills by State (As of June 15)**

In the three weeks after the death of George Floyd, lawmakers from more than a dozen states have introduced, amended or passed bills that address policing, while nearly half of the nation’s state legislatures were not in session. Three states have passed police reform bills.

**By ABBIE VANSICKLE**

Questioning a potential juror named Crishala Reed, the prosecutor homed in on a sentence from Reed’s questionnaire. "I support Black Lives Matter," she had written. "You Can Get Kicked Out of a Jury Pool for Supporting Black Lives Matter But is it legal? A California appeals court is going to decide."

The questioning of Reed’s support for Black Lives Matter will be considered by a California appeals court in the coming months. Lawyers for the defendants in the...
I wanted to cry, but I held it, I didn’t want to look weak. I would never want my kids to go and do that.

Jails Turn to UVC Robots to Fight Coronavirus

Some sheriffs are buying ultraviolet light machines traditionally used by hospitals.

By ALYSSA SANTO

At the Dane County Jail in Madison, Wisconsin, robots that look like fancy space heaters have rolled from room to room for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, since the end of March. The devices emit high-intensity ultraviolet light, a technology that can destroy viruses including swine flu and SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome).

Sheriff Dave Mahoney bought the pair of UVC emitters, which cost about $80,000, shortly after the coronavirus pandemic hit, and was reimbursed through a federal FEMA grant the county received for COVID-19 expenses.

Now, the robots target everything from solitary cells to eating utensils. Mahoney says he’s had 40 cases at the jail so far after testing the roughly 450 county employees who work there, a level of infection that he believes would be higher if not for the robots.

“Nothing is as nasty as the stuff in the jail,” Mahoney said. “Once you clean a room, it’s only as good as the next person who comes in. That’s why we do it around the clock.”

The Marion County Jail in Indianapolis used bleach as a disinfectant before the pandemic, said Col. James Martin. But it wasn’t always possible for prisoners to leave it on surfaces, such as walls, long enough to work. Now, Martin said, a combination of chemical disinfection, officers run the UVC machines, which the county bought at the end of April.

“We were fighting hard water, dirt and grime,” he said, “but now we’re fighting something totally different.”

Martin said he and others at the jail first learned about UVC from Skytron, a Michigan-based company that manufactures UVC disinfection systems and other equipment for major hospitals, including the Cleveland Clinic.

Last year Skytron began to...
Pursue a foothold in the prison and jail market, attending conferences and supplying machines to jails for free demos, said Larry Perez, his company’s vice president. “I began to think, why aren’t we sharing this with other places in our community?” Perez said. “One of the dirtiest places you’ll step foot in is a jail.”

That strategy has paid off, Perez said. Skytron’s UVC sales to jails more than quadrupled in April, going from 11 jails to a total of 48. Perez said several state prisons have also ordered units, including a machine that sprays an atomized disinfectant mist, which has been adopted by prisons in Connecticut and North Carolina, and a humidifier that a promoter said was being used to disinfect a UVC robot. It is seeking reimbursement through a Bureau of Justice Assistance federal grant, Sheriff Michelle LaJoye-Young said.

As of June 13, the 1,400-bed jail had two positive cases of COVID-19, though Michigan has one of the highest positivity rates in the country—and thousands of incarcerated students are no exception. On the outside, professors are conducting classes over video conferencing and graduations will be live-streamed online. But in prison, where the majority of incarcerated people are cut off from the Internet, the options for distance learning are limited, leaving college administrators scrambling to figure out how to finish the semester from beyond the prison walls. Many have found workarounds now that they can no longer enter the prisons. But they fear the coronavirus could undermine a critical component of college in prison: teaching in person.

Many educators found workarounds now that they can no longer enter the prisons. But they fear the coronavirus could undermine a critical component of college in prison: teaching in person.
In some state prisons, earning a college degree while behind bars could result in a sentence reduction through “good time” credit programs.

on-to-College Pipeline program at John Jay’s Institute for Justice and Opportunity, which enrolls 52 men. At first, classes continued through the mail. Professors sent the remaining course materials directly to the prison, and students completed their work on their own. The program designated several “clerks” who collected coursework and submitted it to the deputy warden. The warden then mailed the completed work to the professors, who graded it and returned it to the students.

Shortly after she reconfigured the semester, Jensen received some alarming news from the Department of Education: correspondence learning is not approved for programs that receive funding through the Second Chance Pell Program, which enrolls nearly 10,000 incarcerated students across the country. Any Second Chance sites wrapping up the semester through the mail would have to pause their classes or return the grant money.

“We heard from numerous postsecondary institutions participating in the Second Chance Pell Experiment that prisoners’ responses to COVID-19 have created significant challenges for the continuation of instruction at prisons,” the department wrote in a statement issuing guidance to Second Chance programs. The department declined to waive the restriction on correspondence classes, and has offered several alternatives for distance learning, including teaching over email or on conference calls. They believe these methods allow for more “regular and substantive” interaction between teachers and students, as outlined in the grant requirements, than simply corresponding by mail.

Now, Jensen is working with New York’s Department of Corrections and Community Supervision to use the prison’s computer equipment, normally used for parole hearings. Jensen hopes they’ll be able to “approximate the Zoom experience” allowing professors to directly engage with their students throughout the week.

A spokesperson for the department said the program is working with college partners to ensure our student population is able to complete required coursework and will continue working to ensure students are able to do so in the future.” The statement added that several facilities are “developing plans for distance learning through telephone and video conferencing.”

Research shows that earning a degree in prison decreases recidivism and boosts incarcerated peoples’ career prospects once they are released. A 2013 study by the RAND Corporation found that every dollar spent on prison education saves $4 to $5 dollars on the overall cost of incarceration in the first three years after someone is released from prison.

It’s not clear just how many incarcerated people are enrolled in college classes. Enrollments plunged after the 1994 crime bill eliminated Pell grants for incarcerated students. Prior to the 1994 ban, there were roughly 772 college prison programs in over 1,200 prisons nationwide, according to a 2017 report by the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative public policy organization. By 1997, the institute estimates, only a handful of college programs in prison remained.

But over the past several years, with new programs the Obama administration started and President Trump continued, college attendance in prison is on the rise. In 2015, the Department of Education piloted the Second Chance Pell Program, an experimental initiative to provide Pell grants to incarcerated students. The program, now in its third year, has provided college classes to roughly 17,000 incarcerated people. On April 24, the DOE announced 67 new Second Chance sites, doubling the number of Pell-funded college prison programs.

Members of Congress have also taken interest in higher education in prison. In April 2019, Sen. Brian Schatz, a Democrat from Hawaii, introduced legislation to restore Pell grants for incarcerated students. The bill received bipartisan support in both the House and Senate before stalling in committee.

Finding their way back into prison classrooms, says Max Kenner, director of Bard Prison Initiative in New York, “is a heartbreakingly difficult equation,” says Max Kenner, director of Bard Pris- on Institute of Justice. “Tensions are high,” Delaney said. “Being able to give people some­thing familiar, and engaging can really help to make sure all the resour­ces are focused on fighting coronavirus.”

Many college administrators say corrections officials have bent over backwards to make sure college classes continue, but without laptops, tablets or an easy way to securely access the Internet, many college programs have had to wait out their semesters on pause. With classes on hold, some incarcerated students won’t be eligible for important incentives. In some state prisons, earning a college degree while behind bars could result in a sentence reduction through “good time” credit programs. In New York, for example, credit students could have six months shaved off their time for completing designated programming, provided they also have a clean disciplinary record.

For incarcerated students at Great Meadow, an isolated prison several hours outside of New York City, the disrupted semester means they’ll have to wait even longer before they’re eligible to transfer to facilities closer to home. Students are placed on an educational hold while enrolled in college pro­grams, so they cannot be transferred to other facilities while they complete their degrees. At San Quentin Prison in California, college classes are suspended until volunteers from the Prison University Project can return to teaching in person. It was a choice between keeping the students on track to finish the semester as planned or ensuring they received a high quality education, said Jody Lewen, the project’s executive director. In-person teaching is essential because students, who overwhelmingly come from marginalized communities, benefit from relationships with their peers and professors.

“It’s particularly important for students who don’t have lots of rela­tionships to a wide range of economic and social networks,” Lewen said. “The professors are people who get to know you and give you guidance and advice.”

As coronavirus spread through­out New York in early March, Jessica Jensen decided it was no longer safe to hold classes at Otisville Correctional Facility. Jensen directs the Prison-
New Hope for People Who Claim Racism Tainted Their Death Sentence

The North Carolina state Supreme Court has upheld the controversial Racial Justice Act, which opponents repealed in 2013

By JOSEPH NEFF and BETH SCHWARTZAPFEL

When Andrew Ramseur walked into the Iredell County, North Carolina, courtroom for his murder trial in 2010, the rows behind the defense table were cordoned off with police tape. His family, who are Black, were “forced to sit in the proverbial ‘back of the bus,’” according to court papers, while the victims’ White family was seated in front, directly behind the prosecution table. During jury selection, prosecutors removed every Black potential juror. In a county that is 12 percent African-American, the 25-year-old was convicted and sentenced to death by an all-White jury.

The North Carolina Supreme Court last week found that Ramseur and more than 100 others were entitled to a hearing to examine whether racism played a role in their being sentenced to death. His case centers around the Racial Justice Act, a 2009 state law that mandated changing a death sentence to life without parole if a person could prove that race was a “significant factor” in their case. The law—the first of its kind anywhere in the country—specifically said that defendants like Ramseur can use statistics from the state or local level to help make their case.

“This could and should be a national model,” said Gretchen Engel, director of the Center for Death Penalty Litigation in Durham, North Carolina.

Data is an especially powerful tool, the justices wrote in last week’s ruling, when it comes to implicit bias: when people act on the basis of prejudices they don’t know or won’t admit holding. “Rarely, particularly in today’s day, do people just outright say, ‘I am doing this because of the color of your skin.’” State Sen. Doug Berger said in the debate leading up to the passage of the law. Statistics reveal the system’s biases even when no one person or single action appears prejudiced.

Ramseur and others submitted data showing that prosecutors in North Carolina’s death penalty trials were more than twice as likely to remove Black potential jurors as White ones. This held true even when researchers accounted for a range of potential confounding factors, such as the higher likelihood that Black people feel ambivalent about the death penalty. Research has also found that statewide, murders with White victims were more than twice as likely to end with a death sentence as murders of Black victims, even when other factors were similar.

The Supreme Court’s decision comes amid a renewed national focus on racial discrimination in the criminal justice system, with huge protests in all 50 states following the death of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis police.

In reaction to the protests and just days before the release of the Ramseur decision, the chief justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court delivered a speech making an argument seldom, if ever, heard from the leader of a state court system: Justice in America is racist.

“Too many people believe that there are two kinds of justice,” said Chief Justice Cheri Beasley. “The data also overwhelmingly bears out the truth of those lived experiences. In our courts, African-Americans are more harshly treated, more severely punished and more likely to be presumed guilty.”

The North Carolina law was inspired by a 1987 U.S. Supreme Court case known as McCleskey v. Kemp, which used statistics to argue that Georgia’s death penalty was racially discriminatory. Warren McCleskey, a Black man sentenced to death, submitted evidence that Georgia murder defendants with White victims were more than four times as likely to be sentenced to death as were defendants with Black victims. The Supreme Court ruled against him, saying that numbers alone were not enough for judges to overturn the sentence. But the ruling encouraged state legislatures to craft their own laws relying on statistical evidence. North Carolina’s racial justice law did exactly that, and a judge eventually ordered three people off death row.

Prosecutors and other opponents turned to politics and a campaign of fear-mongering to tank the law. After Republicans took over the legislature and governor’s mansion in 2013, they repealed it. In last Friday’s ruling, the state Supreme Court ruled the repeal to be an after-the-fact increase in punishment that violated the state constitution. People who filed claims before the repeal can now file them.

That’s about 135 of the 143 people on death row, according to Peg Dorer, executive director of the North Carolina Conference of District Attorneys, which opposed the Racial Justice Act. Many hearings will amount to a full-blown trial, Dorer said, with a judge reviewing voluminous evidence and hearing testimony from expert witnesses.

“It will be a resource suck,” Dorer said.

More than 60 percent of the people on death row were convicted at least 20 years ago. Given the turnover among district attorneys and the decrease in death penalty cases, some prosecutors may be willing to forgo a hearing and agree to a life without parole sentence, the only relief available under the law.

While local prosecutors will have some involvement, Dorer said the attorney general’s office, which argued against the law in the state Supreme Court, will lead the opposition to claims for relief by death row prisoners. A spokeswoman for Attorney General Josh Stein said the office was reviewing the decision to see how to proceed.

North Carolina has a history of criminal justice reform. In 2004 the Tar Heel state opened all prosecution files to defendants in felony cases, known as open file discovery. The state established the nation’s first independent panel for investigating claims of wrongful conviction.
These Political Candidates Are Embracing Their Criminal Records

A group of 2020 hopefuls say their first hand experience with the justice system makes them best suited to fix it.

By CHRISTIE THOMPSON

One of the first things Tarra Simmons tells voters when asking for their support isn’t the prestigious fellowships she’s won or the legislation she’s helped write. It’s about the years she spent behind bars.

It’s a story Simmons, a candidate for state representative in Kitsap County, Washington, has shared at many campaign events, which these days are entirely online: How she lost her car, her house, her nursing license, her voting rights. How after she came home in 2013, most of her minimum-wage paycheck from Burger King were taken to pay the $7,600 she owed in court fees. How she managed to climb out of that life, get a law degree and begin a civil rights nonprofit. And how all of it made her realize that only those who have lived through the system can fully understand how to fix it.

“I went to prison. It’s not something I’m proud of, but I understand how people end up there,” Simmons said at a May campaign fundraiser via Zoom, her digital background set to a generic corporate lobby. “Our criminal justice system is just a Band-Aid; I want to prevent incarceration from happening to begin with.”

Simmons is one of a new crop of political candidates in 2020 for whom being formerly incarcerated isn’t a disqualifier or a political liability. It’s an identity—one they say is vital to representing in state capitals and the hallways of Congress, as lawmakers try to overhaul a system that spends billions to lock up mostly Black and brown people.

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There has been a dramatic shift in the criminal justice conversation in recent years. A majority of voters from both parties now say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports criminal justice reform. And the issue of whether people leaving—or still in—prison can vote received unprecedented attention in the Democratic primary race. But voters rarely hear from candidates who have firsthand experience with the justice system. Several formerly incarcerated candidates stressed that their platforms weren’t solely about prison reform, especially amid catastrophic public health and economic crises. “I had to become the system. “One-third of all Americans have some kind of criminal record. Almost every family has been touched by it.”

There has been a dramatic shift in the criminal justice conversation in recent years. A majority of voters from both parties now say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports criminal justice reform. And the issue of whether people leaving—or still in—prison can vote received unprecedented attention in the Democratic primary race. But voters rarely hear from candidates who have firsthand experience with the justice system. Several formerly incarcerated candidates stressed that their platforms weren’t solely about prison reform, especially amid catastrophic public health and economic crises. “I had to become more of an intersectional candidate, to respond to what my community needs,” said Simmons, who at recent meetings talked about everything from how political districts are drawn to protecting habitats for salmon.

But she hopes her message of decarceration is more timely than ever. “We’re going to have more momentum, especially if we can ground it in a health and economic argument … incarceration costs us a lot of money.”

Making it into the room where it happens will still not be easy. Fundraising for first-time candidates is a particular challenge with door-knocking on hold and in-person events cancelled because of the pandemic. And, like many other parts of civic life for those with felony convictions, serving in government is
restricted by thousands of state-level laws. Multiple states—such as Illinois, Alabama, and Delaware—ban people with criminal convictions from holding most public offices. Others, like West Virginia, outlaw it after certain crimes, like bribery, or bar people for years after conviction. “It’s really disproportionate keep people of color, who are more likely to be sent to prison, out of public office,” Mr. Randall said.

If someone is legally able to run, the stigma of incarceration can still be a deterrent. Even Simmons—who was convicted of a drug offense in a liberal state—has faced significant setbacks. Even Simmons—who was convicted of a drug offense in a liberal state—has faced significant barriers for people coming home from prison and involving them in policy-making. The group has been pushing for legislation to automatically restore voting rights for people leaving prison and to expunge certain criminal records.

Many supporters who attend Simmons’ campaign events carry the invisible burdens of the criminal justice system, and know intimately the innumerable, Byzantine obstacles it creates. “I couldn’t get life insurance because I have a history of a traveler’s license, her car repossessed. People only associate me with my incarceration history, not the tremendous amount of violence I’ve survived,” Simmons said. “I had a really hard time trusting people. Meeting these volunteers made me believe I could heal.”

After her release in 2013, Simmons enrolled at Seattle University School of Law. She graduated with honors and won a prestigious Skadden Fellowship for recent grads working in public interest law. Gov. Jay Inslee appointed her to lead a new statewide reentry council. But her own criminal history would yet again get in the way. The character and fitness board of the Washington State Bar Association wouldn’t let her take the exam required to be a licensed lawyer, claiming that she minimized her drug abuse in her application. “Some of the attitudes she expressed in the record and at the hearing signal that her acquired fame has nurtured not integrity and honesty, but a sense of entitlement to privileges and recognition beyond the reach of others,” board members wrote. Simmons appealed the decision to the state’s highest court. “That’s not true,” she said

Keeda Haynes noted her “personal experience with the racist criminal justice system” in a recent mailer. The Washington state Supreme Court has been pushing for legislation to automatically restore voting rights for people leaving prison and involving them in policy-making. The group has been pushing for legislation to automatically restore voting rights for people leaving prison and to expunge certain criminal records.

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A felony curtails involvement in civic life, too. Keeda Haynes, a former public defender who served nearly four years in federal prison in 2006, is running for Congress in Nashville, Tennessee. But she could not run for local office, even as a public defender. When the community college told him they had to run a background check, “It was like I was being policed and patted down all over again. I was traumatising,” he said.

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people were receiving sentences and the virus, court closures meant fewer ers from county jails to avoid importing prisons stopped accepting new prison-counts have dropped largely because Marshall Project and AP. Instead, head data from eight states compiled by The and to manage the spread of the virus of Justice.

In all of 2019, according to a report on to 22 percent in Connecticut. By com-
drops range from 2 percent in Virginia and mid-June, California’s prison popu-
lation dropped by more than 7,000, less than half of which can be attributed to an earlier decision by the state to let sentenced individuals into prisons. By

As in Pennsylvania, data from states such as North Carolina, Illinois and New Jersey, coronavirus releases only account for less than one-third of the decrease in prison population, which suggests something else is driving the drop. According to Martin Horn, professor emeritus at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and a former convener for sentencing reform, said that while the pris-
on population decreases are a step in the right direction, she is disappointed by the number. Even if the COVID-19 release policies work as intended, they might not lower the prison population enough because states often exclude violent offenders from such releases, Ghandnoosh said.

“Even though we are sending too many people home and keeping them there too long, and even though research shows people who are older have the highest risk from COVID-19 and have the highest chance of recidivism, we are still not letting them out,” Ghandnoosh said.

Additional reporting by Cary As-
pin, Texas Standard; Kevin Larkin, The BL; Andrew R. Caldoner, Maurice Cham-
man, Andrew DeMillo, Eli Hager, Jamilesartin, the best advice I can give you—as

Coronavirus

Not Just Like Being in Prison

Beloved pet. (Or if not, you've got wi-fi!) But I have a really special bond with my trusted pet. (Or if not, you've got wi-fi!)

Looking around the room you are in. What do you see? I bet all kinds of well-
coming things that speak of safety and comfort. Things like a favorite chair, or painting, or maybe some family heir-
looms that’s been passed down from an elderly loved one.

Take comfort in these things. They are important. I know, because as the years drag on for me here behind bars, those are the things I pine for the most.

The things I most look forward to seeing when I finally go home, whatever the world may be like when I get there. And for some reason if you still find yourself getting stir-cra

No, Your Coronavirus Quarantine Is Not Just Like Being in Prison

“I’d give anything to trade places with you right now.”

By JERRY METCALF

For those of you reading this who feel trapped or are getting stir-crazy because of your coronavirus-induced confine-
ment, the best advice I can give you—as someone used to suffering in long-term confinement—is to take a pause, inhale a few deep breaths, then look around at all the things you have to be grateful for.

That’s what I’ve done each and every day for the past 25 years. Every morning when I awaken in my 6-by-

foot cell, I peer out my small window and thank the universe for such a view. It’s not much, mostly razor wire and uniform-clad convicts. But out past all those layers of fencing rests a few acres of deep forest, teeming with life. I’ve found that during trying times like these, the simplest things matter the most. Sure, you’re trapped inside your home or apartment, but all’s not lost. Hopefully you have family, friends or loved ones with you, or maybe a trusted pet. (Or if not, you’ve got wi-fi!)

I have my trusted canine, Toot-
sie, a 15-month-old black lab, whom I am currently training to be a service dog for Paws With a Cause. But I have no family members or loved ones, only a cellmate who snores like a freight train and often whines insincerely about how he’d rather be dead than in prison.

You also have your own bathroom and kitchen, which, I hope, given your access to the world of commercial sanitizing products, are corona-free. I have none of these spaces. I share a bathroom with 56 other convicts. In my cell I have a narrow, lumpy mattress and a middle-school-sized desk that I cram myself into while writing, as I am now as I type this.

And for some reason if you still find yourself getting stir-cra
Shining a Light on Life Behind Bars

“The Writing on the Wall” art installation lets incarcerated people speak for themselves.

By ADRIA WATSON

As COVID-19 continues to spread across the globe, people in prisons and jails are among the most vulnerable. It's almost as if the coronavirus were specifically designed to kill off those locked away from society. I know this isn't literally the case. But this is a virus that is airborne and most affects people in confined, overcrowded spaces. It is also likely to kill people like me with underlying chronic health issues (I suffer from kidney disease). It also likes to kill people like me with no home to sequester ourselves in. It is physically impossible for us to separate.

The way I am seeing it right now, this will go on until those of us imprisoned are all dead, or at the very least, until half of us have perished, leaving the other half to now-open single-man cells in which we can hide.

So my friend, would you like to switch places? I bet your home doesn't seem so claustrophobic now, does it?

I did commit a crime, which I reckon with daily and deeply. And I did deserve to come to prison. But I do not deserve a lonely death because of it. Neither do you.

Jerry Metcalf, 45, is a writer incarcerated at the Thumb Correctional Facility in Lapeer, Michigan, where he is serving 40 to 60 years for second-degree murder and two years for a weapons felony; he was convicted of both in 1996. In addition to his published work, he volunteers as an aide to the mentally ill and trains service dogs for Paws With a Cause.

But rarely do they have the opportunity to share their perspectives with people on the outside.

A traveling art installation called “The Writing on the Wall” aims to change that. Conceived by Baz Dreisinger, founder and executive director of the Incarceration Nations Network, and conceptual artist Hank Willis Thomas, the exhibit projects writings by people who are or once were in prison onto buildings and landscapes. In June, the projections illuminated the exterior walls of the Department of Justice and the now-closed Newseum in Washington, D.C.

“There is so much being said about people who are incarcerated, and you don’t hear enough from them,” Thomas said.

One of the pieces featured in Washington, D.C., was part of an unpublished graphic novel written by Matthew Wilson, also a curator for “The Writing on the Wall,” while he was incarcerated at Otisville Correctional Facility in New York in 2013. The story follows a young man who was orphaned and feels betrayed by his country, and a mercenary who took him in.

“My hopes are to have individuals think about the humanity that’s pretty much forgotten about,” Wilson said, “to be mindful of how they address these individuals, like myself, who are returning back into society.”

The installation has been an ongoing effort with the nonprofit architecture firm MASS Design Group, art-activist collective The Illuminator and the production team Openbox. But before the pandemic, it took a different form: as an immersive, in-person experience that traveled to the High Line Park in New York City, as well as Detroit, New Orleans, Philadelphia and Miami. When the pandemic hit, the organizers reinvented the exhibit as a series of large-scale projections.

The new version debuted in May in New York City with projections on the Brooklyn Bridge, Manhattan Detention Complex and the New York State Supreme Court building in Manhattan. Dreisinger said she and Thomas chose the city, then the global epicenter of the pandemic, because they wanted “to be responsive to that and say we need to push for the release of people from prison, push for all kinds of radical changes that need to happen in the justice system in this moment.”

“The virus has infected thousands of people in correctional facilities across the U.S. Incarcerated people have little chance of social distancing and have unreliable access to hygiene products and medical care.

“The Writing on the Wall” features writing in English and Spanish and from incarcerated people around the world, including the United Kingdom, Argentina, Uganda and Brazil. The organizers plan to take the exhibit abroad to cities including Mexico City and London. At every stop, they coordinate the installation with local justice reform organizations and formerly incarcerated community leaders. In Washington, D.C., the group collaborated with the Office of the Attorney General’s Cure the Streets and the Restorative Justice programs, as well as the WIRE.
**The Marshall Project Wins an Izzy Award**

Honored for our "News Inside" publication for incarcerated readers.

By The Marshall Project

News Inside, The Marshall Project's print publication distributed to readers in prisons and jails across the country, has been honored with the annual Izzy Award by the Park Center for Independent Media. Each issue of News Inside is a collection of The Marshall Project’s award-winning journalism that relates directly to the lives of incarcerated people.

The publication is the brainchild of Lawrence Bartley, Director of News Inside, who joined The Marshall Project in 2018 after 27 years in prison. In his own words, Bartley knows “the frustrations of a hungry mind in prison. News Inside is my attempt to feed that hunger with credible information about the world of criminal justice—free of charge and free of hassles.”

We launched our pilot edition in February 2019 in 30 correctional facilities in 19 states. Now, News Inside is circulating in 502 facilities across the country. A recent edition contains the results of a ground-breaking survey on the political views of incarcerated people, created in partnership with Slate Magazine.

“It’s a labor of love to bring in-depth journalism to folks who crave it,” said Bartley. “I consider News Inside readers my friends, and every article I place before them is meant to empower and enrich their lives. For News Inside to be recognized with an Izzy Award is a win for every incarcerated person looking for an opportunity to show that he or she has changed.”

“I am delighted and proud that Lawrence’s inspired idea for News Inside has been recognized with an Izzy Award,” said Susan Chira, editor-in-chief. “Lawrence’s determination and innovation in creating and distributing News Inside has enabled us to directly reach incarcerated people and to learn more about their perspectives and opinions. It’s particularly gratifying to win an award in the name of a journalist who embodies the values and mission we cherish at The Marshall Project.”

Named for legendary investigative journalist I. F. “Izzy” Stone, the annual Izzy Award is presented by the Park Center for Independent Media (PCIM) at Ithaca College and honors outstanding achievement in independent media. PCIM will celebrate the 12th annual presentation of the Izzy Award this fall in Ithaca, NY.
is a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization that seeks to create and sustain a sense of national urgency about the U.S. criminal justice system. We achieve this through award-winning journalism, partnerships with other news outlets and public forums. In all of our work we strive to educate and enlarge the audience of people who care about the state of criminal justice.

Contributing Writers

JOHN J. LENNON Sing Sing Correctional Facility, Ossining, N.Y.
ARTHUR LONGWORTH Monroe Correctional Complex, Monroe, Wash.
JERRY METCALF Thumb Correctional Facility, Lapeer, Mich.
JULIA PRESTON
TOM ROBBINS
ANAT RUBIN
RAHSAAN THOMAS San Quentin State Prison, San Quentin, Calif.
GEORGE T. WILKERSON Central Prison, Raleigh, N.C.

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Contact

Lawrence Bartley
The Marshall Project
156 West 56th Street, Suite 701
New York, NY 10019
212-803-5200
lbartley@themarshallproject.org
newsinside@themarshallproject.org

themarshallproject.org