“I know that I have basically NO rights at all . . . But I have a two-year-old daughter that I must be there for, and I will not give up my fight for justice.”
**A Letter from Lawrence**

When I was serving my 27-year prison sentence, spring came with sunny thoughts of freedom. But today, even though I’m free, I don’t have those pleasant thoughts. Part of me is still in there with you as you struggle to survive in the coronavirus era.

To help you fight COVID-19, we’re presenting a survival guide co-developed with M.D.s Brie Williams and Leah Rorvig of Amend/UCSF (page 13). For a look at how sheriffs, prosecutors and public defenders are scrambling to move people out of jails to slow the spread of the virus, read “Coronavirus Transforming Jails Across the Country” on page 21.

Even as COVID-19 dominates the conversation, News Inside remains committed to bringing you a deeper view of the criminal justice world. “What Do We Really Know About the Politics of People Behind Bars?” is the first of a series driven by the political opinion survey we featured in Issue 3. Impressively, over 8,000 of you in 25 states responded.

My sincere thanks goes to all who filled out the questions, free-wrote your thoughts and photocopied the surveys for your friends. Special thanks goes out to the ambassadors who spread the word about the survey and to the jail and prison administrators who supported it.

In this issue, you will also find “Trade Your Prison Sentence for a Smartwatch?” (page 19). It’s an investigation into a for-profit company that claims it can get people released earlier through a new kind of electronic monitoring. Then there is “Newsrooms Rethink a Crime Reporting Staple: The Mugshot” on page 24, which explores one media outlet’s stance against modern-day “scarlet letter” branding.

The last article I want to point out is “How to Fix Our Prisons? Let The Public Inside.” It demonstrates the value volunteers bring into facilities with art, education, therapeutic exercises and more. I know how valuable this work is as I once participated in a theater program called Rehabilitation Through the Arts where I learned the right way to stand on a stage, how to use voice projection and other skills that proved useful on and off the stage.

I will never forget the little bit of good I experienced in a place I didn’t want to be. Because of that, when prison officials invite me to go into facilities to discuss my work and re-entry experience, I jump at the chance. Now people look at me the way I used to look at volunteers who took time out of their day to help me help myself. I truly appreciate the opportunity to give back.

**Letters to the Director**

Congratulations on an excellent publication with flawless, captivating articles. I look forward to more of your success.

**L. Gonzalez**

I am writing to express my gratitude after reading the December issue of News Inside. I am 14 years in on a 30-year sentence. It’s great to hear of progress towards the many problems with prison in general. For most of us stuck in the system there just isn’t much in rehabilitation offered to occupy our time productively and news is hard to come by.

**Justin**

When I was walking through the day room I stopped to check the community table, as I always do. With an insatiable thirst for reading material, I dug through the pile of old Sports Illustrateds to come upon your publication. In truth I was going to just pass it by when the yard bell rang, signaling those of us not going to the yard to lock back in. So I just grabbed your publication out of fear of being locked in without any reading material. Admitting I was slightly disappointed expecting another collection of poems and ramblings, Boy was I pleasantly surprised. I found truthful articles packed full of valuable information. I admit to taking some notes before placing your magazine back on the table with the hopes that someone else could benefit from the reading.

**James**

I would like to… subscribe to your magazine because I see a lot of information that’s encouraging and educational pertaining to criminal justice policies affecting incarcerated people.

**Martha**

**Lawrence Bartley**

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

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What Do We Really Know About the Politics of People Behind Bars?

More than 8,000 people responded to a first-of-its-kind political survey. Here is what they said.

Nicole Lewis, Aviva Shen and Anna Flagg
Series Produced by Nicole Lewis and Lawrence Bartley

A simple question at a Bernie Sanders town hall last spring sparked a debate new to prime time: Should incarcerated people be allowed to vote? Sanders said yes—his home state of Vermont (and its neighbor, Maine) are the only states to give all people in prison that right. Later, Joe Biden said no.

Yet in a country awash in political polling, the views of those who are most affected remain a mystery: the 2.3 million people behind bars. Do they want to vote? If given the right, who would they vote for? What issues do they care about most? No one’s ever really asked.

This is why The Marshall Project partnered with Slate to conduct the first-of-its-kind political survey inside prisons and jails across the country. Now that criminal justice is a campaign issue and many states are restoring voting rights to those convicted or not. Most of the rest will spend anywhere from five to more than 21 years in prison.

Sentenced or not. Most of the rest will spend anywhere from five to more than 21 years in prison. The Florida primary on March 17 will bring one of the most significant tests of this new landscape. It is the first major since Floridians voted in 2018 to restrict the working class to cast a ballot to an estimated 1.5 million people with felony convictions. Before the measure, Florida had one of the strictest disenfranchisement laws in the country, which left 1 in 10 voting age adults unable to vote. The historic measure was the greatest expansion of the franchise in decades, but it was obstructed by the Republican Legislature, which passed laws requiring payment of fines and fees before restoring rights. The partisan legal battle is ongoing. However, our survey suggests that granting the right to vote to those currently or formerly incarcerated may not overwhelmingly benefit one party over the other.

Overall, the survey responses reflect a diverse and often contradictory set of beliefs from people who, should they ever get the right to vote, cannot be seen as a single bloc.

While some incarcerated people, more respondents say they now see the ballot as a way to advocate for their interests.

“Before coming to prison I really did not think it was all that important to vote or even care what was going on in the government,” said Antonio Ayers, who is incarcerated in Arkansas. “But now that I have time to sit back and watch what goes on, I know that as a citizen it is very important to let what I want to see happen influence people in charge.”

To reach people whose access to the outside world is severely limited, we inserted a survey into The Marshall Project’s print publication, News Inside. This magazine is distributed in more than 500 prisons and jails across the country. (Prisons house people convicted of felonies, while jails house those awaiting trial or who were convicted of misdemeanors.) As more results come in and the general election kicks into gear, we plan to return to respondents for their thoughts.

Roughly half of the 8,266 respondents identified as people of color or mixed-race, with 20 percent identifying as Hispanic/Latino, 17 percent as Native American, and 19 percent as Asian or other races. The remaining 41 percent identified as white alone, and 8 percent did not give any race. (If you would vote if given the right, who would you vote for? What issues do they care about most? No one’s ever really asked.) As more results come in and the general election kicks into gear, we plan to return to respondents for their thoughts. Most have completed high school and are between 28 and 45 years old. Eighty-five percent are men, 14 percent are women and 2 percent are gender non-conforming. Sixteen percent have at least some college education, and 36 percent have a high school diploma.

Most have completed high school and are between 28 and 45 years old. Eighty-five percent are men, 14 percent are women and 2 percent are gender non-conforming. Sixteen percent have at least some college education, and 36 percent have a high school diploma.

Many incarcerated people have served in the military. Seventy-five percent identified as white alone, and 8 percent did not give any race. (If you would vote if given the right, who would you vote for? What issues do they care about most? No one’s ever really asked.) As more results come in and the general election kicks into gear, we plan to return to respondents for their thoughts. Most have completed high school and are between 28 and 45 years old. Eighty-five percent are men, 14 percent are women and 2 percent are gender non-conforming. Sixteen percent have at least some college education, and 36 percent have a high school diploma.

Respondents skewed whiter than the overall prison population, and were disproportionately incarcerated in red states. State prisons hold a disproportionate number of black and Latino people. Thirty-three percent of state prisoners are black, while black, white and Hispanic make up 13 percent of the United States population, for example.) As a result, the survey is not representative of the overall prison population. So instead of focusing solely on the respondents as a whole, we looked for trends across race, gender, party affiliation and other demographic categories to ensure our reported results were meaningful. We also surfaced as many individual voices and opinions as possible.

Which Candidates Do They Back?

Just like the country, respondents were divided. Forty-five percent of white respondents said they’d support Trump for president, with white men showing the strongest support.

That undermines conventional wisdom: Conservative media and politicians often regard incarcerated people as potential Democrats, citing research into the voting habits of formerly incarcerated people. About 30 percent of white respondents chose a Democratic candidate, while 25 percent said they would not vote or did not know which candidate to back.

For people of color, no single candidate prevailed, but 20 percent of black respondents chose Biden as their top choice, Sanders coming in second at 16 percent. Almost a third of respondents of color said that they didn’t know who they would vote for, or they wouldn’t vote at all. The survey was disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic, so some candidates dropped out.

Regardless of who they’d vote for or which party they back, the majority of respondents had little faith in elected officials. More than 80 percent do not believe politicians are generally acting in their interest. This disenchantment crosses racial lines.

“I grew up being told in history class and school that politicians could be trusted to do what is best for the working class and poor, and overall for the country, to get older and realize the corruption in both major political parties,” wrote Allan Martin, a white man who is incarcerated in Bella- my Creek Correctional Facility in Ionia, Michigan.

Despite the widespread disillusionment, many respondents described how their time behind bars led them to become more politically engaged and shaped their views.

Those who identified as Democrats or Republicans were more likely to feel that party’s values align with their own.

Marsella Smith, who is incarcerated in Florida’s Calhoun Correctional Institution, said for Sanders in the 2016 primary and considers himself on the opposite side of the political spectrum from Trump. But even he credits the president with signing the First Step Act. “What the federal government does, eventually, the states follow,” he wrote.

Race and Incarceration

The survey is intended to be a snapshot of politics and voting behavior, as well as an opportunity for long-term, ongoing, clarifying the rights restoration process.

For black respondents in particular, issues of race loom large, and racism embedded in the criminal justice system, informs their political beliefs, and black people, more than any other group, say prison has increased their motivation to vote. By contrast, almost one-third of white respondents said race does not matter at all when it comes to politics.

Many black respondents pointed to racism in society at large, and racism embedded in the criminal justice system, to explain why their political views are intertwined with their race.
“Being a black man from the inner city, I see firsthand that the politics are not structured to help me,” wrote David Adkins, who is incarcerated in Lansing, Kansas. “When I was released to take funds away from education and put into prisons. When I can look at a flawed system that targets young black males instead of helping them.”

How much does your racial identity inform your political views in prison?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of white versus black respondents who said...</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Voting Rights

The results suggest that many incarcerated people are still interested in politics despite being temporarily (or in some cases permanently) stripped of their right to vote. Many said they get their news by watching local TV stations or cable news and said they discuss politics with family or friends occasionally (as opposed to very frequently, frequently, rarely or never).

How do you feel about policy tightening border security?

Percent of Republicans versus Democrats who said...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Oppose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>81%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inside / Outside

Our results show some intriguing contrasts between the perspectives of those inside prisons and jails and those outside. Most of those who identified as Republicans in our survey opposed an assault weapons ban (unlike Republicans outside prison, who do support such a ban).

Notably, incarcerated Republicans embraced some policies usually labeled as liberal. Three-quarters of Republican prisoners supported a minimum wage hike and marijuana legalization. That’s far higher than the 55 percent of Republican voters in favor of marijuana legalization, or the 43 percent who back a minimum wage increase.

The support for a higher minimum wage is likely a reflection of incarcerated people’s economic realities. Poor people are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, and although many people work while incarcerated, they usually receive far less than the minimum wage. In the general electorate, lower-income Republicans are more likely to back a minimum wage increase than their higher-earning Republican peers.

“Our economy is the most important thing I worry about,” said an incarcerated white prisoner at a Minnesota prison. “No one should be homeless, or jobless, unless they choose to be,” wrote Jimmy Tyrell, who identifies as a Republican and is incarcerated at Marion Correctional Institution in Ocala, Florida. “We need to do more to help our own impoverished citizens.”

In contrast to Republicans behind bars, incarcerated Democrats expressed views that are closer to those of their counterparts outside prison—Democrats inside prison often supported tighter border security, and strongly backed marijuana legalization and increasing the minimum wage. However, a bare majority support an assault weapons ban, far lower than the 88 percent of Democrats outside prison. Republicans and Democrats inside prison are still far apart on issues like gun control and immigration.

As they do on the outside, most white respondents identified as Republicans or independents, while most black respondents said they were Democrats or independents. Survey respondents were more likely to identify as independents than the U.S. population overall.

Trump’s Surprising Popularity in Prison

Many incarcerated white people said they’d re-elect the president—if given the chance.

Nicole Lewis and Christina Cauterucci with data analysis by Anna Flagg

Series produced by Nicole Lewis and Lawrence Bartley

Before prison, John Adkins, 43, didn’t care about politics. He watched the news regularly but said he mostly wanted to see reports about the ongoing gang violence in Southwest Detroit, where he lived. Now, after 23 years in a Michigan prison for murder, Adkins is an ardent Republican and supporter of Donald Trump.

He credits conservative media for his political education. In prison, Adkins began watching the news again but soon grew sick of “the demonization of straight, white, Christian men on CNN and MSNBC and just about all mainstream media,” he wrote, using the email system at Macomb Correctional Facility, where he is incarcerated. So he found himself drawn to right-wing shows such as “The O’Reilly Factor” and “Tucker Carlson Tonight.” The hosts’ positions on key issues such as abortion (against) and gay marriage (also against) won him over. But above all, Adkins says, he identifies as a conservative because he feels under attack by the left.

“I am so tired of the double-standard of the left in the country” Adkins wrote. “Their rhetoric is what is divisive in this country, not Donald J. Trump’s!”

It is widely believed that the majority of people in prison are Democrats—and some Republicans who oppose re-electing Trump for released prisoners have expressed fears that they would vote Democratic. Black people, who consistently favor Democrats, are in fact overrepresented in prisons. Although white people are 64 percent of the total population, they only account for 38 percent of people in state prisons.

In a first-of-its-kind political survey of the incarcerated, The Marshall Project and Slate found that a significant share of white respondents called themselves Republicans and would vote to reelect Trump in 2020—if given the chance. Forty-five percent of white respondents backed Trump, about 30 percent picked Democratic candidates, and the remaining 25 percent said they did not know or would not vote.

The survey is the most comprehensive snapshot of currently incarcerated people’s politics to date, but it has limitations. Respondents skewed whiter than the
overall prison population, and many respondents are incarcerated in red states. As a result, it is not representative of the overall prison population. Instead of only focusing on the respondents as a whole, we looked for trends across race, gender, and other demographic differences to ensure our reported results were meaningful.

Which party do you most identify with?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Republican party</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Democratic party</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inside prison, reasons for supporting Trump vary. Some of the reasons reflect the particular circumstances of prison life. Most prisoners share a cell, making it difficult to tune out conservative cellmates or right-wing media, or to even of the reasons reflect the particular circumstances of prison gender, and other demographic differences to ensure our respondents as a whole, we looked for trends across race, the overall prison population. Instead of only focusing on the channel is on. Prisons are also notoriously segregated and can be a breeding ground for white nationalists. Others are ideological: Some respondents are attracted with the Democratic Party, “only because my mom labeled all Republicans racists who want to keep the rich rich and the poor poor.” In the six years he’s been in prison in Kansas after he was convicted of murder, his understanding of politics has changed. “A lot of incarcerated, poor and white people identify as Democrat because we’ve told Republicans want to keep us poor and incarcerated” he said. “But now I believe the opposite: that Democrats want to keep us spin-led by the government and Republicans want to wear us off.”

Criminal justice reform is broadly popular among Americans across the political spectrum, though Democrats are more likely than Republicans to support substantial changes to the current system. While some incarcerated Trump supporters don’t know or care what the president is doing—or don’t know how to think about what his policies mean—they’ve been paying attention to the news—he pre-fers the Wall Street Journal and Fox News—and soon became concerned that his work hours might get cut if companies that employ prisoners began sending jobs overseas. fingers that the First Step Act, released in recent years, as far as criminal justice reform is concerned, really can’t tell you anything that the Democrats have done. “I wish they’d vote to reelect Trump clarify that they don’t love the Wall Street Journal and Fox News—and soon became concerned that his work hours might get cut if companies that employ prisoners began sending jobs overseas. It was while he was waiting for his trial that he says his unkempt suit sat down and told him that he needed to learn to read so that he could understand evidence about his case unearthed during the discovery process. While he was in the county jail, a volunteer came in weekly to teach him. “I was an awakening,” Sanchez, 46, said in a phone interview. “That got me interested in politics.” He says that when he was transferred to state prison, he started paying more attention to the news—he pre-fers the Wall Street Journal and Fox News—and soon became concerned that his work hours might get cut if companies that employ prisoners began sending jobs overseas.

![For Those Serving Long Sentences, Politics is a Lifeline](image-url)

Respondents who’ve spent decades behind bars were more politically engaged than their peers, but they’re also the most cynical.

Nicole Lewis, Rachelle Hampton and Anna Flagg Series produced by Nicole Lewis and Lawrence Bartley

When Pedro Sanchez was arrested in 2003, he didn’t know how to read or write. He was 30 at the time and had been selling drugs for two decades, first in New York and then in Maine, where, in 2001, he was convicted of murder and sentenced to 40 years in prison. It was while he was waiting for his trial that he says his unkempt suit sat down and told him that he needed to learn to read so that he could understand evidence about his case unearthed during the discovery process. While he was in the county jail, a volunteer came in weekly to teach him. “I was an awakening,” Sanchez, 46, said in a phone interview. “That got me interested in politics.” He says that when he was transferred to state prison.
after his conviction, he ran afoul of prison rules. His behavior led him to be classified as a security threat, and he was consigned to solitary confinement for about two years. In solitary, he realized he had a choice to make. "I said, 'Wait a minute, I can go home when I'm 65 or I can die here.' That was eye-opening for me."

That turning point led Santiago to politics as an antidote to despair. When he got out of solitary, he focused on his education, and in 2015 he passed a high school equivalency test. Though he entered prison as a registered Republican, his views changed as he spent more time watching the way coverage differed between news stations like MSNBC, Fox News and CNN: "They all want us to believe a certain thing."

"I spent decades in prison could easily result in a total withdrawal from politics. But in a first-of-its-kind survey, The Marshall Project and Slate found that people who have spent more years behind bars are more politically aware than their peers who've been incarcerated for less than a year. Respondents with long sentences were more motivated to vote, more likely to change their political views and more likely to discuss politics than those who had spent less time in prison."

Yet if those in our survey who'd spent more time in prison tended to be more politically engaged, they were also most cynical about politicians' commitment to criminal justice reform. Roughly 30 percent of respondents have spent 21 years or more in prison. While this survey is, to date, the best account of their political opinions, it has some limitations. The survey was voluntary and may represent a self-selecting group of people who are already politically engaged and following the news. As such, it is not a fully representative sample of the overall incarcerated population and may not reflect the views of people whose long sentences have deepened their alienation and who declined to respond. Here are the stories of three other survey respondents who have spent long stretches behind bars.

Joseph Badagliacca, 43, Florida

In his darkest moments last year, Joseph Badagliacca battled thoughts of suicide. He had served nearly two decades of his life sentence for murder—with no hope of getting out because there is no parole in Florida.

"I may never have the opportunity at a real life out there," he wrote. "I understand most people would say that my victim never got a chance to complete his life because of my involvement. There are times I agree and wonder if I deserve to get out, or to even live right now."

Struggling with the prospect of growing old and dying behind bars, Badagliacca found purpose in politics. He's contributed to a campaign to create a path to reentry for the incarcerated who have demonstrated they've truly changed.

"We've lost everyone except my mom as a result of my incarceration and just like anyone else, I don't want to die alone in here. So … I fight," he wrote. Badagliacca entered prison at 26. "It was surreal," he wrote, recalling his initial shock. "It was like I was in a dream with everything moving outside of myself."

Over his 17 years in prison, he's learned to speak Spanish while incarcerated, earned a paralegal certification and is working on his bachelor's degree. He says the focus on self-improvement is common for those facing long terms. "Emotionally, spiritually, morally, educationally, physically … we are more focused on the things that matter," he wrote.

Demonstrating rehabilitation has political value, too. The Florida Legislature is working to fix the state's overcrowded and expensive prison system, but several reform bills have not gotten much traction. He understands the lawmakers' hesitance. With nearly 100,000 people in prison in Florida, many aren't getting the programming they need to be productive on the outside. Badagliacca says lawmakers are scared to risk letting some violent offenders out for fear they'd commit new crimes.

"It's political suicide," he wrote. "Emotionally, spiritually, morally, educationally, physically … we are more focused on the things that matter," he wrote. Demonstrating rehabilitation has political value, too. The Florida Legislature is working to fix the state's overcrowded and expensive prison system, but several reform bills have not gotten much traction. He understands the lawmakers' hesitance. With nearly 100,000 people in prison in Florida, many aren't getting the programming they need to be productive on the outside. Badagliacca says lawmakers are scared to risk letting some violent offenders out for fear they'd commit new crimes.

"It's political suicide," he wrote. The public may be cynical about criminal justice reform, he says, but he suspects that attitude stems from misinformation and a fundamental misunderstanding about the purpose of prison.

"We were removed from society AS punishment," he wrote. "Mistakenly, a lot of people (including some of the officers in here) believe we are here FOR punishment. Some of us are really just regular guys who are defined by the worst mistakes of our lives instead of our innumerable contributions. We want to be better, show others we're better and, of course, convince the lawmakers we're better."

Vegas Walker, 25, Kansas

As a kid growing up in Wichita, Kansas, Vegas Walker said she was exposed to prostitution, guns and drugs at an early age. By the time she was 11, she started smoking weed and hanging out in the streets. By 13, Walker said she was in and out of jail.

Life at home was chaotic. Her mother went to jail when she was 5 years old, and her father was rarely around, forcing Walker to stay with her alcoholic grandmother for several years. Walker says she remembers going to school dirty because her grandmother couldn't look after her.

Nonetheless, she's grateful her grandmother insisted that Walker get a high school diploma.

"As much as I couldn't stand my grandma, she had five kids by the age of 18 and still managed to graduate from high school," wrote Walker, who is black and serving time in Topeka Correctional Facility. "And that's all she wanted from us. That's the only thing I managed to do correctly."

In the chaotic years before Walker went to prison for stabbing an ex-boyfriend during an argument, she said she didn't pay much attention to the news or politics. She was absorbed in selling drugs and trying to stay alive as a woman in an arena typically dominated by men.

"It's hard on the streets for anyone, but for a woman it is 10 times harder," Walker wrote. "We are viewed as an easy target. I had to fight harder and be 10 times more scandalous than the next person or I would have been eaten alive out there."

It wasn't until she landed in prison that Walker said she first started thinking about how politics shapes people's lives. Walker said many of her political views are shaped by the unfairness of the criminal justice system. She believes prisons in Kansas are designed for people to fail and return. Practices like stop and frisk, she said, allow police to harass innocent black and brown people. And when a judge sentenced Amber Guyger, the Dallas police officer who shot and killed Botham Jean in his own home, to a relatively short 10 years in prison, Walker said, it felt "like there are two sets of rules for people of color and white people."

"We were removed from society AS punishment," he wrote. "Mistakenly, a lot of people (including some of the officers in here) believe we are here FOR punishment. Some of us are really just regular guys who are defined by the worst mistakes of our lives instead of our innumerable contributions. We want to be better, show others we're better and, of course, convince the lawmakers we're better."

"I may never have the opportunity at a real life out there," he wrote. "I understand most people would say that my victim never got a chance to complete his life because of my involvement. There are times I agree and wonder if I deserve to get out, or to even live right now."
Walker is set to be released next March. As that day approaches, she’s started to worry about how she will make a living with only a high school diploma. There aren’t many opportunities for education or skill-building in women’s prisons, she said. Walker said she is drawn to Bernie Sanders because of his focus on improving poor people’s lives. But even if he wins, she isn’t sure it will make a difference.

“I do believe that it’s important to vote and have a say,” she wrote. “But I don’t really believe that candidates can actually make half the things they say come true."

The public may be cynical about criminal justice reform, he said, but he suspects that attitude stems from misinformation and a fundamental misunderstanding about the purpose of prison.

Samuel Byrd, 46, Florida

Samuel Byrd said some of his friends in prison have told him he’s too conservative to be black.

He doesn’t support illegal immigration, aid to foreign countries or financing an extravagant lifestyle with credit cards. He does believe in marriage before children, college education and keeping dollars on American soil. He admires the conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh too, although Byrd does not identify as Republican.

His political convictions have strengthened during his nine years in Okeechobee Correctional Institution in Okeechobee, Florida. He said his surrounded by people who “only know what they learned in the streets, on the block or at the trap,” and that most barely finished high school and aren’t interested in bettering themselves. Byrd, by contrast, has a few years of college under his belt. Listening to others blame “the system” for their problems has pushed him further to the right.

“There are very few inmates who I can hold a serious conversation with that don’t involve committing felonies or sports,” Byrd wrote. “Politics, even the ones that directly affect them, are not a major topic. Most blacks hate Trump but can’t tell you why. Most whites think he’s doing a better job than Obama but can’t tell you how. Both groups defend their positions by simply misquoting what they heard somewhere.”

Before prison, Byrd said he spent his time “being a broke playboy,” spending his money on strippers and romancing other men’s wives. In 2010, he was charged with attempted murder and ultimately sentenced to life in prison.

Now Byrd works in the law library helping others with their cases. He prefers to focus on people with short sentences, pushing “them to admit to what stupid way of thinking landed them in prison” and encouraging them to think about “what are they willing to change and give up once released”

Byrd can’t vote, but he says he would choose Michael Bloomberg to oppose Trump “because he, like Trump, is a billionaire businessman.” (The survey was distributed in December, before Bloomberg dropped out.) Byrd isn’t persuaded by the promises made by progressive candidates like Sanders and Sen. Elizabeth Warren. He believes that education is key to a productive life, but he doesn’t support free college education.

Instead, Byrd is in favor of personal responsibility, not government assistance, even when it comes to keeping people out of prison.

“This country was built by those who climbed the ladder of success that the forefathers erected, not by those waiting for someone to throw them a rope,” he wrote. “I believe that we should focus on increased education not reducing mass incarceration. I want to see prevention through education, not treatment by the government.”

Safety practices to avoid infection

- Wash your hands with soap frequently, for at least 20 seconds each time.
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow.
- Practice “social distancing,” which means staying 6 feet away from other people as much as you can.
- Refrain from touching your eyes, nose and mouth—all parts of your face where COVID-19 can enter your body.

Incarcerated people would be best served to use the same prevention practices, but the actual nature of prisons and jails, combined with restrictions on supplies can make it more difficult to ward off the virus. That’s why News Inside teamed up with Brie Williams, M.D, M.S. and Leah Rorvig, M.D., M.S., medical experts from the University of California San Francisco who specialize in criminal justice. Williams also runs a prison reform program called Amend at UCSF. Here, we answer your coronavirus questions while being considerate of your unique circumstances.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Medical Advice</th>
<th>Prison/Jail Adaptation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should I be scared about getting released?</td>
<td>Most places outside of prison have a lower risk of infection than any type of group-living situation. This is because it is easier to stay 6 feet away from people you don’t live with when you are out in the community. Also, it might be easier to get cleaning products and to stay away from others who are sick.</td>
<td>This is a scary time, but you’ve improved while incarcerated. In the free world you will have more space and access to safety and cleaning equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve heard that handwashing is the best defense against getting and spreading the virus. How do I keep my hands clean if hot water is unavailable or inconsistent in my cell or dorm area?</td>
<td>While hot water is better than cold for hand washing, your technique matters most: Wet your hands all the way up to a little past your wrists. Rub soap on the front and backs of your hands and wrists, and scrub for 20 seconds. If you have access to clean paper towels, use one to turn off the faucet and throw it out immediately. If soap and water aren’t available but hand sanitizer is, it has to be at least 60% alcohol to work. Use the same technique. Cover the fronts and backs of your hands and wrists with sanitizer and rub them together for 20 seconds.</td>
<td>Fill bottles in the shower specifically for handwashing. Heat your water using a hot pot, stinger, slop sinks, or a bowl you place on the radiator. Insulate buckets of warm water with blankets and towels for longer-lasting use. Try to wash or sanitize your hands every time you leave and return to your cell.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can I shower safely in a communal setting?</td>
<td>Try to stay 6 feet away from other people and be sure your hands are clean before touching your face.</td>
<td>Before and after toilet use, clean the seat and flush handle with bleach diluted with water if it’s available. If you don’t have bleach, do the same with a rag lathered up with soap. When possible, place a clean towel on the seat. Wash and dry the towel after use. Place it directly in front of a fan—if you have access—to speed up the drying process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it safe to sit on a toilet that 200 people in my dorm share?</td>
<td>Getting COVID-19 from sitting on a toilet seat is unlikely. However, the toilet handle, stall divider and sink faucets could be dirty. Be sure to wash your hands before and after using the bathroom. The toilet handle, faucets, and other frequently touched items such as the door should be disinfected at least daily.</td>
<td>Against the rules, but it might be worth asking the COs on your tier/unit to make an exception: Before leaving your cell or bunk, protect your eyes with shades or glasses. Cover up your mouth and nose with a clean—cotton if available—T-shirt, scarf or kerchief with the top seams torn open. Women can repurpose head scarves and bras into masks. If your prison industries program is making masks and other protective gear, consider signing up for it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do I protect myself from COVID-19 when I am outside of my cell or off my bunk? Do I need a mask?</td>
<td>Wash your hands frequently, don’t touch your face, try to avoid crowded spaces and stay at least 6 feet away from others at all times. If there are some people you can’t distance yourself from, try to keep this group as small as possible. Some research suggests that a mask you make out of two layers of cotton cloth (from, say, a sheet) can reduce the risk of you and others spreading COVID-19 to each other.</td>
<td>Against the rules, but it might be worth asking the COs on your tier/unit to make an exception: Before going to bed at night, cover bars with a clean sheet, garbage bag or the plastic from a new mattress. In double-bunked dorms, people at the bottom can hang the barrier from the top bunk to create a tent. Top bunkers should lay under a sheet as much as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I get COVID-19 from an object someone has sneezed or coughed on?</td>
<td>It is possible to get the virus by handling an item that someone with the virus has coughed or sneezed on and then touching your mouth, nose and eyes.</td>
<td>Don’t touch your face. As often as you can, wear disposable gloves over your washed hands and remove them after you touch surfaces. If you lack disposables, wear your exercise or winter gloves over clean hands. After you remove your gloves, wash and dry them. Speed-dry gloves by placing them directly in front of a fan, if you have access.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many of the items I purchase from the commissary or canteen are packaged in cardboard or plastic. How can I protect myself?</td>
<td>The virus can stay “alive” on plastic or metal for up to 72 hours and on cardboard for up to 24 hours. Try to disinfect or wash with soap any packages. Remember to wash your hands whenever you touch things from a common area. Wear disposable gloves while handling your items. If you don’t have any, use your exercise or winter gloves. Throw away any cardboard boxes and plastic packaging before you enter your cell or bunk area. Store exposed food in small garbage bags.</td>
<td>Wash and air dry the net bags you use to carry the items you bought after you unpack them. And wash and dry your gloves and hands before relaxing on your bunk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I live in a cell with bars for doors or an open dorm. How do I protect myself from people coughing and sneezing at night?</td>
<td>Unfortunately, reducing risk in open-air dorm rooms is difficult. To protect oneself and others, anyone with symptoms should be immediately evaluated by medical staff and housed alone until they have received results from COVID-19 testing.</td>
<td>Against the rules, but it might be worth asking the COs on your tier/unit to make an exception: Before going to bed at night, cover bars with a clean sheet, garbage bag or the plastic from a new mattress. In double-bunked dorms, people at the bottom can hang the barrier from the top bunk to create a tent. Top bunkers should lay under a sheet as much as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s the safest way to use the community phone?</td>
<td>Phone receivers, buttons and cords should be disinfected at least daily. Wash your hands before and after you make a call. If you choose to wrap the receiver with a clean sock or piece of cloth, don’t touch your face with the side that covered the receiver. If you take your headset off, cover your phone with soap and water thoroughly. Don’t use it again until it is completely dry; germs thrive on moisture.</td>
<td>Wash your hands before and after you make your call. If you have access to a call, make sure that you don’t touch your face. The gloves will have the same germs on them that your hands would. If you wear gloves outside of your cell, throw them out when you get back or wash them with soapy water and let them fully dry before using them again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have community TVs here. If I don’t watch television, I’ll go crazy. Am I putting myself at an outsized risk?</td>
<td>It’s important to do the best you can to reduce the amount of stress that you are feeling and to get enough sleep. Watching TV may help you do both.</td>
<td>If you feel compelled to converge around the TV, ask your CO if you can try to keep yourself safer by: Covering eyes with shades/glasses, use T-shirts, or scarfs to cover nose and mouth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should I purchase stolen mesh hand gloves?</td>
<td>Proper hand washing is more important than wearing gloves. If you do wear gloves inside your cell, make sure that you don’t touch your face. The gloves will have the same germs on them that your hands would. If you wear gloves outside of your cell, throw them out when you get back or wash them with soapy water and let them fully dry before using them again.</td>
<td>Ask the CO in your area if you can wear plastic or rubber gloves. If you are outside of your cell, make sure to wear your exercise or winter gloves before touching surfaces. After taking off the gloves, wash and dry them. Place them directly in front of a fan—if you access—to speed up the drying process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What should I do if someone who prepares food has symptoms?</td>
<td>Currently there is no evidence of transmission of coronavirus through food. However, anyone with symptoms should be immediately evaluated.</td>
<td>Respectfully ask the food handler to consult with the medical department. Remember that we are all in this together. There is no need to be rude to symptomatic people who may be afraid and vulnerable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I Did My 25 Years. Now I’m Fighting Another Sentence—Deportation

I barely remember my birthplace, Jamaica, and I have no family left there. Frankly, I’m terrified.

By COLIN ABSOLAM as told to AKIBA SOLOMON

I was only 11 years old when I moved from my grandparents’ home in Saint Mary Parish in Jamaica to my mother’s one-bedroom apartment in the Bronx, New York. I don’t remember much about where I was born, besides the country living. And yet, after serving 25 years for a murder I committed when I was 19 and earning parole, I may be deported to a place that I haven’t as much as seen in more than three decades.

Because my deportation is automatic due to the fact that I committed an aggravated felony, my only hope of staying in the U.S. is if the governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, grants me an executive pardon. With the help of The Defenders Clinic at the City University of New York School of Law, I filed a formal petition in November. Now all I can do is wait at the Buffalo Federal Detention Facility to hear about what will happen to the rest of my life.

Here’s a short version of why, instead of returning home to my family in New York City, I’m in an ICE facility hundreds of miles away.

When I came to the South Bronx in the ’80s, adjusting to junior high was difficult. I didn’t speak or dress the way everyone else did, and I was bullied every day. I would get blamed for the fights I got into and my mother—who worked as both a housekeeper and an aide in a nursing home—had to come up to the school to get me. I also had to defend my little brother.

The Bronx finally began to feel like home in high school. I had learned how to fight and made friends with older kids. Nobody was telling me to “go back on the banana boat” anymore. I was also involved with two women at the same time. Both were pregnant by my senior year. My job at a fast food restaurant wasn’t enough to support two children, so with a little convincing from friends, I dropped out of school and started selling drugs. When my mother found out what I was doing, I left home in shame. My girlfriend and I started living in a broken car that belonged to a friend.

On June 23, 1992—two months before my first child was born—an older, bigger dealer ordered me to stop selling in the same building as him. When I ignored him, he smashed me in the face. I left the area, but later when I came back to see my girlfriend, I encountered him again. He assaulted me and blocked my exit. That’s when I went and got a gun a friend was holding for me and fatally shot him.

Thinking I was the victim, I turned down a 7 1/2- to 14-year plea deal and opted for a trial. I spent three years on Rikers Island awaiting trial and one out on bail. Finally, at age 24, I was convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to 25-to-life.

Now, this may sound contradictory, but considering the life I was living, my incarceration was a blessing. In Sing Sing Correctional Facility, where I spent most of my time, I was fortunate to meet individuals who took responsibility for their crimes and dedicated their time while incarcerated to improve their lives and the lives of others. These men later told me that they saw the potential in me for change and took a liking to me. They urged me to get involved in all the therapeutic and educational programs offered in order to keep me from being overcomy by the pitfalls of prison.

One program I participated in was the Alternatives to Violence Project. A friend of mine, an older gentleman, signed me up for it. I developed ways to address problems without resorting to violence. After a lot of introspection, I was able to address my regrettable past and rebuild my value system.

And Alternatives to Violence set me up to get educated. At the urging of another friend, I earned my GED. In 2017, I got a bachelor’s degree in behavioral science from Mercy College. Last year, I earned a master’s degree in professional studies from the New York Theological Seminary.

Hoping to give back to the community I harmed, I co-founded a group at Sing Sing called the Forgotten Voices Committee. Our mission is to redefine what it means for incarcerated people to pay a debt to society. We have brought kids ages 10 to 17 into the facility, not to “scare them straight,” but to listen to them and help them deal with violence arising in their communities. We also formed Voices From Within, an anti-gun violence initiative that resulted in a video series of the same name.

For many years I also ran Prisoners for AIDS Counseling and Education, a program that serves 300 clients a year. I was responsible for day-to-day operations and trained dozens of staff and peer educators. I also did curriculum development and coordinated with college professors to ensure that the science was state-of-the-art.

In June, I was granted parole. If things were different, I would have gone home to my family and entered the Justice-in-Education Scholars Program at Columbia University.

Instead, I’m in the ICE detention facility near Buffalo, which is more restrictive for me than Sing Sing. There are two bunks per cell here, and we’re locked in most of the day. Even if my family could travel more than 300 miles to get here, there are no contact visits. You talk to someone in a booth and struggle to hear what your loved one is saying.

Since arriving here on Oct. 24, I’ve had plenty of time for my mind to race. Frankly, I feel terrified.

Yes, I spent 25 years in prison, but I’m still worried about how I will survive in Jamaica. When I got to this facility one of the staff members gave me a manual that explained what I should be concerned with when returning to Jamaica. Part of it is broken down into do’s and don’ts. The do’s include advice like “try to be Jamaican” and “use local accents and dialect to avoid attracting negative attention.” Given that I haven’t as much as visited Jamaica for 35 years, I don’t see how I can do these things.

Some of the don’ts are equally frustrating—and repetitive: There’s “don’t sound like a foreigner” and “don’t go off to strange areas” and “don’t accept assistance from a stranger.” But to me, everyone is a stranger in Jamaica.

My father passed away. My grandparents passed away. I don’t have any relatives left. Besides overwhelming me, not having any family there may make it physically impossible for me to leave the facility where I will go for processing after I get off the plane. I’ve heard that someone with a Jamaican address has to sign the individual out, so I could be stuck there.

I’m also worried about my physical safety. If no one takes me in, I may end up on the streets of Kingston, which are not so nice. Organized crime pretty much runs the place. For a hint, just Google “Dupus” or “Shower Posse.” That first day I’m out of state custody, I have no idea what I’m going to do for a meal, and I don’t know where I’m going to sleep.

Then there’s the stigma of being a “deportee.” Being called a “deportee” in Jamaica is like being referred to as a “felon” in the United States. The community sees deportees as individuals who had an opportunity to come to the U.S. and squandered it. They’re not accepted as law-abiding citizens or individuals who deserve a second chance. This damages your employment opportunities.

My family is also suffering. My mother is elderly, and she was anticipating my coming home to take care of her. She’s been taking care of me my entire life, and now it’s supposed to be my turn.

My daughter feels like she’s being punished a second time. First, she had to grow up with me being in prison. Now she feels like she’s losing me again. She often cries when I call home, and sometimes she doesn’t want to speak because it bothers her so much.

I have two grandchildren. One is a child that I haven’t yet met because of distance, and the other is a 7-year-old who I talk to on a daily basis. She has also been crying ever since she found out that I’m not coming home.

I fear for my son the most. He hasn’t been the same since my other son, Kino, was sentenced to 17 in his absence. While I was inside counseling other individuals and children, I wasn’t able to protect my sons.

My sons were close, and since the murder, the one who survived has been making a lot of irrational decisions that are putting him in conflict with the criminal justice system. He’s facing five years. If I were there physically, I would be able to help him deal with his situation. But I’m not there.

My brother, nephew and sister-in-law who have supported me through...
out my entire incarceration, are upset because there is nothing they can do. I know some people think I deserve to be sent back to Jamaica because of what I did. But during the 25 years I was incarcerated, I took responsibility for what I did. I helped other individuals—volunteers who will take their place. Let Us In must not be a substitute for more difficult prison reforms. The systems still cry out for radical change.

Let Us In would achieve several goals at once. It will provide tools for the incarcerated to lead healthy, productive lives once they leave prison. It is shameful that they are often released as damaged men and women, with few skills to cope in society. Educational and other programs offer incentives for the incarcerated, which enlightened superintendents will embrace.

And finally, Let Us In would create a generation of prison reform proponents—volunteers who will take their experiences back to their communities, who will vote and who will one day employ the formerly incarcerated who will help them rebuild.

By CHRISTIE THOMPSON

Last summer, Delores Wallace’s sister, who was serving a 1½-year sentence in federal prison, asked her to look into a company that was all the buzz on her cell block. The company, called Oaks of Justice, claimed it could help people get out of federal prison early and serve out their sentences at home while being monitored by a state-of-the-art surveillance system.

Wallace was skeptical. Her sister had just spent over $6,000 on another early release promise that went nowhere—one that claimed she could shave time off her sentence by enrolling in rehab. “At this point, I’m nobody’s fool,” Wallace said. But her sister was hopeful, so Wallace agreed to contact the founder of Oaks of Justice, a woman named Jo Morgan.

In emails to Wallace, some of which were shared with The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of ColorBlindness,” a “racial caste system” that has disproportionately punished a generation of young, usually male, people of color. The president must speak to people’s pain, and acknowledge that we imprison too many people for too long, and at a cost to taxpayers of billions of dollars a year.

Inmates and the free. Let Us In will go a long way toward achieving these goals, and it would hold participating institutions accountable to the citizens who routinely pass through its doors. It might also make the rest of us a little uncomfortable. And that’s O.K., too.

By NEIL BARSKY

Corps, it could inspire a generation of young, creative minds on Rikers Island. And Philadelphia, Chicago and other major cities have elected progressive district attorneys.

Unfortunately, what happens inside the walls of the nation’s prisons has not changed at all. They can be stifling in summer and freezing in winter. The residents are often belittled, abused and cut off from anything resembling rehabilitation. Constitutional protections are virtually nonexistent; solitary confinement, to pick one example, is considered torture by much of the world, but is business as usual inside America’s state and federal jails and prisons, home to roughly 2.1 million people.

Here is what the next president, or President Trump, can do to reform mass incarceration: Open up this hidden world to the public. I call my proposal “Let Us In.”

The public should first understand the conditions within the walls, to meet the men and women who reside in our prisons, to look them in the eye, shake their hands and teach them skills they can use once they are released. After all, 90 percent of them will end up back among us.

Recent college graduates should be able to go inside the walls to dispense their skills and knowledge. Serious consideration must be given to training and safety.

Within two years, the organization would be up and running, a nonprofit corporation to take its place. Imagine former Presidents George Bush and Barack Obama as honorary chairmen. Eventually, the programs would be funded by a combination of government grants and nonprofit contributions, much like the Corporation for Public Broadcast-

Sentence for a Smartwatch?

Another dubious get-out-of-jail offer is spreading through federal prisons. Lawyers say it’s a fake.

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that a program of this kind would never
years of knowledge and experience,
based on their federal prison system and a former
with the Federal Bureau of Prisons
with potential customers that officials
would return to their families
wrist like a smartwatch. It sounded like
Marshall Project, Morgan explained
But attorneys familiar with the
true belief this will happen," Morgan
said that the tracking devices displayed
on her site may look the same as exist-
ence and experience, the
agency has no such deal with the
organization. Attorney Shon Hopwood in
In emails sent to potential customers
last summer, Oaks of Justice said it had
nearby 1,000 applications. Law firms
in federal prison say they’ve been
officials did not respond to a request
for comment.
Winnie Joanne Barefoot—insisted that
was left on her sister's sentence and her
dollars, depending on how much time
Morgan wrote in
organization. Attorney Shon Hopwood in
Several families told The Marshall Proj-
was released from federal prison.
and serve out their sentences at home while being monitored by a surveillance system
that her program allowed people
not stupid. I wouldn't fritter away money
but that she could not provide
real name, according to court records.
Among
fits our criteria when we succeed?"
To shield family members involved in
the business from further investigation.
She saw price changes and
of families whose loved ones are in
federal prison.
about the organization.
"Eventually I'm going to ask you to send
me money, ' then definitely that can
breaking any laws, she appears to be
saying false hope among hundreds of
families whose loved ones are in
federal prison.
"I will be so mad if this organiza-
tion is not a real thing. They have told
my family it is real—my mother has
higher hopes of me coming home before
her mother passes away," one woman
in federal prison wrote in an email.
She asked to remain anonymous in cas-
total deal with the
company turns out to be legitimate
after all. "If the Oaks IS real, I don't want to ruin my chances of being able
to come home through their program. I
need all of the hope I can get."
Morgan who has used several
aliases, was released from federal prison herself in December 2016, after
serving nearly five years for bank
fraud for multiple white-collar crimes,
court to court records. Among
them was running a hyperbaric oxygen
therapy business—a medical treatment
to increase oxygen to the lungs—that
billions of dollars of treatment that was
never provided. In a phone call, Morgan
denied profiting from false insurance
claims, but said she was a deal
president and family members involved in
the business from further investigation. She saw price changes and
of families whose loved ones are in
federal prison.
In a follow-up email, Morgan did not
respond to a request for comment.
"Please do not ask for updates. We just
counted, and since August 19th, we have
answered over 400 emails about this.
"I'm not on my case. You could be
by Morgan's tweet.

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In Texas, Dallas County District At-
torney John Creuzot told The Marshall Project he was frustrated about the slow pace of releases from the county’s jail, among the largest in the country. The jail population is now almost 1,000 over its typical average of 5,000. All jury trials have been canceled, so Creuzot worried those numbers would swell. His office has been working with de-
fense attorneys and judges to release eligi-
able people on personal recogni-

tion bonds, he said. In a city with a dire police staffing shortage and at least one officer testing presumptively positive for coronavirus, Creuzot also questioned why so many people were still being arrested for minor charges, like drug possession. Under state law, his office must be ready for trial within three months of an arrest. “These drugs will not be tested within 90 days,” he said, so there’s no point in jailing people on those alleged offenses.

In New York, the jail at Rikers Island has already had its checked twice that day. Those who remain in custody have access to Clorox wipes and hand sanitizer. But because the sanitizer contains alcohol to kill germs, staff is squeezing it onto inmates’ hands, said Sheriff Greg Ahern. To keep the pop-
ulation down, the sheriff told deputies to issue citations for most low-level crimes, rather than booking people into jail.

The jail holds a population equivalent to
8,500 people from 9,100. On Thursday, California’s jails, including Los Angeles County’s, which typically houses more than 17,000 people. On Thursday, California’s governor ordered the entire state to shelter in place. To get ahead of a looming public health crisis, judges and sheriffs had ordered the release of hundreds of people from jails across the state.

In the Bay Area, more than 300 people have been released from the Santa Rita Jail as coronavirus has spread. They included people nearing the end of their sentences, as well as older and medically vulnerable people. SALVAN GEORGES/THE WASHINGTON POST, VIA GETTY IMAGES

activity at Oklahoma courts be-
gan slowing this week, after the state’s Supreme Court and Court of Criminal Appeals issued an order encouraging use of social distancing to reduce risk of the virus spreading among judg-

es, court employees and the public.

The state prison system has already stopped taking in new prisoners, so now those with recent criminal convictions must wait at county jails. Historically, the Tulsa jail has dealt with overcrowding by having inmates sleep in plastic beds shaped like boats on the floor.

worried the delays in the court system would further pack the jails, the county public defenders began reviewing cases of the 1,200 detain-

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In recent weeks the jail population has dipped under 1,000, despite some objections from prosecutors. As of Thursday, the Orleans Parish Sheriff’s Office said it had released 23 people who’d been held on minor charges.

"You have to stop business as usual, and we don’t want to commit to that," he said Friday. "The sheriff hasn’t come out and said, ‘We don’t want the vulner-
able, we don’t want low-level offenses, and we don’t want probation holds in our jail!’

In a city with a dire police staffing shortage and at least one officer testing presumptively positive for coronavirus, Creuzot also questioned why so many people were still being arrested for minor charges, like drug possession. Under state law, his office must be ready for trial within three months of an arrest. “These drugs will not be tested within 90 days,” he said, so there’s no point in jailing people on those alleged offenses.

In New York, the jail at Rikers Island has already had its checked twice that day. Those who remain in custody have access to Clorox wipes and hand sanitizer. But because the sanitizer contains alcohol to kill germs, staff is squeezing it onto inmates’ hands, said Sheriff Greg Ahern. To keep the pop-
ulation down, the sheriff told deputies to issue citations for most low-level crimes, rather than booking people into jail.

The jail holds a population equivalent to
8,500 people from 9,100. On Thursday, California’s jails, including Los Angeles County’s, which typically houses more than 17,000 people. On Thursday, California’s governor ordered the entire state to shelter in place. To get ahead of a looming public health crisis, judges and sheriffs had ordered the release of hundreds of people from jails across the state.

In the Bay Area, more than 300 people have been released from the Santa Rita Jail as coronavirus has spread. They included people nearing the end of their sentences, as well as older and medically vulnerable people. SALVAN GEORGES/THE WASHINGTON POST, VIA GETTY IMAGES

activity at Oklahoma courts be-
gan slowing this week, after the state’s Supreme Court and Court of Criminal Appeals issued an order encouraging use of social distancing to reduce risk of the virus spreading among judg-

es, court employees and the public.

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Newsrooms Rethink a Crime Reporting Staple: The Mugshot

Confronted with the photos’ lasting impact, some news websites no longer use them as click-bait.

By KERI BLAKINGER

Some are red-eyed from crying, others visibly drunk. Some sport black eyes or jarring face tattoos. Occasionally, one offers an addled grin.

Online mugshot galleries, where news organizations post rows of people who were arrested, once seemed like an easy money maker for struggling newsrooms: Each reader click to the next image translated to more page views and an opportunity for more advertising dollars.

But faced with questions about the lasting impact of putting these photos on the internet, where they live forever, media outlets are increasingly doing away with the galleries of people on the worst days of their lives.

In January, the Houston Chronicle became the latest major paper to take that plunge. At an all-hands staff meeting, the paper’s editors announced their decision to stop posting slideshows of people who have been arrested but not convicted—a move that would disproportionately impact people of color by historically overabinde to low-level arrests, worried that the overabundance of crime coverage created a false impression of southern Mississippi.

A 2018 survey of 74 papers by University of Nebraska-Lincoln journalism professor Matt Waite, a former incarcerated New Yorker who is curiously named a motivational speaker, reported that 40 percent published mugshot galleries. There’s no comprehensive tracking of such media practices, so it’s not clear how much that figure has changed. Publishing mugshots can disproportionately impact people of color by feeding into negative stereotypes and undermining the presumption of innocence, said Johnny Perez, a formerly incarcerated New Yorker who is currently director of U.S. prison programs for the National Religious Campaign Against Torture.

“It reaffirms existing biases and creates biases where none exist,” he said. “People of color are already more likely to be found guilty than their white counterparts.”

“It creates this situation where you’re criminalizing folks before they’re convicted of any crime,” he said, noting that the existence of mugshots on the internet, where they’re easily searchable, can make it hard for people to get jobs.

Last year, Cleveland.com/Advance Ohio announced swapping changes to its crime coverage. Editor Chris Quinn says the decision was prompted by a community leader who asked him if he’d ever considered the racial dimension of mugshots.

It took a few years, but ultimately Quinn decided to cut back the use of mugshots, stop naming people accused of minor crimes and create a committee to evaluate requests from people looking to have their low-level brushes with notoriety removed from the internet.

“We finally decided we’re causing suffering here,” he told me.

Matt Waite, a journalism professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, likened mugshots to “a digital scarlet letter.”

A decade ago, when Waite was a reporter at the Tampa Bay Times in Florida, he helped create software to scrape booking information and images from local government websites and display them in a traffic-boosting web gallery. As such, he and his colleagues started sending the weirdest photos to each other; they realized the project was going to be problematic.

“Legally, it’s public record—but legally, it is not always right,” he said. “Fortunately, I worked at an organization that was willing to listen.”

The paper built the site to eliminate the photos after 60 days, and blocked Google from indexing the page so it wouldn’t be the first thing to pop up in search results. Still, Waite says he harbors complicated feelings about the final product.

“I’ve been on both sides of this: in 2010, I was arrested with heroin and was still sitting in jail when my mugshot was published. I was facing multiple counts of possession and drug use, and they hadn’t even made it to the file yet.”

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I didn’t like it; I was struggling with drug addiction and the entire internet seemed to be making fun of my appearance. But I didn’t fault the news organizations. I knew I’d fucked up, and mugshots seemed like an unchangeable part of the media landscape.

After prison, I went into journalism, starting at a small local paper and later spending a year at a national tabloid, where I later when hundreds of crime stories and slide shows. I hate it, it seemed like the cost of being a reporter; if I wanted to write about criminal justice, I would also have to cover crime and everything that entailed.

But after more time, organizations started shifting away from mugshots, and I started posterioring management at the Houston Chronicle, where I worked at the time, to do the same.

Last year, a woman asked me about removing a friend’s old mugshot from a story. He’d been arrested for burglary in 2008 but only convicted of misdemeanors, trespassing. She said he’d cleaned up his life, and a quick records search showed he’d at least avoided further arrest.

But when I Googled him, a mugshot from the paper’s decade-old story—with photo—from the first thing to come up. Her friend wasn’t trying to get his name removed from the story; she only wanted the mugshot deleted. Years ago, he’d begun using another name to avoid any connection to the one piece of newspaper coverage about him. Now, it was just his face connecting him to his youthful mistake.

It’s not clear that the Chronicle’s new policy would help someone like him. The paper will still use booking photos when they have news value. Lorando said the paper does not generally remove or edit stories that were accurate when they were published.

“If we get documentation of unreported later developments that alter the context of the original story, we will consider updating the post,” he said.

“The goal, as always, is accuracy and fairness.”

A Couple That Crafts Together Stays Together

Jenny Jimenez and her husband, Jesse, who is incarcerated in Illinois, have found creative ways to show each other love, especially around Christmas. Puzzle filters, nail clippers and Lifetime original movies are involved.

By JENNY JIMENEZ as told to BEATRIX LOCKWOOD

My husband, Jesse, has been back in prison since last January. He was released last Christmas Eve, hours before we were married, but we didn’t get to do much together during the weeks he was out. He had an ankle monitor, and he couldn’t even use the upstairs bathroom without it going off because the parole agent hadn’t come by yet to give him movement. He couldn’t get back to work or begin his engineering classes. He would watch me out the window struggling with groceries and cleaning snow off the car and it began to wear on him.

On Jan. 4, he cut his ankle monitor off in a fit of rage.

Knowing how frustrating it is to sit in a cell, I try to send him something in the mail every day, whether it’s a letter or a printout or something I’ve made. There’s only one person in the mailroom for the prison, which has just over 2,000 people, so I’m determined to get ahead of the holiday rush.

Jesse and I have already started our 12 days of Christmas. I’ve been making gift tags for each of the 12 days and taking pictures of myself wearing them on different outfits. I makes me drawings of the partridge in the pear tree and other gifts from the song and sends them to me. He’s a really talented artist. I laminate those and use them to decorate the garland in my living room.

Sometimes the prison challenges our holiday cheer. For instance, Jesse spent weeks decorating a T-shirt he bought from the commissary, with little turtle doves and hearts. He was making a Christmas pajama shirt for me. But they confiscated it because they said he was using it to send me “a message.”

I sent him a picture of my Christmas tree, but it was sent back. They said it was gang-related.
because of the five-pointed star at the top. “No stars,” they said. So I’ve been getting really creative. I learned to use this Silhouette machine to make these cutout Christmas trees that I send him, one at a time. Once he gets them all, they’ll go together and make a 3-D tree. He’s not allowed to have scissors.

My latest project is a Shutterfly book for the 12 days of Christmas that moves when you flip through it. I put a circular indentations around them because of the shape of the nail clippers; he’s not allowed to have scissors. I sent him little pictures of all the ornaments that I mailed him. He can see my cleavage and the new “Mrs. Jimenez” tattoo I got on my chest.

We were in the same ambulance together. I was screaming like a banshee in pain, holding on tight to him, handcuffed to the bed next to me. He kissed my hand before I was airlifted to the hospital with a spinal cord injury. They took Jesse to a different hospital, and I didn’t have my phone. He kept calling for days. He was so worried about me, and I was worried about him. Neither of us knew the extent of each other’s injuries.

Later, someone brought my purse in from the wreckage. It was about a week from the day of the crash before I was able to pick up his call. He was so worried about me, and I was worried about him. Neither of us knew the extent of each other’s injuries.

Jesse and I have always been different. After he ripped off his ankle monitor last year, we screamed and cried, but the damage had already been done. So we decided to take a road trip together before he had to go back to prison. We would go to Nashville to hear country music, and then to Memphis to see Graceland. We booked an Elvis-themed room and everything. It would be our honeymoon. Then, we were going to go to turn him in. We were on our way to Memphis when a police car pulled up over for speeding. When we stopped, we looked at each other knowingly. “Can you get away?” I asked. Then I said, “Go!” We took off. They chased us for what felt like an eternity. Then the crash happened.

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Jesse’s release is scheduled for next December. When he gets out, we’re going to finally have our big wedding ceremony. I just booked the venue—for Christmas Eve.

Jenny Jimenez is a wife, mother and pastry chef living in the Chicago area. She’s a former karate student and a former pastry chef who has been one of the hardest things to work through. The limited communication has been one of the hardest things to get used to. I want him to know I am always here, no matter what.

He doesn’t see the messages right away because he has to check his e-mail on a barely functional tablet. He can’t get the messages in his mind, silly things like, “Wow, look at her dress.” Even if he doesn’t get it for days, he’ll know I was there watching with him. The limited communication has been one of the hardest things to get used to. I want him to know I am always here, no matter what.

Jesse can be so tough, but he has a heart of gold. It’s difficult being in that horrible, egotistical environment. I think that without our communication, he wouldn’t be such a divine, loving man anymore. He would become institution-alized and depressed.

Admittedly, I flood the mailroom with letters, cards and books. But I want him to get something every time they do pass-out at the prison. He’ll always be reminded that he is loved and not forgotten.

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