

STATEVILLE SPEAKS

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE • FALL/WINTER 2018

THE PUSH FOR PAROLE

By Shari Stone-Mediatore

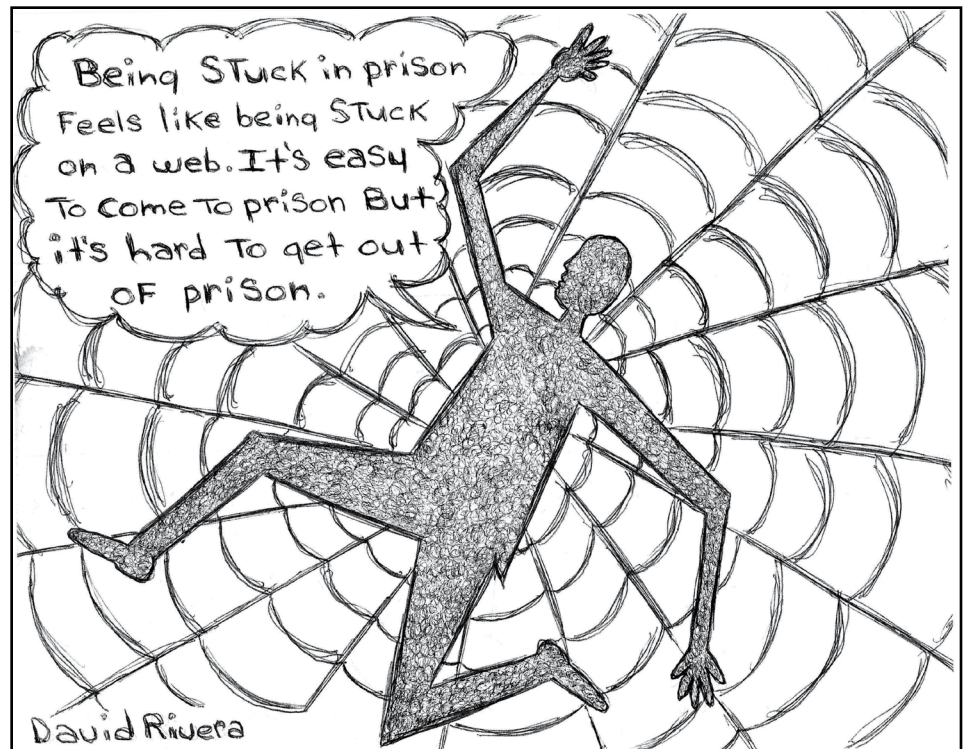
On Thursday, November 8, 2018, the Illinois state legislature held a public hearing to discuss the issue of bringing a system of parole to Illinois. This was a subject-matter-only hearing. However, by January, Representative Rita Mayfield plans to have parole legislation ready to present and will hold another hearing to discuss that legislation.

In her introduction, Representative Mayfield indicated that she only learned there was no system of discretionary parole in Illinois during a public debate delivered by the Stateville Debate Team.

Representative Mayfield did an excellent job of chairing the hearing. Unfortunately, only a few legislators attended (probably because people are recovering from the activities of the recent election). Nonetheless, Representative Mayfield, along with co-chairs Representative LaShawn Ford and Representative Art Turner, effectively moderated the panels and asked pointed questions. Another legislator and staff-person listened attentively.

We filled the room with about 30 advocates for parole from all walks of life. We had plenty of people prepared to speak on behalf of parole; however, a few minutes before the hearing began, the legislators informed us that only 5 people would be able to present testimony on behalf of parole. Among others, Brian Nelson, of the Uptown People's Law Center, was prepared to speak about his own incarceration and torture. Due to the limitations, he and many other attendees did not have a chance to speak. Still, their presence helped to demonstrate a strong show of support for establishing a fair system of parole in Illinois.

The hearing began with presentations on behalf of parole by Bill Ryan, Katrina Burlet, Alan Mills of the Uptown People's Law Center, Juan Rivera*, and Janet Mandoline. Then two prosecutors spoke against parole and Jennifer Bishop raised concerns from the perspective of victims. The prosecutors tarnished their own credibility when one of them claimed that



they were certain that every person they had prosecuted was guilty; and when one claimed that he was confident that there was no racism in his region, DuPage county.

The legislators then allowed time for respondents. Tim Libretti, Shari Stone-

“...a strong show of support for establishing a fair system of parole in Illinois.”

Mediatore, Ken Berry, and the brother of an incarcerated man responded to the misleading claims of the prosecutors and tried to put a human face on people with long-term sentences. No one from the opposing side commented. It seemed that most of the audience were supporters of parole. Ken Berry, who has experienced law-enforcement and incarceration from multiple perspectives, presented a particularly compelling case for educational programs and

rehabilitation, so that incarcerated folks can be ready for parole and reintegrate successfully when they leave prison.

The hearing ended with Dan Johnson from Restore Justice presenting an update on their parole bill, HB 531, which they hope to pass this veto session. He stated that, after the bill is passed, they will work hard to make it more inclusive. (Currently, HB 531 does not apply to people who are currently incarcerated; it applies to people in the future who were not yet adults when the crime occurred.)

Representative Mayfield indicated that she is working on legislation informed by the bill developed by the Stateville Debate Team. She stressed that she is open to suggestions from all parties. She hopes to have an inclusive parole bill, with a bill number, ready to present in January.

** Editor's Note: Juan Rivera, himself is a chilling example of wrongful convictions and prosecutions gone awry. ■*

Hope...Redemption...Change

#TEAM FREEDOM PROPOSAL INTRODUCTION

By Elbonie Burnside

This proposal is written with the concerns of the overcrowding in Illinois prisons in mind. # Team Freedom understands due to the seriousness of particular crimes a certain requirement of measures must be taken into account. However, the Illinois Constitution Article 1, Section 11 states: All penalties shall be determined both according to the seriousness of the offense with the objective of returning the offender to useful citizenship. In order for the percentage of criminal activity to drop, both lawmakers and breakers need to realize that we all fall short of perfection and the human thing to do is change for the better.

The penal system in Illinois is overcrowded for two reasons. 1. Crime rate is at an all time high. 2. Politicians have realized long ago how to secure pensions and squeeze an extra dollar out of taxpayers. The overcrowding is a serious matter for those on the inside of prison as well as those on the outside. At Logan Correctional Facility inmates ship in from different counties with no bed space. Because of this a dorm is formed in a gym on the house building 14. That gym holds 70 beds and with a recent shipment Logan has resorted to having inmates sleep on the floor.

Proper healthcare service is inadequate. Because of the overcrowding inmates aren't able to reach the healthcare at a sufficient time to take care of their health concerns.

Education programs are at an all time low, offering two vocational classes, a pre-GED and a GED class.

Food portions are small and do not meet the Illinois Department of Corrections Food Services guidelines.

Inmates are not taken care of with proper attire needed. Two bras, two socks, two panties, two blue pants and one state shirt isn't enough clothing suitable for every day function when there are seven days in a week. Currently there are no shoes for the inmates coming through R & C. Because of this, inmates are handed three pair of socks to wear throughout the facility. When there are shoes, navy blue ship on canvas shoes are handed to them. These shoes aren't durable and once wet; the shoe begins to fall apart.

#Team Freedom embraces any offender who rehabilitates and returns to society as a productive citizen. We do not understand the theory that non-violent offenders are the only people considered when the topic of early release is a possibility. Maybe it's because

these offenders are normally repeat offenders and will continue to have chances at freedom, when under the truth in sentencing, violent offenders have no chance at all. Majority of offenders under 100% truth in sentencing are unjustly sentenced and some should be charged with 2nd degree murder instead of 1st degree murder. Offenders sentenced under the truth in sentence statute should be returned to society once rehabilitated. As all offenders should be.

The goal is to rehabilitate, restore and return to society. There are a few ways in which I'd like to present to help prevent overcrowding in prisons and have more productive members returned to society.

1. Parole Board
2. Truth in Sentencing
3. Program Sentence Credit

I only ask for an open mind throughout this proposal and some great thought...

Parole Board

Before the parole board was abolished in 1977, offenders were summoned to present their evidences of rehabilitation in hopes the board will agree and set them free from the prison system. The parole board was abolished because it did not feel effective. Reason being those paroled early were returning being repeat offenders and the percentage rate was extremely high.

Times have changed since 1977, prison has as well. Those who were convicted before 1977 still have a chance to appear before the parole board. After interviewing offenders who had been in and out of prison since that decade has pointed out various key elements that lends some insight in how prison accommodated prisoners during that time. The population of female inmates wasn't as high as it is today. Dwight only housed a few hundred.

Prisoners were able to wear street clothing and have family send a box containing clothing and personal items every 3 years.

Prisoners were able to wear jewelry (chains, earrings, rings, etc.)

Prisoners were accommodated with a home appliance (microwave) to cook food with.

BBQ functions were held on the facility grounds.

Food was of value (pork chops, catfish and beef to name a few); no soy-based prod-

ucts.

A snack bar was available that gave prisoners the ability to order food as if from a fast food restaurant.

Clothing was able to get ordered from a catalog.

Although the few accommodations are trivial in the most people who have these specific needs at their disposal everyday, but in the prison lifestyle these main qualities give inmates the feeling of being "home away from home" as one inmate described. Another said, "It felt like I was away at college". With degrees up to a bachelor being obtained at the time, who could dispute the claim? None of these accommodations exist today. Though the percent of repeat offenders is still moderately high, those who are repeat offenders are those convicted of non-violent crimes and those who are likely not to return are the prisoners sentenced under the truth in sentencing statute.

Opinion: People are afraid offenders convicted of serious offenses who show some form of redemption and are allowed on the streets again only to return back to prison for committing the same type of act.

Observation: Those who are rehabilitated and can show evidence of rehabilitation are likely to be able to function in society. These specific prisoners are looking for a chance to prove rehabilitation is possible and are not looking for laws to break that will force them back into a prison that isn't comfortable by any means.

Truth in Sentencing

Before the truth in sentencing statute was implemented in 1999, those who were convicted of a violent crime were expected to serve 50% of their sentence. Because of this statute offenders are expected to serve 100% of a sentence, which strips away the main objective of a punishment, which is to be restored to useful citizenship. Recidivism isn't likely to occur in offenders over the age of 50 and neither is it likely to occur in offenders serving or have served more than 10 years no matter the age. There are model ex-offenders who are role models in their communities and promoting positive activity. Jouradine Smith, Benneth Lee and Jolinda Wade to name a few.

It costs \$24,655.75 to incarcerate a person for a year in prison.

Opinion: Due to current administration

SEE FREEDOM, PAGE 11

STATEVILLE SPEAKS NEEDS YOUR HELP



The main goal of Stateville Speaks has always been to provide a voice to those incarcerated, especially in Illinois, by allowing a platform for them to share it through their writings. It has also allowed us to disseminate information about laws and policies that may be of concern to those on the inside.

Over the past several years Stateville Speaks has been able to operate through the generous funding of Cynthia Kobel and the Kenneth and Harle Montgomery Foundation. The newsletter has been able to be widely distributed because of her commitment to incarcerated individuals and their need to be heard. Additionally, because of her support, we have been able to provide no-cost subscriptions for any interested inmate.

Unfortunately, moving forward, Ms. Kobel and the Foundation will no longer be able to fund Stateville Speaks. Having said that, we truly wish to thank her for her past generosity, and we wish her well. We would also like to thank Northeastern Illinois University for providing us a space to house Stateville Speaks. Having a home base is important and has been a great help in maintaining order. However, the university does not provide funding for Stateville Speaks. We count on donors outside of the university to keep the program, (printing and postage) going.

Sadly however, our work here has not concluded, nor has it diminished. Over the years we have discussed many important topics, the abolition of death penalty, the closure

of Tamms Supermax, police torture induced confessions, unfathomable living conditions and sometimes non-existent medical treatment. You brought to our attention Orange Crush, solitary/administrative detention/segregation, as well as the lack of programming or training for a possible re-entry, hopefully a successful re-entry into society.

While there are many, many significant topics that need discussing, none seem more vital than the chance to grow, change and make amends to society, none as vital as the restoration of parole. It is with that discussion looming before us that we are actively seeking other funding sources to keep the newsletter going. It is important to us at Stateville Speaks that we continue to provide an outlet, or voice for those incarcerated. So to any and every one out there if you are interested in donating, contributing or sponsoring, even one edition at a time, please email us at info@statevillespeaks.org or write to us at:

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In the meantime, we will keep working at it on this end. We ask that you please keep it coming: the great essays, poems, drawings, insight and honesty. And as always, thank you for letting us be your voice. ■

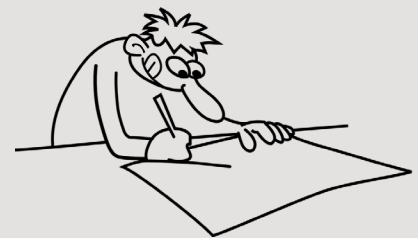
UPDATE: PAROLE ILLINOIS ART & ESSAY CONTEST



We have been overwhelmed by the quantity and quality of submissions. We received over 130 essays and dozens of artwork. Some of the artwork could be entered as a logo or art piece. Therefore, we have decided to enter each art submission into both the logo and artwork contests (although each piece is eligible for only one prize).

As announced, the artwork will be judged by online voting. Online voting will be open Dec 15 - January 15. The logo will be judged by visual artist Horace Ike Okafor-Newsum. The essays will be judged by a panel of judges led by Professor Emeritus Penny Hirsch of Northwestern University. We plan to announce winners by the end of January. All finalists will be posted with their identifying information on the Parole Illinois website. ■

SUBMISSIONS WANTED



Stateville Speaks wants to publish your article, essay, letter, poem or artwork in an upcoming issue. Please try to limit articles to around 500 words. Articles may be edited for length. Artwork may be printed in black and white, but published online in color. Due to the volume of submissions we receive, work will not be returned. If you have a topic you would like us to address in an upcoming edition, drop us a line and let us know. See page 11 for address.

WHY DO INCARCERATED LIVES MATTER?

By Sherrell Towns



Incarcerated lives matter for a multitude of reasons beginning with the fact that prisoners account for and make up an absentee segment of society, while prison itself merely serves as storage space for warehousing society's outcasts – the men and women who find themselves incarcerated.

The obvious reason incarcerated lives matter is that every sentence pronounced is neither a death sentence nor a term of natural life. Many of these outcasted men and women sentenced to a term or imprisonment will likely return to the very society that once casted them out. Most of these men and women will oftentimes return to society in far worse condition than the condition they were in prior to being sent to prison – a contributing factor to recidivism. But to understand this cycle we must examine issues such as poverty and racism which tends to sit at the heart of the problem.

Many of the incarcerated men and women who find themselves in prison are young, poor and uneducated; dropouts from inner cities and ghettos all across America who have turned to the streets to survive and find themselves lacking better options or trying to escape abandon-

ment, abuse, a dysfunctional situation, but without the requisite social survival skills and tools to navigate a jungle that is hostile to the hopes and dreams of youths caught up in the life in the fast lane under the rigors and pressure of everyday life situations and scenarios that lead to bad choices and decisions made by immature and underdeveloped youth but should be reserved for mature and experienced adults.

Many of these men and women are raised in single parent homes wherein oftentimes the mother is the sole care giver and provider, the father either in jail or dead or just a dead beat, and family values centered around keeping a roof over the head, clothes on the back and food on the table. Circumstances that create for part time parental guid-

ance and a broken school system to co-parent. The lack of after school activities and programs for inner city and ghetto youths leaves the door open for many of these youths to get sucked in and swallowed up by the street influences and ultimately become products of the environment that is producing more convicts than college graduates. This is what the everyday struggle looks like in minority and poor communities across America and paints a picture of the conditions many of the men and women find themselves in when sent to prison.

Incarcerated lives matter because recidivism begins long before those men and women first reach prison by the conditions that shaped and made them ripe for prison to begin with. These men and women are not born criminals, but by the time they reach prison they will be doomed to repeat offend because, absent an intervention, the criminality that lands them in prison will be ingrained behavior and instinctually all they know, born of the conditions that made and shaped them to survive as criminals. This is merely a tip of the iceberg but important nonetheless inside and outside of prison because funding for educational and social devel-

opment, vocational training, and other societal survival skill sets and tools have been taken out of prison and put to what society believes to be better used, as a direct result of failure on the part of society to realize that incarcerated lives matter. The focal point here being prevention and rehabilitation, neither of which exists, to either head off incarceration or nip recidivism in the bud.

Incarcerated lives matter because the men and women sent to prison and later returned home in a worse state are a problem for society, and simply warehousing people in a cage modified for human habitation for a period of years without recognizing their humanity is not the way to solve it, but rather will adversely affect generations to come while negatively impacting society for even longer.

Incarcerated lives matter because prisoners are one of the most vulnerable segments of our societal population and rightfully deserve to be a protected class or group from unchecked authority in the hand of prison guards with bigoted or racist dispositions or predilections for brutality, sexual abuse, torture, etc. or indifference toward the human dignity of prisoners over whose lives they have complete control and a social license to kill behind the veiled secrecy of the prison wall is an invitation unto fascism and modern day slavery in a post-World War II and post Jim Crow era.

Incarcerated lives matter because our society will be better off when every man and every woman protected under the blanket of Americanism can benefit from having their humanity recognized and their human dignity respected.

Incarcerated lives matter because every man and every woman convicted of a crime may have lost the presumption of innocence, but nonetheless may not be necessarily guilty as charged. Specifically, Illinois is a state that found and exonerated more innocent prisoners on death row than guilty were actually executed before recognizing the system in Illinois was irreparably broken and ultimately decided to abolish the death penalty in part due to systemic corruption involving police torture, false confessions and fabrication charges, etc.

Incarcerated lives matter because this could be you dealing with the human suffering of being incarcerated, or someone you love and care about being incarcerated. ■

REFORMATION OF OUR JUDICIAL SYSTEM

By Lawrence Frazier



In America, we need judicial system reform that is focused on justice and truth. When a jury makes a decision based on what turns out to be erroneous information, or perjured testimony the system is reluctant to correct the error. Every day we see examples of people with money, power, and position afforded one form of treatment within the judicial system, while the poor and disadvantaged are treated radically different. All too many African Americans know what it is like to be accused of a crime they have not committed.

In Illinois, defense lawyers, journalists and students have helped free 14 of 288 Death Row prisoners. That is an error rate (thus far) of 4.9% in cases that receive intense scrutiny. Applied to the general inmate population, that would translate to roughly 100,000 people, or enough to fill 80 prisons. If the number of prisoners who have been released in capital cases is any indication, a significant percentage of the 2 million residents of State and Federal prisons are living a nightmare. Only because no one wants to appear soft on crime, Congress and the courts emphasize bureaucracy over justice. Our penal system is littered with innocent people who do not have the resources or the influence to overturn wrongful conviction.

Governor George Ryan of Illinois did a very courageous thing in commuting all the prisoners on Death Row sentences to life. That took a lot of courage, regardless of his reasoning. Now if a governor can see the injustice, and act on it you know it was bad. What about

the cases that did not receive the publicity, the intense scrutiny, of the death penalty, but received 50, 60, 70 or hundreds of years? Perhaps for crimes they did not commit. In essence, a 60-year sentence is the death penalty for an innocent person, because it slowly kills you from the inside out. Your spirit dies first along with your hope, and thus you are subjected to a slow suffering, agonizing death. This I know! In the more complex cases, which are most of them, how does an innocent man end up behind bars you ask? Most often, it is because of mistaken or perjured eyewitness testimony, according to one study. Eyewitnesses' played a role in three quarters of the first 67 convictions reversed by DNA evidence and in 38% of death-row exonerations, it was the only evidence presented. Other factors in false convictions include police misconduct, lab errors, coerced confessions or incompetent counsel (something that is very hard to prove). In a single year the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals ruled three times that lawyers accused of sleeping through portions of trials had provided sufficient counsel. Something is wrong!!

Prosecutors who withhold evidence, coach alleged victims to commit perjury or otherwise break the rules, play these games because they are under tremendous pressure to win cases, not to seek the truth, and they have little to fear if they are caught fixing a case.

The Chicago Tribune analyzed 381 murder cases in which defendants had convictions overturned because of official misconduct and

found that not a single prosecutor had been charged with a crime or disbarred. Only five faced discipline and the harshest punishment was a 30-day suspension. Many went on to become judged or a District Attorney. One was even elected to Congress. Bureaucracy over justice. In one notorious case, the Supreme Court refused to hear a condemned man's compelling claim on innocence because years earlier his lawyers missed a filing deadline. In 1993, the court ruled in *Herera v. Collins* that a prisoner cannot simply argue in Federal Court that new evidence points to his innocence. He first must prove that his trial contained procedural errors. (The technicalities that may free the guilty, but also protect the innocent). If the Court and Judges refuse, or are reluctant to consider new evidence, who is left to correct the errors? Prosecutors are not lining up for the job. Despite an oft-cited admonition by the Supreme Court that they operate with "the two-fold aim that the guilty shall not escape nor the innocent suffer", legislators have cut off other escape routes. The Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, championed by Senator Orrin Hatch passed in 1996, gives an inmate 12 months after conviction is final, to file a Writ of Habeas Corpus. Our system of justice has failed us miserably but yet no one seems to care, and we compound the problem with unjustified pride, the pride in turn has turned to arrogance. Something is very wrong! One day all this will change, as God will establish true righteousness and justice in the land. What a joy it is to know that in the fast paced, restless, insecure and bureaucratic world we live in, it will take only the wrath of God, to give us hope, comfort and perfect peace.

I write this article because I am innocent of the charges of which I have been convicted, and to compound this great miscarriage of justice, I was given an illegal and unconstitutionally illegal sentence of 60 years. This was based on official misconduct, police misconduct, perjured and false testimony, evidence tampering. The same evidence that was used to convict me is the same evidence and testimony that would free me and show my innocence, if I had the proper help, influence or money. However, without the Lord in my life I will never be free even if I am released from prison. With the Lord in my life, and God on my side this bureaucracy doesn't stand a chance. ■

PRISON OR HER?

By Keith Bennett

Each day that passes, we are all one day closer to death.
Each day that passes, are days we will never get back.
Each day spent in prison, is another day we spend without freedom
A lot of guys throw their entire lives away for the Mob, for their guys...
I fail to understand how the Mob and the guys can be more important
than being free...

FREEDOM!!!

In my opinion, the best reason to stay out of prison...

IS WOMEN!!!

25 years I've spent listening to the sound of men's voices day-in and
day-out.
Very seldom have I been able to hear the sound of a woman's voice and
laughter.

Why do guys throw their entire lives away for the Mob and their guys?
Each year there are at least 600 gang-related murders in Chicago alone.
On Thanksgiving 2017 there were 44 gang related murders in Chicago...
The ones who can put a stop to this senseless violence is you and your
guys.
You guys have to put down the guns and drugs and stop gang-banging.

There is power in making a decision.
Everything that happens in our lives, whether that be success or failure,
it all begins with a decision.
Our destiny is shaped by our decisions.
The decisions we make today will determine our future.

I will spend the rest of my life in prison because I made the decision to
use the drugs I used...
Had it not been for that, I'd of not lost my mind and committed the
crimes I committed.
I haven't held or kissed a woman in 25 years and I will never make love
with a woman again.
Is this really what you guys want for your life?
Would you rather spend your days in a prison cell with our guys, or out
in the free world, enjoying life with your girl?
Your days in prison should be spend on getting out of prison and think-
ing about how to stay out of prison.

It's your decision...Nobody else's! ■



INDEPENDENCE

By Christopher Trotter

Imagine wrists being wrapped in handcuffs, a judge imposing long
math numbers, and iron bars being slammed shut in the face of the man
of your household, who was the financial backbone, changing your fam-
ily hustle to family struggle.

Prison can financially damage ex-prisoners and their families. The
families, from financially supporting fighting the case and expenses
once convicted. An independent man is now dependent on the state and
whatever family he has left due to broken relationships and spirits from
incarceration. Imagine the emotions of finally being heard by a court
recognizing your innocence, or even relief from Illinois over sentencing.

Once released after doing numbers, with no corrections, help or
training, who is going to hire him? Where is he going to go, home to his
Momma? He is still a dependent, depending on the system. Illinois De-
partment of Corrections is not a department of corrections, but instead, a
department/system of obstacles to make you a dependent.

As a prisoner soon to be ex-prisoner, we all face a reality check of
the following questions. 1. Where am I going? 2. What am I going to
do financially? 3. Is there any other options than following a broken,
corrupt system that's proven to fail? 4. How can I dream again and have
success? I can't come back! ■

RESPECTED, LOVED & EQUAL

By Eric Snead

In a room of checkers, I have a mind for chess
I want to be "Respected, Loved & Equal" more than less
People are ignorant with a closed mind
I tend to leave them behind
They pat me on my back and call me intellectual
They then whisper that I'm homosexual
Two strikes against me being black and gay
I won't let hatred lead me astray
"Respected, Loved & Equal" is all that I ask
To some this is a difficult task
I'm viewed as square peg in round hole
Like Charlie Brown I receive a lump of coal
My sexuality doesn't define who I am
Why do so many others give a damn?
We have to crawl before we can walk
"Respected, Loved & Equal" my kind of talk
We can run yet we can never hide
Issues we have to take in stride
Have the will to finish from the very start
These words I write are from the heart
We will fall for anything if we don't take a stand
For equality I'll extend a helping hand
I read this book titled "The Measure of a Man"
Apply myself to this I'm sure I can
I want to play my part in the sequel
Oh to be "Respected, Loved & Equal" ■

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See page 11 for details.

WHO IS TO BLAME?

By Pablo Salgado

Sadly, for far too long we have been greatly deceived. Force to conform to policies adopted from inhumane sadistic animalistic concentration camp mentality by IDOC Administration without at times the slightest discomfort or outcry in our part. Because of this, the deception continues to succeed, converting itself to a perpetual system of mental deterioration and nothing else.

In order to understand this abstraction, it's important to fully accept that we are not only prisoners in the physical sense. We are also prisoners in the disturb minds, ideals and concepts of IDOC past and present. Administrations, who long ago, has enter a cycle where we have been viewed NOT as humans, but rather as objects.

This has facilitated the emergence of such practices, having on inmates in their cells 23/1.

The introductions of soy, lack of the basic medical attention. Long term segregation. A.D. (Administration Detention) etc., which are all part of the long spectrum of extreme isolation and a form of social deprivation and dehumanization.

IDOC will introduce new policies once in a while to give the illusion that prison reform is in the fore front in their agenda. These policies and new regulations only serve as a twofold. First, to continue blinding the prisoners to their current condition and extinguish any thought of resistance. Second, to shock the morale and while still in shock implement further submissive, sheep mentality tactics.

IDOC view with great triumph, what they believe to be effective policies, practices, regulations, as management tools to rehabilitate and also deter any disruptions or rebellion inmates.

Not fully understanding the only thing that has been achieved is a complete failure from every level within IDOC administration. A great chasm between inmate and staff its final product. A.D. (Administration Detention), and long-term segregation prisons like Pontiac C.C, a daily remainder of their failure to perceive a prisoner as a human being, but rather simply as objects. In order to appease whatever conscious IDOC staff has left, they continue to remind themselves, as they slam steel prison cell doors every day, that they are simply doing their jobs.

So, who is to blame, in this daily spectacle within IDOC? Who has lost touch with reality? Who has fallen victim to the fog that descended over their minds, which enables them to fully grasp what they have become? Are we? Are they? Who is to Blame? ■

THE REHABILITATION INITIATIVE

By Charles Childs

Does anyone notice what's terribly wrong in Illinois prisons? I'll tell you, in my opinion, not enough energy is being invested into the fight to bring back parole. There's an inside joke that even suggests that the dominant conversations around Illinois prisons has been reduced to four main topics: 1) Does anyone know what's for chow tonight? 2) ...when we going back to commissary? 3)...what's coming on TV tonight? And 4) ...when we coming off lockdown? I disagree.

However, while we've been distracted by whatever distractions that has been distracting us, 'everyone else' somehow has gained control of the narrative about us.

My question is why isn't our voice the loudest?

The Rehabilitation Initiative is the idea that every offender who rehabilitates or habituates his/herself through educational, vocational and/or self-help programs deserves a meaningful opportunity to earn his/her freedom. Especially if those offenders have served in excess of 20 years. Illinois Constitution states, in relevant part, "All penalties shall be determined both according to the seriousness of the offense and with the objective of restoring the offender to useful citizenship." (ILL. Constitution 1970, art. I, sec. II). However, between the dissolution of parole in the late 70's and the creation



of Truth-in-Sentencing laws in the late 90's, the sentencing objective in the Constitution has been abandoned. As a result, de facto life sentences (sentences that exceed the offender's life expectancy) has been the trend of the last two decades.

I suggest to anyone who would benefit by parole to think deeply about the risk we pose to ourselves and our futures by idly standing by assuming that someone else will do for us what we're not even doing for ourselves. I challenge everyone who reads this essay to engage at least two people with dialogue and debate about what a functional parole system in

Illinois should look like and why Illinois should have one. I also encourage you to send emails, write letters and/or make calls to your State Representative and find out if their position is in favor of Bringing Back Parole. If it's not, then take steps to persuade them from your point of view. For developing practical alternatives to the "lock 'em up and throw away the key" mentality is our RESPONSIBILITY, one that we must RESPOND to collectively, according to each of our ABILITIES. In conclusion, many of us are no longer the people we were when we came to prison so many years ago. We've learned a lot. We've matured. We've changed.

Therefore, it's time we regain control of the narrative about us and make it clear to the public that oftentimes the sentence itself doesn't reflect or even consider a person's rehabilitative potential, chiefly because it's been given to set an example and to deter others. Let's combat the stigma that long-term sentences create, by revealing that redemption and personal transformation is a reality for every human being who chooses that path. The pursuit of freedom is our common purpose and it's far greater than everything that divides us – so let's fight for parole. ■

INDIGENOUS

By Efrain Alcaraz

Dear Mother, I understand your pain as my indigenous traditions. In your body rivers of blood, carrying life, splitting your body causing pain, in my vein's rivers of blood, carrying my indigenous pain.

We were both conquered by humans and we both suffered the consequences, in your part, pierced your body, with powerful drills trying to steal your blood that is killing the world. The black gold.

In my part they only pierced my veins with needles, to steal my indigenous blood, on your surface thousands of indigenous tribes passed by farewells, in search of better lands, in my mind only painful moments passed dissolving farewells.

But you are the best Mother, you burdened me when I was born, you gave me food when I was hungry, and you gave me to drink your blood when I was thirsty.

Thank you, Mother Earth. ■

THE ENEMY WITHIN

By Eric Snead

If score was kept of life's mess, I'd have perfect ten
The greatest battle I have is "The Enemy Within"
In times of trouble, chaos and confusion I befriended
Bad mistakes and decisions over & over I defended
In perfect world my shelves are well stocked
In reality my cupboard bare and I'm shell shocked
I pay my fare on the emotional roller coaster ride
"The Enemy Within" is so eager to play outside
Under Dr. Feelgood I have been sedated
Thoughts of the afterlife I have contemplated
Drip drops go through my vein of morphine
A paradise I enter is so serene
"The Enemy Within" interrupts and starts intrusion
Under lock & key he is kept in seclusion
As a son, brother, father and uncle I wasn't the best
As a man time will always put me to the test
None of us is ever above reproach
There is no subject I will not broach
Stretch with yoga and meditate with Zen
My biggest fight is with "The Enemy Within"
From Chicago to Champaign I've had a constant battle
It rained on my parade when I visited Seattle
Anger makes David Banner turn into the hulk
Damage and destruction unleashed by the bulk
Rolling with the punches I take it on the chin
Hit with your best shot I start to grin
Centrifugal force cause my head to spin
I regain my sense and suppress "The Enemy Within" ■

SCARS THAT DON'T HEAL

By Eric Snead

In black & white I see many shades of gray
Do you hear & listen to all that I say?
The warrior and soldier both must battle until
Many wounds leave "Scars That Don't Heal"
Through choppy waters slowly I navigate
With destiny we all have a date
For foolishness I've lost zest and zeal
On my mind many "Scars That Don't Heal"
You break bread by loaf and leave me a crumb
To that one great big temptation I succumb
With a devil I played "Let's Make a Deal"
All I have to show are "Scars That Don't Heal"
In bad blood we both have bathed
No one comes out to be unscathed
You copy at Medline by swallowing psychotropic pill
In the mirror you reflect "Scars That Don't Heal"
For redemption I give it one last shot
I know I give it all that I got
Struck by lightning, shocked by electric eel
They take pleasure in pain of "Scars That Don't Heal"
Sad old day in the Happy New Year
Writing on wall is all so crystal clear
In IDOC so much time on hand to kill
Plastic surgery can't hide "Scars That Don't Heal"
I spin Wheel of Fortune and say a vowel
Bankrupt, I'm ready to throw in the towel
In presence of the fake, I'll keep it real
Bandages only cover up the "Scars That Don't Heal" ■

PRISON

By Eddie Williams

I'm rougher than any thug. I don't do hugs, there is no room for love. I'm free of all prejudice. I hate everyone equally. Consumed by the isolation and the same old routine, I breakdown the weak so easily. Empowered by the thirteenth amendment. I own you slave! Ankles scarred, wrists swelled, handcuffed and shackled, never again will you be without a blemish. I'm the only subject in your sentence. I'm a graduate school for the dropouts. And I have given out more degrees than a university. I'm a genius. Capitalize on your bad decision. And once I take hold, it'll be worse than any drug. Dependent broken soul give up hope all ye who enter here. Like gravity I pull the nefarious toward me. And even if he does make a break, it won't matter to me. I still remain full to capacity with all the coming and going like cavities. So, give me your tired, your rich and poor. No, I'm not America, just it's addiction, mass incarceration with no rehabilitation. I was here before Jesus and the masses have tried me before they have tried religion. I go by many names, but you can call me prison. ■

Thanks to Illinois Prison Talk (IPT) for support and further dissemination of Stateville Speaks, and your tireless reform efforts.
Visit www.illinoisprisonstalk.com to learn more.



WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES

By Willie Scales

Dear Prisoners:

We all make mistakes!
Mistakes can be forgiven, but only if we repent today!

So I beg you to please exchange your negativity and your destructive behavior and exercise that energy toward something positive, like seeking vocation training, enrolling in a GED testing course or a college program!

Something that will not only be positive and fruitful for you, but also for your
Wonderful offspring's, as well as for your community!

Real life begins by committing yourself
Completely to God today!

To the question of your prison life,
God is the answer!

To the problem of your prison life,
God is the solution!

Do not let your prison life set back you are having hold you back
from getting out of prison,
But use them to learn and grow today!

I know what it is to be in need,
And I know what it is to have plenty! ■

DETERMINED

By Tammy Englerth

I am just a normal inmate. Like many others I have transformed from a silent onlooker to a vocal activist. Prison walls don't stop you from using your voice. My outward circumstances have not changed – I am still just another prisoner. But my inner world has shifted dramatically. I am an overcomer, and so can you be. You can't change your mistake or circumstance, but we can make our time useful by helping others and most of all ourselves. People will always judge, but it's up to use to succeed. Make your time useful by working on you. Don't stay silent. Your voice is there. Things can't happen until your voice is let free. Show society that you are a good person and you are just a human who made a mistake and that is striving to achieve and better yourself. No walls or gates will stop you. We already live in a harsh environment so make the best of what you got now. Be king to yourself. Others hatred, anger, etc. doesn't get you nowhere. A pen, paper, etc., whatever it takes your worth being hard. Determine to take your prison time and turn it into something good. We might not be able to change our circumstances, but by using our voices we can help others, so this won't happen to them. That is a blessing itself. -We are survivors- ■

To subscribe to Stateville Speaks, or to submit an article, essay, poem or artwork, see page 11 for guidelines and mailing address.

SAVE OUR UNITED STATES CHILDREN!

By Willie Scales

Dear Parents,

Our society and justice system never take into consideration that children are not yet fully developed emotionally or psychologically and that most have not received a proper education.

From one mistake, we label them a threat and "menaces to society". We conclude that juvenile offenders will never contribute anything worthwhile to society. But how can we make this determination against our United States youth?

Drugs are one of the biggest problems plaguing our United States youth, with the ages of drug users steadily increasing. What makes a young person take drugs? To some, drugs serve as a way to escape problems of peer pressure, low self-esteem and self-worth, and not feeling loved. These problems seem insurmountable to them.

Drugs lead to changes in behavior, which leads to violence. Crime and eventually prison and death. If a person has cancer, they receive treatment to battle their disease. The same should apply to our United States children who use drugs. We need to provide them with counseling and treatment, not a prison system.

We should not turn our backs on them, simply locking them up in prison. By doing this we send the message: "We don't have the time or patience to help you".

We have the power to help our United States children become productive members of society or destructive-wreaking havoc on our communities. Their ability to choose well depends on us. Remember our United States children's future depends on our choices.

"Please save our United States juveniles" ■

PAROLE ILLINOIS

Who are we? We are a coalition of people inside and outside of prison who are working toward a more just and humane legal system.

We believe in the power of redemption and transformation; and that it is inhumane to order people to spend decades in prison until they die without any periodic assessment of whether such sentences are necessary for public safety. We therefore stand against policies that sentence people to death by incarceration, whether that be life-without-parole or excruciatingly long sentences that people cannot outlive.

We recognize that excessive sentencing laws have piled up in Illinois, to the point that few people understand them, and thousands of people are now required to die behind bars. We also recognize that each of these problematic sentencing laws needs to be repealed. And we recognize that each ameliorative law needs to be applied retroactively. However, we don't believe that we can wait to establish a fair parole system until each of those battles are won individually, because many people will die behind bars in the meantime.

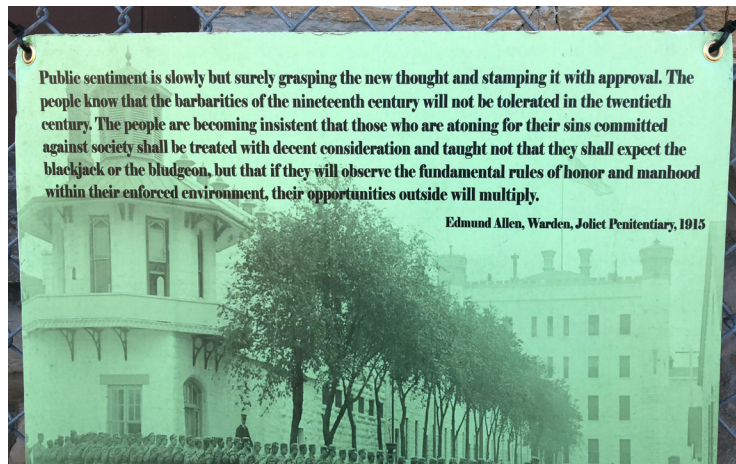
Therefore, our first course of action is to bring to Illinois a fair, inclusive, and retroactive parole system. We are building a grassroots movement and working with legislators to promote parole legislation that is inclusive and that prioritizes rehabilitation and return to full citizenship. In addition, this legislation must distinguish the initial trial (which focuses on responsibility for the crime) from the parole hearing, which should focus on a person's level of rehabilitation and current risk to public safety.

We believe that such a parole system would present the most expeditious way for the many over-incarcerated and wrongly incarcerated men and women in Illinois to obtain their freedom. We don't take this lightly. We are prepared to devote substantial effort to establishing a fair and inclusive parole system and maintaining a fair and effective parole board.

We seek to mobilize people behind the wall as well as activists and loved ones of incarcerated individuals to fight for parole and, more broadly, for a more just and humane legal system.

Our recent activities:

- We have been working with Representative Rita Mayfield to develop fair and inclusive parole legislation. On November 8, Representative Mayfield held subject-matter-only hearings to discuss bringing a fair parole system to Illinois. We testified at that hearing.
- We have contacted state senators to discuss their possible sponsorship of the Stateville Debate Team parole bill.
- We set up a website, ParoleIllinois.org, and a Facebook page, www.facebook.com/ParoleIllinois/
- We are holding an art and essay contest on why Illinois needs a good parole system. Winners will be announced by the end of January.
- Following the formation of a new Restorative Justice and Safe Communities Committee by Governor-elect Pritzker, the Stateville Debate Team wrote a memo to the chairs of the com-



mittee. The Debate Team explained that any true criminal-legal reform must include the establishment of a fair parole system and must be informed by the voices of people with direct experiences of prisons and the criminal-legal system. Parole Illinois is helping to distribute the memo to committee members and state representatives.

- We are developing campaign materials to distribute to friends and family members as well as other materials to distribute to elected officials.
- We are preparing to organize friends and family members of incarcerated individuals to lobby our representatives and tell the stories of their loved one who deserve parole.
- We are producing a video about the need for parole that we will launch when our bill is introduced.
- We received a grant to produce a booklet of exemplary men and women in Illinois with life sentences who deserve parole.
- We are working with Scrappers Film Group to take the film *Stateville Calling* on a nationwide tour in the spring.

If you are on the inside and want to get involved in the campaign for a fair and inclusive parole system, send your name and address to the PO Box below and indicate that you would like the Parole Illinois campaign packet for people on the inside. We will be sending out the packets in January or February.

Parole Illinois
PO Box 7155
Westchester, IL 60154

Note that we cannot respond to individual queries at this address. However, your family and friends on the outside can email us at ParoleIllinois.org, check out our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/ParoleIllinois/> and receive regular email updates when they sign our support form: <https://paroleillinois.org/support-us/> ■

FREEDOM

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

and the move to Logan facility it is apparent rehabilitation for a long-term offender has been put to a halt. #Team Freedom understands due to the seriousness of particular crimes, much stricter punishment is issued, but it should include a chance of rehabilitation. This act, as well as not giving the convicted a chance to prove as much, is a violation of the 8th amendment.

Observation: #Team Freedom observes the change in offenders convicted of violent crimes. A lot of these offenders have spent their entire adult life in prison, which diminishes any chance of recidivism. These offenders are hoping for change within the legal system. A chance to prove they are rehabilitated and are able to function in society as law abiding citizens.

Program Sentence Credit

As it is stated in the revised administrative rules on sentence credit, not all offenders are eligible for programming credit. Offenders earn one-half day off their sentence for each day of participating in such programs (education, life skills course, behavioral modification, drug treatment, re-entry planning) at Illinois Correctional Industries programs if they successfully complete the programs. Violent and class X crimes are not eligible, but why? Due to overcrowding shouldn't everyone be considered for this Program Sentence Credit? Program Sentence Credit would be a good way for offenders convicted of a violent crime earn time off their sentence at a good cost. Learning and being able to obtain the necessary tools needed to function in society. Whenever an offender is able

to take advantage of programs prison has to offer, a level of confidence is imbedded and the offender believes there is a chance to make it in society, while being an ex-felon, but that is no longer possible since transferring to Logan. There is no productive life style for the prisoners of Logan who are serving 3 years or more.

The objective of prison is to correct/rehabilitate but with over 2000 women, rehabilitation is no longer possible for prisoners such as myself, which is a huge percentage of Logan's population. If the % rate is checked on the number of prisoners who have returned to prison more than once after obtaining some form of program sentence credit, then a question has to be asked. Are offenders only entering such programs to earn time off their sentence with reform or rehabilitation far from their mind? If so, how can the legal system fix such a problem only a convicted offender is willing to fix? If there is little to be said about offenders who take advantage of programs because they can earn credit, then there surely is a lot to be said for those who have absolutely nothing to gain from these programs but reform and rehabilitation.

Opinion: As stated earlier Logan does not provide a productive lifestyle for prisoners who have a substantial amount of time to serve. It is believed this reason is to keep the prisoner in their current state of mind – imprisoned/corrupted.

Observation: Offenders who take advantage of prison's programs only for the purpose of self-improvement speaks volumes of a person's character and potential they have at rehabilitation. It was possible for prisoners to do so before Dwight and Lincoln were closed down for women. ■

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POLITICAL 'TOON BY ARKEE

"I SENTENCE YOU TO
NATURAL LIFE IN PRISON...
WHAT WAS THAT?"

"DON'T BLAME ME, JUDGE.
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S
KILLING THEM."



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