

# STATEVILLE SPEAKS

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE • SUMMER 2018

## SILENCING THE DEBATE SUCCESSFUL STATEVILLE PROGRAM INEXPLICABLY CANCELLED

By Gayle Tulipano  
Stateville Speaks Editor

In October of 2017, Katrina Burlet, founder and director of the Justice Debate League, started a debate team at Stateville. C. C. While seemingly quite remarkable, it was not unheard of, as Burlet had already been coaching a successful team at the Illinois Youth Center (IYC) in Warrenville, for about six months. According to Burlet, "They were able to leave the facility to compete against their peers at regular debate tournaments. They brought home multiple awards."

The goal of the Stateville debate team was to conduct a public debate. The approved debate topic was the Illinois parole system. A debate event was planned on December 15th. Unfortunately, that scheduled debate was cancelled, allegedly because nine legislators were unable to obtain timely security clearances into the prison. Instead, they held a practice debate in front of eight people from the public.

Eventually, the debate event was scheduled and took place on March 21st. While the entire Illinois General Assembly was invited, about 20 made it, as did many community advocates, activists, clergy, educators, as well as high ranking members of the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC).

By all accounts it was a very positive and successful event. The debate team was very professional and extremely well-prepared, with each member contributing either with opening or closing speeches, or by participating in the actual debate. The arguments were both informative and powerful. Who actually won the debate was hard to determine and may not have been as important; those fortunate enough to have been there were witnessing a humanizing event within Stateville C.C.; a rare occurrence, to be sure.

Two weeks later, Assistant Director Gladys Taylor, who had attended the debate event made a surprise visit to the debate class.



*Katrina Burlet, Director of the Justice Debate League, and Bill Ryan, Consulting Editor of Stateville Speaks, voiced their concerns at a press conference held at the Thompson Center in Chicago on May 30. Photo by Dawn Larsen.*

According to Burlet, it was at this time that Taylor, often known for being a proponent of programs- drug rehabilitation, re-entry initiatives, such as job prep and work release programs, showed her disdain for this program.

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### Taylor did not want other members of the Illinois General Assembly to hear what these men had to say.

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Despite any disapproval select members of IDOC may have felt towards the debate team or their facilitator, Burlet and her team caught the eye of WGN News reporter Ben Bradley. On April 19th, Bradley and his news station ran a generous segment highlighting the work that they were doing.

While the media coverage increased

awareness of the debate team, Burlet's goal was to have this powerfully-crafted examination of parole, by her debate team - those who are ultimately affected - to be videotaped for the rest of the legislature to view. Taylor, according to Burlet, would not allow the taping, nor did she want for other members of the Illinois General Assembly to hear what these men had to say. On April 24th, according to Burlet, Taylor informed her that this would be their final class. There was no definitive reason as to who made or why that decision was reached; however, Burlet did not believe that Stateville Warden Walter Nicholson had any involvement in the cancellation of the debate class.

Burlet was also unsure if the message of the team would still be captured by video.

Then, according to Burlet, Dr. Anita Bazile-Sawyer, Chief of Programs and Support Services for IDOC informed her that after attending a meeting with other top-level depart-

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*Hope...Redemption...Change*

# DEBATE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ment officials, the debate was to proceed and would be video-taped, after all.

However, one day before the debate was to be taped, according to Burlet, she was once again contacted by Bazile-Sawyer, this time to be told that the debate would never be taped.

In absence of the video taping of the debate team, Burlet attended the IDOC Adult Advisory Board Meeting instead. It was there she met and spoke with IDOC Director John Baldwin, who according to Burlet, had nothing but kind words and praise to say about her and her debate program(s). Thus, according to Burlet, she is quite sure Baldwin himself was not even aware of the halting of the debate team classes, as she was the one that informed him, at that time, of the cancellation.

The same evening, as she did every week for the past year, Burlet went to IYC-Warrenville for her usual Thursday night coaching of the debate team, only to find that she was banned from the facility. According to Burlet, even the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ) was confused by the ban, as she had never been accused of breaking any of their rules.

Stunned and receiving no answers as to “What just happened?” Burlet and her supporters perused another avenue and held a press conference at the James R Thompson Center in Chicago. According to Stateville Speaks’ Assistant Editor Dawn Larsen, “The press conference was well attended, with members of the public, as well as family members of currently incarcerated individuals, who understand the importance of having programs available to their loved ones.”

The press conference concluded with the attendees walking to Governor Bruce Rauner’s Thompson Center office, to hand deliver a letter written by the Stateville debate teams asking to reinstate the team, Burlet as coach and allow legislators “...unfettered access to state prisons.”

A rally was also held to draw attention to and get some answers to the abrupt end to the debate class and its instructor.

In an effort to gain insight Stateville Speaks called the Programs Department at Stateville C.C. and was told by Ms. Gonzalez that she was “...unaware of the problem...”, before being sent into the IDOC telephone maze. We also contacted IDOC Media Administrator, Lindsey Hess for answers. (See “We Asked the IDOC,” at right.).

Finally, we reached out to Ben Bradley at



Burlet, left, spoke with the media after the press conference. Photo by Dawn Larsen.

WGN News, via email, in which he responded that he too was looking into the problem and would report anything newsworthy. Thus far he has not.

As we go to press, Stateville Speaks has learned that a lawsuit is close to being filed in this matter. We will update you in the next

edition on who the actual litigants are and the scope of the lawsuit, should it proceed.

As of right now, Burlet let it be known, she will not give up and as far as the return of the debate team, “it’s absolutely going to happen.” ■

## WE ASKED THE IDOC...

Staff members from the Stateville Speaks newsletter were fortunate to have attended the debate held at Stateville C.C. in March, 2018.

We, like many others that attended were so impressed with the effort and performance the debate team put forth.

Additionally, we like so many others were stunned that this program was abruptly halted. We have been unable to find a reason why, although are aware that this was done shortly following the airing of the piece on WGN, highlighting the debate team.

Since this program was run by a volunteer, it was done with no cost to the IDOC. The class had been taught without incident for over six months prior, so there appeared to be no security risk from the men in the program. Additionally, with good programs, at no cost are so scarce, we are baffled as to why this

program was shut down.

We are including various articles about the debate team in our upcoming issue and do not want to go to print without a statement from the IDOC. We would appreciate any insight that you would share with us, as to why, and if there is any remedy to this loss?

We thank you in advance for your timely reply. - Stateville Speaks

## ...AND THEY ANSWERED

The IDOC acknowledges that the program has positive attributes and was well-received. This program – like others in our department -- is currently under review. The Department will make a determination on how to move forward once the review is complete. - Lindsey Hess, Media Administrator, IDOC ■

# BRING PAROLE BACK TO IL

By The Stateville Debate Team

Illinois is one of only two states in the United States that lacks a parole system.\* For decades, Illinois abandoned rehabilitation and embraced over-incapacitation, handing out excruciating long, and often unconstitutional sentences, that served little purpose other than possibly satisfying some victims' desire for revenge by handing down excessive sentences. We are now at the point where well over 5,000 Illinoisans are already in prison with some type of sentence that requires us to die in prison (LWOP, defacto life), and hundreds more Illinoisans receive such sentences each year.

The old parole system in Illinois was abandoned in the late 1970s after it was criticized for being biased. Nevertheless, our current system of having no parole at all is acknowledged to be even more biased. Thus, abandoning parole clearly did not solve the

problem. We now believe that a better, fairer parole system can be implemented, one that constantly checks and adjusts for bias.

We see this as a long-term campaign that we will fight to build support for, as long as it takes to get it implemented. We are going to be bringing major resources to support it, and need all incarcerated men and women to get involved. We are done supporting garbage legislation passed off as "reform," but written to appease prosecutors' associations.

Key Points: Retroactive, and everyone considered for parole regardless of crime of conviction or original sentence.

Dozens of organizations, as well as politicians, activists, family members and friends of the incarcerated have expressed interest in and excitement for this campaign.

For people with internet access who want

to learn more about the campaign, please go to: ParoleIllinois.org and send an email to the address below requesting to: A) be placed on the list to receive news about the campaign; and B) have your name or organization added to the petition in support of bringing an improved parole system to Illinois.

For people who are incarcerated: A) spread the word and get your family and friends involved; and B) if you have someone willing to write a letter detailing why you deserve parole, please have them type it and email it to ParoleIllinois@gmail.com so that it can be featured on the site.

It's time get political!

\*Yes, we know about C-Number holdovers from the old system. ■

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## A SEA OF FORGETFULNESS (A LETTER TO MYSELF)

By Jevonti Davis

If I only knew then, what I know now, I would've never indulged in the fantasy of drugs, or exemplifying the image of a tough guy. I saw these two things (drugs and machismo) as a rite of passage toward manhood; major reasons why I've made such reckless and haphazard decisions; thus ruining my life. If I only knew then, what I know now, I would've embraced and never abandoned my original role models; wholesome figures, such as blue collar workers and/or civil servants.

I would've never chosen to look up to the villainous 'bad guy' flamboyant celebrities, such as the killers, the drug dealers, the gang bangers, and the rappers. I wouldn't have allowed myself to be impressed by the bravado, the glory, the fast money, and the harlots. I would've known better. I wouldn't have allowed myself to be brainwashed by these negative impressions. I would've turned right, instead of turning left.

Even though, I may sincerely regret some things I've committed. I'll never regret anything I've endured; because the experience was necessary in order to gain sophistication and maturity; chiseling me into the man I am today (and I like who I am). The experience was necessary also, because I lacked the guidance of a father. Therefore, the process of me becoming a man required trial and error; self-taught by the

'school of hard knocks.'

But, if only I knew then that society wasn't forgiving enough to disregard and erase the stigma I've created for myself; giving me a clean slate; allowing me a second chance; I would use my acquired wisdom to guide others caught up in reckless folly; and therefore benefit the community by making fruitful and constructive choices (not destructive ones). I'll educate and apply myself as a servile and productive citizen; part of the solution, and not the problem, therefore, rendering myself a useful component to society. A fine representation of what a man is supposed to be.

But, if only society was like God, and forgiving; throwing my sins into a "Sea of Forgetfulness", I'll earnestly change; sincerely and enthusiastically. I'll strenuously focus on becoming a model and outstanding citizen, someone reliable, someone competent, someone valued, a good son to my mother, a supportive brother to my sisters and an ideal father to my daughter. I'll even audaciously pursue a team partnership with a woman; intent on being a protective and provident husband; creating a blissful and happy marriage. I'll universally strive to become a better man, exerting great effort on repentance. I'll exemplify change without 'faking the funk'. ■

## REMINDER

Please do not send any legal documents-appeals, briefs, or original grievances. We do not have the legal expertise, legal education or credentials to assist you with them. We do not want you to incur costs for printing or postage, all for naught, as we do not have a staff attorney. Beyond just the cost to send it back to you, the biggest fear that it may be lost or not returned to you in a timely manner. Please don't send them.

Please do continue to send us pertinent excerpts or copies of your grievances along with your letters and excerpts from your cases/appeals along with your essays. We will continue to read, to better understand the issues you face. And more importantly, we will continue to publish to allow others to understand as well. ■

## CLARIFICATION

It has been quite a while since we received so much interest as was created by the piece, "Introducing Definite Decade Sentencing," by Sharonda Miller, a contributing writer from Logan C.C. Her writing is impressive and her synopsis and solution in reviewing those rehabilitated, yet remaining behind bars, for decades beyond what is necessary for safety and unnecessarily inhumane, is equally impressive.

Unfortunately, this not a proposed House Bill, but an inspiring idea from someone who knows all too well that unfair and harsh sentencing laws serve no one. Fortunately, change does start with great ideas. ■

# TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

By Milton Pope

Any form of positive growth and/or rehabilitation apparently is laughed upon under this system; otherwise I'd be inside a medium facility learning trades in preparation towards becoming a productive citizen, upon my release, in November, 2023. I am overly eligible, as I've complied and continue complying with the Departmental Transfer procedures, but to no avail have I been granted relief. Despite my remaining disciplinary free, as well as consistently incarcerated, since September, 1989.

I have no living family left, no place to call home. I must work beyond average to recover from this 25-year absence. Here inside Stateville Correctional Center, I'm not given any job opportunity nor do they possess any programs to elevate me because I have 13 certificates. All I'm asking for is the opportunity to advance. The only way for me to advance is by being transferred to a medium facility like Danville, due to their trade programs.

I'm trying to get around being a person whose only resources in freedom consist of government handouts or a life of crime. Chicago already has too many additional problems. I simply desire being a part of the solution. Your help will grant me the tools it takes to accomplish this task. Have me transferred to a medium facility or set me free considering

my original times served. I'm only doing dead time now at taxpayer's expense for staff assaults that happened over 20 years ago.

How long must I be accountable for that when I served all sanctions handed by the adjustment committee? I even spent 11 years in Tamm's super maximum prison, unwarranted and out of retaliation because of my history. The judge sentenced me to a term of 50 years, October, 1991. I had to do fifty percent. I served 25 years. How much money you need to spend holding me here? When my charges were two counts of attempted murder and home invasion, which means nobody died in my case, thank god.

I entered the system at age 19. I'm 45 now. What more can be done that hasn't already? I'm scarred by this life and I must recover from this absence. Therefore; even when I'm set free, it'll be like prison with the climb toward success I will have to make. I will have no place to call home, no skills to operate phones, computers, cars, etc. I must learn what the norm to all others is, allow me to get started!

Finally, why are we not allowed to earn good conduct credits? Being able to earn good time from three to six month's every 90 days will help kick me (and others) out sooner. ■

# ECHOES

By Jesse Cunningham

The trouble with words is their limit  
They spray out and land indiscriminate  
A slight of tongue seems  
For you to believe  
That set-up has come from some image

The speaker's ignored by the presence of ghosts  
What he intends will not be disclosed  
But falsity reigns  
Confusion maintains  
A sublimity appearing most source less

Why give in to this secret  
Psych wards will take you completely  
The fault is your own  
Freud is renowned  
So an asylum bed sounds the most peachy

Could the supernatural be divine?  
In centuries past this was not a crime  
But to explain they'll demand  
Repeat what you can  
It will be your conundrum whether to

What's a negative voice really worth?  
Not even a second on planet earth  
But voices command  
Your attention's demand  
Let no one dwell on your birth DNA ■

# IDOC "THE MEANING"

By Curtis Britton

**Illinois** – a state of the N-Central US; admitted as the 21st state in 1818.

**Department** – An area of responsibility or interest; or a functional division of a large organization.

**Of** – being or containing; or originating at or from.

**Correction** – The treatment of offenders through a system of penal incarceration, rehabilitation, probation, and parole or the administrative system by which these are effectuated, free from error or fault.

**(IDOC)** – Practice what you really mean. ■

# SEE CHANGE

By David Wynter

God in heaven let us pray  
A few more kids were shot today  
The shooters had human features  
But acted more like alien creatures  
A child has died, and one in a wheelchair  
For being outside enjoying fresh air  
Kids get shots for measles and mumps  
Please, not pistols or 12-gauge pumps  
Why all this senseless violence you ask?  
Question that devil in the ski mask  
For this evil phony it won't end well  
It's go to prison, or straight to hell  
For destroying lives and so much pain  
Tell us shooter, what did you gain? ■

# LOVE

By Augustus Rogers

*But God commendeth his love toward us on that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, Romans 5:8*

I can't help but wonder what would happen if we would ever love like Jesus loves, as we peel away layer by layer, as we become more comfortable with our God and our own humanity, we become increasingly transparent. We must achieve a level of honesty that will keep us from being estranged from our important relationships.

We have love and be loved by someone to the degree that we can say, this is who I am, and it is all that I am. Love me and be patient with me. There is no telling what I will become, but today this is who I am." ■

# SUBMISSIONS WANTED

Stateville Speaks wants to publish your article, essay, letter, poem or artwork in an upcoming issue. Please 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 7 for address.

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See page 7 for details.

# Life in Prison without Parole: The Other Death Penalty

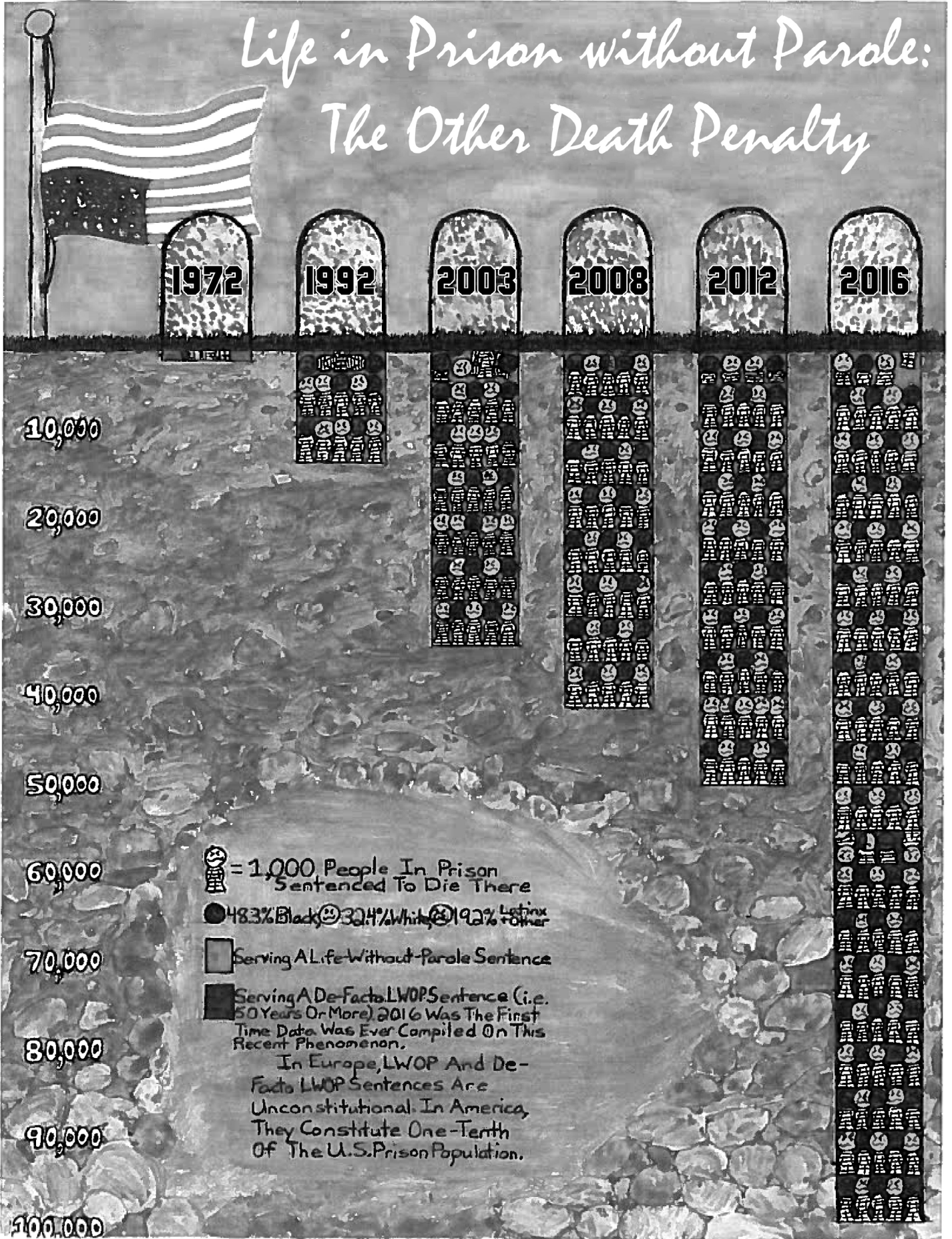


Illustration by Joe Dole

# WHY ILLINOIS NEEDS A PAROLE SYSTEM

BECAUSE over 5,000 Illinoisans are currently sentenced to die in prison, and hundreds more receive such sentences every year;

BECAUSE Illinois has no true parole system, but has dozens of overly-punitive laws that incapacitate too many people past the point that they cease to pose any threat to society;

BECAUSE Illinois' accountability laws ensnare too many people for conduct not their own;

BECAUSE Illinois courts are refusing to provide fair and constitutional sentencing hearings to people sentenced to die in prison for crimes committed as juveniles or young adults;

BECAUSE Illinois needs a safety valve for the plethora of wrongfully convicted people in prison who lack the resources to prove their innocence;

BECAUSE the clemency process is completely ineffectual due to political calculations;

BECAUSE parole would help alleviate an overburdened court system which is systematically failing to ensure that people receive due process;

BECAUSE since Illinois abolished parole in 1978, the Illinois Department of Corrections' budget has ballooned from \$52 million to nearly \$1.5 billion, draining state resources;



BECAUSE the Illinois prison system is one of the most over-capacity prison systems in the nation;

BECAUSE partially due to being over-capacity and underfunded, the Illinois Department of Corrections abandoned its mission of rehabilitation;

BECAUSE parole costs only about \$2,000 per person annually while incarceration costs \$38,000;

BECAUSE society now has the tools to create a fair and effective parole system;

BECAUSE Illinois is one of the few states without any type of compassionate release law;

BECAUSE it would help to reduce some of the moral injury suffered by correctional staff forced to watch people die in prison for no legitimate penological purpose;

BECAUSE mass incarceration is inhumane and is the civil-rights issue of our era;

BECAUSE Article 1, Section 11 of the Illinois Constitution states that all criminal penalties "shall be determined both according to the seriousness of the offense and with the objective of restoring the offender to useful citizenship";

BECAUSE people should be afforded an opportunity to prove they can be productive citizens; and BECAUSE IT IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO!

- PAROLEILLINOIS.ORG

## ART AND ESSAY CONTEST

### Art Contests

Design a logo for Paroleillinois.org. Prize: \$100. Winner will be chosen by visual artist and author Ike Okafor-Newsum.

Create visual art depicting parole and/or rehabilitation. \$150 for first place; \$100 for second place; \$50 for third place. Winners will be chosen by online voting at Paroleillinois.org.

### Essay Contest

In 500 words or less, explain why Illinois must establish a parole system for everyone. \$150 for first place; \$100 for second place; and \$50 for third place. Winners will be chosen by a panel of judges.

### Submission Instructions

All contest submissions must be received by October 31, 2018. On the back of your artwork, please include your full name, ID number, address, and where you would like your artwork sent after the contest. On the top of your essay (above the title) please put your full name, ID number, and address. All submissions will be judged anonymously.

Send submissions to:

ParoleIllinois.org  
PO Box 394  
Delaware, OH 43015

\*\*\* Any entries may be used for the website or in promotional materials for the campaign to bring a revolutionary parole system to Illinois. \*\*\*

**DO NOT SEND SUBMISSIONS TO STATEVILLE SPEAKS**



# “Ms. DIVINE”...

By: Corey Hodges

Who is she? With a name like “Divine”...  
 A tree full of wisdom that is deeply rooted with  
 some of the most eclectic seeds.  
 Truthfully, you wonder if is it a façade or an illusion?  
 And is she anything like the unfeigned message  
 That she brings?  
 Her words become food for thought  
 Because they fulfill you mentally,  
 so you try to retain her  
 Because she alone produced nourishment...  
 Her walk is mellifluous, and her smile festive  
 You can tell she has “evolved” like a butterfly  
 So you’re intrigued to catch her...  
 I wonder if I’m able to look into the eyes  
 Of this woman we call Divine.  
 Will I see “Hurt” or “Pain”?  
 And a little girl trapped inside that wants to  
 Become a virtuous woman, but society refuses  
 To let her rise  
 She has already reached heights unattainable,  
 Because she was born to fly...  
 “Divine” is her name, and she’s a teacher to thousands  
 Unbeknownst to her she has the ability to plant seeds  
 That gives “Birth” to resilient flowers...  
**Dedicated to my sister, Ms. Marquita Striblin**  
**More than a rose, always a lotus... ■**

## CLARIFICATION ON SUBSCRIPTION AND DISTRIBUTION PROBLEMS

Nothing makes us as feel as validated as a letter or a note that says we are “getting it right”. And when a subscription check is enclosed, we would normally be giddy, with affirmation to keep it up and do better. However, all too often we are getting mail that says, “I’m not getting my newsletters”, “I have not gotten them since I’ve been transferred.” or “I will pay when I can afford to do so, can you send the newsletter?”, and the worst is... “I’ve sent my subscription check and have not received my S.S!”

We have indeed hit a rough patch with censorship in many of the prisons, especially where new wardens are not aware that they too have rules to follow with regards to publications. Perhaps we also have not been diligent enough in our oversight on their delivery. We are however aware and working to rectify the situation. In the meantime, we appreciate and accept donations, but: Stateville Speaks is free to inmates and will never be denied due to inability to pay. We appreciate your patience and support, as we continue to work through both our re-education and legal options. ■

## STATEVILLE SPEAKS STAFF • SUMMER 2018

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LWH 4062  
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Please do **not** send originals.  
Please limit essays to around 500 words.

Thanks to Illinois Prison Talk (IPT) for  
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 Visit [www.illinoisprisonstake.com](http://www.illinoisprisonstake.com) to learn more.

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# POLITICAL 'TOON BY ARKEE



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