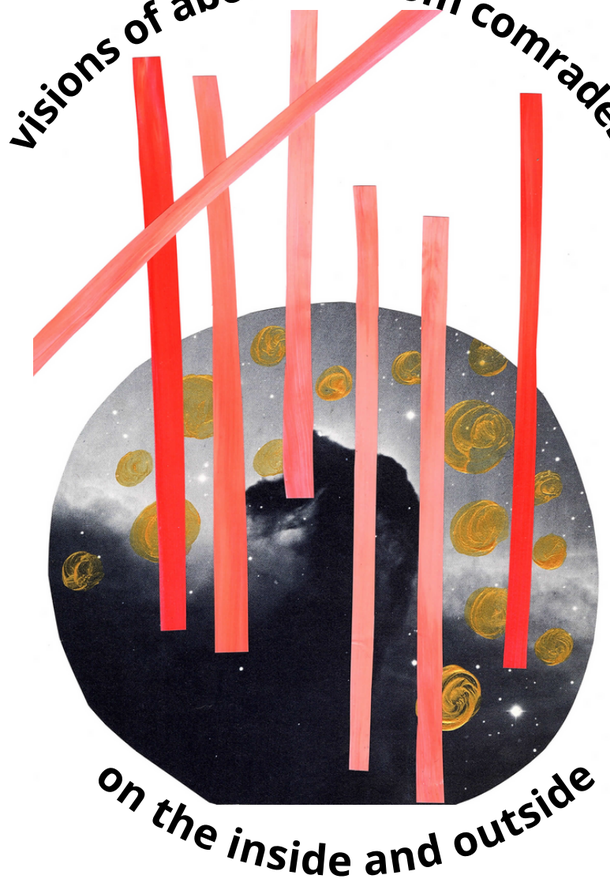
To Me
ABOLITION
Is...



Website: https://www.nonewwaprisons.com/
Instagram: @NoNewWashingtonPrisons
Twitter: @NoNewWAPrisons

Note: all art, except where otherwise specified, by Taylor Buck

(We Struggle Together). By "J.Lee"

* I remember, as a young child of "8,"while having a crush on other classmates, I didn't know what it meant to be gay, or straight.There were many rejections filled with hate, as I tried to cope, but I didn't relate, so I escaped. Into my own reflection.Through the mirror, what did I see? A sad, lonely child, who couldn't be "me." Nobody seemed to recognize the pain visible on my face, as I tried to hide the truth, which caused me to "internally" run-away.I was left to feel, that my love was my fault, that somehow "my choice" was a mistake. So, suicide I did contemplate.*

I remember, as a child of "10," playing with my neighbor friends. Being teased over and over again, not knowing why I was looked-upon differently, just wanting a true friend. Instead, I became their target, without any remorse, or a helping hand. I was "alive" right in front of them, but they refused to embrace the free love, in this child of 10. There seemed to be hate everywhere, with no end. This was the early 80's my friend. Understand?*

I remember, as a child of "12," loving to entertain, and share the joy of myself. Not knowing when the next attack would come, or how to defend myself. I realized quickly, that I was being used. Looked upon as trash. A throw-away child, with many hands of abuse.The one sanctuary I should have had, was my family, yet they were just as bad. I lost "trust" in them. There seemed to be no way out of this nightmare.*

I remember, as a child of "14," already damaged beyond repair. Everyday was a scare in my small town, and everywhere. I could find none like me.Many nights, I'd cry myself to sleep, with nobody to hold or comfort me.Where was love, when I needed it the most? Where was my hero, my quide, my angel, hope, or liberty? Why could I not be free?

* I remember, as a teenaged "16," hidden wounds not seen, not knowing what to make of me. Being told my free love is insanity, that I shouldn't be this way. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't hide my thoughts and feelings inside. So, I ignored and denied their opinions of WHO, or WHAT I was meant to be. Mentally, I drifted slowly away, because this world didn't want me to stay.I then made my own way. Today, I can say, I'M A SURVIVOR!I CELEBRATE ME!

* I remember, as a teenaged "18," surrounded by complete strangers who couldn't recognize "me." As I walked among them, looking for love desperately. All I found, were those who didn't understand WHO, or WHAT I was, STILL AM, as I write this from my memory.Many nights I sat alone, praying I would have met you, so I could have held you close. However, it was not meant to be, unfortunately.

* I cannot forget, that dreadful day (at barely "19"), I finally gave-up, on the reality of "me."I got a gun.I attempted to end "my life's pain."However, as I tried to die, I became that "scared little child," I was soo familiar with. That "fear" became my own worst enemy.I feared, if my family knew what I was doing, they would punish me. Then, more abuse would come, if I didn't take action immediately.In my attempt to protect myself, I pointed the gun at my Grandfather.In my attempt to "scare him away," the gun accidentally fired.He died that day.

* It was "suicide by proxy," they say.*

I'm now in State Prison. Been here, (in years) "26."The State gave me no mercy. Just a bunch of Court Ordered Debts.While I have been housed in the most inhumane of places, I have finally found others "like me."* I NOW, FEEL FREE.* It's a sad reality.* I now share my story with you, hoping change will happen due to my abuse. I pray that all young people can meet somebody like me.

Maybe by doing so, their lives may not end in tragedy.....* FROM INSIDE OUT, I'm "J.Lee."

"A Cost" by Eric

In my world the real victim of my prison sentence of life without the possibility of parole is my son. This past year my son turned three years old. The possibility of having to co-raise my son from prison will continue to be difficult to say the least. The impact on my son and I, not to mention my family and friends, is immeasurable. Every day is a fight to stay upbeat and depression free, to continue to choose to rise above all the challenges that a sentence like mine entails. I have tried to explain what it's like to be in my shoes, however I stopped trying as it's like asking a woman in the midst of childbirth to explain all she's going through. The cost of my incarceration cannot be measured in time and money, but in tears, heartbreaks, lives missed, highlights such as my son's first words, and other pivotal moments.

Having alternative sentencing in the least, where I could have a deeper impact on the raising of my son or be involved in his life would be life changing. I would jump at the chance to be back in the real world with a real job/ being a productive member of society providing for my son. My family, my friends, the fight is just beginning. The fight for me to not be forgotten by people in my life. I will continue to find ways to strengthen the bonds which transcend concrete walls and razor wire fences. I will never give in. I will never give up but will continue to rise above every obstacle one step at a time.

"Life or Change"
by Natasha Pendragon

If life can change a person, then wouldn't it mean more for the person who could change a life?
For isn't life based on the decisions a person makes? Life is always changing, always shaping and cutting us like an unpolished diamond. Each facet a new lesson learned or a memory made.
With that said, is life worth more for those that have to struggle for change or is it for those that have it made?
Is an artist only as good as the materials they have? Or are their talents only as good as someone is willing to pay?
I feel life is more like a rose. Life has its thorns, and it can only grow when not being held back by weeds or rocks. Isn't it the same way with the potential of a person who's not being put down by hurtful words or actions of others?
Who is to say what is worth more, a past that can be looked at and studied like a history book, or a future that hasn't been written yet?
If love is worth a thousand words, wouldn't it be more profitable in the here and now and the memories we could create?
For it must be better to have loved and lost than never to have loved, for a heartbreak can leave you speechless!

No New Washington Prisons

We are so excited to bring this zine into the world and to engage people on the crucial practice of prison abolition, as understood by people who are currently held or have been held captive in these institutions. This collection of writings, collected throughout 2020, comes from people imprisoned in Washington State who have come together as part of a project fighting prison expansion. We understand the ending of prison expansion as one crucial aspect of prison abolition, which works best when coordinated with related efforts such as getting people out of prison, closing existing prisons, supporting people in surviving attacks from the criminal punishment system (badge-and-gun, gavel-and-robe, walls-and-bars, beds with restraints and meds without consent), and building community projects that are needed for actual safety.

As a coalition of people inside and outside of prisons working to choke the life from these institutions, what you are reading here represents just one moment in a process of collaboration. The zine, we hope, isn't so much a final word on our work together, but a compass for us to orient ourselves, a shovel for us to start digging holes through walls, a trumpet call to wake up everyone thinking prison reform is anything but a trick to make things change so that they can stay the same. In that spirit, we present the perspectives of people currently held in Department of Corrections (DOC) facilities, and also want to include this piece to represent what some of us on the outside are thinking about abolition.

We should be clear about what we are talking about when we are talking about a prison. It's important to be clear because if you just pay attention to the most common idea about prisons, it's hard to know what prisons are really about, because the most common idea is a deliberate lie. The most common idea is that prisons are places that keep bad people away from the rest of society so that society as a whole can be safe from bad people.

Normally you wouldn't find something so cheesy and full of holes unless you were next to the cold cuts at the grocery store. Hole: The idea of good people and bad people doesn't help us understand human behavior or get to the bottom of why people harm others (this is kind of important if you want to prevent interpersonal harm). Hole: If anyone's a bad person, it's probably someone who is caging people. Hole: Tons of people are unsafe outside of prison, and if anything there's evidence that more prisons leads to things being less safe in the rest of society.

What are prisons, then? Prisons are one of the tools the capitalist state uses to help make sure that the capitalists can keep hold of their private property and continue to live parasitically off of everyone else. It is an institution that oppresses in order to protect violent exploitation. Capitalism is inherently unstable because it relies on a few people exploiting and controlling way larger numbers of people. In order to help balance the scales and prevent revolutionary activity, capitalists implement prisons to control and separate the people who are most likely to rise against capitalism because the capitalists' boots are on their necks: poor people, Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, disabled people, queer and trans people, people who rebel against these systems. Police serve a similar purpose domestically, and the military, along with the soft but deadly pull of global financial institutions, serves a similar purpose internationally.

By caging people and destroying relationships, the U.S. government enables capitalism to thrive. With the distorted half-truth of individualism, this project comes to look like it's working toward justice. Let's stop falling for the bullshit. We don't want progressive prisons, we don't want friendly cops, we don't want prisons even when they are called hospitals. We want people to be free. And that's a vision where police and prisons are in the rearview.

"Abolition from the Inside: Phoenix Rising" by Jessica Phoenix Sylvia

What does the prisoner know of abolition? I must first write not as a prisoner, an activist, or an academic, but as one who has risen from crisis. The first abolition starts with the liberation of self. Most of us do not really belong to ourselves, nor do we really know individuality. The individual must pay the price for their individuality, for the world demands us to conform, or pay the price! The deal that begs to be made is compromise, and compromise always benefits the oppressor. When we, as human beings, learn to compromise ourselves and our values, we give away our power. To truly understand abolition is to have a personal revolution that raises self from the ashes of self-oppression and compromise to become a free spirit. Emma Goldman says, "If I can't dance then it is not my revolution." Oscar Wilde says that a man who does not think for himself does not think at all. Dominique Jackson says, "Go ahead and buy those heels and stand on their necks until they respect you." I still get goosebumps when I read George Jackson. He says that people who refuse to stop fighting can never be repressed. They either win or die, which is much more attractive than losing AND dying. Oh, but this requires resilience, for unless one is a bully seeking easy fights, they will be knocked down more than a few times, and trust me when I say that the floor is NOT your friend.

I remember the last time I failed at trying to kill myself. Once I rose from the ash-heap, I decided to never again ask permission to be myself. I had to claim the space between my ears and in my heart, which required self determination and an understanding that I was oppressing myself. Once I decided on self-liberation and became dignified, I decided to never again bend my spine for anyone or to beg for anything and developed an abolitionist's integrity. As Oscar Wilde says, "As for begging, it is safer to beg than to take, but it is finer to take than to beg. No: a poor man who is ungrateful, unthrifty, discontented, and rebellious, is probably a real personality, and has much in him. He is at any rate a healthy protest. As for the virtuous poor man, one can pity them, of course, but one cannot possibly admire them. They have made private terms with the enemy, and sold their birthright for very bad pottage. They must also be extraordinarily stupid." The abolitionist understands that history shows us, as MLK says, that the oppressor rarely gives up their power willingly, it must be demanded. Peaceful protests are nice, but a person begging with hat in hand for someone to provide them a safe space is a sure loser. The abolitionist does not suffer white fragility, and must be prepared for expropriation if and when the situation calls for it.

As part of my evolution of self, I decided to determine my identity on my terms. I changed my middle name to Phoenix. To me, this represents burning my dead life at the funeral pyre. I rose from the ashes, to build resilience through post-traumatic growth and to live freely, beautifully, and bravely. That is abolition from the inside.

"The Second Emancipation: The Abolition of Prisons in America" by Tonelli Anderson

When we talk about abolishing prisons in America, most people scoff at the idea. Their thoughts immediately steer towards how many criminals will be walking the streets, an increase in gang activity, a rise in property crimes, but most of all, an increase in rapes and murders. These are valid concerns. These are probably some of the same concerns slave owners had in the mid-1800's when talk of abolishing slavery was being shopped around. And like slavery, there is a huge economic impact that abolishing the prison system would have. Most prisons are built in small rural communities. These prisons sustain these communities by supplying them with jobs and revenue, from consumers from the prison, and people outside their community visiting the prison. Without these things, some of these communities would shrivel and become economically distressed. On a larger scale, politicians would miss out on political contributions from the corporations that supply the prisons with everything from food to clothing, from office supplies to appliances. Then there is the issue of Correctional Industries...

In short, Correctional Industries was created to be a work training program to help prisoners gain work experience and, in some cases, attain occupational training. They are supposed to be a not for profit corporation, but the public will never know what their books look like because legislation has made it to where they don't have to answer certain public disclosure requests. Another thing that was legislatively done was to make it so that state agencies have to purchase certain things from C.I., for example, license plates and car tabs are made by C.I. These are things that the public has to have for their motor vehicles. These are lucrative businesses. Now, C.I. has food factories. DOC has to purchase prison meals from them. Food Factory makes meals for public schools and meals on wheels for seniors. What is illogical about it is, it costs DOC upwards of 7% more to buy from the Food Factory than it would if they were to use local and national food suppliers. On the health care front, DOC cuts so many corners with the care of its prisoners that, in a Correctional OMBUDS report, DOC was determined to be implicit in the deaths of many prisoners by the denial of services or the lack of diaganoses/misdiagnoses of illnesses. Nurses act like providers and officers. Providers like to prescribe unnecessary and experimental drugs. Mental health help is futile. They treat mental illness with punishment. It is easy to point out the flaws in the system from the inside. The problem comes from getting people besides family and friends to listen or, better yet, to care!

by Amanda Knight

To Me, Abolition Is...

Idyllic
Near Utopian

A world devoid of the dark corners
where society sweeps things under the rug

The absence of buildings where the mortar
is made of desperation and broken lives

Where not only the concrete and barbed wire crumble down
from weathered misuse, but the prisons in our minds fade away

Where society no longer says, dispose of this inconvenience,
but instead, how can we help heal?

Abolition is breaking walls and barriers,
conquering fears and challenging our own beliefs

Creating change rather than remaining bystanders
in our own lives, whether victim, perpetrator, or witness

Abolition is freeing ourselves from xenophobic beliefs
understanding that your and my life paths are not mutually exclusive

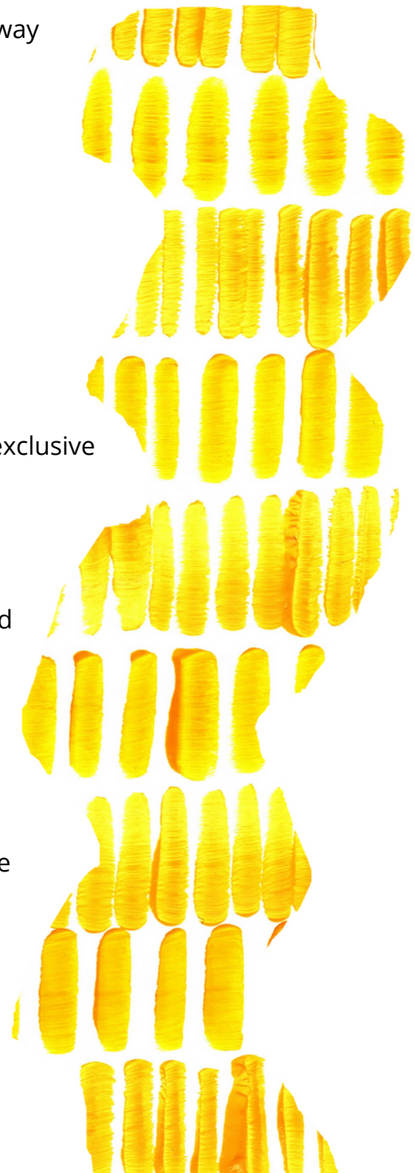
that opposing perspectives and practices can coexist
and still arrive at the same destination

Abolition is deconstruction of the infrastructures in your mind
that has incarcerated you and weaponized your fears

Derailing stereotypes and media-brewed fears
Seeing all human beings as deserving of humanity

Remembering that there is an entire life and thousands
of experiences behind one bad day, one unchangeable choice

Knowing that our worst moments, mine and yours,
do not define us or erase our best



"Abolition from the Inside: Phoenix Rising" cont.

I suppose now that I am ready to live and die as a free spirit. I am ready to not only think and speak about dismantling systems of oppression, but to do it. Mikhail Bakunin says that one deed is worth more than a thousand books. In 1935, the CPUSA built a popular front against fascism. W.E.B. Du Bouis, Aime Cesare, and others viewed fascism as "A blood relative of slavery and imperialism, global systems rooted not only in capitalist political economy, but in racist ideologies that were already in place at the dawn of modernity." If this is the definition of fascism, how could I not support an antifascist movement? Du Bois, in Black Reconstruction, writes that abolition requires tearing down institutions and building and maintaining new ones that value us. Our national experience has been different. We have ended institutions like slavery only so that they can be repurposed under Jim Crow. So in the words of Kropotkin, "It is just to wash the earth clean, to sweep away the shards and refuse, accumulated by centuries of slavery and oppression, that the new anarchist society will have need of this wave of brotherly love. Later on it can exist without appealing to the spirit of self sacrifice, because it will have eliminated oppression, and thus created a new world instinct with all the feelings of solidarity."

Liat Ben-Moshe writes about abolition as being in part a breaking of attachments that rely on professional experts telling us what to do, as if they were clairvoyant. I say that we need to trust the process of living out our values without being ruled by fear, hate, and panic. Who is the professional that knows best? I don't need the hegemonic discourse or the protective gaze of the carceral state and its necropolitical solutions. I need the state to leave me alone.

Abolition requires engaging in transformative justice solutions that deal with the conditions that produce harm. Oscar Wilde says that society has the criminals that it deserves. Kropotkin says that if we change the conditions, human nature will change. What does this mean? It means that we need a political and economic framework that helps us to accomplish our goals of creating a world where all of the needs of all of the people can be met. In this country the left and the right are two wings of the same bird that does not represent the people's interests. What is needed is a politics that gives all people equality, liberty, and solidarity of the human race. This means abolishing the state and oppressive conduct regulation by way of a retributive criminal justice system and its policing, courts, and prison system. All forms of government rest on violence and are therefore wrong and harmful as well as unnecessary.

Abolition also means doing away with the authority of the capitalist and the competition based system that encourages exploitation and wage slavery. Land should never be owned, only occupied. People should have their needs met. Oscar Wilde says, of socialism, or whatever you may call it, "That by converting private property into public wealth, and substituting cooperation for competition we can restore society to its proper condition and meet the needs of each member of the community.

"Abolition from the Inside: Phoenix Rising" cont.

Abolition starts off as a very personal revolution of self. The abolitionist isn't asking for permission. The abolitionist is unruly and self determined. The abolitionist is a free spirit and an individual, and is ready to pay the price that may be necessary in a world that demands: conform or else! The abolitionist knows that people deserve better and is prepared to commit to the type of protest that Emma Goldman may call her own, or that George Jackson would be proud of. It requires an understanding of oppression and fascism. It is not complete without a huge coalition of folks who put aside identity politics, respectability politics, and come together for a movement that requires beauty, compassion, courage, and commitment. The revolution is calling me from the inside. I cannot be repressed because I will never stop fighting, and I am ungovernable.

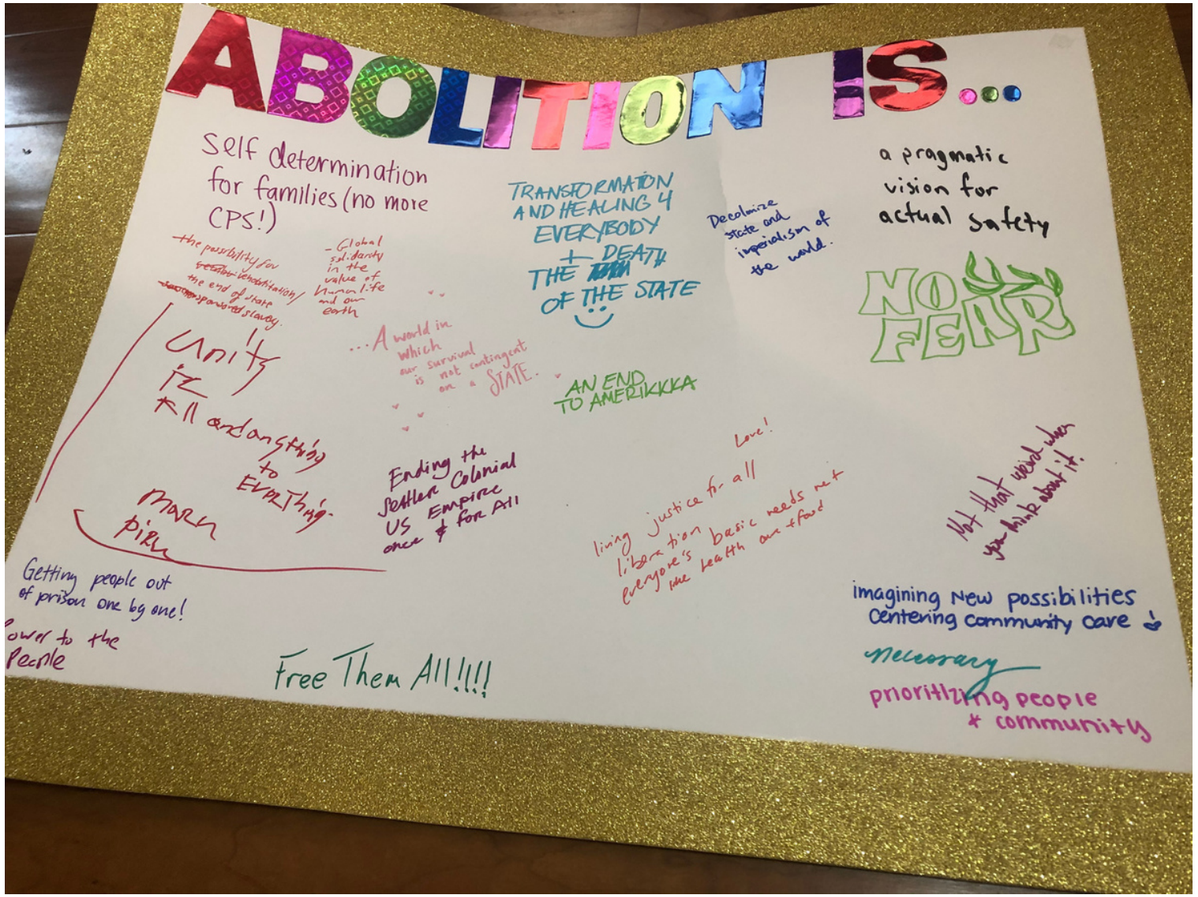
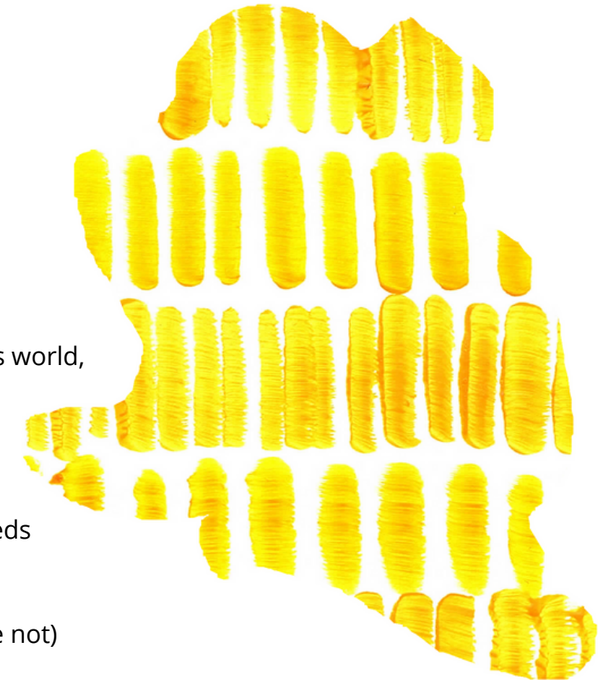


image: photo of a poster board with a gold glitter board that is titled "Abolition is" with responses gathered from community members at an event

"Who Am I?" by Suzie Le

Who am I anyways,
can you really take heed to 25 years in 2-3 minutes?
25 years enduring a 25 year sentence,
you do the math.
Let me rewind, 8 years old I smoked my first cigarette and guzzled my first beer.
let me go back further,
parents divorced at three,
stayed with a mother whose only stability was shelter
homes and odd men in the wee hours of
the night.
what can she say but that she had 3 kids to feed and money was tight.
Now let me fast forward,
I never graduated college
and at 17, I had part in taking someone's life.
Thanks to God,
there is a higher power
because although I don't deserve it,
somebody seen a light in me,
He's given me a second chance at life,
I've gotten to know myself,
amongst the struggle of falling short,
in my addictive behavior,I
try to leave my failures behind me,
slowly picking up the pieces,
So who am I??...
I am merely a small speck in this enormous world,
simply trying to get by,
what do I enjoy,
I enjoy history,
the art in studying human behavior
the "typical shopping sprees" every girl needs
I love God, although I am only human
I received my GED here In prison,
I am family oriented, (even though they are not)
who am I?
My name is Suzie Left
just another sinner
trying to make it right
fully unclothed
vulnerable to this life.



"To me, abolition is..." (Parts 1 & 2)
by Vincent "Tank" Sherill

to me, abolition is...
Phila (brotherly love) in practice

to me, abolition is...
a selfless action of grace and
compassion

to me, abolition is...
the tearing asunder of the
oppression We are under

to me, abolition is...
not silence,
not complicity,
not assimilation,
not doing nothing...
is never an option,
never a solution,
not abolition.

to me, abolition is...

planning, digging, breaking,
running, hiding, escaping (yesteryears)

today it's...
politicizing, organizing, transforming
people and policies

to me, abolition is...
the machinations of the oppressed,
and liberation of the suppressed,

to me, abolition is...
freedom of the press,
and the dressed up lie undressed

to me, abolition is...
demanding from power the best
and settling for nothing less

to me, abolition is...
the secret oath declaring meetings
in the darkness of night
under starlight

to me, abolition is...
going to places with the most cases
of harm and abuses
and listening to the voiceless

to me, abolition is...
freedom
justice
and
equality

"Slavery Abounds: The 1865 Burden"
by Jacob J. Gamet

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude . . .except as punishment for a crime . . . shall exist.
--13th Amendment (1865), U.S. Constitution

YES, it's true! The 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution still permits slavery for anyone convicted of a crime and imprisoned.

Locked up now for over 17.5 years, I wrote "The 1865 Burden" as a poem to provide a behind-the-scenes peek at America's 1865 slavery legacy -- as it's "being" applied in 2020 to me and other Washington state prisoners, and similarly to prisoners across the country.

The 1865 Burden

KNOW YE, future objects of vengeance
Your enslavement was decided in 1865

As criminals, you are Property of the State
HENCEFORTH, we authorize WA DOC to:

Strip away the dignity of your humanity
Assume control over your personal affairs

Yoke you tautly as fitting beasts of burden
Commoditize you by way of menial labor

Set a minimum grazing gratuity of 0.42c/hr
Your day's labor shall not exceed a meal tip

Lawfully deduct up to 95% of your monies
Of $100 from loved ones, pay you only $5

For 30+ years, deny cost OF living increases
Yet annually increase your costs FOR living

"Slavery Abounds: The 1865 Burden" cont.

Ergo, increase your medical copay fees
Rec fees, and food and property prices

Feed you comestibles suitable for animals
Labeled, "Not fit for human consumption"

Offset budget cuts by reducing food quality
Supplement meals with pricey food packages

Provide offerings that exploit your loved ones

Design and benefit from the below offerings:
> Phone company contract kickbacks
> Deductions of money from loved ones
> Jpay media contract kickbacks
> Food and property program kickbacks
> Misusing the Offender Betterment Fund

Signed and executed by:

WE THE PEOPLE of 1865
Slavery Pacifists / Slave Owners

By Anonymous cont.

Just like slaves did all the work, would you be surprised to know that prisoners actually do all the hard labor, does all the work in the prison! They are actually the plumbers, the electricians, the cooks, the farmers, and the janitors. Just like some slaves were paid little to nothing for the labors they did, prisoners also face similar situations. For example, in Washington state, prisoners are paid a maximum of $55 a month for non-industry workers, and $1.63 an hour for industry workers. It has been a fight for the state of Washington to change the prison indigent amount from $10 to $25, Thank God this happened.

As a person of color, nothing reminds me more of slavery than seeing an incarcerated person chained down like an animal, for example: law enforcement officers, jail officials, and prison officials are allowed to shackle a person with chains on both feet, waist, and hands. History reminds us of what happened to slaves during transport from Africa, they were shackled the same way inmates are shackled during transports.

It is not a coincidence that similarity exists between slavery and prisons, because they are virtually the same. Prison is just a legal version of slavery. Just as a law enforcement / correction officer has the power to shoot and kill a fleeing inmate, the slave owners had the same power to kill a fleeing slave. The nexus here is very clear, and very easy to identify, because mass incarceration and slavery is based on the same principles.

(3) “Congress does have the power to totally abolish all form of slavery”

Section two of the 13th amendment gives Congress the power to legislate this provision. Congress can pass a law today saying “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in the United States or territories, neither could slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever be imposed as a form or as a result of punishment.”

(4) “The collateral consequences of modern days slavery extends beyond race”

The result the legalized modern-day slavery touches every race, and most economic class. As a black person and an incarcerated person, I have come to realize that, even though most of the laws specifically targets people that looks like me, due to the systematic racism. It will be unfair not to point out that, some that do not look like me also falls victims to this vindictive knee jerk laws. Apart from people of color, poor white people, people with mental illness, Hispanic/Latinos and Indigenous people falls victim to the legalized form of slavery. The people within the identified class, are more likely of becoming victims of the criminal justice system, which is the direct pipeline to imprisonment or should I say modernized slavery.

By Anonymous

“(1) Are we really free, was slavery really abolished?”

To examine this question, we do not have to look beyond one specific provision in the United States Constitution. The 13th Amendment states: Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for a crime wherefore the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist in the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction. As a person of color, a minority, a textualist and an originalist, Looking at the plain language/text of this constitutional provision, it is mind blowing and disturbing for me as an African native, knowing that I could one day be subject to a similar situation as my ancestors who were captures and sold into slavery—meaning I could be considered a legal slave, as a result of a criminal conviction. You might say “OH, that is a radical statement.” I submit to you to that it is not. I am living it, along with other 2.3 million people in the U.S. considered prisoners/incarcerated.

I ask myself a question, why did the framers of the 13th amendment include this dangerous caveat? I wonder if the framers really intended to abolish slavery? After doing my research, I came to a conclusion that some of the framers never intended to abolish slavery in its entirety. Going back to history, during the fight to establish a clear and direct constitutional guaranteed bar against slavery, the framers knew that there was a firm opposition and stance against the abolition of slavery by the Depp Southerners. They knew that there was no way they could ever pass a constitutional provision totally prohibiting slavery. One could only conclude that the 13th amendment was a result of a compromise, because there was no way a total abolition of slavery would have bene successful.

(2) “The 13th amendment legalized slavery and empowered the prison industrial complex.”

The caveat in the 13th amendment created an environment where you can be enslaved, and involuntary servitude could be imposed on a person.

As a result of the 13th amendment, a political agenda by a pro slavery government official in the south was created, this resulted in what was called the “black codes.” The 13th amendment along with the “black codes” enabled the state to arrest and convict black folks for minor acts, such as accusation of a black person been rude, or wandering eyes toward a white woman, or staying out after curfew, or even for just being homeless. Once a black person is convicted, he or she can now be leased out to plantation owners, whereby they are now owned and subject to servitude or slavery.

Comparing what happened then, in the framework of the prison industrial complex, as a prisoner, you have a minimal right, meaning you are virtually controlled by prison officials, where you are forced to work, told how to dress, where to sit, where to stand, and what not to read, this is the same conditions slaves were put to by the hands of the plantation owners when sold out.

By Eric

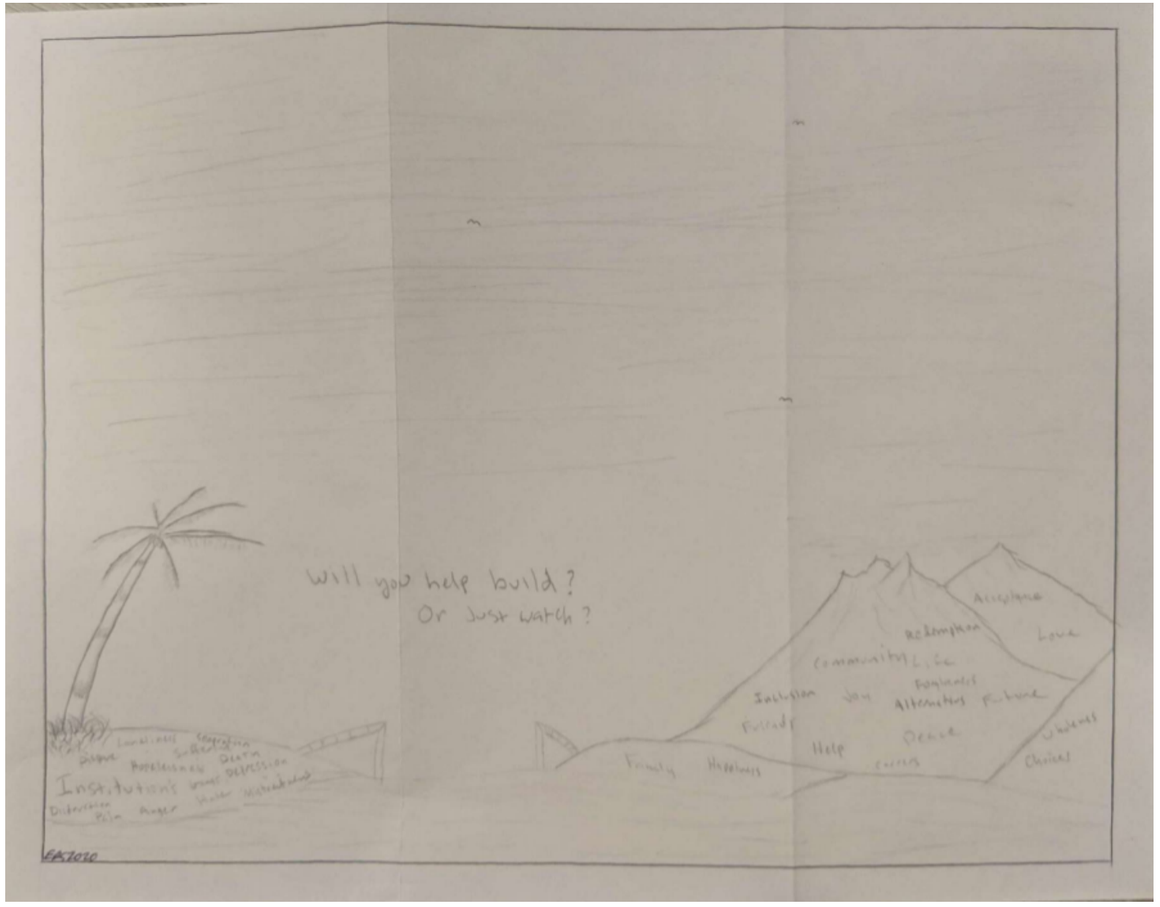


image: drawing from Eric

"My Celly, Little Dano" by Jeff McKee

As a prisoner I have little responsibility. My food, electricity, rent, is all provided. I'm told when to eat, when to sleep, when to shower. About the only things I am responsible for is trying to navigate the 136 poorly delineated and overly broad rule violations and guarding against being sexually and/or physically assaulted. I do miss being responsible for the normal daily problems of the non-incarcerated and having others rely upon me.

One morning, while walking the yard, a praying mantis landed on my shirt for a free ride. Who am I to deny the little guy some help? I walked him straight to my cell and found him a good perch to hang out on. I showed my friend Dano my new celly. He asked what I named it and, as a joke, I said "Little Dano".

image: drawing of "Little Dano" a green mantis on a blue and brown background

With any new celly you try to figure out their habits and pet peeves to work around. I opened my eyes one morning to see Little Dano's goofy face on my pillow staring at me. Now, while it's hard to have a bad day when it starts out with such a goofy face staring at you, I realized there was a danger of squishing the little guy in my sleep. So, each night I make sure he is on a perch and not likely to end up on my bunk. We started a game of hide and seek. Each morning, I move carefully around the cell until I find his hiding spot

You may be wondering how I ensure Little Dano has his daily nutritional needs met. I'll tell you. I rarely, if ever see any other bugs in my cell. He does eat the tuna fish, chicken, and, baffling to me, the turkey ham from my daily meals. I must admit I was leery to feed him the turkey ham as I swear that stuff is slowly killing me. But Little Dano really likes the gristly greasy thing and will gnaw on it for 30 minutes.

When I go to yard, I collect various bugs and worms. My friend told his mother the highlight of his day was watching how excited I get collecting bugs for Little Dano. The other day, as I was returning to my unit, out of the corner of my eye I saw a fat bug, scooped it up into my pocket for Little Dano. Unfortunately, what I had put into my pocket was a stink bug. It took three days to get the smell out of my pocket and cell. Little Dano didn't mind and gobbled the poor thing down.

I became concerned that little Dano was not getting enough water, so I put some on the end of my finger and stuck it in his face. Had I given it a little forethought I would have realized bugs, like humans, don't like a giant finger poking its face. Little Dano immediately latched on to the end of my finger with its needle ridden forearms and began chomping away at the tip of my finger. Shoot. Now what? I gently tried to nudge his forearms off as he's eating more of my finger. It started to really hurt until I had to shake him off my finger. Gnaw gnaw gnaw. Ouch ouch ouch, shake shake shake, Finally Little Dano lost his grip and went flying into the either.

Being a father at 17 and sole supporter of a wife and two kids thereafter, I miss being relied upon for others safety and security. One day Little Dano decided to crawl off his perch and plopped into the toilet. I'm quite a germaphobe, but the panicked look on Little Dano's face as he laid on his back in the middle of the toilet let me know he was in serious trouble. As the giant hand scooped him from the the bowel he latched on with those needled forearms for dear life. He was further terrified and dug in when then giant hand gave him a fountain bath. I felt bad but could not have him crawling around the cell covered in toilet water.
About a week later Little Dano took another dive into the toilet. This time not seeming panicked at all calmly crawling into the giant hand and enjoying the following fountain bath. As this is not a game I'm willing to play the toilet is now covered with a T-shirt and is used as a trampoline. Little Dano has a lot of characteristics of a cat. He grooms himself and has the same attitude. Playful at times and irritable at others. I took a square of toilet paper and rolled it into a pencil shape. I'll poke the end around the corner of Little Dano's perch and he perks up into attack mode, attacking like a cat.

After a particularly good day collecting bugs, Little Dano ate half his body weight in spiders, bees, and a moth. Shortly thereafter he fell off his perch, stumbled around, and appeared sick. I was rather worried. Afraid I may have poisoned him. I placed him in a special perch where he would not be in jeopardy of falling and said a little prayer for his recovery. I woke to quite a surprise. Little Dano was not a “he” and now is an expecting mother as she was standing proudly over an egg sack. Needless to say, Dano was not happy about the name and suggested I rename her “Little Dannet.” Too late. You can't rename a pet months later. Too confusing.

Little Dano has since laid three more egg sacks and I discovered that each sack called an "ootheca" can produce between 30 and 300 young mantids. When I told this to Dano he said "you’re going to have some explaining to do when they all hatch.". Which I replied "I know. How am I going to explain why they look like me?" Just kidding. Although they probably will They all have my hair style. Two scraggly hairs on top.

In all seriousness. Having Little Dano as my celly brings purpose and joy to my life and joy to the others in my unit. Little Dano is the model of patience. She will stay in one spot without moving for days. When I get stressed, just looking at her brings me calm. Not only do I enjoy finding and feeding her and making sure she has safe perches, others in the unit enjoy bringing her food and checking up on her condition.