



# Students Against Mass Incarceration!

by Benjamin Woods

Students Against Mass Incarceration (SAMI) was started at Howard University in February, 2011. After taking a course on the Black Power Movement and reading books like Safiya Bakari's "The War Before" and Michelle Alexander's "The New Jim Crow", several students decided to use the information learned to advance the Black community. Uniting with other students who had organized before around prisons, they started SAMI.

SAMI aims to raise awareness of the prison industrial complex, existence of political prisoners and recidivism. Our vision is to build a movement for the complete abolition of prisons and freedom for all people imprisoned for their political beliefs and actions. We are anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and prison abolitionist. We understand that prison abolition can only occur through a radical transformation of the society, particularly the economic system.

## **Incarceration Targets Youth of Color**

In the 1960s and 1970s there was a peak of movement activity in the U.S. and the world. Youth were at the center of these movements. One of the most revered organizations of this period was the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. The average Black Panther Party member was between the ages of 18-22. Over 60% of panthers were women. In SAMI we argue that the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) has two functions: profit and social control. So called racial profiling particularly targets young Black and Brown people. We see that one of the central purposes of the PIC is to stop the development of another Black Power Movement, American Indian Movement, Chicano

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## Open Letter to NJ Organizations and Individuals Concerned About Justice!

The Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State has launched an aggressive struggle to unify affected communities throughout the state of NJ to demand robust decarceration (release) from NJ state corrections facilities. We have held meetings weekly in Newark and will hold our first major event, a street panel discussion on decarceration on the Newark City Hall July 30. Our aim is to launch a statewide coordinated effort to bring about the passage of what we call The NJ Decarceration Act bringing about sweeping reductions in NJ's state prison populations. You have probably heard how the U.S. has 6% of the world's population yet holds 25% of the world's prisoners, more than every other country.

Over 1000 NJ residents have signed a petition with specific proposals as to how this can be accomplished.

<http://chn.ge/Rf10Th>

While there are many political and social sectors now calling for one kind of "prison reform" or another, given the racist and classist way that this state and nation determines who gets arrested, who gets prosecuted, who gets sentenced and for how long, it is of utmost importance that communities targeted by mass incarceration (like Newark, Camden, Jersey City, etc.) take the lead in structuring the kind of decarceration legislation that is initiated and fought for. We need to take the first step.

### **Plan of action of Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State:**

#### **NJ Decarceration Act**

While we have done some ground work in Newark and have developed a plan with NJ Senator Ron Rice to pursue the NJ Decarceration Act, there is plenty of room for more ground breaking organizing in all of the urban communities of the state.

We are hoping that NJ's rich and diverse array of activist organizations and voices participate and become part of this effort.

We invite your members, organizers and leaders as individuals as well as your organization to become part of this effort. We believe there is tremendous potential for success to deliver real and significant decarceration in NJ through our organizations and individuals working in common purpose to demand the passage and

implementation of a NJ Decarceration Act. We have sent a letter to and met with NJ Senator Ron Rice urging him to take the initiative toward introduction of the NJ Decarceration Act. We urge your members and your organization to make similar contact with your own NJ representatives.

#### **Community Forums**

On July 30, we are presenting a Street Panel Discussion on the steps of Newark City Hall on the issue of mass incarceration and the fight for decarceration. We believe community meetings of this sort, organized by local committees in communities targeted for mass incarceration around the state are an optimal way to educate, organize and mobilize support for a mass movement as well as to promote efforts to effect decarceration legislation in NJ. We have members who are willing to speak to your organization, in classrooms and at campuses and community meetings. Please contact us for more information.

#### **NJ Decarcerator**

We have produced 1000s of copies of this paper and we are using it as an organizing tool – distributing it at community meetings, demonstrations and other activities. Also when collecting signatures on the petition we share the NJ Decarcerator paper with folks who sign. Contact us today if you want to help distribute the paper.

#### **Petition**

We continue to urge people to sign on to the NJ Decarceration Act petition – on-line at this link:

<http://chn.ge/Rf10Th>

You can also print the petition from this link and gather signatures face to face the old fashioned way, with a clipboard and pen: [DecarcerateNJ.org/DecarcActPet.docx](http://DecarcerateNJ.org/DecarcActPet.docx)

#### **Justice Committee**

In addition to supporting the call for decarceration, we also participate in championing the call for justice in cases of political prisoners, those who have been falsely convicted, over charged, over sentenced, victimized by atrocity and nonetheless punished by the criminal system or abused and tortured in correctional facilities. Please approach us with requests to support. We will work with families as well as other organizations to demand justice. At this

point we can call attention to these issues, help educate the community and support actions around these cases. As the community develops a stronger sense of unity around these issues, we can work with others toward effective strategies that can actually bring about results.

#### **New Jim Crow Study Group**

We have obtained 10 copies of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* and are reading and studying and discussing the topics so that we can all get a better understanding of the motivations and details of mass incarceration – so we can better argue for decarceration as we organize and unify.

#### **The Blog Site**

We are publishing our work, articles for NJ Decarcerator, opinions of members, etc. on our blog site, easy link:

<http://bit.ly/1jLGFPY>

#### **Facebook Group**

Most of our decisions, meeting minutes and some on-line discussion are documented on our Facebook group:

<http://on.fb.me/1rgSoqH>

We do not have it all figured out, just a starting point. This is a very new effort so you can get involved now and help shape the direction of this struggle. The most important aspect of our strategy and tactics is that we organize, educate, take agitational action, converge and with any luck, unify!

Anything we win from the state of NJ will likely be watered down and the result of compromise. It will help but will not solve our problems which are systemic in nature. We believe in struggling for short term goals to help individuals, families and communities in the short run but to keep our eyes and our instruments of struggle focused on long term objectives of systemic change for a system that does not depend on mass incarceration and the endemic racism, abuse and torture it entails for maintenance and survival.

Please be encouraged to contact us at 973-223-2114 or 908-881-5275 with any questions or ideas you have and we hope that you and / or a representative of your organization can join this historic fight to DECARCERATE THE GARDEN STATE!  
**Sincerely, Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State**



## Petitioning NJ State Senate and Assembly: We call for the passage of a NJ Decarceration Act to deliver large scale reductions in NJ's state adult and youth prison populations

We have gathered over 1000 signers on-line - you can sign at this link - please share <http://chn.ge/Rf10Th> . A print version of the petition for face to face petitioning is available here:

[DecarcerateNJ.org/DecarcActPet.docx](http://DecarcerateNJ.org/DecarcActPet.docx)

We call for incarceration reductions of 20% in the first 2 years and 50% over 4 years. The legislation should provide for guidelines of offenses for which prisoners should be released (e.g. nonviolent simple possession charges and small scale economic offenses), guidelines for release of those given particular lengths of sentences who served a percentage of their sentence (e.g. release all those sentenced under 6 months, who have served 50% of a term up to 1 year, have served 70% of 1 – 3 years, 80% of 3 – 5 years, etc) as well as those who are beyond a certain age who served a certain percentage of their sentences.

The particulars can be determined with input from communities targeted by mass incarceration.

Funds saved must be channeled into providing jobs, training and services for those exiting the prison system.

We call upon NJ Senators and Assembly persons to address the passage of the NJ Decarceration Act as a high priority emergency as NJ's targeted communities need immediate relief.

Police enforcement, prosecution and sentencing in NJ is subject to extreme racial and class bias. Most of the population in NJ State Prisons is made up of non-violent drug related simple possession offenses and related charges incurred during arrests for those offenses. Many others are for small scale non-violent economic crimes of survival. Overwhelmingly the prison population in NJ is disproportionately Black, Brown and / or poor.

Mass incarceration takes a tremendous toll on the targeted Black and Brown populations of NJ's inner cities in undermining family structure and interfering with community organizations and infrastructure. It serves to exacerbate poverty given the large numbers of incarcerated adults in the prime age range of their income generating potential.

Mass incarceration also disenfranchises the targeted communities from playing an active role in defending the interests of these communities as the large numbers of incarcerated could otherwise be playing a role in helping community organizations to fight for the needs of their communities.

While the USA argues on the international stage that it upholds the ideals of freedom, it holds 25% of the world's prisoners while making up just 6% of the world's population.

Furthermore it costs the state roughly \$53,000 per year to hold a single prisoner and for that cost, prisoners are subject to barely edible food and a lack of safety, unhealthy conditions and subject to rape and sexual assault. According to studies, 50% of sexual assaults on prisoners are carried out by prison personnel. Furthermore, enforcement of laws that have little benefit, such as NJ's marijuana laws are costly as well. According to an ACLU report, NJ spent \$127 million on enforcement of marijuana laws in 2010 alone.

Mass incarceration maintains a system where inner city populations and their communities can continue to be subject to super oppressive exploitation, their communities developed only for the interest of the wealthy and their ability to resist such deprivations are curtailed by the tremendous toll of having large portions of their adult and teenage population behind bars or otherwise under control of the criminal justice system.

The NJ Decarceration Act can be a major step toward fighting poverty, rebuilding family and community infrastructure, fortifying community organizations and empowering and enfranchising communities with the ability to assure development of their neighborhoods for the interests of the community instead of toward enriching wealthy outsiders.

[Decarc@DecarcerateNJ.org](mailto:Decarc@DecarcerateNJ.org)

973-223-2114  
908-881-5275

[DecarcerateNJ.org](http://DecarcerateNJ.org)

blog:

[decarceratenj.blogspot.com](http://decarceratenj.blogspot.com)

On Facebook:  
[onfb.me/1rgSoqH](https://onfb.me/1rgSoqH)



## Welcome to the First Issue of The NJ Decarcerator!

The NJ Decarcerator is being published for the first time to support the efforts of the Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State as well as others that are engaging in an effort to bring about an end to mass incarceration in NJ and beyond.

In this first issue we highlight our proposed initial plan of action to mobilize communities across NJ that are targeted for mass incarceration and a political effort to fight for passage of the NJ Decarceration Act in NJ.

We also include articles about some of the abuse that occurs in the NJ dungeons with names like East Jersey State Prison (Rahway) and Bay Side State Prison.

We publish an article by Rev. Jack Johnson, a leading vocal opponent of solitary confinement in NJ.

We provide the text of the petition we have been circulating and provide the link where you can sign on-line and where you can download hard copies for face to face gathering of signatures.

We include the views of the founder of the national student group Students Against Mass Incarceration.

We provide a detailed account of the travesty of justice for Kwadir Felton, a young Black man from Jersey City, who was blinded by a police bullet to his head and has been sentenced to 16 years imprisonment.

We provide links to the on-line resources of the Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State.

We provide an outside supportive but critical analysis of our work that was published by Counterpunch.org .

We take a look at the bail reform proposals in NJ and review the critique of it provided by NJ Senator Ron Rice.

We provide information about our justice subcommittee, our street forum approach to education and mobilization and other aspects of our action plan,

We also give information about other efforts around the issue and other aspects of decarceration work.

We offer the view of a former CO on "dehumanization."

We do not have all the answers – we only know that something major has to be done immediately to address this issue as the crisis that it is.

We are hoping through our actions and through our paper the NJ Decarcerator, we can strike a nerve with those in the targeted communities and help bring about a critical mass that can take effective action to END MASS INCARCERATION!

Peoples Organization for Progress opposes mass incarceration - for more on their work: [njpop.org](http://njpop.org)

**Join the fight to support freedom and justice for political prisoners.**  
**Join the Jericho Movement 718-325-4407**  
**[www.jerichony.org](http://www.jerichony.org) • [nycjericho@gmail.com](mailto:nycjericho@gmail.com)**

## Justice Sub Committee

Any decarceration movement needs to fight on several fronts. We need to fight for changes to laws for the reduction of those incarcerated and at the same time we need to struggle in solidarity to support those who are tortured, denied due process, retaliated upon and otherwise abused by the carceral system. Furthermore, a decarceration movement needs to struggle for the freedom of those who are incarcerated due to state repression because of their political activities and their actions on behalf of their communities against super oppression – political prisoners. AND – those who have been falsely convicted, those who have been convicted based upon sham trials, those who were over prosecuted and over sentenced . . . they all need to have Decarcerators (us!) fighting for justice and freedom.

Decarceration activists need to connect up with organizations like the Jericho movement which fight for freedom for and otherwise support political prisoners [www.thejerichomovement.com](http://www.thejerichomovement.com) . We need to help communicate and follow through on the action calls on behalf of political prisoners.

We need to support people like Kwadir Felton who was blinded for life due to a police bullet in the head and then prosecuted and sentenced to 16 years in prison. His mother Renee Felton coordinates the Justice for Kwadir Felton Committee and can be reached at: :201-892-2141 / [ladyd4407@yahoo.com](mailto:ladyd4407@yahoo.com) . (Story on page 4). Our Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State needs to be a clearinghouse where families can come and share the stories of how their members have been victimized by the injustices that are rampant in the criminal system.

We need to support the demands to end torture in the prison system including prolonged solitary confinement. We also need to support demands for an end to systemic violence including sexual violence and abuse within the system, which is often promulgated by corrupt elements in corrections as well as tolerated by them. When prisoners organize and unify to demand an end to abuse – they need to know that the decarceration movement on the outside is communicating their concerns and building support on the outside.

As our forces grow and we become effectively organized and we begin to win changes to the mechanisms of mass incarceration, we need to determine what works and take effective action in pursuit of justice, so that when we take such action, we get justice!

Please be encouraged to contact the Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State with request for support - hopefully we will be able to provide the support that is so necessary.

Want to be a writer,  
distributor, producer, editor  
of NJD! for the next issue?  
Call 908-881-5275  
immediately!

Does your group have a decarceration committee? We can help. We offer support to like minded organizations that want to figure out how to better reach out, organize, unite and help communities impacted by mass incarceration. If you think your group could do more in this area and you want some support in doing so, please contact us immediately at 908-881-5275



**Decarc@DecarcerateNJ.org**

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**DecarcerateNJ.org**

**blog:**

**[decarceratenj.blogspot.com](http://decarceratenj.blogspot.com)**

**On Facebook:**

**[onfb.me/IrgSoqH](https://www.facebook.com/onfb.me/IrgSoqH)**

## NJ's Bail System – Poor Are Guilty Until Proven Innocent

In NJ around 11000 people are in jail awaiting trial largely due to the inability to post bail. For some, even an amount of \$100 is too much and can lead to a lengthy pre-trial time in jail. Across the political spectrum there are those calling for “bail reform” in NJ. The proposal being discussed is to replace bail for release of those charged with an “assessment of risk” of harm to oneself, the community or to others. Those who are not posing of such a risk would be released on their own recognizance. Those deemed to be a risk would be held until a trial.

To change the bail equation, there are two steps that are needed. A constitutional amendment is needed to remove the “right to bail” which is currently in the NJ constitution. The second part of the solution is for there to be comprehensive legislation providing for the details as to how the reform will be carried out. The presumption is that many of those who are currently held in lieu of bail due to their impoverished condition will be instead released on their own recognizance.

Sen. Rice at a recent meeting with the Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State shared his views on the topic – he believes there is a fatal flaw in the constitutional amendment as written currently. Due to the underfunded NJ court system, NJ's accused rarely receive a “speedy trial” as is. Sen. Rice's view is that unless the constitutional amendment makes specific reference for the right to a speedy trial \*and\* the dismissal of charges of the trial has not occurred within 180 days, the elimination of bail could lead to indefinite detention without conviction for those who are assessed to be a risk and ordered to be held. Sen. Rice is swimming up hill on the matter as many of the groups advocating for reform like ACLU and the Drug Policy Alliance as well as Governor Christie and many others are do not agree with the need for such language. Their view is that those matters can be settled in the legislation that will be needed to actually enact bail “reform.”

According to Sen. Rice the problem with that is there is no guarantee that the make up of the NJ legislature will assure the right to speedy trial and the funding for the courts to actually implement that right will bring about that result. Even if they do, the law would be subject to change to water down or eliminate the provision for the 6 month release. The result for someone who is assessed to be a risk, could be to end up being detained indefinitely awaiting trial.

By the time you are reading this, the constitutional

The following are some of the founding members of the Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State:

Edwin Bradley, Veronica Branch, Milton Conway, Cassandra Dock, Cynthia Flood, Dawn Haynes, Michael Allen Hobbs, Donna Jackson, Brittani Johnson, Myra Lawson, Ruben E. Mendez, Dennis Porter, Chris Redwood, Beautiful SeeAsia, Bob Witaneck (apologies to any inadvertent omissions)

Newspaper laid out with public domain Scribus  
<http://www.scribus.net> (download and you can help with next issue)

Looking for: distributors (to get this one out) and writers, photographs, graphics, layout volunteers, donations and fundraisers, ads, promoters and other help to get this issue out and the next issue to the printer.

## Decarcerate at your middle or high school, campus or community:

1. Contact us. **Click join button at <http://DecarcerateNJ.org>**
2. Are there any groups that are approachable around issues of school to prison pipeline, decarceration, prisoner abuse, etc? Make contact with those groups. Attend their meetings and present proposals to get started.
3. Get a location for first meeting, either at a library meeting room, at a local pizza or cafe shop, in the school commons area or wherever you can meet quickly without red tape. Spread the word in social network, with fliers, word of mouth, e-mail and phone.
4. Propose an initial small scale activity like handing out NJ Decarcerator newspapers, showing a film or having a discussion, inviting a speaker, etc. (You can contact us about getting a representative to speak or helping to find someone local to you who can address the issue..)
5. See where it goes.
6. Contact us as you go. We can help you figure out how to navigate obstacles to get things going. We all have to think of ourselves as organizers. The first step is within each of our minds when we make a decision to act.

## Broken On All Sides

NJ's own Matt Pillischer who has worked extensively with Decarcerate Pennsylvania has produced a superb film documentary, available on DVD: Broken On All Sides: Race, Mass Incarceration & New Visions for Criminal Justice in the U.S. is an hour-long independent film that explores the intersection of race and poverty within criminal justice. The video is available directly from the producer at: [brokenonallsides.com](http://brokenonallsides.com) Decarcerate the Garden State will obtain copies of the DVD and have them available for loan or donation. We will organize presentations of the film. Matt's other project, in line with our work, is to convene decarceration proponents from around the state. More on that effort is available at this link: [www.defeatmassincarceration.com](http://www.defeatmassincarceration.com) .

amendment could already have been signed and prepared for this November's ballot and the likelihood is that the dangers being highlighted by Sen. Rice will not be corrected. The deadline for the bill to get the amendment on the ballot is August 4.

Passage of the bill will be marketed as a measure to reduce the jailing of those yet to be convicted prior to their trials – due to their inability to make bail. NJ Decarcerator shares the critique though that there are inherent dangers should the “at risk” accused who no longer receive bail be remanded indefinitely awaiting the slow turn of NJ's wheels of justice – without a constitutional guarantee to a speedy trial and without the funding needed to expedite the trials of the accused. The legislature of NJ as in other states have not proven to be particularly enlightened in regard to allowing the mass jailing of impoverished accused and the mass incarceration for low level non-violent convicts in NJ institutions – there is no guarantee that they will produce the proper legislation to correct the flaw in the amendment as currently being proffered.

The People's Organization for Progress has its own concerns about the constitutional amendment and it calls for a full set of conditions to be included in legislation before it will back the constitutional amendment. From POP testimony to the NJ legislature:

For this reason, we will only support this resolution for a constitutional amendment if it is balanced with comprehensive bail reform legislation that moves the current broken bail system away from using money bail and replaces it with a system that bases pretrial release decisions on risk. Real, comprehensive bail reform promotes both safety and justice. Legislation to enact real, comprehensive bail reform must include several key elements.

- It must remove money as the primary mechanism of pretrial release, basing pretrial release decisions on risk rather than resources.
- It must require the use of risk assessments on arrestees with higher level charges.
- It must authorize the release of low-risk individuals under the least restrictive conditions possible.
- It must permit the detention of those who are judged to be truly dangerous.

When the police stop you . . . [bit.ly/1gCrNOO](http://bit.ly/1gCrNOO)

Please read this guide from ACLU and have your family members read . . . many times care taken when encountering cops can reduce the danger of prison.



## Torture Never Stops in NJ Solitary Units



East Jersey State Prison "Rahway" - Scene of the crime

**Article:**  
[bit.ly/1t13XEz](http://bit.ly/1t13XEz)

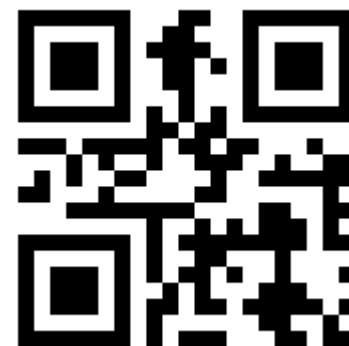
process rights and subjected him to cruel and unusual punishment as retaliation for possessing cell phone(s).

It is very important that the Court see people from the community in the courtroom, to show that the community is interested in enforcing constitutional rights and seeing what happens in the prisons. By the time you read this the court matter might be settled but we all need to be concerned with the torturous treatment of prisoners in NJ prisons.

**Mr. Alford writes, as follows**

"I was placed in a specially built steel caged cell for three (3) years and for the entire duration I was refused any and all human contact, the right to legal aid or assistance, to clean or sanitize the caged cell, phone calls, religious service, to shave or receive a hair cut, visitation, clean clothes, and or bedding, electricity, light, air ventilation, and or proper sleeping conditions.

I was filmed on numerous occasions by a Female staff member, refused recreation and any and all other activities that were afforded to all other inmates. I was refused the right to call my lawyer or any lawyer for that matter. My living conditions were atypical and significantly harsh as compared to ordinary prison life. I was the ONLY Person to ever be housed like this in the State of New Jersey."



DecarcerateNJ.org

**On Facebook:**  
[onfb.me/1rgSoqH](https://onfb.me/1rgSoqH)

**To find out how to support, contact: Jean Ross, Esq. 609-924-6508**

Lester Alford has brought suit against NJ corrections for having been placed in solitary for 8 years without a hearing. The restriction seemed to stem from discovery of a cell phone in his possession and his refusal to identify the corrupt corrections officers that enabled him to come into possession of it (which could lead to serious harm had he fingered the culprit(s)).

In a trial that starts on July 28 in Union County Courthouse, floor 13, 2 Broad Street, Elizabeth, with Presiding Judge Grispin -his charges the state violated his due

**GET 100 COPIES OF NJD! TO DISTRIBUTE AT SCHOOL, TO NEIGHBORS, IN THE STREETS. CALL 908-881-5275 OR WRITE [DECARC@DECARCERATENJ.ORG](mailto:DECARC@DECARCERATENJ.ORG)**

### NJ Decarceration Act: Our First Steps

One of the strategies of the Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State has been to send a letter to NJ Senator Ron Rice asking him to introduce The NJ Decarceration Act.

<http://bit.ly/1kfW8IP>

The letter led to an article in the NJ Politicker for which the Senator was questioned about our letter. <http://bit.ly/1qED3Ct>

His initial comments were: "I think that there are some non-violent offenders who should be out of jail," . . . "I'll listen to what they have to say, because even [Gov. Chris Christie] has talked about non-violent offenders being removed [from prison] if some other things take place. We just haven't gotten the legislation together yet to make sure that regarding non-violent criminals, we still have a way of keeping up with them and trying to give them the right direction."

He attended a meeting with the Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State on July 16 at which he made clear that he thought the concept of our proposed bill was worthy. He asked us to draft the bill in resolution format to provide to him which we have done: <http://bit.ly/UsWMGv>

We are currently following up with him and urging him to come out with a statement that he is planning to introduce the bill probably in some revised form.

We need similar processes to occur around the state and particularly in the areas of the state that are the zones targeted for mass incarceration – of course those are the impoverished inner cities populated by majority Black and Latino populations.

We urge you to review our letter and take it as an initial draft and tailor it to suit your own areas of the state, politics and style – or to write your own letter – either way – and to get some local folks to sign on to it and get it in to your senators and assembly persons around the state. The way you

pursue the legislative support might not take the exact shape as we have done – do it the way you know works in your location or model your approach after ours either way.

We can help you get the ball rolling – point is we are going to have to get legislators from throughout the state on this issue. We need to make sure there is core support from the targeted communities and we will have to fight hard to keep the bill from getting too diluted to the point where it is ineffective or even counter productive.

Of course we recognize the shortcomings of a legislative effort and do not believe our decarceration fight should be limited to trying to get bills passed. The system that oppresses our communities, that keeps joblessness in double digits, that imposes poverty wages and abusive working conditions, that plunders public education for profit, that speculates on inner city real estate to yuppify the choice sections of town while pushing the impoverished into prisons and into the streets – depends on mass incarceration to keep any possible resistance in check. If thousands from our communities are incarcerated and many thousands more are dealing with various legal challenges to keep out – it weakens our ability to assert our power and get control of our own communities and resources. The issue of mass incarceration is systemic and will demand systemic solutions.

In the meantime though, our communities need immediate relief from the devastating toll mass incarceration is taking and therefore it is necessary for us to fight for legislative improvements while keeping our eyes on the long term goals and our feet in the long term fight. We want to help you get this action going in your area of the state – and we will be there to help! Contact us today!

### Organizing the Street Discussion

Academic discussions with presentations by knowledgeable scholars and activists with rich experience in struggle can be a tool of our struggle to inform and educate our constituencies so we can more effectively engage in struggle. Often these activities are inaccessible to the folks who most need the knowledge since they are held on universities – and campuses are off limits often to the people in the local communities hosting the campuses – with technical no trespassing rules that can create a barrier to participation in campus based activities.

The challenge for the decarceration movement is to make our educational platform most readily accessible to the people that are most affected by the policies we are trying to change and the system that we are up against. One of our strategies is the "street forum." That could mean literally that, a discussion in the open air on the street or it could mean a discussion in buildings that are readily accessible to the public and are on the well beaten path of the public.

In May there was such an event in New Brunswick around the issue of marijuana laws and the need to include decarceration in any law changes. A second such event is occurring on July 30 in front of City Hall in Newark (it might have occurred by the time you read this – hopefully videos of it will be available from DecarcerateNJ.org .

We would like to help other communities, particularly those communities most directly impacted by mass incarceration to host such events. We can move them inside in the winter and keep them on the streets when the weather permits. What it takes is one or two people in the community that are interested and can get a location for some start up meetings to begin the planning. Invite local people who are interested – we can attend and help with the organizing if you want. Develop the planning for the event, what issues you want to cover, and ideally some actions around the issue and educational activities as part of the momentum building process.

Each event will take the shape as determined by the local group that organizes is and each event will be a step toward discovering how to do it better for the next one. As we build we will continue to circulate the petitions and connect with the local existing activist structures . . . providing the groundwork for mass mobilizations that will be needed to effectively win gains on the issue of decarceration.

**[Decarc@DecarcerateNJ.org](mailto:Decarc@DecarcerateNJ.org)**

**908-881-5275 / 973-223-2114**  
**DecarcerateNJ.org**



To get a glimpse inside the chambers of Bayside Prison . . .

<http://bit.ly/1zZAihc>

### Ongoing Crisis at Bayside State Prison

Bayside State Prison in South Jersey has a history of severe prisoner abuse, racism, and systemic accountability problems.\* Now 100++ prisoners, who were recently transferred from Bayside due to infrastructure problems, are speaking out (as are their families), alleging extreme violence, racism, intimidation, retaliation, and corruption by prison staff.

Prisoners and human rights activists and attorneys have been collecting testimonies of transferred prisoners. family members of prisoners and former prisoners, as well as analyzing checklists of commonly reported Bayside problems. Organizer, attorney, and filmmaker Matt Pillischer. Esq. is working to produce a short advocacy video to expose abuse and corruption at the prison, and put pressure on the Department of Corrections, law enforcement, legislators and journalists to investigate the crisis.

Concerned citizens have initiated a Bayside State Prison Organizing Committee, to strategize how to publicize conditions at Bayside and coordinate multifaceted approaches to change.

#### Short term objectives:

1. to protect prisoners recently transferred from Bayside, who are providing information about conditions at Bayside;
2. to continue gathering information from prisoners, former prisoners and family members about these conditions;
3. to educate legislators and people in the community about conditions at Bayside;
4. to mitigate harm by defending individuals at risk and making systemic recommendations to the DOC.

#### Long term:

1. effecting significant change at Bayside - focusing on violence, racism and related serious justice, accountability, and quality assurance problems at the prison;
2. using the persistence of the problems at Bayside to highlight the necessity for formal independent community based prison system oversight in NJ. Jersey.

\* <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/21/nyregion/claims-of-widespread-beatings-persist-in-a-1997-prison-episode.html>  
\* <http://solitarywatch.com/2010/04/14/n-j-prison-abused-inmates-dunrg-month-long-ockdown/>

We want to work with people who were confined at Bayside, or their families, to bring attention to this crisis. Therefore, we are also seeking participants for a short advocacy documentary about the crisis at Bayside State prison, being produced by Matt Pillischer, Esq. (producer of Broken on All Sides).

**Contact Jean Ross, Esq. at:**  
[jeanross55@aol.com](mailto:jeanross55@aol.com) phone and fax 609-924-6508

Bayside State Prison Organizing Committee, including members: American Friends Service Committee, Women Who Never Give Up, People's Organization for Progress. Please direct questions and return petitions to Jean Ross (above)

#### Bayside Voices: 2014 - Voices from Bayside State Prison in Leesburg, NJ

"I have never, in all my years in prisons, experienced anything like what is happening here at Bayside." (Common statement)

(When I was at Bayside) "I saw some inmates get beat up to the point that they were almost dead."

"These were not just any beatings, but beatings inflicting such brutal force that one was broken to the point of sobbing, begging for his life."

(In 1997, after Officer Baker's death) "I saw that the guards that were of color were left out of the unites where all the beatings took place and all the racist name calling took place."

"If an inmate did do any complaint about any staff member or guard they were beat up then set up. I would keep writing more, but it hurts me bad to keep thinking about the things I went through there..."

"I have personally seen the carnage and witnessed the boots to the head, face, and body of handcuffed and sometimes unconscious prisoners."

"They got people trained not to go near that (remedy) box. They know what will happen."

"He then layed me face down on the ground and jumped on me off a desk onto my mid to lower back, which caused me to defecate on myself..."

"They have prisoners who clean up the blood, before SID comes to investigate."

"They go into inmate cells and open their food and dump it all over the cells or take trash cans and dump them in cells."

"I have been threatened by officers day by day"

A mother reports: "He gets harassed for just asking a question...His supplies have been ransacked...shampoo and lotion poured out all over his papers and things..."

(Heard from an officer's shack.) "Here come those fucking monkeys."

"I witnessed a guy get kicked and stomped while handcuffed"

(An officer said) "Are you scared?" "When I said yes, he said you'd better be, we'll kill you down here you fucking spit."

"After a beating, they will go to the witnesses and threaten to beat them if they say anything."

"They use prisoners to do lookout for the Sgt. while they watch TV and gamble and drink."

"A guard called "B" used to beat up Black and Hispanic prisoners."

"There was a guard who gave me cigarettes to sell to the prisoners..."



**Let's work together and support each other. Let's listen to each other and learn about each other's hardships. We will realize what we have in common. NJD! is your resource for organizing and uniting against systemic mass incarceration.**



## Justice Subcommittee: Kwadir Felton Blinded for Life by Police Bullet, Sentenced to 16 Years

**by Rania Khalek, reprinted with her permission and that of Truth Out where it appeared initially.**

On January 10, 2010, 18-year-old Kwadir Felton was shot in the face and permanently blinded by Jersey City, N.J., Police Sergeant Thomas McVicar. Yet it is Felton who faces decades in prison.

McVicar insists he was forced to open fire because Felton tried to rob him at gunpoint. Felton, now 22, vehemently denies having been armed.

At his trial in November, Felton testified that he had just left a baby shower and was on his way to his girlfriend's house when he heard someone say, "Yo, you little black mother fucker, you better get the fuck down before I blow your fucking brains out."

"There's no reason to have a weapon on me," Felton told the courtroom. "That's not me. I was raised better than that."

There is evidence to suggest Felton is telling the truth. PQ His fingerprints and DNA were nowhere to be found on the weapon in question, the police version of events is full of holes and discrepancies at every turn, and witnesses have been harassed into silence by authorities.

But this wasn't enough to sway the jury, which found Felton guilty on all counts, including aggravated assault of an officer, unlawful possession of a handgun and conspiracy to distribute controlled substances.

Upon hearing the verdict, Felton's mother, 51-year-old Dawn "Renee" Felton, who was recovering from open heart surgery, fell to the floor weeping and was quickly dragged out of the courtroom.

Felton broke down as well, sobbing and shouting at an officer, "I don't understand! You didn't have to shoot me in the head for no reason! You trying to charge me with something I didn't do!"

Brooke Barnett, Felton's attorney, has since filed several motions for a new trial, citing "prosecutorial misconduct" and calling the state's evidence against Felton "absolutely and unequivocally contradicted." All motions thus far have been denied with one motion still pending that accuses a juror of having a conflict of interest.

Felton has yet to be sentenced, but prosecutor, Ray Mateo, said at trial that he faces up to 30 years in prison with 15-year parole eligibility. [He has since been sentenced to 16 years. ed.]

### Cowboy Cop

According to McVicar, he was alone inside his vehicle doing undercover surveillance in relation to the drug conspiracy investigation when Felton tried to rob him at gunpoint, forcing him to open fire through the closed car window, striking Felton in the face.

However it remains unclear whether McVicar was on or off duty that night. "There was no physical evidence showing he worked that day. There was no timesheet. There was no dispatch," Barnett told Truthout.

McVicar was driving his personal vehicle, a red Toyota Tacoma, which happened to be covered in bumper stickers celebrating gun ownership and conservative politics, "things that we felt went to his state of mind and character," said Barnett. But

The Justice Subcommittee of Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State supports the demand for justice for political prisoners and those who are falsely convicted or over charged and over sentenced. We encourage support for the Justice for Kwadir Felton Committee which you can contact through Renee Felton :201-892-2141 / ladyd4407@yahoo.com .

the judge would not allow it.

"I'M THE GOD-FEARING, GUN-TOTING, FLAG-WAVING CONSERVATIVE YOU WERE WARNED ABOUT," says one sticker.

Even more damning is that McVicar did not immediately report the shooting. Instead, he reported that shots were fired in a different location, where there had been no shooting. Between 20 to 30 minutes passed before McVicar reported that Felton had been shot, during which time Felton received no medical attention. "They did not think that this kid was going to live," said Barnett. And perhaps they did not want him to.

Also called into question is McVicar's claim that he shot Felton with his .45 caliber service weapon. Chase Blanchard, the defense's forensic pathologist, testified as an expert witness that it would have been impossible for Felton to survive a shot to the head with a .45 caliber with hollow point bullets at close range. Even though the bullet wound to Felton's head was a through and through wound, meaning it entered one end and exited the other, the bullet was never recovered from the scene, leaving more questions than answers.

Furthermore, Blanchard argued that the absence of "dicing injuries" from shattered glass to Felton's hands and face suggests he was not shot through a closed car window, as McVicar alleged.

For many in the neighborhood, McVicar's behavior did not come as a surprise given his reputation as a brutalizer. But according to Barnett, people in the community were scared to speak publicly about their violent encounters with McVicar.

"I've never seen this reaction of people on the streets refusing to be involved, not out of fear of retaliation from criminals, but from fear of retaliation from the cops," Barnett told Truthout.

The stories of McVicar's brutality continued to pour in even after the trial. "Right after the verdict came out, someone reached out to me who literally moved to Atlanta because he had been beaten so badly by [McVicar]," said Barnett. "This is a cowboy cop."

With Barnett's attempts to obtain McVicar's internal records rejected and his victims too scared to come forward, McVicar's violent streak was shielded from the jury.

### Officer Can't Get Story Straight

Jersey City police sergeant Joseph Sarao, allegedly the first officer to respond to the scene of Kwadir's shooting, offered several different versions of how the gun Felton was allegedly armed with was handled, each one more contradictory than the next.

In a statement to the Shooting Response Team shortly after the shooting, Sarao said he arrived at the scene to find Felton laying on the cement with a gunshot wound to the head and a gun resting beside his calf. "I decided not to move the gun at this time to try to preserve the crime scene," he explained.

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CALL 908-881-5275 OR WRITE  
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## Former Corrections Officer Calls for End to "Dehumanization" in NJ Prisons

by Milton Conway

I served as a Corrections Officer at Northern State Prison from June 1987 until December 1992. At the time of my hiring, the newly built facility had, as a requirement that Newark residents be given first preference of the jobs as guards and as civilian staff. "Of the 371 people employed, 217 are Newark residents and 26 live in other parts of Essex County."

When I initially began working at the facility, there were very few of my family and friends incarcerated, but as the years progressed and the "War on Drugs" was waged, there were far more of those who I knew finding their way into the system and eventually onto my housing unit. I attending Corrections Officer Training Academy (C.O.T.A.) in June-August of 1987. The overall theme of the training was to instill in us that we, custody staff, were responsible for maintaining the security of the facility. As part of the "sensitivity training" that related to the dehumanization process employed within the State's Correctional facilities, the officers were each strip searched, dressed in prisoner jump suits, handcuffed, shackled, locked in cells and ignored by the officers conducting the training. As I went through this process, I couldn't help but feel a sense of loss: loss of the feeling of LOVE within my person and also from those who were serving as my custodians. The training seemed to make it easier to see the convicted felon as much less than human and therefore not worthy of human attention.

Custody staff and their concerns took priority over all other day to day operations within the facility. Social services, religious services, and other activities that would have served as Re-Humanizing elements were ALL suspended if there was a CODE BLUE or anything related to the work of the Custody staff. When a CODE was called, there were officers assigned to a specialized unit who were deployed in riot gear to the location of the disturbance. Most of the officers in this unit would appear to have no issue with cracking a head or two in order to subdue the perpetrators of any infraction that required them to "suit up."

I couldn't help but feel that some of my White colleagues, who were not raised in or around Newark, were a bit too anxious to "suit up" and "crack heads" back then. Most of the supervisory staff (sergeants, lieutenants, and captains) at that time were those who had served in South Jersey facilities and "made rank" by moving up to the newly built Northern State Prison. There was definitely a disconnect in the culture and life experiences of those who were serving as new hires and those who had been working the system's policies for quite a while. Soon, there were many more of my family and friends in the system and this presented many challenges...to say the least.

One event in particular truly tested my resolve and helped to plant the seed of doubt in my mind regarding my future service as an officer. A cousin of mine was transferred to the housing unit where I was stationed. I worked the 3rd shift, which was the hours between 10:20pm and 6:20am. Now, this particular cousin had a very severe speech impediment which made it difficult for others to understand what he is saying. (my family even gets frustrated as we try to make out what he is saying) On one particular night, I walked the tier to take the count of all of the prisoners so as to deliver said count to Central Control. My cousin, who had been on my tier for about two months prior to this day, was considerably more quiet and subdued that usual so after I finished my count and called it in, I returned to his cell door to speak with him.

As I approached his window I could see that my normally very animated family member was very lethargic. I asked what was wrong. He raised his head from his mattress and I could see that the

left side of his face was very swollen and his left eye was almost hanging out of his face. He stated that "they got me messed up on that Thorazine" and I asked what happened to his face. Due to the speech impediment and the drugs that had been administered to him, it was impossible for me to make out what he was saying. I later inquired with the Central Control Blotter (administrative custody officer) and asked that he check the log book and incident reports to tell me what happened. He shared with me something to the effect that my cousin was found in an area that he did not belong and when questioned became belligerent and the responding officers felt threatened and had to "subdue" him.

During the majority of my time there I was an ideal officer, with no disciplinary charges for the first 5 years, but in the months following that incident, I received no less than 3 Neglect of Duty and 2 Insubordination charges, all of which evolved because of the way the administration handled my cousins complaint. I challenged my superiors at almost every turn. I felt that the dehumanization of my family member was not going to go unnoticed and that there was something that someone could do about it. I was turned away and told that this was the "way that things are." I agreed, but made up my mind that they should not stay that way. I soon took a leave of absence from State employment and focused on the business that I had started with my younger brother a few months prior. I vowed that i would work to reduce the number of prisons that were needed in the Garden State.

For many years after I left Northern State Prison, I would ask my former colleagues how they could continue serving in a capacity that removes a person's humanity from them. Most would simply state the fact that the criminal did the crime and must pay the time. To which I would retort, "But what about the CORRECTIONS part of it?" "When do they get Re-Humanized?" At that point I got blank stares and the statement that they had to pay their bills.

As time passed on, I began to see a direct connection between the dehumanization of the incarcerated and the breakdown of the Black Family and the Black community. I soon theorized that when a person is dehumanized they lose the capacity and ability to LOVE themselves. A person in this state has No Esteem, No Pride, No Sense of Self and can easily be trained, ordered and manipulated by others. Thereby making them easier to keep in custody. A human being with LOVE of Self will NOT readily or easily submit to Oppression and will Never Allow themselves to be held in Custody under a system as unjust as the American System of Justice has become over the years.

It is my mission to Re-Humanize The Dehumanized in the State of New Jersey and throughout the country. We must Educate them of their Inner Nobility and challenge them to help us bring the Kingdom of Heaven to this earthly plane. I am a member of the Baha'i Faith and we believe that Justice is our right as given by God. Time is the Divine Reconciler and now is the time for Justice in New Jerusalem (NJ).

I would like to call upon Corrections Officers and others employed in the prison systems to break the silence and expose the ongoing abuses of prisoners. We can develop ways to provide source protection to get the information out. I would also like to invite Corrections Officers, past and present, to join me in forming Corrections Officer Professionals for Decarceration (COPD) . Contact me at [miltonconway@yahoo.com](mailto:miltonconway@yahoo.com) .

Milton Conway is a founding member of the Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State

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# UNITY

## End the torture in NJ of long-term solitary confinement

by Rev. Jack Johnson

Recently, the PBS show “Frontline” aired “Solitary Nation,” a graphic portrayal of solitary confinement in prisons, jails and detention centers throughout the United States.

We saw in nightmarish detail the mental and physical deterioration experienced by prisoners in isolation. The episode left no shred of doubt in my mind that the use of long-term solitary confinement rises to the level of cruel and unusual punishment, treatment not fit for any living being.

According to the United Nations special rapporteur on torture, solitary confinement beyond 15 days should be prohibited because of its devastating psychological toll. The Supreme Court ruled in 1890 that solitary confinement constituted torture. And yet today, the practice of locking prisoners in a cell, alone or with one other person, for 23 hours a day, for months, years, even decades, persists in every state.

Perhaps even more chilling than witnessing on our television screens the pools of blood spilled as a result of cycles of self-harm is the knowledge that this is happening every day in our own towns and cities.

As a United Methodist pastor who has spent the past two years campaigning for alternatives to isolated confinement in New Jersey with the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, permit me to provide a brief snapshot of our own backyard.

Our state was one of the first to test solitary confinement as a primary tool of correctional control in the modern era. Bonnie Kerness, coordinator of the AFSC Prison Watch Project, recounts the adoption in 1975 of “management control units” in New Jersey State Prison, then Trenton State Prison, as a response to politically dissident groups in the wake of the civil rights movement.

Using sensory deprivation, long-term isolation, seizure of property and denial of outside human contact, New Jersey law enforcement worked with state administrators to dismantle groups deemed “radical” by incapacitating their leaders. Since the 1970s, decades of “tough on crime” rhetoric have led to an unsustainable ballooning of our prison and

jail populations and a shift toward a punitive model that focuses on control and disposability of human persons.

The “Frontline” report failed to address the draconian, disproportionate impact of our correctional policies on communities of color, evidenced in New Jersey and throughout the country. New Jersey’s reliance on incarceration and isolation has a direct, detrimental impact on our poor communities of color. As of 2007, New Jersey boasted the third-highest black-to-white incarceration rate disparity in the United States. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the cities and counties from which most state prisoners hail are also those with the highest poverty rates, school closings, policing and public health issues.

A 2006 study by the Vera Institute of Justice reported that more than 80,000 prisoners are in isolation at any time, but this number did not include jails or detention centers. These figures reflect the now-common practice of funneling public monies (and private contracts) into the construction of “supermax” facilities — prisons made up exclusively of solitary confinement units. Once a rarity on the U.S. correctional landscape, these super-maximum prisons are in at least 44 states.

While “Frontline” highlights the new perspective on solitary confinement in Maine that followed a statewide campaign of community and religious leaders, legislative efforts are also underway in California, New Mexico, Colorado, New York and Massachusetts. Texas passed a study bill last year, backed by the largest correctional officers union in the state.

As national scrutiny increases thanks to prisoner hunger strikes, public hearings and communities of faith speaking out about the immorality of this practice, New Jersey legislators must act to end the torture of long-term solitary confinement here in our backyard. As “Frontline” made clear, our safety and humanity depend on it.

The Rev. Jack Johnson is a United Methodist pastor who lives in Columbus, N.J. To become involved in the effort to end solitary torture in NJ, contact him through this e-mail address: [interfaithpartne@aol.com](mailto:interfaithpartne@aol.com)

**Did you sign the on-line petition yet? <http://chn.ge/Rf10Th>**

**Become a face-to-face petitioner - spread the word**

**Print petition from this link: [DecarcerateNJ.org/DecarcActPet.docx](http://DecarcerateNJ.org/DecarcActPet.docx)**

**Signature gatherers should make sure you have copies of the NJ Decarcerator to give to signers!**

**Call for Month of Decarceration Action Oct. 2014**

**[www.stopmassincarceration.net](http://www.stopmassincarceration.net)**

**PLANS MADE BY ACTIVISTS GATHERED IN NYC TO SAY NO MORE TO MASS INCARCERATION**

2.2 million people in prison . . . more than 80,000 of them held in the torture of solitary confinement . . . more than 5 million formerly incarcerated people are denied basic rights even after they’ve served their sentences. . . . All of this disproportionately targets Blacks and Latinas/os. When you add the families and communities of all these people, it amounts to tens of millions of people living their lives caught up in the criminal “injustice” system of this country. This is unjust and illegitimate. It must be stopped, and the movement to stop it will be taking a huge leap forward in October, 2014.

A strategizing session held in New York City brought together people from many different backgrounds from all across the country last week, and a Call for a Month of Resistance to Mass Incarceration, Police Terror, Repression and the Criminalization of a Generation was issued at this session. The strategy session was hosted by the Stop Mass Incarceration Network. 90 people participated in the session, including family members of police murder victims, formerly incarcerated people, family members of people currently incarcerated, people involved in struggle against inhumane conditions in immigrant detention centers, students, attorneys, media people, ministers, immigrants from several different continents. There were Asians, Blacks, Latina/os and whites assembled to flesh out a vision of the Month of Resistance and

develop a plan for making it as powerful as possible. People came from California, Texas, Illinois, Ohio, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, New Jersey, Connecticut and of course, NY to participate in this session.

This session envisioned October as a month of powerful manifestations of determined resistance to mass incarceration, including: nationwide demonstrations on October 22, the National Day of Protest to Stop Police Brutality, Repression, and the Criminalization of a Generation; a major concert and other cultural expressions, panels and symposiums on campuses and neighborhoods, sermons in churches, mosques and synagogues and more. It will be a month that involves thousands and thousands of people in standing together and saying NO MORE to the horrors being enforced on millions of people by the monstrous system of mass incarceration in this country. If you are someone who is forced to live your life under the threat of mass incarceration and all its consequences, you must join us in acting in October.

If you are someone who understands how wrong all this is, how much it devastates the lives of so many people, you must join us in acting in October. Join us in making October a month of powerful resistance that can awaken millions to these horrors and challenge them to join in acting to make it NO MORE.

**Stop Mass Incarceration Network \* Email: [stopmassincarceration@gmail.com](mailto:stopmassincarceration@gmail.com) Web: [www.stopmassincarceration.net](http://www.stopmassincarceration.net) \* Twitter: [@StopMassIncNet](https://twitter.com/StopMassIncNet) \* Phone: 347-979-SMIN (7646)**

Analysis:

## NJ Decarceration Activism (originally published by Counterpunch.org: <http://bit.ly/1pfGn3f>)

by MICHELLE MATISONS

New Jersey is politically polarized around a hostile, pro-corporate Governor who recently granted over 1 billion in public funds to Republican backed firms that support his policies. The state public infrastructure endures attacks on employee pensions and public education. Public officials from Governor Christie, to charter school enthusiasts like Democratic Senator George Norcross, to local, controversial school superintendents such as Camden’s Paymon Rouhani and Newark’s Cami Anderson collude with the corporate agenda in contempt of the people. Newark mayor, Ras Baraka, has given new optimism to those feeling defeated, but keeping Baraka’s victory in perspective, Cami Anderson’s school superintendent contract was just renewed amidst massive controversy that had Newark citizens in the streets protesting alongside religious leaders and high school students who managed to occupy the Newark Schools building. Activists continue to insist that publically funded schools stay tied to communities and the state’s fair funding mandates while opposing school resegregation through chartering and diminished funding sources.

But, as of today, Anderson’s school restructuring plan, One Newark, is being implemented for the fall semester. If this plan is carried out, student and youth opportunity will further diminish in a state that already sees high rates of racialized incarceration for its citizens. What does public education hijackers have in mind for New Jersey’s poor youth? More incarceration?

With a current polarized political climate spawned from the Christie administration’s arrogant indifference, and ongoing social policies that threaten to further segregate the state along racial/ class lines, it is important for citizens to forge new alliances and wage activist campaigns that can demonstrate people will continue to fight back, and possibly achieve concrete victories. On the other end of the school to prison pipeline from public education activism is the anti-mass incarceration (or decarceration) activism launched (Spring 2014) Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State. As the Newark school system gets bludgeoned by corporate charter schemes, decarceration activists plot to move in on this important historic moment widely referred to as “decarceration”.

Based in Newark, the Committee has introduced a bill entitled “NJ Decarceration Act” which calls for large scale reduction of the prison population—“particularly for nonviolent drug related and other small scale and other nonviolent small scale economic ‘crimes of survival’.” They urge NJ Senator Ron Rice (D-Essex) to support their bill, and the Committee has covered all relevant bases in this effort. It sent Senator Rice a letter signed by fourteen Essex County residents; it is organizing a street panel discussion to be held on July 30, 2014 at 5:30 pm outside Newark City Hall; and it established an online petition with 1,057 signatures to date. It appears that Committee members are, in the words of one member, ready to take on the “Black Agenda issue, an issue that affects the impoverished throughout Essex County, this unjust ‘justice’ system...”

**Decarceration Activism Dead-Ends**

Activists beware. There’s a class war within decarceration efforts. One side represents corporations and colluding public officials positioned to profit from the needs of shifting prison populations. The other side represents communities most affected by mass incarceration. A variation on a theme of decarceration is endorsed by entities that string us along with their head-nodding support while preparing their whitewashing machines and watering down systems to undermine true activist led decarceration initiatives.

Decarceration—and the larger prison reform climate championed out of financial and sometimes legal necessity, never morality—is a very hot political commodity right now. When the war on drugs started, politicians strutted their bipartisan tough on crime stances in an obligatory fashion at every press conference. Now, since the prison snake is eating its own tail and needs to find new sources of nourishment, and the stats about the drug war’s effectiveness in ensuring public safety and addressing addiction issues are well established, reform, restructuring, alternate sentencing is the political class’ latest obligatory talk—all under the guise of more judicial fiscal practices for all. Not

necessarily justice for all, though. Not by a long shot.

Large scale prison population reduction plagues the criminal justice community which makes its bread and butter off the prison industrial status quo. (Governments contract with private companies that are guarantee a certain inmate capacity at all times, as one example.) As federal, state and local budgets become increasingly encumbered by overcrowded facilities that endanger inhabitants, it’s now or never for prison reform. But be aware. Be very aware. If we call for a large scale prisoner release, we should not accept “alternative” carceral mechanisms such as private prisons, excessive parole surveillance and restrictions, including privatization of parole services, or the growing use of electronic monitoring. It appears more and more that prison companies don’t care as much where the prisoners are so long as they can capitalize off the fact of their status as criminals.

While community groups move to advance rational and humane decarceration agendas, decarceration groups must be on the lookout for what James Kilgore refers to as “carceral humanism” that “repackages” mass incarceration as rehabilitative, with specialized courts or home electronic monitoring programs. This is the first of several dead ends decarceration activism should avoid. We want freedom, not more comfy cuffs.

Like decarceration activists, the US commercial bail bonds industry (BBI) also has a big stake in seeing people released—only in their own carefully crafted “pay or stay” way. This is why the BBI is active in the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and increasingly organizes in its own interests. It does not want to miss out on everything the prison reform/ decarceration climate affords their own financial interests; they make campaign contributions across party lines to keep politicians squarely in the mass arrest ethos of American policing’s warlike climate. Think about it: there’d be no bail posted if there was no arrest to begin with! Consider a possibility of increased police budgets as an outcome of successful grassroots decarceration efforts.

As Heather Ann Thompson mentions in a recent Huffington Post editorial on “The Decarceration Dodge”, as decarceration efforts increase in the prison reform era, racial profiling (such as New York’s notorious “Stop and Frisk” practice), and mass arrest remains pervasive and appears to be increasing, not declining. Thompson writes: “Indeed, as we celebrate the dip in federal and state prison populations that have resulted from litigation or legislation, disproportionate policing and racial profiling is still resulting in historically unprecedented levels of containment and confinement...” Another dead end for decarceration activism could emphasize getting people out, without connecting to the warlike culture of mass harassment, profiling, and arrest that keeps tax dollars flowing to police departments on one end and supporting bail (and other private) industry profits on the other.

One final dead end is the great potential to divide and conquer decarceration activist constituencies with the painful question of who gets released under pro-active decarceration measures such as that initiated by the Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State. In their petition text, the Committee calls for “incarceration reductions of 20% in the first two years and 50% over 4 years. The legislation should provide for guidelines of offenses for which prisoners should be released (e.g. nonviolent simple possession charges and small scale economic offenses), guidelines for release of those given particular lengths of sentences who served a percentage of their sentence (e.g. release all those sentenced under 6 months. Who have served 50% of a term up to 1 year, have served 70% of 1-3 years, 80% of 3-5 years, etc.) as well as those who are beyond a certain age who served a certain percentage of their sentences.”

Here we see the toughest job decarceration activists face. The decision to pragmatically approaching decarceration by crime category, time served or individuals’ age or medical status can erase the more utopian demand that no one should be detained inside illegitimate facilities designed for dehumanization. There’s no avoiding these complications between the pragmatic reform agenda and the more utopian prison abolitionist agenda. Regarding who qualifies for release, the Committee’s idea that: “The particulars can be determined with input from communities targeted by mass incarceration” begs elaboration, but is a

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## Justice for Kwadir Felton! 201-892-2141 / [ladyd4407@yahoo.com](mailto:ladyd4407@yahoo.com)

From page 4

But Sarao offered a significantly altered story at trial.

According to a transcript of Sarao's testimony provided to Truthout by Barnett, Sarao told the jury that he arrived at the scene to find the gun lying beside Felton's bloodied head rather than his calf. He added that he dragged the weapon with his foot several feet until it was next to Felton's thigh.

"[T]he gun was right near his head. He was still twitching, and I wasn't sure if he was still a threat, so I, with my foot, dragged it away from him at least three or four feet," Sarao told the courtroom.

Barnett told Truthout that this discrepancy calls into question why there were no traces of Felton's DNA found on the gun, which would surely have been bloodied had it been next to Felton's head, which was pooling blood.

Sarao also told the jury that an unnamed officer under his direction bagged the weapon and took it to police headquarters for storage without registering it as evidence and then brought it back two hours later to be photographed at the crime scene. But during cross-examination, Sarao again changed his story, denying that the gun had ever left the scene.

### Witness Harassed Into Silence

A couple of months after her son was shot, Renee told Truthout that she spoke with a man who witnessed the aftermath of the shooting, which occurred just outside of his house.

"He saw what happened, but the cops harassed this man so much, he moved away twice," said Renee.

The man heard a noise, presumably the gunshot, and went outside to check things out.

"He said he seen Kwadir laying on ground but he said he seen no gun laying by Kwadir's body," said Renee.

"He said there were two cops in the car. One cop got out on passenger side, the other cop got out on driver's side. He said when all the cops was coming there were no sirens, no flashing lights. He said it was just so quiet like they didn't really want too much attention."

"He said when the cop got out that shot Kwadir, he seen the cop kicking Kwadir's right leg, and he seen his left leg shake. And then he said Kwadir sat up and the cop pushed him back down and started searching him."

"He said if we need him for anything he would not have a problem going to court to testify."

But months later, when Renee paid him a visit, she learned from neighbors that he moved away. By the time Barnett managed to track him down, the witness changed his story. He moved a second time after state authorities located him.

The man ended up testifying at trial but left out the details that were most damaging to the officers.

"There is no cooperation from anybody," said Barnett. "Even post-verdict, anybody that my detectives tried to talk to would not leave their phone number. They don't want to be involved for fear of retaliation, not from the streets, but from the police department."

"It's Been Hell"

Felton said at his trial that after losing his eyesight, he lost the will to live and on several occasions tried to kill himself.

"(Going blind) took life from me," he told the jury. "If I couldn't see, I didn't want to live."

It was a rough road for Renee, as well. "The last four years has been the worst years of my life," she told Truthout. "It's been hell."

Renee rushed to the hospital when she learned Felton had been shot, but was prevented from seeing him. All she knew was that her son had been arrested while laying unconscious and handcuffed to a hospital bed in the ICU, and no one would tell her why.

Three days later, with his brain still hemorrhaging, the authorities moved Felton to a prison hospital and bail was set at half a million dollars.

"They didn't even give him time to heal," said Renee. "If we didn't get him out, he would've died in jail."

Felton's court-appointed lawyer got the bail reduced to \$200,000. With help from a local pastor, friends and family, Renee raised the \$4,000 needed to secure a bail bond and Felton was released. But a week later, he was arrested again, this time on drug conspiracy

charges. Though he was wheelchair-bound and blind, bail was set at \$125,000.

The drug conspiracy charge was related to a wiretap investigation that had little to do with Felton. Of some 900 phone recordings, Felton was in a handful of them. "Kwadir did not become relevant to their conspiracy until he was shot by a police officer," explained Barnett. PQ "They used the drug evidence to really dirty him up to lose the sympathy of the public."

Shortly after Felton's arrest, Renee was kicked out of Jersey City public housing. She soon lost her job and had to move in with her daughter, where she became Felton's full time caretaker.

"I had to do basically everything for him," said Renee.

In addition to a life-altering physical disability to contend with, Felton was, and still is, emotionally traumatized.

"You have no idea how many times I went to the psych ward," said Renee. "He felt because he couldn't see no more, there was no purpose for him living. I had to hide all the knives in the house. I had to hide all the medication."

"It took him almost three years to accept he was blind," said Renee. But eventually Felton went back to school and earned the high school diploma he would have received the year he was shot.

At his trial, Felton told the jury that walking in last June's Snyder High School graduation ceremony was "one of the greatest feelings in the world," adding that he wants to pursue higher education so he can teach the blind.

"I want to attend college and get my degree, get my master's degree in education and communication and teach braille," he said. "I want to work for the commission of the blind."

But his dreams have once again been shattered.

As he awaits sentencing, Felton, who suffers seizures and constant physical pain, is locked up at Hudson County Jail where he is unable to access the medical services he desperately needs.

"I speak to Kwadir every day," said Renee. "He's just sitting in jail; he can't see, and he's on anti-depressant medicine."

On top of blinding him, the shot to his head shattered his entire sinus cavity and left a cyst on the right side of his brain, leaving him in constant pain. According to Renee, doctors have determined that his right eye will need to be removed at some point.

### Punishing Victims

Felton is not alone. The criminal justice system has a penchant for punishing victims of police violence who are lucky enough to survive.

Leon Ford Jr. was just 19 years old when he was paralyzed by Pittsburgh police who pulled him over in 2012. Today he is facing 20 years in prison for allegedly assaulting the officers who paralyzed him.

Lamont Earl Dukes, 30, was trying to surrender to the St. Louis police officer who was chasing him when he was shot him twice last July. The next day police visited Dukes in his hospital bed to charge him with "resisting arrest."

Andre Fiorentino, a 32-year-old black man from Coatesville, Pennsylvania, nearly died when he was shot several times by police outside his home in November. He has since been charged with attempted murder of the officers who say he shot at them twice. Though Fiorentino denies having been armed, authorities spent no longer than 24 hours investigating the shooting before siding with police.

The overzealous prosecution of Kwadir Felton seems to fit this pattern.

Not satisfied with robbing Felton of his eyesight, the state of New Jersey appears determined to take the next several years of his life as well.

"[Jersey City authorities] just want to bury it," said Barnett. "because the amount of money that this kid and his family would have recovered would have been astronomical."

Renee doesn't care about the potential payout. She just wants justice for her son. "This cop needs to be off the street because he goes around shooting our babies for no reason," she said. "I'm fighting for Kwadir's freedom, and I'm fighting for justice."

## Students Against Mass Incarceration

From Page 1

Movement, and Puerto Rican Movement etc. In short, youth are the most targeted and most affected.

### Mass Incarceration for Profit

Private prisons are central to the Prison industrial complex. The two largest prison management companies, CCA and GEO group, had a combined revenue of almost \$3 Billion in 2010. The rise of private prisons is connected to the neoliberal thrust to privatize various aspects of life that previously had been the domain of the state. These same corporations are trading on the NYSE. To maintain the high revenue flow they must ensure a steady supply of prisoners. Thus private prisons have contributed huge amounts to politicians. In turn, elected officials use the rhetoric of law and order and pass harsh drug sentencing laws.

### Imprisonment Equals Enslavement

Enslavement is still legal in the US. The 13th amendment states "involuntary servitude is abolished except in cases of punishment for a crime." The State can legally own human beings, once they are convicted of a crime. In the 19th century, under "Convict leasing" a private employer could hire out convicts, 90% of whom were Black, at a fee to the state. Governments passed things like vagrancy laws, that stated a person had to prove employment on command. Many Blacks were arrested on trumped up charges to provide labor to white corporations and plantations. Such laws were the predecessor to today's stop and frisk policies. Now, prisoners are paid as little as 10 cents an hour to make everything from furniture for college campuses, assemble cell phones and serve as call center agents. The PIC is a continuation of previous forms of national oppression of Black people.

### Immigrant Detention

There are several connections. CCA states that it plans to move into the area of immigrant detention. CCA was a member of the American Legislative Executive Council (ALEC), a right wing lobbying group made of some of the largest transnational corporations. Through ALEC, CCA helped to craft the legislation that became SB1070 in Arizona. The anti-immigrant thrust is pushed by the prison industry. Chicanos are one of our natural allies in the struggle to abolish all prisons.

### Cops in Schools, Schools Like Prisons

The purpose of education in any society, including the US is to reproduce the social order. Following this premise, public schools in the US want to maintain the colonial domination of Black and other people. Majority Black schools are historically underfunded, have the least experienced teachers, and the students are the most criminalized. Similar to college campuses, the campus police became prevalent after the racial rebellions in the late 1960s. From personal experience I can tell you, K-12 schools are increasingly like prisons (bars on the windows, metal detectors, and armed police roaming the halls). It is preparing youth for their future role in society: prisoner. The slightest infraction warrants arrest, suspension, or expulsion. Youth are labeled as a "problem" and they get kicked out of school into the streets where their future life options are



almost always prison.

### Organizing Against Incarceration Nation

To fight these issues we got to educate-agitate-organize. Right now we are in the education phase. SAMI has gone everywhere from prisons, adult education courses, high schools, and other college campuses to conduct workshops around the issue of mass incarceration. We need to be clear about our objectives: 1) end of the capitalist system 2) full self-determination for Black people in US 3) the abolition of all prisons.

The issues are interconnected. You can not abolish all prisons unless the profit system that sustains it is ended. Black people and the entire US must undergo a cultural revolution, meaning a transformation of values, norms and beliefs. Something similar occurred during the New Negro and Black Power Movements. Most people in the US have taken on the neoliberal values of individualism, consumerism and white supremacy. We in SAMI attempt to use the arts to kick start a cultural revolution. Last semester we created a mixtape which included the songs of artists like Brand Nubian, Dead Prez, Common etc. and speeches from activists such as Malcolm X, Fred Hampton and Angela Davis.

Colleges and high schools have to organize together on the issues that most affect them such as campus police, military recruitment on campuses, and racist stop and frisk policies. In most urban areas, students could organize direct action campaigns around these issues. Stop and Frisk must end immediately! It is one of the primary methods used to get Black youth caught in the PIC. How Youth Can Connect to Movement

**SAMI is a Black radical student organization. We look forward to starting chapters and organizing with fellow comrades. We can be contacted at [samiathu@gmail.com](mailto:samiathu@gmail.com), 607-339-8188, twitter: @samiathu, and Youtube: HowardSami. Other organizations doing similar work include Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, Jericho Movement and Black August Planning Organization. Much respect to all the aforementioned groups. .. Free'em All!!!**

Do you have a friend or family member in prison, a youth facility or detention center? Would you want us to send a copy of NJD to them? As the publisher of the paper, we can send the issue directly to them. However you need to give us the name, ID and address of the incarcerated person. Please send the information to [Decarc@DecarcerateNJ.org](mailto:Decarc@DecarcerateNJ.org).

Interested in starting a Committee to Decarcerate at your college or in your high or middle school? Contact us immediately, we can help you get started!

973-223-2114 / 908-881-5275



# Proposed NJ Decarceration Act

In response to a letter to NJ Sen. Ron Rice who represents the Essex County District and chairs NJ's Legislative Black Caucus calling for introduction of a NJ Decarceration Act, Sen. Rice met with the Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State. He expressed his openness to the proposed bill and suggested to our committee that we provide an initial draft of such a bill. Below is the initial draft as provided to Sen. Rice late in the evening on July 22,

## NJ Decarceration Act Initial Draft

Whereas: United States has the world's highest incarceration rate and incarcerates 25% of the world's incarcerated while only making up 6% of the world's population;

Whereas: There are growing calls in NJ for decarceration measures across the political spectrum in the interest of cost savings as well as human rights;

Whereas: : There is an outcry from the Newark community and in Essex County in the form of community meetings, forums, petitions and letters calling for action to address the crisis of mass incarceration;

Whereas: The rates of recidivism and the violence and abuse many of those who are incarcerated are subject to, both institutional as well as at the hands of other incarcerated inmates, demonstrates the diminished success of the correctional system;

Whereas: NJ holds over 20,000 incarcerated persons in NJ state prisons;

Whereas: There are severe racial disparities among those incarcerated in NJ with Black people

representing 60% of the NJ incarcerated persons;

Whereas: the disproportionate incarceration of NJ's Black population is directly linked to economic disparities as well as racism in policing, prosecution and sentencing;

Whereas: Economic conditions including joblessness and sub-livable wages increases the propensity toward non-violent criminal acts of economic survival;

Whereas: Mass incarceration undermines the family of targeted communities by removing adult members that are needed for parenting and mentoring;

Whereas: A child who has an incarcerated parent has a 1/3 chance increased likelihood they will have interaction with the criminal justice system;

Whereas: Mass incarceration undermines the political power of targeted communities by making it impossible for the incarcerated to vote and to participate in community organizations that advocate for the betterment of the community and volunteer to help the youth, elderly, those with disabilities or otherwise those needing support;

Whereas: The political weakening of targeted communities makes it easier for corporations and powerful political organizations to exploit the resources of those communities for personal gain and against the best wishes of those communities;

Whereas: Mass incarceration undermines the

targeted community economically by removing the young adults during their age of prime income generating potential;

Whereas: 25% of NJ state inmates are incarcerated for small scale non-violent drug and drug related offenses.

Whereas: The cost per person incarcerated is over \$50,000 per year;

Whereas: It has been amply demonstrated through studies that funds expended on creation of employment opportunities, re-entry support and incarceration prevention have a far greater effectiveness in preventing incarceration;

Therefore be it resolved: That we enact the NJ Decarceration Act introducing robust goals for decarceration and defining timelines and criterion for large scale prison release. Goals are as follows:  
NJ's incarcerated persons are to be reduced by 20% over the next 2 years and by 50% over next 4 years.

Be it further resolved: That the following criteria be utilized to free NJ's state incarcerated persons:  
\* those incarcerated for non – violent simple drug possession charges and related arrest charges;

Those incarcerated for small-scale non-violent economic crimes of survival

Those sentenced to under 6 months prison time  
Those sentenced to 1 year or less who have served 50% or more of their term

Those sentenced to over 1 year to 3 years who have served 70% of their term

Those sentenced to over 3 years to 5 years who have served 80% of their term

Those over the age of 60 who have served 80% of their term

Be it further resolved: That 100% of the savings from the cost of housing each decarcerated person freed be redirected to providing meaningful training and employment in tasks of building and rebuilding urban housing, infrastructure, clinics and other public projects and to support services for those that need them for successful re-entry into the community;

Be it further resolved: that upon release, legal restrictions and discrimination in hiring, housing, education and other lingering penalties including financial burdens be removed to support greater potential success for each individual's community re-entry;

Be it further resolved: That any and all NJ restrictions on voting on those who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated be removed and that voting be extended to those who are serving in NJ institutions and not restricted by federal statute;

Be it further resolved: That Monitoring and reporting be developed for such projects and services to assure effectiveness and transparency;

Be it further resolved: that sufficient funding be provided to assure the realization of the decarceration as defined in this bill.

## NJ Decarcerator thanks Attorney Joseph Fortunato for his support



Joseph A. Fortunato Law Offices  
51 Upper Montclair Plaza #22  
Montclair, NJ  
(973) 744-5958

The experienced attorneys at the Joseph A. Fortunato Law Offices are dedicated to protecting your rights from start to finish of the legal process, from arraignment to outcome and an appeal of your outcome if necessary.

## What about when they come out? Connecting the Dots Between Mass Incarceration and the Other Issues (and "The System")

This is a legitimate question asked by those who are approached with the decarceration question. As our proposed NJ Decarceration Act states:

"That 100% of the savings from the cost of housing each decarcerated person freed be redirected to providing meaningful training and employment in tasks of building and rebuilding urban housing, infrastructure, clinics and other public projects and to support services for those that need them for successful re-entry into the community."

While there certainly are some in prison due to injustices and others due to bad luck – not criminals – just those who did nothing more than most any of us do and just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time - clearly there needs to be resolution of issues at least in many cases that led to the incarceration of the individual.

It also is not enough to say that programs are put in place to incorporate meeting their needs since often such programs attract opportunists that know how to manipulate the system to capture funds with a wide margin without delivering adequate support. Therefore it is important that agency monitoring be included in the act – and more importantly that the community be engaged in watch dog and monitoring of those agencies and projects funded to provide re-entry services, training, education and jobs.

Of utmost importance though, our efforts for decarceration must not be in a vacuum. This issue is urgent and demands our focused action but it is but one of many forms of oppression under a system designed for the benefit of the wealthy billionaire class and multinational corporate capital.

Much of the petty crime that leads to arrest and incarceration would not be occurring if there were full employment, affordable housing, cost controls on food, water and other staples, livable wages guaranteed by law, enforced protection against abusive working conditions and if many other basic human needs were accessible without working yourself half to death or having to go into

the unofficial – criminal – economy to make ends meet.

The movement for decarceration needs to be hand in glove – the same movement basically – with the movement to challenge the system and all of these maladies. As we demand decarceration we need to demand jobs, we need to demand livable wages, decent housing, affordable food, shelter and water, public schools controlled by the community, community control of neighborhood development for the benefit of the community - - and we need to develop a program of effective action around all of these issues.

We also need to develop community organizations that maintain a full court press around all of these issues and at the same time develop a way to nurture and support those who are returning.

Even if we are to pass the NJ Decarceration Act, it will not solve the problem of mass incarceration. Firstly, what passes will not be the same as what we are proposing because there will be many amendments, attempts to weaken or render ineffective, practical changes, etc. that are applied to wend it through a legislative body that currently is controlled by an alliance between the republican party and the right wing "Christie-crats" within the Democratic Party.

More importantly, mass incarceration plays a critical role in the maintenance of an oppressive class system. It weakens the ability of oppressed communities to wage effective struggle in defense of community needs. The struggle to end mass incarceration needs to be seen as several fold, firstly to begin to provide some relief to the communities that are targeted, economic, social and political relief by making families and communities more whole by the return of those serving for petty trumped up crimes, and secondly as part of a multi issue struggle that understands the systemic nature and roots of our problems and joins the battle for long term systemic solutions to our problems.



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**YES! I want to be a member / supporter of Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Street / Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

Membership: Yes: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Numbers: Cell: \_\_\_\_\_ Land: \_\_\_\_\_

Attending what schools (if any)? \_\_\_\_\_

As a new organization we have yet to set up a mechanism for receiving donations so for now, membership is free!

Hopefully members will participate in the work toward making this an effective and successful effort!

Clip coupon and mail to::

**Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State**

**P.O Box 25331**

**Newark NJ 07101**

You can also register your membership at the JOIN button at

**DecarcerateNJ.org**



## Torture and death in America's prisons

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<http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/07/15/pers-j15.html>

15 July 2014

Viewed from the high-rise multi-million-dollar apartments lining the South side of New York's Central Park, colloquially referred to as Billionaires' Row, Rikers Island looms just over the East River. The sprawling island prison complex, which warehouses over 12,000 inmates in squalor and misery, lies between Manhattan, home to a fifth of America's billionaires, and the Bronx, where half of all children live in households that do not have enough to eat.

"There's lots of brutality... Horrible brutality," the former director of mental health services at Rikers told the New York Times. On Monday, the newspaper reported, based on a review of internal prison documents, that over a single eleven-month period, 129 inmates were beaten so severely by prison guards that their injuries were "beyond the capacity of doctors at the jail's clinics to treat." In four out of five cases, the prisoners were beaten after they had been handcuffed.

The Times article describes blood-splattered examination room walls and inmates bound and beaten unconscious with brass knuckles, even as medical staff begged the guards to stop. This is not happening in some remote "third world" dictatorship, but in the financial center of world capitalism. All the brutality of class relations in America, where an oligarchy of a few tens of thousands gorges itself while condemning millions to misery, is expressed in America's teeming prisons.

Rikers Island is the rule, not the exception. Last month, the Miami Herald ran an interview with an inmate who recounted how he had been roused by guards early in the morning to clean up "large chunks of human skin" that had peeled off of Darren Rainey, a 50-year-old inmate scalded to death the previous night by guards at Miami's Dade Correctional Institution.

The guards had turned one of the prison's showers into a torture chamber, controlled from a nearby mop closet. They made a regular practice of locking their victims in the shower, laughing, cracking jokes, and asking, "Is it hot enough for you?"

Over the July 4th weekend, three more bodies were found in Florida state prisons under mysterious circumstances, bringing the total number of in-custody prison deaths currently under investigation in Florida to ten.

Such incidents, widespread despite being only occasionally and superficially reported in the press, make a complete mockery of America's pretensions to being a model of democracy and defender of democratic rights around the world.

A large share of those who are killed or tortured in US prisons are mentally ill or handicapped. According to one BBC investigation, "More than 80 people with mental health problems have died as a result of abuse or neglect in US jails since 2003."

The report notes that there are more than a million people with mental health problems in US prisons. Due in part to reduced government funding for mental health, correctional facilities hold up to 95 percent of the institutionalized mentally ill population in the United States.

Conditions are emerging in America reminiscent of the debtors' prisons of Dickensian England. Last month, a 55-year-old mother of seven died in prison while serving a two-day sentence for failing to pay truancy fines imposed because her children missed too many days of school. She was one of tens of thousands of poor people who are put in jail for failing to pay fines or other court costs.

In the United States, every social problem, whether gun violence or domestic abuse, is treated

The guards had turned one of the prison's showers into a torture chamber, controlled from a nearby mop closet . . . locking their victims in the shower, laughing, cracking jokes, and asking, "Is it hot enough for you?"

as a policing problem and reason for imposing longer sentences and hiring more police. The US imprisons more people than all other developed countries combined, in a sprawling prison system that sweeps up hundreds of thousands of people every year.

The latest revelations of torture and murder in US prisons touch on just one aspect of the intimidation, violence and brutality inflicted every day by police in America. Since 2010, the Albuquerque Police Department has killed 26 people, including James Boyd, a mentally ill homeless man whose killing sparked nationwide outrage. Last week, it was reported that the Albuquerque Police Department was purchasing at least 350 more assault rifles similar to those used to kill Boyd.

According to official statistics, the police on average commit between one and two "justifiable homicides" every day in the United States. Over the July 4th weekend, police in Chicago shot five people, two of whom died.

Night-time, no-knock police raids have become increasingly prevalent in the United States, with over 100 raids by SWAT teams taking place every 24 hours. Last month, the American Civil Liberties Union reported that the Defense Department has transferred more than \$4.3 billion in military assets to police departments, including helicopters and armored vehicles.

The growth of police violence is an expression of the brutalization of society amid soaring social inequality and an endless and escalating series of wars. While the wealth of the country's billionaires has more than doubled since 2008, workers' wages are being slashed and social programs gutted. In Detroit, which once had the highest standard of living of any American city, thousands of the city's residents have had water to their homes shut off, while the city's retirees are seeing their pensions slashed to pay off the city's millionaire bondholders.

Police violence currently targets the poorest and most vulnerable elements of society, including the homeless and mentally ill. But these practices are being prepared for use against a far broader section of the population amid the growth of popular opposition to inequality and war.

This is part of the broader attack on democratic rights. The president defends his "right" to order the assassination of American citizens, the CIA steals documents from the Senate with impunity, and Americans' most intimate personal data is collected, stored, analyzed and read by the intelligence agencies. As the trappings of democracy fall away, the dictatorship of the financial elite over society becomes more brutal, naked and open.

Inequality, war, and police violence are not blemishes on an otherwise healthy social order. Rather, they are expressions of the intractable crisis of the capitalist system itself, and the inevitable outcome of growing poverty and misery on one hand and the enormous concentration of wealth on the other.

The only alternative to this state of affairs is the organization of a mass socialist movement of the working class and establishment of a workers' government.  
Andre Damon

## 76% of those Incarcerated in NJ State Facilities are Black or Latino

Currently, 76% of the 22,318 inmates in the NJ Dept. of Corrections are Black or Hispanic. This is an outrageous example of disproportionate minority confinement. It speaks of institutionalized racism and classism that permeates the criminal justice system in NJ.

For details, see:  
[bit.ly/1k1eTiE](http://bit.ly/1k1eTiE)

Newark Anti-Violence Coalition supports decarceration . . . See:  
[on.fb.me/1k1oYMW](http://on.fb.me/1k1oYMW)

## Who Are the Decarcerators in Your Neighborhood?

Like any issue that is not yet established in a particular neighborhood, the first step is usually finding 2 or more people who want to take a stand on the an issue. An initial meeting is probably better than trying to go it solo. Approach those you have worked with before. Contact those organizations that you believe would likely support decarceration. Set up a first meeting in an organization meeting room, a library or even in a person's house, at a restaurant or at a park bench. The first meeting does not have to be huge – 3 people is an excellent start. From there you can discuss who else can be contacted, divide up the list of organizations and individuals, come up with some initial ideas of what you want to do and see what you can get going. It all starts with the first person deciding they want to DECARCERATE!

## If Pot is Legalized in NJ . . .

A bill has been introduced to legalize marijuana in NJ. In similar law changes in Colorado and Washington state, there was no explicit provision regarding the legal status of those serving prison terms, standing accused or with conviction records for past offenses. In NJ a group of NJ residents formed the NJ Committee for Marijuana Decarceration. They welcome the introduction of the proposed legislation but call for an amendment that would provide "unconditional amnesty" for those who are serving prison time or facing criminal charges in NJ for marijuana and related offenses as well as "unconditional expungement" of criminal records for such charges.

The group is stating that its members are not necessarily in favor or opposed to people using the drug once it is legalized but more motivated by the issue of justice and in ending the contribution of marijuana prohibition to incarceration in NJ and

throughout the nation and the racial bias in police pursuit of marijuana law enforcement and the criminal justice system in sentencing.

A report by the ACLU states that in 2011, \$127 million was spent on marijuana law enforcement in NJ. The same report highlights that a Black New Jersey resident is 3 times as likely to be arrested for marijuana related offenses than a white resident even though use of the substance is roughly equal between the groups. See <http://bit.ly/1hmSqeJ>.

Communities are devastated and weakened by over incarceration particularly around non-violent drug offenses and non-violent retail economic crimes of survival. Those interested in making sure that any effort to legalize marijuana in NJ includes decarceration and records expungement can join NJ Committee for Marijuana Decarceration on Facebook here: <http://on.fb.me/1tQCswt>

## NJ Decarceration Activism

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great beginning to avoid divisiveness inherent in the system.

Proposed legislation on pragmatic categorization of those fortunate to qualify for release should avoid the extremely divisive and painful dead end implication that anyone should be held under current jail and prison conditions. In the case of everyone's favorite example of the classic "violent vs. nonviolent offender" category: how does it make sense that someone who has already committed a violent act should then be subjected to more violence upon detention? Because they deserve it? The crimes committed by incarcerated individuals should never eclipse the great state and corporate crime that is the mass incarceration business. Pragmatically, it may make sense to propose more acceptable crime classifications for release

qualifications, but let's avoid vilification of incarcerated individuals (sex offenders included) in decarceration materials, rhetoric, and organizing. This is an excellent educational opportunity for decarceration campaigns, and it will continue to draw lines in the sand among activists.

In today's generalized prison reform era, grassroots efforts like the Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State, are critical. They ensure community voices are central at the decarceration planning table, they further test the legislative waters and popular consciousness around activist led anti-incarceration initiatives, and they provide concrete lessons about ongoing possibilities.

Michelle Renee Matisons, Ph.D. can be reached at [michrenee@gmail.com](mailto:michrenee@gmail.com).



[Decarc@DecarcerateNJ.org](mailto:Decarc@DecarcerateNJ.org)

908-881-5275 / 973-223-2114 /

[DecarcerateNJ.org](http://DecarcerateNJ.org)

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Committee to Decarcerate the Garden State  
P.O. Box 25331  
Newark NJ 07101