Incarcerated artist Donald “C-Note” Hooker writes about the restorative power of art and why prisons should be encouraging incarcerated artists, not limiting their access to supplies and ways to get their work beyond the walls. Page 4

Steve Huerta grew up feeling the impact of mass incarceration on his community. Today, the San Antonio All of Us or None chapter leader works tirelessly to deconstruct the system that dominated his childhood in the hostile South. Page 3

In the wake of a federal court decision to decarcerate San Quentin, SQ correspondent Reginald Thorpe writes about the carelessness with which CDCR and the governor’s office continue to handle the spread of coronavirus. Page 8
All of Us Or None
Self-Determination Pledge

As members of All of Us or None, we pledge:
• To demand the right to speak in our own voices
• To treat each other with respect and not allow differences to divide us
• To accept responsibility for any acts that may have caused harm to our families, our communities or ourselves.
• To fight all forms of discrimination
• To help build the economic stability of formerly-incarcerated people
• To claim and take care of our own children and our families
• To support community struggles to stop using prisons as the answer to social problems
• To play an active role in making our communities safe for everyone.

Inside This Issue

Feature Story

Between the heinous acts of white supremacists and the ugly chaos of the 2020 Presidential Election, I think we can all use a palate cleanser (or a chaser if that’s your thing). Through these grueling months, I’ve often sought comfort or motivation in the poetry and artwork that our brothers and sisters inside have sent. This month, I share them with you in the hopes you will be similarly revived and inspired. Page 6

The INjustice System

Incarcerated artist Donald “C-Note” Hooker (pictured right) writes about the restorative power of art and why prisons should be encouraging incarcerated artists, not limiting their access to supplies and ways to get their work beyond the walls. Photo courtesy Donald Hooker Page 4

Mail Bag

Dortell Williams, an incarcerated author at CSP Los Angeles, writes about how the Victim Offender Education Group curriculum changed his perspective and his life in a letter he entitled, “Path to Transformation.” Page 5

Bill Watch

AOUON chapters around the country continue to push for change and equality via the policy arm of our organization. Check out “Bill Watch” for a roundup of legislative items in states where All of Us or None has a presence. Page 9

COVID Inside

Another dispatch from San Quentin correspondent Reginald Thorpe. In October, a court found the governor and CDCR’s handling of the coronavirus inside SQ so egregious it ordered the administration to immediately cut the prison population by 50%. While Gov. Newsom decides if he’ll appeal, Thorpe’s friends and neighbors are dying. Page 8

Coming Home

Alissa Moore (pictured left) was released from prison in August after spending over half of her young life behind bars. She knew the road to freedom would be tough, and the road to successful reentry littered with barriers. So she put the hard work in when she was still inside to make sure she had a head start. “You can sit on your ass and eat Ho Hos for 20 years or start making some hard decisions,” she said. Photo courtesy Alissa Moore Page 10

Cover Image: A Note From the Artist

The Art Issue kicks off with a bold image from incarcerated artist Jessie Milo. This work was sent to All of Us or None accompanied by the following explanation:

For me, the concept of America and the image of the flag in contrast to/with someone of color is a controversial picture. The flag represents our country in relation to the world. But here at home, it’s tied to the system of oppression and government. But the VOTE will be the oppressive system’s demise. “We the People” will be more true, more inclusive one day. And we’ll be proud of what We the People built and restructured! It can be awkward to stand next to a flag today, but we can’t surrender it. ‘Cause then they would win. They don’t get to claim America any longer!

The tides of change are slow like a glacier, but as people of color grow in numbers, the face of America is changing. One day, we will be proud of what we built and the flag will be awkward no longer. We’ll embrace it and let go of the pain and anger. We won’t forget, but we will be able to live with our hearts free and not in fear. Treatment will be valued over vengeance and people will get help instead of being killed or caged. I dream of a world where everyone’s redeemable and people won’t sit around contemplating suicide because they’re facing being sent to die in prison with 174 years to life.

That’s the America I want to love... But most of all I just want America to love me.

If you would like to send feedback or contribute to the All of Us or None newspaper, please contact the Editor.

Paula Lehman-Ewing @ All of Us or None 4400 Market St., Oakland, CA 94608 paula@prisonerswithchildren.org

To learn more about Jessie’s story, visit Change.org
By Oscar Ashley

If you ask Steve Huerta, the struggle for a just and equal United States begins in Texas. Since his stint in prison, he’s dedicated life to that idea. But the determined president of the All Of Us Or None San Antonio chapter was not always the committed activist he is today.

“My life was on the streets,” Steve said. “The bathroom at the park was my bedroom. If I wasn’t there, I was at my mother’s grave.”

Steve grew up with numerous siblings and only one parent, resulting in a childhood largely void of adult guidance. He had to figure out what to eat, what to wear, where to sleep, and when to get up for school.

Though Huerta spent three months in prison in 2001 as an adult, he feels that the prison system influenced his life growing up.

“Mass incarceration impacted me as a child,” he recalled. “It paved the way to my adulthood because it impacted my community.”

“It forged my character as an activist,” he continued. “It made me who I am.”

Today, Steve seeks to aid community members of San Antonio are also impacted by mass incarceration.

“Working in the South, we have to work two to three times harder than our colleagues in the East and West, and we get 100 times less attention,” Steve explained. “This is very racist territory, and they see us as troublemakers.”

Despite facing numerous adversaries, Steve maintains a calm and determined resolve.

“Like any normal person, you have moments when you get really frustrated, and that is a natural reaction,” he said. “The real test is if you stay in it for the long haul.”

So how did he get involved in this movement for the long haul?

“I got involved because I realized this was not something I could do part time, every once and awhile,” he explained. “This is a lifelong task.”

These days, Steve spends much of his time on a voting project: He’s identifying households with formerly incarcerated San Antonions, educating them on their rights -- people with conviction histories in Texas have the right to vote once they’ve completed parole/probation -- and encouraging them to vote if they are able.

“Formerly incarcerated people in Texas have to believe that their voice can make a difference,” he said. “That is the only way we will get power behind our demands.”

“We are very much neglected in the electoral process,” he continued. “If we [AOUON] weren’t here, there would be thousands of San Antonions who didn’t know they had the right to vote.”

The contentious environment Steve operates in every day is not for the faint of heart. But being a product of the unjust system that he now works to dismantle, Steve believes that San Antonio, and Texas as a whole, represents a vital piece in the larger, nationwide movement.

“Texas is the wound to a united national movement,” he said. “Until that wound is healed, we won’t truly have a clear, connected national approach.”

Steve believes in the potential of Texas and of the formerly incarcerated population.

“Our voting project gives voice to our community, but the formerly incarcerated voting power does not lie in the realm of nonprofits,” he said. “It lies in the realm of formerly incarcerated activism. Only through that can we get power.”

Oscar Ashley is an intern at Legal Services for Prisoners with Children. He grew up in Berkeley, Calif., and currently studies government and music at Wesleyan University.

Know a formerly incarcerated person with an inspiring story? Nominate them for our Spotlight feature by sending an email to the Editor:
paula@prisonerswithchildren.org
The Untapped Potential of Prison Art

By Donald “C-Note” Hooker

If the 2.3 million-strong American prison population were a city, it would be the fourth largest behind New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, all known for very vibrant art scenes. The American prison culture is a part of the American street culture, and street art is the biggest art movement in history.

This is mainly because street art has many points of entry. There is the visual art most commonly known as graffiti. There is the literary expression of poetry and urban novels. There is expression through dance, and musical expression in rap. Recently, with the commercial success of the Broadway play “Hamilton,” street culture, through the art of Spoken Word, has even infiltrated the world of theater.

Unbeknownst to most, the father of the American graffiti movement is Daryl “Cornbread” McGrey. Cornbread was exposed to graffiti while in a juvenile prison. That’s where he honed his craft and acquired his tag. Prison graffiti birthed graffiti which birthed street art, its legalized form.

Works by America’s top graffiti and street artists in print form can go for $100,000 easily. But what about their imprisoned counterpart? The prisoner-artist receives no such public support, yet they rival, if not surpass, these artists in their craftsmanship.

The prisoner-artist’s ability to express his or her self through art is fundamental to rehabilitation and the Restorative Justice movement. Prison art is a primary method of raising funds for legislative reform, prisoner reentry programs, and support for families with a loved one behind bars.

Yet the prisoner is on their own when it comes to acquiring supplies for these various forms of expression. Incarcerated artists receive no money and very little recognition for this yeoman’s work. This leaves, untapped, art as a potential source of rehabilitation.

Before I became a volunteer in the Prisoner Restorative Justice movement, I did not possess that sentiment. Creating art is a very lonely and internal process. It is an applied science. It’s all about figuring out and working out problems with how we express things. Contrast that to the prisoner who feeds their senses with a healthy diet of “entertainment” -- playing cards, playing dominos, watching television, or listening to the radio. The artist and their art have to grow independent of this type of diet.

When you get a prisoner interested in the arts, you get a man or a woman seeking deeper meaning in their lives. The imprisoned poet or writer wants to know the etymology of words. The imprisoned visual artist studies the geometry of shapes. Learning English or math because you want better outcomes for your craft, so that readers, seers, or listeners, understand you better is a transformative process.

But if America fails to acknowledge her talent gesturing inside her prisons, she is wasting an opportunity for better outcomes in the criminal justice system.

I was the brainchild of an art exhibit that combined the works of two men’s prisons and a women’s prison. The women artists were precluded from having their names associated with their art. These artists were discriminated against because of their gender. The most important element to an artist, imprisoned or not, is to get their work out and to have their name associated with that work.

Failure to receive recognition can stunt the growth and kill the dreams of any aspiring artist. For the prisoner-artist, this is especially challenging. Their greatest challenge is to get their work over the prison wall.

When we are failing to tap into the therapeutic aspect of art, is there any wonder why our women prisoners have exceptionally high suicide rates? When we are failing to tap into the intellectual development that comes with wanting to improve as an artist, is there any wonder why our prisoners are ill-prepared for reentry? We must upgrade the status of this art form and the artists who apply themselves. Rewarding this type of behavior incentivizes other prisoners to model this behavior. I know what happens if we don’t from experience trying to get other prisoners to participate in art or contribute works for fundraising. I’m commonly asked, “Why should I?”

C-Note is an incarcerated artist at CSP Los Angeles. He is an internationally known poet, playwright, painter, and musician. His drawing “Incarceration Nation” (pictured on the left) was the feature image of the April 2020 issue of the All of Us or None newspaper.

The AOUON newspaper is honored to provide a platform for incarcerated artists. If you have work you’d like featured, please send to:

Paula Lehman-Ewing
c/o Legal Services for Prisoners with Children
4400 Market Street
Oakland, CA 94608
Dortell Williams is an incarcerated author at California State Prison, Los Angeles. He penned the July Injustice column, entitled “The Ghost of Jim Crow,” and has authored two books, Dark Tales from the Dungeons: Horrors from the ‘Hood for Youth to Beware and Looking in on Lockdown: A Private Diary for the Public. This month, he wrote AOUON about a crucial turning point in his 30 years inside. He titled it “Path to Transformation.”

Claud in a carrot-orange, one-piece jumpsuit and karate shoes three sizes too big, I was escorted by a pair of beefy correctional officers through a labyrinth of walkways and other fate-sealing gates until we reached the prison yard. When the prison gate slammed behind me, rudely shattering the A.M. silence that stilled the night, there was a steady flow of ominous admonition: “Don’t go over there or you’ll get stabbed.” And “Don’t cross this line or you’ll get whacked.” Barked a steady flow of ominous admonition.

I began teaching Victim Sensitivity Awareness toward a BA in Communication Studies from Cal State Los Angeles, I expect that I will learn more and grasp an even deeper understanding of interpersonal dynamics and the facets of trauma: fear, hopelessness, depression, anger and dissociation. Over time, I developed healthy coping skills; I can now recognize character defects in others and respond properly and with empathy. I know what it is like to be driven by anger. I also understand that healed people can heal others.

I now understand that hurt people hurt others.

Understanding the potential and value in others undergirds my ability to guide crime survivors and fellow prisoners on the path to healing. What I learned from these interactions is that there are many instances where trauma claws at both victim and perpetrator. Where these experiences overlap there is opportunity to create a community.

About a year ago, people on the outside began reaching out to me seeking guidance and healing from their trauma. My success in this area has given me a new lease on life. I have found purpose and ability on my road to transformation. VOEG distinguishes between physical and emotional trauma. It explains victim cycles and defines domestic violence. It gave me new ways to express empathy and compassion. I now understand that hurt people hurt others, and that is the crux of the cycle. I began teaching Victim Sensitivity Awareness to my peers. A safe space was created for openness and honesty. We cried openly in class. We studied victim impact, the five stages of grief and the facets of trauma: fear, hopelessness, depression, anger and dissociation.

The high-pitched alarm sounded frequently at California State Prison at Pelican Bay, often over the echoing screams of those housed inside. Pelican Bay was my initial place of imprisonment, starting back in 1992. I was a 26-year-old first-timer, a terrified fish in a sea of vicious piranhas that made street criminality look like child’s play.

The reputation of Pelican Bay, just south of Oregon, had been seared into my mind long before I arrived. A secluded, high-tech human vault sprawled with maddening concrete and solitary grooves where men were forced, in many cases, for decades to idle and forlorn existence.

As the warnings predicted, I was met on the yard by a series of mean-mugs, time-hardened faces, gangster poseurs and Nazi masks. They barked a steady flow of ominous admonition: “Don’t cross this line or you’ll get whacked.” “Don’t go over there or you’ll get stabbed.” And they called this the recreation yard.

When I finally entered the quiet, semi-darkened realm of Housing Unit 2, my residence for the next two years, I was terrified. My knees were restless with vibration, my heart beat violently between my chest and throat, and perspiration ran rivulets down my armpits, stealing what little moisture was left in my mouth.

On the yard, tensions between the races, between various gang factions and between prisoners and the officers was thick. Like most California prisons, Pelican Bay was a stress-filled, pressurized powder keg as fragile as a hairpin trigger. Yet I survived the norms of violence and dehumanization long enough to be transferred to Lancaster, a new start.

I knew I needed to make a change, but I needed direction. I decided to write the Insight Project at San Quentin for their Victim Offender Education Group curriculum. It was VOEG that had the most profound effect on my transformation. VOEG distinguishes between physical and emotional trauma. It explains victim cycles and defines domestic violence. It gave me new ways to express empathy and compassion. I now understand that hurt people hurt others, and that is the crux of the cycle. I began teaching Victim Sensitivity Awareness.

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**Scars-of-Love**

Life as I knew it changed when Kevin was killed.

His fragile body lay lifeless as his skull is crushed by the pressure of that diesel's wheel.

A gruesome image still so fresh can't believe that it's true.

The long term effects of a trauma that happened in 1982.

No therapy or grief counseling… just echoes of my mama's voice saying that it'll be alright.

Not even a hug or kiss to help soothe the aching pain at night.

Never did I imagine that such a pain would last for so long.

I was just eight years old when I first heard the words “Boy, be strong.”

But how could I muster up the strength to be strong at the feeble age of just eight?

Vivid images, lucid memories and nightmares I found hard to escape.

Emotionally scarred no remedy for healing the pain that I felt.

Welts from the belt made me numb to the constant deliverance of blows that I was dealt.

Every time I rebelled because things felt all wrong.

Abuse and trauma played within my undeveloped brain

like a melody from a bluesy song.

What was I to do -- who was I supposed to turn to?

Hmmm! Good question

My life changed at the very moment trauma robbed me of my adolescence.

This became the beginning of my scars of love.

Hopelessness of an innocent boy deprived of love.

- Ricky D. Godfrey, CSP Solano

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**Holding On**

Am I strong enough?

I asked myself this question.

At times, I need to latch

Onto life's hard knocks.

Stand up, and become a rock

I need to hold on.

I need to be counted as one

Who made a difference

In this unjust situation.

I'm a part of the equation.

I need to hold on.

Why do I feel left out?

Is it because I’m not stout enough?

I need to hold on.

My body has been placed in shackles.

My feet into chains.

Often I wonder

If I'm still the same.

I need to hold on.

There is one thing

I still have.

It’s my mind, it’s free.

Free to wonder,

Free to explore,

Free to give more.

I need to hold on.

I'll sing a song entitled “Free.”

That way I’ll know of God’s glory.

I'm strong.

And I will hold on.

- Troy L. Johnson, CSP Solano

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**Heaven to Betsy Haiku**

Layers of masks bought

Death every day, like it or not

Nine lives, hope we got

-Alyce Copeland, California Institution for Women

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**The True Meaning of an O.G. is a Letter from an O.G.**

This lifestyle we live… this lifestyle is predestined. This struggle we endure, it’s been written…

whichever book you read, whether it’s the Bible, the Qur’an or Torah. We all come from somewhere.

In the end, we all go somewhere. We all have an origin. Some, it’s the house on the hill.

Others, a brick house, one bedroom, five siblings raised by grandma. Beans and rice or mayonnaise sandwiches for dinner by candlelight. No bus money so we walked 3 miles to school.

Lunch tickets, it’s how most of us got food during the day. On our way home from school we detour through the allies. The stench of the homeless, the aroma is horrific. A mixture of urine and unidentified smells. Years later we found out it was the smell of death. At the end of the alleyways through the broken glass and cigarette butts a group of individuals, doing what they do. Observation allures us. White tees, fitted caps, gold chains, and the latest tennis shoes. My stomach growls, yet the hunger is not for food. It’s the fistful of dollas. It grabs hold of our veins… cold. Cold as ice. Consequence becomes irrelevant. We get fronted the sack.

The birthplace of sin. The apple comes in many shapes and forms… before we know it, a new chapter in a new book begins. The higher power becomes your puppeteer. Our strings begin to dangle, our heart fragile. And the blood that flows through our veins… cold. Cold as ice. Consequence becomes irrelevant. We get fronted the sack.

The only words we hear are, “Bring me this back.” We never look back. From double-ops to zips, our new code of conduct overlooks the commandments tenfold. Yet we honor thy mother. But we ask ourselves, “Are we really our brother’s keeper?” We pick up new definitions like “love,” “loyalty,” and “respect,” not really knowing that others practice deceit, jealousy plus envy equals betrayal.

In the end, the lifestyle consists of cliches and acronyms, hence the phrase “My loyalty is my sin,” or “The hate you give little infants fucks everyone.” That “thug life.” “Blood in, blood out.” “Guard your thoughts and close your mouth.” “Rather be carried by six than judged by 12.” “Dead or the shelf.” Those who survive the trials and tribulations from the beginning to the bitter end, know the true meaning of an O.G., an Original Gangsta, is a letter from an O.G.

-Bobby Washington, CSP Los Angeles
**Black is Beautiful**

As the power of my prayer ignites an internal spark through the pores of my fingertips, I glance at the vast mouth of darkness as it swallows my vision. My eagerness of freedom cries to the throne of the Most High, thoughts are diverted from the glamorous shine of the night sky, how it reflects what I see everyday in the mirror when I say,

Black is beautiful and how beautiful is black

Goosebumps awake from slumber through my pigment. I shudder at mistakes that lead me to an everlasting fall in this darkened hole. Every day is a reminder that my sinful desires have elected to blacken me out. Beneath the sand pressure on this black coal of a heart has been polished and cleansed with mercy and forgiveness of God. Now a diamond, the shine from within has tormented the smut that once covered this dim vessel, without soot this gem could never glimmer. Now I say,

Black is beautiful and how beautiful is black

The prints of my character have been graffitied. The earth as my canvas has been sprayed by a scabbed intellect that reveals his wounds in time. Blossoms from a black cloud that rains 11 years of order and instruction has mutated color of petals of what was a dying rose. Emerging through cracks from an unfinished road, the melanin of my surface adapts to the harsh conditions everyday. Even in the sun my skin cells absorb damage from ultraviolet rays.

Grateful I am when I say,

Black is beautiful and how beautiful is black

-Maurice Reed, San Quentin

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**Lost Breath of 2020**

From hands up don’t shoot, strong Repressed anger so it’s those who loot, danger Why so surprised diverse races rise It’s Groundhogs Day, for most a nightmare replayed Can we breathe, ease up off neck truly no

Repressed anger so it’s those who loot, danger From hands up don’t shoot, strong

-Meso Dhu Rufus (aka George Coles-El), San Quentin

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**Fighting the Power**

Books call it THE GREAT MIGRATION, but people aren’t birds
Yet we fly in flocks & also remain lonesome doves So do crows & many of them equal a murder
Birds of a feather, flock together
And the worst of vultures kill us all little by little with each passing day
With oppression & by smoke bombs, metal batons and O.C. Pepper spray
The penitentiary is a place with fair weather friends
This ain’t no game, ’cause your wings are tied or clipped
That’s why so many take that black tar with a syringe & have dippd
Because for some it’s better to and easier to inject
That’s why so many take that black tar with a syringe & have dippd
Instead of fighting the power and system with their brains fueled with hope.
To talk to “yo Dear Mama” costs way more than a dime
Because for some it’s better to and easier to inject
That’s why so many take that black tar with a syringe & have dippd

-The Mad Rule!

**The Mad Rule!**

Pillage the village
Deth/ˈloʊ/ the virgins
Let the will of Satan be done!
A Lynch mob by virtue is democracy’s heart
String ’em up, let em hang, get it done!
The Mad Rule!
Abuse the children
Torture the captives
By the law of the land, get it done!
Lie to the masses
Defraud and classes
By the might of the gun, get it done!
The Mad Rule! The Mad Rule!
Brainwash the youngest
Blackmail the strongest
Oil to the gallow, let it de done!

**The Mad Rule!**

We are your leaders
Now do as we say
March to the ovens, get it done!

Here is no Freedom
You’re deal, dumb and blind
Say the word, kill ’em dead, get it done!

The Mad Rule!

-All of Us or None: Food of the Mind

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**Black is Beautiful**

-“Chauchik - Rest In Peace” by Rudy Rocha, CSP Corcoran

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**Tapestries**

The world is falling apart at the seams. White supremacists work to usher in a new regime, infecting Blacks and Hispanics, departing our dreams. While people stand in lines for soup, rice, and beans. Protests and murals and speeches get seen Covered in law enforcement boots on the scene. More stick time and MRAPs intervene While Black police chiefs speak the streets clean. More and more healthy people get COVID-19. Prisons locked down, punished with quarantine To separate incarcerated people caught between Rehabilitation, riots, and cell latrines.

The issue is people don’t see all of humanity As worthy of their time and scrutiny, actually. So while minorities should slave in prison factories, The rich happily accept gratitude for their mastery: Yet they wear masks under the cotton cross-hatchery Of fear-mongering and terrorism that gradually Erodes their minds with fears of replacing statues, see, And make laws that oppress and infect accurately: Scheming on the marginalized for their vanishment, Using firearms and face masks for their vanity And attacking revolutionaries, citing insanity So they can weave pain and suffering tapestries…

-Meso Dhu Rufus (aka George Coles-El), San Quentin

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**Lost Breath of 2020**

From hands up don’t shoot, strong Repressed anger so it’s those who loot, danger Why so surprised diverse races rise It’s Groundhogs Day, for most a nightmare replayed Can we breathe, ease up off neck truly no respect, land of not free they do it for all to see, land of the oppressed.

Bitter sowed seeds, sad legacy, rotten fruit, family tree, who’s to believe we helped build this land of half-ass opportunity Brutality we endure, persevere continued, proclamation of a shadowed emancipation I stand as I am, I’m still held high from the inside Must I die by the hands of the police, freedom of speech baby shit waist deep; missing pages of history, black miss educated to education of US

-Ralph A. Brown, San Quentin

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**November 2020**
How Overcrowding led to “the worst epidemiological disaster in California correctional history.”

By Reginald Thorpe

My neighbor, Gerald, died a few days ago. Over 1,368 incarcerated people and 150 staff, all infected. Six incarcerated individuals have died.

COVID-19 is not present at Quentin, actively and aggressively infecting incarcerated people and staff, because of someone's mistake or poor decision making. COVID-19 is here because the current system of lawyers, CDCR administrators, state officials, and politicians has failed us all, society, taxpayers, and incarcerated people alike.

On June 9, 2020, there were 789 incarcerated people housed in North Block, which has 400, two-man cells. The building was operating at 197.25% bed capacity while COVID-19 was spreading throughout the building. There was severe overcrowding.

In the Plata/Coleman v. Newsom case, the 9th District Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that 137.5% bed capacity for the entire prison population was a level at which CDCR could operate and provide incarcerated people a constitutional level of medical care (Plata) and mental health care (Coleman). What is the bed capacity to prevent the rapid spread of the coronavirus within CDCR institutions? If each and every CDCR facility was operating at 137.5% bed capacity rather than the entire California prison population, we would probably be a lot more healthy and safe here at Quentin, staff included.

San Quentin was once a receiving center, so the institution's population numbers were always fluctuating. This allowed CDCR to let San Quentin’s mainline housing (North Block, West Block, and H-Unit) operate at, or near, maximum capacity. Nevertheless, Quentin is designated as a “high risk medical institution.” It houses incarcerated people with mental health issues. Before the pandemic, H-Unit housed emergency outpatients. Some of these people are now housed in West Block, South Block and North Block. They are not receiving a constitutional level of mental health care due to the outbreak. Moreover, these buildings are not designed to house incarcerated people who are in the EOP program. People infected with coronavirus should have never been brought here.

CDCR pays Marin County a fine every year -- approximately $2.5 million in taxpayer dollars -- to house incarcerated people at or near maximum capacity at Quentin. The overcrowding at Quentin has put an enormous strain on administrators’ and staff’s ability to afford all incarcerated people their constitutional rights amid the pandemic. Constitutional rights are not conditional, no matter what the situation and/or circumstances may be. CDCR is not exempt, somehow, from abiding by the Constitution because of the pandemic. Neither are other institutions.

COVID does not care what you are: CDCR staff, the CCPOA, Gov. Gavin Newsom, the 9th Circuit, Michael Bien (plaintiffs' attorney in Coleman), Donald Spector (plaintiffs’ attorney in Plata), the medical receiver, a senator or assemblymember, a superior court judge, an attorney, a public defender, or an incarcerated person. It only cares that you are human.

To the incarcerated people in California state prisons, I say this: A lot of us are going to be released. I beg you on behalf of us that will be left behind and those in the county jails across the state, waiting to fill your bed space, please do not get out and commit crime. The resources are out there to help sustain you until you can get back on your feet. You must take initiative and seek them out relentlessly. Network! Your life depends on it. You have a better chance of surviving the pandemic in society than you do in jail or prison.

Coming back is no longer a viable option now that COVID is lurking in the atmosphere of these institutions, waiting to infect you and, maybe, main you, disable you, or even kill you. Wear your mask outside and indoors if there are a lot of people. Wash your hands often and carry hand sanitizer when you leave your home. Social distance as much as possible. Thank you and may God bless all who are reading this.

Shout out to America's new branch of the armed forces, front-line soldiers, doctors and nurses. I wear my mask and social distance to be one less person you have to treat.

Extra shout out to teachers. Now you are much more esteemed and respected. These children need you now more than ever before. This is your chance to live out your purpose.

No one I know with a release date, parole date (lifer), or acute medical issue in North Block has been released. Stay tuned for Gov. Newsom and CDCR’s shell game, “Shuffle the Incarcerated People Between Institutions.” This will make it appear like people are being “released,” but most of them are really just being transferred.

On October 22, prison officials were court-ordered to immediately and dramatically reduce the population of San Quentin. The First District Court of Appeal in San Francisco cited CDCR’s “deliberate indifference” to the pandemic’s effect on the prison population. Unless successful on appeal, CDCR will be required to transfer or parole about half of the roughly 2,900 individuals currently housed at San Quentin. The prison caught national attention when it became the site of one of the nation’s worst coronavirus outbreaks. At its peak, 2,200 incarcerated individuals were infected (about 75% of the population). Twenty-eight prisoners have died from the virus. The court called it, “the worst epidemiological disaster in California correctional history.”
Members of All of Us or None Eastern Washington and the Spokane County Bar Association met with the state Supreme Court justices to address systemic racism within the criminal justice space.

Photo credit: Megan Pirie/All Of Us Or None Eastern Washington

Members of All of Us or None Northern New Jersey held a DIVE N (Directly Impacted Voter Engagement National) get the vote out event in Newark, helping eligible individuals with conviction histories register. Photo credit: Tia Reynolds/All Of Us Or None Northern New Jersey

November 2020

Bill Watch

California

California’s legislative season ended in August. An updated Bill Watch will be provided in our next issue. In the meantime, here are two significant legislations that passed in 2020.

- California Racial Justice Act (Kalra) AB2542 prohibits the state from seeking or obtaining a conviction or imposing a sentence “on the basis of race, ethnicity, or national origin.” The bill would require overturning a conviction or sentence for discriminatory conduct by the judge, a lawyer, a law enforcement officer, an expert witness, or a juror toward a defendant. It also prohibits prosecutors from taking race, ethnicity and nationality into consideration when exercising discretionary jury strikes, and allows defendants to provide proof of sentencing disparities imposed on other similarly situated individuals convicted of the same offense of a different race.

- Juvenile Justice Realignment SB823 will close the Division of Juvenile Justice, the state’s youth prison system. It will also help prevent the transfer of youth to adult prisons, and provide counties with funding to keep young people closer to their homes and the services they need to heal.

Idaho

- Clean Slate (Ruelb and Lent) [number pending] would allow individuals with felony convictions for nonviolent and nonsexual crimes to petition the courts to seal their public records. Individuals applying for sealed records would need to have served their whole sentence and have not reoffended in the three years following their release.

Illinois

- Right to Vote (Ford) HB4377/HJRCA33. a bill and constitutional amendment, would ensure incarcerated people would be able to vote in the state of Illinois.

- Electronic Monitoring (Madigan) HB 1115 would eliminate the use of electronic monitoring for people who have completed their state prison sentences and are not required by statute to be on a monitor, ending the practice of imposing electronic house arrest for people who have already done their prison time.

Missouri

- Fresh Start Act (Koenig) SB 647 would require that no person shall be disqualified from pursuing, practicing, or engaging in any occupation for which a license is required solely or in part because of a prior conviction of a crime, unless the crime for which an applicant was convicted directly relates to the duties and responsibilities for the licensed occupation.

- Death Penalty With Mental Illness (Hannegan) HB 1756 would prohibit the execution of any person found to have suffered from a serious mental illness at the time of the offense for which they are accused.

Kentucky

- Kentucky Voting Rights (Higdon) SB62 would amend the Constitution of Kentucky to grant persons convicted of a felony other than a sex offense, a violent offense, or an offense against a child, the right to vote five years after completion of sentence. This bill passed the Senate but was not voted on by the House before the end of the 2020 session.

- Successful Supervision (seeking sponsor) is a proposed bill being made by All of Us or None Louisville and ACLU Smart Justice Advocates of Kentucky. It will seek to target supervision to ensure successful outcomes for those that are dealing with the issues from being on probation parole, including the elimination of fines and fees. It will also establish a system of compliance credits, such as Work for Time credit, Education for Time credit, and a mandatory time calculation.

New Jersey

- Slavery Exemption (Rice and Cunningham) SRC 96 is a proposed amendment to the state constitution that would prohibit slavery or involuntary servitude in New Jersey prisons.

- Limiting Police Presence at Voting Locations (Reynolds-Jackson and Wimberly) A4655 would limit law enforcement presence at polling places and ballot drop boxes and prohibit electioneering within 100 feet of a ballot drop box.

- Public Health Emergency Credit (Mukherji and Sumter) A4235/S2519 would require credits to be awarded to certain incarcerated individuals and returning citizens during public health emergency. It would also prohibit the creditor to have contact with victim upon release.

New York

- Mental Health Bail Reform (Kaplan) S7242 would establish a pretrial mental health and substance abuse services bail fund.

- Voting Rights (Parker) S 6821 would require the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, in collaboration with the state and county boards of election, to establish a program to facilitate voter registration and voting for incarcerated individuals.

North Carolina

- The Second Chance Act (Britt, Daniel and McKissick) H 874 would set up automatic expungement for people who are found not guilty or have charges against them dismissed after July 1, 2020, and allow people to petition for the expungement of nonviolent misdemeanor and felony charges after a period of good behavior.

Pennsylvania

- Probation Reform (Williams) SB 14 would reform how long Pennsylvanians stay on probation and the time served in prison for probation violations. It also specifies that a court may not impose a sentence of probation consecutive to another sentence of probation.
Alissa Moore took a creative approach to job search. She had to: she was applying from behind bars.

Incarcerated for the majority of her life, Alissa had languished in prison until 2008 when she decided, as she puts it, to start “making healthy choices.”

“If you want to get out and have a life, you need to prepare for that life,” she said. “I had to make a decision about what I wanted for my future.”

It took some time, of course. Alissa paroled in August 2020, 12 years after she decided to change her lifestyle and 23 years after she’d arrived. But she’s been able to navigate the reentry process thanks to a lot of pre-planning and hard work before she knew if she would even get out.

“You can sit on your ass and eat Ho Hos for 20 years or start making some hard decisions,” she said.

Alissa, that meant putting aside half of any money she made doing prison labor or money she received from friends and family. It meant less commissary and small luxuries, but it also meant she would emerge from prison with a small nest egg. That nest egg allowed her to get her car back and travel to and from job interviews.

And she had a number of job interviews due to another hard decision: She’d take risks and put the hard work in before she was released to ensure she’d have opportunities waiting for her when she paroled.

She found a list of the Fortune 500 companies and wrote the founders of all of them. Some wrote back: A few said they’d keep her posted, some said they were not hiring, but three wanted to know more about her.

Because of the tremendous effort Alissa put in prior to her release, within 30 days of being paroled she had a roof over her head, a stable job and a car to take her to and from that job.

“You have to be creative and determined,” Alissa said. “If you want to be successful out here, it’s within your grasp.”

That’s not to say reentry has been easy. Her hard work while she was inside helped her overcome the obvious barriers to reentry such as housing and employment, but the mental and emotional transition to life beyond the walls has often been overwhelming.

While the post traumatic stress of 23 years behind bars allowed Alissa to succeed in high pressure situations on the outside -- on the job training being one example -- it also made her extra sensitive to the everyday hustle and bustle. She had to learn how to navigate a more disparate geography: When she was incarcerated, everything she needed was in one place, but now she had to travel to one end of town for groceries and another end of town for clothes.

She had to learn how to navigate social interactions with people who could not relate to all the things she was processing as a newly returned citizen.

“If you want to be successful out here, it’s in your grasp.”
Resources & Events

Coronavirus Resources
Supporting directly and system-impacted people during crisis
https://www.beyond-prisons.com/covid19

Safety manuals for individuals in state, federal and California correctional facilities
prisonerswithchildren.org/Coronavirus

COVID-19 Mutual Aid (Newark, NJ)
https://www.alloffusornone-northernnj.com/covid-19-newark-mutual-aid

Our state constitutions are not symbolic documents, they are living documents that form the basis for all of our laws. The language that remains in our constitutions permitting slavery is immoral and we must remove it.

Abolish Slavery National Network

Join the national movement to end slavery in America
Learn more at abolishslavery.us

Welcome Home Initiative

Since the Public Health Credit Bill was signed into law, our communities must prepare for the influx of need to make sure that our brothers and sisters have the mutual aid support they require during this critical time following their immediate release.

If you’re able, please help us welcome our family back home.

Visit www.alloffusornone-northernnj.com to donate.

All of Us or None Monthly Virtual Membership Meeting

Every third Thursday
6:30 pm to 8:30 pm PT
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All of Us Or None Membership Form

YES, I want to become a member of ALL OF US OR NONE!

Name & Number:
______________________________
______________________________
______________________________
______________________________
County of Origin:

Institution:

Address:

Mail this form & any questions to: Willard Birt/3004
4400 Market Street
Oakland, CA 94608

I can organize & facilitate group meetings
I can help with membership
I can distribute materials & resources
I can address & pass along feedback