



Hunger News & Hope

...a Seeds of Hope publication

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Are US Prisons the New Poverty Traps?

by Jessica Foumena

Many experts, including those from the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) agree that the United States has the world's highest incarceration rate. The high number of American inmates—plus increasing health, race and gender disparities in the justice system—are raising concerns about whether US prisons may be the new poverty traps.

Human Rights Watch (HRW)—one of the world's leading independent organizations dedicated to defending and protecting human rights—is now listing what it deems as injustices perpetrated by the US prison system. "The sentencing practices include disproportionately long prison terms, mandatory sentencing without parole, and treating youth offenders as adults," one HRW article reports.

"People who commit crimes must be held accountable," Jamie Fellner, senior adviser in the US Program at HRW, told a *Sacramento Bee* reporter. "But accountability may not require the continued imprisonment of people who have already spent years behind bars and who have become terminally ill or permanently incapacitated. If they have families willing to care for them, what does the public gain by forcing them to stay in prison?" Fellner added that incapacitated prisoners are too costly to keep.

Studies show that US incarceration rates have more than tripled since 1980. Over the past 30 years, this increase was strongly related to drug sentencing. However, the research shows striking racial disparities. For instance, among working-age men from 18 to 64 years old, one in 87 are whites, one in 12 are African-American and one in 36 are Latino.

An overwhelming number of African-American and Latino young men with a 10th-grade education make up most of the prison populations in the United States. Originally from poor neighborhoods, most American inmates and their families find themselves immersed in a poverty trap once they have spent time behind bars.

The US had an incarceration rate of 500 prisoners per 100,000 residents in 2010, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. A Population Reference Bureau report states that men make up 90 percent of the prison and local-jail population, with an



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Homeboy Industries: *A Leader in Gang Intervention*

by Alyssa Miller

Homeboy Industries, founded in 1988 by Father Greg Boyle and his parish at Dolores Mission Church in Los Angeles, CA, is now the largest and most successful gang intervention and rehabilitation program in the US and has helped change the lives of more than 120,000 men and women.

The process is simple. High-risk, formerly gang-affiliated or incarcerated men and women enter the program and get a second chance at life. To join the program, clients simply have to walk through the front door.

Homeboy Industries began as a nonprofit program when Boyle and his parishioners, taking note of the high rate of gang activity and incarcerations in Los Angeles County, asked a simple question: “What if we were to invest in this population rather than just endlessly incarcerate?”

According to the Los Angeles Police Department website, Los Angeles County is the “gang capital of the nation” with more than 450 active gangs and a combined membership of more than 45,000 people. Of the 16,398 reported gang crimes over the last three years, there were 491 homicides, 7,047 felony assaults, 5,518 robberies and 98 rapes.

A study published in the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* reported that a high-risk youth could cost society between \$3.2 and \$5.6 million over the course of a lifetime. However, Homeboy Industries can provide the necessary skills to lead a productive life for the cost of approximately \$20,000 to \$45,000 per client.

So, for example, if a 20-year-old high-risk client completes the program and does not revert to a life of criminal activity after he or she re-enters society, Homeboy Industries could theoretically save taxpayers between \$2.9 and \$5.2 million over that client’s lifetime.

On a client’s first day at Homeboy Industries, he or she is given a case manager, who helps the client set goals. For some clients this may be to earn a GED certificate; for others it could be an action plan to develop their job skills and gain future employment.

Some clients have children held by Child Protective Services. Homeboy Industries helps reunite those clients with their children.

When clients first begin the program, they are put to work in maintenance positions. Later, they are moved to vocational training programs or to one of Homeboy Industries’ seven social enterprises.

The enterprises—Homegirl Café and Catering, Homeboy Farmers Markets, Homeboy Diner, Homeboy and Homegirl Merchandise, Homeboy Bakery, Homeboy Grocery and Homeboy Silkscreen and Embroidery—allow clients to receive vocational training and earn money for themselves and their families.

Once clients have proven themselves, and if they decide to stay within the Homeboy Industries family, they may take a position as a program administrator. Throughout the year,

Homeboy Industries employs approximately 200 people in their social enterprises.

In addition to job training, Homeboy Industries provides several services for its clients: tattoo removal, case management, mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence assistance—as well



Left: Father Greg Boyle and former gang members and other participants in various Homeboy enterprises in Los Angeles, CA. Photo courtesy of Homeboy Industries.

as education programs and a solar panel installation training and certification program for interested clients.

All of the services were created to make the clients' transition to becoming productive members of society as easy as possible. Once clients leave the program, they should have the necessary skills and confidence to support themselves even if they don't stay with the Homeboy Industries family.

In addition, Homeboy Industries offers consumer science courses to its clients. More than 400 men and women take classes at the Homeboy Industries headquarters each month, and all classes are taught by Homeboy Industries' staff members, licensed mental health personnel and volunteers.

Of the 10 classes offered, some options include: anger management, parenting, baby and me, leadership, domestic violence and substance abuse.

All of the services are free of charge to both clients and community members.

While the majority of funding for Homeboy Industries comes from private, individual and family foundations, as well as board members and fundraising events, approximately 25 percent comes from Homeboy Industries' social enterprises.

Elements of the Homeboy Industries' program model have been adopted in 46 programs both nationally and internationally.

"Homeboy industries has been the tipping point to change the metaphors around gangs and how we deal with them in Los Angeles County," Boyle said, as reported on the Homeboy Industries' website. "This organization has engaged the imagination of 120,000 gang members and helped them to envision an exit ramp off the 'freeway' of violence, addiction and incarceration."

If a 20-year-old high-risk client completes the program and does not revert to a life of criminal activity after he or she reenters society, Homeboy Industries could theoretically save taxpayers between \$2.9 and \$5.2 million over that client's lifetime.

—Alyssa Miller, a native of Pickton, TX, recently completed a degree in Professional Writing at Baylor University and was a Spring 2014 Seeds of Hope intern. She has been a Seeds writer for several years. Sources: Homeboy Industries (www.homeboyindustries.org); Los Angeles Police Department (www.lapdonline.org); Social Science Research Network (<http://www.ssrn.com>).

Curt and the Sacrament of the Poor from *40 Days in Orange*

by Kent McKeever (Edited by Kristin Waites)

Curt was a new face at the Mission church where I was serving as pastor. He had a great attitude, working hard within days to get a job and start back down the right path. But a few days after I met him, I saw that he had been beaten up so badly I didn't even recognize him. Broken jaw, swollen face, lacerations and, after a few days in the hospital, he had made it back up to our Mission.

I asked him what had happened. He said he didn't know who did it, but word was that it was some folks that we knew. I was furious. I remember driving by where several of them hung out, usually harassing people and creating fear in others.

Staring them down and forming thoughts about how to get back at them, I seethed. All this time, in Bible study, we were reading Jesus's words in Matthew's gospel about anger and love for our enemies.

And then Curt showed up in Bible study. Right in front of our eyes, we had a real-life, timely example of exactly what Jesus was confronting in his teaching. Curt didn't seem to hold any anger or desire any vengeance on those who attacked him.

Instead, he stated that he had learned much from his experience, including that he felt like he was carrying the burdens of his attackers, and was doing it gladly.

I will never forget how I felt. I was taken aback and put in my place. The scales fell from my eyes. Curt was leading the way in living out this life-giving truth: we are to love our enemies, and even bear their burdens.

At the time, and over the years, this experience with Curt, and my other experiences among the poor, began forming in me the realization that the poor are a sacrament—an outward sign of an invisible grace.

Bearing the burdens of the world on their broken backs, bloodied faces, scarred hands and weary feet, the poor manifest the truth that, where sin has increased, grace has increased all the more.

The poor are not perfect, but this does not alter the truth that they bear our burdens. Their suffering carries with it the sin of the world. In this way, the poor reveal our God of grace, present with those who suffer, redeeming and bringing life from death.

Like Curt, the poor carry the burdens of their attackers, living humanly in the face of death, saying *yes* to life. As we share in the struggle with our brothers and sisters who carry many of our burdens, we will experience the sacramental nature of the experiences of the poor.

[See page 5 for more about *40 Days in Orange*, Kent's blog about spending Lent in a prison uniform.] ■

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imprisonment rate 14 times higher than the rate of women. A 2010 study published by the Prison Policy Initiative claims that innocent Latinos and blacks are more likely than whites to experience the use of force from the New York City police.

In the *New York Times* series "Time and Punishment," columnist John Tierney concentrated on the social impact

A recent Pew Center study says that, as of January 1, 2008, more than one in every 100 adults in the US is behind bars.

of incarceration. One column tells about the long and hectic journey of Carl Harris, his wife Charlene Hamilton and their two daughters, throughout Harris' 20 years in prison. Now in their 40s, the couple feels as though they are starting completely over.

Even though the couple believes Harris' time in prison was needed for his personal growth, Ms. Hamilton said, "They overdid it. It didn't have to take that long at all."

Unfortunately, Stephanie George was not as lucky as Carl Harris. Sixteen years ago, Judge Roger Vinson condemned the then 27-year-old George to serve a sentence of life without parole, even though she claimed to be unaware of the half-kilogram of cocaine found by the police in her attic. The most dramatic detail in this case is that Ms. George had no criminal history until that conviction.

A recent *New York Times* article, "For Lesser Crimes, Rethinking Life Behind Bars," confirms the need for the US justice system to re-evaluate the severity of sentences, particularly when they are given to people under 30.

The National Institute of Justice—the research, development and evaluation agency of the US Department of Justice—is dedicated to improving the knowledge and understanding of crime and justice issues through science.

A recent Pew Center study says that, as of January 1, 2008, more than one in every 100 adults in the US is behind bars. The data also claim that African-American females aged 35-39 represent the highest number population, after African-American males.

Significant disparities are apparent again, in terms of gender and race. Among American women aged 35-39 who are incarcerated, one in 355 are Caucasian, one in 297 are Latina and one in 100 are African-American.

It would seem that inmates in South Carolina are faced with an additional discrimination. In an editorial published in the *Post and Courier*, based in Charleston, SC, Megan McLemore pointed out that South Carolina is the last state in the Union that segregates inmates who are HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)-positive.

In a landmark decision made in late 2012, District Court Judge Myron, a federal judge in Alabama, ruled that segregating HIV-positive prisoners in separate housing—with unequal program opportunities, inferior mental health care and fewer work options—violated the Americans with Disabilities Act.

McLemore, a senior health researcher at the New-York-City-based HRW, went on to say that "HIV is no longer a mystery disease, and we now know that segregating prisoners is unnecessary and harmful."

In the 1980s, the US government undertook severe measures to ensure the safety of its citizens. However, the US has now the world's highest reported rate of incarceration.

Are these measures still relevant today—especially when numerous human rights activists have called out the unnecessary economic and human costs associated with them?

—Jessica Fomena wrote this article shortly before returning to her native Cameroon in West Africa, where she works as a Communications and Marketing Manager for a school in Yaoundé, Cameroon. She was a Seeds of Hope intern as part of her studies for Baylor University's Master of International Journalism degree.

Sources: Population Reference Bureau (www.prb.org), *New York Times* (including the series "Time and Punishment" and "Prison and the Poverty Trap," www.nytimes.org), Prison Policy Initiative (www.prisonpolicy.org), US National Institute of Justice (www.nij.gov), Human Rights Watch (especially "Growing Up Locked Down," www.hrw.org).



cartoon by Norma Young

40 Days in Orange:

Living in the Uniform of the Imprisoned

by Kent McKeever (Edited by Kristin Waites)

Editor's note: Kent McKeever is the founding director of Mission Waco Legal Services (Waco, TX), one of that mission's many programs that serve poor and marginalized people. Kent has a degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and one from Vanderbilt School of Law. He also serves as youth minister at Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco.

Kristin Waites, a Seeds editorial intern, combed through the blog that Kent kept during Lent and part of Eastertide (www.40DaysinOrange.com) and selected the following excerpts. Kristin is a professional writing student at Baylor University.

Day 1, Ash Wednesday 2014

I have decided to spice up Lent for myself this year. Instead of giving up sweets or coffee or sports on TV, I am choosing to wear an orange prison/jail uniform for the 40 days (not counting Sundays) leading up to Easter.

The next 40 days will surely reveal some answers to why I would choose this, answers both for me personally and for anyone who reads this blog and wants to join me in this journey. But here's a start at explaining why I have chosen to spend 40 Days in orange.

No country incarcerates a higher percentage of its population than the United States. One out of every 100 adults in America is incarcerated, a total population of approximately 2.3 million.

This situation subjects 1 in 4 American adults to legal discrimination with long-term effects on life's basic necessities—housing, employment, food, education—and one's constitutional rights—voting and jury service—that effectively relegates them to a lesser status, basically an underclass, for the rest of their lives.

I am a follower of Jesus Christ. Lent is a time of penance, of sacrifice, of humility. It is a time to commit oneself to a spiritual discipline that will draw us in to God's presence and prepare our souls for Easter. I want to take seriously Jesus' words that he has been sent to "proclaim freedom for the prisoners" and "to release the oppressed" and find out more of what they mean in the context we find ourselves in today in the United States.

I want to experience, even if it's only a little bit, what it might be like to carry a dehumanizing stigma with you everywhere you go. I really think I have no earthly idea what it is truly like. Thus, this Lenten journey in the uniform of the

imprisoned is my small, small part in seeking understanding and solidarity, justice and love.

Day 6

Walking in the shoes of prisoners is exhausting. As I mentioned last Friday, I bought the real prison uniform, shoes and all. I feel like I am wearing a mix between that cover they put on you when you get X-rays and an orange traffic cone. It made me think of how it might feel for the millions

I want to experience, even if it's only a little bit, what it might be like to carry a dehumanizing stigma with you everywhere you go.

of men and women in our nation's prison system as we strip them of comfort and any form of individuality. I am beginning to understand how exhausting it must be.

It is exhausting mentally and emotionally. For the first few days of this Lenten journey, I was able to stick pretty close to people that I know and who would understand and support me. But on Saturday, when I ventured out into the general public, it started getting real.

Stares, questioning glances, avoidance. And some genuine curiosity and conversations. But mostly stigma. I am now beginning to taste and see, albeit in a limited way, what it might be like for the stigmatized in our society. I don't know how to begin to change our penchant for stigmatizing and ostracizing others, but hopefully next time I won't add to the burden.

Day 8

Earlier this week I had a chance to break away and go on a picnic with my family at Lake Waco. I realized that I was experiencing something that most people in orange or post-orange hardly ever get to experience: rest and leisure.

God gave humankind the Sabbath, a day for us to slow down, relax, move away from things that distract and tear down and wear us out. I have that luxury, that opportunity. I

"40 Days" continues through page 8

am not locked up in prison, shackled by criminal records, in the chains of poverty. Millions are, and they suffer for it because the Sabbath is stolen from them. The gift of rest and leisure, that we all desperately need, is not one they are allowed to receive.

I have visited death row. I saw the cage that is the “recreation” space for inmates: a very small square surrounded by thick iron walls with holes that allow for very little light to enter. Animals would go crazy in a space like this. Yet this is where we force already

I wear this uniform because of my own choices, my own hypocrisy and complicity, my own brokenness and despair. I am the problem.

broken human beings to seek any possible rest and leisure they need. The dehumanization and devastation to God’s beloved creation runs deep, and our playing God over these beautiful creations destroys not just their humanity, but ours as well.

Day 12

Serving on a jury is not just a duty. It is our right to ensure that our fellow citizens receive their Constitutional right to a fair and impartial jury, to a jury selected from a “fair cross-section of the community.” Jury duty is a right that should be celebrated, not simply an obligation that should be bemoaned.

However, millions of our fellow Americans have this right stripped away from them. For example, in Texas, people with felony or misdemeanor theft convictions cannot serve on a jury. Their right to participate in their democratic state is prohibited. *You are not qualified any longer to serve on a jury*, this says to them. *We do not value your opinion or feel that you are capable of forming a reasoned opinion on a case. You are not worthy.*

So, if you are a praying person, then pray for jurors. Pray for the judges and the lawyers and the courthouse staff. Pray that they will have hearts of compassion for people who are caught up in the system. Pray that they will see people as people.

Pray for all our fellow citizens that we might see our rights as what they are, instead of obligations, and celebrate them. Pray for the millions of Americans who hear they aren’t worthy when they are forbidden the right of jury service.

Day 16

For my first-ever half-marathon, I decided not to give up my Lenten discipline. I figured, those who truly suffer can’t take it off, so why should I? So I ran 13.1 miles in orange.

However, I couldn’t help thinking, though, of all of the people who struggle every day to “run the race.” Some have been forced to start the race over or have made mistakes and false starts which have set them back.

We have to realize that the race of life isn’t the same for everyone. We all must put one foot in front of the other every day, but we all need a little help from our friends. There are millions of folks out there who need you, not to run for them, but to hold their hand, make them an encouraging sign, remove some obstacles from their path, and simply be a friend full of compassion and love and forgiveness. You will be amazed at what you will receive from them along the way.

Day 17

Just a few days ago I found myself looking in the mirror and my gut reaction was dejection. Orange again?! I had an immediate negative visceral reaction to seeing myself in the same outfit for two weeks in a row.

I seriously had to take a step back and think about the bigger picture. This is what people with criminal records have to deal with every day of their lives. Sure, this is something the ones in prison or jail “doing their time” deserve; it is part of the punishment. But what about all those folks who have done their time, thinking they could actually shed the cloak of imprisonment, and re-enter the free world, where they could be whoever they wanted to be? Yet they get out and try to move on, only to find that society continues to clothe them in shame and contempt on a daily basis.

Little Easter 4 (the Fourth Sunday in Lent)

Earlier this week a friend shared some concerns that I might be viewed as a bit too radical for Central Texas. For several hours I was feeling quite sullen and deeply conflicted. Was I doing more harm than good? Was I really too radical? So many thoughts were going through my mind, and my heart was troubled.

I received a phone call from a good friend later that afternoon. He quite wisely stated, “But Kent, you will never hear these concerns or statements from those who actually suffer. The poor and oppressed aren’t concerned about you being too radical.” Amen, brother, amen.

So I began again at that moment to remember that I am not doing this for the powers that be. I am wearing the orange prison uniform for the powerless and voiceless. On their behalf, I am using what power I have to speak truth in love and grace, with a call for our collective confession and repentance and transformation.

Little Easter 5 (the Fifth Sunday in Lent)

Courage is waking up every morning and living with hope in spite of a debilitating stigma attached to who society says you are. Courage is transforming the way that we as people of faith do church, fulfill our

mission, and seek love and justice so as to open wide the doors of both our church buildings and our hearts to the poor and marginalized. Courage is realizing that we need their voice, their mercy, their faith, their lives, more than they could ever need us.

Day 31

In recent years the number of women in prison has increased at nearly double the rate for men. The collateral consequences run deep in our society for these women, but not only does this mass incarceration affect the individuals caught in the system, it devastates families and communities in its wide-spreading wake.

The parents of one in every 50 children in the United States are in prison, over half of them serving time for nonviolent offenses. More than 40 percent of parents in prison lived with their children before being locked up. Half of them were the main source of financial support for their children.

As I picked up my 3-year-old son from his crib this morning, I thought of the parents and children whose lives are torn apart by our systems of incarceration. Millions of families do not have the luxury I have to get down in the floor to play ball or wrestle with their kids, to sit around the breakfast table together. It breaks my heart that our collective penchant for punishment devastates families, tearing them apart, leaving them shattered and on their own to pick up the pieces.

Day 32

Lately, I have been feeling the heaviness of the burdens I am writing about. These issues are not easy to hear and discuss and feel, and it gets kind of overwhelming after a while trying to figure out ways to respond, how to change the system. More than anything, I feel the wearisome sting of the lack of mercy and compassion in our world.

But then I think about how insignificant my weariness is in comparison to what millions of my brothers and sisters face every day and they give me strength. We all have our burdens, but if we bear

each other's burdens, maybe, just maybe, we might not all get so weary.

Day 37

This journey in orange is not only for those wearing, or who have worn, the orange uniform of incarceration. I also wear this uniform of the imprisoned for the billions of the poor and marginalized people locked up and locked out by chains that we have made in this society. It's not just about prison cells, but also sweat shops, brothels and chat rooms.

I wear this uniform because of my own choices, my own hypocrisy and complicity, my own brokenness and despair. I am the problem. It's not the women and children of poverty who sell their bodies to survive, but all of us who have been asleep, comfortable in our own isolated and insulated beds, while millions of people across our world have been sold, trafficked, and commodified.

These are chains that we have made, but we don't see the shackling because we are blinded by ignorance—ignorance that we want to protect. We must open our eyes, and then speak the truth.

Continued on page 8



Above: Kent McKeever, wearing his Lenten prison uniform, in the sanctuary of the former Central Presbyterian Church, now home to Kent's Mission Waco Legal Services office and a variety of other ministries for low-income people. Dylan Hollingsworth, a freelance photojournalist, came to Waco with a New York Times reporter to interview Kent during the last days of Lent. Dylan followed Kent around for a few hours and ended up visiting with him in the old sanctuary.

Photo by Dylan Hollingsworth.

Day 39

Poverty is when those of us who are not poor want never to see the poor, the homeless, the criminal right in front of our eyes. Poverty is when our comforts come before our neighbor's survival. Poverty is when

We as Christians follow a condemned prisoner. That's at the heart of our faith.

we become blinded by our complicity with systems of oppression and accepted social "truths" that cast people aside to the margins of existence. Poverty is when we dehumanize the other by perpetuating myths about the poor.

Day 40

My parents were in town for the weekend so we went to a local restaurant for some takeout. As we waited for our food, a worker named Juan came up to our table. He said he heard what I was doing and wanted to shake my hand. He knew from experience what I was

wearing. He had been there. I asked how long he had been out. Two years. And he had been blessed with a job at this restaurant since he got out.

Things were going pretty well for him, but I could still see a remnant of that shame that we place without mercy on people like Juan. We shook hands again, he thanked me, I told him it was a blessing for me to meet him. He concluded, "We're not all bad people."

*E*ditor's postscript: As a member of the church where Kent serves as a minister, I had a front-row view of his Lenten adventure. In the early days, he explained to our youth — and, later, our congregation — that he, as a white, male professional, realized that he had no idea what it would feel like to be one of his clients.

"Plus, we as Christians follow a condemned prisoner," he told them. "That's at the heart of our faith."

Although he took on this discipline as an act of humility, he caught the attention of print and broadcast media across the country — including the New York Times. He was also called up for jury duty during Lent, and showed up wearing his orange. He later said, "Does God have a sense of humor, or what?" ■

Maybe He's Not So Crazy

by Dylan Hollingsworth

I met Kent McKeever last spring outside of the old church where he practices law in a weathered section of downtown Waco. He was waiting for me outside in an orange jumpsuit.

Over the last 40 days of Lent, he's worn it everywhere: church, jury duty, work and even around the house with his wife and three children. He's not crazy, though. Turns out he's just a Christian.

I followed Kent around town for half a day and, as we were walking into a grocery store, I asked him to explain, in short, why he's wearing the suit.

He told me that he wanted to attempt for one moment to feel what it was like to be feared, stigmatized and rejected, simply based on one's appearance. This is something that he hasn't experienced much of in his life, being a white male in a professional field.

He also wanted to show solidarity with the people that are overpopulating our penal system, who regardless of their guilt or innocence are God's children and still deserve compassion, understanding and most importantly, love-fueled efforts to help them overcome their brokenness. It is the lowest among us that truly need our love, he says.

Kent accidentally found himself in the legal field after attending Seminary School. His mission quickly became helping the disenfranchised, the struggling, those whom society casts away and minorities and immigrants who don't have resources for proper legal

representation. You know, the people Jesus talked about offering our time, love and resources to. The ones we are quick to forget about.

We sat for a while in the pews of the old church and talked about some of the criticism he's received while wearing the suit, in particular from conservative religious friends.

When hearing of people's inability to understand why he advocates for people on the fringes, we both couldn't help wondering if some people have actually ever read the Bible, specifically Jesus' teaching in bold red letters.

I study history and look at those we ridicule, vilify and often ultimately put to death. Jesus, Socrates, Martin Luther King...the really long list of people who came to offer change and love and were rewarded for it with scorn.

I keep wondering why it takes ideas that seem radical to break up our complacency with broken systems. I look at friends like Kent who, at first glance, might seem to be just a little crazy. And I realize now that what is commonly accepted as sanity rarely transforms the world into a better place.

Stir the pot, my friends. And take some time to love the least of these.

—Dylan Hollingsworth is a freelance photojournalist. He came to Waco in April to take photos of Kent McKeever for the New York Times (see his photo on page 7).

Resources & Opportunities

The New Jim Crow

a review by Polly Mann

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*. The New Press: 2010, 290 pages. Available in multiple markets, around \$15 for paperback.

In the 1920s, when I was a child in Hot Springs, AK, there were certain unspoken and unwritten racial rules. A white person called any black person by his / her first name and any black person addressed the white person as Mr., Mrs., or Miss.

All people of color entered the homes of white people by the back door. Schools were segregated and one had only to view the exterior of the schoolhouses to recognize the inferiority of the black school system.

Today, all this has changed in Arkansas as well as other places. Overt racism is not practiced, but prejudice still exists. Its ugliest manifestation is the massive, and most often, unjust incarceration of young black men for drug usage. This is the theme of Michelle Alexander's barnburner of a book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, replete with statistics to bear out her thesis.

In his forward to the book, the eminent Professor Cornel West says, "There is no doubt that if young white people were incarcerated at the same rates as young black people, the issue would be a national emergency."

Alexander explains, "Although white people use drugs under similar circumstances and in similar amounts as people of color, the penalties are different.... We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it."

Virtually all constitutionally protected civil liberties have been undermined by the US government's war on drugs. The Anti-Abuse Act of 1986 provides mandatory minimum sentences for the distribution of powder cocaine, used mostly by white offenders, and much more serious punishment for the distribution of crack, the drug most available to African Americans in poor neighborhoods.

A 2000 study of the National Institute on Drug Abuse reported that white students use powder cocaine at seven times the rate of black students, use crack cocaine at eight times the rate of black students and use heroin at seven times the rate of black students. Still, law enforcement, at all levels, concentrates on African-American communities.

Since the US Supreme Court struck down the basic requirement that motorists stopped by police have to consent to a search, police have been able to conduct unreasonable

and discriminatory stops and seizures throughout the United States. *The New York Times* reported that, in 2008, the New York Police Department stopped 545,000 people and 80 percent of those were African Americans.

Overt racism is not practiced, but it still exists. Its ugliest manifestation is the massive, and most often, unjust incarceration of young black men for drug usage.

Thousands of people are swept into the criminal justice system every year pursuant to the drug war without much regard for their guilt or innocence. Police are allowed by the courts to conduct "fishing expeditions" for drugs based on nothing more than a hunch. This is how the roundup works in virtually every major city in the country.

The San Jose Mercury News reviewed 700,000 criminal cases and found that at "virtually every stage of pre-trial negotiation, whites are more successful than nonwhites."

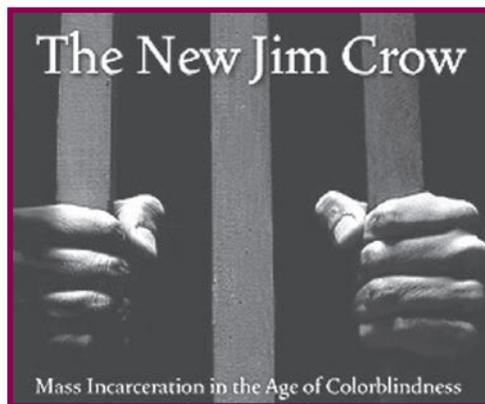
The state of Georgia's "two strikes and you're out" legislation imposes life imprisonment for a second drug offense. As a result, at one time, 98.4 percent of those serving life sentences were black.

The right to effective counsel is at the heart of the criminal justice system. Legal representation furnished indigent and low-income people is usually that of a public defender who is, most often, underpaid and overworked. Thus, the legal services available to low-income (mainly

minority) defendants cannot compare to that available for a person of means.

When a defendant pleads guilty to a minor drug offense, he probably will not be told that a "guilty" plea will most likely prevent him or her from receiving any kind of government benefits. The sentencing might be probation, community service and court costs.

Also unmentioned might be his or her lifetime denial of health and welfare benefits, food stamps, public housing and federal education assistance. His or her driver's license



See "Jim Crow Review" on page 11.

Building the Movement to End the New Jim Crow: *A Resource for A New Vision*

Daniel Hunter, *Building the Movement to End the New Jim Crow*. Daniel Hunter and Veterans of Hope: September 2014, 45 pages. Available from Indiegogo, US\$15.

Many who have read Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, or know the harsh and vast prison industrial complex, have wondered, "What can I do to help stop mass incarceration?"

Daniel Hunter, a veteran community organizer and group facilitator with Training for Change,* has produced a 45-page booklet that takes on that very question. In his prospectus for the project, Daniel wrote, "It's not about suggesting one simple answer, but teaching the skills of organizing, through stories of what the movement is already doing to overcome this crisis."

Whether you're already involved in organizing around the issue of mass incarceration, or if you're part of a small group that wants to tackle the issue, or just an individual wanting to make a difference, *Building the Movement to End the New Jim Crow* will provide assistance. This book is about laying down a long-term vision of a movement—one that isn't just about ending mass incarceration but ending the cycle of caste in the United States.

Through stories and examples, the booklet will cover how to create and grow a group, and how to create campaigns to win meaningful change.

Building the Movement to End the New Jim Crow is a collaborative project between Hunter and the Veterans of Hope Project (VoH).

In addition to his work with Training for Change, Hunter is author of the widely acclaimed book *Strategy and Soul*, in which he writes self-reflectively about a dynamic, long-term direct-action campaign. He brings a keen eye to how movements can learn from their own successes and failures.

Founded in 1997 by Vincent and Rosemarie Freeney Harding, the VoH Project is an educational initiative on religion, culture and participatory democracy. VoH encourages a healing-centered approach to community-building that recognizes the interconnectedness of spirit, creativity and citizenship.

Building the Movement to End the New Jim Crow is a natural and frequently requested follow-up to

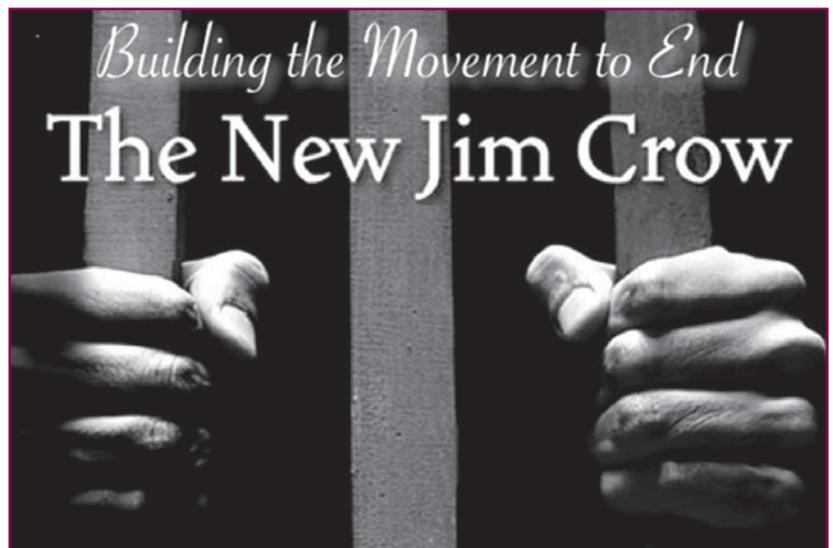
VoH's *New Jim Crow Study Guide and Call to Action*, which has been distributed to hundreds of schools, re-entry centers, faith communities and study groups throughout the United States. VoH spokespeople say they are thrilled to be teaming with Daniel Hunter on this exciting next step in their movement-building efforts.

Veterans of Hope leaders write that, in some ways, this movement may be akin to the US Civil Rights movement in the early 1960s. Most of us know of the iconic images of lunch-counter sit-ins or the massive March on Washington in 1963. But those mass events did not just happen; many decades of organizing led up to them.

Early on, the movement had robust arguments about its goals, wondering if it should focus on ending segregation or pouring energy into black institutions. The movement experimented with tactics, with small groups trying sit-ins, bus boycotts, freedom rides—and even threatening to march on Washington decades before 1963.

Those numerous local experiments were the testing ground for ideas and strategy, allowing people to see what worked and to learn from mistakes. While it may or may not take as many years, our movement also needs to conduct such experiments, many of which are already well underway.

This booklet does not presume to offer neatly packaged answers. Rather, it holds up the good work and learning that's happening now, and encourages the process of reflecting,



Resources & Opportunities

questioning and boldly experimenting as we continue to build a dynamic, multifaceted mass movement to end the new Jim Crow.

—For more information, go to www.indiegogo.com/projects/building-the-movement-to-end-the-new-jim-crow.

**Training for Change* provides activist training for groups standing up for social, economic and environmental justice through strategic nonviolence (www.trainingforchange.org). ■

Jim Crow Review, continued from page 9

may be suspended and he or she may no longer qualify for state employment and professional licenses. He or she will not be permitted to enlist in the military, possess a firearm or obtain a federal security license.

Upon his or her release from prison, the individual now marked as “felon” will need :

A) *Housing*. If a released felon has no friends or relatives, he or she will be forced to find a homeless shelter. However, the Housing Abuse Act of 1988 granted public housing agencies the right to use leases to evict any tenant, household member or guest engaged in criminal activity. Later legislation urged that drug offenders be excluded from public housing based on their criminal records.

Throughout the US, public housing agencies have accepted policies that deny eligibility to applicants even with the most minor criminal backgrounds. The Housing and Urban Development program requires every public housing lease to stipulate that if the tenant, or any member of the tenant’s household or any guest of the tenant, engages in any drug-related or other criminal activity, on or off the premises, the tenancy will be terminated. In a 2002 ruling, the Supreme Court stated, that under federal law, housing tenants can be evicted, whether or not they knew of, or participated in, illegal activity.

B) *Employment*. Forty of the 51 state parole agencies in the US require parolees to “maintain gainful employment.” But most employers will not hire individuals with any kind of criminal record. Employers in growing numbers are barred by state licensing agencies from hiring such people. Most ex-offenders have difficulty even obtaining an interview.

Manufacturing jobs have almost disappeared. Most offenders are tracked for prison at early ages, labeled as criminals in their teen years and shuttled from underfunded city schools to prison. Once labeled criminals, their job prospects are forever bleak. Given the incredibly high level of discrimination suffered by black men in the job market, it is not surprising that huge percentages of them are unemployed.

A war has been declared on young black men who have engaged in precisely the same crimes that go largely ignored in middle-class white communities. The drug war is a system of control. Laws prohibiting the use and sale of drugs are race-neutral but they are enforced in a highly discriminatory fashion. If enough taxpayers were concerned with the cost of incarceration—an estimated \$41,364 per annum per individual—they would demand the justice due the affected young black men. If we could return to the 1970s rate of incarceration we would need to release four out of five people currently behind bars.

—Polly Mann is one of the two founders of the 33-year-old nonprofit *Women Against Military Madness*. She writes a column for its newsletter, has spoken on nonviolence, has demonstrated against weapons manufacturers and has served a week in jail for civil disobedience. ■

Teach Justice through Worship.



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Seasons

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***This issue is dedicated
in grateful memory
for the life of
Kathy Susan Gardner***

Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for the poor and hungry of God's world, and acting on the strong belief that

Quotes, Prayers & Pithy Sayings

Holy Indictment

by Deborah E. Harris

Lord, when did we see you clothed in an orange jumpsuit and visit you?

We look at your incarcerated children through prejudicial, orange-colored glasses.
We sentence our brothers and sisters to the chains of poverty and hopelessness for life.
We forge prison bars of hatred and judgment, confining 2 million of your children in this nation.

Lord, when did we see you clothed in an orange jumpsuit and welcome you?

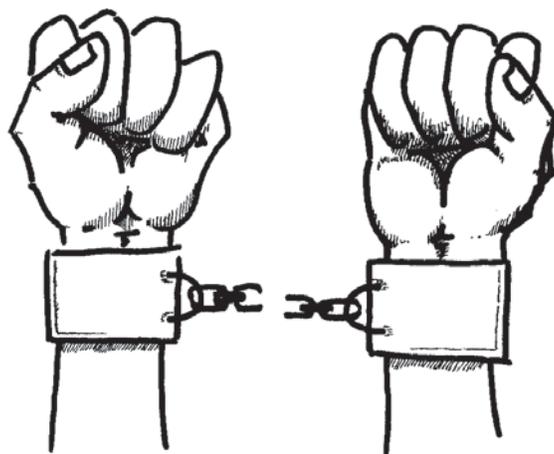
We dispense your Grace to the highest bidder.
We love at our convenience and ease.
We keep a lid on the truth that can set us all free.

Lord, when did we see you clothed in an orange jumpsuit and feed you?

We hide inside "our" horn of plenty and privilege.
We retreat to our ivory towers and say the right words.
We stay busy and keep our heads down.

*O Lord, have mercy on us.
Unlock our hearts with
gratitude.
O Christ, have mercy on
us. Open our eyes with
compassion.*

*—Deborah Harris, a
freelance writer and the
Seeds copy editor, is also a
member of the Council of
Stewards.*



art by Robert Van Darden

biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. The group intends to seek out people of faith who feel called to care for the poor; and to affirm, enable and empower a variety of responses to the problems of poverty.

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Seeds of Hope also produces *Sacred Seasons*, a series of worship materials for the liturgical year—with an economic justice attitude. These include litanies, sermons, children's and youth activities, bulletin art and drama.

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