Criminal Actors — the Informant System and the Drug War

A portion of a public presentation by Nora Callahan, Executive Director
Beyond Bars Conference, Bellingham, WA (see page 9)

As summer travel ebbed, I dove into the study of the informant system, as pertains to those whom the police arrest, then pressure to go back into their places of home and work and set others up for arrest. On December 3rd, I gave a presentation at Heritage College in Bellingham, Washington, as part of a daylong workshop called Beyond Bars. Here are a few excerpts.

Scared people are coached to go out, and then playing the roll of criminal actors, go out, and entrap into this mess, the people they love the most.

In this study of the informant system I ran across something written by an attorney who works for white-collar criminals, and his paper about snitching took this angle: It is a good thing to have [a snitch system]. And they shouldn’t do any time, a snitch shouldn’t do any time, because they are already going to be punished. Nobody is going to like them anymore. No one is going to trust them ever again, and that is their punishment. Don’t give them any time.

How many informants do we have in communities? We can’t measure it because of this secret system, but experts have some guesses.

Because researchers know what is behind the search warrants granted, they know that almost 98% of the time the police don’t have any goods on anyone, just a confidential informant. A lot of informing is going on, and it’s escalating.

The courts are so clogged that everyone who works for the courts is told, “Do not bring this to trial; get this settled.”

So they squeeze these people into rolling on their mother. Our family involved my brother’s girlfriend; it was her brother who turned her in, and so we went through this ourselves. And it is hard to try to explain to people this part — people do 20, 30 years and they get through it. Somehow, I don’t know how. I’ve never been to prison, but they get through it, and what dogs them all of the time is this — how could my sister do that to me? How could my friend do this to me? That stays with them. Scared people are coached to go out, and then playing the roll of criminal actors, go out, and entrap into this mess, the people they love the most.

I’ve an idea — a theory. The violence? It’s all concentrated where they are policing real hard, places like Camden, New Jersey where citizens are black and poor and can’t defend themselves. All the violence in San Diego is concentrated into the Barrio, and places in LA where they force poor people to live; then they police the hell out of them. Not only with uniformed police officers, but who else? Our friends! Pretending they’re police. Acting with impunity.

What happens to young people when their streets are full of criminal actors? Do they end up with any respect for the law? Who’s the law? We have no law! What happens to young people when their streets are full of criminal actors? Do they end up with any respect for the law? Who’s the law? We have no law!

When I grew up, the Russians were doing it a lot, the informant system throughout all the communities. A person could be hauled off and interrogated and taken off to the ice fields. It terrified me, those Russian people. We studied these communities in Russia after that period because there was a lot of mental illness. Our country went over there to help them with all their crazy people. And do you know what our country found out? Our scientists and doctors went over there and came back and said, “It was all those informants. It made them crazy to live among people, and nobody knew who was going to rip them off, or who needed to ‘get in good’, or some favor. And so turn someone in, and that person gets hauled off to Siberia. It made people crazy. Well, that’s what is happening in our communities now.

How many of you have heard that in the United States of America we have the lowest violent crime rate since the 1960’s? Well then, why are we the world’s leading jailer? Did that make sense when you read it? Did you have trouble with it? I did, too. But, I think I’ve figured it out, and I’m not a scientist, but talked to some when I was down in Seattle and ran it by them, and they said they’d check into it.

I’ve an idea — a theory. The violence? It’s all concentrated where they are policing real hard, places like Camden, New Jersey where citizens are black and poor and can’t defend themselves. All the violence in San Diego is concentrated into the Barrio, and places in LA where they force poor people to live; then they police the hell out of them. Not only with uniformed police officers, but who else? Our friends! Pretending they’re police. Acting with impunity.

What happens to young people when their streets are full of criminal actors? Do they end up with any respect for the law? Who’s the law? We have no law!

from maybe — a life sentence — maybe five years. Doesn’t matter, five years? Life? It doesn’t mean anything to the young person, it’s all the same—five years scares them. Maybe ten years scares them; the government will use whatever years to scare you bad enough, because they can.

They’ve assessed this all themselves and said so. The United States Sentencing Commission had to write an assessment of this experiment, this reform. And they said themselves they can’t monitor it; it’s secret, we have a problem here, it’s not transparent law enforcement anymore. But, they aren’t going to do anything about it. They’re not. Unless we say stop. Demand that they stop, organize, and get together.

Question from audience: Seems our government is moving toward more fascist systems, is this part of fascism?

Nora: This informant system is part of what happens when government isn’t public anymore. This is when they need us to turn on each other, and the control factor is they have a lot of prisons and they can open new ones and if the government won’t build them, the private companies will, then the government just leases the space, so they’ve got beds. And when they don’t have beds, they just put up tents.

Comment from audience: In my neighborhood there have been murders over this issue

Nora: Murder of informants, yes. In my neighborhood, too. In the woods, two young boys taken up and murdered and all they found was a couple of dreadlocks. They were digging their own graves before they were shot. And there’s one boy doing 67 years, and two did 12 months. They talked first.

Chuck: That’s a good example if I could add on to it. There were three people charged in an act of conspiracy in Stevens County about three years back. The prosecution and courts both guided into a drug conspiracy by simply alleging that it was. This is part of the problem of how the courts proceed. So, once they had that down, they could proceed on the basis of words. There are so many cases, these drug conspiracies, and so-called trials, in which there

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
isn't anything, except the words of others. This leaves defense attorneys essentially in a weird quandary, they are left feeling kind of dirty; they can't do anything.

They can only talk about what are the options; it's a sales talk. It's not about whether or not a person is guilty. So, in the case of the murdered informants, the two guys, probably one of them the shooter, he ratted or rolled over first, and so did his friend. So, the last guy to get picked up, gets 67 years and the other two, twelve months in county jail. It's the way conspiracies work and you can bargain away that much and get one year, versus 67 years.

**Question from audience:** When you use the term 'snitch' or 'rat' I think there is a tendency that much and get one year, versus 67 years.

**Nora:** Yes. Yes. That's right. That's right, because we have this weakness. When they set up the Stanford experiment in the college, and half the kids were guards and half the kids prisoners, they had to stop that thing right away because in a matter of hours friends were abusing friends. And they went, oh my god, how come? Because we are weird. [Laughter] We need checks and balances. We can't have absolute power. Because when we get it, we'll put the hurt to somebody. I don't understand it.

**Questioner:** Well, I feel like we aren't as thorough about this, seems that people due to drug policy facing 30 years, 40 or life, while these are people who are put in a situation by the system where they are given no option. While we all are responsible for our decisions, even these people that have become informants, I feel like it is important to remember that we have

and set up a system that puts people in the position that they have to choose this. They aren't necessarily bad people. You know, what would we all do?

### Snitching: The Institutional And Communal Consequences

**By Alexandra Natapoff, Associate Professor of Law, Loyola Law School, Los Angeles**

The classic "criminal informant" with whom this article is concerned is a person who trades information about others in order to obtain lenience for his or her own crimes. This writing does not address informants who work solely for money, or citizen informants who provide information to the police without recompense.

The use of criminal informants in the U.S. justice system has become a flourishing socio-legal institution unto itself. Characterized by secrecy, unfettered law enforcement discretion, and informal negotiations with criminal suspects, the informant institution both embodies and exacerbates some of the most problematic features of the criminal justice process.

Every year tens of thousands of criminal suspects — many of them drug offenders concentrated in high-crime inner-city neighborhoods — informally negotiate away liability in exchange for promised cooperation. Law enforcement meanwhile recruits and relies on ever-greater numbers of criminal actors in making basic decisions about investigations and prosecutions.

While this marriage of convenience is fraught with peril, it is nearly devoid of judicial or public scrutiny as to the propriety, fairness, or utility of the deals being struck. Moreover, it both exemplifies and exacerbates existing problems with transparency, accountability, regularity, and fairness within the criminal process.

The caustic effects of the informant institution are not limited to the legal system. They can have a disastrous impact in low-income, high-crime, urban communities where a high percentage of residents — predominantly young African American men — are in contact with the criminal justice system and therefore potentially under pressure to snitch.

The law enforcement practice of relying heavily on snitching creates large numbers of criminal informants who are communal liabilities. Snitches increase crime and threaten social organization, interpersonal relationships, and socio-legal norms in their home communities, even as they are tolerated or under-punished by law enforcement because they are useful.

(Edited: Alexandra Natapoff is an Associate Professor of Law, Loyola Law School, Los Angeles, J.D., Stanford Law School; B.A., Yale University. alexandra.natapoff@lls.edu.)

Many questions and concerns raised in this excerpt from her Introduction derive from previous experience as Assistant Federal Public Defender and working as an advocate in low-income communities of color. Her entire study is available online at: www.law.uc.edu/
I was born in 1967 and was sentenced in 1996 to 12.5 years in federal prison for conspiracy to manufacture meth. I am a first-time non-violent drug offender. When released from prison I will be 40 years old, and then will be on supervised release for 5 more years.

Years ago I became friends with a man whom I found out much later bought and sold methamphetamine. I met him through the tenants of a rental house he owned. Charming and friendly, he asked to stay in my apartment while I was at work, saying he was doing major refurbishment on his own house at night. Unknown to me, he used my washer and dryer for himself and his friends and generally trashed my house. After several weeks of this, I tried to end this arrangement, but he refused to leave.

Then began a cycle of verbal abuse that soon escalated into violence. I had thought of myself as an aspiring young professional woman. Now I felt like dirt. Women who suffer abuse acquire a co-dependency and inner shame. We don’t want to tell anybody, long to be loved, and out of fear and guilt stay with the abuser. For me, through a support group, I found the strength to walk away.

My friendship with that man lasted only a few months, but the consequences were deeper than anything I could imagine. During the entire time, he was engaged in a drug-dealing ring.

A couple of years after I terminated our friendship, he and two others were indicted for conspiracy to manufacture and distribute methamphetamine. I was questioned by detectives and asked for my cooperation. I had received death threats and did not cooperate, and so I was included in the indictment. He cooperated with the government and received a four-year sentence, reduced by one year for cooperation. I was left to deal with the consequences of the years of abuse.

Conspiracy was originally meant to catch the “kingpin” at the top who frequently escaped punishment, since he has the encompassing charge under which the man at the top escapes punishment, since he has the top escapes punishment, since he has the most to tell in order to reduce his sentence. Others who may have played a minimal role receive 10 years to life, since they do not have information helpful to the government, or out of fear for their lives dare not reveal information they may have.

With the incentive to fabricate stories due to harsh mandatory sentences for conspiracy, the criminal justice system has torn apart families, pitting brother against brother when family members are indicted. It has ripped the fibers of the family unit holding the country together. My father fought in three wars to defend this country. He would turn over in his grave if he could see what this country is doing to its citizens.

I lost the opportunity to have children, as I will be too old on release. I lost precious years with my family. I lost thousands of dollars in legal fees, and I lost happy times with my friends. When you come to prison, it is very lonely. Everyone forgets about you except your family and your closest friends.

With the incentive to fabricate stories due to harsh mandatory sentences for conspiracy, the criminal justice system has torn apart families, pitting brother against brother when family members are indicted. It has ripped the fibers of the family unit holding the country together. My father fought in three wars to defend this country. He would turn over in his grave if he could see what this country is doing to its citizens.
Reflections on landmark Connecticut event

BY CLIFF THORNTON, EFFICACY DIRECTOR

I offer some observations about the late-October 2005 Hartford Drug Conference that was chaired by Dr. Bob Painter. Considered Hartford’s “minority leader,” he’s a Republican City councilor to a Democratic Hispanic mayor. The fingerprints of drug policy reformers were all over the conference content.

The conference presented great diversity both in the audience and on the panels. Behind the leadership of Mayor Eddie Perez, the importance of a conference hosted by and held in a capitol city inspired invaluable cooperation with Trinity College, and the financial support of the nonprofit foundation of health insurer Aetna, Inc.

Aetna’s executive director, a Latina attorney, gave a moving keynote address about the non-stigmatizing of addiction during which she discussed her own struggle with chronic depression.

I will share only two observations concerning legalization and the conference as an effective model for future gatherings. The discussion of legalization and its capacity to alienate or attract people has been debated within the reform movement. In the past I respected the opinion of many who felt the “legalization” word was a “bridge too far beyond the mainstream” with the capacity to scare more than persuade.

Whatever may have been the reality back then, in 2006 the need to prove that drug prohibition has failed is fading; it’s conceded by the mainstream. The unconvinced but open-minded are more concerned with what the alternative looks and sounds like, whether you call it legalization, regulation, normalization, or liberation.

I watched a mayor, a judge, a state prison commissioner, city councilors, doctors and therapists, recovering addicts, nurses, teachers, Hispanic and black community activists accept the failure of current policy and recognize the need for an alternative involving more treatment and fewer police. Opinions differ!

Within this informative and rich discussion, legalization was mentioned many times as a tool for better public health and safer neighborhoods, not for a worsening of current conditions. While most spectactors were sympathetic to reform, many were merely fed up with drug prohibition and struggling for an alternative.

The law enforcement panel attempted to argue otherwise, with some exceptions like the district attorney who said the problem with current policy was absence of too little public shame for drug use and users. The police chief angrily denounced “legalizing” experiments in “his grandchildren’s neighborhood”. These prohibition panelists talked about “demand reduction” and gave lip service to treatment, demonstrating their lack of insight.

My considered opinion is that drug prohibitionists no longer own the “legalization” word as a scare-tactic in public discourse. Reformers now have a great opportunity for presenting open public education forums.

The police, the state prosecutor’s office and the DEA were powerful early in the presentation. They spent some time shamelessly promoting more of the same and claiming vaguely, and with no documentation, the failures of acclaimed Amsterdam, Zurich and Baltimore drug policy reforms. The contrast between law enforcement views and reformers’ framing of the public health question and the regulation policy struck me as quite educational and enlightening.

Sr. Judge Burnett of Washington, D.C., representing black, professional criminal-justice experience within the criminal justice system — gave a powerful presentation for policy change virtually immune from criticism. Other presentations included: demographic studies about the Hispanic community, female addiction, testimony of recovered addicts now delivering therapy, juvenile justice workers. Dale Gieringer regaled listeners with stories of how Oakland, CA has survived medical marijuana distribution without a “political earthquake.” All presenters provided knowledgeable and respected views about practical change from drug prohibition to regulation.

Concerning drug management issues, professor and psycho-pharmacologist Robert Heimer of Yale’s Public Health School taught us about the role of drugs in drug abuse management. Reformers frequently say that “treatment works,” but I found it useful to know more about what and why, particularly because prohibitionist, coerced-abstinence “treatment” ideology bankrupts so many junk-science therapy programs for marijuana users.

The conference closed on the compelling issue of what can be done now by cities and local activists, within the framework of federal prohibition laws and state prohibition enforcement. In particular, Roger Goodman of the King County Bar Association of Seattle is working up a list of “little changes” for distribution, doable work now to reduce the harm of prohibition.

This type of conference can be held in other cities, packing a comprehensive agenda into two days, with city officials hosting. Every city has ‘players’ in this failed war on drugs: frustrated health care delivery experts, frustrated community activists, academic experts, addiction survivors and open-minded law enforcement officials.

Yet to be seen is whether the connections made by local activists can be harnessed to provide an ongoing source of political organizing and pressure on state and municipal lawmakers to create change. Hartford happens to have a mayor who is ready to lead a neighborhood parade with no fear of soft on crime criticism. The real work has just begun.

(EDITOR: Cliff, or Clifford Wallace Thornton, Jr., can be reached by postal mail at Efficacy, PO Box 1234, Hartford, CT 06143, by telephone at 860 657 8438, or by email to efficacy@msn.com, Website: www.efficacy-online.org)

Another perspective on Hartford Conference

Activist Scarlett Swardlow of Students for Sensible Drug Policy (www.ssdp.org) reported on some important lessons she learned from the Hartford Drug Policy Conference of October 2005:

Accessibility: The conference only cost $25 to hear an amazing line-up of speakers and panelists. There was also food and drink for all the attendees. Moreover, the city hosted the conference in Trinity College. Trinity is similar to many universities, operating on a lovely, yet isolated, setting. For as soon as you step outside college grounds, you’re in the parts of Hartford where fighting the Drug War wasn’t a matter of choice, but one of survival.

This is one of the communities that observers talk about when noting how communities experience the Drug War differently. I commend Cliff and all other organizers for holding the conference in the midst of the community, as well as making it affordable to people of all walks of life. That’s not something I’ve seen very often at our drug reform movement’s events and conferences.

Diversity: The conference presented a wonderful, winning combo of people with varied backgrounds in academia, public policy, treatment, and harm reduction. Also, I found it impressive that not only were members of the city and county governments present, but officials from the state and I believe federal levels as well. And, of course, the majority of the people attending were members of the Hartford community.

I commend all of the organizers of the conference for understanding the importance of uniting with the communities we’re working with. That sounds like a statement that deserves a “duh” in response, but it’s another rarity in drug reform activities. At such times, the preponderance of experts from academia, public policy, treatment, harm reduction NGOs, etc. often make it seem as though our events and conferences are overflowing with bureaucratic “wonks,” and so it was heartening to see something more real.
What’s Happening in the Movement?
The Rockefeller Drug Law Project and Tulia Drug Sting

Since May 1998, the William Moses Kunstler Fund has been building a network of prisoners, families and their supporters to fight against New York’s extraordinarily punitive mandatory sentencing laws for drug offenders, commonly called the Rockefeller drug laws.

Due to efforts by the Kunstler Fund, the Mothers of the New York Disappeared, and many other organizations and individuals who have worked tirelessly for reform, the last year has brought some small but significant legislative changes.

On December 14, 2004, Governor Pataki signed into law the Rockefeller Drug Law Reform bill (A.11895) (S.7802) that was approved by the legislature on December 7, 2004. Under the new law, all convictions for felony drug offenses that result in a state prison sentence will be determinate, putting an end to mandatory life sentences. While this legislation will mainly affect sentencing in drug cases in the future, aspects of the legislation are retroactive, impacting those already serving sentences for drug convictions.

Since January of 2006, the Kunstler Fund has provided pro bono legal representation to approximately 10% of those eligible for resentencing (454) and has devoted considerable energies to helping these inmates fight for release. Resentencing under the new law has proven more difficult than anyone imagined. It has been particularly difficult in New York County, where the District Attorney’s office has put up considerable opposition to many resentencing petitions.

The Kunstler Fund is still in court in New York County on several of these cases. Because the reforms are so new, these early cases will set the precedent for how future petitions are evaluated and future cases are decided. We are fighting to make sure that the due process rights of eligible inmates are protected and that their cases receive the attention that they deserve.

For example, in 1989 Severina Jacquez was tried in absentia and sentenced to 17 years in prison under the Rockefeller Drug Laws. She was arrested 12 years later while trying to recover her bail money and sent to prison, leaving her 14-year-old daughter alone on the streets of New York for two years until she was taken in by Our Children of Catholic Charities. In June of 2005 the Kunstler Fund filed for resentencing and under the new changes in the Rockefeller Laws, Ms. Jacquez’s sentence was reduced to nine years, plus two years off for good behavior. However, her deportation has been ordered at the expiration of her sentence. The chances of her being allowed to remain in the United States with her daughter are slim, but the Kunstler Fund is fighting for Ms. Jacquez, in spite of the odds.

In September of 2000, the Kunstler Fund investigated a racist drug sting in Tulia, Texas, which imprisoned approximately 15 percent of the town’s African American community. The Kunstler Fund brought ongoing national media attention to the story. We raised tens of thousand of dollars for the victim’s families who were devastated by the initial outcome. We also produced our own 26-minute documentary about the sting, Tulia, Texas: Scenes from the Drug War, which has been broadcast and distributed widely. In August of 2003, Governor Rick Perry pardoned those convicted in the Tulia Drug Sting.

In April of 2003, Tom Coleman, the undercover officer responsible for the arrests, was indicted for lying about his past in evidentiary hearings leading up to the pardons. In January of 2005, Coleman finally went to trial on these charges. Coleman was convicted, but received no jail time, and was sentenced to 10 years probation.

The Kunstler Fund was there for the perjury trial, and has continued to document events as they unfold. We have recently completed an update of our documentary, entitled Tulia 46, which tells the story of the drug sting from the beginning of our involvement in September of 2000 through the present day.

The Kunstler Fund is pleased to be able to thank our donors with copies of The Emerging Police State, a recent collection of the speeches of William M. Kunstler edited by Michael Steven Smith, Karin Kunstler Goldman, and Sarah Kunstler. This collection includes transcripts of secretly recorded speeches from Kunstler’s FBI File.

The defiance, anger, passion and optimism of “America’s most celebrated and most detested” radical lawyer William Kunstler ring throughout this selection of his unpublished speeches. Kunstler’s outspoken opposition to war, racism and political repression resulted in an extensive FBI file, which included secretly recorded transcripts of many of his public speeches. The introduction by Michael Ratner, President of the Center for Constitutional Rights, New York, highlights the fact that Kunstler’s warning about the encroaching police state is even more prescient today.

In our efforts to provide a voice for the voiceless and to secure human rights for those who fall prey to draconian laws, we ask you to help us with our funding for these important projects. This is a critical time for us. Your tax-deductible contribution is greatly needed in order for us to continue to help those in need.

Please help us to continue our work. It is your support that makes our victories possible. You can donate by credit card on our website, www.kunstler.org/donate.html, or by check. Please make checks payable to the William Moses Kunstler Fund for Racial Justice, and mail to the Kunstler Fund at 13 Gay Street, New York, NY 10014.

“Contributions to the WMK Fund are tax-deductible under Section 501 © (3) of the Internal Revue Code. A copy of the Fund’s annual report is filed with the Attorney General and a copy is available either from the Fund or the Attorney General’s Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10272.”

New York Drug Law Reform less than meets the eye

According to a report by New York’s Legal Aid Society released in December, last year’s partial Rockefeller drug law reforms lowered some sentences and allowed a relative handful of inmates (the “A-1” cases), to be resentenced, but did not address sentence reductions for the majority of New York’s prisoners. The report, “One Year Later: New York’s Experience with Drug Law Reform,” called on New York legislators to come back and finish what they started.

While last year’s partial reform expanded treatment options for prisoners, it failed to grant more power to judges to order treatment instead of prison, and it failed to fund community drug treatment programs, the report found. Most importantly, the partial reforms did not significantly reduce the state’s prison population.
The idea of “November Coalition” was discussed informally in the early months of 1997. Prisoners came up with the name, and their loved ones set upon its mission by spring. With few exceptions, the Coalition’s founding and organizing principles were crafted from the anguished pleas and dire circumstances of drug war prisoners and their families.

This history is an introduction to the Coalition’s membership, assumptions and goals. It may also be viewed as a summary for organizers interested in what can happen when people stop griping about their circumstances and begin to do something that will change them.

Two prisoners and a couple of prisoners’ sisters took the first steps to create a grassroots organization that would educate communities about the human destruction in the wake of the war on drugs. Through their own stories, the Coalition began to illustrate that drug prohibition laws produce crime, corrupt the criminal justice system, increase illegal drug use, and leave a trail of broken family relationships due to separation by incarceration. When prison time is over, the label ‘ex-felon’ is a lifetime stigma on the outside.

Out of a “Colville kitchen” emerges a national organization

Director Nora Callahan was a principle Coalition founder in 1997, recruited and urged on by her long-imprisoned brother, Gary Callahan, and other prisoners at Oxford Federal Correctional Facility in rural, central Wisconsin. Martha Christman, a local artist who lived near Nora’s home in Colville, Washington, volunteered and assisted Nora. Martha’s son, Ian, designed the initial website graphics and organization’s logo.

Martha’s brother, Mark Ingraham, was serving 10 years for a marijuana conspiracy. Morgan, a friend and fellow volunteer, set his hands to keyboard for the first time in his life, entering names of a growing membership into a database.

On April 1, 1997 Nora uploaded the November Coalition’s website at www.november.org. Almost instantly the correspondence and communications between prisoners and their loved ones developed into thousands of conversations with many others through the ‘magic’ of the Internet.

Martha built an information booth, and Consuelo, another Colville woman with a loved one in prison, managed the booth while Nora gave speeches and kept her paying work for as long as she could manage. Within a fast growing network of volunteers on both sides of prisons’ walls and wire they “gave it all to the cause.”

The enthusiastic response reinforced the need to communicate with a mass audience. The Coalition’s first issue of the Razor Wire newspaper was published in May 1997 with definite goals in mind. The Razor Wire reports on drug policy reform efforts, legislative updates, news about drug law vigils and meetings, legal analysis, and shared letters between prisoners and citizens of the free world alike.

Out of a “Colville kitchen” emerges a national organization

Directors said that drug war prisoners had to be “humanized” after years of “drug scare” propaganda and demonization thoroughly dominating national media stories from 1986 through 1992. Toward this goal, the Coalition has developed a pattern of success learned from educating citizens by the accepted method of case study — gathering and publicizing stories on The WALL at www.november.org.

The Coalition’s home office began designing projects to involve people in lobbying government officials and educating friends, family and associates. Like ripples on water, the Coalition’s condemnation of the drug war soon rolled into thousands of relationships through a diverse network of volunteers and sympathetic media.

Callahan began accepting invitations to travel and speak at public gatherings in distant cities. Her passionate, heartfelt speeches about the hardship and pain common to prisoners and their loved ones’ fractured lives bring listeners to tears, sympathy and action.

Throughout 1997 and 1998, online communications — which networked the home office with drug reform leaders, prisoners’ family members, writers for national media, and sometimes college students working on term papers — continued to build membership, one willing to roll up its sleeves, get active, and work hard to end the drug war.

(To be continued in the Spring 2006 Razor Wire)
Allison Bigelow and Doug Hiatt in the Our House kitchen. Dinner Saturday night was courtesy of Doug, who whipped up an amazing spaghetti sauce that included fresh vegetables from the garden.

Evening music on the catwalk, courtesy of father and son Michael and Katana Christen and Doug Hiatt.

“Our House” — national headquarters of November Coalition

The day was filled with an intensive open forum discussion on the various issues of Washington State Drug Policy.

“If all politics is local, so is every social justice movement. The compassion and commitment I felt from this small group can change the world. Thanks again for hosting, November Coalition.” — Andy Ko, ACLU of Washington State
Beyond Bars
A Conference on the Politics of the Prison Industrial Complex
December 3, 2005, Fairhaven College, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA

The conference began with “Set Up To Fail”, (left) a half-hour play put on by the Lake Stevens, WA-based group Justice Works!, which depicts the average experience of incarcerated people being put through the system. Below, cast and crew take a bow.

For more information about booking this theater troupe for a WA State presentation, contact Lea Zengage of Justice Works! at lzengage@northwest.net or see www.justiceworks.info

Panel featuring former political prisoners and political prisoner support activists, in commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity for Political Prisoners. Left to right: Harjap Grewal, Mark Cook, Danielle Dhighe, Amin Odeh, and Christina McLean

Photos courtesy Tom Murlowski, Katana Christen, Andy Ko

Left to right: Monte Levine, WA State Harm Reduction; afri-1, Colville area resident and activist; Nora Callahan, November Coalition; Allison Bigelow, Seattle MediMJ activist; Lew Wilson, retired Spokane attorney. “The Abduction of Motherhood” hangs in the background (see page 16).
Parole Bill gaining Congressional support

Special thanks go to Garry L. Jones, the Advocate 4 Justice [www.advocate4justice.org], for his tireless work motivating members of Congress to support this important piece of legislation.

Immigration Bill adds new mandatory sentences
HR 4437, the “The Border and Immigration Enforcement Act of 2005”, was introduced in early December by House Judiciary Chairman Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr. (R-WI). A knee-jerk and hastily slapped together response to the recent controversy about our “Broken Borders”, HR 4437 adds a host of draconian new sentences, mostly to do with immigration law violations.

As Sensenbrenner is Committee Chair, he was able to call up this 170-page piece of legislation for a vote with only two days notice, and it passed out of the Judiciary Committee with minor revisions along clear partisan lines despite lively debate.

US Congress considers legislation to gut Habeas Corpus
Last spring, several members of Congress introduced legislation designed to eliminate federal review of criminal cases for the stated purpose of speeding up executions. The legislation, known as the Streamlined Procedures Act, would effectively kill the writ of habeas corpus by stripping federal courts of jurisdiction to consider cases in which a prisoner’s constitutional rights may have been violated.

The legislation would apply to all criminal cases, including capital cases. Sen. Jon Kyl (R-AZ) co-sponsors the legislation as S 1088 in the Senate and as HR 3035 by Rep. Dan Lungren (R-CA) in the House. It has been contested and amended after sharp Committee debates.

Prisoner phone rights reform
HR 4466, The Family Telephone Connection Protection Act of 2005 has been introduced by Cong. Bobby Rush (D-IL).

It will require the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to prescribe rules regulating inmate telephone service rates.

This legislation is needed because the telephone is the primary method by which individuals maintain contact with loved ones who are incarcerated. Studies show that this communication reduces recidivism and facilitates rehabilitation.

However, Inmate calls are limited to collect calls in most prisons and jails, and are some of the highest phone rates in the country. Commissions are paid to correctional institutions by phone companies and can be 50% or more of the total charges.

Congressman responds to constituent’s letter about HR 3072
Monika Czaplicki sent the Razor Wire editor this positive response from her federal representative in Congress, one that offers hope, insight and more than casual interest in provisions of HR 3072:

Dear Ms. Czaplicki,

Thank you for contacting me to express your support for HR 3072, a bill to change the reform parole guidelines for federal prisoners. It is important for me to have the benefit of your views, and I appreciate the time you have taken to contact me.

As you are aware, the majority of federal inmates are non-violent drug offenders with very long sentences. Many people in prison are serving life sentences for non-violent offenses without the possibility of parole.

In response to overcrowding, I agree that we should consider new proposals such as those contained in HR 3072 to assess whether non-violent first-time offenders should be paroled earlier and how providing improved rehabilitation and other assistance to drug offenders can help them become contributing and self-sufficient members of society. At this time, the bill is pending in the House Judiciary Committee.

As you may be aware, the Fiscal Year 2005 emergency supplemental appropriations bill I supported includes $176 million to hire, train, equip and relieve overcrowding. In addition, the Judiciary Committee recently passed a bill to extend the U.S. Parole Commission for three years and continue its authority to make emergency adjustments to federal sentencing guidelines. This would allow the Sentencing Commission to make emergency guideline amendments to reflect recent changes in federal law. The Judiciary Committee passed this legislation in June, and it awaits further consideration by the full House.

You can be assured that I will keep in mind your concerns about overcrowding should the House vote on HR 3072 or related legislation during the 109th Congress.

Thank you again for sharing your views. If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me. For more information and to find out about other important issues that I am working on in Congress, I urge you to visit my website at www.house.gov/timbishop.

Sincerely,

Timothy Bishop
Member of Congress

Dear Senator Obama:

Over a year ago, on Friday, February 13, 2004, over 50 people’s lives changed for the worse here in the Rockford area. Every taxpayer’s life was changed as well, especially those in the Rockford area.

Those lives were changed by the “War on Drugs.” At least eight people were arrested and charged with conspiracy to sell cocaine or a cocaine base. Six of those eight pleaded guilty. At least three of the eight are expected to receive a minimum sentence of twenty years in prison. It is unfortunate that they are African-American and Hispanic.

Those eight people are mothers and fathers. They are also sons and a daughter. They may have been involved in illegal activities; yet do those actions require twenty years of life in prison to rehabilitate them? There are people who commit murder and molest children that receive lesser sentences. How is it that non-violent offenders receive harsher sentences than violent offenders?

These may have been involved in wrongdoing, but the punishment doesn’t fit the crime.

Eric Sterling was counsel for the U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary and participated in the passing of minimum mandatory sentencing. He has been outraged by the usage of minimum mandatory sentencing, and has stated that it is a waste of human life.

As the Senator for Rockford, Illinois, I ask what are you willing to do to help these eight individuals, and others in situations similar to this? We are spending tax dollars to keep these people incarcerated for years. Why can’t we rehabilitate them and educate them so they will have other options and opportunities to support their families?

I have been speaking with churches and individuals in the community. I look forward to hearing from you and working with you in the near future on this travesty. I would like to thank you for taking the time to read my letter.

Sincerely,

Toni Thomas, Rockford, IL
The United States of America imprisons its citizens at rates three to ten times higher than other democratic societies. The sentencing laws are getting tougher and tougher. The prisons are crowded, dangerous, and offer only limited medical treatment. There is no authentic rehabilitation in this system. The prisons of the new millennium are set up for citizens to stay incarcerated for a very long time. The federal system is stopping mothers from raising their children. We need to stop relying on incarceration and give prisoners a second chance, and an education.

Thousands of people are incarcerated illegally, and I am one of them. My name is Crishone Johnson, born and raised in Washington DC. I am a 37-year-old African American female, and a first-time non-violent offender. I am serving a 20-year sentence for Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Cocaine Base. My case is out of the Western District of Virginia, and I have served almost nine years of my sentence. I have nine years remaining to serve according to the justice system, but GOD has the last and final answer. I was charged with conspiracy, yet, in order to have a conspiracy charge you must have had a two-level enhancement for a firearm that I never possessed. That brought my base level up to 36 — not to mention an additional two criminal points for probation, to place me in a higher category even while the PSI report was being prepared for sentencing.

The people who testified against me, known drug users, were working with the US attorney, and they told lies in my case to get out of their own trouble. No evidence was submitted or proved to a jury or finder of fact beyond those charges in the indictment.

This is an illegal procedure prohibited under the Sixth Amendment. My basic constitutional rights were violated. All the enhancements that the judge and probation officer made up in my case are improper and illegal under the latest Supreme Court interpretations of Sixth Amendment intent in Blakely and Booker. Under the new ruling I should have been sentenced to 12-18 months instead of the 240 months I received.

I was raised in a middle class home in Washington DC. My mother worked very hard to take care of her two children, giving us the best education, clothing, medical care, food, and housing. I took care of my little brother and the household chores while she worked; this taught me to be independent. Now my mother is taking care of my son. My mother is a wonderful, loving person, and if it wasn’t for her and God, I would be insane inside these walls. The support my mother and son give me keeps me uplifted.

This is my first time in prison, and I know that I made a big mistake. I am a victim of the drug war, a single mother working and just trying to make it and take care of my child, bills and myself. I don’t think that I deserve 20 years or more for the first time in prison. I feel as though I should be punished for what I did, but not for 20 years worth of time away from my child and family. This time is affecting our children; they’re wondering when their mothers are coming home. My son asks all the time, “Mommy, when are you coming home?” I tell him one day soon because I have faith in God, and he will return me to my son and family.

The children of today are our future. The judicial system is not concerned how this affects them. Children need their parents, especially their mothers. We need to teach our children about this criminal justice system. Teach them about the corruption and abuse within prisons, and the wrongful convictions in the system. We need to be there for them, love them, let them know they are somebody and that they can be productive citizens. I have a child who is 14 years old. I have been physically absent from his life for nearly nine years. I love my son dearly. Most children I see in the visiting room feel abandoned by their parents, dealing with psychological complexes of desertion, and emotionally destroyed. Does our government view this as the right thing for our children and society.

Congress hasn’t made the rulings in Blakely, Booker, and Shepherd retroactive for people sentenced illegally 20 years ago. Why must we wait for Congress to rule if the Supreme Court stated that we were sentenced wrongly? Why are the Judges not trying to correct these sentences? In thousands of cases, including mine, the facts were not proven to a jury, the facts were found by the judge and the probation officer. How can this continue to go on and on? I’m asking for justice.

Crishone Johnson 05809-084
FPC Alderson
Glen Ray Road, Box A
Alderson, WV 24910

Snitch Culture Run Amuck

In mid-November, 35-year-old Chadwick Shane Cochran was beaten to death by fellow inmates at Los Angeles County Jail, according to the Associated Press. Authorities report that gang members, who mistakenly thought he was an informant, screamed “Snitch!” while beating and stomping Cochran for up to a half-hour. Cochran, who was mentally ill, was in jail for a nonviolent offense.

Also, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reports that two criminal trials in October were brought to a halt because of the presence of “Stop Snitchin’” t-shirts. The shirts are an increasingly popular trend on the urban streets of eastern cities.

“Snitching becomes a fact of life,” according to Alexandra Natapoff, an associate criminal law professor at Loyola Law School who published a University of Cincinnati Law Review article on the phenomenon (see page 3).

“At every barbecue, at every holiday party, someone is under law enforcement pressure to snitch. That in my mind is a destructive public policy.”

November Coalition - The Razor Wire www.november.org
What’s cooking with Booker?

By Chuck Armbury, Razor Wire Senior Editor

O hio law-school Professor Douglas A. Berman advocates publicly for reforming US drug war laws and enforcement practices. His website provides a rich resource for updates and comment on Blakely, Booker and various drug war and other criminal law raisings.

To help foster new thinking about arguments for downward sentencing departures, Berman wrote in mid-November 2005 that the US House of Representatives found time to pass a resolution expressing disagreement with a recent Ninth Circuit Court decision on parental rights. Catching Berman’s eye in the House resolution was the bold statement that “the rights of parents of minor children bear the same weight to defendants’ claims for a departure or variance on the basis of parenting responsibilities? The Eighth Circuit in Tobacco rejected a parental responsibilities claim. In that case, the defendant stressed that he was the primary caretaker of his three children, that he stayed at home with his children, and that one child ‘has asthma; another has a blood disease requiring yearly hospitalization and making him sick when exposed to the cold.’”

Undoubtedly, November Coalition families will understand and support the House declaration that “the rights of parents ought to be strengthened whenever possible as they are the cornerstone of American society.”

Berman then asks, “Given the overwhelming approval of this resolution?” by the House of Representatives, should federal district courts apply their new Booker discretion to give greater weight to defendants’ claims for a departure or variance on the basis of parenting responsibilities?

The Eighth Circuit in Tobacco rejected a parental responsibilities claim. In that case, the defendant stressed that he was the primary caretaker of his three children, that he stayed at home with his children, and that one child ‘has asthma; another has a blood disease requiring yearly hospitalization and making him sick when exposed to the cold.’”

Berman has a strong “feeling that congressional action in response to Booker is all but inevitable.” He insists there’s a “beltway buzz that both the House and the Senate may jump into Booker action come the one-year anniversary of the Booker decision.”

Berman argues that “cumulative and even circuit-by-circuit data provide only a superficial view of post-Booker sentencing data.”

Professor Berman praises the diligence with which “the US Sentencing Commission’s Booker webpage continues to update post-Booker sentencing data.”

Florida’s Sunshine Law is among the nation’s most broadly sketched open-government statutes, giving citizens considerable access to most meetings and documents generated by public officials.

Exceptions to public records are numerous, with legislators adding between 10 and 20 new exemptions each year. There are currently about 800 exemptions in the law; the most commonly cited are investigative materials, security measures and personal details such as Social Security numbers and medical information.

Jail builder faces open records suit

A South Florida company hired to build a prison in Graceville and recently scolded for overbilling the state now faces allegations that it violated the Sunshine Law by withholding public records.

The Geo Group Inc. — a sprawling corporation that claims 28 percent of America’s private prison market — was accused December 2, 2005 of ignoring a request for scores of documents related to its contracts with three Florida facilities, including audit records, lawsuit payments and court injunctions.

The company now has until later this month to respond to a public records lawsuit filed by Prison Legal News (PLN), a non-profit watchdog organization that publishes a monthly newsletter on prison issues and prisoners’ rights.

According to the suit, PLN claims it requested in April information related to lawsuits that resulted in settlements or verdicts against Geo Group, as well as contract audits, violations and court-ordered injunctions. The company responded, according to Editor Paul Wright, with a simple spreadsheet that provided a limited amount of information related to one category of the request.

Wright said he then submitted a second request in September and since has been stonewalled.

“I do a lot of public records stuff and try to be fairly conservative with the requests,” Wright said in a telephone interview Monday. “I guess when Geo or Corrections Corporation of America or the Department of Corrections in Florida and Washington get a letter or a phone call from PLN, they know it’s not going to be good news.

“So they’re pretty hostile with us. They hem and haw. That’s the way they operate.”

What’s cooking with Booker? Continued on next page
Investigation details Abuse, Endangerment of Prisoners after Hurricane Katrina

BY MICHELLE CHEN, WRITING FOR NEWSTANDARD NEWS

Nov 18 — From a cramped jail cell, to neck-deep waters, to a lockdown on a desolate highway, the prisoners were trapped every step of the way. “They told us if we didn’t shut up, we were going to stay there another day,” one former inmate of the New Orleans prison recalled after guards forcibly moved her, two days after Hurricane Katrina drove a torrent of water into her cell.

Yesterday, legal advocates with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) publicized a collection of more than 70 testimonials gathered from former inmates of Orleans Parish Prison who claim their captors trapped, abandoned and mistreated them after the disaster hit on Aug. 29. The reports counter earlier claims by the police department the facility was evacuated quickly and safely.

The published statements of the female and male detainees, all anonymous to protect the identities of the witnesses, relate a sense of utter helplessness as inmates skirted death in Katrina’s wake, languishing for days with little or no food or water. The stories detail the terror of being locked in their cells as floodwaters rose and physical assaults by prison staff as they were herded onto the overpass of Interstate 10, where they waited to be picked up and shipped to other facilities.

One inmate said the “floodwater got up to six feet, up to my neck, and I’m six-one. I really thought I was going to die.” He recalled that some inmates flocked to the jail windows calling for help. According to the testimony, though guards initially ignored the pleas, he was eventually moved onto the I-10. Throughout the evacuation process, he said, guards subjected him to brutal treatment as he was surrounded by floodwaters rife with waste and corpses. The inmate reported witnessing more abuse by prison guards after being transferred to facilities in other parishes.

Another witness stated that after “the deputies left us for dead,” some inmates attempted escape and were shot at. Others recounted that while waiting on the overpass to be taken to safety, guards deprived them of food and water and brutalized them indiscriminately.

According to the testimonies, guards used attack dogs, electroshock weapons and pepper spray to subdue prisoners; inmates were sprayed when they tried to stretch their legs or asked for food, or sometimes for no apparent reason. One former detainee recalled that keepers denied him blood-pressure medication and threatened to shoot him if he asked for it again.

In one of the prison buildings, female prisoners were crowded on the second floor to escape the Katrina floodwaters that had overtaken the first floor. “People crammed like sardines — it was horrible,” stated one inmate, who had been housed for a few weeks at the facility while awaiting trial. Some female inmates reported being forced to drink water from a garbage can as filth and feces piled up around them.

In response to charges that authorities mistreated prisoners after the hurricane, Orleans Parish Sheriff Marlin Gusman told CNN in an interview in October, “I make no apologies. It was tough. But we did it safely.” Denying claims that some prisoners were trapped for days after the storm, he stated, “We evacuated everyone out of this jail before the city was evacuated. That’s a fact.”

This is not the first time prisoners’ rights issues have surfaced in investigations of failures in the governmental response to Katrina.

In September, the international advocacy organization Human Rights Watch urged the Justice Department to conduct an investigation of the treatment of inmates during the catastrophe. The group alleged that Gusman had not initiated an evacuation of the prison until midnight on Monday, August 29, while other parishes had begun their evacuations on Saturday or Sunday. By that date, according to Human Rights Watch’s investigation, prison staff had completely abandoned one building on the compound, Templeman III, with more than 600 prisoners still inside.

The evacuation of the prisoners was not complete until Fri., Sept. 2, the group reported, and over three weeks after the storm, more than 500 inmates remained unaccounted for.

The ACLU is currently litigating a federal class-action lawsuit on behalf of an estimated 6,500 New Orleans prisoners who were left behind in the hurricane, claiming that the lack of an adequate evacuation plan violated prisoners’ civil rights.

As of early November, Orleans Parish Prison officials had not responded to the organization’s requests for information regarding the evacuation plans and any deaths that occurred at the facility after the hurricane. In a statement criticizing the non-response, Joe Cook, executive director of the ACLU of Louisiana said, “We need to know why Orleans Parish Prison fell into complete chaos while surrounding parishes managed to evacuate guards and prisoners to safety. Only then can we prevent this from happening again.”

Source: The NewStandard News (www.newstandardnews.net)

LAWSUIT ... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

company and in 2003 became the majority shareholder. The group changed its name to Geo Group in November 2003. Earlier this year, the state awarded the company with a contract to design, construct and operate a 1,500-bed prison in the Graceville Industrial Park. The $68 million facility will house medium-security and close-custody inmates, and is scheduled to open in 2007.

The contract was awarded by the same state agency that publicly rebuked the Geo Group earlier this year, concluding in an audit that Geo and CCA received “questionable contract concessions” and overbilled taxpayers by $12.7 million.

According to an audit by the Department of Management Services, the now-defunct Correctional Privatization Commission — which was to oversee private prison contracts in Florida — allowed the companies to bill for vacant positions and avoid minimal requirements for nurses, vocational trainers and teachers.

The commission also allowed inmate welfare funds to be used to cover chaplain and library services that the companies were required to provide. Both the commission and the two companies should share the blame, according to a state spokesman.

“There’s responsibility on both sides,” spokesman John Kuczwniak the The News Herald earlier this year.

Said Wright: “I really hate to say this, but there is no ‘best’ private corrections company. None of them really stands head-and-shoulders above the rest. They all kind of do the same thing: understaff their facilities so they can make a financial profit.”

Source: Miami News Herald

( Editor: Paul Wright receives mail at 972 Putney Road, # 251, Brattleboro, VT 05301. Telephone: 802-257-1342. Email: Paul pwright@prisonlegalnews.org
Prison Legal News Website - www.prisonlegalnews.org)
roughly a thousand people showed up in Lafayette Park across from the White House in Washington, DC on August 13th for the first national rally aimed at ending this country’s reliance on mass incarceration and obtaining better treatment for those behind bars. While the numbers were relatively small, the protest could mark an important step in bringing together a more unified movement calling for fundamental reforms of the nation’s criminal justice apparatus. Led by Montgomery, Alabama, radio personality Roberta Franklin and Friends and Families of the Incarcerated, the Journey for Justice to Washington was a true grassroots effort. While it picked up endorsements from a lengthy list of prison and drug reform organizations, including DRCNet, it didn’t pick up any big grants. Instead, local groups and individuals spent money from their own pockets to get to Washington. In Alabama, mothers of prisoners held fish fries to raise money to rent buses. David Losa, the brother of a man doing 25-to-life under California’s three-strikes law for possession of trace amounts of methamphetamine, rode his bicycle 3700 miles across the country to be there. New York City sent at least two busloads.

For those who persevered and arrived at Lafayette Park on Saturday morning, it was not so much the Promised Land as the inferno, with Washington’s notoriously steamy summer weather living up to its reputation. As sweating speakers orated in the blistering sun, demonstrators sought shelter beneath the shade of trees. But the rhetoric was as hot as the temperature as speaker after speaker blasted the system that makes America the most prison-friendly country in the world.

Roberta Franklin told the crowd how her crusade began with letters from women inmates in Alabama complaining about their lack of medical care. The letters and her involvement with the lawsuit that arose from them opened her eyes to the injustice of the system, she said. “I used to believe in this system,” Franklin said. Now, she said, “it’s my belief when good people... hear the story of America’s prisons, they’ll be disgusted.”

Eric Sterling, executive director of the Criminal Justice Policy Foundation shared with the crowd some perspectives on movement building. “We are already well along in building a movement,” he said, “and we need to understand what it is we are trying to do. We want to appeal to the vast mass of Americans because they will ultimately be the political support we need for the changes we want. If we do not do that, we will not succeed. We need to appeal to the common values of the American people, the things we all believe in, like fairness, equal opportunity, strong families, redemption. What we are trying to do is win over the American people,” Sterling insisted.

Part of the movement’s job, said Sterling, is to demolish the myths that power-holders use to maintain the status quo. “There is the myth that long sentences reduce crime through deterrence, but they don’t — they only destroy families. There is the myth of country club prisons, where in truth the prisons are unsafe and dangerous, with inadequate health care and rife with violence,” Sterling said as part of lengthy list of such myths.

Bryan Stevenson, an attorney who heads the Equal Justice Initiative of Alabama, excoriated tough sentencing policies. “We’ve represented dozens of people sentenced to life in prison without parole for stealing a bicycle, writing a bad check or simple possession of marijuana. And it’s that kind of sentencing policy that has resulted in the prison population growing from 200,000 to two million in the last 30 years,” he told the crowd.

“I was proud of what we accomplished,” Franklin told DRCNet. “A lot of prisoners’ family members got some hope. That’s important. But there were also alliances made. We had a real mixture; we had people there on behalf of those physically abused and medically neglected in prison. We had death penalty people, and we had people representing political prisoners. We had the drug people,” she said. “I will say this for prisons and the criminal justice system: They present so many issues you can form alliances around.”

David Losa arrives on time from his 3,000-mile bike ride for justice. Despite the heat and the less than huge turnout, organizers and attendees alike called the event a success. “This was a good start for better, larger marches to come,” said Garry Jones, a former state and federal corrections officer and founder of the Atlanta-based Advocate4Justice, a group dedicated to undoing mandatory minimum sentences and reintroducing parole in the federal system. “This is going to grow year after year. When I speak, I want people to know that it’s not the drug users but the drug dealers who are causing the violence in our communities. We can destroy the dealers by regulating drugs instead of banning them and taxing that income.
and putting that money back into reentry programs and back into our neighborhoods,” Jones told DRCNet.

During his Saturday speech, Jones challenged black ministers to hold politicians accountable. “If a politician wants to speak in your church, you should check his voting record,” Jones said. “Is he the same person who voted for those mandatory minimum sentences that are destroying black neighborhoods?” If so, Jones said, maybe the church should not implicitly endorse him by allowing him to use its pulpit as a platform.

As a correctional officer, Jones got to see the human face of the drug war close up. “We’ve been fighting this drug war for 20 years and they haven’t put a dent in the drugs. They came out with the mandatory minimums to get the so-called kingpins, but it’s the low-level guys — and their girlfriends — who get locked up,” he said. “I want to go back into those prisons with a message of hope and to tell those prisoners to start writing their congressmen about the parole bill. That bill offers hope for the prisoners, and that makes for a better, safer environment inside the prison — for the prisoners, for the guards, and for the smooth running of the institution.”

“I’m not disappointed in the turnout,” said Franklin. “The crowd in Washington tells me we could accomplish a lot more if we had more money and more support. Generally, these national demonstrations have big money and more support. Generally, these movements have big money and more support.”

“Unfortunately, sometimes the reformers fail and we saw that in part in Washington Saturday,” said Sterling. “Most of the reform organizations failed to provide any meaningful support for the demonstration.”

“There were more than a thousand people who wanted to be there bad enough to pay their own money,” said Franklin. “Imagine what we could have done if we had had the money to do mass mailings to get the word out. You know, I’m sick of going to conferences and hearing the same people say the same things and in the meantime, the prisons are getting fuller. We’ve had enough conferences. We know what the problem is. Now, it’s action time.”

As is to be expected in a movement encompassing diverse elements — prison reformers and prison abolitionists, people interested in drug policy and people interested in prison health care — there was little agreement on ultimate solutions. But there was agreement on working together despite differences. “We were not going to let our differences divide us,” said Nora Callahan, executive director of The November Coalition, a group advocating for freedom for drug war prisoners.

“I think the drug people and the prison people really came together in Washington,” said Dean Becker of the Drug Truth radio network. “They all really seem to get it. They see it’s going to require a combination of forces to get it done,” he told DRCNet.

It will get more complicated, Callahan predicted. “This is a young movement. Mass incarceration only started a heartbeat ago in the 1980s, and it has taken us some time to react. We began to work on the issues where we had been victimized. For the November Coalition and me, it was the war on drugs. For some else, it might be the death penalty. For others, it’s prison abolition. For a long time, each of us have been focused on our issue within the broader movement for criminal justice reform and not getting what we want. We realized we have to get together, and many grassroots leaders did get together in Washington.”

Plans are already afoot to turn Saturday’s rally into the basis for continuing collaboration among the various groups represented in Washington. “We are trying to form a national committee with representatives from each state,” said Franklin. “If we can become a true national movement, we can start to have an impact on things.” One possible action, Franklin said, was a national boycott of prison phone lines, whose extremely high rates led to charges of gouging what is literally a captive market. “If we got all the men and women to stay off the phones, maybe we could get some justice,” she mused. “And it’s something that both families and prisoners can participate in.”

Some participants in the Saturday rally are already expressing interest. “If I’m invited, I’d like to participate as a regional organizer,” said Julie Mormando of the JusticeWorks Community in New York City. “This is a grassroots movement largely organized by the people directly impacted, but they want to garner representatives from different states and cities, and when that happens, New York will be represented for sure,” she told DRCNet.

“This is the beginning of a much, much broader movement.”

That it is time to forge a broader coalition was a common notion. “Now we need to begin coming up with a common vision of a strategy for raising this issue to the level where the public becomes aware of the impact that this country’s criminal justice policies are having,” said Joseph “Jazz” Hayden, campaign director for Unlock the Block, part of the nationwide Right to Vote campaign, an effort to restore voting rights to people with felony records. Hayden helped organize two busloads of protestors from New York City for Saturday’s march.

“There will be another march,” said Callahan, “and it won’t be in August and Congress will be in session. We are looking at September 2007, we have already begun forming a working committee, and having a year to organize gives us time to create local activity that will bring progress long before we join together again. The first time I went to DC on a Journey for Justice there were 60 people. This time, there were 1,200. Next time, let’s have 250,000.”

With a first national committee meeting set for October, Franklin said the nascent coalition is looking to develop an alliance that can get things done. “We want that parole bill passed, that would be a terrific accomplishment,” she said. The crusade started in Montgomery appears to have created some ferment and awareness among the diverse groups working on prison issues in relative isolation, and Franklin is getting set to keep stirring the pot.

“You haven’t seen the last of me,” she warned. (Editor: Slightly edited for space)
Journey for Justice: FMI March on Washington
August 13, 2005: Lafayette Park, Washington, DC
Organized by Family Members & Friends of People Incarcerated

Amy Ralston, founder of the Can-Do Foundation (www.candoclemency.com), brought this display all the way from Los Angeles for the Friday evening DC March Reception. The display, titled “The Abduction of Motherhood”, is one of five handmade by the female inmates of FCI Pekin, Illinois — another hangs in the main hall of ‘Our House’ (see page 9).

No age limit on working for justice — members of TOPS, The Ordinary People Society (www.wearetops.org/)

“If you are tired of the medical and physical abuse of the incarcerated, tired of being disenfranchised, tired of mass incarceration and private prisons, tired of family members being robbed by phone companies, tired of the billion dollar prison industry, tired of fake politicians, tired of draconian drug laws, tired of children being treated as adults in the courtroom, tired of being wrongfully convicted, tired of corrupt officials in our criminal justice system, then this is the movement for you.” — Roberta Franklin, lead organizer of the DC March
Approximately 1000 people showed up for the March On Washington, DC, rallying together in solidarity despite the near-record 100-plus degree heat.

(Left) David Losa reaches the end of his historic 3000 mile Bicycle Journey for Justice from Santa Barbara, CA to Washington, DC and is immediately surrounded by the media (left). David’s Journey was sponsored by FACTS, Families To Amend California’s Three Strikes (www.facts1.com)

(Left) “We responded because the call came from the streets, it came from sister organizations from around the country. We responded because millions of caged men and women in America compelled us to take the next step.” — Geri Silva of Families Against California’s Three Strikes (FACTS)

(Right) Amy Ralston, former drug war prisoner and founder of Can-Do: Justice Through Clemency, displays some of the women prisoners she advocates for.

For more coverage of the FMI March on Washington, DC, visit www.journeyforjustice.org

Photos courtesy Nora Callahan, Amy Ralston, Sherry Swiney, Keith DeBlasio, Loretta Nall
Understanding your mission in building the movement

BY ERIC STERLING, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE POLICY FOUNDATION (WWW.CJPF.ORG)

(Editors: This article is a slightly condensed and edited version of Sterling’s speech given at the DC March, Saturday, August 13, 2005)

The goal of the movement is to win over the broad majority of the American people to support criminal justice or drug policy reform. To achieve this goal requires a strategy. Being able to carry out the strategy requires that we know what that strategy is.

Today I am not going to try laying out the specific elements of a strategy. But there is a fundamental problem we must understand and a fundamental goal we must understand.

The problem is that those who hold power in government and business and who profit from the status quo do not want change. And they don’t want to give up the power that we need to make the change. Our goal is justice for our loved ones, justice for our communities, justice for all of us.

Ordinary Americans must be won over to our cause. They need, over time, to be alerted, educated, inspired and involved in the process. We must win their hearts and their minds. And to do so, our movement must appeal to common values: fairness, equal opportunity, strong families, redemption and second chances, cost effectiveness, and prevention.

There are four roles any movement needs to have successfully filled. These four roles are all important. Sometimes there is conflict in a movement because people who are good in one role don’t appreciate the importance of the other roles:

The CITIZEN role emphasizes widely shared beliefs that the public and movement have in common. America’s values are consistent with our work for justice. They give us legitimacy.

The REBEL role puts the issues on the agenda through nonviolent action. They show how the government and powerholders violate public trust, and REBELS force society to face the problems the government’s approach has created.

The CHANGE AGENT works behind the scenes building coalitions, educating reporters. They redefine the problem to show how the government and powerholders violate widely held values. But the public is unaware of the problem. The problem is not yet a social issue. We are way past that stage. That might have been the situation in the 1980s when the Congress was using the media to create the picture of a crime epidemic, and prison population was growing rapidly. In those days, when prosecutors like Rudy Giuliani were running big drug cases, there was not much sympathy to low-level drug offenders being sent away with king-sentences.

In stage 2, opposition begins to grow. Protests and challenges to the powerholder institutions show that official channels aren’t fixing the problem. A social movement develops. This was the situation in the late 1980s and early 1990s as FAMM, The Sentencing Project, and Drug Policy Foundation started up. The U.S. Sentencing Commission started writing reports finding that mandatory minimums were creating more racial disparity in sentencing, but Commissioners couldn’t get Congress to fix the problem.

In stage 3, the public sees the victims’ faces. The 1994 crime bill had the “safety valve” to curb mandatory minimums in some cases. The Democrats tried to offer a more progressive anti-crime bill. The movement was growing. We learn about Kemba Smith and Dorothy Gaines.

In stage 4, there is a take off. There is usually a trigger event. There are dramatic actions. Action is taking place around the country. The problem is put on the national agenda. About 40 percent of the public oppose the current policies.

A trigger event in drug reform occurred when President Clinton commuted the sentences of Dorothy Gaines and Kemba Smith at Christmas 2000. In the medical marijuana movement, it is easier to see a series of trigger events. A key was the election of 1996 in California. Another was the report of the Institute of Medicine in March 1999. Another was the Raich decision in the 9th Circuit in December 2003, followed by a Supreme Court decision in November 2004 and June 2005.

In many respects we are mostly in Stage 4.

Stage 5 is one we are also in. People in the movement see the goals unachieved. They see the powerholders unchanged. People see fewer numbers at the demonstrations or the demonstrations are less frequent. Despair and frustration is felt. We see the intransigent Congress, and the Hinchey Amendment doesn’t get lots more votes this year than last year. We lose the medical marijuana case in the Supreme Court. More mandatory minimum bills are considered in the House Judiciary Committee.

Stage 6 is when we have a majority of public opinion. The majority supports medical

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
marijuana. The majority is opposed to ineffective sentencing. We are involving mainstream citizens and institutions. The newspaper editorial boards support us around the nation. Bills to repeal mandatory minimums are introduced.

Stage 7 is success. Large majorities oppose the current policy and support reform. They no longer fear our alternative. Some powerholders split off and change position. Powerholders propose minimal reforms, but the movement continues to demand social change. New laws and policies are enacted and implemented.

The “post success 8th stage” is critically important. It is then when we will push to extend our success.

We want to achieve not simply reform of prisons and the courts, but an education system that fails our kids and shuffles them off to hopelessness and illiteracy.

We want to reform the health care system that fails to adequately treat mental illness, emotional problems or metabolic problems that lead to delinquency and trouble.

We want to end drug prohibition that keeps the organized crime system in place, that keeps corrupt cops going, and that provides drugs to kids and troubled adults without any protections.

Those of you who have gathered today in the face of stage 5 despair are the heroes. You are out here on a hellishly hot day to face off with the powerholders to demand justice. You have the determination and grit to win. With a proper understanding of our jobs, with a well thought out strategy, with wise and proper leadership, we will win, and we are here today to see that we do win.

“Love and honor all people who suffer under repression. Know one’s deeper motives for doing this work, and continue to study history from diverse views. Be prepared for sacrifice of old ways of thinking and doing, and stay flexible ideologically. Identify white superiority as a dynamic feature of racist repression driving foreign and domestic policy. Act as if there will be no tomorrow, as if humanity hangs in the balance, and be scrupulously honest and scientific in consideration of developing new support for the human rights movement. Wherever you may live, be involved in your government.” — Nora Callahan, quoted from Light Among Shadows: A Celebration of Orlando Letelier, Ronni Karpen Moffitt, and Heroes of the Human Rights Movement. Copies available by request at MoreInfo@November.org.

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I do not want to shirk my responsibilities — except that, just what are my responsibilities? I mean, where does my life end and the life I share with everyone else in the subculture of prison begin? What can a “convict” do?

This morning on the way to the messhall, I heard a flock of birds overhead but didn’t look up. Almost a billion children will go to bed hungry and cold tonight.

Pondering that, it has occurred to me there are three things that are real: A loving God, human folly, and humor. Since the first two pass by my comprehension faster than an under-aged patron ignores a busboy at Hooters, I must do what I can with the third.

Unfortunately, due in large part to special interest groups, trying to negotiate the narrow straits of what’s acceptably funny nowadays is like trying to navigate through the Sargasso Sea of plastic toadstools in the middle of a bumper-pool table.

Meanwhile, in prison you have to have a sense of humor, or your sanity will last about as long as Luciano Pavorotti in the Puget Sound Fun Run.

In fact, if you ask me I’m pretty convinced humor is just as good for the soul as tuning into the 700 Club to watch Pat Robertson pray.
Lockdown America Revisited
A Conversation with Christian Parenti on Prisons, Policing, and the War on Terror
INTERVIEWED BY Bob Libal, DECEMBER 09, 2005

C
hristian Parenti is a writer for The Nation magazine and has authored several books including The Freedom: Shadows and Hallucinations in Occupied Iraq, recently available in paperback. His 1999 book, Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in an Age of Crisis, was a groundbreaking text on the rise of the prison and policing system in the United States.

I spoke with Parenti in Ossining, New York in August about the history of prisons, policing and how the criminal justice project has changed since his book was first published.

Bob Libal: It’s been over 5 years since Lockdown America was published. If you were to write a new preface to it, would you include anything new?

Christian Parenti: One would have to deal with the war on terror because that has changed the criminal justice project in many ways. It hasn’t completely transformed it, but it definitely reinvigorated it.

Right after Lockdown came out in 1999, it almost seemed for a moment that incarceration rates were starting to plateau. There was definitely a mainstream, elite rethink underway about the crackdown. This was indicated by editorials in the New York Times and by big mainstream networks that did whole series on the horrible conditions in prisons and over-incarceration — really quite good documentaries.

And then came September 11. Since 9/11, there has been this whole new discourse of national security and that has reinvigorated the criminal justice project and re-branded the project of domestic repression. Even though most people are not arrested on terror-related charges, the war on terror has shut down that developing mainstream critique of the whole repressive project.

Libal: To step back a moment, we’re here in Ossining, New York, the hometown of the Sing Sing prison. Sing Sing is one of the country’s oldest and most infamous prisons. Maybe it’s appropriate if we talk about how prisons became such a dominant factor in the lives of so many Americans?

Parenti: There are different causes at different times. The basic thing that I argued in Lockdown America, and would still argue today, is that policing and prisons in the United States, along with being about public safety, is also always about managing the contradictions of a class society that uses race and racism as its main ideological explanation for itself.

So that’s what prisons have always done — managed the exploited and excluded populations that capitalism produces naturally through crisis and produces artificially through policies that make people poor.

Libal: What was the thing that changed in the 1960s and 1970s that lead to the explosion in incarceration?

Parenti: What happened in the 60s and 70s is the whole political rebellion — the civil rights movement, the black power movement, the riots, the anti-war movement. And then very importantly the economic crisis that begins to take hold in the early 1970s.

The 1970s were years of class stalemate between the working class and the ruling class in the U.S. And the incarceration rates don’t actually go up dramatically in the 1970s. The first act in the big post-60s prison and policing build-up — because Lockdown America and the whole thesis of that book is not just about prisons, it’s about the whole repressive project. So the first thing you have in response to the riots in 1968, which was a particularly bad year of rioting, you get this massive federal crime bill which creates the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration which is this giant federal bureaucracy which starts channeling matching grants to states.

States that become willing to invest more in repression themselves will get more federal money. This leads to a whole retooling and an ideological upgrading of the American policing project.

That stalemate is broken by Reagan and Carter. Carter appoints Paul Volcker. Volcker under Reagan sends the economy into a recession by raising interest rates at the Federal Reserve dramatically. This is called the cold bath procession, and it was done intentionally to lower the expectations of the American working class — so that they would work harder for less, and so that their formal and informal political power could be smashed open.

And the primary way to do that was poverty and unemployment. So, poverty and unemployment were engineered in the early 80s. That helped drive down wages; unions were broken, expectations were broken, people started working harder for less. And then the economy could be expanded with deficit spending, which is exactly what Reagan did. But there is this perennial problem of what to do with the poor who were again very numerous and often showing up in the wrong places at the wrong times — like homelessness in major cities. Then you get the reengagement with the repressive project through the discourse of the war on drugs.

The war on drugs was also a component in the first stage of the crackdown in the 60s, so you get this reengagement with the war on drugs in the 1980s with Reagan. And then you get another series of federal crime bills and throughout this — even though most law enforcement is handled at the state level — the discursive tone was set at the federal government by the federal government through federal programs that rewarded states that would spend money and change laws so as to beef up repression and punish states that did not go along with it by not giving them money.

So, that’s the second part of it. And now we have this third generation which is really the war on terror which means that there is always more money for repression and all the old projects of controlling people who do not have jobs and show up in the wrong places at the wrong time, controlling immigrants. All that stuff gets reinvigorated by the discourse and funding of the war on terror.

Libal: There is an interesting debate about whether prisons are good for economic growth. Most of the recent evidence shows that prisons are bad for local economic growth — they slow long-term job growth in rural communities especially. Is this an argument that could be utilized to slow the growth of this industry?

Parenti: In Lockdown America, I took issue with the version of the Prison Industrial Complex argument that said that prisons are just about creating jobs. I said, no, this is about maintaining the contradictions of capitalism. The social contradiction is that capitalism needs poverty and creates poverty naturally and through policy, yet is always

Continued on next page
Cops and Harm Reduction Hotties, Oh My!

BY SILJA J.A. TALVI

You wouldn’t have expected it during any other week, but for a few days in mid-November, pot smoke wafted throughout the hallways and meeting rooms of the Westin Hotel in Long Beach, California.

Upscale hotels aren’t typical hangouts for barefoot young hippies, recovering addicts, or a handful of self-described “harm reduction hotties” toting their own 12-month calendar and information about how to minimize disease and other damage from injection drug use.

But here they were, rubbing elbows with retired police chiefs, academics, addiction specialists, attorneys, non-profit directors, religious leaders and formerly incarcerated prisoners.

The occasion? The 2005 International Drug Policy Reform Conference organized by the Drug Policy Alliance. With nearly 1,000 registrants from all over the United States and many parts of Europe, Latin America and Canada, the event offered attendees nearly 75 sessions over three days, on topics such as harm reduction psychotherapy, rogue anti-drug task forces, and cutting edge cannabis research in Canada.

The group causing the biggest buzz, by far, were the representatives of LEAP, Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, which calls for an end to the drug war altogether. In the three years since the group’s founding, the not-for-profit has cultivated an impressive advisory board with the likes of former New Mexico Governor Gary Johnson; Joseph McNamara, San Jose’s former police chief; Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell; former Seattle police chief Norm Stamper and US District Court Judge John Kane.

Years ago, police officers would only have mingled with this crowd as undercover agents, but here, burly LEAPers were treated like celebrities in their own right, easy to spot because of their buzz cuts, cowboy hats and/or extremely large lettering on their brightly colored t-shirts: “Cops Say Legalize Drugs. Ask Me Why.”

A LEAP panel discussion yielded shocking stories from the drug war front lines. Admissions from LEAP Director and former New Jersey State police lieutenant Jack Cole, a 26-year veteran and narc, surprised even this drug war-savvy crowd. “We lied regularly about the numbers of drugs we were seizing,” Cole said, explaining that if his fellow officers were lucky enough to bust someone for one ounce of cocaine, they’d immediately look for a cutting agent to double the amount of the seizure. And if a seizure’s street value stood at $1,500, the cops would bump it up to $20,000. “Who’s to question it,” Cole asked.

Other panelists spoke of leaving the profession because they couldn’t stomach the lies or the corruption, especially when they noticed fellow cops striking deals with the people they were supposed to arrest, selling and smuggling drugs, and buying cars, trips and multi-million dollar homes with their proceeds.

Garry Jones, a retired senior lieutenant who has worked in prisons across the country, including the federal system, recalled instances where people would come to prison on visiting day just to buy drugs from the inmates. “My [colleagues] were bringing drugs inside the prisons, making big money … There was no way to escape drugs in prison. You couldn’t do it yesterday and you can’t do it today,” he said.

Jones said that he was particularly troubled to see ever-increasing numbers of African American men being locked up, often on drug-related offenses.

In this session and many others, plenty of talk was devoted to the plight of the poor people and people of color who make up the vast majority of American jail and prison populations. The few formerly incarcerated men in attendance echoed the sentiment that it felt good to hear so many people acknowledging the seriousness of the problem.

But if there’s one thing that prison teaches longtime inmates, it’s that there’s no point to talking if you can’t back it up. People who have been locked up tend to have little patience for bullshit, even if it’s well-intentioned and comes from a gentle medical marijuana activist selling colorful, close-up pictures of fat buds, or from red-eyed college students passing joints on the hotel patio.

“Building a movement with integrity has to be about more than weed… There are a lot of people advocating on our behalf, but are we allowed to come and sit at that table with them?” — DORSEY NUNN, PROGRAM DIRECTOR OF LEGAL SERVICES FOR PRISONERS WITH CHILDREN, AND CO-FOUNDER OF ALL OF US OR NONE.

“Building a movement with integrity has to be about more than weed,” says Dorsey Nunn during the conference’s only session by and about the formerly incarcerated. Nunn, a former crack addict and prisoner, is now the program director of Legal Services for Prisoners with Children, and co-founder of an advocacy group, All of Us or None.

“There are a lot of people advocating on our behalf,” he said, “but are we allowed to come and sit at that table with them?” Nunn’s question was straightforward and to the point, but the sentiment is still relatively new within the drug policy reform movement.

Just as the drug policy reform movement has benefited from the insight and visible presence of LEAPers, so, too, can it be made more powerful and effective if it creates more seats at the table for the men and women who have lived through this brutal war, and experienced it from the inside out.

Silja J.A. Talvi is a senior editor at In These Times, an investigative journalist and essayist with credits in many dozens of publications nationwide, including The Nation, Salon and the Christian Science Monitor. She is at work on a book about women in prison.

Lockdown … Continued from page 21

thwarted by poverty because the poor organize. And, even when they don’t organize, they can rebel in unorganized fashions. They at least undermine the legitimacy of the system and offend the sensibilities of the moneyed class. So, they have to be managed.

And that’s the primary thing that the whole repressive project is and was about. Now to the extent that it can also stimulate economic growth somewhere, well, that’s great for all the interests that make profits off of that.

That becomes the belief, whether or not it’s true, of local boosters and the levels of towns and states. Because all they ever hear trickling down from the high priests of political discourse from Washington, DC all the way down to the local papers is that this works.

Libal: What do you see as the hope for rolling back the repressive project in the future?

Parenti: I still have the same hope that I had before, that the war on drugs has gotten so broad and pulled in so many people that experience starts overriding ideology. So many people have enough real experience with criminal justice to not fall prey to the fear-mongering of the media and the ideology and discourse that come out of the media.

Bob Libal is a student/youth organizer for Grassroots Leadership’s Not With Our Money! Campaign. He can be reached at bob@notwithourmoney.org.
Cannabis for PTSD
To help treat returning Iraqi combat soldiers, California’s Dr. Tod Mikulya gave this online advice to a returning Iraq War vet for coping with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome or PTSD:

“Medically, cannabis is the treatment of choice for PTSD but definitely would spell the end of your military career. If you elect not to medicate with cannabis, the regular exercise regimen - avoidance of drugs and alcohol and a specialized debriefing - is the least worst response to this chronic psychiatric disorder.”

Source: www.ccrmg.org/journal/05spr/opinion.html#mik

Appalachian seniors charged with drug-dealing
The Associated Press reports on a growing problem of senior citizens selling their prescription medications to make ends meet. Floyd County (KY) jailer Roger Webb told AP that seniors have a ready market for their prescription pills, especially painkillers, and some may be succumbing to the temptation of illegally selling their medications.

“When a person is on Social Security, drawing $500 a month, and they can sell their pain pills for $10 apiece, they’ll take half of them for themselves and sell the other half to pay their electric bills or buy groceries,” Webb said.

The predictable response by local authorities: lock ‘em up!

Since April 2004, the anti-drug task force Operation UNITE has charged more than 40 people who are 60 or older with selling drugs in the mountains of eastern Kentucky, including 87-year-old Dottie Neeley. In a telephone interview from jail, the 4-foot 8-inch Neeley told AP that she suffers from emphysema and asthma, and uses oxygen daily. Neeley faces 10 years in prison if convicted of trafficking in prescription drugs.

Pulaski man cuts his wrists in court
A Pulaski man slashed his wrists in a federal courtroom in Roanoke (VA) on August 17, 2005 after pleading guilty to drug charges, and officials say the blade he used was so small it could not be detected in a pat-down search.

John Timothy Underwood, 38, had just pleaded guilty to conspiracy to distribute more than 50 grams of methamphetamine plus two counts of carrying a firearm in relation to a drug trafficking crime when he nonchalantly reached into the front pocket of his jail uniform and made a rubbing motion at each of his wrists, said supervisory deputy U.S. Marshal Ron Donelson.

Two courtroom security officers almost immediately noticed the blood, witnesses said, and stepped forward to clamp the wounds and act as human tourniquets. Underwood was taken by medics to Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital, where he was treated and released.

Iraqi heroin abuse is soaring
According to IRIN News Service, there is a rising number of Iraqi addicts who also work as dealers to make money and finance their expensive habit. When they can’t sell enough heroin to finance their next fix, many resort to stealing from shops instead. The Ministry of Health has warned that drug abuse is rising steadily among men and women of all ages in Iraq, especially in the capital Baghdad and in the south of the country.

Many consumers of heroin and cocaine say they have been traumatized by the increasing cycle of political violence in Iraq as Islamic insurgents step up their fight against the US-led coalition which invaded the country in 2003 to depose former president Saddam Hussein. And drug pushers have also found a lucrative market amongst soldiers in the US-led occupation forces. They report strong demand from Italian troops in particular.

“There has been a huge increase in the consumption of drugs since last year,” said Kamel Ali, director of the Ministry of Health's drug control program. “The numbers have doubled. In most cases the users are youths who have become addicted and are now working as drug dealers under pressure from the traffickers in order to keep themselves supplied,” he said. According to Ali, the number of registered addicts in suburban Baghdad has more than doubled over the past year, rising to over 7,000 from 3,000 in 2004.

The Ministry of the Interior said police had captured 45 cars carrying packages of smuggled heroin over the past 15 months. Their drivers face life imprisonment or even the death penalty, if convicted. But stiff penalties for drug dealing are no longer an effective deterrent.

IRIN News ([www IRINnews org] is a United Nations news and information service, a project of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

November Coalition - The Razor Wire www.november.org
No mother should ever have to bury her child, ever. Most folks would think that was the worst pain a human heart could bear. But they’d be wrong. Far worse pain comes from knowing your child was betrayed and mindlessly ground up by the government you’ve trusted to serve and protect.

In *So Many Tears*, Teresa Aviles tells the heart-wrenching story of how the War on Drugs took away her first-born child, Isidro. Implicated in a federal drug conspiracy, Isidro was sucked into the maw of the criminal justice nightmare and sentenced to 26 years for a first-time non-violent drug law violation, destined never to return to the arms of his loving family.

Arrested with no drugs, money or evidence of any sort, and convicted on the questionable word of a paid government informant, Isidro was eight years into his sentence when he was taken deathly ill. Teresa tells of being saddled by the sickening frustration resulting from communications with an unfeeling bureaucracy while just trying to get information and help her ailing son.

Even now this mother still doesn’t have any real answers. Isidro’s death certificate, written by US Bureau of Prison officials, still states he was a White Male who died of AIDS.

This book is an unflinching look at the gritty reality of life in the housing projects of the Bronx, New York City, and a wake-up call about the racism and classism still alive and well in the streets of America. Having grown up in comfortable white suburbia in the Midwest, I feel almost incapable of critiquing this story, but perhaps that’s the strength of this emotion-stirring book: its ability to hold any reader spellbound by the awful misfortune of one family.

I challenge anyone of any race, color or creed who defends mass incarceration as a response to drugs and crime in America to read and experience *So Many Tears*. You won’t be disappointed with your new understanding of incarceration’s social-damage side effects.

Teresa Aviles vowed on her son’s deathbed that she would devote her life to ending the injustice of the War on Drugs, and she fights tirelessly still.

Teresa has been a steadfast volunteer with the November Coalition since that dreadful day in July 1998 when her son died mysteriously. Every year she organizes demonstrations, sponsors a Summer Picnic and hosts a Christmas Party for local children of incarcerated parents, all in honor of her fallen son, Isidro Lamont Aviles.

*So Many Tears* is available from Amiaya Entertainment LLC, PO Box 1275, New York, NY 10159, (212) 946-6565, and online at www.amiayaentertainment.com

You can read more about Teresa and her work at www.november.org/Volunteers/NY/TeresaAviles/
Project Welcome Home

In 1998, Gale Sky Edeawo accepted an invitation from Linda Hill of the Savannah Runaway program to address a group of youth and employ her literacy coaching skills to help them utilize writing as a tool for coping with the frustrations of their lives.

Edeawo discovered that many of their difficulties stemmed less from hardcore delinquency on behalf of the youth themselves than from the fact that many of their parents were incarcerated.

The problem was bad enough when the imprisoned parent was a father no longer able to provide for his family; but it was far worse when the absent parent was a single mother no longer able to shelter, guide, or nurture her children.

In fact, an estimated 200,000 children have mothers in jail and more than a million have incarcerated fathers.

Attempting to help break the cycle of children losing their mothers to prison, and women in general losing control of their lives to conditions likely to lead to prison, Edeawo joined a volunteer project to work with women inmates at the Chatham County Sheriff Complex.

The life skills counseling she offered women behind the bars evolved, in January 2001, into an extended referral service called Project Welcome Home for women exiting prison and reentering society.

"Project Welcome Home was actually created in Cell Block 2-C of the Chatham County Jail with the assistance of the female inmates who participated in my life skills class," says Edeawo.

Protest on the Beach

At least twice a year, Rachel Morton (pictured above in black tee), November Coalition Volunteer from Laguna Beach, CA, joins with Orange County NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws) for their “Rallies Against The Failing War On Drugs”. Displays and banners are spread out across the beach and boardwalk, educating the public about Drug War Injustice.

For more on Rachel’s activism, visit www.november.org/Volunteers/CA/RachelMorton/
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ormer Seattle police chief Norm Stamper's new book (Breaking Rank, from Nation Books) dares to speak the ugliest truths and inbred dangers of America's law enforcement system.

Chutzpah is one of my favorite Yiddish words, perhaps best translated as "brazeness" or "unmitigated gall." Stamper isn't a Jewish man, but chutzpah is something that he embodies. And he embodies it in spades.

Stamper didn't have to work hard to cultivate his chutzpah. He had it when his father was beating him as a child and he resisted the abuse. He had it when he decided to make the leap from working at a humble pet hospital in National City to be a cop. He had it when he had the nerve to propose the idea of "community policing" as the eventual chief of police in San Diego. He had it when he had the nerve to propose that domestic violence was so serious an issue in Seattle that it deserved a police unit all to itself. And Stamper had chutzpah when he was willing to open his powerful new book with a letter to former Tacoma Police Chief David Brame, who killed his battered wife and himself in front of their two children.

That's just the beginning of this groundbreaking book. Not only does Stamper call for the legalization of drugs and prostitution, he goes to great and personal lengths to highlight the paramilitaristic, racist, homophobic and sexist threads woven throughout the fabric of American law enforcement. But Stamper is always careful to talk about the exceptions to those threads.

When we met in person for an interview, I admit to watching to see if Stamper's body language matched the words coming out of his mouth. Not only did the body language and the message match, but the joint effect of intensity and integrity is one I come across infrequently, at best, in my daily life.

If there's one skill that I can lay claim to, it's that I'm used to truly observing people as I'm interviewing or interacting with them. I'm particularly accustomed to watching cops and other people in law enforcement and corrections very, very carefully, to see if their gestures and facial expressions sync up with their utterances. Often, they do not.

It shouldn't be a mystery that most folks in uniform are not speaking as individuals; they are speaking as members of a force far greater than them. That force has the power to revoke their livelihood in a real way.

Retired and living in the San Juan Islands, Stamper isn't trying to get political props, or to move forward in his career. He's been there, done that.

Consider this: when he realized his own emotionally abusive tendencies toward the women in his life, Stamper not only went into therapy, but took the extra step to contextualize his patterns. He realized the same patterns were repeated by many men from all walks of life — the same kinds that eventually led Brame to his lethal course of action and destruction.

He doesn't ask for the reader's sympathy. The descriptions of his own abusive patterns are hardly sympathy inspiring. But Stamper gets real in order to try to get other men, including cops, thinking about the commonality of abusive behavior toward women.

"I didn't do any of that for purpose of soul-cleansing," Stamper told me. "I had come to terms with what I had been ashamed of well before writing it out. And when I came to the moment of writing about all of this, I had to think about how personal [I wanted] to get ... I've made a point of explaining to other police officers that you need to know yourself. You need to know where your shadows lie and what are those shadows concealing."

I asked Stamper about what happened at the WTO demonstrations. I spent the entire duration of the now-historic 1999 WTO demonstrations on the streets, reporting and photographing. I waded into the fray informed about the political issues involved, but without a strong partisan filter. By the end of that week, I was neither a fan of the so-called anarchist Black Bloc nor the Seattle Police Department (SPD).

In particular, I was outraged by the SPD's heavy-handed, often brutal, handling of the tens of thousands who had gathered to protest the specter of corporate globalization — to say nothing of the hundreds simply caught up in the fray as innocent bystanders. I told Stamper as much. His response surprised me because it went beyond even what's in his book, Breaking Rank (Nation Books).

"We blew it, on Tuesday morning, when we started to gas non-violent demonstrators," he says. "That was unfair, unjust and inhumane. We believed in the decision at the time. We thought, 'what choice do we have?'" Stamper's rationale then, as he explains, was that if ambulances could not get through in the event of an emergency, he needed to do something about it. The extremism of the response is one that Stamper is no longer comfortable with.

"I am clearly responsible for the decision," he told me. "And I'm sorry for that decision. It was the wrong decision and I should have vetoed it." None of this actually fixes what happened during those few days, but it is an unexpected admission. Stamper got me thinking about politicians (plus other people in power) and how hard it is to apologize when something's been done wrong. The fingers are always pointed elsewhere.

Come to think of it, many folks do it in their daily lives, even over the most trivial of mistakes.

Stamper breaks this pattern by pointing the finger inward — and, by extension, explaining the mindset of some of the more unhealthy men and women in the ranks. He also gives plenty of props where props are due, never downplaying or glossing over what is, indeed, one of the toughest and most dangerous jobs in the nation. The power of the book is in all of this. Breaking Rank is not an easy thing, and I, for one, am grateful that Stamper had the courage to do it.

Silja J.A. Talvi is an award-winning journalist and columnist for Evergreen Monthly, and this article appeared in the November 2005 issue. Her email address is sisu@well.com.
Not too long ago our city re-wrote the drug laws to benefit the elite. Unfortunately, our community is one that advocates and encourages drug use for college students and the elite, but promotes moving poor people into U.S. labor camps for the same offenses. The permanent residents and children around the college at times don’t feel free to go outside because of the massive amount of drug use locally.

It was that way when I lived around the campus around four decades ago with no police intervention. Recently, when the complaints became so numerous about the drug use, the mayor called off the police and created a public policy that if police were called more than three times on these college residents, they would have to move.

The punishment is clear. Move the party next door! Or, cynically, why don’t the law-abiding citizens move? If the main idea was to advocate, promote and normalize drug use among politicians, doctors, lawyers, dentists, engineers and other elite members of our society without consequences, the idea became real.

But the ‘idea’ also included pursuing and prosecuting poor Americans, burdening them with walking dossiers for the same exact offenses, and making it clear that our country’s drug control policies have failed and been turned into a program of sociology. So why should Americans support drug laws, and what exactly are they arresting these poor people for?

Is arresting and using an approach of hard-line sentencing against poor people for drug use justifiable when it’s implemented by some of the very elite people prosecutors and legislators — who are advocating drug use and protecting people from being arrested for the same activity on the basis of class privilege? Richard Hellstrom, Lexington, Kentucky

Perhaps you know more about this than me. After reading the umpteenth story about poor Martha Stewart and how her electronic monitor and other restrictions of your life of privilege and power? Is the media simply trying to make you look bad with your overblown complaints about the electronic monitor chafing your legs or your inability to comply with the modest restrictions of your house arrest? Have your business advisers told you to lay off the “social activism” stuff?

Needless to say, if you have forgotten your commitment to reform and gone back to decorating and cooking recommendations, we are all the losers here.

Jack R. Lebowitz (Editor: If you’re patient with her website’s process, you, too, can congratulate Martha, repeat Lebowitz’s questions, or ask some questions of your own at www.marthastewart.com)

I hope all is well. It has been a bit hectic around here too. I have finally finished writing all the members of both Houses of Congress (more than 535 letters) to be sure that they are aware of HR 3072. Now, my colleagues and I are generating letters to get our family members and friends involved in our plight.

We are sending out hundreds of letters a week to be signed and forwarded to the appropriate members of the House and the Senate. We also encourage everyone to make multiple copies and share those letters with others in their area. The multiplying factor should easily be times three.

Love, Glenn

I am in custody for drugs, a hearsay conspiracy conviction that is so bogus. I’ve been an addict for 20 years, and that’s all I’ve been — a buyer/user. I’m facing a minimum of 20 years to life for talking on the phone to this guy who brought in 20 others.

As for me, I do have a problem and it’s drugs. I’m 44 now, and I’m through with it. Now that I’m facing a long time in prison, I just pray to God that I will one day reunite with my two children who are going through hard times now. It’s been two years since I’ve seen them and every time I talk to them on the phone they always ask me, “Daddy, when are you coming home?”

I feel so crappy and I tell them, “One day, honey.” I don’t know really how to tell them and maybe you folks can help me out. I don’t have any money to give, but I really like the stuff your newspaper has. I have a few stamps for a copy or two. I really thank you for your time and attention. Much mahalo and God bless

Razor Wire.

Robert Lum

### How to communicate with The November Coalition

- **Letters:** We receive lots of mail. Rest assured that we read every one of them, but we simply do not have the time or staff to actually respond to more than a few.
- **Legal cases:** We cannot offer you legal representation or advice. Please do not send us your legal work unless specifically requested.
- **Prisoner profiles (The WALL):** Please continue to submit your stories, but if at all possible, send us a picture along, preferably of a prison visit with your loved ones. Stories should be concise, factual, and include personal background such as age, family status etc.

Although The November Coalition staff endeavors to verify the accuracy of WALL stories, written by the prisoners themselves, we assume no responsibility for their content. Credentialed media can be provided with documentation and family contacts if they wish to research a story. To do so, please contact media@november.org.

- **Articles for Razor Wire & Internet:** Editorial should be no more than 800 words; articles no more than 1,200 words. Submitted items should be typed & double spaced, or neatly printed by hand if you don’t have access to a typewriter. Please limit the use of bold, italics, underline, or other special formatting.

- **Artwork:** We need your cartoons and sketches, please! Let your creativity and imagination run wild.

- **Donations:** We will gladly accept postage stamps from prisoners and others, as well as monetary donations.

### Dear President George W. Bush:

Hi, my name is Raymond. I have two brothers, I love them so much. I love my mom and dad so much. But we are so sad because our dad is in jail. We all need our dad. My family is Christian, and the Lord knows what are you going to do.

Please Mr. President, sign the November Coalition thing so my dad can come home. It is going to be four years without my father. I am going to be 13 years old. My brothers are 10 and five, and he’s always asking when is daddy coming home.

Can you imagine three years without your father? Please sign the November Coalition so he can come home. God Bless you and your family.

Sincerely, Raymond

( Editor: Raymond, we’ll do our best to deliver your poignant plea for justice to the President.)

### Dear November Coalition,

My name is Lynda. And I am 9 years old. I have a brother named Jorge. He is 10 years old. Since I have been really sad because I do not get to see him often. I really want him to come because I miss him a lot and sometimes when I think about him I start to cry. I think that when he comes home I might have a puppy. I also think that we will move to Colombia and raise money to buy a farm there. I want us to have a good life.

Lynda

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> [www.marthastalks.com](http://www.marthastalks.com) But that site seems down, so I went to the corporate site and posted (08/26/05) the following on the “welcome home” thread after much difficulty (this is one of the most difficult to use and read forums I have seen, probably deliberately that way):

> **Are you still an activist, Martha?**

> Let me first say I am sympathetic to your plight. However, what made me that way were your statements made from Alderson in which you recognized that many other women less well-off and powerful than you, were being unfairly incarcerated, mostly because of our trumped-up drug laws.

> I read on reform sites how you met and spoke with women associated with the November Coalition who befriended you in your hour of need, and how you hoped to advocate for them and other women in similar dire straits once you got out.

> What happened? Is the media simply not reporting your efforts, or have you simply forgotten what you learned behind the razor wire and gone back to your life of privilege and power? Is the media simply trying to make you look bad with your overblown complaints about the electronic monitor chafing your legs or your inability to comply with the modest restrictions of your house arrest? Have your business advisers told you to lay off the “social activism” stuff?

> Needless to say, if you have forgotten your commitment to reform and gone back to decorating and cooking recommendations, we are all the losers here.

> Jack R. Lebowitz

> **November Coalition so he can come home. God Bless you and your family.**

> **Sincerely, Raymond**

> (Editor: Raymond, we’ll do our best to deliver your poignant plea for justice to the President.)
Book Review: 7 Tools to Beat Addiction

By Stanton Peele, Ph.D., J.D. (Three Rivers Press)

Reviewed by Chuck Armsbury, Razor Wire Senior Editor

Stanton Peele has been investigating, thinking, and writing about addiction since 1969. His first bombshell book, Love and Addiction, appeared in 1975. Its experiential and environmental approach to addiction revolutionized thinking on the subject by indicating that addiction is not limited to narcotics, or to drugs at all, and that addiction is a pattern of behavior and experience which is best understood by examining an individual’s relationship with his/her world.

7 Tools to Beat Addiction presents a refinement of Peele’s lengthy and rich experience in professional counseling work. This book takes a distinctly nonmedical approach. It views addiction as a general pattern of behavior that nearly everyone experiences in varying degrees at one time or another.

Viewed in this context, addiction is not unusual, although it can grow to overwhelming and life-defeating dimensions. It is not essentially a medical problem, but a problem of life. It is frequently encountered and very often overcome in people’s lives — the failure to overcome addictions is the exception.

“Addiction is a way of coping with life, of artificially attaining feelings and rewards people feel they cannot achieve in any other way. As such, it is no more a treatable medical problem than unemployment, lack of coping-skills, or degraded communities and despairing lives. The only remedy for addiction is for more people to have the resources, values and environments necessary for living productive lives. More treatment will not win our badly misguided war on drugs. It will only distract our attention from the real issues in addiction.”

Peele’s approach puts him at odds with the American medical model of alcohol/drug abuse as a disease — one that is gaining acceptance worldwide. Everything about the disease approach — separating people and their substance use from their ongoing lives, not recognizing that addiction fades in and out with life conditions, viewing it as biogenetic in origin — is wrong, which Stanton strivings to show throughout this book and website.

His experiential, environmental approach leads to a range of radical ideas for approaching seemingly insoluble social problems concerning drugs, alcohol, and behavior. For example:

- a science of addiction geared towards brain mechanisms, irrespective of life problems and experiences, is barking up the wrong tree and is doomed to fail;
- self-cure is standard and occurs as people come to grips with the problems, people, and patterns in their lives;
- as they do so, formerly problem users frequently learn to use the substance moderately, or at least with fewer problems;
- treatment succeeds by helping people navigate their existence rather than by teaching them that they have an inbred, life-long malady;
- most drinking and other substance use are not pathological;
- how children learn to view substances largely determines whether they get stuck in drinking/drug use as a life-long destructive habit;
- a completely negative educational approach to alcohol, as well as drugs, increases the likelihood children will encounter substance use problems;
- the notion that substance use is a disease is simply the wrong way to prevent problems and to treat problems when these appear;
- many activities which are correctly viewed as addictions — like compulsive shopping, gambling, sex — have incorrectly come to be treated as diseases;

one wrongheaded result of the whole disease conception of addiction is that society now often excuses people for criminal behaviors that are labeled as addictions or diseases (e.g., PMS, post-traumatic shock, post-partum depression in addition to alcoholism);

while it is correct instead to firmly punish drug- and alcohol-related misbehavior, the punishment of simple drug use — so-called “zero-tolerance” — is irrational and has been proven to be an expensive failure;

- non-moralistic policies, education, and treatment that recognizes that people may sometimes use drugs or alcohol, but treatment that also engages people in productive activity and assists people to overcome difficulties in their lives, will succeed better — and certainly disrupt society and the lives of users less — than our current policies and treatments.

Source: www.peele.net, selected and edited for emphasis and space here.
Rad Radio the Rave

It should surprise no one that low power and local radio broadcasting is on the rise and finding success across the country. These small to medium-range stations offer a menu of commentary and music that stimulates thought, encourages dialogue and nurtures the democratic experiment called the USA. In turn, listeners hungry for alternative views and news have been supporting low budget, independent radio free of the corporate censorship rules dominating major broadcasters.

In Spokane, Washington, Thin Air Community Radio (KYRS-FM) “serves the Spokane area with progressive perspectives, filling needs that other media do not, providing programming to diverse communities and unserved or underserved groups.

Thin Air programming shall place an emphasis on providing a forum for non-corporate and neglected perspectives and discussions on important local, national and global issues, reflecting values of peace, social, economic and environmental justice, human rights, democracy, multiculturalism, freedom of expression and social change.

Thin Air’s arts, cultural, and music programming shall cover a wide spectrum of expression from traditional to experimental and reflect the diverse cultures Thin Air serves. Thin Air shall strive for spontaneity and program excellence, both in content and technique. (Source: Thin Air’s mission statement, online at www.kyrs.org)

For the last few years November Coalition issues have been aired occasionally on independent radio. Throughout year 2005, Dean Becker for the Drug Truth Network, this radio show called “Cultural Baggage — The Unvarnished Truth,” has interviewed live (by telephone) the Coalition’s executive director, Nora Callahan. Becker’s show is produced at the Pacifica Studios of KPFT, Houston (TX), and has affiliates throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Sharing Thin Air Radio’s commitment to “a forum for neglected perspectives and discussions,” Becker starts each of his shows by saying, “I report the unvarnished truth about the pharmaceutical, banking, prison, and judicial nightmare that feeds on eternal drug war. And I don’t condone or encourage the use of any drugs, legal or illegal.” Here are a few question and answer exchanges between Becker and Callahan in an early-2005 broadcast:

Becker: Welcome to Cultural Baggage. Nora, tell the folks a little bit about yourself and your organization.

Callahan: Well, the November Coalition was founded in 1997 to represent and advocate for the prisoners of the drug war. Myself, I’m the sister of a prisoner of the drug war. My brother asked me, along with other prisoners, if we couldn’t start an organization that would be the voice of the drug war prisoner and join in the other coalitions that involved mostly stuffed shirts. We were more like the victims of the drug war. And so we’re not “reform from the center;” we’re “reform from the bottom.”

Becker: Nora, I know that in many states, certainly in many municipalities in Texas, there is a raging controversy about the crime labs and their part in sending people to prison — that many times the people doing these tests don’t even rinse the containers before the next test.

Callahan: Well, that’s the same problem, if you look at it; it’s the same problem of all of the prison abuse and the weird culture. What happens when you lose a system of lawful checks and balances that’s called the “rule of law.” It is what is the definition of justice. That’s the definition of justice, that we would follow legal procedures. But when you have people in custody and they’re not following legal procedures and being abusive, when it’s a crime lab and nobody is looking, it allows for so much abuse. And this is what we have to stop, is this constant moving away from the rule of law. The definition of justice is that we follow rules. The other is lawlessness; and there is lawlessness in these crime labs, yes.

Becker: Indeed. Nora, I want to ask you about this, and I don’t have a lot of stats involved; but this afternoon I caught from the Dallas Morning News a report that prison rape has increased by 160% in the last 4 years, and they say that’s a sign of vigilance. What is your thought in that regard?

Callahan: Overcrowding. If you put people in cages like animals, you are going to get animal behavior. It is used as a system of control. You know — be good, do this, do that, or you might get harmed and it could be rape. It is a problem. I do think that in some prisons, it’s not as bad as in others; and each prison needs community oversight. Again, if you hide people away and nobody is looking — good isn’t going to come out of that. We are supposed to have an open society, in part because that’s what keeps us in check. You don’t close corners. You don’t put people into cages and closets and nobody is looking in. It opens the door for abuse, and it is something odd about human nature. If you give a set of people within another group of people absolute power over these people, they will abuse it. The Stanford Experiment of the late-60s long ago proved that.

Professor Philip Zimbardo took college kids and set them up and said, “Okay, you’re prisoners; you’re guards.” And within hours, the abuse started. They had to stop the experiment quickly. The abuse — in fact the college — came under fire for allowing as much abuse of student on student. It occurred so quickly when they went into role playing prisoner and guard.

Becker: Nora, one last question. Now we are both well aware of the fact that there’s 2 — almost 2.1 million of our fellow citizens in prisons, the vast majority of them there for drug charges. What has been your observation? Is this going to change without the involvement of Joe Citizen out there? The one’s who understand the problem?

Callahan: No, because historically it doesn’t change. People in power abuse people that have no political power. The only way that it is going to change is if everyone assumes that political power as the 4th branch of government, “we the people,” and learn to use our voices and demand change, demand justice. Because the war on drugs — we can’t afford the injustice anymore. We’re going broke. Not to mention financially, that’s only part of it. The emotional damage, the long-term societal damage of locking up this many people.

Becker: It is indeed, and such a waste of people and money and capability. Where we could invest that money in other more worthwhile endeavors.

Callahan: That’s right. Schools, not prisons.

Becker: And you make a strong point with it; and once again, I want to thank you for being with us.

Callahan: Okay, thank you.

Holler to the Hood Documentary

The one-hour DVD offers viewers an in-depth look at the United States prison industry, and the social impact of moving hundreds of thousands of inner-city minority offenders to distant rural outposts.

To order or view a trailer, visit www.appalshop.org/h2h/film/ or contact:
Holler to the Hood, 91 Madison Ave, Whitesburg, KY 41858
E-mail: h2h@appalshop.org • Phone: 606-633-0108
DEA, local police raid San Diego medical marijuana sites

From The Drug War Chronicle

In a coordinated sweep, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and state and local police raided 13 San Diego-area medical marijuana dispensaries in early December. The multi-agency raiders seized marijuana and medical records, but made no arrests except for three people seized on outstanding warrants. The search warrants were not issued by the feds, but by California authorities, meaning if any criminal charges are filed, defendants would be tried under California law.

According to reports from dispensary operators and patients, the DEA and police came in like gangbusters. Eyewitness accounts of raids around the city described raiders entering the facilities with guns drawn, handcuffing staff and patients, running warrant checks on everyone, then searching the premises and seizing marijuana and records. Police reported seizing 50 pounds of pot, computers, and patient records from the raided clubs.

"The cops acted as if they were raiding Al-Qaeda headquarters," said Tony Amirine, who runs an Ocean Beach dispensary called Utopia. "Guns to my forehead, handcuffed, down on the ground," he told San Diego CityBeat. After a group of eight to 10 heavily-armed officers secured the premises, they searched the place for three or four hours, Amirine said. "All I do is sell weed to sick people."

That is legal under California's Compassionate Use Act, passed by popular vote in 1996, and supporting legislation passed last year. At last count, the number of medical marijuana dispensaries in the state hovered around 160. But California dispensaries and even medical marijuana patients can be prosecuted under federal drug laws, which do not recognize medical marijuana.

The raids came after a months-long investigation that included sending undercover agents into the dispensaries in an effort to obtain medical marijuana without the proper paperwork. Law enforcement spokesmen claim they were able to do just that.

The response from medical marijuana supporters was immediate and energetic, with San Diego activists meeting Monday night and demonstrating downtown Tuesday, and the medical marijuana defense group Americans for Safe Access (ASA) organizing protests at federal buildings in cities around the country Wednesday. But movement veterans also warned other dispensaries to shield themselves from such raids by being extremely careful to operate within state law. In other words: Don't sell marijuana to people who cannot prove they have a doctor's recommendation to use it for medicinal purposes.

Calls from Home unites Holler to Hood

What if media artists in the rural coalfields of Appalachia produced community radio programming (WMMT-FM) in response to the growing number of prisons being built in their region? And what if the primarily urban prisoners and their families began working with the media artists and their friends to produce a message that speaks boldly and eloquently for human rights and justice?

Join with prisoners, their family members, artists, media producers, community radio stations, and young people in re-broadcasting Calls From Home, a unique national media event that will bring the voices of hundreds of prisoners and their loved ones to communities across the United States.

Recorded the evening of December 12, 2005, the program will be edited to one hour and offered free to stations across the country for re-broadcast. Last year's Calls From Home broadcast was heard on more than one hundred stations, including the prisoner-run radio of WLSP at the Louisiana State Prison in Angola.

We will be offering a "house party" version, along with talking points for groups who want to use the program in their community as a means to host a discussion on the operation and effects of the criminal justice system. Here is how you can get involved:

Send us suggestions for radio stations you think would be interested in re-broadcasting the program.

Agree to volunteer as host of a "house party," using the program as a tool for leading a community discussion.

Spread the word among prisoner family members who may want to call in to the program.

For more information and how to get involved in producing Calls From Home, visit our website at www.appalshop.org/h2h/calls, and to learn more about Holler to the Hood visit www.appalshop.org/h2h.

We believe in the power of human stories to infuse social change movements with lasting energy, continuous interest and widespread acceptance.

Sincerely,

Nick Szuberla, Amelia Kirby, and Tucker Wilson, Holler to the Hood staff

E-mail: nick@appalshop.org
Phone: (606) 633-0108
91 Madison Ave, Whitesburg, KY 41858

Count Me In!

Working to end drug war injustice

My Contact Information (non-prisoner):
Name ________________________________
Address ________________________________
City ______ State ______ Zip +4 ______
Phone ________________________________
Email ________________________________

Annual Dues: $30 • Students: $15 • Prisoners: $6

☐ I don’t know a prisoner, but I will sponsor one.
☐ I have enclosed an additional $6.00

Total Enclosed: $ ______

Do you have a loved one in prison?
☐ I want to sponsor my imprisoned loved one’s membership and have enclosed an additional $6.00.
☐ I am a prisoner. I have enclosed at least $6.00 (money order or stamps), or made arrangements for payment.

Name ________________________________
Registration Number ________________________________
Prison ________________________________
Address ________________________________
City ______ State ______ Zip +4 ______

TNC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Your gift or donation is tax deductible.

The November Coalition
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"First off, my name is Arthur Tharpe, a.k.a. (BARWIRE). I'm the founder as well as the lead artist of Yard Down Entertainment, which is partnered with Saturn Media LLC. I created the group while incarcerated at Donovan Correctional Facility, and based the format upon true insight of an ex-felon with big dreams.

"Anyhow, during my stay at the maximum secured facility, I studied media marketing, promotions, distribution and public relations, among many other avenues, to help my dreams become my reality. Upon my release, my studies began to pay off faster than I'd imagined, with the support & consultation of none other than James "Jay-I" Clark, the founder of Saturn Media LLC. He basically handed me the ball and I ran with it.

"It also required support plus dedication from local youths in the neighborhood to help the mission be carried out. That came from my street team, a group of kids who were eager to see me succeed so that they could see me the next day, including my daughter, Sha’Veha!

"However, my main objective is to do what I've wanted to do since L.L. Cool J "rocked the bells"... become a rap artist. But over the years my passion grew stronger as my life of crime increased. This is when I knew it was either a cold cell and lonely nights, or sunny days and bright lights, so I chose to keep warm, and at the same time bring along some lost souls that were as hungry as myself. With this I present to You "Yard Down Entertainment"! The term Yard Down is used to alert inmates of hostile activity on the premises and to "get down" or to be "shot down".

"If you think musically, then you know Yard Down music is serious business. Making up the group is a host of ex-felons: Nutty-Nut is a songwriter/marketing promoter with a liquefied sound to keep you wet from sweat. Next up is Toot Wit Loot, a songwriter/founder of Seasoned Vet Entertainment/producer, who has the skills to keep the music beats comin'! Than we have Tyrone, the Southern Gravel, a songwriter/distribution coordinator with the voice to make quiet storms. Last but not least by a long shot is Kelo, a songwriter/founder of Pushover Records which is branched off of Yard Down Entertainment coming soon in the streets near you. Kelo produces that mid-west, ruff around the edges style that keeps you tuned in without pause or skip.

"For those with the same dreams as myself, here's some words to remember: It's easier done than said, because if you can say it, you can DO IT!!

"We've done local venues in the San Diego area, speeches in troubled communities to troubled youths from Spring Valley, South East, downtown, Pacific Beach, all the way to Arizona. It's nothin' — if you got the time to make it big, we got an ingredient you can use to make sure your cake is baked right!"

Barwire is founder of Yard Down Entertainment. James Clark, founder of Saturn Media Marketing, signed a 50/50 joint venture deal to start an entertainment company.

According to Clark: "Satturn Media discovered Barwire (he's an old friend from high school from the same hood). After prison I took Barwire under my wing to teach him more about the business. After working in Los Angeles for the major labels (x-marketing grassroots director for Nelly, Ruff Ryders, Eminem and many more artists), I moved back to my home town, San Diego to open up business in 2002 to help the small independent record labels. A year later I connected back with Barwire and put him through the most important step in this business "Artist Development".

We were in a group together in high school and I just knew Barwire had the talent. One thing that I am a fan of is his writing skills. Barwire is now working on a short film about his life growing up and making it in this music business. He's also working on a new deal by signing record companies and developing young talent. The newest member to the Yard Down family is also an ex-inmate from Cincinnati, OH: Kelo. (JAY-I)"

Yard Down Entertainment
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San Diego, CA 92138-0853
www.myspace.com/yarddownent
Visit Saturn Media Marketing on the web at: www.satturnmedia.com

Richard suffers from intractable pain caused by multiple sclerosis and failed spine surgery. He is serving 25 years in a Florida State Prison for "illegal prescriptions".

In recent months, Richard has become a prolific artist, submitting dozens of wonderful and humorous drug war cartoons to the November Coalition. We’ve posted scans of everything he’s sent on our web site. In a saner world, he’d be working for the New Yorker.

Instead, Richard was recently moved, in shackles, to another Florida Correctional Facility; one without proper medical care or even wheelchair access facilities. He needs to be free — now.

Visit www.november.org/cartoons for info on how to help Free Richard Paey

What is The November Coalition?

We are people like you all over the world who condemn drug prohibition laws and oppose US Drug War policies. We are prisoners and parents of those incarcerated; we are wives, sisters, brothers, children, aunts, uncles and cousins. We’re friends of prisoners, legal professionals and concerned individuals, too. All across this land of America, we’re anyone sick and tired of conflicted and ineffective illegal-drug laws; repressive legislation that long ago needed reexamination and redirection by national and international officials.

The November Coalition was founded in 1997 as a non-profit, grassroots organization with a mission to raise awareness in individuals and communities. There is a spiraling increase in numbers of imprisoned in the United States due to drug-law enforcement.

We arouse and activate fellow taxpayers about existing and impending dangers of an overly powerful federal government acting beyond constitutional constraints. We counsel victims of this peculiar ‘war,’ most of whom were minor participants, and warn our fellow citizens of the steady erosion of civil liberties, human rights and personal freedoms allowed by federal and state authorities.

Coalition members and supporters are convinced that the War on Drugs does nothing but stimulate an ever more profitable and violent underground economy. The intent of any law should create a safer country and safer world, not one more costly and less free.