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Exiled from Prison to Prison

By Edwin Chavez

San Quentin Rehabilitation Center

Thousands of illegal immigrants have been deported from the U.S. to Third World countries, including El Salvador, where they are confined in prisons accused of gross human rights abuses.

The Salvadoran deportees, which could soon include naturalized U.S. citizens, are stripped of their clothing and checked for signs of tattoos. They are also stripped of the few items of property they own and more importantly, of the rights guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution. Salvadorians in California prisons face

"The Salvadorian Government has practiced its policy of imprisoning its own people for having tattoos."

the terrible choice of parole and a deportation to San Salvador, where they would face conditions far more dangerous and harsh than any they would face incarcerated in the US. Some Salvadorans are considering delaying their scheduled visit to the Parole Board to avoid the risk of being forced to go to El Salvador.

On February 3, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio publicly announced Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele's offer to lock up foreign criminals, including U.S. citizens, in the notorious Terrorism Confinement Centre (CECOT). Rubio's announcement was in line with the Trump Administration's determination to deport illegal immigrants by the thousands. The Salvadorian government has practiced a policy of imprisoning its own people for having tattoos. The "Association with Illicit Activities" law criminalized all skin-ink images– ranging from the Virgin Mary to praying hands. Any image could

be considered a link to gang membership under this law, which is a part of a state of emergency that has been renewed every 30 to 90 days since March 2021. Gabriel V. Chavez, 51, formerly a California prisoner incarcerated at Soledad, is now confined in prison in El Salvador.

Chavez lived in the US as an undocumented citizen since he was nine years old and had been imprisoned since he was 16. After 32 years in prison, Chavez was released and immediately detained in an



ICE detention facility...Continued on page 4

What it is like to be Sentenced to "LWOP"

By Sunny Nguyen

Substance Abuse and Treatment Facility

(Trigger Warning: Mentions of Suicidal Ideation)

Hello... Hi mom... How are you?... I'm fine, I'm good mom... no, no I'm o.k.... You haven't been feeling well? Did you go to the Doctor? ...Mom, you got to go if you're not feeling good... You have insurance, Lynda signed you up for that Obamacare... I'll call her after... Mom, you have to take care of yourself; you're older now, please mom... Mom don't talk like that... Mom don't cry.... I'm fine, it's nothing... I'm alright... no, it's like school, just no girls.... It's like the army... no, I'm not sad... of course I miss you... yes, I want to come home... Yes, I know mom, I'm staying out of trouble,... I'm trying mom... I know all of them already got out... It's not because I keep getting in trouble... I don't know... Mom, Stop!... It's not because I don't want to come home... Yes... Yes... I know, She said she's going to take you

this summer to come visit me... It's not your fault mom... Please don't be sad mom... Mom, as long as you're good, I'll be good... Yes I know you're getting old, but you still look young mom... Ok mom... Mom, I gotta go... Mom don't worry okay, I'm fine, please take care of yourself. Don't worry about me... It's nothing mom, if you need anything call Deanna okay? I love you too mom, bye.

For the last 30 years, I've been lying to my mom, my sister, and maybe even my-

self. Phone calls home become less and less. It's not because I don't care or love my mom. It's because I love my mom and sister so much; I figure if they hear from me less and less, they will slowly forget about me. Well– at least they would get used to me being dead. In reality, that's what I am; that's what I feel. I exist, but I don't. I breathe, but for what reason? All I do is cause pain and hurt to my victims and their families. To my family and those who love me, I'm a failure, a disgrace, a burden.

At 18 years old, my mind couldn't understand the gravity of the situation. Life without parole, what does that even mean? I'm going to spend the rest of my life in here? Rest of my life... I'm 18 now, how long will I live, 40? 50? Shit I'm Asian, we live till like 110... Hell no, rest of my life in prison, they can't do that. The first few years were extremely tough, adjusting to this ...Continued on page 5



Photo from Umanoide

Welcome to the July Issue!

By Joan Parkin

The kidnapping, imprisonment, and attempted deportation of human rights activist Mahmoud Khalil by DHS agents under the Trump administration should awaken us like a baseballbat to the head. This attack on Khalil, a Columbia University graduate and legal resident, is part of a broader assault on free speech to silence dissenting voices at a time of growing unrest on college campuses. As Khalil, who now considers himself a political prisoner, writes in an open letter from a detention center in Louisiana, “My arrest was a direct consequence of exercising my right to free speech as I advocated for a free Palestine and an end to the genocide in Gaza.” Despite his own circumstances, Khalil speaks of the appalling conditions that exist for the men all around him.

He tells us, “I am writing to you from a detention facility in Louisiana where I wake to cold mornings and spend long days bearing witness to the quiet injustices underway against a great many people precluded from the protections of the law. Who has the right to have rights? It is certainly not the humans crowded into the cells here.”

Khalil’s struggle reveals free speech and prison reform are inextricably linked and the way forward is by speaking out for those who do not have a vehicle to voice their grievances. Whether through direct incarceration, censorship, or legal bullying

within the U.S. prison system, those with state power frequently attempt to silence dissent because they fear the power of mass action.

Trump’s attempt to silence dissent by jailing activists comes from an old playbook. We could go back to the labor movement at the beginning of the 20th century when political prisoner Eugene Debs won a million votes for president from Chicago’s Cook County Jail, or to the 1960s, when Martin Luther King and Angela Davis were jailed for their political beliefs. Black Panther Party and Young Lord members were routinely harassed and jailed by police, and BPP member George Jackson spent over a decade in prison—mostly in solitary confinement—for stealing \$70 of gas and was eventually murdered by guards.



Photo from Jon Tyson

of the anti-death penalty movement in the 1990s, remains in prison, framed for killing a cop, and Native American activist and political prisoner Leonard Peltier was only just released after spending almost 50 years in a federal prison.

But even though we might have seen this before, there is something qualitatively different in how Trump operates. A close counterpart might be Ronald Regan, the one who said, “The man with the badge will keep the jungle at bay,” created the image of the welfare queen, and brought us trickledown piss down economics, but Regan operated more covertly on the international stage. We all remember the Iran Contra scandal, where he and his side-kick Ollie North sold guns to the Iranians to raise funds to help the Contras defeat the revolutionary Sandinistas in Nicaragua. These were all covert operations. On the domestic front Trump is getting away with things that Reagan who avoided attacking the press, might salivate over.

There’s nothing covert about Trump and his assaults on the First Amendment. Since he has been in office, he has restricted the AP’s access to White House press conferences and events (for not recognizing the “Gulf of America”), put Voices of America on administrative leave, signed an order eliminating the US Agency for Global Media (USAGM), VoA’s parent company, along with six other federal agencies, and attacked mainstream media. He said in a contentious speech at the DOJ, “I believe that CNN and MS-DNC, who literally write 97.6% bad about me, are political arms of the Democrat [sic] party and in my opinion, they’re really corrupt and they’re illegal, what do they do is illegal.” He’s also held up over 400 million dollars from Columbia for its handling of pro-Palestine demonstrations and alleged failure to protect Jewish students.

The only modern president who comes the closest to the sheer viciousness of Trump is Bill Clinton, who shredded the social safety net while tripling the rates of incarceration and execution. It was Clinton who brought us the inhumane three-strikes your-out laws, and prison building reached an all-time high while he was in office. Frankly, it’s because the Democrats have been pitching the ball to the right all these years and away from the interests of the working class that we have Trump in the first place. Biden and Harris are no exceptions, and Obama

was luke-warm in his response to the Black Lives Matter movement, particularly in acquiescence

to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, ...Continued on page 4 who murdered the young and unarmed Trayvon Martin.

Now we have a different type of political leader who’s certainly not a populist, even though he rode in as one, sort of. Instead, he would be king and do anything he wants to satisfy himself and the pockets of his billionaire buddies. The gloves are off. Musk has been on TV with a chainsaw to show how serious they are about



LETTER

— from the editor

“If they come for me in the morning, they will come for you in the night.”

Joan Parkin is the Director of the *Vanguard Incarcerated Press*, the author of *Perspectives from the Cell Block*, *An Anthology of Prisoner Writings*, and co-founder and former director of Feather River College’s Incarcerated Student Program where she is also a Professor Emerita. She also serves on the Board of Directors for the Vanguard News Network and teaches college English in prisons. She received her Bachelor of Arts from Boston University and PhD in Comparative Literature from The Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York. She was the coordinator in Chicago for the Death Row Ten, a group of wrongfully convicted death row prisoners who were tortured by former police commander Jon Burge, many of whom won pardons by Governor George Ryan in the victorious abolition campaign that led to historic death row commutations.

Our Mission

The *Vanguard Incarcerated Press* (VIP) wants to do more than shine a light in the darkest corners of America's prison system; we want to build a bridge between the incarcerated and the community through our newspaper. Prisons by design isolate and dehumanize incarcerated persons, leaving them with few resources to connect with a larger community.

A newspaper produced by incarcerated persons working with educators and social justice activists on the outside has the potential to create communities of readers and writers who are no longer isolated from each other but joined by the relationship to our newspaper. When an incarcerated individual sees his/her/their name in print, they know that they have joined a broader conversation of contributors to and readers of the *VIP*.

Our parameters are simple, anyone with a story about prisons or the criminal justice system can submit for consideration. Of course, themes appear around the viciousness of the system, its racism, barbarity and absurdity. While maintaining an abolitionist framework of the system, we remain inclusive of the vast array of voices that make up the carceral landscape. As abolitionists, we plan to join these incarcerated voices in the larger conversation about prison abolition.

In partnering with other organizations, we join forces with the broader abolitionist movement. Our goal is to join our writers and readers in a larger movement to challenge conditions of confinement and the inequities that oppress disenfranchised masses and resist positive change.

Who We Are

The *VIP* publishes hard-hitting news and commentary written by the incarcerated themselves, depicting prison life, human rights issues, and critiques of the criminal legal system. We seek to expose injustices lurking in America's prisons, empowering a community of incarcerated voices along the way. We are enabling those voices to be heard, without censorship, and creating a community forum where our contributors can engage in civil debate, oppose the brutalities of the carceral state, and challenge the status quo, all in the pursuit of systemic change and prison abolition.

Disclaimer

The purpose of the *VIP*'s monthly publication is educational, providing incarcerated writers with a platform to improve their skills as journalists and exposing our readership to a diversely sourced representation of authentic inside voices. For this reason, the *VIP* does not censor the content submitted by its contributors; the views and perspectives represented in articles from our contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the *VIP*, its affiliates or employees.

A Note on Language

We are staunchly committed to maintaining our anti-censorship policy, as outlined in our disclaimer. However, as of this issue, we are updating our policy on language going forward: we will change all instances of the word "inmate" to person-centered language, such as "person in prison" or "incarcerated individual." We do this to acknowledge that many incarcerated people find these terms dehumanizing and to meet the current standards of other incarcerated journalism organizations, such as the Marshall Project. We ask that all of our writers uphold this new policy going forward, or we will edit this language in your piece for you before we publish it.

Announcement

Due to administrative changes at the Davis Vanguard, we will now be releasing an issue every other month instead of monthly. We apologize for the delay you may experience in receiving the *Vanguard Incarcerated Press* and we hope you will be patient with us as we strive to produce the best product possible.

In other news, Sophie Yoakum will be stepping down from her position as Production Manager to focus on her full-time job. Evelyn Ramos will be taking over starting with the next issue.

Staff & Editorial Board

Editor-in-Chief

Joan Parkin

Production Manager

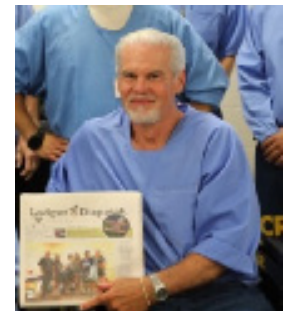


Evelyn Ramos

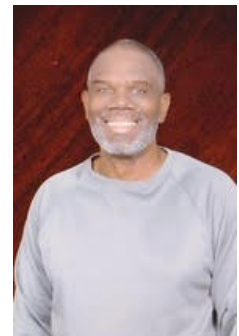
Inside Editors



Angie D. Gordon
San Quentin State Prison



D. Razor Babb
Mule Creek State Prison



Jamel Walker
Mule Creek State Prison

for two years before his return to El Salvador. He is covered in tattoos. Maria Elizabeth Hurren, his mother, said in an interview, "As a mother, the pain I carry inside is so intense that there are no words that I can express to consult any other mother who may end up being in my situation. [Gabriel's] imprisonment in a foreign land, when he has not committed a crime, when he has not been there in 42 years. I can't hear his voice over the phone, see him, or even correspond with my son, so I don't know if he is alive."

"If I am considered a threat to the Salvadoran government, why is President Bukele accepting us deportees and locking us up without us having committed a crime?" asked Juan Lopez-Urrutia, a resident at San Quentin. "Why not refuse us? If we are accepted, why can't he [Bukele] create a program for deportees to integrate back into society? This could give us the opportunity to become law-abiding citizens. Help us get a job, not a pair of handcuffs. Does he even care about his returned citizens? There are many options, he can even put an ankle monitor on us to see how we'll behave. To send us to Izalco, CECOT, for having tattoos is an additional torture."

Not all San Quentin residents agree. Some men interviewed argued that since they were here illegally, they shouldn't be in the country.

Los Angeles podcaster Marlin Henriquez, creator of El Salvador Patria Querida, said the Salvadoran president is thinking about holding on to power. In a phone interview, he said he believed that Bukele is locking up his fellow citizens to suppress them and to demonstrate that he is in charge:

"Bukele has created a pipeline of mass incarceration in a Third-World country where food is scarce. El Salvador is the only country in the world that charges inmates between \$100-- \$260 just for food, and clothing is an additional charge of \$80. These very same people are dying from starvation." Henriquez argued that the U.S. should not be sending people to die under inhumane conditions.

Oscar Aguilar, a San Quentin resident, said that it does not make any sense that the Salvadoran government is locking up its citizens for having tattoos: **"Why haven't the United Nations fired Human Rights Watch for failing to intervene?"** stop this inhumane practice of incarcerating innocent people?"

According to a January 9 report from YouTube, a disturbance broke out on January 8 at Izalco, one of the Salvadoran prisons, where Gabriel Chavez is confined. Fifteen prisoners were wounded by gunfire and three died. The Izalco prisoners reportedly have no access to the judicial process.

Leandro Gonzales, 44, also a San Quentin resident, was twice served with the "Foreign Consulate Notification and Foreign Prisoner Transfer Treaty Program Notification" for him to serve his time in his native El Salvador. A photocopy shows that he declined and signed this forms twice.

"I am afraid that when I get off the plane, I will be arrested and housed in El Cecot for having tattoos," Gonzales argued. "In my twenty-years of incarceration, the CDCR has cleared me of any gang associations. If I was placed in Cecot, my life will be in limbo, not knowing if I will ever get out"

Enriquez asked for the U.S. to investigate the atrocities and arbitrary treatment that the regime of El Salvador is conducting. He said more than 300 persons have died in prison there.

cutting the "corrupt" bureaucracies, which equals the dismantling of worker protections and the cutting of jobs and the welfare of millions around the world. And don't think this extra money made from the destruction of the Department of Education, the Department of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and USAID will soon be in our pockets. This is crony capitalism. All one has to do is look into Trump's gilded Oval Office (for real) where he is surrounded by shimmering golden objects, to know where his budgeting priorities lay.

But that's just it. Even if he does rub shoulders with Muskian border-line fascists, history still matters, and history shows us that the only way we will be heard by the state is for all of us to finally stand together without exception in solidarity and say in unison "enough is enough!" That's why we need to stand with Mahmoud Khalil. He may be the first, but he won't be the last. Already, there is a second student from George Town University who has been detained. If our government can be so emboldened to kidnap a U.S. resident from his or her family—Khalil's wife is eight months pregnant--for the "crime" of speaking out against the genocide going on in Gaza right now--this morning another newborn was killed--then anyone could be at risk of incarceration and prosecution. Angela Davis's words say it best: "If they come for me in the morning, they will come for you in the night."

As someone who pounded the pavement and shouted through many a bull horn as a leader in the historic Chicago Death Row 10 struggle, I can attest that they are listening in and monitoring the conversations of those who threaten the status quo. While fighting the state of Illinois to free death row prisoners, I received terrifying phone calls with gunshots ringing out in the background, my phone was likely tapped, and, on another occasion, I was threatened to be killed and put in a trunk. Prisoners face this type of censorship and worse every day. Their mail is screened, phone calls monitored, conversations overheard, and tablets scrutinized. They're even threatened with solitary confinement for arbitrary infractions.

Now, more than ever, the role of incarcerated journalists is critical. We must amplify our papers to speak truth to power and champion justice. With any luck, Khalil will become a lightning rod, sparking a larger movement against the relentless attacks on free speech, both inside and outside prison walls. The time to speak out is now!

Note from the Editor

Although Khalil Mahmoud was released on June 20, 2025, after a federal judge ruled his detention likely violated the First Amendment, his deportation case remains pending as the government continues its appeal. In July 2025, Mahmoud Khalil filed a \$20 million claim against the Trump administration under the Federal Tort Claims Act, alleging false arrest, malicious prosecution, and defamation. He alleges damage to his reputation, emotional trauma, and career disruption—including missing his son's birth and graduation. Through his legal team, he's positioning the case as a broader effort to expose retaliation against political speech. Khalil has embraced the expanded platform that resulted from his high-profile detention. He has given interviews to major outlets including Reuters, Time, and Democracy Now!, continuing to speak out on Palestinian rights, campus free speech, and civil liberties. He has also addressed allegations of antisemitism, rejecting them and characterizing the concern as exaggerated hysteria on Columbia's campus. Since his release, Khalil has reunited with his wife, Noor Abdalla, and their infant son, Deen, spending time with family in New York City. He has prioritized being with them, especially given the uncertainty surrounding his residency status.

new world, not knowing what to look forward to. An appeal? Denied. I told myself if I don't get any action by the time I'm 30, I'd kill myself, "Fuck this shit!" So much guilt for the lives I took, anger at myself for making the choices I made, hurt for breaking my mom's heart.

Whatever I did, it's on me, but that's not how it works. Everywhere I look, I see the ripples my actions caused. I can't wait to 30, no more prison bullshit, no more staring at walls reflecting on all my mistakes, the guilt, all the what if's, all the why's, all the sadness, feeling of being hopeless.

2006, 30 years old has finally came. It's over this year! Eye for

"So much guilt for the lives I took, anger at myself for making the choices I made, hurt for breaking my mom's heart."

an eye, that's what they want. Punishment. Am I going to hang myself? How's that gonna work? From the vent? The tower might see me and I got to wait til

my celly leaves too. You don't have to hang yourself, you can just tie it straight across from under the top bunk, lean forward and once you lose consciousness, its done. How about a \$50 paper? Slam the whole paper and you're out. I started planning my parole, getting my affairs in order, I finally had something to look forward to. I had hope. The stigma of killing yourself was frowned upon in my circle. You did the crime. You did the crime, now man up and do the time. I used to believe that killing yourself is weak- but I felt like my reasons were different. I didn't want my mom and sister to suffer any more, no need to worry about me. Also give them (the law, the people) what they want. I will take responsibility. I'll sacrifice myself to make everything right. As that year was going by, I made an effort to call my mom more and to let her know I'm ok, that I'm not suffering in here. For her not to worry. I came to realize my mom blamed herself for me being in prison: if she would have done things differently, if she would've raised me instead of leaving me with my grandma, if she would've acknowledged my sister and I as her kids instead of saying we were her sister's kids. My mom confessed these things to me during our phone calls. She felt guilt, regret, shame, sadness. My mom pleaded with me to stay out of trouble, to take care of myself so that one day they would let me out. She told me she would die if anything happened to me. Killing myself was now out of the question. Instead of easing her pain, I would be causing her more grief and heartache. She would think I was suffering so much that I took my own life. That would be on her conscience. So regardless of how I feel or what I'm going through in here, my job is to reassure my mom I'm fine, I'm happy; that life is good. That's the new plan.

Decades have gone by and I purposely try not to think too much. Thinking too much will drive you crazy, I've seen other LWOPs literally lose their mind, but how do you stop yourself from thinking? In the last 10 years they have lessened restrictions on those sentenced to LWOP. We can now go behind the wall to work or get a

vocation and attend self-help groups. If you have been staying out of trouble and programming, you will be able to go to the land of "Milk and Honey" Level 2. After spending over 20 something years on the 4 yards, I finally reached this pinnacle in the summer of 2021

I have been on the level 2 yard close to 3 years now, programming, sticking to my plan and just living life. I do not know why I am here?! The land of "Milk and Honey" does not give a person sentenced to LWOP a taste. I have seen plenty of inmates go home here. Bunch of short-timers who pass through, other guys who are at the end of their long sentences, and I have also seen over 20 lifers get granted parole since I've been here. I am truly happy for all of them. Everybody here is working on their rehabilitation, bettering themselves, and preparing to return to society. Everybody here has an incentive, an opportunity to be able to gain their freedom. Everybody *except* an LWOP.

Imagine every day you sit down at the dinner table with everyone. Everyone is starving, everyone had a long day at work and it's time to eat. Food starts to get passed around but it skips you, every dish passes you over. You reach, you ask, you yell, you beg, but nobody hears you. So you just sit there watching everyone

"Thinking too much will drive you crazy."

eat, talk, laugh. All you can do is watch, listen, close your eyes and imagine how food must taste. You show up at the dinner table day in day out, week after week, years go by. Sometimes you just don't want to show up at the dinner table anymore, it's torture. You're like a dog waiting for a crumb to fall off the table. But even a dog will learn, nothing is going to fall off that table.

I sit on my bunk everyday and see the guys in the dayroom studying, I hear all the self-help discussions. I hear how excited they are about being able to finally see their kids, kiss their wife, and hug their mom. I can't blame them. As a LWOP, I am able to participate in the programs offered, do the work. I'm encouraged to and I do, do it. I read a long time ago how the cruelest type of punishment is isolation. Physical punishment will end, the pain will stop, and your body will heal. But isolation keeps you away from everything you care about, you love. It alters your mind. It kills your spirit slowly.

Being sentenced to LWOP feels like nothing is right. The burden I caused is forever heavy on my soul. To me it's like I spilled something on my brand new t-shirt and it got stained. I washed it, bleached it and put it back on. Nobody can see that stain now but me. I continue to wash it, pick at it, but it's forever there. I just wish I could get a brand new t-shirt, but I can't. I will forever carry this burden I caused, with "Life Without Parole" or without it. Good news is I just found out the new average male lifespan is 73 years old. I'm 48 now, so only 25 more years to go. Until then I'm sticking to my plan, doing the work, and showing up at the dimer table. Hey, I can't help but notice the dog doesn't show up anymore.



Photo from Robert Klank



Photo from Ye Jingham

“A Beacon in the Dark” Inside San Quentin’s First-Ever Transgender Visibility Night

By: David Greenwald
Davis Vanguard

In a historic first for California’s oldest and most iconic prison, San Quentin State Prison hosted a Transgender Visibility Night Panel Discussion—an event believed to be the first of its kind inside a state correctional facility.

Organized by incarcerated trans woman Angie Gordon, a Vanguard Board Member and Editorial Board member of the Vanguard Incarcerated Press, the evening served as both a celebration and a reckoning, amplifying voices that are often marginalized within the prison system and society at large. What emerged from the event was not only an acknowledgment of visibility but a powerful assertion of humanity, solidarity, and yes, even joy.

For Angie Gordon, who emceed the evening and shaped its vision, the event was a manifestation of collective resilience. “We were there to share a message of resiliency in the face of setback,” Gordon told the Vanguard. “Trump is a punch in the face, for many out there but especially for the trans community, but punches in the face are going to happen, it’s what you do with those moments, right?”

In that spirit, Transgender Visibility Night was not about merely occupying space—it was about transforming it. From panel discussions to candid storytelling and powerful performances, the evening redefined what visibility can look like behind bars: joy as resistance, truth as healing, and community as survival.

“We believe that joy is its own form of resistance,” Gordon said. “Coming together, holding each other up, showering each other with flowers, not only celebrates joy, but inspires it too.”

As incarcerated trans women and nonbinary people shared stories of perseverance, self-discovery, and chosen family, the audience—made up of fellow residents, volunteers, media, and outside supporters—witnessed something rare and intimate. “The empowerment of our community was working right there in front of all of us,” Gordon reflected. “The people on stage were seizing the power in their voice and impact of a community united.”

Transgender individuals represent one of the most vulnerable populations within prisons. Disproportionately subjected to violence, harassment, isolation, and denial of adequate healthcare, many find themselves navigating a system that was never designed to recognize, let alone protect, their identities.

Gordon addressed this directly in her opening remarks: “We know that the trans and gender nonconforming community is disproportionately impacted by all kinds of black crimes, intimate partner violence, physical victimization, premature death, sexual victimization, suicidality... Visibility is a critical factor in that game, right? Because you can’t help somebody that you can’t see.”

Visibility, she argued, is not just about recognition—it’s about survival. And survival, in this context, is not a passive endurance but an active and ongoing act of defiance.

The Transgender Visibility Night was framed around the concept of “transgender joy”—a powerful antidote to the dominant narratives of trauma and victimization that so often define public understanding of incarcerated trans people. “If you don’t have a livable life, it’s hard to wake up in the world,” Gordon said. “So today this project is about reaching into our community and finding the stories of joy and perseverance and resiliency.”

One of the most poignant themes that echoed throughout the evening was the importance of sanctuary. The loss of the community’s Tuesday night meeting space—a casualty of administrative oversight—was deeply felt by many attendees. That space had been more than

just a room; it had become a home, a place of refuge from the daily stresses of prison life and the constant threat of judgment or reprisal.

“It’s just having somewhere where I can be me to totally 100%,” one woman said during the panel discussion. “Where all of us can be ourselves without having to worry, without having someone to judge you or give you a side-eye.” Another woman echoed that sentiment: “For the first time... I was like, this is home.”

Yet even as they mourned the temporary loss of their physical sanctuary, the event itself stood as a testament to the community’s resilience and ingenuity. Participants made clear that their sense of community was not confined to four walls—it was something they carried within themselves, built

together, and offered to one another in countless acts of mutual care. **“A safe space where we can just be ourselves”**

The panel discussions focused on what organizers called “transgender joy”—not in spite of incarceration, but often born from the very relationships formed within its confines. For some, this meant romantic partnerships. For others, it was the powerful bonds of chosen family—sisters, aunties, and mentors who had become lifelines.

“When you’re fighting and struggling to find your identity... that’s where a lot of the validation I was getting out of my relationship,” one speaker shared. “It brought a sense of calm.”

In a particularly moving moment, a panelist named Judy shared what it meant to be in a relationship while incarcerated. “You find joy in your relationship by just having someone to connect with,” she said. “Someone to experience day-to-day trials and tribulations with. Someone you can trust and be yourself around.”

Another participant emphasized the rarity of simply being accepted: “I find joy just being myself. I don’t try to be anyone else. This is my authentic self... and that brings me joy.” Throughout the evening, the idea of joy was reclaimed—not as an indulgence, but as a necessity. Joy, in this context, became a form of political power, a collective resource, and a declaration of worth. The event was made possible in part through the involvement of outside scholars and orThe event was made possible in part through the involvement of outside scholars and organizations, including Dr. April Carillo, a queer criminologist from the University of South Dakota. Participating via Skype—an extraordinary administrative allowance made possible by San Quentin’s progressive “California Model”—Dr. Carillo served as a facilitator, consultant, and thought partner for the project.

“I usually don’t use my title,” Carillo told the crowd, “because I don’t care that I have a degree, but quite a few people often do—especially when it comes to legitimacy in the academy and in corrections.” Carillo’s presence underscored the event’s academic and activist ambitions: this was not simply a prison program, but a research-informed narrative project aimed at challenging how trans communities are seen and studied—particularly in the context of incarceration.

“What we did last night, it matters,” Gordon later said. “When you demonstrate strength and resilience, when you make trans communities visible, you are laying the table for them to speak truth to power.” The organizers hope that Transgender Visibility Night will become an annual event at San Quentin, expanding its reach, influence, and impact. Already, the team has plans to compile ...*Continued on Page 7* video and audio footage into an educational resource that can be shared with trans communities at other prisons—particularly those where isolation and invisibility remain the norm.

“Our community members are hiding in rooms, searching

to find themselves," Gordon said. "If we can get our stories on that platform and get that into those hands, we know it will be found."

In the meantime, the group is working to secure a new permanent sponsor for their weekly meetings. "Without space, community can't form," Gordon emphasized. "We're just transient right now." Still, the event itself demonstrated that even in a system not built for them, trans people inside San Quentin are building something powerful—something that refuses to be silenced. "Visibility is not just about being seen," one speaker said in closing. "It's about being valued."

That night, they were both.



"Members of the California Model Team at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center" – three correction officers who helped make the event happen

Photos from that night



The whole crew outside prior to the event



Angie Gordon (left), David Greenwald (center), and Anand Jon Alexander on the right

Fake News

By Julian Green

Massachusetts Correctional Institution

As I lay in my bed reading the stories from my brothers and sisters in California. I want to whisper back, I feel your pain, because the truth is, I feel your pain.

My name is Julian, and I've been incarcerated for the past 17 years, convicted of 2nd degree murder under the joint venture theory. At 36 years old, I find myself

"As I read, only a plea of freedom creeps through my soul"

a Boston University undergrad and a student enrolled in Emerson college pursuing a degree in media, literature, and journalism.

Being a convicted murderer while never ever actually killing anyone has eaten at my soul for years. I've been lost in this fake narrative that I am a killer. By creating We Are Joint Venture Inc, I wanted to put a face to all the men and women who are, too, suffering under a fake label. A label that has been destroying my life. "Julian Green, her father is a convicted killer." These are the words used by DCF when my mom went for custody of my daughter. Those words were whispered to my daughter for 14 years.

Now my daughter is 17 years old, and she wears a We Are Joint Venture Inc., bracelet. She knows her father never took a life, and that the system lied. I just don't understand how as a

society we continue to live on, when injustice is all around us.

When Maura Healey was elected Governor, I remember telling every joint venture at a meeting that this woman understands inequity, disenfranchisement, and false labels. Now, I wonder if I was wrong.

Can you imagine hundreds of white kids, being locked up for life, labeled and charged with murder, when they never killed anyone? It would be a public outcry, lawmakers would be gathering together to figure out how this is happening. To my brothers and sisters in California, we have to end the felony murder rule, we have to end LWOP, and it is time that the two most liberal states join forces in our advocacy work to transform the prison system.

We Are Joint Venture Inc, is an advocacy organization for sentencing parity in the criminal legal system. We seek to build a social justice movement to end the extreme sentencing and excessive charging of defendants, including the use of life without parole for non-participants. We see joint venture prosecution as a miscarriage of justice; it results in the convictions of people who are factually innocent of murder.

"If history told us one thing, it told us that justice always overpowers injustice, that truth always overpowers a lie, and most of all that light in darkness can show you the way..."

The Lack of Mental Health Care

By Jacob Lester

Arkansas Department of Corrections Cummins Unit

So many of us suffer in excess of what our sentence or punishment is meant to be, due to the sheer fact that those meant to help us, to treat us, and to ultimately protect us choose not to do so, often even going so far as to endanger or mistreat us knowingly. This is a major problem in the prison system of Arkansas, as well as those of many other states.

Many people fail to comprehend the fact that the mentally ill are not a minority in this country's prisons and jails; if anything, they tend towards the majority. Does that shock you? According to the statistics provided by Leah Wang of Prison Policy Initiative in her article "Chronic Punishment: The unmet health needs of people in state prisons," roughly 56% of inmates suffer from some sort of mental health problem. From personal experience, that number seems low, but since the Hippocratic oath seems to be forgotten in the Prisons, who truly knows? It is even harder to determine if places like the

"Many people fail to comprehend the fact that the mentally ill are not a minority in this country's prisons and jails"

Arkansas Department of Corrections purposefully practices neglect and malfeasance towards inmates, or if they do not utilize appropriate measures to find adequately trained professionals. What is truly concerning is the majority of the mental-health care team not being trained, certified, or even licensed. They are inadequately prepared for the jobs they take on.

Let me share my experiences with the Arkansas Department of Corrections' Mental Health Department to help you see the inherent problems. Draw your own conclusions as you will.

On the second day of being at intake in Ouachita River Correctional Unit in Malvern, Arkansas, I was brought to see a Mental Health Care Manager for intake processing. She spent roughly five to ten minutes asking me questions she read off the computer screen and entering my responses. Due to my responses on past mental health diagnoses, I was scheduled to see a provider for further review. Until I saw the provider, I would not receive any of my mental health medications, taken off then abruptly, and left to suffer. Roughly three to six days later, I was brought to the same office and, through telecommunications, saw one Doctor Forrest, who, in less than five minutes, decided to discard my Bipolar and ADHD diagnoses, keeping only the catch-all personality disorders 'not otherwise specified' and put me on Effexor, only. After a nearly three-year struggle to find balance in my psychiatric medications, this new doctor chose to ignore me and my records to place me on a downward spiral. Without proof, investigation, or evidence, he chose to ignore my established diagnoses obtained through diagnostic testing, chose to ignore my self-reporting, and then chose to violate the Do-No-Harm part of the Hippocratic Oath, starting me on the spiral towards a major mental health crisis.

After that visit I was not seen by Mental Health again until I arrived at Cummins Unit. Once here, a Mental Health Case Manager came by to talk to me. Ms. Dantzler asked me a set of standard questions to include if I was suicidal or homicidal; these exact same questions she would ask me every time I saw her, almost verbatim, like a memorized spiel. She would stop me in the hallway monthly, never prying into my answers or investigating, even when I reported side effects from the Effexor. It was close to six months later before I saw another provider, even though I had been constantly reporting my

side effects and asking for a medication change. Finally, since I was being ignored, I quit the Effexor, unable to stomach the side effects. I was suffering. For months I had been reporting extreme mood lability, rapid mood cycling, increased irritability, hypersexuality, and increased anxiety! I explained to Mr. Giggleman MHNPP that Lithium and Cymbalta in combination were the only medications we had found to work. Mr. Giggleman told me he saw no need for me to be on a mood stabilizer and instead started me on Wellbutrin.

"I was being ignored when I reported symptoms"

Within a few weeks, I was crying at the drop of a hat, hypersexual, overly sensitive, feeling panicked and anxious, and often exhibiting extremely poor impulse control. I was being ignored when I reported symptoms, and my new case manager, Ms. Price, was the sister of someone I had issues with, thus I was not comfortable talking to her, and they would not transfer me to a different one. Finally, after throwing a big enough fit, I got in to see Mr. Giggleman again, who explained that I did not have a Bipolar diagnosis and that I shouldn't need a mood stabilizer. He also said that Dr. Forrest is one of the best forensic psychiatrists around, so if he didn't see the need for a Bipolar diagnosis, then I didn't need it. I lost it then and asked him how anyone could diagnose a patient in five minutes or less, it is impossible, especially when I have a year of therapy sessions to verify my diagnoses. He looked at me puzzled. Finally, I asked for a month off of medications to let my body try to reset itself. Mr. Giggleman promised I would be scheduled to see him if I decided I needed to restart medication, yet that proved to be an utter lie.

After a few months I started having severe and increasing issues, yet again. By then, I had been moved to the hole and was back in East Hall due to poor impulse control. Every time I reported symptoms to Mrs. Haynes or Ms. Franks, they said they would notify Mr. Giggleman. Still I continued to be ignored and

denied the chance to see Mr. Giggleman by their supervisor, Jonathan Wiscover, who said I didn't need to see him right now and would possibly be worked in in about six months.

Meanwhile, I kept melting down and getting worse until I decided to start self-medicating to make everything bearable. For the next several months, I did my best to stay high on meth in an attempt to deal with it. Of course, it leads to even more complications.

You have to afford it somehow, and I refused to spend my mom's money on it, so eventually I got into trouble and was sent to the hold- followed by three months in Ad-Seg. The entire time I was back there, I continued to report symptoms, arguing with Ms. Franks and Mrs. Haynes.

When I learned that no one besides the providers was certified or licensed, I was appalled. One of the Mental Health Case Managers let it slip that they did not have to be. Ms. Dantzler had actually transferred to being a CO by that time as well. Finally, in July of 2024, I was seen by Dr. Richard, a Psychiatrist, who asked what was wrong and said he would review my file. He took less than two minutes to ignore me. I had to pester Mental Health to be told that Dr. Richard did not see the need to start me on medication. Now I am fighting my issues yet again and trying extremely hard to stay off of drugs without any help or support, and the mental health department ignoring me at every turn.

The Arkansas Department of Corrections attempts to destroy inmates at every turn, including the act of letting their mental health deteriorate, until they are no longer suitable for reintegration into society- thus having them always rotate through the Correctional Systems, earning the system money.



Photo from Susan Wilkinson

What Are We Willing to Sacrifice for Truth?

By D. Razor Babb
Mule Creek State Prison

The week before the election, *The Washington Post* and *The L.A. Times* both caved to their billionaire owner's wishes and whiffed on endorsing a candidate for president. Rarely, in my memory, have these two nationally recognized news institutions failed to endorse. As faltering as it is, I can still recall when JFK urged the American citizenry to "ask not what your country can do for you." That was a different time and seemingly a different America.

It certainly was a different media landscape, and freedom of the press meant something that has been significantly altered since that time of innocence when we had the anti-war and the Civil Rights movements, Black power, flower power, and college protests where the protesters really meant it. Were things really so different back then? Yeah, I think so. Certainly, the way those events were reported on was different.

Maybe I fail to consider, however, that many of today's journalists never knew a time when only three networks reported the news. There was no internet, social media, or cell phones. No AI, iPhones, Wi-Fi, Facebook, Meta, Uber, or Amazon. The first interview I ever did, I stuck a Sony handheld cassette recorder into the face of Florida's governor to get comments that we transferred to a reel-to-reel back in the newsroom, edited by splicing the tape with a razor blade, and recorded onto a tape cassette that resembled an 8-track, then rushed it into the anchor booth where anchors read news live, introducing the recorded 40 second sound bites.

Back then, if you told my old news director, Steve Daily, that *The Washington Post* wasn't endorsing a presidential candidate due to billionaire owner intervention, I'm pretty sure that would have led to an on-air editorial (tirade) that would have succinctly stated what many (most) *Times* and *Post* editors are too skittish to say. Self-preservation trumps journalistic integrity, apparently. I wonder what Woodward and Bernstein would say? Or, more contemporarily, Maria Ressa, the Filipina Nobel Prize winning journalist who stated during her 2021 acceptance speech in Oslo, "I stand before you, a representative of every journal-

ist around the world who is forced to sacrifice so much to hold the line, to stay true to our values and mission: to bring you truth and hold power into account." She described the god-like powers of technology, the new gatekeepers of the information ecosystem, which is at odds with true journalism, the old gatekeepers.

She spoke of how the new gatekeepers have allowed a "virus of lies to infect each of us, pitting us against each other" and playing on fear, anger, and hate, which has set the stage for authoritarianism, dictators, and fascism. The last time a journalist was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize was in 1936 to Carl von Ossietzky, who never made it to Oslo to accept because he was in a Nazi concentration camp. Ressa asks fellow journalists and the world, "What are you willing to sacrifice for truth?" She speaks of journalism, truth, and ethical honor intersecting at this moment in history where hate, lies, and divisiveness thrive ... and she speaks of January 6th, relating from experience how we don't know who we are until we're tested until we're forced to **"We, as a nation, as members of an allegiance built on an ethos of truth to power, are being tested."**

The stalwarts of our industry are failing the test. If the bigs can't stand for truth, then trust falters, and we lose a shared reality. Without a common set of guidelines, it becomes impossible to deal with existential realities because truth becomes subjective and dependent on who is speaking, who is in power, and who signs the paychecks.

To be sure, the media landscape has changed since Woodward & Bernstein, but does that mean we have to sacrifice and lose sight of the importance of truth, honor, ethical responsibility, and working toward the greater good? If so, aren't we asking not what we can do for our country but what is good and safe for ourselves? What are we willing to sacrifice for truth? Let's be inspired by the journalists in Gaza and those around the world willing to sacrifice everything in the fight for justice.



Photo from Jon Tyson



Photo from Michael Carruth



Photo from Bruno van der Kraan

From the Inside Editor's Desk

By Jamel Walker
Mule Creek State Prison

As many stand by and watch America descend deeper into fascism, we continue to see numerous examples demonstrating the use of the word fascism is not hyperbolic in the least. In fact, it is not hyperbolic enough. One glaring example that the 47th President is dragging the country deeper into fascism is his misuse of the Alien Enemies Act to deport immigrants alleged to be gang members to CECOT Prison in El Salvador. Many on the right tout this move as bold and courageous, and claim their president is protecting the country from gangs. Those on the other side of the aisle are very worried — as well they should. Has anyone paused to wonder why these alleged gang members were detained and deported to a prison in a country known for committing human rights abuses? Has anyone asked, “Why has the felonious 47th President deported these individuals without proving they have committed any crimes, but pardoned members of the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers who were convicted of engaging in the January 6th Insurrection? Has anyone asked why has the felonious 47th President paid \$6 million to the government of El Salvador to incarcerate individuals court after court has ruled should not have been deported in the first place? Has anyone asked himself or herself, who could be next? The US Supreme Court has ordered, Kilmar Armando Abrega Garcia, whom the government admitted was deported due to “administrative error,” to be returned. It has also ordered anyone else allegedly subject to removal under the Alien Enemies Act be given adequate notice and judicial review before they can be removed. After months of delay, and claiming they couldn’t, the current fascist administration returned Abrego Garcia and charged him with several crimes. At this juncture, it is important for us to understand what the Alien Enemies Act is, and how our country’s felonious 47th president has abused his power in invoking it. The Alien Enemies Act of 1798 provides:

Whenever there is a declared war between the United States and any foreign nation or government, or any invasion or predatory incursion is perpetrated, attempted, or threatened against the territory of the United States by any foreign nation or government, and the President makes a public proclamation of the event, all natives, citizens, denizens, or subjects to the hostile nation or government, being of the age of fourteen years and upward, who shall be within the United States and not actually naturalized, shall be apprehended, restrained, secured, and removed as alien enemies.

The President is authorized in any such event, by his proclamation thereof, or other public act, to direct the conduct to be observed, on the part of the United States, toward the aliens who become so liable; the manner and degree of the restraint to which they shall be subject and in what cases, and upon what security their residence shall be permitted, and to provide for the removal of those who, not being permitted to reside within the United States, refuse or neglect to depart therefrom; and to establish any other regulations which are found necessary in the premises and for public safety.

The first sentence makes it clear that, in order to invoke this act, there must have been a declared war between the United States and “any foreign nation or government.” The United States has not declared war against “any foreign nation or government” nor has “any foreign nation or government” declared war against the United States. Some would argue that we must continue reading the first sentence because, as the president has said, “We have been invaded by immigrants.” However, regardless of how far one

reads into the sentence, there is no support for the president’s actions simply because, as it states in the rest of the sentence, “any invasion or predatory incursion is perpetrated, attempted, or threatened against the territory of the United States” must be perpetrated “by any foreign nation or government.” According to several federal courts, the plain language of the Alien Enemies Act requires the existence of two prerequisites before it can be invoked; a declaration of war by or against a “foreign nation or government” and, “invasion or predatory incursion perpetrated, attempted, or threatened against the territory of the United States by any foreign nation or government.” Alleged, or actual gang members, does not constitute a “foreign nation or government.” As a further illustration, the Alien Enemies Act has only been invoked three times previously; during the war of 1812; during World War I; lastly, during World War II. In fact, the history of the Alien Enemies Act reveals that it was only meant to be invoked when the United States is involved in a war with a “foreign nation or government.” We should be very worried if the pattern of this fascist president holds true, and we allow him to vilify our federal courts when they do not agree with him. If we allow him to ignore court orders — despite having said he would not — we should be very worried. When we allow him to invoke power he clearly does not have, and to surround himself with unqualified individuals not loyal to the Constitution or us but loyal to him, we should be terrified. Because, in a world where we allow fascists to reign, wielding power they do not deserve, interpreting laws they are not qualified to interpret, and believing in their heart of hearts that they are above the law because they and their loyalists say so, we should be petrified.

Today, immigrants are being rounded up and sent to third-world prisons to be tortured. Yesterday, it was alleged terrorists sent to “black sites” and Guantanamo Bay. Tomorrow, it will be anyone who stands in the way of “Making America Great Again.” They know who we are; Black, Brown, LGBTQ+, Leftists, Progressives; citizens of a democracy we must all refuse to hand over to a fascist dictator. America, we must never forget what can

Jamel Walker is serving his 40th year of a life without parole sentence. He has earned a Bachelor’s of Arts in Communication Studies from California State University - Sacramento, and is a graduate student at California State University - Dominguez Hills, working on his Masters of Arts degree in the Humanities, with an emphasis in Abolition and Liberation. He is a Certified Literacy Mentor, a Certified Human Services Paraprofessional, a social and racial justice advocate, penal abolitionist, journalist and writer.

Join the Conversation

We have received a number of contributions on the Dynamic Security pillar of the California Model. We appreciate all the insight and considerations submitted by our readers.

Moving the conversation forward, we now want to focus on another pillar of the California Model, **the pillar of Normalization**. This pillar represents the department’s desire to make an incarcerated person’s experience as close as possible to the world they will face once free. This means changing the prison environment so that it is less of a foreign institutional landscape filled with razor wire and gun emplacements, correctional hardships, and headaches; instead, the department intends to move towards more of a makeshift community setting with increased freedom and movement, better access to current technology, and less punitively constructed spaces.

We ask our readers: Can normalization work, and if so how? What efforts have you seen on this front where you are? Where is it superficial, and where do you see its possible merit?

Please send us your response to this prompt in 100 words or less. We value your perspectives and are eager for you to join the conversation. Let’s continue to learn from each other.

Subscription Information

The *VIP* is a monthly publication distributed free of charge to incarcerated readers; likewise, we share digital copies of the *VIP* to our supporters on the outside. If you are interested in being added to our mailing list, please use the following contact information:

Inside readers, send subscription requests to the address listed at the bottom of this page.

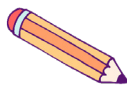
Outside readers can find copies of the *VIP* on our website www.DavisVanguard.org/vip/ or email us at outreach@davisvanguard.org to be added to the list to receive the newsletter electronically.

Call for Proposals

Solitary Watch is accepting proposals for grants to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated journalists through the Ridgeway Reporting Project. The grants, ranging from \$500 to \$2,500, will fund stories that have yet to be told about all aspects of solitary confinement, for publication in news outlets nationwide.

To receive the full application instructions, including deadlines for each of the next two funding rounds, write to: Ridgeway Reporting Project, Solitary Watch, PO Box 11374, Washington, DC 20008. Please do not send proposals without first reviewing the full application instructions.

Write To Us



The *VIP* accepts submissions, either as manuscripts or query letters, from currently incarcerated writers. We are interested in content covering prison and the experiences of the incarcerated. For a more detailed coverage of the content we are looking for, please send us a self-addressed stamped envelope and we will forward you a copy of the *VIP*'s Official Style Guide.

All submissions making factual claims must include their sources and appropriate citations for referenced material; likewise, content which includes interviews with incarcerated people's names, likeness or quoted words must adhere to departmental requirements governing media interviews with incarcerated people.

Generally, we are looking for the following types of articles:

- Carceral Narratives
- Profiles/Interviews
- Investigative Reporting
- Op-Eds
- Prison Culture Analysis
- The Criminal Justice System
- Humorous Anecdotes
- Special Event Coverage
- Program Coverage

Please send **your submission, a short bio, and your preferred pronouns** to the mailing address listed at the bottom of this page.

Note: We appreciate all of our writers for sending us their submissions. However, due to the high volume of submissions we receive, we apologize that we are unable to respond to every letter we receive. In addition, **do not send us the original copy of your submission if you would like us to send it back.** We are unable to send your submissions back to you. And importantly, **we do not pay for articles.** All our writers are volunteers. We are a small staff with a small budget, and we want to thank our writers and readers for being patient with us.

Support Our Work

The *VIP* is a nonprofit publication written and edited by incarcerated people. We distribute our bi-monthly issues to incarcerated readers free of charge; we also provide mentorship services for both incarcerated journalists and scholars. Through the education and equitable empowerment of the incarcerated, we work tirelessly to disrupt the oppressive and violent social hierarchies in prison, striving to create meaningful opportunities for change and personal growth in the lives of those on the inside, but we cannot maintain this important work without the gracious support of our allies and community partners.

If you believe in what we do and have the ability, please make a financial contribution to our cause. For those who are unable to contribute financially, please help us promote the *VIP* and share it with a broader audience, bridging the gap between the prison and the community.

To make a donation and learn more about the work we do, please visit www.davisvanguard.org. Checks may be made out to The *Davis Vanguard*, with *VIP* in the memo, and mailed to the address listed on the right.

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