



# VANGUARD INCARCERATED PRESS

Volume 9, Issue 1

inside  
March/April

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## The Pillar of Normalization

By John L. Orr

*Mule Creek State Prison*

In the “normal” world of civilian life, workers know their job incentives: arrive on time, do well, and you receive acceptable wages. If the position does not provide any recognition and commensurate pay—find one that does.

California prison employment incentives are non-existent. Changing from a maximum pay incarcerated clerk job to a similar position in the workplace results in starting back at entry-level pay—no exceptions. In the outside world this does not happen. Normalization in the prison workplace should mimic actual outside-the-walls employment ethics, not perpetuate Draconian forced labor standards.

**“Normalization in the workplace should mimic actual outside-the-walls employment ethics...”**



John L. Orr.

## Please Press Five

By Ronin Grey

*Correctional Training Facility*

“Voice is important, a way to know a soul” - Shawna Forde [death row, Arizona]

One of the most stressful things about prison used to be using the phone.

With 16 phones for a yard of almost 1,500 guys, you could spend hours in the phone line—especially on a holiday—and at any time your chance of telling your mom “Happy Mother’s Day” might vanish in a cloud of dust kicked up by shuffling sneakers as a dispute over who cut whom in line got physical.

Even if there were no brawls or alarms, you might not even make it out to the yard where the phones are. You might have an antagonist in the tower who doesn’t want to turn the phones on. You might stand in line half the day only to miss your people in the narrow window of time you have to place a call, before the next guy’s breathing down your neck to get on with his own spin of the phone roulette-revolver.

In April of 2023, at my facility, the prison rolled out tablets to the incarcerated population. Aside from everything else about tablets, one feature of ours is the ability to make telephone calls from it. All of a sudden, instead of 16 phones for 1,500 guys, there were 1,500 phones—and zero fights, at least over “I was here first, motherfucker.” Using the phone went from being the most stressful part of the day to the most relaxing.

I hear that on the street now, it is considered rude to call people, and that you are supposed to text first, or do whatever it is people do now. Sometimes, people outside are as bad at communication as we are in here. But while it may be considered poor manners to call without warning, thank you for remembering that I am a caveman and I’m reaching out to you from the Stone Age, where nobody teaches folks like me the rules of polite society.

And thank you for enduring the torturous automated messages informing you that you have a phone call from a prison, that yes, really, a prison, and that yes, seriously,

**“And I am sincerely thankful for everytime someone presses five.”**

the person calling you really is a prisoner. So, if you are absolutely sure you want to accept the call, then go ahead and press five. Your phone call will be monitored, your phone number recorded, and you will undoubtedly be placed on a list of People Who Talk to them.

And I am sincerely thankful for every time someone presses five.

What a phone call means to someone in prison may not be readily apparent: Yes,

we want news from home, yes, we want to know if mom’s feeling better, and yes, we want to confirm that the mail got sent, that the pictures got sent, that the money did—all that.

**“We want to catch a glimpse of domestic life. We want to spend a few moments feeling included again.”**

But more than what’s on the surface, we want to reconnect to the larger body of humanity. We are like a severed limb in the discard pile, but when we connect, it is like we were never shorn away for a

blissful fifteen minutes. We want to step outside of the miserable, stifling, boring, oppressive world of incarceration and remember what it feels like to be with real human people. To remember what it feels like to just talk. To have someone want us around.

We want to take a breath of free air. We want to catch a glimpse of domestic life. We want to spend just a few moments feeling included again. We want to spend time with someone we love, to feel present in their life despite the distance and our isolation.

I am 40 years old. Last week, I began my 17th year inside a state penitentiary. I don’t have many happy memories to look back on. The people I knew before prison are long gone from my life. But when you press five, I’m not in prison. When I am with you, I am not in this place that daily chisels away at my soul. I know they said I don’t have one, but here’s a secret: I do.

# Letter from the Inside Editor

By D. Razor Babb  
*Mule Creek State Prison*

VIP Director Dr. Joan Parkin is away tending to family affairs this month. We all wish her and her family the best and look forward to her return by the next edition. As one of VIP's inside editors it is my privilege to fill in for Dr. Parkin this month, not an easy lift ... anyone who has met Joan knows that attempting to live up to her standards is no enviable task.

As someone who was present when Dave Greenwald delivered the brainchild of VIP, and has witnessed the evolution and struggles this paper has endured over the past three years, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the dedication, will, and grit exemplified by those who have contributed to and have supported its publishing. It is no simple task to produce and finance a print publication these days. Dave's insight in hiring Joan Parkin was an inspired stroke of genius which propelled and

**"We need all of us to use our social networks to rally to the cause."**

enabled this project to flourish and endure.

The cause of abolition and allowing a forum for free expression of those most critically impacted by mass incarceration is noble, and necessary. Prison journalism and writing-reporting from inside are critical elements in ensuring the national dialogue is representative of all cultures. Without the visceral realism of our incarcerated experiences being shared, this nation's prisons will remain places of isolation, hopelessness, and despair.

I call upon you all, each and every reader, writer, and reporter involved as a participant in this publishing venture to step forward and become a committed partner in this worthy cause. We need the best of your stories, your ideas, your contributions in all manner which will ensure this important and valuable work continues.

There may come a time when printed papers like VIP will no longer exist. However, as someone who has been engaged in prison publishing for 20+ years and with more than 50 years reporting experience, I have witnessed my share of successes and failures.

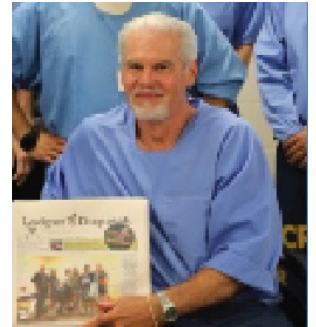
I have learned from these experiences that quality reporting and an adherence to sincere journalistic intent and execution endures. With that foundational basis and with people like Dave Greenwald and Joan Parkin leading the way, our chances at success are better than average, although not absolute.

In the coming months we will be seeking your support and the assistance of the abolitionist and social justice communities to spread the word of VIP and seek creative sources of revenue and funding to keep this paper going. It is going to take all of us to continue making this happen. It is unreasonable to expect or assume any one person, or the other guy or gal, to carry the load. We need all of us to use our social networks to rally to the cause. In the future, there is the possibility of VIP evolving to a more commercially viable product with ad sales, regular fundraisers, full page book ads, online art auctions, subscriptions, and expanded online content and integration with proceeds going to support the paper. In the future, contributors

will be paid for their stories. Many people in our social circles regularly spend \$10 on a cup of coffee or send us quarterly packages. Let's direct some of those resources toward supporting this valuable literary and journalistic endeavor.

The stories of the dispossessed, disenfranchised, and marginalized communities the incarcerated represent need to be a part of the social dialogue and must be told and heard. After all, who knows better about what's needed in criminal justice reform than those with the most experience in this arena, and those most viscerally impacted?

In solidarity,  
D. Razor Babb



**LETTER** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ *from the editor*

## Message from the Production Managers

By Mia Bella Rodgers and Maxine Pollock

Hi everyone! I am so proud to serve as one of your Production Managers. We review every single letter we receive, and each and every one of them is so special and full of life. As a Criminology prelaw student, this role has transformed my aspirations into centering around institutional policy, reform, and a humanised court system. The world is terrifying right now, and every voice contributing to change matters. If we are not loud about injustice, policy leaders will remain in their comfortable systems that benefit off of people like us. We hear you. We see you. It is my utmost goal to carry your letters in my heart throughout my career, and make real change. Everyone deserves access to resources and programs that allow them to prove their character. Thank you so much for supporting the VIP and trusting us with your heart. We carry it with tenderness and empathy.

Thank you so much,  
Mia

It is an honor to be one of your Production Managers alongside Mia. I have thoroughly enjoyed delving into this new role by reading your valuable and diverse submissions. The VIP's mission is one I hold close to my heart and Mia and I plan on elevating this paper to the best of our ability. While we unfortunately do not have the capacity to respond to each and every letter we receive, I want our readers to know that your participation in our work does not go unnoticed. Your perspective, lived experiences, and wisdom are more valuable now than ever before, and I know the insights you consistently provide will certainly inform my path forward towards becoming a public defender. Keep writing, remain brave and steadfast, and don't be a stranger. Wishing you all a prosperous new year.

With admiration,  
Maxine

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Joan Parkin is the Director of the *Vanguard Incarcerated Press*, the author of *Perspectives from the Cell House*, *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.

**Who We Are**

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, 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.

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 forwards: 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, Evelyn Ramos stepped down from her position as Production Manager to focus on her job and studies. Mia Bella Rodgers and Maxine Pollock took over starting with this issue.

**Editor-in-Chief**

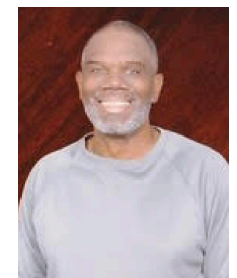
Joan Parkin

**Production Managers**

Mia Bella Rodgers



Maxine Pollock

**Inside Editors**Jamel Walker  
*Mule Creek State Prison*D. Razor Babb  
*Mule Creek State Prison*

It doesn't matter to me where we are or what we're doing. Are we at the grocery store? I don't mind. I haven't been to a grocery store in 17 years. Are we doing laundry? Cool, I wish I had a machine like that to do mine. Are we by the lake? I haven't seen a body of water bigger than a stainless steel sink since I got locked up. Is there a tree? Can we touch it? What kind is it? I haven't been near a tree in almost half my life.

**"Even at home, the phone takes me to a whole new world with you."**

Even at home, the phone takes me to a whole new world with you. Are we cooking? What's for dinner? Are we on the couch? Are we on your bed? Are we whispering to each other so everyone else feels like they're far away? Seventeen years ago, I did things like this, but my heart then entered stasis—until you accepted my call and woke it up.

It's been all these years since I talked to a woman who didn't have a baton on her hip. All these years since I heard a woman say, 'I love you.' All these years since I said, 'I love you.'

I love you.

*Your call will be monitored and recorded. Thank you for using Global Tel Link.*

## **Teshuvah and Women's Rehabilitation: A Jewish LWOP's Perspective**

**By Dana Gray**

*Central California Women's Facility*

When most people think of judgment, they also think of sin. In Judaism, sin means "missing the mark." Jewish tradition draws on an analogy between life and archery. Just as one doesn't always hit the bullseye, each one of us fails to act in ways consistent with our own highest values or that of society. Sometimes we "miss the mark." Jewish tradition teaches that within each of us, dwells an inclination for both good and evil. We are created with the capacity to choose between right and wrong and it is our choice to make. This choice is not made by anyone other than ourselves.

So how do we get back on target? The process of correcting one's course is called Teshuvah (turning or returning, as in turning from an improper course to the proper, and returning to God). I won't define God here as I see it, YOUR Higher Power opens this process without prejudice to personal belief. Teshuvah is when you recognize your error and choose to correct the behavior and vow not to repeat it. You know when you've made Teshuvah when you are faced with similar circumstances and refrain from repeating the error. It is, in effect, renewal.

In rehabilitation, we are expected to achieve this same concept. It comes in the form of recognition of wrongs, character, defects, denial patterns, criminal thinking, taking responsibility, making amends and relapse prevention plans. We examine our conscience by writing and examining our crime impact statement. We examine it through cognitive behavior patterns that we learned in our childhood environments, and how these behaviors were reinforced into adulthood. It is a call to conscience.

Rehabilitation is like the Jewish term of renewal, and is a year-round process. We have the capacity to renew ourselves, to make new of those things that are repeated over and over in our lives. Renewal is an action word and it takes our good inclination to make it work. Although we cannot take back our

crimes, we can make Teshuvah for the thoughts, actions, and behaviors that shaped our criminal choices. As we look into that mirror of criminal choices, we are bound to see imperfections. For a woman, much of that is packaged in shame. Shame doesn't have to be crippling. It doesn't have to define you. It can be the impetus that causes us to break down the barriers and examine our actions to create healthy growth.

Speaking for myself as a woman and a LWOP that has been down for 30 years and counting, I have spent many of these years not only in the process of renewal, but in recovery as an addict and a child of addicted parents. Quite honestly, you cannot have a full rehabilitation and renewal without recovery. I have had to dig deep into my own complex, traumatic childhood as a rape victim with severe familial dysfunction, food

**"[Shame] can be the impetus that causes us to break down the barriers and examine our actions to create healthy growth."**

insecurity and neglect. That's the Reader's Digest version, and guess what? I am NOT the victim. My victims are. This re-alization allowed

me to have deep remorse and make meaningful amends. My amends are for the rest of my life.

For true rehabilitation, I have had to not just see myself as a childhood victim, but see and understand how I turned that into victimizing others. Seeing myself as a victimizer was hard to admit to myself because of the thoughts and beliefs that were instilled in me as a child. Those subsequent behaviors did not send up red flags because to me they were "normal." Blaming others, minimizing, and manipulation were used to cover and justify my defects, failures, and rejection was comfortable and familiar since that's all I ever knew. I understand the etiology of my crimes now and that has deepened my remorse and yes, my shame too.

Today I teach women the methods, tools and principles with which I was able to work through the process of renewal and rehabilitation. I do this through a denial management group focusing on intensive insight into what got the participant to the point of making a life altering criminal choice that would forever change the lives of their victims, their families, community, and society as a whole, the proverbial ripple effect.

Our actions can affect people we least expect or don't even know. They are also taught to make a relapse prevention plan for their actions and triggers. I teach them Teshuvah. As an LWOP, one would think I sit around and eat honey buns all day. What gives me hope and keeps my life meaningful is to help others. It is part of my amends and year-round renewal. For these reasons I hope that someday these qualities in many LWOP women will be considered and LWOP will be abolished.

We are not throwaways. We can rehabilitate, and we have the lowest recidivism rate. We keep our inclinations, both good and bad, in the foreground always. As rehabilitated women that have value and the potential to turn the social reproduction of criminal thinking in all classes into criminal prevention, we prevail. I ask you out there to please consider this, if only for a moment and see us as worthy. Would you open your heart and give LWOPs the gift of a parole eligible sentence and let us earn our way to parole?

The sign above Justice Ginsberg's door read, "Tikkun Olam." It is the concept in Judaism that Jews, as part of the human family, have a responsibility to contribute to the well-being of the broken world, thereby repairing it. This isn't solely for Jews. It is for ALL of us. Let LWOP women (okay...and men), be the Tikkun Olam today.

# HOPE?

By Ahmad Thomas

*SATF Corcoran State Prison*

“Laws change all the time, promise me you will stay healthy, faithful, and never give up.” I will never forget hearing these words from my dear mother Sandra Lee Thomas, may she rest in peace. It was in 1989, shortly after the judge sentenced me to life without the possibility of parole plus 35 years to life, when my mother said this to me. I don’t know that anything could have prepared her to come to terms with the notion that her only child had been sentenced to die in prison, but I’m confident that her words of encouragement were meant to ensure that I never accepted that fate. Reflecting back on my nearly 40 years of incarceration, I believe I have experienced the gamut of mental, emotional, and physical pains associated with such a hopeless sentence, from the numbness I felt when the judge pronounced the sentence, to the physical scars I have suffered as a result of fights and prison riots. Not to mention, the discouraging letdowns associated with denials of appeals, or even changes in laws that would otherwise help me if it weren’t for my sentence. However, despite many reasons to be despondent over the years, I have found optimism through the grace of God, and through the promise I made to my mother 37 years ago.

My mother was an only child, and I am her only child. We were all we had. How do you explain to a mother that her only child was sentenced to what is equivalent to a living death sentence: life without the possibility of parole? I will never forget having to make that call to my mother after I was sentenced. I didn’t fully grasp the severity of an LWOP sentence, so I didn’t have an idea of how I was going to explain it to my mother. Yet, with tears in my eyes, I did the best I could.

Maybe my mother predicted the challenges that I would face as a young man trying to adapt to such a desultory and unforgiving environment that is designed to break you. At the end of the call, she told me that God will have the last say, he will change the laws, “It’s not what man says, it’s what God says.” And one day he’ll set you free. She made me promise to never give up and keep praying. Unfortunately, my mother passed away never to see me walk free. But just as I promised her, I have remained faithful and hopeful and I refuse to give up. It has been so hard living with knowing my mom died feeling that her bad parenting is what resulted in her only child being sentenced to LWOP. Although this couldn’t be further from the truth, I couldn’t have convinced her otherwise. After I was arrested my mom got sober and stopped using drugs. I was so happy and proud of her, but she still blamed herself for my actions. Realizing that was not fair to her, I have been dedicated to keeping my promise. Furthermore, my faith in God, and the thought of my victims who did not deserve to die, and their families who did not deserve to suffer the pain and hurt I’ve caused is all part of my motivation and drive to change and to never give up.

As a naive 19 year old kid, I didn’t fully understand the ramifications of a life without the possibility of parole sentence. This was my first experience with the criminal justice system. I had never been to the Youth Authority, county jail, or had any serious run-ins with the law. Perhaps, blissful ignorance is what helped me through the blur of court proceedings. Even after the judge sentenced me, and I was placed back in the holding cell, I still didn’t fully understand what had just happened. Although other individuals in the holding cell tried to explain what LWOP had meant, it still didn’t register.

It wasn’t until I left the county jail and made it into the prison system that reality began to sink in. It was at this point that I began to understand that there is a mindset associated

with the belief that you will die in prison. Can you imagine the mentality you must sustain while living with a LWOP sentence in California’s maximum security level 4 prisons? Well, I can tell you based on my personal experi-

ences that it is a very abnormal way to live. For me, at a young age I quickly learned that in order to survive I had to adopt the “I don’t give a fuck” mentality. This was the common disposition of individuals around me with a similar sentence. With LWOP you must learn to suppress emotions, feelings and disregard any sensitivity towards anything. Your whole focus and constant awareness needs to be strictly on your environment in order to survive. Your life can end at any moment. I lived like this for the first 15 years of my sentence. This is the mentality that was necessary in order to survive. This warped mindset was my reality. Essentially, it was do whatever it takes to live, but at the same time you’re thinking, live for what?

Life without the possibility of parole is a hopeless sentence to say the least. Living with this sentence you are forced to develop a stoic and callous attitude. Think about it: why should I care? I’m never going home. I’m going to die in prison. That’s at least what I had been told all of these years, so why should I care? At one point, my situation became so bleak and hopeless when two of my associates who were also sentenced to LWOP decided they didn’t want to live in cages like animals for the rest of their life. One hung himself from the vent in his cell, and the other slit his wrist and bled out. At the time I respected what they had done. I felt like it took a great deal of courage, but at the same time hopelessness to kill yourself. I didn’t have the courage to kill myself, but I was so hopeless that I considered petitioning the governor to change my sentence from LWOP to a death sentence. Considering the fact that I was sentenced to spend the rest of my life in prison, my thinking was why prolong the inevitable. This is the warped mentality that a sentence like this produces. However, this mentality is not only a result of the sentence, the prison conditions and treatment by staff also contributes to this dejected mentality.

For example, I recall for years I would sign up for self-help classes and education programs to better myself, and to get out of the cell only to be told, “Hey you’re not getting out, these programs and classes are reserved for those who are returning back to

society.” Moreover, when inquiring about job assignments, I had specifically been told that ‘LWOPS’ had nothing coming. Over time, you begin to accept this as a fact, but when you do, you

have officially entered the abyss of hopelessness. Think about this: You go to a zoo or animal shelter and you are looking at this animal locked in a cage moving back and forth in a “walk alone.” That was how I lived pacing back and forth in the SHU (Security Housing Unit) like a caged animal. I think about those who said they loved me but their particular love wasn’t strong enough to withstand, or strong enough to endure my nearly four (4) decades of incarceration. I’m all alone now. I think about when I die what will become of my body? Will I be buried on prison grounds with my CDCR prison number marked on my headstone if no one claims my remains? This is the type of thoughts that I am forced to contemplate considering the depth of hopelessness I have lived with for so many years.

**“We were all we had. How do you explain to a mother her only child was sentenced to what is equivalent to a living death sentence: life without the possibility of parole?”**

**“Think about it why should I care? I’m never going home.”**

*"HOPE?" continued*

As the years continue to add up, with age you become wiser and start looking at life a lot differently. As I began to think about my mom who died in 2012, and the promise I made her I realized I had to abandon the "I don't care" mentality. I realized that I am much more than my sentence and I no longer chose to be defined by it or let it dictate my life. Although the sounds of clicking handcuffs, the sounds of alarms, the smell of pepper spray, the sound of the 223 coming out of the mini 14 rifle, or the two to three men coming at you with weapons in a prison race riot will never escape me, I never want to live like that again.

No longer do I want the narrative to be that those who are sentenced to LWOP are irredeemable and hopeless. I am serving my 37th year of this living death sentence, and CDCR is now emphasizing the "R" in its name which represents rehabilitation. As a result, there have been changes in how individuals sentenced to LWOP are classified and housed. At one point, we were only allowed to be housed on maximum security level four prison yards. Now, with good behavior, we are able to be housed on minimum security level two prison yards. This shows how times have changed. Now I am able to take advantage of all the self-help programs and trades that may be available besides those that are only offered through correspondence courses. For example, I believe that programs offered in person are more effective and transforming. Now I can envision obtaining my A.A. in sociology. This type of goal was unfathomable with my old way of thinking. I believe that this is proof that incarcerated individuals are capable of change and no longer the people we were at the time of our crimes. This also shows how CDC(R) is acknowledging that we are capable of change. I am a testament to this change, as well as the other 146 LWOPs who are housed here at S.A.T.F. Corcoran State Prison.

We are doing what is required of us and more to show that we are much more than what this sentence says of us. The narrative has since changed, and we are showing this by attending self-help groups by contributing and giving back to the community through fund-raisers, cosmetic drives for those less fortunate, by showing good work ethic, and through programming and getting along without any racial division. All of these positive steps are helping to change the narrative and negative stigma of this hopeless sentence, and I'm truly grateful and proud to be a part of this change.

My hope and prayer is that someday soon LWOPs will be afforded the opportunity to go before the Parole Board to show that we are no longer a threat to society and more than capable of becoming productive citizens. We now know that the recidivism rate for those sentenced to LWOP whose sentence was reduced or commuted is less than 1%. If I was afforded an opportunity to demonstrate my change to a parole board and granted my freedom my life would change drastically to say the least. Most importantly, I would be able to visit my mom at her resting place and show her that I fulfilled my promise to her, as her only child never gave up and didn't die in prison due to life without the possibility of parole.

**"We are doing what is required of us and more to show that we are so much more than what this sentence says of us. The narrative has since changed and we are showing this ..."**



California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation /  
The Associated Press.

## Death Row's Living Dead Ushers in a New Era at New Folsom Prison

By Juan De Dios Villa Ramirez

California State Prison, Sacramento

California's penal system is home to 95,000 fourth-class residents. A majority of these residents are labeled as violent gang members of all races, creating a new society within CDCR. Now, imagine being unique amongst them and labeled as the worst of the worst in this society. These people live in a small section of the Pinta, San Quentin's Condemned Row.

Buenos dias! I am one of the 675 "living dead" on California's Death Row, segregated from all other regular incarcerated individuals in a "prison within a prison" called East Block. I have survived over 15 years (out of 26 years of incarceration) in solitary confinement, the hoyo. The Adjustment Center (AC) is a prison within a prison where we spent a majority of our cell tiempo (time) handcuffed, shackled, and wearing only a t-shirt, boxers, and shower slippers, forced to be strip-searched upon leaving our cells to take a shower. This says more about the COs (correctional officers) than me. My only human contact was with COs in full riot gear who carry metal batons and large canisters of OC spray—in your vernacular pepper spray or mace, only more potent. My beastly and detestable upbringing here was child's play compared to my "true battle" for salvation and psychological well-being later on. In the hoyo, my teachers taught me to have inner discipline above all else and the value of the written word. Daily workouts of my body and mind reinforced my self-worth.

I grew into manhood in the hoyo, shackled and handcuffed, alongside 25-30 like-minded comrades (comrades). Even though we all lived in single-man cells and single-man recreation yards, I never felt alone in the cages. Our world taught me how powerful one can be all by themselves, especially if one embraces the recorded written word throughout history.

The Adjustment Center (AC), the prison within a prison, within that prison, uses solitary confinement to isolate you from the general population of death row. The Institutional Classification Committee (ICC), headed by the warden, told me on July 17, 2001, that unless I cooperate with his staff (become a rat), my stay in the AC will be indefinite. By refusing his instructions with foul language, I was labeled a troublemaker and was forced to spend the first 4 years on the row in the hoyo. The long-lasting effect of my decision was 18 years in solitary confinement in San Quentin.

I grew up with the same 25 to 30 Mexicanos homies, all from Southern California. We all arrived on the row in the late 90s and early 2000s, in our early twenties. They became my surrogate familia for over two decades and unfortunately not all my surrogate family was able to withstand the rigorous demands of having an honorable and reprehensible personality for daily living in our environment.

In 2023, just out of the hoyo, rumors of the governor finally approving death row transfers to other state pens spread like wildfire. I believed in my heart I would never leave S.Q. solitary confinement much less be able to walk a main-live garda. Finally, we were all leaving the dark, dirty, and dingy small cells in East Block's Condemned Row. Now in our late forties and early fifties, we were self-educated men on our way to maximum security prisons throughout California.

**"You see, I accepted fate's decision to place me in a concrete jungle to wait for the state of California to get their REVENGE by murdering me!"**

**"...I was mesmerized by the green grass all over my new home."**

Under protest, I was transferred here to Sacramento State Prison or New Folsom level 4-180 yard on May 8, 2024. I spent seven horrible days on 24/7 lockdown for orientation. One stays hungry there, with no canteen access, only three 10-minute showers per week and one phone call only on Fridays. Cold in the cells and without any personal warm clothing, I slept in the white, blue-striped paper jumpsuit issued for CDCR transportation buses, just to stay warm at night. The worst part was always feeling dirty because the staff do not allow razors to shave within this prison.

In orientation, you're only issued 2 boxers, 2 pairs of socks, 2 sheets, 2 blankets (worn and thin), and 1 set of blues. Every request for warm clothing was denied with the response, "not till you get out of orientation" or "when you get out of orientation, your people will hook you up." By the end of my first seven days at my new home in New Folsom, I had lost seven pounds. My mind wondered what was in store for me in a place where you're treated this badly upon arrival.

Despite all I have been through in my 26 years of incarceration, my past experiences seemed like a walk in the park compared to the next several days at C-facility. It was a new stilo (style) of psychological warfare. Even though I had a 34-year career of war, in and out of state institutions, with and without weapons, I was about to face a notorious battle-hardened enemy, none other than my psyche!

On May 17, 2024 at 2:30 pm, I—this bona fide adult pintero (convict)—stood frozen by amazement and uncertainty. I was standing by the exit door of the orientation section of 7 block uncuffed, staring at the green grass, actual live grass and sidewalks leading to freedom. As the bright sunshine hit my face, I could smell the grass and remembered missing touching or sitting on fresh grass. It had been 26 years since I last ran my fingers through green grass. I had forgotten how much I really missed this tiny aspect of true freedom.

A female officer next to the door led a lot of orientation sections while speaking to me and three other incarcerated individuals. They were all general population (GP) like myself, and as she read out their housing locations, they went on their ways. Throughout this interaction, time and sound and all movement stood still as I was mesmerized by the green grass all over my new home.

You see, I accepted fate's decision to place me in a concrete jungle to wait for the state of California to get their REVENGE by murdering me! Then, destiny challenged my choices with indefinite solitary confinement placement attempting to break my will and well-being. So, I removed all normal society life thoughts and memories from my mind by locking them in my heart—a hoyo survival technique I was taught in my first years in the AC.



Mia Bella Rodgers.

After what seemed like hours frozen at the door, I returned to reality noticing the female CO speaking to me. Everyone else had gone already, we stood facing each other in the sally port.

I said, "I saw your lips moving, but everything you said sounds like Chinese to me because I just got here from the Row and never been in the prison main line before."

She stated, "Oh, I'm sorry, so you're one of those three here!" I realized it's also the staff's first day and first interaction with a Living Dead without shackles, chains, or handcuffs for their protection. Trepidation came across her face momentarily, vanishing as she noticed my half smile and flushed face, the kind a new kid in class gets on the first day when they are asked to stand up and say their name and where they came from.

Being totally forthcoming with you, I felt a mix of uncertainty and anticipation about the amount of unhandcuffed freedom the Living Dead has. Once I recovered myself, she was pointing to where I needed to be going: large black double doors. That was all I let her say because I was gone, speed walking with my bedroll and medication in bags in hand. I did not let her finish talking as the bright sun hugged my body like a hug from Mama. The little voice in my head said, "do not turn around if they decide to handcuff you once more" or some head hancha CO decides I, a Living Dead, does not belong out of the hoyo around regular convicts.

I was forced to declare war against that little voice we all have in our heads that controls our decision making and innermost feelings of fear, joy, and amazement. That which psychologists call our conscience, our good Angel and bad Angel, for all our thinking. This war was the second I would be entitled to here at New Folsom Prison, not to mention it being my first real day around regular prisoners after 23 years and 10 months on lockdown on the Row.

Time and sound stopped, and I felt as if I was wearing ear-plugs. This was a foreign sensation and beyond a simple explanation. Maybe it

**"I was forced to declare war against that little voice we all have in our heads that controls our decision making and inner most feelings of fear, joy, and amazement."**

was a defense mechanism to keep one's mind from being overstimulated, leading to an emotional breakdown. All I know is that it was the most difficult task I have ever undertaken. No one can help you differentiate what's true or false or good or bad for one's self-well-being. It led to the most emotionally and psychologically draining day in all my young 34 years of incarceration: day one on main line GP level 4-180 yard.

My days begin at 5 AM most days, getting myself and the cell cleaned. One must get psychologically pumped up in order to begin a new Unique Living Dead life amongst like-minded individuals of all races. But not all my years of daily physical fitness and self-education, including 4 years of college (1 class away from AA in sociology), could have prepared me for this day. I felt completely ill-equipped upon commencing my battle of the day. Most importantly, was my lack of up-to-date socializing lingo, seeing as I spent 2 ½ decades with the same comrades, where any out-of-group socializing must be done through chain-link fences with barbed wire, as a Quetero holding a mini 14 assault rifle and a six-round block gun listens to your conversations.

Now, this new yard consists of at least over a hundred comrades, and in its totality, I'd guess 200 convicts of all races. This face-to-face interaction with my new like-minded comrades was forgotten as a normal fact of life. My New Folsom segregate familia is close to one

hundred, and at first glance, mind-blowing. The unique living dead only number three on this yard. On the outside, we look the same, but our uniqueness is internal because death follows us like a 3 o’clock shadow. No matter how much you shave, it shall be there once more, till YOU decide to remove it.

**“Seriously, it was a truly out of body experience I lived on my first day of yard, but I must say I have never been happier.”**

Upon entering my yard, it was mind boggling how big it was and I can roam at will. Being new, introducing myself to each one of my gente was great, but extremely stressful. My intro was “I am Juan, Kern County.” I must have said it a million times it seemed. Being around so many people for the first time, my head was on a swivel turning every which way, trying to act as normal as possible as that little voice was intoxicated by the proximity of the people next me because on the Row you learn to watch your back and keep your eyes on anyone behind you.

There were so many gente next to me and my hands would not stop twitching. It looked like my hands had a mind of their own, moving so much, so unaccustomed to being without handcuffs or shackles and no pockets in my shorts to hold my hands. That was my only “tell” of how nervous I was on my first day on the yard.

To be totally honest, I was not psychologically prepared to handle this much, especially without any type of rehabilitation. I was released to a mainline to cope as best as I could. I know being part of this crowd left me terrified and excited at the same time, and I was happy above all else.

I knelt, picked up some grass, smelled it, and rubbed it on my cheeks. As the day progressed, my personality jumped into the driver’s seat and got me through that taxing day.

It took about two weeks for my hands to calm down and get back to normal, becoming just another fourth-class citizen in our society. My first day on the yard was truly an out-of-body experience, but I must say I have never been happier.

## Unequal Justice

By Joshua Davis

*Rhode Island Department of Corrections*

Recently, Rhode Island passed R.I.G.L §13-8-13(e) “Life prisoners and prisoners with lengthy sentences.” Section (e) was passed after the legislature gave consideration to advancements in neuroscience related to the development of individuals aged 18-25. The frontal lobe is not fully developed in these individuals, and their ability to calculate risk, assess consequences, and make rational, thought-out decisions is at a level more akin to adolescents.

This group has been deemed “youthful offenders” or “emerging adults”, and even with this lack of processing ability, has been tried

**“The major issue with the section of this statute is that it specifically excludes LWOP offenders.”**

and sentenced as though they were no different than fully matured adults. Many states have now accepted the emerging science to back up the development of the youthful offenders’ mental processes and have enacted laws to help relieve youthful offenders of the draconian sentences they received, namely life without parole (LWOP).

Many cases support this science through the testimony of experts in the field, a few of which Rhode Island relied upon are *Miller V. Alabama*, 567 U.S. 460 (2012), *Roper V. Simmons*, 543 U.S. 551, and *Graham V. Florida*, 560 U.S. 48. The statute I am speaking out about, R.I.G.L. §13-8-13(e), reads “Any person Sentenced for offence committed prior to his or her twenty-second birthday, other than a person serving life without parole, shall be eligible for parole review and a parole permit may be issued after the person has served no fewer than 20 years imprisonment unless the person is entitled to earlier parole eligibility pursuant by any other provisions of law. This subsection shall be given prospective and retroactive effect for all offenses occurring on or after January 1, 1991.”

The intent of this subsection is to give youthful offenders the opportunity for early release due to their age and neurological development at the time of their offences. This statute allows even those sentenced to multiple consecutive life sentences the opportunity to be considered for parole in 20 years. The major issue with the section of this statute is that it specifically excludes LWOP offenders.

In Rhode Island, there are only 6 LWOP youthful offenders who fit the age classification, under 22 years of age at the time of their offense and the date of offence, which, according to this statute, is on or after January 1, 1991. I was 20 years old in 2006 when my offence occurred. The other men, who, like me, were youthful offenders, ranged in age from 18 to 21 at the time of their offense. We all fit all the requirements of this law exception for our LWOP sentences, which in Rhode Island is not mandatory, a LWOP sentence is discretionary. Also noteworthy is that it says, no “youthful offender,” under 22 at the time of their offense, has been given LWOP after 2008 when I was sentenced to it following a guilty plea.

The exclusion of us six men from this law is an unequal miscarriage of justice. This is a violation of my and the other five men’s constitutional right to Due Process under the Fifth Amendment and our Fourteenth Amendment right to Equal Protection under the United States Constitution. This law was enacted based on solid neuroscience, which directly applies to us.



Justin Gill.

The science of brain development does not discriminate based on any extrinsic factor, especially a man-made construct like a criminal sentence. If the neuroscience used to create this law does not discriminate or exclude us LWOP offenders, then neither can this law.

Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court in *Commonwealth V. Mattis*, 224 N.E.3d 410 (2024) just

*“Unequal Justice”* continued

ruled it is an unconstitutional violation of their state constitution’s 8th Amendment prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment, to sentence anybody to LWOP who committed their offense prior to their twenty-first birthday, again relying on the same neuroscience as Rhode Island’s 13-8-13(e) statute.

So, you see where Rhode Island ignored the fact that neuroscience applies to us 6 LWOP youthful offenders, thereby violating our constitutional rights. One state away, Massachusetts protected the rights of youthful offenders serving LWOP. Rhode Island excluded me and the other five men with no rational governmental basis, and Massachusetts abolished LWOP for the same age group. Rhode Island Law §13-8-13(e) is supported by science, yet it is selectively applied by the state. It is a prime example of a constitutional violation and application of unequal justice.

Neither I nor the five other men excluded from this law are less capable of rehabilitation, growth, maturity, and overall change than those similarly situated, who are serving multiple life sentences for the same offenses as us. The only difference between these later individuals and us is that, according to statutory construction, the state could have given them LWOP but elected not to.

The six of us youthful offenders are deemed unworthy to be included in Rhode Island General Law 13-8-13(e), and the state turns a blind eye to the fact that we also fit in the neuroscience. We miss out on the opportunity to rejoin our families, kids, and grandkids. We don’t get the chance to show a parole board that, in all our 20+ years of incarceration, we chose to take the road less traveled and improve ourselves.

“Time heals our griefs and wrongings, because we change, and we are no longer the same.” - Pascal

## As the World Turns

By Glen Cornwell

*California Medical Facility*

On May 23, 2024, when I arrived at California Medical Facility Vacaville, I knew I would have some adjustments I would need to overcome. What I didn’t know was that because I’m in the Enhanced Outpatient Program (EOP) I would have some parts of my custody that required me to be separated from the general population, which doesn’t make sense to me.

Since I have several groups, plus religious and veteran services, I’m sitting in the same room with mainline incarcerated people everyday, Monday through Fridays starting at 5:00 AM. At least one day keeps me out on the mainline until 8:20 PM. All that time I’m rushing to and fro, cramming, adding to discussion while representing myself to my fullest potential.

When I finally do make it back to my wing, my mind is moving so fast I’ll play 7 to 10 games of chess just to calm down and relax mentally. Several nights a week I’ll play pinochle until the day room closes at 8:00 PM. By the time the last medication line finishes at 9:00 PM, I’m usually asleep. When my alarm goes off at 5:00 AM, it’s on again. I’m back from breakfast at 6:30 AM and off to one of my groups or library studies by 8:30 AM.

Another thing I didn’t get was why we EOPs had to go to a small yard despite our integration into the mainstream population. The majority of the population went to the main yard, which is about 10 times the size of our EOP yards. Of course, the EOP yards here are at least 3 times the size of the yards on San Quentin’s death row. Whoever thought of the yards there had a strange sense of humor.

About a month ago (as the world turns) the “powers that be”

**“For some reason I started thinking about so many men I did time with on death row, many of whom died while I was there, men I called friends and even family.”**

finally decided EOPs could go to the main yard. It took me about a month to free up a day to go out because, between my busy schedule and studies, I usually sleep on my off days. When I finally stepped out on the big yard, “blown away” is an understatement.

Something about being out and uncuffed in such a vast area overwhelmed me. Somehow the giant yard and rolling tree-filled hills blended together, making the double fence and handgun towers seem like non-issues. The small yards we had been going to had four story buildings on either side, limiting my visions of the hills to only a few hundred yards. In the big yard, I could see hills to the horizon on either side.

Back when I was here between 1985 and 1987, there was a giant pile of weights in the first section upon entering the yard. None of that existed now, replaced by sparsely spaced benches and sidewalks, which enlarged the yard. Today, the entire scene was spacious, vast, open, and peaceful. When I looked to my left, a few beach cruiser bicycles sat outside a small building which used to be the yard shake, selling ice cream sodas. Now people checked out yoga mats, basketballs, and bikes, which I did.

The four lap mile track loop was still dirt, but I rode back and forth the length of the yard, learning to ride a bike again. After about 3 minutes, I called it a successful endeavor and gave the state the bike back. At that point, I found an empty bench and got lost in the view of rolling tree-covered hills and beautiful blue sky as far as my eyes could see.

For some reason I started thinking about so many men I did time with on death row, many of whom died while I was there, men I called friends and even family. One of them, Mario, even happened to be related to my sister’s husband.

We’d been close for years, him much younger than I, because we both came up in the Nickerson Garden project in Watts, California. My niece wrote to me asking if I knew Mario and in fact, he was one of the few people I was with every time we hit the yard. Finding out we were related by marriage made us that much closer, knowing that all we needed was to get out and go to a family reunion. Sadly, before I was transferred to CMF, Mario somehow died in his cell. I never found out the actual reason. As far as I know, we went on lockdown for a period of time, he got weak, and he died, a reality which happened on death row from time to time.

Now, peering up at the vast rolling hills, I couldn’t help but wonder if he would have appreciated the beautiful hills, wide blue sky, and fresh air. Of course, since here and hereafter are now concepts, there’s no reason for me to think all my friends who have passed away don’t have a better view. I also had the realization that Him, the most high and mighty, has no answer for all our questions, like why couldn’t all my departed friends be enjoying this view with me? I guess sometimes even to our most sincere prayers, the answer is simply no!



Joel Rosenbaum/The Reporter.

# It Does Not Have to be This Way

By **Jamel Walker**  
*Mule Creek State Prison*

The tragic killing of Renee Nicole Good, 37-year-old wife and mother of three, was predictable. But it didn't have to be. It should be clear to everyone that we are living in an ever-increasingly fascist police state. However, we must understand that we don't have to live in a society where many members of law enforcement view themselves as hammers, and the American citizenry as nails. One would have thought that, after the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis over five years ago—six blocks from where ICE agent Ross shot Renee Nicole Good in the face—we would have learned our lesson. However, it is clear we have not. According to the PBS NewsHour, since the current administration has unleashed ICE agents onto the streets of America, they have killed 31 people. Since George Floyd's killing in 2020, according to Statista.com, between 2020 and 2024, police have killed an average of 240 Black people per year. Moreover, according to Mapping Police Violence, in 2025, the police have killed over 958 people. Of this number, approximately 88% were not Black. This statistic tells us that law enforcement does not only kill unarmed Black people, they murder anyone they deem as nails. Some in our country are okay with this, believing they are not potential nails to be hammered.

In the immediate aftermath of the videos of Renee Nicole Good's killing going viral, comments have been made justifying her being shot in the face by ICE agent Ross. According to the LA Times, outspoken ESPN commentator, Stephen A. Smith sparked controversy when he stated on his SiriusXM talkshow "Straight Shooter" that, although the killing of Renee Nicole Good was "completely unnecessary ... from a law enforcement perspective", it was "completely justified." DHS Secretary Kristi Noem, and other members of the Trump administration have vilified Ms. Good as a "domestic terrorist" and "violent rioter"—as if these labels justify her killing.

Law enforcement is not permitted to use deadly force to unalive unarmed citizens for failing to comply with their orders. As a society, we grant law enforcement the ability to use force when carrying out their lawful duties. We have permitted them to use necessary force, which includes lethal and less than lethal force to protect their lives and the lives of others. They are prohibited from using excessive force. The killing of Renee Nicole Good is an example of unnecessary and excessive force. She was not responsible for her own death. She was not a criminal, domestic terrorist, or violent rioter. She was a mother of three, a wife, a daughter, a friend, a member of her community, a poet, and a victim of the police state we currently live in. She did not deserve to be killed, especially at the hands of law enforcement.

This should be obvious to everyone, but sadly it is not. The question is, why not? Why has our society become so willing to accept law enforcement killing unarmed people? Is it because we have become so desensitized to violence in general that we don't even blink when we hear about the latest killing at the hands of those we hire to serve and protect us? Is it because we have been socialized to respect authority without question? Is it because we are just afraid to demand better, believing that we won't be safe from criminals by insisting law enforcement be held accountable? Or is it because we constantly are bombarded with propaganda through popular media that tell us we should believe the president when he lies and says his Brown Shirts, he calls ICE agents, are going after illegal immigrant criminals? Evidence of this lie is that a recent statistic indicates since ICE agents have been

unleashed onto the streets of our country, they have made over 2,000 arrests. Of those arrested, approximately 10 people had a criminal record of some sort.

Should we believe DHS Secretary Noem when she calls a dead woman, unalive at the hands of one of her agents, a "domestic terrorist"? Should we believe her deputy secretary when she calls Renee Nicole Good a "violent rioter" or when vice-president Vance remarks that Ms. Good is responsible for her own death?

We know better. We should be grateful for all the video evidence taken by vigilant community members. Otherwise, we would be left with the "official account" of what happened instead of what we all witnessed through the eyes of the people who were on the scene. The question is, what are we going to do with the knowledge that some of our leaders are attempting to convince us to believe them instead of our lying eyes?

Instead of accepting the narrative that says law enforcement are keeping Americans safe, we should be asking, who is going to keep Americans safe from law enforcement? Of course the unaliveing of Renee Nicole Good was predictable; this is what happens when we allow a fascist criminal, who lies at every turn, to be elected president. He and his supporters will vilify and dehumanize all who do not agree with them. Renee Nicole Good did not weaponize her vehicle, this fascist president and his supporters have weaponized law enforcement.

Since the killing of Renee Nicole Good, there have been protests throughout the country. However, let us not forget that after the brazen lynching of George Floyd over five years ago, we witnessed the largest protest in American history. Approximately 15 - 26 million protestors took to the streets in the summer of 2020; yet, since then, there have not been any substantive police reform. Police have continued to unalive unarmed people, and will continue to do so if we the citizens of this country do not demand that our political leaders do at least one simple thing; stop trying to convince us what we see with our own eyes is not what's happening.

We must take to the streets in larger numbers than we did in the summer of 2020. Peaceful protest is crucial. We did not get this far without struggle. However, protesting alone will not be sufficient to awaken us from this horrible nightmare; it must be combined with nonviolent direct action like what happened during the civil rights movement, along with demanding our local city council members, state and federal legislators, do whatever is necessary to reign in the Weaponizer-in-Chief. While we do this, we all must remember; it does not have to be this way.



Renee Nicole Good. (Donna Ganger/Facebook).  
CBC News.

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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.

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# Join the Conversation

We have received a number of contributions on the Dynamic Security and Normalization pillars 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 Peer Mentorship**. According to the CDCR website, this pillar represents the department's goal to "empower the incarcerated population to use their lived experiences as tools for mutual support." This means establishing mentorship groups where older incarcerated folks—some of whom were mentees themselves—support their peers in pursuing educational programs and other professional skills. Valley State Prison is spearheading this initiative, with mentors and mentees reporting that they have experienced a multitude of personal benefits and that this program creates a more relatable and positive environment in prison.

Of all of the pillars, could Peer Mentorship—with its focus on reducing recidivism—represent the greatest impetus for deconstructing the harmful mechanisms by which prison is hardwired and equipping incarcerated individuals with necessary skills? Or, does Peer Mentorship merely shift responsibility for rehabilitation onto prisoners themselves while leaving broader structural conditions of incarceration intact? We ask our readers: Can Peer Mentorship 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? For our non-Californian readers: Do you desire Peer Mentorship at your institution, and is it even possible?

**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.



Youth Peer Mentor Program graduation at Valley State Prison.  
Submitted to CDCR by Lt. Humberto Gastelum.

## 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](http://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.

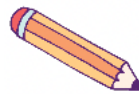
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## Write To Us



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.

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.

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