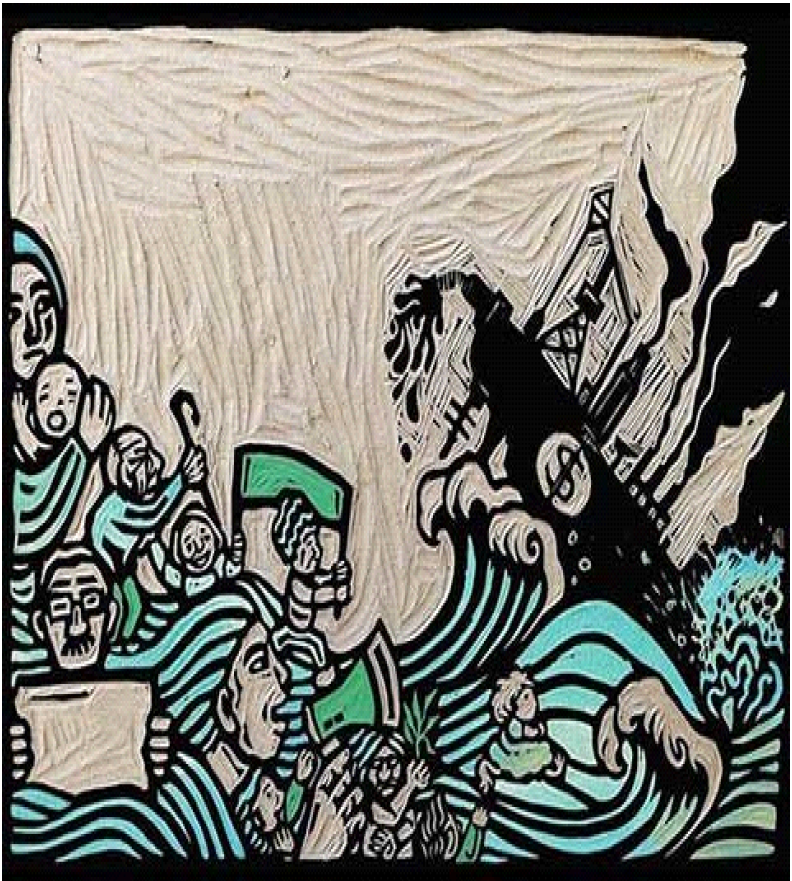


Prisoners in Disaster



The legacy of abuse, exploitation and endangerment of prisoners in disaster.



"During the Flood" by Donald "C-Note" Hooker, K94063 (B5-136) PO Box 4490.

In times of unnatural disaster, prisoners caged within institutions in storm paths and mandatory evacuation zones are regularly abandoned to "shelter in place" where they endure horrendous and dangerous conditions. Simultaneously, inmate labor is exploited by the state and corporations alike and prisoners are routinely put on the frontlines of climate catastrophes to face flames and floodwaters alike for next to nothing per day.

This zine, written by Mutual Aid Disaster Relief, is an evolving compendium of the legacy of inmate abandonment and exploitation in disaster. *Here, whenever available, we amplify impacted inmate's own words to tell their stories.*

Part I *“They left us there to die.”*

Prisoners in Disaster

Part II *“Prison labor is modern slavery. I’ve been sent to solitary for speaking out.”*

Prisoner Labor in Disaster

Part III *“It radiated heat in the heart of the Connally Unit without any escape.”*

Climate Chaos and Mass Incarceration.
What Comes Next?

Part I

Prisoners in Disaster

It was 3 a.m. when the line of inmates were directed through knee deep floodwater at the Carole Young medical unit of the Texas detention center from the bunk house to the main building (McDonald, 2018). Hurricane Harvey was delivering a deluge across the state with up to 40 inches of rain in some communities. With nearly one hundred fellow detainees with disabilities, on dialysis, undergoing chemotherapy and with post-surgical wounds, the march across 75 yards of flooded terrain was difficult. In the words of one prisoner who went through the harrowing experience,

“That’s when I notice the ladies with wheelchairs, walkers and crutches are struggling. One woman is crying hysterically because she is afraid of water and the dorm boss can’t get her to take one step forward” (McDonald, 2018).

The situation deteriorated as the hours passed. Carole Young is situated just adjacent to the reservoir and the army corps had determined a breach was possible (McDonald, 2018). The facility had not been evacuated. The next two days were a waiting game punctuated by screaming guards, the emergency on-site delivery of a baby by a pregnant inmate and dwindling food supply (McDonald, 2018).

A number of institutions were left un-evacuated during the powerhouse storm which took the lives of 68 people and caused 125 billion dollars in damage.

When Hurricane Ike devastated Galveston County, TX in 2009, the National Weather Service warned of “certain death” to those who did not evacuate. About 1,000 detainees, forced to shelter in place, suffered through dismal sanitary conditions.

Detainees stated that during the storm they could hear air conditioning units banging against the building. Water seeped into their sleeping quarters and caused ceiling tiles to fall off. The story was wrought from within the vacuum of a culture of carceral autonomy by the Texas Civil Rights Project (2009) and other prisoner

solidarity bodies. They told of limited and dwindling food and water supplies as well as medical neglect and inadequate inmate access to their medication.



A Texas State prison unit in Rosharon is submerged by water from the flooded Brazos River in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey.

Inmate lives, not made a priority, led to indescribable suffering with no way out. When Harvey struck, this evident history and record of lived experiences was ignored. In Stiles Unit, a Texas state prison near Beaumont, 3,000 prisoners were left in the storm path.

While the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) reported that “offenders” were “in good spirits,” the reality of the experience from the other side of the bars drastically conflicted with that statement (Baptiste, 2017).

With no way to flush toilets, cells were filled with the stench of urine and feces. Overflowing receptacles mingled sewage with floodwaters pooling on cell floors. One prisoner wrote, “We did not have to suffer like that” (Baptiste, 2017). Stiles was one of four prisons, three state and one federal, in the storm path which Harvey slammed into, devastating the water pressure system, spilling exposed toxic waste from a Superfund site east of Houston and devouring communities under veritable lakes of contaminated floodwaters.

Following the storm, incarcerated storm survivors recounted their experiences inside of the damaged institution, and testimonies of self-restriction of meals and fluids began to surface,

“When the water got cut off, you couldn’t use the restrooms in the cell. Now you gotta watch what you eat, you gotta watch what you drink. They came around with some water and brought us sack lunches-sandwiches, things like that. I couldn’t eat because it was going to make me use the restroom, and the whole cell is gonna be messed up” (Gross, 2017).

ICE and immigration detention profiteers CoreCivic and GEO Group, likewise, left detainees to shelter in place during Harvey (Kozłowska, 2017). GEO Group operated *several* different facilities that lay in the storm’s path, but both multi-billion-dollar corporations were unwilling to evacuate the people they profit from caging as punishment for their exercising movement across borders.

The events that unfolded in the Orleans Parish Prison (OPP) following Sheriff Marlin N. Gusman’s refusal to comply with the mayor’s first ever mandatory evacuation of the city of New Orleans contributed to the scenes of suffering and destruction emblazoned in the historic tragedies of Hurricane Katrina.

Following Gusman’s contention that, “The prisoners will stay where they belong” (Frenkiel, 2006), OPP was plunged into darkness. Katrina closed in and inmates on the lowest level lost ventilation and stifling heat took hold. Electrical doors became inoperable and hopelessly locked shut, which trapped prisoners inside as floodwaters rose.

Thus, the legacy of prisoners trapped in Katrina’s path is one in which 6,500 incarcerated persons were abandoned up to their necks in floodwaters teeming with sewage, while guards, charged with their safety, fled wholesale.

The ACLU report released one year after the storm: *Abandoned & Abused: Orleans Parish Prisoners in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina* (2006), spoke with one thousand prisoners who had been stranded in the stifling heat in partially submerged Orleans Parish Prison while guards fled the premises. These were experiences of utter terror.

One guard was reportedly locked in a ward of the prison and ordered to the roof with a shotgun and given the directive to shoot any inmate exiting the flooding building. This command, to *murder* unarmed inmates fleeing for their lives in the absence of any state or city body evacuating them to safer spaces, took place while, outside the prison, armed white supremacist vigilantes were shooting and killing people of color. During the height of the vigilante violence, those perpetrators gleefully recounted their racism fueled killing sprees on video, saying it was “like pheasant season.”

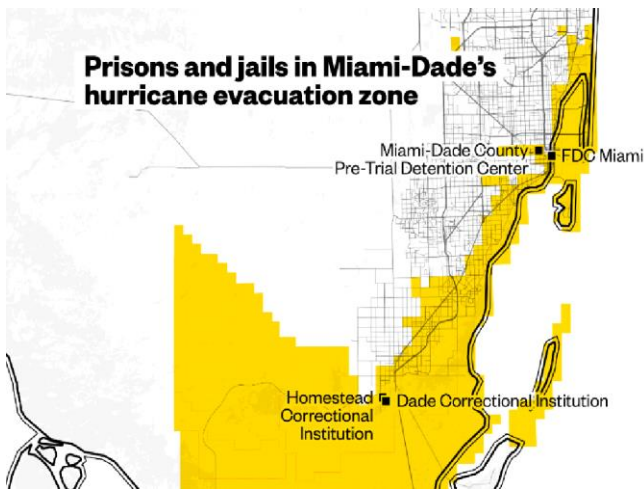
This atmosphere also included an occupation of police, military and private defense contractors, then known as Blackwater, to whom black, brown and impoverished survivors were, in the predominant narrative, *all* viewed as criminal. For all intents and purposes, these armed disaster colonialist forces treated New Orleans residents *in their entirety* as escaped prisoners rather than storm-impacted community members enduring a veritable hellscape with no end in sight.

Inmate statements on the events in OPP all affirm their neglect, abandonment and endangerment when they should have been evacuated to higher ground. Gusman has responded, in the face of these testimonies, by calling detainees speaking out “crackheads, cowards and criminals” (ACLU, 2006). This was followed up in another Gusman interview by him saying, “They’re in jail, man. They lie” (ACLU, 2006).



Realizing the mistake in his insistence in trapping prisoners at the doomed facility, Gusman sent in rescue teams to evacuate inmates only *after* they were trapped for days in the pitch black, fighting to escape the toxic floodwaters.

Years later in Florida, with a mass evacuation underway as a precursor to Hurricane Irma, inmates in Miami-Dade's most vulnerable institutions were forced to shelter in place in defiance of Miami's storm surge planning map. Once again, the state was leaving cages full of people for whatever floodwaters may come.



Miami's Storm Surge Planning Map during Hurricane Irma

During Hurricane Irma, confusion and uncertainty among prisoners extended to dozens upon dozens of persons on house arrest who were swept up by Miami police to suffer the storms in local prison institutions.

Meanwhile, on the inside, 4,500 inmates were enduring an exacerbation of their baseline - a persistent mold issue. These inmates weren't just *not* evacuated, they were trapped in prisons which were fortified by SWAT-style special operations rescue team units coming in from nearby states.

Following power outages after the storm, prisoners were left in mold riddled, suffocatingly hot cells where floodwaters pooled on the floor around their feet.

In the aftermath of the storm, a multitude of articles, complaints and lawsuits surfaced from the wreckage with regards to conditions inside of the prisons during, and in the time immediately following, the hurricane. The complaints, largely, didn't have much to do with the inmates at all, but the *prison guards* who were at the facility as Irma passed through.

Guards backed by their union, the American Federation of Government Employees Local 506, complained of the mold riddled facility, multiple leaks, flooding and barely breathable air thick with the smell of human waste.

As they weathered the storm inside of the facility, the time they spent engaged in enforcing the non-evacuation and trapping of inmates, guards were outraged that they were exposed to what prisoners endure in the daily disaster of mass incarceration and in the acute disaster that was Hurricane Irma.

Disregard for inmates' lives extended to non-incarcerated persons with outstanding legal issues in other spaces of Florida during mass evacuation efforts. As droves of people rushed to local, high intensity weather shelters, Sheriff Grady Judd of Polk County was busy on social media, taunting people with possible outstanding arrest warrants, saying, "If you go to a shelter for Irma and you have a warrant, we'll gladly escort you to the safe and secure shelter called the Polk County Jail."



Feeling completely secure in sharing such a breathtakingly irresponsible statement which effectively dissuaded countless storm threatened persons from seeking potentially lifesaving shelter while a deadly hurricane approached, highlights the predominant attitude of power towards criminalized bodies, both inside and outside of carceral institutions.

In this instance, they were left by Judd to face the choice of risking their lives to preserve their freedom or seek possible safety and almost certain incarceration. And thus, increasing the population of people being stranded in cages amid the hurricane.

The gravity of this statement cannot be understated. Judd utilized a moment of fear and panic to assert that spaces seen as sanctuary were subject to police predation. Once again, the state prioritized criminalization in times of emergency and climate chaos over the public's need for safety and shelter.

With the acceleration of climate catastrophes, this amounts to yet another of the many invisible barricades erected before people in disasters. Many low-income people without the means to evacuate and forced to weather storms in their homes are targeted in narratives of the "why didn't you evacuate?" trope. However, this is almost *never* levied against prison administrators who *have* the means *and* the orders yet refuse to evacuate storm threatened incarcerated populations.

But Judd's statements aren't actually a distortion of the realities of most *official* storm shelter's protocol. Cops *are* a common sight at shelter check-in tables where incoming persons must submit ID's in exchange for safety. ICE and border patrol predators are also often present.

Shelters are heavily policed during disaster. As detestable as Judd's statement was and is, it is a testament to the normalization of the state's strategy of utilizing moments of fear and panic to exert domination and to arrest, imprison, detect and trap undocumented and status-threatened persons, exercise military actions against civilian bodies, defend corporations and commodities by force, and

to criminalize and detain those traversing the borders of capitalism to procure items they need to survive - in short, shock and awe.

In Miami, ICE was violating its own loose protocol for detainee safety while in the evacuation process of 1,900 immigrant prisoners of the state. One prisoner recalled, “We were fed cold and unfit meals for human consumption” (Barbero, 2018). Inmates were shackled and chained during an elongated transport process to Miami International Airport. Numerous detainees made statements on the horrendous quarters they were transferred to for days on end while they awaited transfer back to Krome - a facility known for sexual violence by prison guards against inmate populations as well as various other human rights violations.

Holding cells were slimy and riddled with mold. Prisoners were given detergent to sanitize their own cells, which remained unlivable. Drinking water and warm meals were a rarity (Barbero, 2018).

During hours-long transports, prisoners were restricted from bathroom usage and were threatened with pepper spray by prison guards when they tried to demand access (Barbero, 2018). Pregnant detainees were also subjected to these conditions. Almost wholesale, detainees’ cases were delayed, and deadlines missed due to the haphazard evacuations marked by threats of violence and basic rights restrictions.

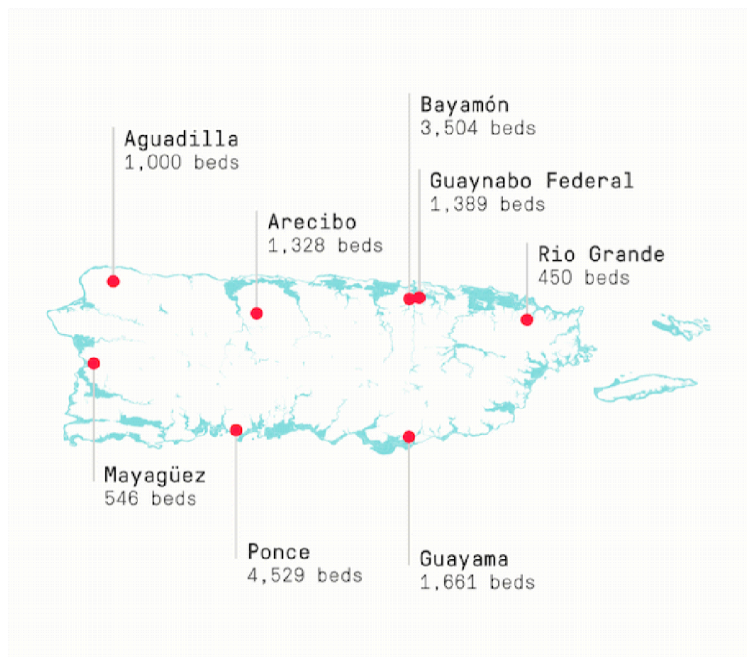
In Puerto Rico, September 2017 inside MDC Guaynabo located just outside of San Juan, 121 inmates were on lockdown in unit 2C (Chrastil, 2018). Running water and electricity had failed. No showers. No ability to flush toilets. Illness and dehydration persisted while prison guards humiliated and abused prisoners incarcerated in the facility. Meanwhile, outside the prison walls, a storm which would claim thousands of lives, was ripping through the island leaving mass destruction in its wake.

“Living conditions in my cell were not fit for human habitation. The smell and stench was so intoxicating that I no longer had the urge to eat... Negligence and abusive treatment was beginning to agitate the inmates” (Chrastil, 2018).

This account was exposed in court documents from a pre-trial detainee trapped in the facility in those horrific days just before, during, and after the storm.

In completely dark cells, stretchers carrying prisoners who had become overwhelmed from the unsanitary conditions created by (Chrastil, 2018). Those caged in toilet overflowing and flood water permeating cells were self-restricting food and fluids so as not to have to relieve themselves, adding to the miserable air quality.

Prior to Hurricane Maria, MDC had been well known for mass overpopulation, abuse and unsanitary conditions for the people it incarcerated. On the night Maria charged through, MDC held over 1,000 prisoners caged within it, people forced to shelter in place, on an island where every prison is situated in high flood-risk zones.



A flood zone map indicating prison locations across Puerto Rico. From The Marshall Project

Inmates in non-evacuated prisons during Hurricane Maria were experiencing a disaster within a disaster. Outside of Aguadilla

Guerrero state prison, news crews recorded prisoners' screams for water, food and power. A medical and supplies distribution team from Mutual Aid Disaster Relief arrived at the gates of MDC in Guaynabo to check on prisoner conditions and were told by a weary guard at the entrance that he had been working nonstop for 16 hours. He described a scene where Maria felled the security gates surrounding the prison and local police made a perimeter of armed guards - enforcing and affirming the desperate conditions those incarcerated within its walls were trapped in.

The imposed suffering on Puerto Rico's imprisoned wasn't related to a lack of planning, a failure in evacuation, or inadequate contingency preparations, it was a blatant disregard, purposeful and unapologetic.

Prison authorities and the state governments of South Carolina and Virginia were condemned by numerous media outlets and the public following *their* refusal to evacuate storm path institutions with Hurricane Florence approaching. This justifiable outrage led by Fight Toxic Prisons came from seeing clearly the cost of past prison evacuation refusals and the ensuing deadly and dangerous ramifications inmate populations have time and time again endured.

These are critical steps in cultivating a culture of resistance to the prison industrial complex, a culture which envelops the core demands of decarceration and abolition.

During phone zaps launched by prisoner solidarity movements, the South Carolina governor's office, in defense of their backing the South Carolina Department of Corrections in sheltering threatened prisoners in place, cited the *inconvenience* of moving inmates to safer ground. South Carolina hasn't evacuated its prisons since Hurricane Floyd in 1999.

The resulting suffering by inmate populations in those institutions was horrendous - and predictable. Prisoners were kept on lockdown and their storing of extra water in buckets and bottles was disallowed and declared to be contraband. (Storing clean drinking water is a basic foundational element of storm preparedness and survival assurance.)

When Florence smashed ashore, it filled community streets, homes and schools with floodwaters as hundreds of inmates were left in harm's way.

In the waterlogged byways of Horry County, two women in mental health crisis who had voluntarily sought care were taken into police custody and eventually placed in a sheriff's transport van to be taken to an area mental health facility.

Deputies Joshua Bishop and Stephen Flood disregarded flooded roadway warnings *and* a national guard checkpoint while transporting Nicolette Green and Wendy Newton to a hospital for mental health treatment when floodwaters quickly overtook the van. It was soon submerged and washed into a hole. The women remained trapped in a cage in the belly of the van as the water came rushing in.

As they drowned, Bishop and Flood assisted one another to the top of the van and stood there waiting while Nicolette and Wendy took their last breaths beneath the officers' feet.

Hundreds of thousands of people with severe mental health issues are incarcerated and at the mercy of the state. Those in mental health crisis are *even more* vulnerable than those incarcerated without mental health struggles as their agency is removed and the state essentially becomes their medical proxies.

Nicolette was the mother of three children, one who passed away from cancer. She had battled depression and schizophrenia for over twenty years according to her sister who made this public statement:

"The officers were on-what appears to be-a completely closed off, flooded road. Why they decided to try to drive through is beyond me. But it cost us my sister. She didn't deserve to have her life ended this way. She was seeking help. She trusted people and they killed her."

Wendy was the mother of three children and had been seeking care for fear and anxiety the day she was driven intentionally into the floods despite every indication not to.

Marion County Coroner Jerry Richardson dispassionately stated that their drowning deaths were because of "a courtesy" being done by

the deputies and that it “just didn’t work out.” Ending with, “Sometimes you do the right thing and it ends up wrong” (Selk, 2018). Unfounded absolution.



Wendy Newton

Nicolette Green

9.18.2018

In Wendy and Nicolette’s cases, advocates point out that neither of the women had a history of criminal charges. This has dual meanings. On one hand it cultivates an understanding that those with mental health issues are routinely criminalized by the state. But on the other, it props up the narrative that those who *do* have a history of criminal charges are somehow deserving of such abuses, violence and neglect by those who cage them.

Both Bishop and Flood were fired from their police jobs and criminal charges were handed down in the wake of their essential manslaughter of the women.

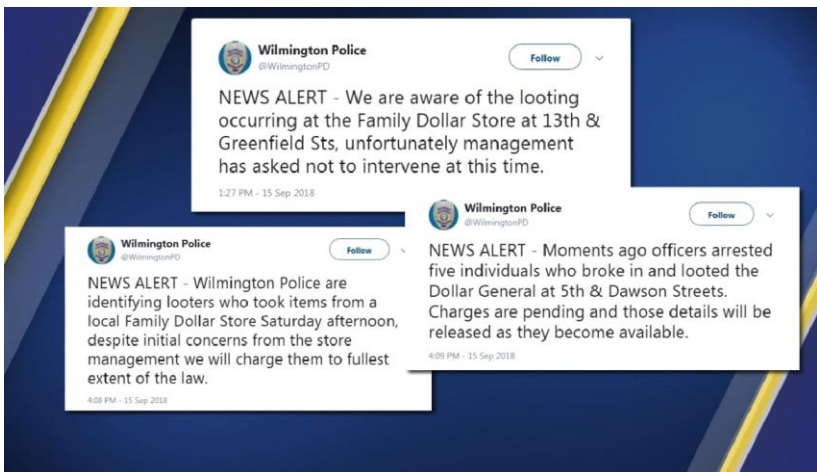
But they are still alive. And Wendy and Nicolette are not.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Florence, owners of a local Wilmington, North Carolina dollar store called on police to “stand down” as they passionately pursued felony charges against five people they arrested for “looting.”

The actions of corporations, cops and governments seem to more *aptly* fit the actual definition of looting. *Their* looting is for the purposes of financial gain, resource theft and increasing power. But when tossed as an accusation to criminalize disaster survivors, it is done following the act of their procuring items they need in a disaster context where access to stores, fuel, food, drinking water, and medication is either highly limited or completely restricted. The former historically ends with entire swathes of land and peoples plundered, injured, dead, or dying. The latter typically just results in insurance claims filed from businesses to cover the spread.

Businesses with water and food tightly locked up, while the storm-impacted community (i.e., their customer base) around them struggles *without*, deserve to have their doors kicked in. If only law enforcement frenzy existed instead around the common act of price gouging in post-disaster communities.

Despite the dollar store manager’s opposition to police involvement, Wilmington police had a field day on social media posting updates as though they were pursuing the arrests of Wall Street or White House criminals who regularly swindle, steal, and destroy lives.



The ridiculously inflated police narrative was their effort at building intellectual walls around laid-bare commodities where *actual* walls had fallen down around them.

The massive police occupation of disaster zones following Hurricane Florence serviced and defended capital rather than life. This criminalization of *survivors* in disaster lends itself to the *prisoners* in disaster crisis, as disasters are used as a pretext and dragnet to trap and imprison the black, brown and poor. It wasn't a Wells Fargo bank or a Mercedes dealership community members took what they needed from that day, but a dollar store, whose *entire* supply line is day to day essential items like food, water, hygiene items, and household cleaning products.

The following year, Hurricane Michael, a category 5 hurricane inundated the Florida panhandle with such high force winds that massive buildings lay in heaps and the ones still standing had massive chasms of empty space in their walls and roofs where Michael's powerful squalls eviscerated them.

Florida Department of Corrections estimated tens of millions of dollars in damage to the region's 23 prison institutions. Gulf Correctional Institution was not evacuated in the days before the massive storm smashed into shore. The institution took a direct hit.



Gulf CI took a direct hit from Hurricane Michael 3 miles inland from the coast.

With all inmate communication to the outside world cut off, institution heads placated the concerned public with false narratives of trapped prisoners in heavily damaged institutions having all the food and drinking water they needed. They assured a concerned and storm traumatized community that their loved ones were safe.

They lied.

Concerned mothers, partners, and other family members went public to the media as parts of the roof were torn off, the facility was plunged into darkness, and the roaring storm brought water cascading into the damaged structure.

“Water was coming through the doors,” one inmate said to a family member who feared retaliation if their name was revealed (Hirji and Ansari, 2018). They had reportedly been given food on the brink of going bad and were told to eat it quickly because more food wasn’t coming.

According to a prison official’s wife, “a lot of the dorm rooms are destroyed,” there was “a lot of roof damage,” and “the staff housing are gone” (Hirji and Ansari, 2018). This from a facility whose staff assured the public and media that all was well.

What was left behind of prison institutions after Hurricane Michael was damaged roofs, felled fencing, a destroyed and collapsed prison structure outside of a main housing facility, roof tiles torn away with the winds, debris strewn around the perimeters of the areas - and a lot of police. Enforcing orders to trap prisoners inside of damaged, leaking, poorly ventilated facilities, police took up guard around the damaged perimeter. Throughout the city, there were frantic mobilizations of ICE, CBP and law enforcement caravans defending the sanctity and safety of a damaged shopping mall and countless felled businesses.

The mother of a trapped inmate inside of Gulf Correctional Institution stated,

“These inmates were left scurrying in chaos because nobody had a plan. I want to know who failed these inmates. I want to know where my son is and did he sleep on the floor” (Hirji and Ansari, 2018).

With the chaos of environmental degradation, superstorms, tornadoes, heat waves and hurricanes along with rising sea levels (while many prisons are situated in flood zones) continue to increase in frequency and intensity. This is a scientific certainty and one we have seen accelerate across the face of the planet.

State government and law enforcement agencies quick to declare emergencies with storms incoming have made a protocol of abandoning and endangering inmate lives. False assurances to the public and media outlets have only affirmed their total disregard for the well-being of those they cage in the path of storms which are predicted to, and then subsequently devour, nearly everything in their path.

This is in addition to the miseries of the multi-faceted nightmares that incarcerated populations experience *on a daily basis* of overpopulation, unsanitary conditions, cruelty, solitary confinement, inadequate legal access and arbitrary collective punishments from the coercive and corrupt prison industrial complex.

Impacting these injustices is the exploitation of prisoner labor in the aftermath of disasters which places them, under-trained and dramatically under-paid in the path of everything from wildfires to oil spills, from floodwaters to the sea-life corpse riddled shores affected by Red Tide.

Part II

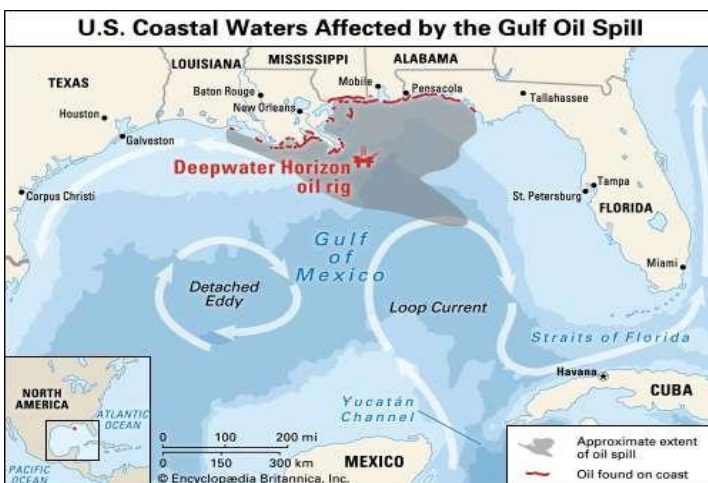
Prisoner Labor in Disaster

There is a strong necessity to viscerally reconstruct the conditions that incarcerated populations are caged within as the floodwaters rise and wind speeds accelerate.

In the aftermath of disasters, accolades are typically lavished upon “first responder” emergency personnel and police while storm-impacted communities (the true first responders) organize effective grassroots relief and rebuild projects.

In many communities in this post-disaster or in-disaster context, inmates who are drastically under-trained and under-paid are placed on the front lines of emergent, and oftentimes life threatening, crises.

From clearing literal tens of thousands of pounds of waste and deceased marine life in Red Tide impacted Manatee County to the dangerous and deadly BP oil spill cleanup in Louisiana, to fighting fires on the West Coast, coercive prison institutions and inmate labor programs exploit prisoner labor for profit.



During the cleanup efforts after the Deepwater Horizon disaster, which spilled tons of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico, inmates of color predominantly made up the prisoner cleanup crews, hired by BP (Young, 2010). This is a microcosm of the larger issue of disproportionately incarcerated people of color in Louisiana who make up 70 percent of its dramatically overpopulated prisons.

BP received lucrative tax write-offs for circumventing the local coastal community workforce and employing an easily exploitable labor force who they could gag from speaking to the media or the public regarding their highly dangerous work in the searing heat shoveling crude oil drenched beaches.

When exposed for this circumvention, BP simply took prisoners out of INMATE marked workwear and placed them in BP t-shirts in unmarked van transports to quell public outrage (Young, 2010). And what these costumes *didn't* achieve in hiding their exploitative operations, prison officials *did* through keeping quiet, refusing media sought commentaries, and through a campaign of silence with respect to communicating their efforts to in-the-dark political and regulatory bodies.



BP exploited, underpaid and gag ordered, inmates in the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill

Acute exposure to the numerous chemical compounds of crude oil carry devastating effects on the human body: exposure related cancer, respiratory issues, central nervous system damage, skin infections, chronic airway disease and psychological ramifications such as post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety. Inmates worked in close proximity to crude oil and chemical dispersants for twelve hours a day up to six days per week during the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Prison labor programs vary from state to state. Inmates are coerced into the exploitation of their labor for corporate and state profit, tax benefits and write-offs. And as such, they are placed in the middle of unfolding disasters as well as the wreckage immediately after them. This includes search and rescue - a traumatizing process, fighting fires, cleaning up hazardous waste spill sites, working in toxic floodwaters, and a variety of other life-threatening situations for zero to just a couple of dollars per hour. They are unable to pick and choose assignments.

Many inmate workforce programs dangle the subtraction of days off the totality of their sentences for doing risky, dangerous work which exposes them to some of the most dangerous conditions imaginable.

In the case of wildfires, prisoners have died during inmate training programs and on the scene of wildfire disasters. Over the span of just seventeen months, three California inmate firefighters lost their lives (Goldberg, 2018). These inmates likely wouldn't have been accepted to work as firefighters post-incarceration, but risking their lives for two dollars an hour with woefully inadequate training was deemed as acceptable to the state, when the financial bottomline of the state was factored in.

This lends to the evidential hypothesis that inmate lives are disposable to the state and to corporations who profit from their labor. As the social epidemic of mass incarceration continues to exhibit, there will be no shortage of inmates at the fingertips of those willing to engage in modern day slavery for state and corporate profit.

Their lives, and subsequent deaths, are tragic casualties at the altar of the California state's savings of 100 million dollars per year, as the family of Matthew, a young, incarcerated father, who was killed when a tree fell and struck him while clearing brush, found out (Goldberg, 2018).

Matthew told his son his daddy was a hero. Just months after his death, the prison labor program which placed him in the location of his death, and all associated agencies, were cleared of any wrongdoing.



Matthew Beck, inmate firefighter killed on duty, with his newborn son

Shawna Lynn Jones had been deployed as part of a conservation camp firefighter unit and was struck in the head by a massive boulder which tumbled towards her as she was working firelines in 2016 (Serna & Mejia, 2016). She passed away shortly afterwards. Like Matthew, Shawna was making just dollars per day to risk her life fighting an environmental catastrophe.



Inmate firefighter Shawna Lynn Jones was killed after working a CA fireline. She was 22 years old.

To a resistant public who would flatly reject low wage, dangerous condition laden, hard labor programs like California's numerous Conservation Camps, which spawns tragically under-trained workers, these programs generally promote nuance free narratives that inmates are "happy" for the opportunity.

The reality is that, juxtapositionally, incarcerated persons who are forced to exist in overcrowded, unsanitary, unsafe conditions in correctional institutions have two choices at their disposal. Risk their lives for just dollars per day or pass endless days in state cages and the horrendous conditions that option entails.

Decontextualizing this reality allows for state and police justification of all manner of exploitative practices, as death by death and injury by injury, inmate workers are dropped into toxic and lethal corporate and state complicit unnatural catastrophes.

Global warming, resource extraction, and deregulations on ecocidal corporate protocol are zooming to a cataclysmic head unchecked, and privatized prisons and associated labor camps are profiting from the aftermath while false narratives earn their slavery operations reformatory accolades in the process.

In a Marshall Project interview (Hager, 2015) with a former California inmate firefighter from a state conservation camp, the firefighter describes 40 to 50 foot flames snapping in the air, debris falling everywhere, all with 45 pounds of gear on his back in the brutal heat.

“You’re still counting down the days until you go home; it’s not like you want to stay there. But fighting fires, man, that is so much safer than being in prison” (Hager, 2015).

This thought is followed by a further clarification of what ‘safer’ means when compared to the reality of daily life in prison, “I saw guys fall off cliffs and get pretty injured, chainsaw injuries, burns, heat stroke” (Hager, 2015).

Deirdre Wilson, a former inmate at the Puerta La Cruz fire camp noted,

“It’s a cruel joke. You’re volunteering to put your life on the line, but you’re not really volunteering—the system evolved out of a system of slavery where we commodify human bodies and function off of their labor” (Goodkind, 2018).

Colorado’s State Wildland Inmate Fire Team or SWIFT, a state department of corrections program, places prison labor teams before raging wildfires for six dollars per twelve-hour days (Burness, 2018).

Hassan Latif, who runs an organization called Second Chance Center and was a former Colorado prisoner himself, calls attention to the fact that these inmates, post-liberation, would not be considered for any level of EMS employment,

“What is it saying about a person’s life, that while you’re incarcerated you can do one of the most dangerous jobs in America and put your life at risk,

and do so for dollars a day, and then when you get home, because of that conviction, that mark on your life, you're not qualified or worthy of putting your life at risk again to save the homes of your neighbors?" (Burness, 2018).

In January of 2005, a historic 17 inches of rain in just over two weeks in La Conchita, California led to a catastrophic mudslide, killing over twenty people and injuring many more. Among the terrifying scene of muffled voices of those flash buried under a deluge of the surging mud, cadaver dogs surveyed the wreckage and trained emergency workers removed bodies found in trees, cars and structures. 155 inmates were also doing search and rescue ops throughout the detritus (Engber, 2005).



California inmates on a search and rescue operation in the aftermath of a 2018 mudslide.

It is unclear if inmates in disasters receive the same level of critical incident stress management trauma care in the wake of searching for dead bodies through floodwaters, mudslides and earthquake rubble, if at all. What *is* clear is that the level of trauma vis-à-vis physical and emotional distress that is endured by inmates who are labor-exploited in disasters is only exasperated by returning these workers to prison labor camps and cages which contain innumerable stressors that can lead to violence, self-harm and even suicide.

Suicide rates among incarcerated persons are at staggering rates across the country as it is. And prison guards are not trained in trauma care or wellness support and have, in numerous cases, exhibited extreme cruelty with respect to inmates expressing suicidal ideation.

Such was the case in Michigan where prison guards bet a sandwich that a female inmate was going to express suicidal thoughts. When the inmate later asked for a suicide prevention vest, a guard pumped her fist and shouted, "Someone owes me lunch" (Stanley-Becker, 2019). The woman was then ignored while self-harming in the shower, leading to her death days later.

Following high intensity bouts in post-disaster settings, inmate disaster workers may likely be forced to cope with inadequate mental health services and poorly trained staff. As a package, the experience is a cyclical and systematic process of exploitation and endangerment.

In the case of cleanup efforts post Hurricane Irma, in Dixie, Gilchrist, Franklin, and Highland counties unpaid prison labor crews were deployed on dangerous hurricane debris clean-up missions.

On Florida's policy of paying zero to inmates clearing broken tree limbs and other debris across the state (or for any other labor), the director of the Lake Worth Human Rights Defense Center likened it to modern day slavery, saying,

"It's not that much different from a slave plantation. The only difference is now the slave owners wear uniforms and their employer is the state" (Lipscomb, 2017).

The Florida Department of Corrections boasts free inmate labor saves the state close to 60 million dollars per year. Florida ranks as one of the country's top three states with the highest number of incarcerated persons and is one of six states in the country (all located in the south) who pay inmates nothing for their labor. One inmate in Florida's Lancaster work camp tells the true cost of this

‘savings’, saying he and his fellow work camp prisoners were “ground down to nothing” (Conarck, 2019).



Florida inmate crews cleared debris logged roadways for no pay after Hurricane Irma.

Echoes of slavery and the “leasing” of mass incarcerated populations ring a deafening tone in today’s prison industrial complex. In Angola prison, where 80% of male inmates are black, its warden has indicated his nostalgia in finding the grounds to be “a big plantation in days gone by” (Stack, Garbus, and Kurtis, 1998).

Given this document’s opening scenes of inmates stranded in locked down institutions as disasters bear down, and the subsequent inhuman conditions they are left caged within, there is legitimate concern about the safety of inmate crews being placed on the front lines of disasters. From fires to hazardous waste cleanups to earthquakes and more, inmates have suffered a variety of injuries from maiming to death.

Even in the absence of exacerbated unnatural disasters, inmates exploited for their labor face deadly situations for little to no pay.

These stories aren't unique. Exploitative prison labor, or modern-day slavery, leaves in its wake incarcerated bodies which have been maimed, burned, crushed, disfigured, poisoned, suffocated, sickened and killed.

Prison labor in post-disaster contexts will likely only increase as human-made climate catastrophe ramps up. In many instances, these are not naturally and spontaneously occurring events. They are environmental issues whose increasing frequency and degree of destructiveness run parallel to the short-sightedness of our climate and energy policies. It is a toxic blend of corporo-political ecocidal status quo operations that are maintained at the highest levels of power, for profit.

The lives of incarcerated masses are treated by the state as expendable as they are placed in the crosshairs of a planet reeling from humanity's unprovoked assault on the natural world.

Part III

At the intersection of Mass Incarceration and Climate Catastrophe. What comes next?

This is a question abolitionists, climate justice organizers, freedom of movement advocates, radicals, various aligned allies and co-conspirators can explore together as part of a broad based, horizontal effort to manifest and move with the fluid features of our resistance.

The United States prison industrial complex has privatized and monetized the enslavement of 25 percent of the global population of the incarcerated, *even as the US makes up just 5 percent of the world's total population.*



Mass incarceration is a booming industry in which those with the keys to the cages occupy an exception in the 13th amendment, finding it a space large enough to conduct all manner of exploitation.

It is a constitutionalized, mass forced servitude, multiplying the loot and bounty of some of the wealthiest corporations in the world as well as one of its wealthiest governments many times over.

Companies like Starbucks, WalMart, McDonalds, AT&T, Verizon, Pfizer and many more have exploited prisoners' labor across the country for a few cents up to a few dollars per day, laying off multitudes of union workers and being complicit actors in the silencing of incarcerated whistleblowers and their allies through isolation and punishment.

Adding to the depths of exploitative praxis, prisoners were put to work building Patriot missiles for Raytheon and Lockheed Martin, the likes of which are subsequently pitched to oppressive regimes across the globe by the U.S. government.

State captives coerced into toxic, deadly and dangerous work in disaster zones as well as inmates swept into slave labor schemes have waged a mass resistance, organizing through the bars and across state lines. They wage strikes and leverage broad based abolitionist movement organizing to demand their human rights against forced labor untouched by labor laws and regulatory checks that other businesses and corporations' labor forces are subjected to.

The prison industrial complex is growing the wealth of the wealthy through modern day slavery. Correctional institutions and corporations have manifested a profitable synergy that, with the state's blessing, has no reason to stop or slow down. Prisons across the country are overpopulated, rampant with coercive power dynamics, and absent of accountability or any semblance of meaningful oversight to defend the rights of the nation's largest and growing source of cheap labor: prisoners.

①

~~Miss~~
Texas

Belly of the Beast "Inferno"

By: Sherrard O. Williams

As the Texas Summer Obviously
unfurls within the month of July, August,
inside Texas penological system, this
is only the very beginning of a
Category III, heat advisory conditions
of 100 plus; 20% humidity & 105 heat
index, allied w/ a potent mixture of
prison finest construction of "concrete
& steel", that naturally embraces
and/or absorbs such solar system power
and generates the fatal energy of
heat related issues from its scientific
effects.

cut in the middle of nowhere, in wondering
what would it feel like to have a
gigantic shade tree towering over the
John B. Connolly Unit on Kennedy Tr. to
deflect the waves of sun rays and provide
not only the inmate's but the staff
officials w/ what anyone would
Crave for during summer — a nice long

Situated atop some of the most toxic sites in the country, such as superfund cleanup sites, old mining sites, and landfills, prisoners are deployed to work at in-house factories and front-line disasters. They routinely lack clean drinking water. Sewage and mold infested cells are a daily reality. Dumped mountains of coal ash and heavy metal poisons are leached into the soil.

At toxic prison sites, cancer rates and deaths, gastrointestinal issues, respiratory issues, sinus issues, throat issues and skin conditions plague the incarcerated populace. Medical care at many facilities is woefully inadequate, misapplied and negligent. Cataclysmic climate change and global warming expose state captives to heat waves and hurricanes alike, left un-evacuated and without recalibrated parameters to see to their safety through the storms. Labor is extracted at gunpoint. And isolation cells are filled with whistleblowers and prisoner justice organizers.

What hope do we have when environmental policy translates into an almost status quo of climate catastrophe? What hope when constitutional loopholes allow forced labor as a punishment for state-enslaved populations? What hope when families are abducted and imprisoned for crossing a line on a map which seeks to delegitimize their right to movement? What hope when individual realities of survivors are terror-washed, scapegoated and propagandized into nothing more nuanced than 'criminal' and 'invader'.

Like dominoes toppling into one another, global warming will make entire regions of the earth unlivable and a mass displacement of climate refugees will, in all likelihood, ensue. Criminalized for their own displacement, many refugees could likely be rounded up into camps and immigration detention centers. Mass incarceration would swell to even more untenable levels than currently exist. Climate chaos and global warming will most likely continue to increase in destructiveness and commonality and when the effects manifest, prisoners will be left to fend for themselves, caged, as floodwaters rise up around them. Many may be left to languish in stifling hot cells infested with mold and with no access to ventilation, clean water,

food, or medical care. Others will be sent into the aftermath of the storms to risk (and very possibly lose) their lives fighting fires, traversing toxic floodwaters, soaking up oil drenched sands for wealthy earth exploiting corporations, or trudging through mudslides to find survivors. And they would be doing this for a couple of dollars per day, if that. This is already the reality many prisoners experience, and the current trajectory is for this to continue to expand at a breakneck speed.

Health hazards, human rights violations and labor extraction from imprisoned masses are imposed and fortified by state power through their monopoly on violence. While amassing unquantifiable fortunes off of the back of inmates, they simultaneously leave them stranded while disasters close in. The misery inside is testified to by a person enduring a life sentence in TX, “The conditions of confinement are, at a bare minimum, expected to be livable. Not Marriott or Hyatt Regency. Livable” (Mrkusic and Gross, 2018). Conditions are neither currently, nor historically, anything approaching livable.

And from the focal points of all of this misery, inmates have organized nation-wide prison strikes, work stoppages, work slowdowns, hunger strikes, boycotts and protests while organizing with abolitionists and allies on the outside acting in solidarity with resistance encampments, phone zaps, disseminating information/videos/images leaked from the inside, holding noise demonstrations and supporting through various other avenues.

But engaging in stratagems of resistance and sabotage have been met by warden retaliations and counter revolutionary measures to silence and punish organizers on the inside. From a Jailhouse Lawyers Speak Pre-Strike statement in August, 2018,

“Prisons in America are a warzone. Every day prisoners are harmed due to conditions of confinement. For some of us it's as if we are already dead. So what do we have to lose?”

These antagonisms, rights transgressions and ecocidal protocols are systemic issues running through every cell block in every prison in every state across the country. They meet at various intersections

from environmental racism to climate justice to mass incarceration to working class struggles and labor exploitation and beyond. Thus a systemic resistance is critical on every front.

From the prison gates to the phones, exposure and pressure are in a race against the clock to erode the system before the system erodes our ability to exist. Tenets of a powerful and broad movement to decarcerate and abolish the long unfolding, long growing epidemic of mass imprisonment must necessarily be multi-faceted and intersectional and it must amplify and uplift organizing from the inside. The state is counting on tactical narratives of hatred and fear to further entrench their power and render a would-be resistance into an emotional, spiritual and organizational paralysis. We cannot let that happen.

Solidarity with prisoners is an antidote, and it is needed especially in times of climate crisis and disaster. Physical prisons depend on constructing prisons of the mind. The walls between prisoners and those on the outside, while physical, need not keep us from each other. We will care for each other. We will build bonds that are stronger than the bars.

We will support each other's survival, in crisis, and beyond.

We are all we have.

We are all we need.

“In the past three decades I have endured every level of abuse they have to offer: I have been starved, beaten, dehydrated, put in freezing cold cells, attacked with attack dogs, rendered unconscious, chained to a wall for weeks.

There’s nothing left to fear.”

- Kevin Rashid Johnson



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