

Human Rights in the U.S.

2022 Report



Brought to you by Alliance for Global Justice

Preface by Comité Cerezo México

Introduction by Gerald Horne

Conclusion by Margaret Kimberley



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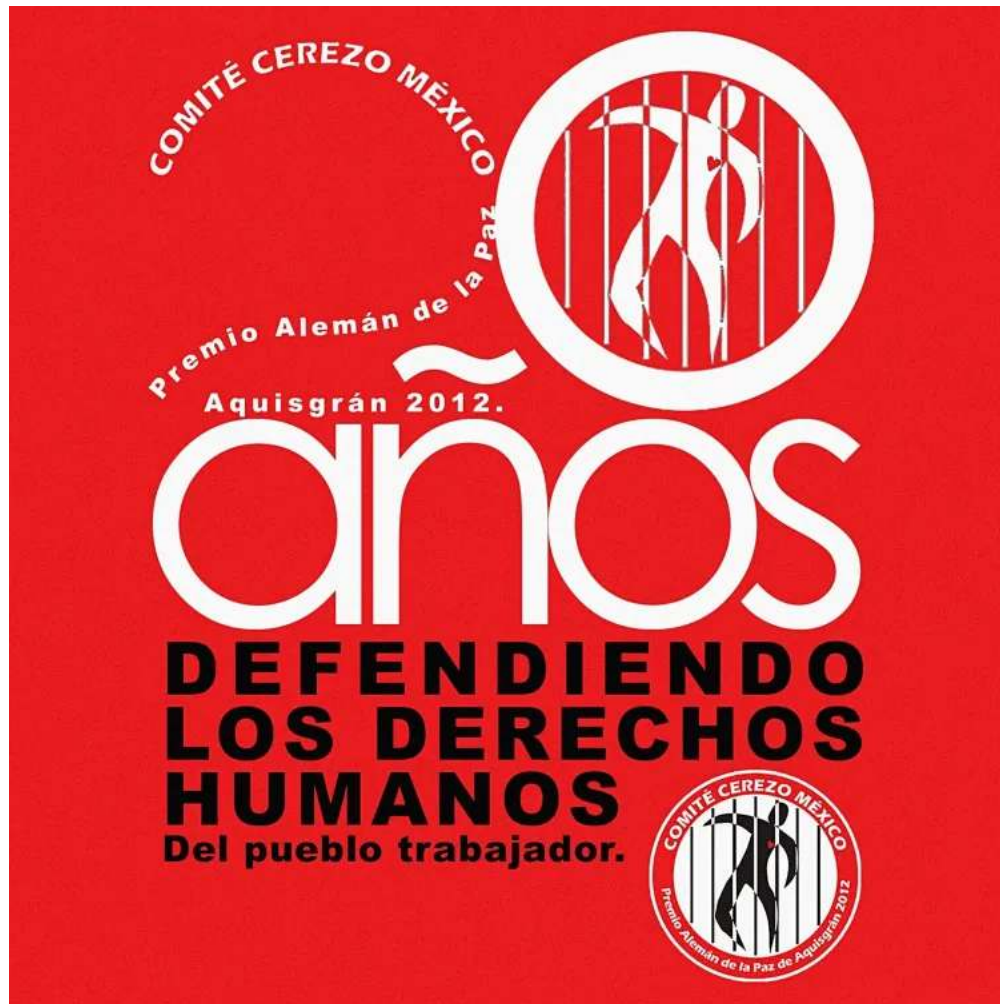
Conclusion by Margaret Kimberley

Executive Editor & Senior Columnist, Black Agenda Report

Preface by **Comité Cerezo México**

Human rights organization

April 12, 2022



Source: Comité Cerezo México

To all the compañeros & compañeras of Alliance for Global Justice

Sending you a fraternal salute from every one of us that belong to the [Comité Cerezo México](#), an organization that for more than 20 years has protected and promoted the defense of human rights. Firstly, we would like to congratulate you on the release of your report on the human rights situation in the United States. We'd also like to share that it has been an honor to have been able to contribute in some manner to this publication.

Human Rights in the United States: 2022 Report

For many years, the lives of millions of people across Latin America have been impacted by injustice and by the political repression and counterinsurgency politics promoted by the United States government. In the concept of human rights and specifically in the documentation of human rights violations, the people have found a tool to arrive at the truth about those responsible for policies that violate human rights, their objectives and beneficiaries; a tool to struggle for justice, for the integral reparation of damage, and to maintain alive the memory of the peoples' struggles for their liberation from the yoke of Capital.

Wherever human rights violations exist, the documentation of those violations is a useful tool, even in the very bowels of the main exponent of imperialism in our times: the United States. A country as big and powerful as the blood, life, and labor of the working class and the peasant class upon whom it was erected still stands as a hegemonic force in the world.

It is of critical importance that the people of the United States of America come to know and utilize human rights as a tool for popular struggle. It was a pleasure for us to share our knowledge of this subject and we celebrate that AFGJ will launch its [Human Rights School](#) initiative in the U.S. this year. We think that knowing and mastering this tool is not an end unto itself, but fundamentally a means to achieving a dignified life for peoples all over the world.

In closing, we want to express that what we know and share about the subject of human rights is a result of the long struggle and theoretical development of Latin American peoples. Fundamentally, we are nurtured by all struggles, and if we have contributed anything, it's all been due to the need and persistence of the struggle for the peoples' dignity. Today, we must also learn from the heroic people of the United States with whom we are united in our diverse histories of resistance and dreams of truth, justice, memory and the integral reparation of damage.

Introduction by Gerald Horne

Historian & scholar of African American Studies

April 7, 2022



Source: Monthly Review

On 17 December 1951, Black Communist attorney and activist, William L. Patterson, delivered the “We Charge Genocide” petition to the United Nations in Paris. Ten days later, the U.S. government moved to invalidate his passport.

This searing document, still worth reading and birthed in no small measure by Patterson’s comrade, Paul Robeson – the great artist and activist, the “tallest tree in our forest” – was the product of a mass worldwide organizing campaign by their organization, the Civil Rights Congress (CRC) – whose efforts were so intimidating to Washington that they were driven out of business by 1956.

Today the Alliance for Global Justice is not only walking in the gigantic footprints of the CRC but also extending the call by Malcolm X before his tragic assassination in 1965 to internationalize the human rights struggle in the U.S., and by the National Conference of Black Lawyers, which sought to do so in the 1970s.

Their campaign is similarly worthy. Their focus on voter suppression is reminiscent of the original CRC Petition. Likewise, their targeting the death penalty recalls a time when even more languished on death row than there are today.

Their focus on anti-Asian violence in the U.S. forces us to recall that in 1945 U.S. imperialism for the first – and it is to be hoped the only – time in world history committed the most profound episode of mass murder in world history: the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, massacring within minutes tens of thousands of people of Asian ancestry – the latter factor being not coincidental. Their focus on police terror also evokes the naked white supremacy emblematic of U.S. imperialism.

This malignant phenomenon infects – like a virus – every aspect of U.S. life, be it housing or employment or immigration or education or health care or foreign policy.

This Human Rights Report is thus more than welcome and, it is to be hoped, will have a similar impact as the 1951 effort, which led directly to the erosion of a hateful Jim Crow.

Methodology

Report structure

This report is a compilation of articles written in 2021 and 2022 by AFGJ staff and other associates that identify and contextualize present-day violations of human rights and the underlying issues they bring to light. Articles are compiled into segments that analyze their key findings.

Our articles draw from a foundation of available sources to illustrate the frequent, systemically occurring and political nature of human rights violations and their pervasive impacts on individuals and communities.

Each segment assesses existing information, data, statistics, demographics, analyses and testimonies to introduce the historical and present-day conditions that form the basis of human rights crises that take precedence in the U.S. today.

Theoretical framework

Our Human Rights Report surveys the full depth and breadth of human rights violations in the United States, reviewing violations of civil and political rights as well as universally recognized social, economic and cultural rights.

This report identifies some of the most prevalent human rights issues in the U.S. today and analyzes their root (institutional, socioeconomic and cultural) causes. It recognizes human rights violations to be founded in political and economic structures of oppression that concentrate wealth, power and, ultimately, the full realization of human rights into the hands of an elite few by depriving communities of access to resources and undermining their political agency.

Classifications

Individual human rights violations target individuals and are often but not always perpetrated by other individuals. These violations are often commissioned directly by the state, its institutions or its forces as blatant acts of political oppression or repression.

Examples include acts of police brutality, police murders, political incarcerations, arbitrary and indefinite detentions, abuses in detention, workplace safety violations, torture, acts of surveillance, acts of discrimination in public or private institutions, forced disappearances, disappearances ignored by the state and acts of paramilitary violence.

While we refer to these human rights violations in our report, we recognize that many of these violations are under-reported to begin with and more data is needed to fully convey their profoundness in the United States. We look forward to diving further into this area of research as we begin building our own database.

Collective human rights violations effectively target entire communities or populations as a result of institutionalized oppression, structural failures or strategic political repression. Sometimes directly commissioned by the state, these violations take the form of structural violence because they occur systematically.

Examples include poverty; hunger; labor law violations; housing insecurity; disparities in access to healthcare, education and social services; lack of access to breathable air or clean drinking water; voter suppression; the criminalization of protest; the militarization of police and security forces; commercial exploitation and degradation of human ecosystems; mass incarceration and detention; and acts of militarism and sanctions imposed on sovereign nations.

Among individually and systematically-occurring human rights violations, we identify three criteria for attributing direct accountability for the violations to the state: by commission, omission and acquiescence.

Human rights violations by commission are directly commissioned by the state and directly target individuals, communities or populations.

These often take the form of individual human rights violations but can also manifest as collective human rights violations commissioned through the imposition of harmful policies and practices.

Human rights violations by omission are attributed to the state when it is held accountable for granting impunity to transgressions on human rights or ignoring human rights violations (individual or collective) perpetrated by an entity or force of the state. The perpetrators of the transgression or violation left unaddressed by the state can be authorities in the private sector (i.e. corporate administrators), civilians in the personal sphere (i.e. paramilitaries, neighborhood militias, far-right terrorists or domestic abusers), un-identified civilians not investigated by the state or rogue political actors (i.e. law enforcement).

Human rights violations by acquiescence are similar to human rights violations by omission in that the state doesn't play a direct role in the human rights violation(s), but it remains a driving force through its consent and sometimes endorsement of the human rights violation.

Examples include political assassinations by privately contracted security forces, police complicity towards paramilitary violence and the encouragement of domestic terrorism by political authorities.

Legal framework

In addition to identifying and assessing human rights violations in regards to their root causes and human impacts, we adopt international legal frameworks that set standards for holding states accountable for human rights violations. In each chapter we identify violations of widely recognized international human rights treaties and declarations, namely the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and a number of other documents aimed at further interpreting and affirming the rights enshrined in the declaration. In doing so, we intend to map the many ways in which human rights violations in the U.S. are violations of universally recognized guidelines for the protection of human life, liberty and dignity in all of its forms and begin to unveil the hypocrisy a state that deceitfully, opportunistically and dangerously champions itself as a global pioneer of human rights.

Part 1: a nation deeply divided: racial inequality & white supremacy



Source: Alliance for Global Justice

Overview

Slavery in the U.S. was once called “the peculiar institution” but few things are more peculiar than the racism and white supremacy that prompted and fueled the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Jim Crow, and today’s spectacularly peculiar climate of racial animus that characterizes life in modern-day USA. Racial inequality and white supremacy play foundational roles in shaping many aspects of reality in the United States.

Racial inequality is a common underpinning almost all human rights violations and race is a common determinant of falling victim to a human rights violation. It permeates every economic, political and social system at the basis of U.S. life.

Racial oppression is a driving force in widespread human rights violations, even when race is not specifically mentioned in the laws and policies that created and maintain these conditions.

This section analyzes several different iterations of racial bias and white supremacy in the United States today:

- **Black America & white supremacy: race as fundamental to human rights violations** examines racism and how it is expressed through institutions, policies and practices.
- **From “Black Lives Matter” to “housing is a human right”: a look at structural genocide** spotlights the increasingly life-threatening structural violence impacting Black and Brown communities amid a growing housing crisis.
- **Nobody’s child: victims of the child welfare system** examines an institution that is generally considered benign but is, in fact, an integral part of the unholy alliance between the institutional racism at the base of the U.S. healthcare systems, the war on drugs, educational apartheid and neglect, mass incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline.
- **Cruel but not unusual: the economics and inherent racism of mass incarceration** takes a deep dive into the carceral system as it applies to Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples in the U.S.
- **Crueler but still not unusual: the U.S. death penalty** explores one of the most fundamental violations of human rights, namely, the American penchant for killing offenders – especially those who take white lives.

Violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- **Article 1:** that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights
- **Article 2:** that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race
- **Article 3:** that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security
- **Article 4:** that no one should be held in slavery or servitude
- **Article 5:** that no one should be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

- **Article 6:** that everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law
- **Article 7:** that all are equal before the law and entitled without discrimination to equal protection of the law
- **Article 10:** that everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing in the determination of their civil rights and obligations
- **Article 11:** that everyone charged with a penal offense has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty
- **Article 12:** that no one should be subject to arbitrary interference with their privacy, family, home or correspondence
- **Article 13:** that everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within a state
- **Article 16:** that everyone has the right to found a family, and that the family is the most fundamental unit of society that is entitled to protection by the state
- **Article 17:** that everyone has the right to own property alone and in association with others, and no one should be deprived of their property
- **Article 21:** that everyone has the right to the government of their country, directly or through freely chosen representatives; that everyone has the right to equal access to public services in their country; and that the will of the people should be the basis of the authority of government as expressed through periodic elections and universal suffrage
- **Article 23:** that everyone has the right to choose their employment, earn equal pay and live in economic conditions sufficient for a dignified existence
- **Article 25:** that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of themselves and their families, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, social services and security in case of loss of livelihood caused by circumstances out of their control
- **Article 26:** that everyone has the right to an education and the full realization of their human development

Violations of international human rights treaties

- The **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination** requires that states revise governmental and other public policies and rescind laws and regulations that perpetuate racial discrimination and pass legislation for prohibiting such discrimination, including discrimination in access to political participation and all forms of civil rights as well as discrimination in access to education, employment, occupation and housing.
- The **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** establishes a universal framework for the protection and preservation of the most basic economic, social and cultural rights inherent to all human beings, including the right to work in just and favorable conditions, to social protection, to an adequate standard of living, to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, to education and to the enjoyment and benefits of cultural freedom. The United States has not ratified this treaty.
- The **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** elaborates further on the civil and political rights and freedoms listed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The treaty requires states to commit to the promotion and respect of the self-determination of its citizens and ban discrimination in access to civil and political rights.
- The **Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment** prohibits torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The treaty requires states to take legislative, administrative and judicial measures to prevent such acts from taking place during activities that disproportionately target racial minorities, such as arbitrary arrests, detentions, and incarcerations, as well as in the training of police (civil or military) and other officials involved in the arrest, detention or interrogation.
- The **Declaration on the Right to Development** protects the inalienable human right of every person to participate in, contribute to and enjoy the economic, social, cultural and political development in which all human rights can be fully realized. The declaration affirms the right of all people, as the creators of wealth, to enjoy equal benefits of development. It has been vocally opposed by the United States.

- The **Convention on the Rights of Child**, the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history not ratified by the United States, establishes a universal framework for the protection and advancement of the rights of children to grow, learn, play, develop and flourish with dignity. It affirms the responsibility of the state to protect children by ensuring that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for their care and protection conform with acceptable standards of safety and health.
- The **International Labour Organization Convention 169** sets standards for nation-states regarding Indigenous peoples' economic, socio-cultural and political rights, including the right to a land base. It affirms the right of Indigenous peoples to take control of their own institutions, ways of life and economic development. The United States has not ratified this treaty.
- The **Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** establishes a universal framework of minimal standards for the survival, dignity and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples of the world, including their right to self-determination, health, education, employment, language, culture and identity. Only four countries voted against this declaration in 2007: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States.

Black America & white supremacy: race as fundamental to human rights violations

October 9, 2021



Source: Justin Sullivan (Getty Images)

By Camille Landry (National Co-Coordinator)

The United States is a contradiction. From the stirring words of the Declaration of Independence and the Preamble to the Constitution to the Statue of Liberty beckoning the “huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” the U.S. trumpets to the world – and does not hesitate to export at gunpoint – the ideals of democracy and freedom; yet, it is a nation that is also based upon the murderous oppression of Black, Indigenous and other peoples of color. The United States was born of Indigenous genocide and settler-colonialism, and African slavery, which included genocide and extractive colonialism, all driven by capitalism and the desire to exploit every natural and human resource for the fulfillment of greed and hegemony.

These are not historical issues that have been overcome; they exist today in other no less deadly forms than their earlier iterations.

The last two years have uncovered the skeletons in America's closet. By "America" we mean the American continent, but in no place is this reality more stark than in the United States of America. The Coronavirus pandemic exposed and exacerbated the systemic racism and fundamental inequalities experienced by African Americans and other people. In another chapter of our [Human Rights Report](#), we examine issues specifically related to the pandemic. It's important to note that the Coronavirus did not create these injustices; it merely cast a spotlight on them.

In the United States, issues of inequality and systemic racism are often addressed as civil rights issues. Simply put, civil rights are rights that one obtains by being a legal member of a certain political state. Human rights are rights one acquires by being alive. The historic period of struggle that Black people and their allies engaged in during the mid-20th century is called the Civil Rights Movement. Although many aspects of American slavery, Jim Crow, and the deeply rooted systemic racism that characterizes Black life in this country are uniquely American, these are not merely violations of Black people's civil (e.g. legal, state-sanctioned) rights, but are also egregious and deadly violations of their basic human rights.

These violations of fundamental human rights belie the notion that the United States is "the land of the free." Freedom in the United States is a privilege that accrues to white cisgender[1] heterosexual males, with white cisgender females claiming the crumbs that patriarchy leaves behind.

This article examines key areas of inequality and the ongoing human rights violations that characterize Black life in the United States and constitute violations of basic human rights. Because we are addressing human rights and not merely civil rights violations, these violations are not merely internal matters to be addressed only by the governments, processes or people of the United States, but rather a crime against humanity that is properly addressed and adjudicated upon a world stage.

White supremacy: old horrors, new methods

It's not a new concept; it's a very old reality. White supremacy and racism are as foundational to this nation as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. In fact, they predate nationhood. This third decade of the 21st century has seen numerous incidents of white terrorism and a steadfast refusal by political and social leaders to try to eradicate systemic racism in this country. The United States remains separate, unequal and actively engaged in violations of human rights.

The country has seen a visible resurgence of open white supremacy since the election of Barack Obama. Speech and behavior that for a brief time were considered socially and morally reprehensible – although remaining embedded in every institution, both public and private – have become acceptable and commonplace. The election of a Black president in 2008 signaled to some people a new chapter in U.S. political life and hope for the end of systemic racism, yet served to raise the ire of and mobilize people who hold fast to concepts of U.S. exceptionalism and the alleged inherent superiority of people of European descent.

White rage quickly morphs into white violence. The Trump presidency ramped up the rhetoric, deepened the racial divide, and encouraged flagrant racism. There were 7,759 reported hate crimes in the U.S. last year — the most in 12 years, the FBI [reported](#). Many experts and advocacy groups say the true number is even higher. “The spike in 2020 follows a recent upward trend in bias incidents, and it was a six percent increase over 2019. Nearly two of every three hate crimes reported last year – 61.8% – were motivated by a bias against race, ethnicity or ancestry,” [according to](#) the FBI. Of all hate crimes, [36%](#) were anti-Black or “anti-African-American.”

Yet, most people in this country cannot even agree on the state of race relations and racism in the United States. [More than 40%](#) of white people in the U.S. believe their country has made the changes necessary to give white and Black people equal rights. [Only eight percent of Black people](#) believe that significant progress has been made. [Half of white people](#) in the U.S. believe that discrimination is as bad against whites as it is against people of color. While a majority of people in the U.S. seem to understand that hard work does not guarantee success, a [full 50% of whites](#) believes that people of color would be more successful “if they only tried harder.”

Many in the United States will not even admit that racism exists. Conservatives often argue that systemic racism is a term designed to lay a guilt trip on white people and also explain away the continuing failure of Black people to take responsibility for their own inadequacies. To them, racism only matters when it is conscious and deliberate; racism that is unconscious, implicit, or institutional simply doesn't count in their worldview. And as individualists, they think we are all masters of our own fate: if people are poor, it is basically their own fault. Therefore, systemic racism is an impossibility. [Roughly six in 10 Republicans](#) state that too much attention is paid to race these days.

Structural racism: violations of social, economic & cultural rights

Racism is structural (i.e. systemic), not individual. The dictionary defines racism as prejudice directed against people because of their race, not because of an individual's actions or other characteristics. This definition is simplistic and inaccurate. Racism is more accurately defined as a system of oppression based on race. It is created and reinforced by power differentials in which the oppressor holds power over the oppressed. Racism is systemic; that is, it is embedded in the laws, regulations, and practices of this society and its institutions, communities, and organizations. It manifests as discrimination in areas including criminal justice, employment, housing, health care, education, and political representation.

Structural racism pervades every aspect of life in the United States, rooted in centuries of oppression and fueled by a neocolonial, neoliberal imperialist state for whom violence is the first resort when its hegemony is threatened.

Racism involves the application of force, coercion and restriction of human and civil rights upon powerless people through systems of oppression. Systemic racism is perpetrated by the powerful upon the powerless. It defies the existence of "reverse racism." Those who lack power cannot exercise control over or deny rights to those who enjoy the privilege of being among the controlling class.

Structural racism is intersectional – a concept that recognizes that all forms of oppression intersect to form systems of oppression.

The Oxford Dictionary defines [intersectionality](#) as “the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.”

The intersectionality of racism means that certain groups of people experience different forms and degrees of oppression. Racialized oppression is one form of racism, co-existing with other forms of oppression such as class oppression; gender-based oppression; and persecution of national, ethnic and religious minorities.

All forms of prejudice are oppressive, but not all forms of it are equally consequential. Those that beget structural inequalities – as does oppression based on race, class, nationality, religion, gender, sexuality, and the intersection of these forms of discrimination – are very different in nature from prejudice based on factors such as age, appearance, or geography.

Economic discrimination

“When the Emancipation Proclamation was signed in 1863, the Black community owned less than one percent of the United States’ total wealth. More than 150 years later, that number has barely budged,” writes Mehrsa Baradaran of Harvard University in her book *The Color of Money*.

African American people experience huge and pervasive inequalities in both income and wealth in the United States. Wealth is more important than income as a determinate of security and quality of life because it is an overarching factor indicating long-range status – unlike income, which can change significantly over time. On average, Black households own [only 10%](#) (around \$17,000) of the wealth that the typical white family has (\$171,000).

African American people started trying to amass wealth even before emancipation. People still trapped in chattel slavery hired themselves out, usually with a portion of their wages going to their “owners,” in an effort to build wealth. Their earnings were often used to purchase their loved ones from slaveholders. Most went on to purchase land and/or start businesses and establish schools, churches, and mutual aid societies to create thriving and sustainable communities, despite the hardships and drawbacks that accompany being Black in the United States.

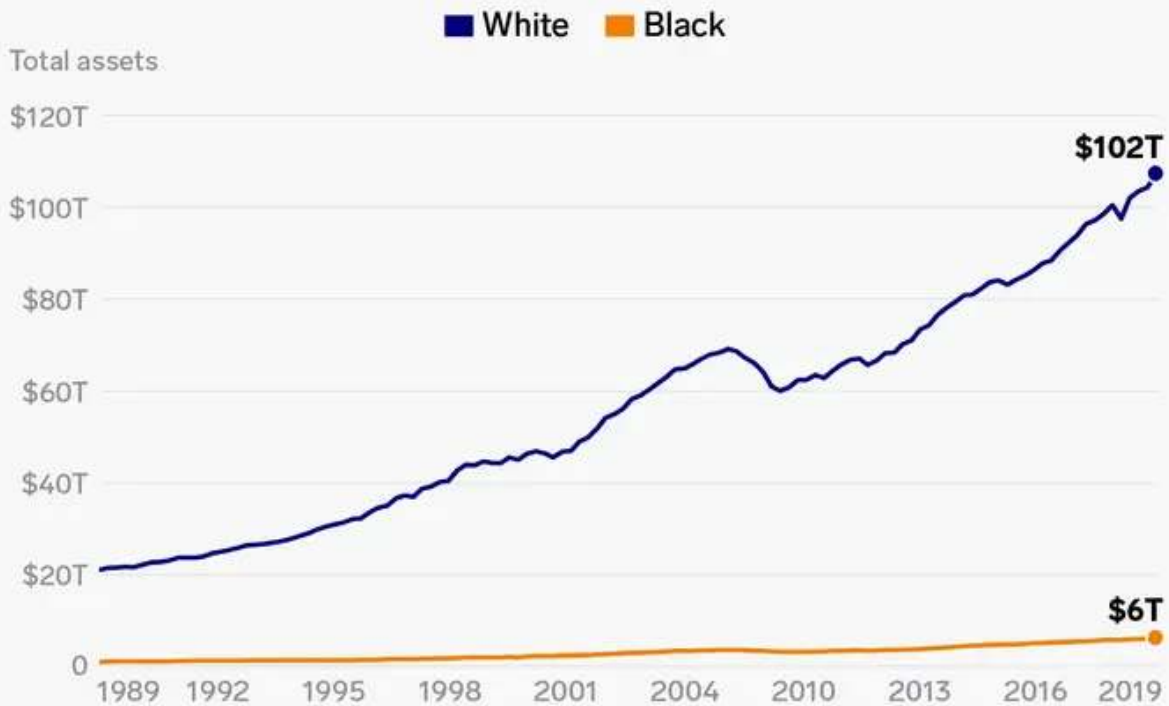
Many established Black townships or districts where residents could escape the depredations of Jim Crow segregation and white supremacy by creating their own communities. Oklahoma alone had more than 20 Black towns and dozens of successful Black neighborhoods. Tulsa's Greenwood District is well known even today as an icon of Black social and economic success that succumbed to murderous white rage. For several decades these all-Black towns provided their residents with lives free of the regular racial brutality and prejudice often experienced by Blacks living in racially mixed communities. Residents could depend upon and support each other. Black-owned farms, schools, and businesses took root.

Many of these communities were destroyed by white rioters (Tulsa's Greenwood; Elaine, Arkansas; Greenwood, Florida; Chicago's African American district; and many more). Others succumbed to government-sponsored economic terrorism: redlining, discriminatory lending policies and practices, *de facto* and *de jure* segregation, income and wealth disparities, the Great Depression, two World Wars and numerous U.S. wars of aggression that conscripted African Americans, coupled with the Great Migration of Black people to the industrial North and to California, along with the transition of the U.S. from a predominately rural to an overwhelmingly urban society – all of which contributed to the demise of these thriving Black communities.

The Coronavirus pandemic exacerbated the wealth gap and thus Black households' financial security. When the pandemic hit in early 2020, Black households were left without the safety margin that wealth provides. Black people faced unemployment and multiple health emergencies, yet many had few or no emergency savings to fall back on during this time. [More than 65%](#) of unemployed Black households lacked access to \$400 in savings; only 46% of white households faced the same challenges.

These issues illustrate the systemic injustice that is inherent in the United States and largely the direct result of government actions and policies. This is clearly evident in patterns of housing. For most people in the U.S., homeownership represents the majority of their wealth; it is passed down from one generation to the next.

Household wealth of Black and white Americans



Source: Federal Reserve Distributional Financial Accounts

BUSINESS INSIDER

Source: Federal Reserve Distributional Financial Accounts

Many local, state and federal housing policies mandated segregation, prevented Black people from becoming homeowners and diminished the value of the property that Black people managed to purchase. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which was established in 1934, furthered the segregation efforts by refusing to insure mortgages in and near African American neighborhoods – a policy known as “[redlining](#).” At the same time, the FHA was subsidizing builders who were mass-producing entire subdivisions for whites – with the requirement that none of the homes be sold to African Americans. Taxpayers actively subsidized homeownership; and homeowners received tax credits for mortgage interest, while renters received no such subsidy.

The federal government manipulates currency in ways that work against the interests of poor and working class people, thus increasing the wealth gap. *The Washington Post* [reports](#):

"It is no coincidence the rich began getting so much richer as globalization exerted downward pressure on wages and deregulated financial innovation increased opportunities for capital gains. A side effect of low interest rates, engineered by the Federal Reserve with the goal of stimulating the broader economy, has been to reduce the costs and raise the benefits of speculation. [...] It is still remarkable – and concerning – that wealth inequality grew during the pandemic. Of \$13.5 trillion in new household wealth added during 2020, more than 70% accrued to the top fifth of income earners, and about a third to the top one percent."

The intersection of structural racism with class oppression in the U.S. has created a maelstrom of misery and oppression in African American communities and people. Taken as a whole, it represents a massive abuse of human rights.

Discrimination in policing & the criminal justice system

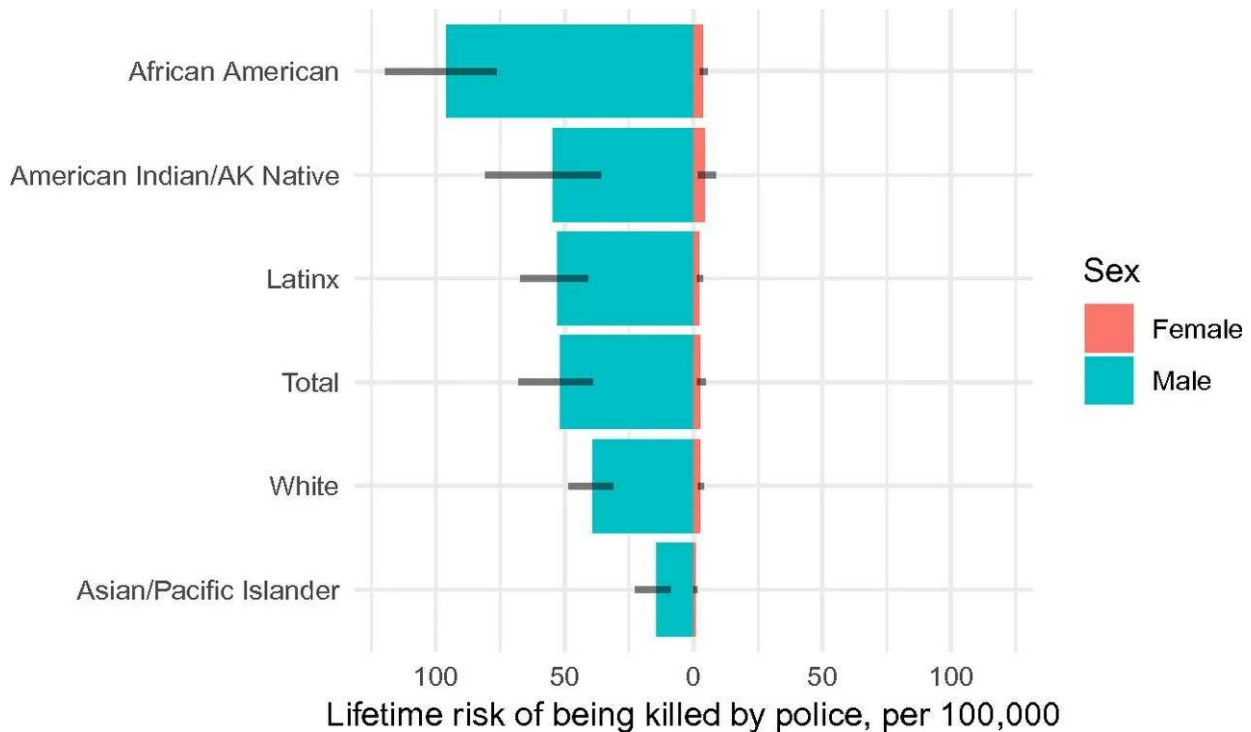
Police murders

The 2020 murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor by police galvanized the nation and prompted people all over the world to protest police brutality against Black people in the United States. Millions of people took to the streets. The sheer brutality and injustice of these deaths, one of which played out on screens throughout the world, gave impetus to dialogue about racial injustice on a level not seen in this nation since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

Despite the mobilization of masses of people and multiple gestures toward amelioration of racism by government entities, mass media and corporations (many of which consisted chiefly of urgings to avoid violence in pursuit of racial justice), there have been few, if any, substantive changes in the systemic racism that pervades the United States.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the incidence of murders of Black people by law enforcement. Police violence is a leading cause of death for young men in the U.S. Over the life course, about [one in every 1,000 Black men](#) can expect to be killed by police.

Black women and men and Indigenous and Alaska Native women and men are [significantly more likely](#) than white women and men to be killed by police. Latino men are also more likely to be killed by police than are white men, [according to](#) the National Academy of Sciences.



As horrific as those statistics are, the reality is even worse: [more than 55%](#) of all deaths from police violence in the U.S. may go unreported.

- An assessment of deaths attributable to police violence in the United States concludes that more than half of all such killings are misclassified or misreported.
- The analysis finds that Black people are the most likely of all racial and ethnic groups to die as a result of police violence.
- The study authors conclude that militarized policing and systemic racism are largely to blame for the high numbers of such deaths.

The fear of violent encounters with the police and the ensuing stress can have negative consequences for the mental and physical health of those it affects. Some experts have referred to these stressors within the larger scheme of structural racism.

The adverse mental health impact also has a “spillover” effect on other members of the community who are not directly affected. Researchers examined the effects that witnessing or hearing about the killing of a Black American have on white and Black Americans. They found that with each additional police killing of an unarmed Black American, Black respondents were more likely to report additional “poor mental health days.”

The purpose of terrorism is fear – and the terrorism of police murders of Black people certainly strikes fear into the hearts of African Americans and others frequently subjected to hate crimes and racialized discrimination. This fear is a tool for maintaining white supremacy and perpetuating oppression.

Criminology instructor Murat Haner and Associate Professor of Sociology Melissa Sloan report in “Race and worrying about police brutality: the hidden injuries of minority status in America” that while only 6.6% of whites “worry a lot” about police violence, some minorities experience much greater fear, with 32.4% of Blacks and 26.5% of Latines reporting they “worry a lot” about becoming victims of police violence. Conversely, three-fourths of whites “do not worry at all” about officer violence, while only one-third of minority respondents “do not worry at all” about police brutality.

This fear permeates every aspect of Black life in the U.S. Black parents have “The Talk” with their children – instructions on how to interact with police to avoid getting shot. “Speak calmly and politely. Keep your hands visible – on the steering wheel or in the air. Ask permission before reaching into your pocket or book bag or glove compartment for your ID. If someone is with you, ask them to record your encounter with police. Don’t get agitated if the police are rough or rude with you.” Black families worry about whether their sons and daughters will return home unscathed after such innocent activities as buying candy at the corner store, jogging through the park, or waiting for friends at Starbucks – all for good reason, as hardly a week goes by without viewers being treated to yet another video of police brutalizing innocent Black children, men and women.

One parent reported:

“Over the years, fears of my son falling victim to violence, at the hands of police or criminals, influenced a very rigid approach to parenting during his high school years that I’m not proud of. Throughout his high school years, I drilled my sons with rhetorical questions that were set-ups for my weekly diatribes: do you REALLY know if your friends carry drugs? Because if YOU’RE riding in a car together and get pulled over, only ONE of you has a rich parent to bail you out. Ultimately, my fixation with protecting my son’s body and reputation meant that he missed out on far too many formative high school experiences.”

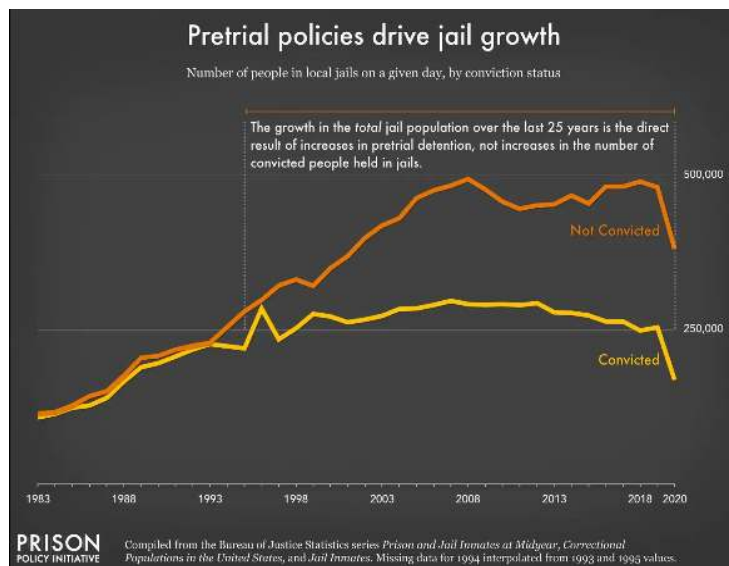
Terrorism of this sort against innocent civilians including children is one of the most egregious and unconscionable violations of human rights.

Mass incarceration

Mass incarceration is mass elimination. Two centuries of evidence documenting the long rise of incarceration in the United States leaves no other interpretation. Incarceration operates as a means of purging, removing, caging, containing, erasing, disappearing, and eliminating targeted populations from land, life, society and power in the United States. It creates an underclass of people forever marginalized and powerless. It is a violation of a fundamental human right: the right to be free.

The U.S. locks up a [higher percentage](#) of its population than any other so-called democracy in the world. The U.S. criminal justice system [holds](#) almost 2.3 million people in 1,566 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 1,510 juvenile correctional facilities, 2,850 local jails, 186 immigration detention facilities, and 82 Indian Country jails – as well as in military prisons, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories. “The land of the free” is actually “the land of the cage.” It should come as no surprise that Black people and other people of color are disproportionately victimized by the U.S. carceral system.

Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, describes a caste-like system in the United States that has resulted in millions of African Americans locked behind bars and then relegated to permanent second-class status – denied the very rights supposedly won in the Civil Rights Movement.



Source: Prison Policy Initiative

The carceral system is heavily impacted by the bias of police mentality, [says](#) the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), as well as by outdated judicial precedents. “It is largely driven by racial disparities, which directly obstruct and deconstruct our communities.”

In every way that Black people encounter law enforcement or criminal justice systems in the U.S., injustice and human rights violations occur:

- A Black person is [five times more likely](#) to be stopped without just cause than a white person.
- A Black man is [twice as likely](#) to be stopped without just cause than a Black woman.
- [65% of Black adults](#) have felt targeted because of their race. (Similarly, [more than 35% of Latine and Asian adults](#) have felt targeted because of race.)

These grim statistics apply to Black youth as well as adults. Despite a [75% reduction](#) in juvenile arrests since 1990, Black and Indigenous youth are still arrested and incarcerated at far higher rates than white youth. Black teenagers remained about [twice as likely](#) to be arrested for a drug offense and three times more likely to be arrested overall. As in other aspects of the justice system, racial disparities grow worse at each step; disparate arrest rates are amplified when it comes to incarceration, with Black youth [6.4 times more likely](#) to be incarcerated than white youth. Of note, the incarceration rates of Indigenous youth are even more oppressive: Indigenous youth are [much more likely](#) to be incarcerated than other races.

For Black youth, the school-to-prison pipeline is a grim reality. It began in deep social and economic inequalities and has taken root in the historic shortcomings of schooling in this country.

The “zero-tolerance” policies that today are the most extreme form of a punishment paradigm disproportionately applied to BIPOC children were originally written for the so-called War on Drugs in the early 1980s and later applied to schools. The resulting extraordinary rates of suspension and expulsion are linked nationally to increasing police presence, checkpoints, and surveillance inside schools, which has caused an explosive increase in arrests and detainment of Black youth, some as young as three years old.

The growth of the school-to-prison pipeline is part of a larger crisis. Since 1970, the U.S. prison population has [exploded](#) from about 325,000 people to more than 2 million today. According to Michelle Alexander (author of *The New Jim Crow*), this is a phenomenon that cannot be explained by crime rates or drug use. Human Rights Watch [states](#) that although whites are more likely to violate drug laws than people of color, in some states Black men have been admitted to prison on drug charges at rates 20 to 50 times greater than those of white men.

Latine, Indigenous, and other people of color are also imprisoned at rates far higher than their representation in the population. Once released, former prisoners are caught in a web of laws, regulations, fines and discrimination – much of it legal – that make it difficult or impossible to secure jobs, education, housing, and public assistance, and often to vote or serve on juries. Alexander calls this permanent second-class citizenship a new form of segregation.

We must confront the human rights catastrophe taking place in our jails and prisons. The contemporary U.S. practice of super-incarceration is closer to new-age slavery than to any recognizable system of “criminal justice.” Our carceral system and the fundamentally racist institutions and practices that sustain it must be abolished.

[1] The Oxford Dictionary defines *cisgender* as “denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.”

From “Black Lives Matter” to “housing is a human right”: a look at structural genocide in the U.S.

April 8, 2022



Source: 48 Hills

From racist police murders of unarmed civilians to mass evictions and forced displacement during a homelessness epidemic, a movement is confronting genocide

April 8, 2022

By Nicole Chase (intern) and Natalia Burdyńska-Schuurman (National Co-Coordinator)

June of 2020 marked a defining moment in history when the police murder of George Floyd spurred a massive popular uprising for racial justice against the backdrop of a devastating public health and economic crisis.

Millions mobilized in solidarity with Black and Brown communities not only losing loved ones at alarming rates to police murders but also to COVID-19 and increasing poverty. Essential workers in at least 160 cities organized a “[Strike for Black Lives](#)” protesting in remembrance of unarmed Black and Brown civilians killed at the hands of law enforcement while demanding economic relief for communities most profoundly impacted by the Coronavirus recession.

Nearly two years later, the recession has taken a massive toll on poor and working class Black and Brown households. The pandemic has exhausted thousands of homes’ financial savings, leaving millions of Black and Brown families one paycheck away from eviction amid a growing housing crisis. Landlords have evicted [at least 75,000](#) tenants while pocketing COVID-19 federal rental aid, and [3.5 million people](#) nationwide are reportedly likely or “very likely” to face eviction. Black-majority neighborhoods in particular face the [highest risk](#) of experiencing serial eviction filings in the U.S. today.

Only [\\$20 billion](#) of the \$46 billion allocated to COVID-19 federal rental aid in 2020 – 43.5% – has been awarded. With insufficient federal relief assistance reaching those in need, low-income families are still navigating an economic crisis with little to no safety net to fall back on. The situation is particularly concerning for poor and working class people of color who face a much [higher risk](#) of pandemic-related job loss, loss of household savings and eviction amid a housing crisis that’s coincided with a [77% increase](#) in homeless deaths over the five years prior to 2020.

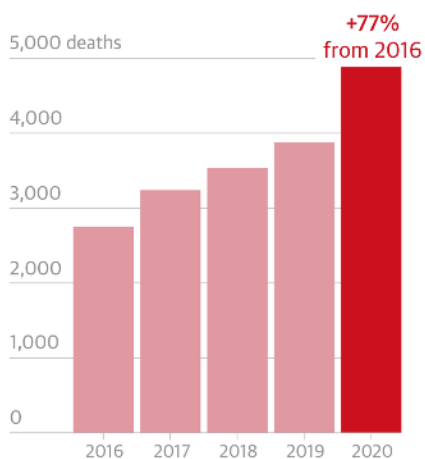
From overwhelming impunity for racist police murders of unarmed civilians to a disastrous mismanagement of a homelessness epidemic disproportionately killing Black and Brown communities, the human rights violations permitted and promoted under our federal government’s watch are tantamount to structural genocide. The Biden Administration’s negligent management of a deadly housing crisis, made even more lethal when compounded by a pandemic disproportionately devastating Black and Brown communities, constitutes a crime in the eyes of the international community.

A housing crisis disproportionately killing Black & Brown communities

Black, Brown and Indigenous families in particular have shouldered **the worst** blows of the Coronavirus recession, among them the highest rates of unemployment, loss of income and savings, evictions and homelessness. Black and Brown households in the U.S. are **most likely** to live with a high housing cost burden, making them especially prone to housing insecurity and the possibility of homelessness in the case of a sudden loss of income or savings. **So are** Indigenous households, which are significantly less likely than white households to own their homes.

Deaths of people who are homeless are up 77% since 2016

Analysis of annual counts from 2016 to 2020 across 20 US jurisdictions



Guardian graphic. Source: Guardian collaborated with the organization Homeless Deaths Count to gather data from local governments and regional homeless service providers. Because the methods for tracking mortality among people who are homeless can vary from locality to locality, deaths should not be compared across the local jurisdictions.

Source: The Guardian

What the past several years have made clear is that homelessness is fatal, and our current homelessness epidemic is disproportionately killing poor and working class people of color. Homeless people in the U.S. are **three times more likely** to die than housed people, according to a local analysis of homeless deaths in the country's so-called "homeless capital," Los Angeles, between 2017-2019. Made even worse by the spread of Coronavirus to unhoused communities, homeless people and particularly homeless people of color in the U.S. face an incredibly **high risk** of infection and developing disease or worse health outcomes.

According to a 2020 study by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, Black people in the U.S. represent about 13% of the U.S. population, yet they comprise nearly 40% of people experiencing homelessness nationwide. Black people experiencing homelessness are among the most endangered demographics in the United States, as the criminalization of race and poverty place them at an **especially high risk** of being targets of hate crimes and police brutality.

According to University of Washington researcher and co-founder of the organization Homeless Deaths Count, Matt Fowle, so many Black and Brown lives could be saved simply by guaranteeing housing to all.

“It’s a tragedy that people are dying without housing,” Fowle [said](#) in an interview with *The Guardian*. “We know the solutions. Housing saves lives and, for these people, is often a form of healthcare.”

Displacement & dispossession: roots of housing insecurity, foundations of neocolonialism

As our colleague James Jordan, a long-time housing rights activist, explains:

“Driving Indigenous nations from their homes, kidnapping Africans for enslavement in another land, the dispossession and poverty that are the lot of our nation’s poor: it is upon this more than anything else that the so-called American Dream is built. Homeless people are far more likely to be victims of hate crimes than the general population. The problem is greatly compounded if one is a person of color.”

As is the current homelessness epidemic, racial inequality in the U.S. housing crisis is the legacy of a long history of displacement and dispossession: of nations, communities, workers and individuals. From the annexation of tribal lands to the gentrification of historically Black and Brown inner-city neighborhoods, displacement and dispossession remain foundational to our housing system and the preservation of race-based power relations in property ownership established by settler-colonialism.

Federal policies have institutionalized the displacement and dispossession of Black and Brown communities for centuries. The Indian Removal Act and the Dawes Act facilitated the forced removal of Indigenous peoples. Federal laws passed in the 20th century terminated more than 100 tribal nations, resulting in the annexation of millions of acres of tribal land by the U.S. By 2017, [more than one in five](#) Native Americans (22%) lived in poverty, compared with just eight percent of the white population, and were far less likely to own property than white residents.

In the 1930s and following the so-called Great Migration of nearly six million African Americans to northern cities, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) developed redlining, a housing program [described](#) as a “state-sponsored system of segregation” that institutionalized racial discrimination through the determination of home values.

As a direct result of the initiative, houses in white communities were deemed more valuable than identical houses in communities of color. After 40 years homes in white neighborhoods had already [appreciated \\$200,000 more](#) than those in communities of color had, further widening racial disparities in household wealth and savings to this day.

For much of the 20th century, federal, state, and local policies subsidized the development of prosperous white suburbs in metropolises across the country by constructing highway systems for suburban commuters through predominantly Black and Brown neighborhoods. In more recent years, the relocation of white middle and upper class residents to cities, increased cost of living and correspondingly [heavy policing](#) of inner-city poor and working class communities laid the groundwork for the gentrification of historically Black and Brown neighborhoods. This resulted in the displacement of thousands of families from cities across the country.

From 2000 to 2013, Washington D.C. residents saw the nation's [highest rate](#) of gentrification, during which 20,000 Black Americans were forced out of their homes. In the three decades leading up to 2015, Black residency in the U.S. Capital had [declined](#) roughly 30%, while the city's white population increased by 25%. By 2019, almost [one in four](#) (25% of) Black D.C. residents live in poverty, compared to just three percent of white residents. The case of Washington, D.C. illustrates a reality nationwide, where over three decades of gentrification has accelerated in several cities across the U.S.



Source: Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign

The Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, a fiscally sponsored project of AFGJ organizing housing takeover campaigns in Philadelphia and other cities across the country, affirms that people have the right to reclaim the basic necessities of life, including housing. "We prioritize #LivesOverLuxury," the campaign proclaims. "Housing and urban development has properties that sit empty for

months and years, while families can't afford places to live. There's something wrong with that."

We charge genocide

While the international community defends the [right to housing](#) as a fundamental and inalienable human right, the denial of housing rights to Black and Brown communities remains foundational to U.S. policy-making and law enforcement. For centuries now, lawmakers have facilitated and police have enforced the ongoing displacement and dispossession of colonized peoples through means of direct and structural violence waged upon them in the name of national interest. From “Black Lives Matter” to “housing is a human right,” a movement is confronting genocide.

Nobody’s child: victims of the U.S. child welfare system

April 19, 2022



Source: Pixabay

How racism, classism and injustice intersect with poverty and lack of an adequate social safety net to violate children’s and families’ rights

By Camille Landry (National Co-Coordinator)

The U.S. child welfare system is broken. It violates human rights of the children it claims to serve. It intersects with racism, classism, patriarchy, the criminal justice system, an all-but absent mental health and substance abuse treatment system and all the other social woes in the United States to form a huge, unwieldy, powerful and deeply flawed system that harms children, families and communities.

The United Nations [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) identifies the removal of children from their families of origin and communities as a violation of human rights. The U.S. child welfare system, together with law enforcement, courts and other institutions, is a major violator of this most fundamental right.

Children sit squarely and precariously at the intersection of social, economic, political and familial problems: poverty, health and healthcare issues, education, housing, social services, policing, criminal justice issues and every aspect of human and civil rights.



Source: United Nations

The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) clearly states:

"Children and young people have the same general human rights as adults and also specific rights that recognize their special needs. Children are neither the property of their parents nor are they helpless objects of charity. They are human beings and are the subject of their own rights."

Children are obviously vulnerable; few have the ability to act on their own behalf to ameliorate circumstances that negatively affect them.

That is why the actions or inactions of the government impact children more strongly than any other group in society. Nowhere is the government's impact more pronounced than in the child welfare system.

Few U.S. institutions display the intersectional nature of social problems as do child welfare issues. Race, wealth inequalities, class, employment, health care (especially mental health and substance abuse treatment), housing, education, the social safety net (or lack thereof), policing, the criminal justice system and every other institution affect children more than adults, because children are more vulnerable and have a lesser ability to act in their own best interests. Thus the most vulnerable among us are at the mercy of a system whose racism, classism, bigotry and continued violation of human rights make them yet another instrument of structural genocide.

In the United States, a child is removed from their home and placed into foster care [every two minutes](#). As of September 2019, nearly [424,000 children](#) were in foster care in the United States. Another [four percent](#) of all children in the U.S. – more than 2.65 million total – are in kinship care. The total number of children who spend some time in state custody is [closer to 800,000](#) for any given year, as some children move in and out of foster care within a year's time.

Authorities estimate that [hundreds of thousands](#) of more children are in “shadow foster care” – unofficial placement with relatives or friends, without going through court – and without resources for the guardians or support for the children. Sometimes this shadow care is arranged or promoted by child welfare workers. Often families take action on their own, sending children to live with someone willing to care for them when parents are unable to provide appropriate or adequate care. The shadow care system is very prevalent among BIPOC people, who have good reason to be wary of the child welfare system.

The child welfare system costs more than [\\$200 million per day](#), over \$80 billion per year. And that's just the direct costs. The cost in broken families and broken children is incalculable.

The social, personal and financial burdens on families, many of whom assume care of young family members without going through the foster system and thus receive no public support, is huge. This money could be used to improve the situations that lead to children being removed from their homes.

The child welfare system in the United States [disproportionately affects](#) Black, Brown, Indigenous and poor white families. Although child abuse and neglect cross all racial, social and economic boundaries, abuse and neglect are [not reported or handled equally or proportionally](#) across all strata, as reflected by the children and families involved in the child welfare system.

Poverty is strongly related to neglect, although poverty does not equal neglect. Dominique Roberts was a single mother of four whose children were seized and placed in foster homes due to her use of illegal drugs. After months on waiting lists for treatment, Dominique found a drug treatment program in another state – the only one that would accept uninsured women with small children – and kicked her drug habit. Upon her return to her home city, she got two jobs, an apartment, and petitioned to have her children returned. The kids came home on a provisional arrangement. Two months later Dominique was evicted from her apartment in a public housing project because of her earlier drug conviction. She moved in with a friend because she didn't have the \$2,500 it would cost to rent a new place, put down a security deposit, rent a moving truck and pay a deposit for electric service. When her case worker found that her roommate had both drug and assault convictions in the past, she removed the children from Dominique's custody again – despite the fact that the roommate's charges stemmed from incidents more than ten years in the past, and the woman was then clean, sober and employed.

Dominique was able to find another apartment and have regular visits with her kids although they remained in state custody. The requirements for her unification with her children were that she hold a job, have an apartment with at least three bedrooms, and remain sober. One day, after working back-to-back shifts on her two jobs with no days off for over two weeks, Dominique fell asleep while driving with her youngest child in the car and struck a street sign. The child was properly secured in a car seat and was not hurt in the accident.

The police officer who responded to the accident looked up Dominique's name and discovered her prior charges. The cop claimed he "smelled drugs" and arrested Dominique. No drugs were found in the car. She was taken to a medical facility where her hair follicle, blood and urine tests were negative for drugs. Despite this, her children were removed again, her parental rights were terminated, and three of her four children were adopted by other people (the fourth child went to live with his father).

Most of Dominique's issues were directly related to poverty. Her inability to find substance abuse treatment that would accept uninsured people prolonged her addiction. If she had been able to afford regular housing instead of living in the projects, she would not have been evicted for prior drug use – and if she had, she'd have been able to afford a new place. She wouldn't have been working two minimum-wage jobs with crazy schedules. If she had been confronted by child welfare workers, she would have been able to afford a good attorney, which would have greatly increased her chances of winning her case. Instead, poverty and its associated maladies tore Dominique's family apart.

Dominique is now dead; her life spiraled out of control after the loss of her children. She was found dead on a highway embankment. Police believe she was pushed out of or fled a moving vehicle, likely due to violence.



Source: Ellen Banner (The Seattle Times)

Dominique's children experience the fate of so many in the foster care system. One is in jail facing a murder charge; one ran away from foster care repeatedly and now has two children of her own, struggling to survive; one has regular encounters with school officials and police due to her anger and

mistrust of authority figures and was recently expelled from school for the fifth time. The youngest is in a special facility for children with emotional disturbances.

The Department of Health and Human Services delivered a death sentence that resulted in one dead mother and a total of six children who have been irreparably harmed.

“Rather than seeing these root causes with clear eyes, calling them out, and taking them on with intention, we remain stuck as a system and society that focuses on the harmful aftereffects, often casting blame on vulnerable families for their very vulnerability,” [states](#) Jerry Milner, associate commissioner of the U.S. Children’s Bureau at the Department of Health and Human Services. “Rather than trying to prevent poverty and the many challenges associated with poverty, such as social isolation and lack of meaningful opportunities and support, we search for increasingly sophisticated evidence-based interventions to treat the trauma or ‘fix’ the symptoms arising from a family’s inability to meet their children’s fundamental needs.”

Poor people do not abuse their children more than affluent families do; they are, however, [far more subject to intervention](#) by child protective services than are families with money. Poor parents are being charged with child abuse and neglect because they cannot afford to properly care for their children.

When a child shows up at school (or doesn’t show up) and is dirty, malnourished, in need of medical care, or known to stay home alone while a parent works, teachers and other adult caregivers (who are mandatory reporters, required by law to report suspected or witnessed acts of child abuse or neglect) call child protective services and that family finds itself enmeshed in the CPS system. Poor parents who have substance abuse or other mental health issues, or who are physically unable to care for their children due to illness, injury, or other issues, are typically unable to access the services that would improve their conditions and assure child welfare workers that their situations are under control.

Poverty and wealth inequality are on the increase [in every state in the U.S.](#) There is a strong correlation between the increase in poor families and the increase in child abuse and neglect reports. Poverty is causing an increase in the number of child abuse reports given by mandatory reporters because more and more children are living in poverty not getting the care they need.

It doesn't mean that poor parents intentionally abuse or neglect their children; it means that poor parents are being charged with abuse or neglect because they can't afford to adequately provide for their children.

Higher poverty levels lead to more dirty and malnourished children. And because our political and economic institutions don't value the lives of poor people, little is being done to change the conditions that lead to children being snatched from the arms of desperate, loving parents and thrust into the peculiar hell that is the U.S. foster care system.

All of this is well documented in the literature and well known to the child welfare establishment. Partners for our Children, a Washington state-based advocacy organization, defines it thusly:

"Families with greater economic resources – whether through public resources such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food stamps or parental employment – are less likely to experience child protective services resulting in children placed in out-of-home care. In addition, the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect [found](#) families with incomes below \$15,000 were 22 times more likely to experience an incidence of child maltreatment than families with an income above \$30,000. Related research [shows](#) a causal effect of income level on the risk of maltreatment reported to the child welfare system."

Foster care placement

Foster care children in the U.S. are mistreated and shuffled between inadequate and dangerous placements, forced to unnecessarily languish in foster care for years. State social service agencies are often grossly underfunded and dangerously understaffed. The lack of adequate staffing is not surprising, given the frequent turnover, low wages, massive caseloads, horrific experiences and other negative working conditions that case managers and other employees often face.

There are many different settings that accommodate children in the foster care system. The percentages of one type of facility versus others varies a lot from state to state. For example, the State of Oklahoma has no state-run emergency shelters. They were closed by federal mandate several years ago because children were being killed and injured in those facilities.

They were replaced by a series of emergency placements in private homes and group facilities run by private organizations. Other states run shelters in which children may live [from a few days to a few years](#).

As part of a continuing trend to move public services into the private sector, many states rely upon group facilities and even foster care management services that are contracted to provide the care that was once the purview of state-run agencies. Public monies are funneled into private pockets – many of them religious-based organizations. Of note, most of those faith-based facilities are operated by evangelical sects – the very groups that make up the Republican Party’s base.

Religious-affiliated foster care organizations often [discriminate openly against](#) LGBTQI foster parents, biological parents and the children in their care. Foster children may be subjected to conversion therapy, either formally or informally. A child who is openly queer may find themselves moved abruptly to a different care setting, contributing to the insecurity and lack of continuity that most children in the foster system experience.

There are several different kinds of foster placement currently in use in the United States:

- State-run foster care facilities are group settings that care for a large number of children.
- Kinship placement removes children from their parents and places them into the care of relatives or friends. Often the definition of “kinship” is expanded to include basically anyone who has been a part of the child’s life. A teacher, youth leader, someone who attended the same church as the child’s family or a neighbor might be considered kin for the purposes of foster placement. Kinship placement [typically costs the state less](#). Kinship foster parents [typically are required to have less training](#) and often do not receive the same dollar amount for caring for children.
- “Shadow foster care” includes informal placement with a relative or a friend. These foster parents [receive little or nothing](#) from the state. Depending upon their own income and assets, they may or may not qualify for TANF, food stamps, Medicaid, daycare, housing assistance or other income-based governmental aid.

- Private foster families are individuals or couples who offer their services to care for children in the foster system. They undergo training and receive a monthly stipend to provide care for foster children. Some other services are available, including support groups, planned outings, arrangements for respite care, provision of clothing for the children and help supplying Christmas gifts and paying for extracurricular activities. However, the amounts that foster parents get generally [does not keep pace with inflation](#). In many states, private foster parents [subcontract with the state](#) through a private agency, which handles their training, supervision and support.

Foster care's impact on mental health

Frequent changes in living conditions create their own special kind of trauma, even if the children are not openly abused or neglected (although many are). Reactive attachment disorder is a diagnosis that is [often carried](#) by children in the foster system. [According to](#) a study for the Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, "attachment disorder is central in the description and understanding of social malfunctioning in institutionalized children and represents a major psychological etiological model that links early maltreatment to later psychopathology."

As is the case in U.S. society as a whole, mental healthcare is often sadly lacking for children, in or out of foster care. The American Academy of Pediatrics [states](#) that "mental and behavioral health is the largest unmet health need for children and teens in foster care. Mental and behavioral health requires the presence of at least one nurturing, responsive caregiver who is stable in the child's or teen's life over time."

[Up to 80%](#) of children in foster care have significant mental health issues, compared to approximately 18-22% of the general population. As a result of these increased mental health issues, foster youth are prescribed psychotropic medications at a [much higher rate](#) than non-foster youth. This presents a myriad of problems, ranging from the "dulling out" feeling that often accompanies psychotropic medications, to outright overdoses and dangerous side effects.

Children and teens entering foster care have already had many traumatic experiences that have adversely affected their well-being. In foster care, ongoing uncertainty, multiple losses and transitions can further erode a child's or teen's sense of self and overall health. Some of the transitions beyond the initial separation from family and all that is familiar include:

- Separation of a child or teen from siblings who remain at or return home or are placed in a different foster care setting
- Visitation (sometimes chaotic and unpredictable)
- Movement to adoption either voluntarily by parent or through termination of parental rights
- Changes in foster home placement
- Changes in school and/or childcare arrangements
- Court hearings in which decisions about living arrangements might be made
- Changes in caseworkers, therapists, teachers or other significant adults
- Identification of and visitation with a newly found relative, especially the biological father when there has been no prior relationship

The adjustment to living with a new family for children and teens is an overwhelming task. During a period of grief and bereavement after being taken from their families of origin, children must adapt to an unfamiliar family and environment. At the same time, that new family must adapt and change to welcome this new person into their home, often without any prior knowledge of the child's needs, personality, likes and dislikes. Attachments may form very quickly, or very slowly. Foster parents and other family members are expected to treat the new child or teen as one of their own, and then the time comes to say goodbye. The transitions, adjustments, and uncertainty of foster care not only place a great strain on children and teens, but also on foster parents and their family members, in addition to their biological parents.

Inside the foster care system

Foster placement is often grim. While it can offer safety to children and teens who were experiencing abuse or true neglect, and without considering the stress associated with such a major life change, many foster care facilities and homes are paltry at best, abusive at worst.

Sometimes children in the foster system are blatantly abused. Reliable data on foster care abuse is notoriously hard to come by. While anecdotes of horrible maltreatment of children by foster parents abound, these don't paint a clear picture of how prevalent abuse is in the foster care system. It is estimated that [between 25-40% of children in foster care](#) in the U.S. have experienced abuse or neglect within the system. Multiple organizations that have studied systemwide foster care abuses have concluded that children in state care are [10 times more likely to be sexually abused](#) than children in the care of their biological parents.

Length of time in foster care is estimated to range from [just under one \(0.73\) year to 17.5 years](#) in care. The average length of time in care is [7.8 years](#). The total number of placements per youth ranges [from one to 39](#). The average number of placements is [8.3](#).

When children are removed from their homes, states generally have three placement options:

- The homes of relatives and other unrelated kin
- The homes of non-relative foster parents recruited and trained by both public and private child welfare agencies
- "Congregate care," which includes emergency shelters, group homes and other residential facilities

Children in non-relative foster placements suffer from being torn from their families and communities. Isabella, taken from the aunt who was raising her for abuse that was never proven (and which Isabella vehemently denied) was removed from a thriving African American and Latine urban community where she was often involved in social justice causes and immersed in the vibrant culture of her neighborhood. She was taken to a predominately white suburban family who attended a fundamentalist Christian church where women and girls were forbidden to wear pants, and a home where the food, music, language, mores and overall environment was completely foreign to her. The foster mom had no idea how to style Isabella's hair or provide care for her dark skin. She was the only Black child in her class. Her foster parents were horrified when she listened to rap and hip hop and forbade her to play her favorite radio station. During frequent prayer sessions, her foster parents prayed that Isabella's birth mother, who is lesbian, would be "saved from her wickedness and find the Lord."

Isabella, now a young adult, says that “being with those people was like being dropped into a foreign country and threatened when I said I was going to return home. They broke me.”

Even when children are placed with foster families of their own race and ethnicity, the stress of adhering to different ways of living, thinking and a new set of rules can be overwhelming. Since almost all foster children experience multiple placements while in state custody, this is no trivial matter.

Congregate care is even more traumatic for children than being placed in non-relative private homes. Congregate care is commonly employed to care for children, especially those who are hard to place with families. This can be because the child has behavioral or developmental issues, requires special care or is an adolescent. Many teenage foster youths end up in group homes (an [average of 10% nationally](#)) because there are too few foster parents who are willing to parent adolescents. A majority of Black male adolescents in the foster system reside in group homes.

Compared to youth not in congregate care, youth in congregate care were [significantly more likely](#) to have suffered all eight trauma types: physical abuse (55% vs. 30%), sexual abuse (40% vs. 24%), emotional abuse (68% vs. 37%), domestic violence (58% vs. 49%), traumatic loss/bereavement (62% vs. 50%), school violence (20% vs. 12%), community violence (31% vs. 16%) and to have an impaired caregiver (60% vs. 40%). Children served in residential treatment [had greater functional impairment](#) in all eight of the functional impairment areas (behavior, academic, attachment, running away, substance abuse, self-injury, suicidality and criminal activity).

Congregate care foster facilities are more restrictive than private homes. Children eat, sleep, play and study in environments where rules are rigidly enforced and opportunities for normal childhood experiences are limited. Frequent staff turnover and poor staff training also contribute to the negative impact of congregate care on children.

Children whose only “crime” was to be removed from their families by child welfare workers are subjected to prison-like conditions.

- What is it like to live in some place where an ever-changing lineup of adults must be addressed as “ma’am” or “sir” and you never know how they will respond because they’re the fifth person to fill that slot within a few months’ time?
- Contemplate the despair of children who must obey arbitrary and obscure rules such as being forced to sleep with their hands outside their blankets lest they touch their genitals at night.
- What do you think it’s like to never enjoy a home-cooked meal (many group homes serve only packaged food that can be easily reheated) – or to never have access to the foods that formed an integral part of your family’s culture?
- Think about times you came home after school and only wanted to be alone in your room – but in group homes you are forbidden access to your bedroom until a certain hour.
- Consider what it’s like to be refused the opportunity to attend a regular school and spend your days in a classroom with the people you live with, and one or two teachers to handle all subjects and grading.

Another major problem, especially in congregate care, is bullying and physical abuse by other children. Foster children are often [battered and even raped by other children](#) in their homes. They are at greater risk of bullying in their schools and neighborhoods because they are perennially “the new kid.”

A significant number of foster children are abused by foster parents or staff in congregate care settings. [According to](#) an independent study from the National Coalition for Child Protection Reform:

- A study of foster children in Oregon and Washington state [found](#) that nearly one third reported being abused by a foster parent or another adult in a foster home. That study didn’t even include cases of foster children abusing each other.
- In a study of investigations of alleged abuse in New Jersey foster homes, the researchers [found](#) a lack of “anything approaching reasonable professional judgment” and concluded that “no assurances can be given” that any New Jersey foster child is safe.

- Independent monitors were appointed to review the performance of the Fulton and DeKalb foster care systems in 2005 lawsuit settlement [found](#) that foster children in the metropolitan Atlanta area are experiencing a “high” rate of abuse and neglect while in state care, according to a report by federal monitors of these child welfare systems.

[More than 58,000 children](#) in the U.S. foster care system have been placed in institutions or group homes. They have little to no experience of ordinary home life and lack the skills to handle such basic tasks as food preparation and laundry. Children who spend time in institutions or group homes have few long-term interactions with adults or other children that are healthy or sustainable. They must figure out on their own, with no experience, how to relate to others in a positive manner.

It is not unusual for foster children to flee their placements. It is not legal for foster parents or the staff of congregate foster homes to physically restrain children from leaving. Many of them simply walk away. In a lot of jurisdictions, these children and youth are not reported to national runaway databases. Although the child's case worker is typically notified, law enforcement involvement is rare unless there is a strong reason to believe that the child has been harmed – or has returned to a biological family whose parental rights have been revoked.

Running away from a foster placement is quite likely to result in the child being placed in a more restrictive environment. Sometimes children are moved out of their hometowns to a city or rural area that's too far away for the child to easily reach familiar territory. Some children are moved to group homes. Others are placed in detention (jail). Being in foster care too often means being institutionalized over and over again. Youth in group homes are [2.5 times more likely](#) to become involved in the justice system than youth placed with foster families. Moreover, frequent placement changes [increase the likelihood](#) of both juvenile and adult incarceration.

Many runaway foster children end up living on the streets, selling themselves for a safe place to sleep or money to eat. Jails and prisons are full of former foster youth. In fact, spending time in foster care is a [major predictor](#) of future incarceration.

Juvenile incarceration & the foster-to-prison pipeline

The [foster-to-prison pipeline](#) exacts a terrible toll on children. The problem is so severe that [one quarter](#) of foster care alumni will become involved with the criminal justice system within two years of leaving care. [Almost 80%](#) of inmates incarcerated in our prisons have spent time in foster care.

Black children are around [twice as likely](#) to be placed in foster care as white kids. Because Black kids are already subject to disproportionate rates of school discipline and criminalization, being a foster youth compounds this risk. Foster youth, particularly girls, are [targeted by sex traffickers](#), and the criminalization of sex work funnels these victims of modern-day slavery into the criminal justice system.

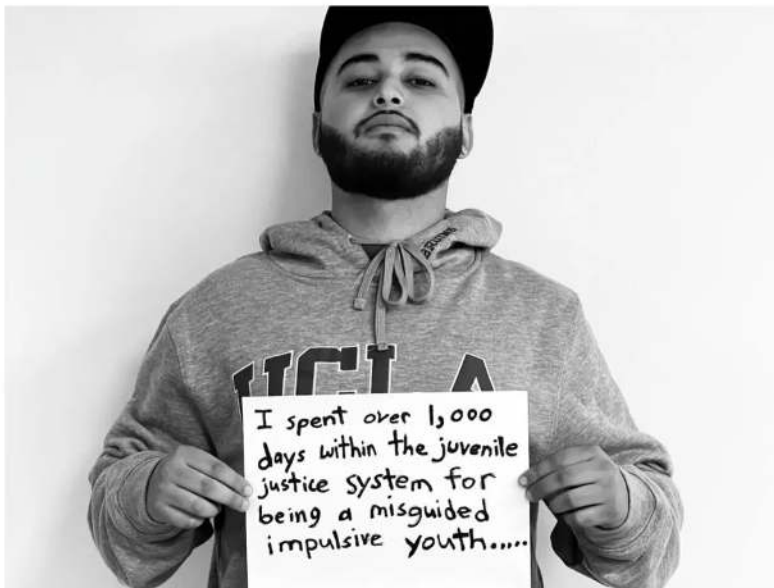
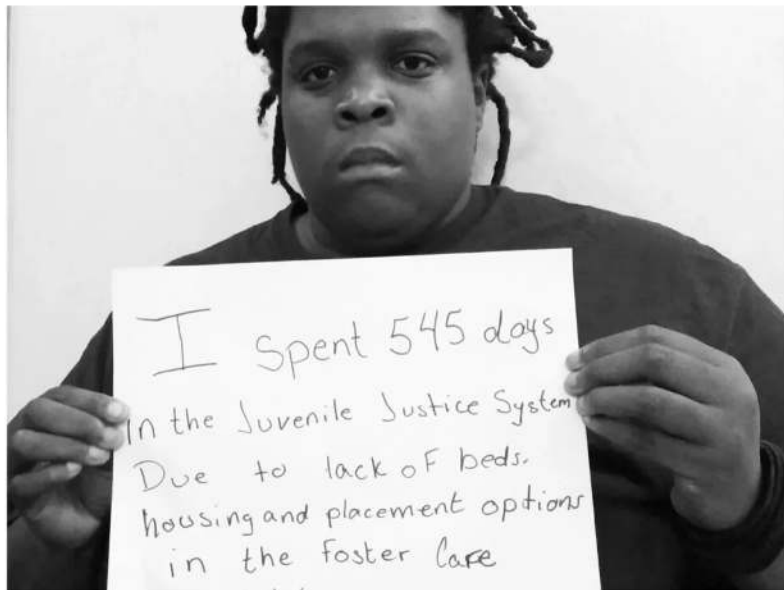
Many foster youth [have the police called on them](#) by their caregivers and face incarceration for small infractions. Foster youth in government-run group homes are [particularly at risk](#) of having police called on them by staff.

Aging out of foster care

As damaging and painful as foster care is, a worse fate awaits young people who reach adulthood while in state custody. “[Aging out](#)” occurs when the young person reaches the age of 18 and/or completes high school. With little experience of healthy family life, few skills and minimal support, these young adults are launched into the world largely on their own. For a time, they qualify for housing and food assistance, but this is limited. The outlook for these young people is grim:

- [Over 23,000 children](#) will age out of the U.S. foster care system every year. Many have lost touch with their families of origin and find themselves completely on their own.
- After reaching the age of 18, [20% of children](#) who were in foster care will become instantly homeless.
- [Only one out of every two foster kids](#) who age out of the system will have some form of gainful employment by the age of 24.

- There is less than a three percent chance for children who have aged out of foster care to earn a college degree at any point in their lives.
- 75% of women and 33% of men receive government benefits to meet basic needs after they age out of the system.
- Seven out of 10 girls who age out of the foster care system will become pregnant before the age of 21.
- 25% of children who age out of the foster care system suffer from the direct effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As adults with poor employment prospects, they also have little to no access to mental health services.



Source: National Foster Youth Institute

Kill the Indian, save the man: genocidal Indian boarding schools

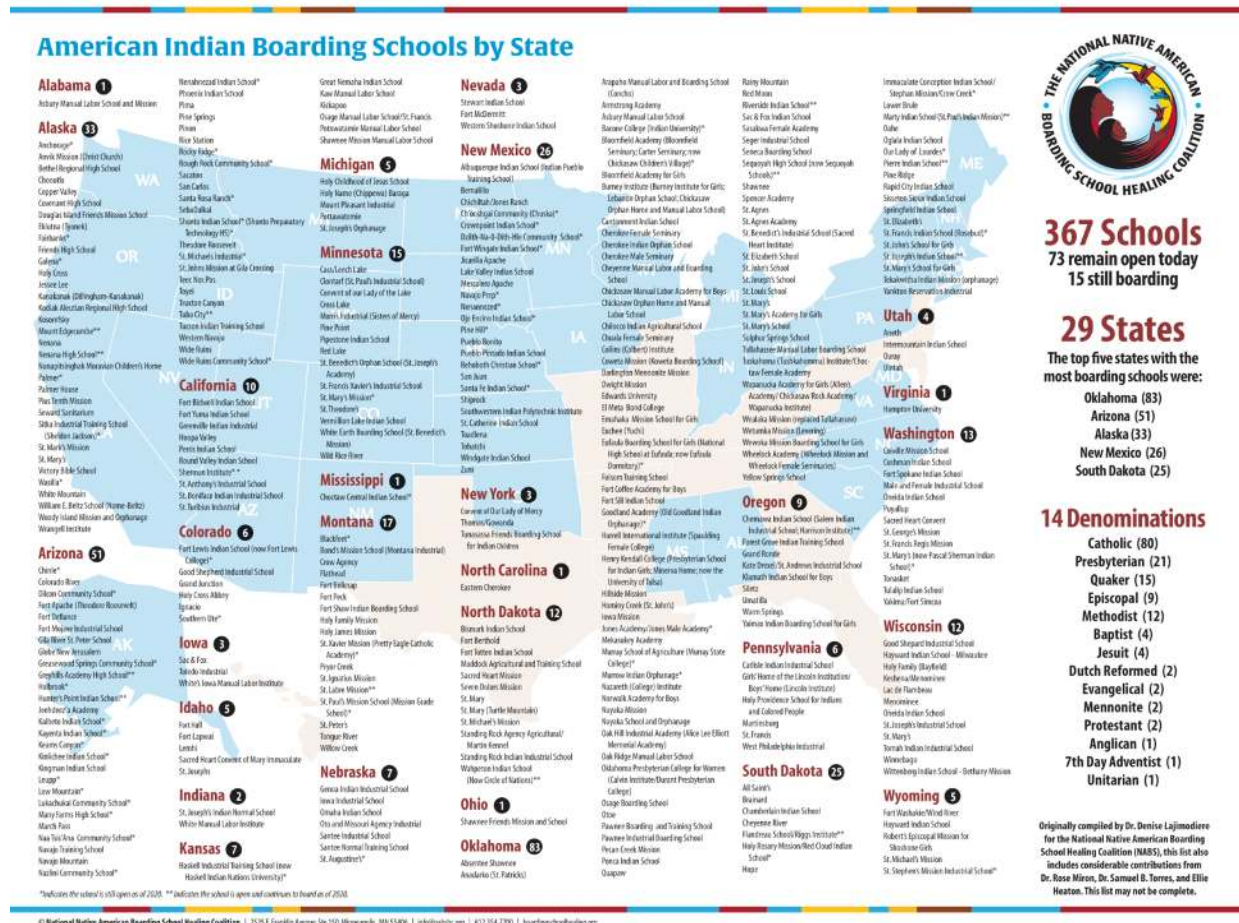
No critique of the foster care system would be complete without considering the most heinous of all systems that separate children from their families. The United States has historically kidnapped Indigenous children with the intention of “beating the Indian out of them.” Children were forcibly removed from their homes, communities and families, and transported to so-called [Indian boarding schools](#). Their hair was cut, their personal belongings were confiscated, and they were beaten for speaking their own language or practicing their religious beliefs. And often, they perished – from beatings and abuse, neglect, disease. Frequently, parents were not notified that their child was deceased – their children simply never came home.

Indian boarding schools were a direct and deliberate instrument of genocide. The schools were literally death factories for Indigenous children and their communities and cultures. The damage did not end when the schools closed or when children left the schools. The experience of growing up without nurture, the trauma of being torn from one’s family and culture, the regular abuse and physical as well as emotional harm wreaked upon Indigenous children, some as young as three years of age, created and perpetuated broken people, broken families, and communities struggling to adapt to the loss of their precious children.

The U.S. Administration for Children and Families [tells the story](#):

“The impacts of the Indian Civilization Act of 1819 and boarding schools have been felt for decades since by thousands of Indigenous families. We know from research that the ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) Indigenous children experienced when they were torn away from their parents and forced to live in boarding schools would have put them at great risk of growing up to be less nurturing adults with harsher parenting attitudes, let alone stripped of their culture and language. Such intergenerational trauma, along with the continued oppression and suffering imposed on Indigenous by the United States government, [has] perpetuated a cycle where adverse childhood experiences and resulting unhealthy and sometimes violent adult behaviors (e.g. child abuse, substance use disorder, and domestic violence) could become the norm.”

The total number of children lost to Indian boarding schools is unknown, as the schools took great effort to hide and downplay deaths and illness among students. Unmarked graves on the grounds of these schools often reveal dozens of children's bodies that lie unidentified, far away from their people and ancestral lands. There were at least 367 boarding schools in 29 states, with the highest concentration in the central United States, according to the [National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition](#), a nonprofit established to address the legacy of these schools.



Source: National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition

The patterns of abuse continue today in the form of foster care, long after the schools have closed. American Indian/Alaska Native children are entering foster care at rates higher than non-minority children – and they stay in care longer. According to a 2007 report by the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), American Indian children are represented at [nearly two times](#) the level expected.

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was passed by Congress in 1978. ICWA was enacted after Indigenous children were systematically removed – often without evidence of abuse or neglect that would be considered grounds for removal – and placed with non-Native families, with the intent to deprive them of their Indigenous family or culture. Studies revealed that [large numbers](#) of Native children were being separated from their parents, extended families, and communities by state child welfare and private adoption agencies. In fact, research found that [25-35%](#) of all Native children were being removed; of these, [85%](#) were placed outside of their families and communities – even when fit and willing relatives were available.

The stated intent of ICWA is to establish federal standards for the removal and placement of Indigenous children and to keep them connected to their families and tribes. While there has been improvement in the status of Indigenous families with respect to the child welfare system, they are still [four times more likely](#) to have their children removed and placed in foster care than their white counterparts.

The bottom line

Irreparable harm is clearly incurred on children who are removed from their families and homes by the state. The fundamental human right to grow up whole, healthy and unharmed with people who love you is thwarted by a system that serves as an entry portal to the criminal justice system, to poverty, to homelessness, to exploitation.

“So what’s right with the child welfare system?” you might ask. The answer is “painfully little.” For children who suffer egregious abuse, being removed from their home may be a matter of life or death. But since the majority of child removals are for neglect, not abuse, we know there are better ways of dealing with these problems. We have shown how many of the problems that get families involved with child protective services are the results of poverty, of an unjust criminal justice and policing system, of a “War on Drugs” that is literally genocidal and to the sexism and racism that are inherent in the child welfare system. None of these underlying issues are being addressed.

As with so many issues in U.S. society, other nations handle this better. In fact, there are programs in some U.S. states that employ mentorship of biological families and wrap-around services for the entire family and manage to reduce the numbers of children who are removed from struggling households. Portugal decriminalized drugs, made substance abuse treatment readily available and effectively reduced the number of children who experience neglect. Despite having been hard hit by Covid with subsequently high unemployment other stressors we're quite familiar with, it's seen an [overall reduction](#) in the number of children in foster care.

Human rights abuses are particularly egregious when they directly harm children. The U.S. child welfare system must be changed fundamentally and at once.

Cruel but not unusual: the economics and inherent racism of mass incarceration

November 3, 2021



Artists: Dey Hernández, Jorge Díaz Ortiz and Sylvia Hernández

By Camille Landry (National Co-Coordinator)

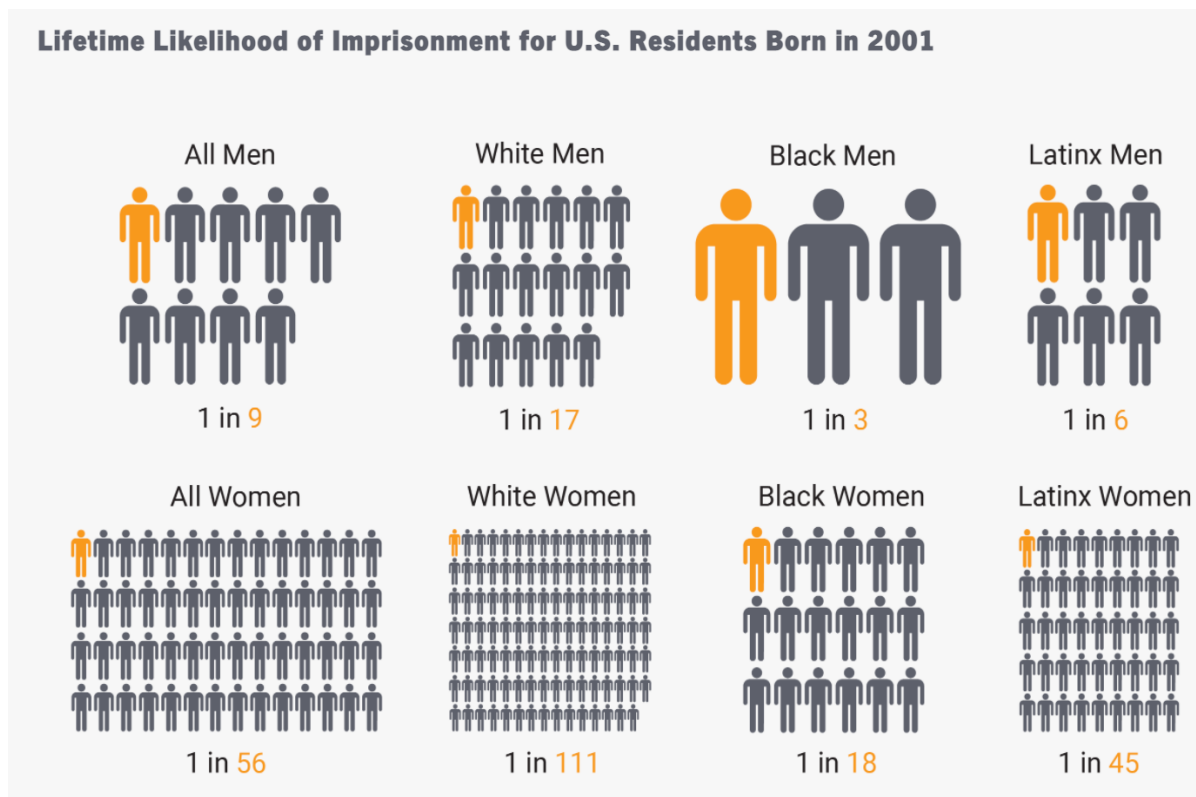
Mass incarceration in the United States is a crime against humanity. It disproportionately ruins the lives of Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples. It wastes human potential. It destabilizes neighborhoods and destroys communities. We all pay dearly for it, in human as well as economic terms. Both at its roots and in its practices and policies, mass incarceration as practiced by the United States is an egregious abuse of human rights.

Prison system costs now account for [one out of every 15 discretionary dollars](#) in states' general budgets. Criminal justice is the [second fastest growing category](#) of state budgets, behind only Medicaid, and [90%](#) of that spending goes to prisons. The nation wastes trillions of dollars on an ineffective and unjust criminal justice system. Every dollar spent on incarceration is money not spent on other critical needs. We have more effective tools for preventing and responding to crime than our prisons.

If you are Black, Brown or Indigenous in the United States, jail and prison are traps targeted at you and waiting to be spring shut. You have a high likelihood of being incarcerated. Race and class play a critical role in who is arrested, who is tried and convicted, who receives the harshest sentences – and who is able to successfully navigate the challenges of post-incarceration life. Black men are [six times as likely](#) to be incarcerated as white men, and Latine people are [2.5 times as likely](#). For Black men in their thirties, [about one in every 12](#) is in prison or jail on any given day. In 2019, the imprisonment rate for African American women (83 per 100,000) was over [1.7 times the rate](#) of imprisonment for white women (48 per 100,000). Latina women were imprisoned at [1.3 times the rate](#) of white women (63 vs. 48 per 100,000).

The graphic below illustrates these facts in brutal detail. Missing from this chart is data on the incarceration of Indigenous and Asian people. [According to](#) the U.S. Department of Justice, Indigenous people experience a rate of one felony conviction for every 200 Indigenous people age 18 or older. The rate for whites was one conviction per 300 adults; for Blacks, one per 51 adults. Asians reflected the lowest rate, about one felony conviction for every 600 Asian adults.

Class is also a factor in incarceration, but class is not as significant a predictor of incarceration as is race. While it's critical that we explore the [relationship](#) between incarceration and poverty, it's not so helpful to suggest that mass incarceration is driven only by class "and not race." Racial biases in the criminal justice system don't only apply to poor people, according to research from Harvard, Stanford, and the U.S. Census Bureau. "Black men raised in the top one percent – by millionaires – were as likely to be incarcerated as white men raised in households earning about \$36,000," *The New York Times* [reported](#).



Source: The Sentencing Project

This helps explain why even Black boys from affluent families run a greater risk than their white peers of ending up poor. The likelihood of incarceration is higher for Black people than for white people at every economic level. Incarceration also has a [crippling effect on wealth accumulation](#), ensuring long-lasting damage to individuals, families, and communities of color.

The highest rate of incarceration in the world

Mass incarceration affects millions of people in the United States. The data show that 45% of people in the U.S. have had an immediate family member incarcerated. The incarceration of an immediate family member was most prevalent for Blacks (63%) but common for whites (42%) and Hispanics (48%) as well. The United States has less than 5% of the world's population but 20% of the world's incarcerated people.

When these facts are considered in the context of human rights, it is clear that the mass incarceration crisis in the United States is an egregious offense. A provision of both national and international law (Article 7 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights) is that people should be equal before the law, i.e. not subjected to unequal treatment, especially due to their race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, or other factors.

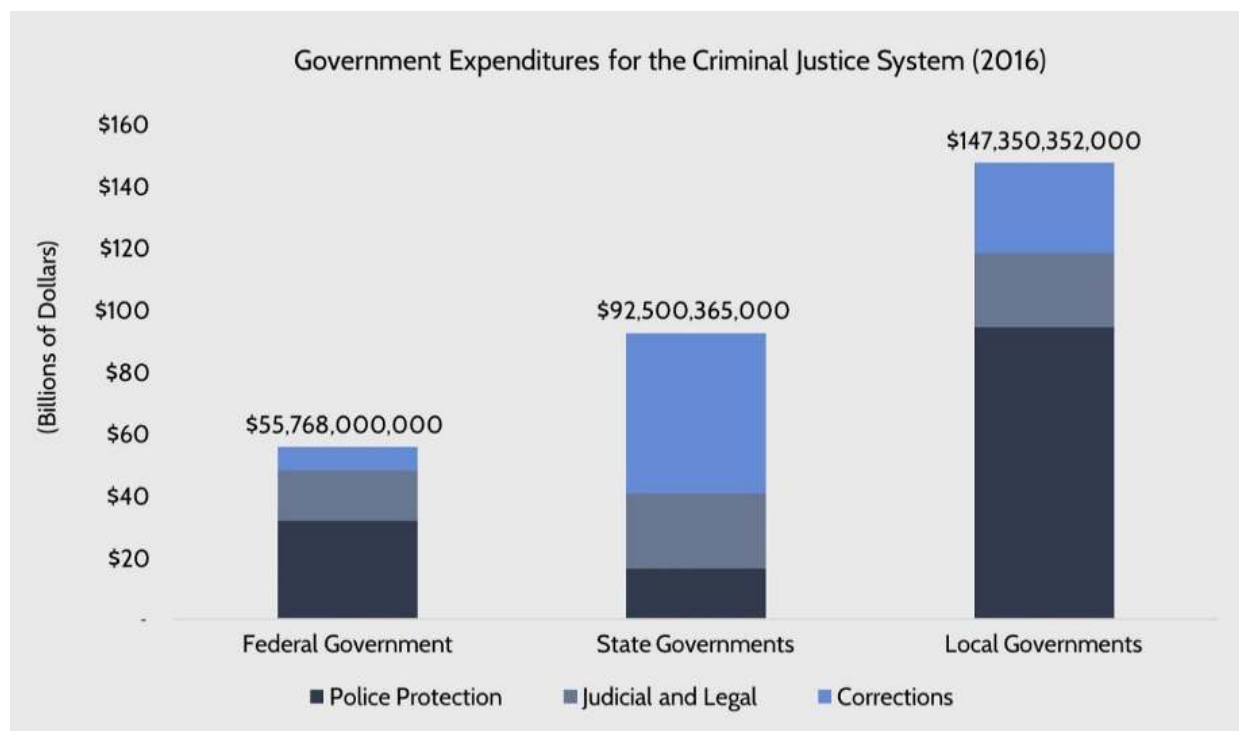
The United States locks up more of its people than any other nation. There are 2.3 million people in the nation's prisons and jails – a 700% increase over the last 50 years. Another 4.4 million people are under some form of probation or parole supervision, more than twice as many people as are incarcerated. In the last 40 years, the number of people under community supervision has increased three-fold.

Changes in sentencing law and policy, not changes in crime rates, explain most of this increase. Starting in the 1980s, the “War on Drugs” resulted in an increase in incarceration for drug offenses from 40,900 in 1980 to 430,926 in 2019. Mandatory sentencing laws increased the length of stay even for low-level offenders. Fully half of the people in federal prisons are incarcerated for drug-related offenses. In state prisons and local jails, most incarcerated people are locked up because of drugs. Most are small-time dealers and have no prior convictions for violent offenses. The rate of imprisonment for drug offenses has risen 900% since 1980.

The costs of incarceration – lost earnings, adverse health effects and the damage to the families of the incarcerated – are estimated at up to three times the direct costs associated with building, maintaining, staffing, and operating prisons and jails. This brings the total burden of our criminal justice system to \$1.2 trillion.

The misery cannot be calculated strictly in dollars. The enormous harm inflicted by the mass incarceration of Black, Brown, Indigenous and poor people is measured in human suffering, destabilization of communities and millions of damaged lives.

Money spent on incarceration is money not spent on education, healthcare, social services, science, art, infrastructure or any of the myriad of unmet needs in the United States. The effects are greatest on communities that are least able to see a diminution of services – those at the bottom of the economic and social order. In the United States, that means Black, Brown, Indigenous and poor people.



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics

Many of the effects of mass incarceration are obvious to even the casual observer: men and women removed from their homes, families and communities; families broken by forced separation; people rendered virtually unemployable by incarceration; and the exploitation of incarcerated people by the prison system, which forces them to labor within a system of modern-day slavery, earning only a few dollars per day.

The social impacts of incarceration

The short answer to the question of what positive effects incarceration has on U.S. society is that incarceration is largely negative. Incarceration has a heavy negative impact on the people who are imprisoned and their families. It is costly in both monetary and social terms. It does little to deter crime. In fact, incarceration is less effective than probation (which involves offenders being placed under court supervision and usually also required to seek treatment for substance use, undergo anger management training, find and keep a job and other rehabilitative efforts).

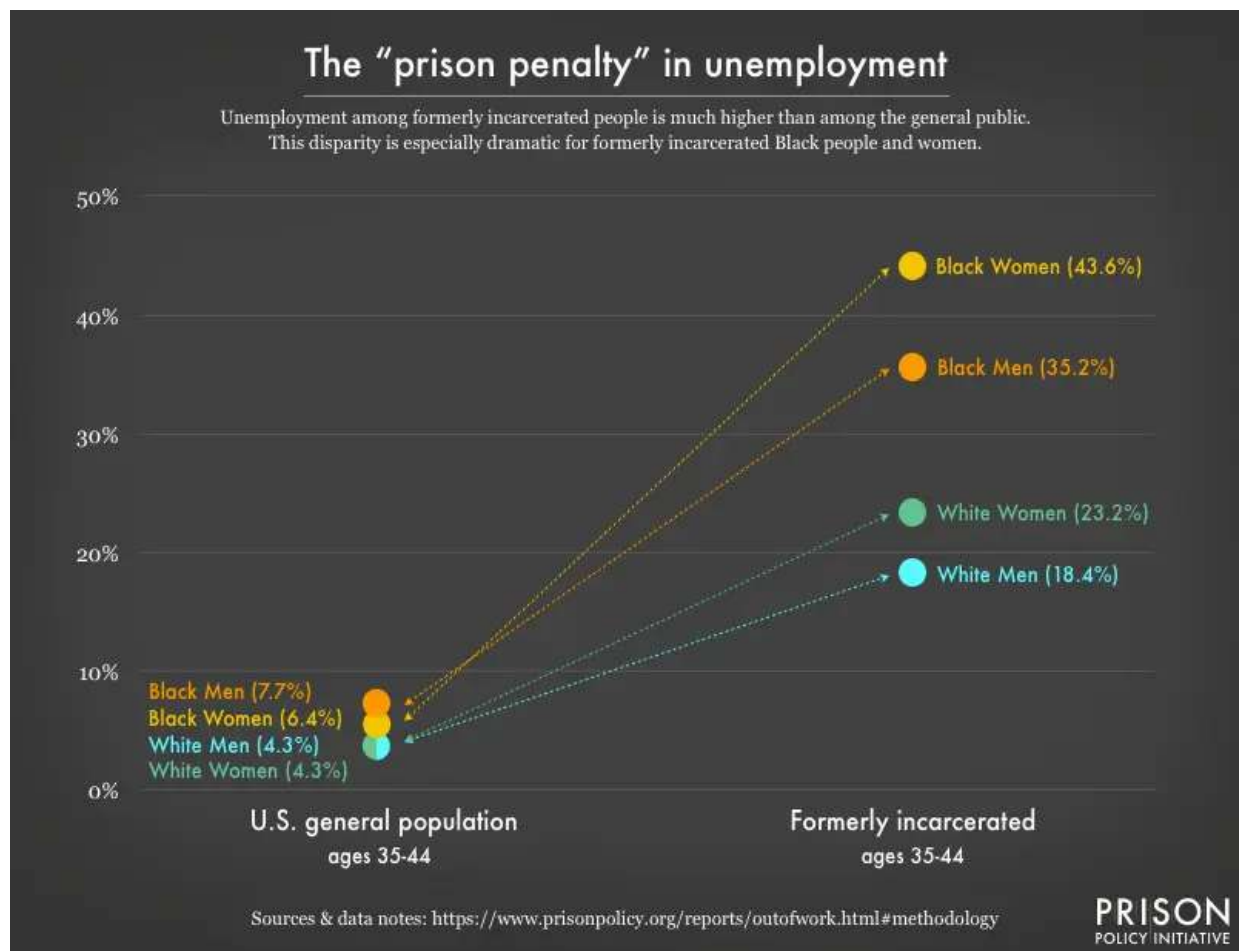
Impacts on employment

Incarceration removes young adults from their families and communities at a critical time in their lives. At a point when their peers are pursuing training, education and careers; starting families; and finding their places in the world, hundreds of thousands of young Black, Brown and Indigenous men and women find themselves literally put on ice – locked up and locked out of society. Upon release, they face a multitude of difficulties, such as requirements to pay court costs and restitution. Failure to pay can result in revocation of parole. Finding a job is challenging. Many employers refuse to hire applicants with felony convictions. Some states prohibit people with felony convictions from holding any state license – including licenses for barbers, cosmetologists, real estate inspectors, undertakers, many healthcare professions and more. These factors make it very difficult for formerly incarcerated people to re-enter society; they create a vicious cycle in which, once arrested and convicted, people have an increased rate of recidivism (return to prison).

Unemployment is high among formerly incarcerated people. [A study](#) by the Brookings Institution found that only 55% of former prisoners had any earnings in the year following release, and of those, only 20% (or 11% of the total) earned more than the federal minimum wage (roughly \$15,000). There are stark racial differences in the likelihood of being unemployed, as shown in the chart below. The greatest difference in post-incarceration unemployment rates compared to the general population [is for Black women](#) – a difference of 37.2%. White men faced the [weakest incarceration penalty](#) with a difference of 14.1%.

Socioeconomic class plays a role in who goes to prison and how long they remain there. **More than 50%** of the people in county and municipal jails have not been convicted of a crime; they are locked up because they cannot afford bail. In many jurisdictions, by posting bail you become ineligible for the services of a public defender – a particularly cruel form of double jeopardy that forces people to decide between being unrepresented in a fight for their lives versus rotting in jail for years while awaiting trial.

People who enter the criminal justice system are overwhelmingly poor. **Two-thirds** detained in jails report annual incomes under \$12,000 prior to arrest. Incarceration further contributes to poverty by creating employment barriers, reducing earnings and decreasing economic security through criminal debt, fees and fines, according to Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. This makes access to public benefits difficult or impossible, disrupting communities where formerly incarcerated people reside.



Source: Prison Policy Initiative

Impacts on children

The impact of incarceration on children of incarcerated people is enormous. [One of every 12 U.S. children](#), more than 5.7 million kids under age 18, have experienced parental incarceration at some point during their lives. The impact of incarceration on children of incarcerated people is enormous. [One of every 12 U.S. children](#), more than 5.7 million kids under age 18, have experienced parental incarceration at some point during their lives. The criminalization of addiction is a leading cause of referrals of families to Child Protective Services and often to the removal of children from their families of origin. Studies indicate that there is [substantial overlap](#) between parents involved in the child welfare and substance use treatment systems.

Over the past quarter-century, there has been a profound change in the involvement of women within the criminal justice system. This is the result of more expansive law enforcement efforts, stiffer drug sentencing laws, and post-conviction barriers to reentry that uniquely affect women. The female incarcerated population stands over [seven times higher](#) than in 1980. [More than 60%](#) of women in state prisons have a child under the age of 18.

It is no coincidence that the school districts with the highest levels of incarceration have the [lowest levels](#) of school performance and matriculation to higher education. They also have a [high percentage of students](#) who are in state-mandated or informal (e.g., with a relative or friend) out-of-home placement. In school, foster children function at a level that is [below average and below their capacity](#).

Impacts on families

Families are hugely impacted by the incarceration of a loved one. The costs of bail, legal representation, and if incarcerated, the costs of phone calls, prison visits (which often require travel of hundreds of miles) and commissary funds (for purchase of food, personal hygiene items, writing supplies, stamps, books, fans, and sometimes socks and underwear) are almost completely borne by family members – most of whom have low incomes.

In most states, the costs of commissary, phone and other paid services represents a significant source of income for the jail or prison.

The Prison Policy Initiative, a nonprofit criminal-justice think tank, estimates that commissary companies earn [\\$1.6 billion per year](#). Many jails and prisons have transitioned from in-person visitation to a video system which can cost up to \$40 for a 30-minute “visit.”

Illness & injuries

Deaths and serious injuries are common in prison. In 2018, state prisons [reported](#) 4,135 deaths (not including the 25 people executed in state prisons) – the highest number on record since the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) began collecting mortality data in 2001. Between 2016 and 2018, the prison mortality rate [jumped](#) from 303 to a record 344 per 100,000 people, a shameful superlative.

[The latest data](#) from the BJS on mortality in state and federal prisons is a reminder that prisons are in fact “death-making institutions,” in the words of activist Mariame Kaba. Prisons are becoming increasingly dangerous – a finding that should not be ignored. [Thousands die in custody](#), largely from a major or unnamed illness – but an [increasing share of deaths](#) are from discrete unnatural causes, like suicide, homicide and drug and alcohol intoxication. People in prison exhibit a [high burden](#) of chronic and non-communicable diseases (e.g., hypertension, diabetes and asthma), as well as communicable diseases (e.g., hepatitis, HIV and tuberculosis), mental health problems, and substance use disorders. [More than 14%](#) of people in jails reported injuries stemming from accidents or assaults that occurred while incarcerated.

Incarcerated women face additional challenges in receipt of healthcare. While the number of incarcerated males has steadily declined, the number of incarcerated females continues to rise. Women have gender-specific health needs which correctional facilities address poorly. Rates of substance use disorder, prior trauma and abuse, mental illness, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) [are high among incarcerated women](#), higher than those of incarcerated men, and these factors intersect with various adverse social determinants of health that characterize their pre-incarceration lives. Moreover, the majority of incarcerated women are younger than 45 and therefore have specific reproductive health needs.

The Coronavirus pandemic has strongly affected people who are incarcerated. There is little to no capacity to practice social distancing or isolate symptomatic people inside jails and prisons. As of April 16, 2021, [more than 661,000 incarcerated people and staff](#) have been infected with Coronavirus and at least 2,990 have died, according to *The New York Times*. Incarcerated people are infected by Coronavirus at a rate more than [five times higher](#) than the nation's overall rate, according to research reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association in July 2020. The [reported](#) death rate of inmates (39 deaths per 100,000) is also higher than the national rate (29 deaths per 100,000).

Parole

Although it is preferable to have the quasi-freedom that parole offers, the parole system remains part of the carceral state and does not function to restore or rehabilitate people. Often parole is another burden that must be borne by the very people it is alleged to help and their families. People on parole are required to participate in programs such as drug or alcohol treatment, even though those programs often come with a price tag and are increasingly unavailable due to the Coronavirus pandemic. They are forbidden to associate with people who have a felony conviction, which might mean that they cannot live with a family member or associate and therefore must find housing that they may not be able to afford. They often have curfews that can make it difficult to get and hold the few jobs that are available to people with felonies. And they must make restitution and pay court costs – or face a return to life behind bars. This is a feedback loop whereby one's status as being under correctional supervision at release from prison [leads to increased debt](#), which in turn increases the chance of remaining under supervision during the first year out.

Mass incarceration exacts a high toll upon people in the U.S. Racial disparities in incarceration disproportionately violate the human rights of Black, Brown and Indigenous people. Elomba Ngabo of Decarcerate Louisiana, a social change movement working for restorative justice in and out of the prison system, states:

"If you think about the definition of genocide (deliberately killing members of a group, inflicting serious mental and bodily harm to a group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group), and you think about the effect of the slavery exception clause (of the 13th Amendment) and the racialized politics infused into the War on Drugs policy and tough-on-crime laws that led to mass incarceration and mass separation of families in Black communities, I mean, what can I say? Ain't that genocide?"

We concur. It is time to end the carceral system of the United States.

Crueler but still not unusual: the U.S. death penalty

December 20, 2021



Source: Tamir Kalifa (Getty Images)

By Camille Landry (National Co-Coordinator)

Volumes have been written about it. Hundreds of thousands of people have protested it, written to their legislators and congress members, prayed about it, sung about it, and hoped that it would end. It has been condemned as inhumane, ineffective, racist, cruel, antiquated, vengeful and just plain wrong by individuals and groups ranging from several popes and other religious leaders to criminal justice scholars, police chiefs and prison wardens. Yet the death penalty in the United States persists.

The death penalty remains one of the most egregious offenses against human rights in the world. The United Nations' [Universal Declaration on Human Rights](#) clearly states that the right to life is paramount among human rights.

The United States is alone among so-called democratic nations in its utilization of the death penalty. More than 70% of the world's countries have abolished capital punishment in law or practice. The U.S. is an outlier among its close allies in its continued use of the death penalty. No other nation that calls itself a democracy regularly kills its residents. We will leave the question as to whether the United States is truly a democracy for another time and place.

Snuffing out life in this manner is the ultimate violation of human rights. Even worse, the death penalty is an ineffective means of preventing crime and keeping communities safe. State-sponsored murder is nothing but vengeance, a relic of the kind of violent, inhumane practices that echo our darkest and most shameful past.

Despite ample evidence that the death penalty is ineffective, racist, costly and immoral, we persist in wreaking it upon the people of this nation. In light of evidence that it is unnecessary and wrong, this infringement of decency and justice is despicable.

Innocent people are sentenced to death and executed. Legal scholar William Blackstone said, "It is better that ten guilty men go free than to execute a single innocent man." Yet many innocent people in the United States have been executed.

For every 8.3 people on death row in the United States in the modern era, [one person has been exonerated](#) in a court of law. The death penalty carries the inherent risk of executing an innocent person. Since 1973, at least 185 people who had been wrongly convicted and sentenced to death in the U.S. have been exonerated. There are many more who maintain their innocence and have strong evidence to back up their claims yet remain on death row – or have already been killed.

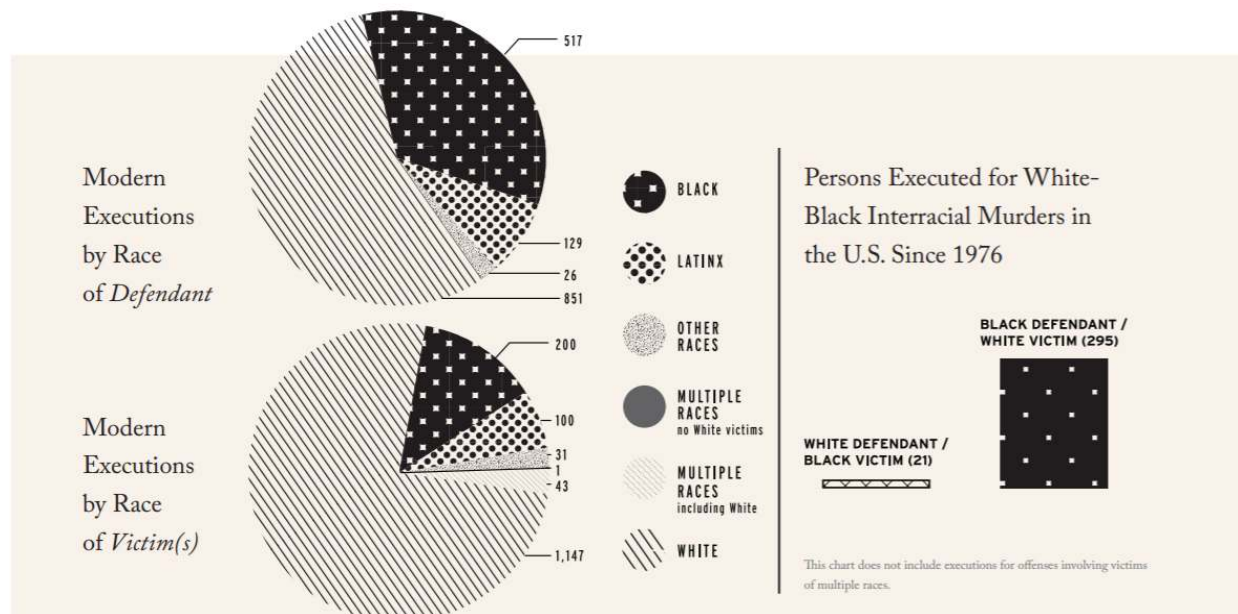
Of 350 persons who were mistakenly convicted of potentially capital crimes, whose cases were reviewed in courtrooms across the country, 139 were sentenced to death and 23 were actually executed. Researchers suspect that there are probably many more cases not yet identified.

[The case of Troy Davis](#) is one of the best-known recent examples of an innocent man who was murdered. Mr. Davis was accused of shooting an off-duty police officer. There was no ballistic evidence to support this accusation. Other people were implicated in the shooting. Counsel for Mr. Davis was inadequate and inept. There was an international outcry against the planned execution of a man who had a credible case for his innocence; yet Troy Davis was killed by the state of Georgia on September 21, 2011.

Misconduct by police and prosecutors is common. According to the Equal Justice Initiative, in death penalty cases, perjury/false accusations and official misconduct are the [leading causes](#) of wrongful convictions. A record [111 exonerations](#) in 2018 involved witnesses who lied on the stand or falsely accused the defendant. In 50 of these cases, the defendant was [falsely accused](#) of a crime that never happened.

Misconduct by police or prosecutors (or both) was involved in [79%](#) of homicide exonerations in 2018. Concealing evidence that casts doubt on the defendant's guilt is the most common type of misconduct, which includes police officers threatening witnesses, forensic analysts faking test results, and prosecutors presenting false testimony.

Official misconduct is more common in death penalty cases, especially if the defendant is Black. Data shows that [87%](#) of Black exonerees who were sentenced to death were victims of official misconduct, compared to 67% of white death row exonerees.



Impact of race on executions. Source: Death Penalty Information Center

The National Registry of Exonerations (NRE) Report on Race and Wrongful Convictions in the United States [reveals](#) that 87% of Black death-row exonerees had been victims of official misconduct, as compared to 67% of white death-row exonerees. Official misconduct is among the most difficult and time-consuming of evidence to unearth, and so it is not surprising that the most recent exonerations – many of which have taken two decades or more – provide ever starker evidence of race effects. The NRE data [shows](#) that 20 of the last 21 wrongly condemned African Americans (95%) to have been exonerated were victims of official misconduct, as compared to 8 of the last 12 white death-row exonerees (67%).

The National Registry [reports](#) that these racial disparities are “for the most part” the product of police misconduct. The Registry [reports](#) “a modest difference” in prosecutorial misconduct rates by prosecutors in death-row exonerations, with prosecutorial misconduct present in 59% of death-row exonerations of African Americans, as compared to 53% of death-row exonerations of whites. It [reported](#), however, “a large difference in the rate of misconduct by police”: 59% for Black death-sentenced exonerees compared to 44% for whites. The Registry further [reports](#):

“The high rate of misconduct by police in murder cases with Black defendants is reflected in the nature of the misconduct that occurs. Concealing exculpatory evidence, the most common type, is primarily a form of prosecutorial misconduct; there is relatively little difference in its frequency by race. [...] On the other hand, witness tampering is committed almost exclusively by police officers and occurs nearly twice as frequently with Black murder defendants.”

Racism is rampant in the way the death penalty is applied. Black people are **14 times more likely** to be sentenced to death for killing a white person than white people charged with the same crime (as shown in the graphic below). People who kill whites are **far more likely** to receive the death penalty than people who kill Black people, even though Black people are more likely to be murdered than whites.

Mentally ill people are often executed despite laws forbidding this practice. The execution of those with mental illness or “the insane” is clearly prohibited by international law. Virtually every country in the world prohibits the execution of people with mental illness. Often the person who makes the determination of sanity in a murder trial is an employee of the prosecution; few defendants can afford to hire their own psychiatrists for determination of sanity. The Supreme Court has repeatedly declined to shield mentally ill people from the death penalty, saying only that people who are insane cannot be executed. But “insane” is narrowly defined as “those who are unaware of the punishment they are about to suffer and why they are to suffer it” – a definition that excludes most people with severe mental illness.

This includes people with diagnoses of schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury – illnesses that make it difficult or impossible to distinguish between reality and fantasy, or to make reasoned choices, or exhibit ordinary levels of self-control. Execution of mentally ill people is cruel, vicious and unnecessary – a clear violation of human rights that is recognized by virtually every nation – except the USA. **According to** the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU):

"There are significant gaps in the legal protection accorded severely mentally ill defendants charged with or convicted of a capital crime. Most notably, this country still permits the execution of the severely mentally ill. The problem is not a small one. A leading mental health group, Mental Health America, estimates that five to 10% of all death row inmates suffer from a severe mental illness."

CRIPPLING DISABILITIES AND UNCERTAIN GUILT DEFINE EXECUTIONS IN 2015

In 2015, America had the lowest number of executions in 25 years. Of the 28 people executed, **75% were mentally impaired or disabled, experienced extreme childhood trauma and abuse, or were of questionable guilt.** An examination of the 2015 cases that resulted in execution reveal a disturbing pattern: It's frequently not just one impairment, such as a low IQ score, that defines these cases, but rather multiple forms of disability and impairment.

"To impose the harshest of punishments on an intellectually disabled person violates his or her inherent dignity as a human being."

—JUSTICE ANTHONY KENNEDY

75%



Source: Harvard Law School – Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race & Justice

Cecil Clayton was executed by the State of Missouri on March 17, 2015. He was 74 years old, suffered from dementia, had an IQ of 71 and was missing a significant part of his brain due to a sawmill accident in 1972 which prompted the removal of about 20% of his frontal lobe (the part of the brain that governs impulse control and problem-solving). He had previously been diagnosed with schizophrenia, extreme paranoia, and more. He checked himself into a mental hospital stating that he could not control his temper. His psychiatrist concluded “there is presently no way that this man could be expected to function in the world of work. Were he pushed to do so, he would become a danger both to himself and to others.” He had suicidal and homicidal impulses.

Six separate psychiatric evaluations found that Clayton should be exempt from execution because he could not understand that he would be executed, or the reasons for his execution. Mr. Clayton was denied a formal competency hearing that could have spared him from execution. MRI evidence of Mr. Clayton's missing brain tissue was presented at the trial, to no avail.

The death penalty does not deter crime. States that have the most executions have the highest rates of violent crime. The Northeast and West have the [lowest](#) murder rates and hold less than one percent of all executions. The death penalty is not a deterrent to violent crime. Consistent with previous years, a 2010 FBI Uniform Crime Report the report [showed](#) that the South had the highest murder rate and accounts for over 80% of executions.

The death penalty is [more expensive](#) than life imprisonment. A death penalty trial typically costs [95% more](#) than a non-capital trial. It costs taxpayers from [\\$2 to \\$5 million per death sentence](#) for the trials and appeals. Life in prison averages [\\$1 million](#) (40 years at \$25,000/year). Louisiana State Attorney General and former District Attorney Jeff Landry says that he can try a second-degree murder case for \$15,000-20,000 instead of \$250,000 for a death penalty trial. Money spent on killing people could be used to remedy the root causes of violence or to keep communities safe in other ways.

The death penalty is applied unequally in other ways, too. Most people are shocked to find that whether the death penalty is imposed is determined more by where the crime was committed, and where the capital trial took place, than the actual facts of the case. Smaller counties have lower budgets for prosecutors and are thus [less likely](#) to charge defendants with capital murder. Larger, more populous and prosperous counties are [more likely](#) to bring death penalty cases to trial. Suburban counties, although they have lower murder rates than urban counties, [send more](#) murderers to death row than their urban neighbors do. Equal justice under the law is a fundamental principle of human rights. The death penalty clearly violates that principle.

As a symbol of “being tough on crime,” the death penalty helps politicians get elected. Since it does not reduce violent crime, it wastes resources. States that have abolished the death penalty can redirect the money saved into programs that actually reduce violent crime.

Poor people are executed much more often than wealthy murderers. The U.S. justice system treats you better if you’re rich and guilty than if you’re poor and innocent. Over 99% of the people on death row are indigent, according to one U.S. Appeals Court judge. Persons of all income levels commit murder, but poor people are the primary recipients of the death penalty. Mentally ill people are executed. Even though the law forbids the execution of those who are mentally ill, experience shows that the determination of sanity is generally made after very limited contact with the accused, often by psychiatrists employed by the prosecution. Inevitably, some who are ill are declared “sane” and fit for execution.

Many people accused of capital crimes are destitute. They rely upon public defenders for their defense; these attorneys have sparse budgets that cannot pay for expert witnesses who could prove their client’s innocence. Some of the attorneys who represent defendants in capital cases have come to the courtroom drunk, fallen asleep during the trial, and failed to call witnesses who could prove their client’s innocence. Some merely have little to no experience in defending capital cases. They’re fresh out of law school or inadequately trained or prepared to defend their clients’ lives. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg once said, “people who are well represented at trial do not get the death penalty.”

Many victims’ families oppose the death penalty. It only prolongs pain for families as it inevitably drags out the legal process and leaves families in limbo waiting for an execution that may never come. Proponents of capital punishment have long argued for the death penalty as a necessary way to bring closure to family members of homicide victims. But science suggests that achieving closure through executions is a myth, and growing numbers of family members of homicide victims do not want the death penalty to be pursued in the deaths of their loved ones. “I know how it feels to lose a son,” stated a mother whose 12-year-old was gunned down in the streets. “Why would I want another mother to go through that?”

Bud Welch, who lost his daughter Julie in the 1995 bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, said of convicted bomber Timothy McVeigh, “At first I’d have killed him myself if I’d had the chance.” As the trial wound on, Mr. Welch realized that the execution of McVeigh would serve little purpose other than vengeance. Bud Welch met and befriended the father of the man who had murdered his daughter and 167 other people, including little children in a daycare center. Bud said of Bill McVeigh, “I recognized it because I was feeling that pain, too.” Bud Welch is now an international advocate for the abolition of the death penalty. “About a year before the execution I found it in my heart to forgive Tim McVeigh. It was a release for me rather than for him.”

Bud Welch is not alone in the realization that the execution of a murderer does little to assuage the grief of a survivor. Six months after the bombing a poll taken in Oklahoma City of victims’ families and survivors showed that 85% wanted the death penalty for Tim McVeigh. Six years later that figure had dropped to nearly half, and now most of those who supported his execution have come to believe it was a mistake. In other words, they didn’t feel any better after Tim McVeigh was taken from his cell and killed.

The jury is in: the U.S. death penalty is racist, classist, ineffective, cruel, unusual, expensive, unjust, incurably flawed, and representative of our most base and ignorant habits. It is an egregious violation of human rights. In other words, everything is wrong with it. It must end, and soon.

Part 2: Beyond the pandemic: a public health crisis



Source: Alliance for Global Justice

Overview

If nothing else has, the Coronavirus pandemic has laid bare the inefficient, inaccessible, discriminatory and overall failed healthcare system of the United States. Regardless of being the most costly in the world, our privatized and for-profit healthcare system continues to fall starkly short of global standards. In addition to its failed outcomes, healthcare in the U.S. remains inaccessible to a significant portion of our population that can't obtain employment-based insurance, don't meet the qualifications for Medicaid or Medicare or simply can't afford the out-of-pocket costs of care under their insurance plans.

Not only is quality healthcare in the U.S. a luxury few can afford and largely ineffective by public health standards, but it's also utterly discriminatory: today's treatments and services are founded on the dehumanization and abuse of women, people with disabilities and people of color as test subjects in scientific studies leading to the advancement of modern medicine.

While once mass subjects of forced sterilizations and gynecological experiments that shackled them to hospital stretchers without anesthesia, Black and Brown women remain the least likely to have access to abortion and other forms of reproductive healthcare.

In the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic and the recession, Black, Brown and Indigenous communities remain disproportionately impacted by public health crises, pressure on the healthcare system: it's no coincidence that they're significantly more likely to die of COVID-19 while also more likely to develop underlying health conditions that compromise their immunity and less likely to have access to the care they need to treat illness.

Our uniquely disdainful healthcare system that generates record profits for insurance companies, specialized care services and the pharmaceutical industry while making life-saving care inaccessible to millions isn't failed per se – it's by design. One can look to the many examples of successful healthcare systems in non-wealthy countries such as Cuba that, in spite of the life-threatening economic blockade imposed by the U.S., continues to protect the right to health as a universal and inalienable human right by ensuring access to quality care that's not contingent on the commodification and devaluation of human life.

This section dives into the public health crisis in the United States beyond the Coronavirus pandemic:

- **Healthcare for human rights, not profits: what the U.S. can learn from Cuba's Coronavirus response** explains why the U.S. healthcare system is designed to fail millions of poor and working class people – the criminally high price paid for maintaining a for-profit industry in the hands of private corporations.

- **Color of Covid: racial inequities in the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic** examines how the Coronavirus pandemic's disproportionate impacts on Black, Brown and Indigenous communities stems from the systemic racism that underlies every aspect of the U.S.
- **The criminalization of pregnancy is a miscarriage of justice** reviews the ongoing political campaign to limit women's power, autonomy and reproductive rights.

Violations of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

- **Article 1:** that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights
- **Article 2:** that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, class or gender
- **Article 3:** that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security
- **Article 5:** that no one should be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
- **Article 16:** that everyone has the right to found a family, and that the family is the most fundamental unit of society that is entitled to protection by the state
- **Article 25:** that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of themselves and their families, including the right to medical care

Violations of international human rights treaties

- The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination** requires that countries revise governmental and other public policies and rescind laws and regulations that perpetuate racial discrimination and pass legislation for prohibiting such discrimination; particularly that which pertains to rights necessary for the advancement of social, economic and cultural rights; such healthcare.
- The **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** establishes a universal framework for the protection and preservation of the most basic economic, social and cultural rights all human beings are entitled to, including the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health. The United States is among a few nations that hasn't ratified this.

- The **Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women** provides a basis for realizing equality between women and men. It defends women's equal access to healthcare and affirms their right to reproductive autonomy.
- The **Declaration on the Right to Development** protects the inalienable human right of every person to participate in, contribute to and enjoy the economic, social, cultural and political development in which all human rights can be fully realized. The declaration affirms the right of all people, as the creators of wealth, to enjoy equal benefits of development. It has been **vocally opposed** by the United States.
- The **Convention on the Rights of Child**, the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history not ratified by the United States, establishes a universal framework for the protection and advancement of the rights of children to grow, learn, play, develop and flourish with dignity. It affirms the responsibility of the state to protect children by ensuring that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for their care and protection conform with acceptable standards of safety and health.
- The **Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples, including the affirmation of their collective right to health. Only four countries voted against this declaration in 2007: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States.

Healthcare for human rights, not profits: what the U.S. can learn from Cuba's Coronavirus response

March 10, 2022



Source: Sven Creutzmann

Cuba's remarkable response to the Coronavirus pandemic highlights the need for a healthcare system that puts people before profits

By Natalia Burdyńska-Schuurman (National Co-Coordinator)

For two years now, the Coronavirus pandemic has done irreversible harm to millions in the United States. To date, over 78 million confirmed cases of infection and over 940,000 deaths due to Coronavirus have been [reported](#). With the global spread of new variants like Omicron, the average number of new confirmed cases in the U.S. just recently reached [unprecedented levels](#), surpassing those of all previous waves.

Boasting the “biggest expansion of affordable healthcare in a decade,” the Biden Administration has yet to explain why over 2,500 people on average are reportedly dying every day from the virus – a record high. The so-called “biggest expansion of affordable healthcare” access clearly has its limits, as 31.1 million people in the U.S. remain uninsured during a deadly pandemic, and out-of-pocket medical bills for COVID-19 averaged a steep \$3,800 per person in 2021.

The disastrous impacts of the pandemic shed light on the inherent failures of the U.S. healthcare system, which regardless of being the most costly in the world – 19.7% GDP (Gross Domestic Product) – continues to fall starkly short of global standards. The data speaks for itself: among high-income countries, the U.S. measures lowest in life expectancy, highest in infant and maternal mortality and second highest in low birth weight, despite ranking the highest per-capita healthcare expenditures.

International comparisons to U.S. health outcomes make clear that GDP cannot reliably suggest a healthcare system’s quality. Defined by the International Monetary Fund as “a monetary measure of the value of final goods and services,” GDP tells us nothing about the efficiency or accessibility of care – important determinants of a healthcare system’s adaptability when emergencies put pressure on its infrastructure.

This is particularly true in the case of Cuba. Even in the face of an economic blockade obstructing the shipment of critical medical supplies such as syringes and other basic materials, Cuba has already vaccinated 93% of its population against Coronavirus. Since the initiation of the state’s vaccination campaign in August of 2021, Cuba now has one of the highest Coronavirus vaccination rates in the world, with daily infections having drastically declined. In contrast, only 65% of the U.S. population is currently vaccinated against Coronavirus (despite the nation’s surplus of vaccines), and daily infections in the U.S. just reached record highs this January.

Perhaps no other country provides a better example of an antithesis to the failed U.S. healthcare system than Cuba, which in its own constitution affirms the right to health as a fundamental and inalienable human right.

Whereas no priority is given in the U.S. to the ratification of international treaties and declarations regarding the [right to health](#), Cuba's nationalized healthcare is completely free and accessible to all at a [tenth of the cost](#) of GDP per-capita spending in the U.S.

Despite spending only [\\$813/person](#) annually (compare that to [\\$9,403/person](#) in public and private spending combined in the U.S.) Cuba's publicly funded and centrally planned healthcare model proves more efficient in disease control and prevention than the mostly privatized and fragmented insurance-based U.S. healthcare system. Since the establishment of the national immunization program in 1962, Cuba's investment in medicine and the biotech industry has achieved the [elimination of six diseases](#), the [development of eight vaccines](#) domestically (including five COVID-19 vaccines), [protection against 13 diseases](#) and the export of hundreds of millions of vaccines a year to [over 40 countries](#). Even throughout the Coronavirus pandemic, the overall rate of mortality from infectious diseases in Cuba remains [less than one percent](#).

According to the Pan-American Health Organization, Cuba has the [lowest mortality rate](#) for COVID-19 in Latin America ([0.9%](#) as of December 2021). As Alejandra Garcia, journalist for Resumen News, [explains](#), "during the most recent wave of the Omicron variant, new cases in Cuba did not exceed or even come close to the previous peak caused by the Delta strain. This result contrasts sharply with most other countries in the world." Meanwhile in the United States, where the mortality rate currently stands at [1.2%](#), "excess deaths" from COVID-19 and other causes [increased at least 23%](#) during the first year of the pandemic.

Cuba recently became the first country to immunize its pediatric population (5-18 years old) against major infectious diseases. As a result of high childhood vaccination rates, children in Cuba today are inoculated against Coronavirus as well as numerous other diseases, such as polio, diphtheria, measles, rubella and whooping cough. Lissette López González, Cuba's National Director of Pediatrics, [explains](#) to Resumen News, "this has marked a milestone not only for the Caribbean nation but for the world that today admires Cuba and its immunization strategy that sought to protect all people, including children." In contrast, only [74%](#) of children in the U.S. have received all CDC-recommended vaccines.

The incredible success of Cuba's immunization program can be attributed to both the efficiency of its centralized planning and the public's trust in its healthcare system – a must for any vaccine rollout to be effective. Unlike in the United States, Cuba's vaccination programs [are not impacted](#) by vaccine hesitancy or skepticism. The vast majority of Cubans choose immunization, whereas low vaccination rates among at-risk populations in the U.S. often reflect distrust in a medical system that has [historically abused](#) women, the disabled, and Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples as test subjects in experimentations and studies.

Widespread participation in Cuba's vaccination program reflects the public's confidence in a healthcare system that puts their lives before profits. As explained in an [open letter from Cuban doctors](#) to the Biden Administration, several factors explain the program's success:

"People trust the easily accessible neighborhood family doctors and nurses, and the health professionals at their community polyclinics – making vaccine hesitancy very rare. In turn, the health system's organizational capacities make vaccine rollout fast and dependable. Finally, Cuban biotechnological research and production centers are well integrated with the needs of the public health system."

One of the most striking and successful attributes of the Cuban healthcare system is its holistic approach to wellness, which focuses on improving baseline health outcomes. Unlike in the United States, where specialized care services, prescription drugs and high-paying administrative jobs [comprise most](#) national per-capita health spending, Cuba's healthcare system invests [first and foremost](#) in primary care for the prevention of disease and chronic conditions. Family doctors work in neighborhood clinics throughout the country, and annual check-ups include [comprehensive health exams](#) for the determination of health risks and preventable conditions. As BBC has [described](#), this preventative approach to healthcare ultimately eases pressure on hospitals, allowing for a more efficient allocation of resources and thus better quality care for hospitalized patients.

Meanwhile in the United States millions of uninsured people can't afford the costs of annual checkups, an inequity in healthcare access that results in [thousands of](#) preventable deaths a year.

At least 56% of U.S. adults report that they can't afford the predatory costs of medical care, a socioeconomic crisis that puts millions of people (one in three U.S. adults) in medical debt per year. For a significant percentage of the U.S. population without employment-based health insurance, access to health services isn't guaranteed in states that have opted out of expanding Medicaid (such as Texas, where at least 18.4% of non-elderly adults are uninsured).

Unlike in Cuba, the so-called multi-payer healthcare system of the U.S. requires most patients to pay for their own medical care with the aid of private insurance agencies, which rarely provide affordable options to low-income workers and the poor. As of 2020, the average cost of health insurance for families excluding copays was \$1,152/month. For many, that amounts to more than an entire month's wages.

Unaffordable healthcare expenses prohibit millions in the U.S. from accessing basic health exams that could prevent health issues in the longer term. According to human rights scholar and healthcare policy analyst Martha Schmidt, "even before COVID and after the so-called Affordable Care Act, tens of thousands of people were dying prematurely by our not having a single-payer [publicly financed] healthcare system. This is a huge number and it barely registers with many human rights activists."

When put into a global context, it becomes clear that the root causes of our public health crisis are the unique characteristics of the U.S. healthcare system. Privatization, deregulation and profit motivation – tenets of neoliberal capitalist economics and foundations of the U.S. political economy – reflect themselves in the dysfunctions of our social welfare system, particularly our healthcare system.

Not only is our healthcare system ineffective; it's also founded on the commodification of care and devaluation of human life. Whereas the Cuban healthcare system works to prevent (and, when needed, cure) disease, our policies are designed to make such care inaccessible to millions of poor and working class people who can't afford it – the criminally high price paid for maintaining a for-profit industry in the hands of private corporations.

Instead of tightening its economic blockade on Cuba and diverting [over \\$700 billion](#) in taxpayer funds to “national defense,” the Biden Administration should focus its attention on its own shameful healthcare system and learn from Cuba’s life-saving example. It should recognize that the human right to health is not up for debate – anywhere – and work to ratify Article 25 of the United Nations’ [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), which affirms the universal right to medical care and other social services necessary for an adequate standard of living.

One can dream that we’ll live to see the day when the cost of vital medical care is no longer the private burden of a country’s people, but everyone’s fundamental right under a publicly-financed national healthcare system. Until then, we can marvel at the example Cuba has set for the world.

The color of Covid: racial inequities in the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

April 7, 2022



Source: STAT News

“When white folks catch a cold, Black folks get pneumonia.” (My grandfather, George Robinson, Sr.)

By Camille Landry (National Co-Coordinator)

What color is Covid? Many people would say red and blue, citing the familiar graphic of a fuzzy red globe with blue spikes. Others might say that Covid has no color. But the Covid pandemic is anything but color-blind. In the United States, the color of your skin is a [predictor](#) of whether you will become infected with COVID-19, how sick you might get, or whether you'll die.

[More than 982,000 people](#) have died in the U.S. from Covid – and this is likely an undercount. This is the equivalent of losing more people than all those who live in Washington, D.C., Boston or San Francisco, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Millions more have become ill, with many requiring lengthy hospital stays. SARS-Covid 19 has disrupted every aspect of life for people around the world.

The pandemic cast a spotlight on systemic racism in the U.S. It's revealed deep-seated inequities in health care, employment, education and economics for communities of color and amplifies social and economic factors that contribute to poor health outcomes. Black, Brown and Indigenous people of all ages, genders, education and income levels and locations are disproportionately harmed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Black, Indigenous and Pacific Islander Americans have experienced the [highest death tolls](#) from COVID-19 in the United States, at a rate of double or more that of white and Asian Americans. [One in 500 Black Americans](#) has died of Coronavirus infection. Case data from the CDC [show](#) that Black Americans, who comprise 13% of the total U.S. population, make up 30% of COVID-19 cases.

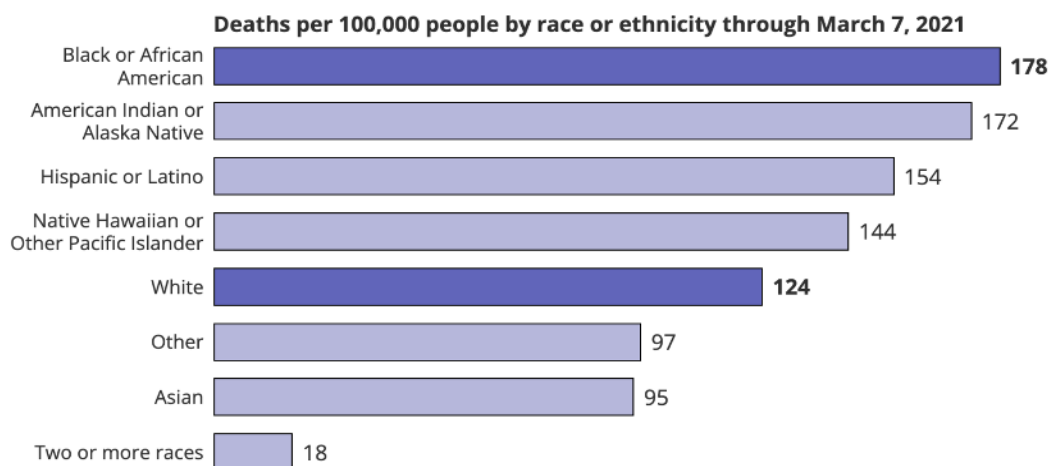
Most of the disproportionate rates of infection and death among BIPOC people stem from the systemic racism that plays a significant role in every aspect of this country. Discrepancies in wealth, education, employment, incarceration, access to health care, plus the burden of dealing with racism in large and small ways, exact a deadly toll on people.

Black, Brown and Indigenous people contract Covid more often than their white counterparts, and they're more likely to die from it. Race and ethnicity are risk markers for underlying conditions that affect health, including socioeconomic status, access to healthcare and exposure to the virus related to occupation (e.g. frontline, essential, and critical infrastructure workers).

According to the Office of Behavioral Health Equity, Black, Brown and Indigenous people:

- Have higher rates of underlying health conditions such as diabetes, asthma, hypertension, and obesity compared to whites.
- Are more likely to be uninsured and to lack a usual source of care, which is an impediment to accessing COVID-19 testing and treatment services.
- Are more likely to work in the service industries such as restaurants, retail, and hospitality that are particularly at risk for loss of income during the pandemic.
- Are more likely to live in housing situations such as multigenerational families or low-income and public housing that make it difficult to social distance or self-isolate.
- Often work in jobs that are not amenable to teleworking.
- Are more frequent users of public transportation, which puts them at risk for exposure to COVID-19.

Nationwide, Black people have died at 1.4 times the rate of white people.



Source: Alliance for Strong Families and Communities

Age is a major factor in who lives and who dies. Among whites, death rates are higher for older people. Because Blacks and Latine people are younger on average than whites, one might predict that they would be less likely to die from a disease that has been brutal to the elderly. But that's not what is happening.

Instead, the CDC, adjusting for population age differences, estimates that in this country, Indigenous, Brown and Black people are two to three times more likely than white people to die of COVID-19. (The death rate unadjusted for age is 1.4 x that of whites.) Latine people are dying at much younger ages than other groups.

37% of Latine deaths were of those under 65, versus 12% for white Americans and 30% for Black people. Latine people between 30 and 39 have died at five times the rate of white people in the same age group. (See below.)

The CDC reported a total of over 920,000 deaths from Covid as of February 15. Among cases and deaths with known race/ethnicity:

- Hispanic people represent a larger share of cases relative to their share of the total population (24% vs. 18%), while their share of deaths is more proportionate to their share of the population (17% vs. 18%). The disparity in cases relative to their share of the population has decreased slightly over time. (As of early October 2021, they accounted for 27% of cases.)
- Black people make up a similar share of cases relative to their share of the population (13%), but account for a slightly higher share of deaths compared to their population share (14% vs. 13%). This pattern has been consistent since October 2021.
- American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander people make up similar shares of cases and deaths relative to their shares of the population, which is consistent with data as of October 2021.
- Consistent with data as of early October 2021, Asian people make up a lower share of cases and deaths compared to their population share (four percent and three percent, respectively, vs. six percent).

- White people account for a lower share of cases compared to their share of the population (54% vs. 60%) but a larger share of deaths compared to their population share (63% vs. 60%). The higher share of deaths relative to their share of the population reflects a shift from October 2021, when their share of deaths was slightly lower than their share of the population. This shift largely reflects a higher death rate compared to other groups during the fourth quarter of 2022, amid the Omicron surge.

Race, class and gender play a large role in infection rates because race plays a role in what job you do, your access to healthcare, and even your ability to take time from work to get vaccinated or recover from vaccine side effects. BIPOC people are [less likely](#) to have employer-sponsored health insurance and thus less likely to have a primary physician, less likely to have sick or personal leave on their jobs and more likely to work in jobs that place them in proximity to other people, with little or no control over how they interact with others. They are less likely to be in executive or supervisory positions, or to hold jobs with flexible hours. They are less likely to be able to work from home. They are less likely to have enough personal or familial wealth that can carry them over if they lose their jobs or must stay home to care for their families. They have fewer options for avoiding Covid infection than white people have.

BIPOC families were [more likely](#) to send their children to school rather than opt for a learn-at-home situation during the pandemic. Working class children must attend daycare and school because their parents have little choice other than to show up to work or face dire economic consequences. This leads to the spread of infection. Children and teens infected with Covid often [do not show symptoms](#) even when they are contagious. This increases the likelihood of them infecting others, since no one realizes the children are spreading the disease.

Impacts on education

Brown, Black and Indigenous children – who were already experiencing an [education gap](#) compared to their white peers – have [lost more educational ground](#) during the pandemic compared to white children, as a result of class cancellation and the shift to distance learning formats.

They have [fewer](#) family resources and less internet access, fewer devices for accessing online learning resources and are more likely to be at home alone or with an adult who cannot offer learning assistance.

The pandemic is widening the already huge racial gap in educational success. I checked on friends whose children attend schools in metropolitan Oklahoma City, where I live. My next-door neighbor, Ruth, who is retired, cared for three of her grandchildren when schools closed. “We waited weeks for workbooks for these kids. Without them, they couldn’t do assignments. Lots of days, they were supposed to be in class on the computer but the computer wouldn’t load the classes, so the kids missed out.”

The city’s chronically underfunded school district was pushed to its limits. Two of her grandchildren had substitute teachers all year due to a chronic teacher shortage in the state. When the shift to online learning came, those inexperienced teachers struggled with the change. “The District announced during spring break 2020 that they would not reopen. Nobody was ready for that,” Ruth said. “I help the children as much as I can. I go over their work with them. I worked as a bookkeeper and I feel like I’m good at math but the kids tell me ‘that’s not the way we do it.’” She feels like the entire year-and-a-half that they were learning from home has been mostly wasted from an academic perspective.

Ruth also worries about the additional grocery bills. “The children were getting breakfast and lunch at school every day. I can drive down the street and pick up the food the school hands out but it’s not as much food as they’d get in the school cafeteria. The kids ask for more. They’re eating me out of house and home!” She laughed, but said that she had to put off getting tires for her car and paying bills because of the added expense. “Their uncle taught the boys how to change a tire and put oil in the car. That’s a good thing. I’m teaching them how to cook. We read together when we can. It doesn’t seem like enough. I really worry that they are not going to be ready for the next grade.”

More than 60 years after school desegregation became the law, education in the U.S. is highly segregated by race and income. [Schools are still segregated](#) and Brown and Black children are paying a price.

Students in well-funded districts have resources and opportunities that their inner-city peers do not have. The zip code you live in largely determines your quality of education and future success.

In a nearby suburb my friend Carissa, who is white, juggled working from home with the responsibility of overseeing the education of her children ages nine and 12. Her suburban district provided iPads to its students; they haven't had many problems getting the online classes to work. Her children attended two of the highest-performing schools in the area. "They did a good job, as good as anyone could have expected," she said. Carissa holds a master's degree. "That education and experience have made it easier for me to step into this role. I was able to help them when they needed it." Her children have now returned to school full-time. The eldest attends a private tutoring center to help him with math, which he struggled to learn through online classes. "I'm glad we had the resources to see us through the last two years," Clarissa explained. "My friends who aren't as fortunate have seen their kids fall behind."

Experts agree. The U.S. Department of Education [found](#) widening disparities between Black and Brown children and their white peers as a result of the pandemic's changes in schooling. Children for whom English is a second language and children with special needs have lost the most ground. Academics aren't the only thing that has suffered. The Department's report on the educational impact of Covid [states](#):

"Nearly all students have experienced some challenges to their mental health and well-being during the pandemic and many have lost access to school-based services and supports, with early research showing disparities based on race, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ identity, and other factors. Heightened risks of sexual harassment, abuse, and violence during the pandemic, including from household members as well as intimate partners, and online harassment from peers and others, affect many students and may be having a continued disparate impact on K-12 and postsecondary girls and women and students who are transgender, non-binary, or gender non-conforming."

The Department of Education also identified increased harassment and bullying of Asian and Pacific Islander students that mirrors the increased racism faced by these communities since the start of the pandemic.

“The pandemic has widened the gaps that have always existed. It has been an educational disaster for the children and youth we teach,” according to the principal of an Oklahoma City high school. “My hope is that this won’t close doors to them that were only ever half open.”

Jobs matter

Jobs matter. The woman checking out your groceries who comes face-to-face with hundreds of people each day, many of whom refuse to wear masks, is at higher risk of becoming ill than someone who works in an office. The bus driver, teacher, receptionist, food service worker, daycare provider, factory worker, and people who are incarcerated or living in a shelter are at higher risk of infection. These people are more likely to be Brown, Black or Indigenous. Many are women. Few of these workers have the protections or support of a union.

We see the effects of sexism, racism and other forms of marginalization in today’s labor market. Data show **racial** and **gender** wage and wealth gaps, persistent **racial and gender unemployment disparities**, hiring discrimination, **barriers to employment** for those who have been involved in the criminal justice system, and more. The pandemic did not directly cause these centuries-old issues, but it made them worse.

The Covid pandemic has amplified existing challenges in Black, Brown and Indigenous communities. Layoffs and furloughs have resulted in many people being thrust into joblessness. They are facing eviction, loss of their homes, their cars and even the ability to feed their families.

Impacts on poverty & food insecurity

Black, Brown and Indigenous families experience crisis-level rates of poverty and food insecurity, especially when compared with their white counterparts. This is not by chance. These disparities are direct consequences of **policies and decisions** made by those in power. Dating back to colonial times and in every realm of their existence, Black, Brown and Indigenous families have been excluded from the systems and institutions that have provided financial security, upward mobility, and generational wealth to white families.

Black and Latine communities have been particularly hard hit by the health and economic crises, experiencing more job losses, higher rates of infection and mortality, and greater likelihood of evictions and hunger than their white counterparts – and more – in just the past two years. According to the Economic Policy Institute, real median income declined 4.5% among Asian households (from \$99,400 to \$94,903), 2.6% among Hispanic households (from \$56,814 to \$55,321), 2.7% among non-Hispanic white households (from \$77,007 to \$74,912), and was statistically unchanged for Black households (from \$46,648 to \$46,600).

The greatest effect on economic equity during the pandemic is a result of the disproportionate shares of women – Black and Latina women in particular – who lost full-time, year-round work. This was largely due to job loss by workers in face-to-face service jobs like retail and leisure/hospitality. Restaurants and stores closed; food service workers whose income depends on tips were hard hit by those closures and by people using take-out and delivery services rather than dining in.

Vaccinations

Race is also a factor in vaccination rates. Even as the nation rushes to vaccinate people and end the pandemic, Black and Indigenous people are not doing well. As of March 7, 2022, 84% of Asian, 64% of Latine and 62% of white people had received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose, higher than the rate for Black people (57%).

There are many reasons why BIPOC people in the U.S. refuse or delay vaccinations. Some distrust public health initiatives. African Americans remember the Tuskegee Study, where Black men were told they were receiving treatment for syphilis but received only placebos; many died from the disease and a lot of them infected their partners. People recall how Brown and Indigenous women were secretly sterilized when they went into hospitals to give birth. They recall the story of Henrietta Lacks, a Black woman who received inadequate treatment for her cancer but whose body tissue was used without her permission to establish what was the first, and, for many years the only human cell line able to reproduce indefinitely. Neither she nor her family received any compensation for this. We've heard stories of cruel medical experiments carried out on our ancestors.

Many people distrust the medical establishment as a result of their own negative personal encounters when seeking healthcare. Treatment at teaching hospitals – often the only source for medical care – often involves having medical students, residents, and other minimally-trained practitioners providing care; sometimes that care is less than stellar. Many BIPOC people have experienced racism, subtle and blatant, at the hands of medical providers. Medical apartheid is real in America. Others distrust the government and its role in creating the vaccine. Regardless of the reason for vaccine hesitancy, the fewer people who receive the vaccine, the higher the rate of infection will remain.

Impacts on mental health

Mental health, always a challenging issue in the Black, Brown and Indigenous communities, is similarly under attack by COVID-19. The journal *Psychiatric Times* [reports](#) that the economic downturn and staggering job losses due to the pandemic have resulted in lost health insurance, financial instability, food insecurity and loss of housing among those lacking the safety net of savings and family resources. The median net worth of white families is [nearly 10 times higher](#) than Black families, eight times higher than Brown families and significantly higher than Indigenous families. These stresses and losses increase the risks of depression, anxiety, substance use, and suicide, as well as poor physical health.

Black and Brown individuals with preexisting mental illness [are among the most vulnerable](#). They are more likely to live in poverty, often in group settings (which greatly increase the risk of infection). Mentally ill people are more likely to be incarcerated. They suffer the stigma and marginalization of mental illness plus bias and discrimination due to their race and economic status. The risk of death from COVID-19 is [50% higher](#) for those with a history of mental illness compared to those without that history.

The [stress](#) of coping with lost jobs, lost income, children who must be cared for during the school day while parents work jobs with no flexibility, and the other burdens wreaked on them by systemic racism have an impact on mental health. The well-publicized incidents of police brutality and murder of BIPOC people are a further source of stress.

A recent report by the U.S. Surgeon General [reveals](#) that African American, Brown and Indigenous people have less access to mental health services than do whites, are less likely to receive needed care and are more likely to receive poor quality care when they do seek help.

The pandemic has been particularly hard on young people. “The pandemic’s negative impacts most heavily affected those who were vulnerable to begin with, such as youth with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ youth, low-income youth, youth in rural areas, youth in immigrant households, youth involved with the child welfare or juvenile justice systems and homeless youth,” [according to](#) an advisory by the U.S. Surgeon General on the mental health of youth.

The deadly effects of conservative politics

No discussion of the racialized effects of the Covid pandemic would be complete without mentioning the damage done to Republican voters by the politicization and rampant anti-science, anti-fact falsehoods that circulate in social media and right-wing news sources. The areas of the country with the lowest vaccination rates are those that have Republicans – especially far-right Republicans – as their local and national representatives. Self-identification as a political conservative who voted for Trump is the strongest indicator of not being vaccinated.

The increase in Covid deaths among people who are younger, southern, rural and white represents a shift from the demographics of the first wave of this pandemic. The first wave of people to suffer and die from Covid were disproportionately Black, Brown, Indigenous and/or older adults, and people with underlying conditions that made them more vulnerable to the virus. Now, severe Covid infections requiring hospitalization or leading to death are most common among the unvaccinated. These deaths are largely preventable.

A Washington Post-ABC News poll [shows](#) a stark divide in vaccination hesitancy by political affiliation. More than a third of Republicans and white conservatives refuse to get a vaccination. Even more refuse to wear masks and abide by social distancing and other safety recommendations.

We've seen their protests at school board and city council meetings. We watched as rowdy truckers drunk on white privilege protested Covid protocols by shutting down the capital of Canada and disrupting traffic throughout the U.S.

Conclusion

Just as the COVID-19 pandemic has lifted the covers off racism and inequality in this society, it has also shown us what many people have been saying for years: things need not be this way. Covid has forced institutions and policies to change in ways that better accommodate all people, and that can at least start to right the wrongs caused by racism and white supremacy. We now see that education can take place outside of a classroom and that we can tailor education to the needs of individual students. We see that it is possible for the government and private industry to provide life-saving medical care to all who need it. We know that people can work from home instead of commuting to an office. We know that governmental support in the form of programs and direct financial assistance can make a hugely positive difference in people's lives.

The pain, suffering and deaths caused by SARS-Covid 19 in the United States shows the damage that racism and inequality wreak upon this nation. Black, Brown and Indigenous people have been disproportionately harmed, and this unequal burden is rooted in systemic racism. This represents a violation of human rights that affects millions of people in this nation, one that robs the world of the human potential and creates generational pain and suffering for people whose only "crime" is to have been born non-white.

It is an ironic and deadly twist of fate that this new increase in Covid infections and deaths among white conservatives, who are precisely the group most likely to deny that systemic racism exists or to support the elimination of racism, is an unintended effect of centuries of white supremacy and systemic racism that have turned upon people who would perpetuate racial inequality. It is a wasteful and tragic consequence of the deep divide in this nation.

The criminalization of pregnancy: a miscarriage of justice

May 4, 2022



Source: Tn8.tv

By Camille Landry (National Co-Coordinator)

The United States of America is a nation – the first nation-state – that was founded on principles of genocide, racism, hatred and misogyny. Despite limited actions to recognize the basic human rights of Black, Brown, Indigenous, female and LGBTQI people, this nation persists in denying fundamental human rights to people who are anything other than cisgender, heterosexual white males who are not poor.

For every inch of progress women make in reaching a position of equity with white males, they are snatched backwards several feet by those who are determined to uphold the misogynistic status quo.

In this nation, this society, despite years of struggle and incremental progress, a significant portion of the adult population holds the attitude that women exist to be submissive, available, and useful to men, primarily as sexual objects, child-producing vessels, and “helpmeets” – not fully autonomous human beings in their own right. Silly girls! Why strive for equality? Women are placed on earth by a patriarchal deity with the intention of being sources of pleasure and progeny for men.

The ongoing campaign to limit women’s power, autonomy and reproductive rights has turned to criminalizing pregnancy. As the American College of Obstetrics & Gynecology [explains](#):

“Criminalization of pregnancy is the punishing or penalizing of individuals for actions that are interpreted as harmful to their own pregnancies, including enforcement of laws that punish actions during pregnancy that would not otherwise be criminal or punishable. Criminalization also occurs when laws not specific to pregnancy are either applied in a discriminatory way against pregnant people or have a disproportionate effect on pregnant people. Criminalization has taken many forms including, but not limited to, the passage of fetal assault laws, policies that punish or penalize pregnant people for substance use during pregnancy, and the practice of judicial intervention or legal attempts at coercion for refusal of care during pregnancy.”

Since 1973, there have been more than [1,200 documented cases](#) in the United States alone of women who have been arrested or charged because of their pregnancy outcomes. These women are overwhelmingly Black and working class or poor.

The criminalization of pregnancy is closely aligned with conservatives’ crusade to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the United States Supreme Court case that legalized elective abortions in 1973. The Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution of the United States protects a pregnant woman’s liberty to choose to have an abortion without excessive government restriction. Even before the Supreme Court’s recently leaked decision to overturn *Roe vs. Wade*, a host of laws and regulations have been enacted by state and federal governments that limit a woman’s right to autonomy over her own body.

One of these strategies is to declare the fetus a person under the law, and then prosecute anyone who is suspected of causing harm to it. This opens the door to prosecution of women who have abortions and anybody who participates in an abortion. In Texas and some other states, this would include even Uber drivers who transport people to abortion clinics, or pharmacists who fill prescriptions associated with abortion.

In the United States, pregnant people have been charged, arrested, convicted and jailed for:

- Having a miscarriage (a “spontaneous abortion” in medical language).
- Using drugs or alcohol while pregnant.
- Being the victim of violence that has or may have harmed a fetus.
- Engaging in behaviors that the court deems risky but that are otherwise legal.
- Attempting suicide while pregnant.
- Refusing medical procedures that the pregnant person does not want or consent to, such as bed rest or cesarean sections.
- Giving birth to a dead or medically compromised child.

It should be a no-brainer that the rights that every human is heir to should apply to everyone, regardless of whether they are playing host to a fetus. Yet, in a vicious intersection of misogyny, racism, classism and hubris, these rights are often denied.

Pregnant people have often suffered suspicion over pregnancy loss. Historically some have been accused of witchcraft or other crimes and **murdered** – burned at the stake, stoned to death – for having successive or suspicious miscarriages. Inability to carry a child to term constitutes grounds for divorce in many societies. Inability to carry a child to term constitutes grounds for divorce in many societies. A common charge against women accused of witchcraft is that witches kill babies – inside and outside of the womb. This persists today in some parts of the world. There is apparently no greater crime than for a woman to refuse her assigned position as an inferior but necessary vessel for reproduction and a relief valve for male lust.

Many of the laws affecting pregnant people are “loophole laws” that were written because the courts cannot technically arrest someone for pregnancy loss. States therefore write laws that can charge the pregnant person under different statutes but still serve the purpose of criminalizing pregnancy. [Concealing a birth](#) and concealing a death are felonies or misdemeanors in several states, and many people arrested after miscarriage or stillbirth are often charged under these laws. Also, many of the laws that have convicted them are those that give fetuses, and sometimes mere fertilized eggs, “personhood.” When a fetus is considered a person in the eyes of the law, the rights of the pregnant person are often [swept away](#). Opponents of elective abortion make no attempt to conceal that overturning *Roe* is the reason these laws were written.

Fetal protection laws

These laws make it illegal to harm a fetus during the commission of a crime. A drunk driver or assailant who harms a pregnant person and their fetus can be charged with manslaughter. It is equally obvious that existing laws that punish those who injure another person through drunk driving or assault are more than sufficient to protect the public. What is the rationale for having separate laws that apply only to pregnant people, unless there is a hidden agenda?

“Fetal protection” legislation would criminalize all abortions if *Roe* is overturned. Even with *Roe* intact, laws that consider the fetus a human being are dangerous to anyone who terminates a pregnancy. Several states have passed or are trying to pass into law statutes that forbid termination of pregnancy because the fetus has developmental issues, genetic problems, or for purposes of gender selection.

Some states require that all abortions be carried out by licensed physicians in a fully-staffed and equipped surgery center, not in a doctor’s office or procedure room. Note that abortion is an extremely safe procedure that can be (and typically is) appropriately performed in the same clinical setting as many other simple procedures such as cervical biopsies, endometrial ablation to control heavy, prolonged vaginal bleeding, endometrial biopsy or hysteroscopy (a technique used to look inside the uterus).

Non-physician practitioners such as nurse practitioners or physician assistants can and do safely perform these procedures in clinical facilities all over the world that are not equipped as full-fledged surgical centers. These fetal protection laws could result in the prosecution of licensed non-physician caregivers who are acting according to their profession's standards and protocols. The laws could also result in prosecution of women who opt for self-managed (medication) abortions because they are not physicians.

Policing of pregnancy



Source: Richard Ross

Fetal protection bills can result in women being prosecuted for behavior that is criminalized only because they are pregnant. People have been prosecuted for opting to have a home birth, for refusing to submit to invasive medical procedures, or for drinking, smoking

or using drugs during pregnancy. In some cases, children have been allowed to sue their mothers for injury caused during pregnancy. Other people have been prosecuted for “failure to protect” when their pregnancy produces a child with birth defects.

In other instances, laws have allowed discrimination against women – which is otherwise illegal – because they have the capacity to become pregnant. Women are excluded from jobs that could cause fetal harm. Typically these job categories have been male-dominated in the past. It is ironic that there have been no attempts to bar pregnant or potentially pregnant women from jobs in fields such as healthcare, childcare, education and housekeeping that might be hazardous to pregnancy but are considered traditional female roles.

These laws are serious violations of a pregnant woman's constitutional rights to privacy, equal protection, and due process. They treat them differently simply because they are pregnant and subject them to standards that do not apply to anyone else.

Recently an infamous case in Oklahoma resulted in a woman being arrested, held and sentenced to prison. Brittany Poolaw, a 19-year-old Indigenous woman, was charged and convicted of manslaughter for having a miscarriage in her fourth month of pregnancy. When she presented at the emergency department after she started bleeding, she admitted that she had used methamphetamine. She subsequently miscarried. Prosecutors charged her with manslaughter despite the fact that the medical examiner noted that a genetic problem or a condition known as placenta previa could have caused the loss of her pregnancy. The nation's leading group of obstetricians went on record stating that methamphetamine use does not cause pregnancy loss. Nonetheless, Brittany Poolaw was convicted and sentenced to four years in prison for the first-degree manslaughter of her unborn son.

The group National Advocates for Pregnant Women [reported](#) on a client in NYC who wanted a vaginal birth but was [taken into police custody](#), had her legs strapped together, and was forced to undergo a C-section – because doctors believed that would be safer for the fetus and a federal court ruled that her rights were secondary to the state's interest in preserving the life of the fetus.

In Alabama [Kim Blalock](#) was arrested and charged with fetal endangerment after she filled a legal prescription for pain medication, prescribed by her doctor to treat an injury she had suffered.

[Marshae Jones](#) was five months pregnant when she was shot in the stomach. Her fetus did not survive the shooting. Ms. Jones was charged with the death. Police said it was her fault because she started the fight that led to the shooting.

Pregnancy & the War on Drugs

It is not coincidental that Oklahoma, the state that jailed Brittany Poolaw, has few slots available for substance use treatment. [Two-thirds](#) of people who seek treatment for substance abuse disorders are unable to obtain it. The same system that prosecutes people for drug use deliberately fails to provide treatment and support for people struggling with substance use.

The situation is similar in the other states that have enacted fetal protection laws. The obvious conclusion is that laws that penalize pregnancy and the use of illegal substances are designed to police female bodies, not to protect either pregnant people or the children they bear.

Miscarriages are extremely [common](#), despite [public perception that pregnancy loss is rare](#). Approximately [10-20%](#) of pregnancies confirmed by testing result in a miscarriage by 13 weeks gestational age, but estimates are as high as [31%](#) to [50%](#) when including individuals who [miscarry](#) before knowing they are pregnant. The March of Dimes, a nonprofit focused on prevention of birth defects and pregnancy loss, [informs us](#) that a significant number of “late” or “heavy” periods in sexually active women are, in fact, spontaneous abortions. In total, almost half of all conceptions end in spontaneous abortion. The true number is unknown because so many pregnancies end before the person knows they are pregnant.

The “War on Drugs” that started under the Reagan Administration in the 1980s has worsened pregnancy outcomes in the name of preventing them. The Drug Policy Alliance [states](#) that “pregnant people are uniquely vulnerable to criminal justice or child welfare involvement especially if they have admitted to drug use or have had a positive drug test at birth.” Prosecutors across the country have targeted pregnant people accused of drug use, supposedly in the interest of protecting their fetuses.

[According to](#) the Drug Policy Alliance:

“19 states and the District of Columbia define prenatal exposure to drugs as sufficient evidence to make a finding of child maltreatment. Seven states consider prenatal exposure grounds to terminate parental rights when there was a prior child with prenatal exposure or when the pregnant person/parent does not participate in drug treatment.”

Pregnancy & immigration

Tactics used by the U.S. government against immigrants, both at the border and within the country, often result in the arrest, detention and deportation of pregnant people.

Because the U.S. confers citizenship on anyone born within its borders or territories, if a child is born while in detention, that child is automatically a U.S. citizen. So, [pregnant people are routinely turned away at the border](#) when seeking asylum in the U.S.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detained pregnant women more than [4,600 times](#) from 2016-2018. These highly vulnerable people often [do not get adequate medical care](#) (if they receive any care at all).

A lawyer described a case where a woman who was seven months pregnant was detained by Border Patrol. Her medication for high blood pressure was confiscated and she was held for over 24 hours without medical attention, despite repeated complaints and requests. Once transferred to the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service she was taken to a hospital, where staff noted the poor condition that she was in. Hospital staff protested the use of [shackles](#) on the woman during and after labor. Shackling during labor can cause complications such as decreased fetal heart rate or a hemorrhage. The presence of shackles may cause a delay if a caesarian section or other emergency procedures are indicated; a delay of even five minutes is [sufficient](#) to cause permanent brain damage in the baby and increased harm to the mother.

Causing greater harm

The criminalization of pregnant people puts both parent and fetus at greater risk by creating barriers to child custody, drug treatment, and prenatal care. It tears children from their mothers and thrusts them into the unique hell that is the U.S. foster care system, which [costs billions of dollars per year](#) – far more than safely reuniting families. The U.S. spent more than [\\$9 billion](#) last year on foster care and related expenses. This is money that could have been used to provide vital support to struggling families that could keep family units intact – rather than tearing families apart.

Inside U.S. prisons and jails, pregnant people are routinely shackled to the bed while they labor and give birth, a violation of established standards of obstetric care.

They are denied the opportunity to hold or bond with their infants. Prisons and jails deny mothers the ability to breastfeed or express and store breast milk for their infants.



Source: Jane Evelyn Atwood

During the 1980s and 1990s, medical and social service personnel panicked over the number of children who were born to mothers who used drugs during their pregnancies. These children were said to be doomed to lives of physical and

mental disability. But, 20 years later, many of the children who were perceived to be “at-risk” are proving the predictions wrong as young adults. The myth of the “crack baby” has been [disproven](#) by scientific research. Prenatal exposure to most drugs does not guarantee that a child will be developmentally disabled or require special services. The drugs most likely to cause pregnancy loss are legal medications that are routinely prescribed and administered by physicians.

Far from protecting women and fetuses, these laws have the opposite effects. They make women – particularly poor women of color – hesitant to seek medical care. The majority of people who have been charged under fetal protection laws are poor, Black, Indigenous or Latine. These are the same people who are at the highest risk of maternal and infant death, the very same women who have less access to prenatal care than white middle-class women.

Pregnancy & race

Adverse pregnancy outcomes differ by race. Research has shown that [Black women are more likely to experience all types of pregnancy loss](#); including miscarriage, stillbirth, preterm birth and infant death; more often than white women.

In addition to their babies being at increased risk of adverse outcomes, Black mothers themselves are [three to four times more likely](#) than white mothers to die of [pregnancy-related complications](#).

The underlying causes that make Black women more susceptible to these risk factors are also related to various issues of racism and systemic inequality in healthcare. Even wealthy, famous Black women are at higher risk of maternal and infant death. Beyoncé and Serena Williams, two of the best-known and most affluent women in the United States, both suffered life-threatening pregnancy complications. They both relate stories of how they begged, pleaded and fought for medical personnel to pay attention to the problems they were having. Despite their money and fame, both women came close to death from very preventable issues. This is not unusual. Statistically, even affluent, highly-educated Black women [have worse pregnancy outcomes](#) than poor, uneducated white women.

Quality of care differs between racial groups. The medical care that Black women receive is not comparable to that of white women. In other words, there is a higher likelihood that white women will receive more effective medical care than Black women.

Writing in the California Law Review, Michele Goodwin [states](#):

“Increasingly, state statutes are the primary means through which legal norms affecting low-income pregnant women’s autonomy, privacy, and liberty are introduced and shaped. Arrests, forced bed rests, compelled cesarean sections, and civil incarcerations of pregnant women in Alabama, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin merely scratch the surface of a broad attack on pregnant women. This recent era of maternal policing reshapes physician and police interactions with pregnant women accused of violating fetal protection laws (FPLs); inspires (and sometimes requires) medical officials to breach confidentiality when treating pregnant women; motivates selective prosecution against poor women, particularly those of color; and evinces improper judicial deference to medical authority rather than law.”

Despite these widely known, scientifically proven facts, Black and Brown women are still disproportionately prosecuted for pregnancy loss. Black and white people use drugs at approximately the same rate, yet [Black women are 10 times more likely](#) to be reported by their doctors to child welfare agencies for drug use as compared to white women.

What we know

- [Abortion rights are human rights.](#)
- Pregnancy is [more dangerous than abortion](#). Banning abortion nationwide [would lead to](#) a 21% increase in the number of pregnancy-related deaths overall and a 33% increase among Black women.
- Theocracies (societies whose laws are based upon religious principles) [are anti-democratic and violate human rights](#).
- Laws that criminalize pregnancy and the postpartum period [result in higher rates of mortality and morbidity](#) for pregnant people and the children they bear.
- Instead of criminalizing pregnant people and sending them to prison, [drug rehab could save billions of dollars](#) and lives. Drug abuse education, prevention and treatment are more effective and far cheaper than criminalizing drug use, incarcerating people and removing children from their families to be placed in the [expensive, dangerous and destructive](#) foster care system.
- Fetal protection laws [violate](#) the equal protection clause of the U.S. Constitution. They discriminate by: (1) Imposing criminal liability on a pregnant person for actions that would not be criminal but for their pregnancy; (2) Increasing the punishment for an offense based on how far along the pregnancy has progressed; and (3) Treating the fetus as a person under the law and then charging the pregnant person with child endangerment or feticide.

The criminalization of pregnancy violates [the most basic human rights](#): the right to freedom; equality under the law; protection from unjust laws; and health care, mental health care and appropriate care for an unborn child. Its laws are created and applied in a way that discriminates against people based on their race, gender and class. These practices represent a miscarriage of justice.

Part 3: Climate crisis & the struggle for environmental justice



Source: Alliance for Global Justice

Overview

Ecological justice is social justice ... and economic justice ... and racial justice ... and gender justice ... and class justice ... and all other forms of justice that we struggle to bring into being. Ecological justice underlies all human rights issues, because without clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, healthy land, waterways, and thriving and healthy networks of living things that uphold sustainable and just means of living, no other forms of justice are possible.

Decades after what can be deemed the start of the environmental justice movement, the struggle continues on hundreds of fronts throughout the United States. People in Louisiana's Cancer Alley battle petrochemical corporations to stop cancer-causing pollution.

People in Jackson, Mississippi – a largely Black city – suffered a catastrophic breakdown of their water systems that resulted in stranding 160,000 people along with hospitals, fire stations and schools, without safe drinking water. In February 2021 an extreme winter storm event caused a massive electricity generation failure in the state of Texas that resulted in a loss of power for more than 4.5 million homes, the first of which to lose electricity were often working class communities of color, resulting in at least 57 deaths and prompting Texans to demand a change to the systems and policies that prioritize maximizing profit margins over the protection of human life.

The Heat, Health & Equity coalition in Manhattan simultaneously works to give relief to people suffering in heat emergencies, and to mitigate harm by addressing climate change, housing issues and governmental programs. WE ACT for Environmental Justice is working to reduce the amount of waste from NYC that goes into landfills and pollutes the soil, air and water. Water protectors in the Dakotas struggle to stop pipelines from encroaching on sacred lands, waterways and communities. As climate catastrophes come, the people continue to fight back for a just and sustainable future.

This section reviews the root causes and intersections of environmental struggles in the United States and their implications for human rights:

- **Our planet: enough for everyone's need...but not everyone's greed** explains who pollutes the most, who suffers the most and what's at stake in our climate crisis: the fundamental human right to live.
- **It's all connected: racism, poverty and environmental assault** explores the economic and political issues of environmental justice, especially as they relate to race and class. It explains why Black, Brown and Indigenous communities are exposed to more air pollution, landfills, lead poisoning, water pollution and industrial pollutants than white communities.
- **Over 530 years of struggle and solidarity: Indigenous resistance in the United States** tells the stories of Indigenous people fighting to preserve their land, air and water, their ways of life, and their fundamental human rights, including historical and contemporary actions and campaigns led by Indigenous communities aimed at countering centuries of settler colonialism's oppression and exploitation of the Earth and its people.

Violations of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

- **Article 1:** that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights
- **Article 2:** that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race or class
- **Article 3:** that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security
- **Article 25:** that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of themselves and their families, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and social services
- **Article 28:** that everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration can be fully realized

Violations of international human rights treaties

- The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination** requires that countries revise governmental and other public policies and rescind laws and regulations that perpetuate racial discrimination and pass legislation for prohibiting such discrimination; particularly that which pertains to rights necessary for the advancement of social, economic and cultural rights; such as the right to improvement in all aspects of environmental hygiene.
- The **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** establishes a universal framework for the protection and preservation of the most basic economic, social and cultural rights inherent to all human beings, including the right to work in just and favorable conditions, to social protection, to an adequate standard of living, to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, to education and to the enjoyment and benefits of cultural freedom. The United States has not ratified this treaty.
- The **Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment** prohibits torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The treaty requires states to actively prevent acts of torture in connection with activities such as extradition; arbitrary arrests, detentions and incarcerations; interrogation; and training of police (civil or military) and other officials involved in the arrest, detention or interrogation.

- The **Declaration on the Right to Development** protects the inalienable human right of every person to participate in, contribute to and enjoy the economic, social, cultural and political development in which all human rights can be fully realized. The declaration affirms the right of all people, as the creators of wealth, to enjoy equal benefits of development. It has been **vocally opposed** by the United States.
- The **Convention on the Rights of Child**, the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history not ratified by the United States, establishes a universal framework for the protection and advancement of the rights of children to grow, learn, play, develop and flourish with dignity. The treaty recognizes climate change as one of the greatest global challenges of future generations and a direct threat to a child's human right to life. It affirms the responsibility of today's leaders to take action against environmental policies and practices that inhibit the full realization of children's human rights.
- The **International Labour Organization Convention 169** sets standards for nation-states regarding Indigenous peoples' economic, socio-cultural and political rights, including the right to a land base. It affirms the right of Indigenous peoples to take control of their own institutions, ways of life and economic development. The United States has not ratified this treaty.
- The **Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples of the world, including their right to remain distinct and pursue their own priorities for economic, social and cultural development. Only four countries voted against this declaration in 2007: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States.

Our environment: enough for everyone's need...but not everyone's greed

July 5, 2022



Source: DisobeyArt and Shutterstock

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Yet, when it comes to the effects of climate change, there has been nothing but chronic injustice and the corrosion of human rights.” (Mary Robinson)

By Camille Landry (National Co-Coordinator)

The most fundamental human right is the right to live. This includes the right to breathe clean air, drink clean water, eat food that does not contain poison and to live in a world that is in balance ecologically, socially, economically, and in other ways. Our political and economic systems wreck the balance of our communities and of the entire planet. Mahatma Gandhi once said, “Earth provides enough to satisfy everyone’s need, but not everyone’s greed.”

The climate of the entire planet is careening from one unnatural disaster to the next. It is not just a change of weather; it is an ongoing calamity that threatens every living thing on the planet. Hurricanes of record frequency and intensity destroy lives and property. The National Weather Service is considering adding the category F6 to its tornado scale system because the latest F5 storms are so much bigger, fiercer, and more deadly than those we saw just 10 years ago; they are affecting regions that are not accustomed to storms of this type and are not prepared to deal with them.

Polar bears and seals starve because sea ice has melted. We lose Arctic Sea ice at a rate of almost [13% per decade](#), and over the past 30 years, the oldest and thickest ice in the Arctic has declined by a stunning [95%](#). An ice shelf the size of New York City [collapsed](#) in East Antarctica as both of Earth's poles underwent simultaneous freakishly extreme heat. In the past month, parts of Antarctica have been [more than 70 degrees](#) (40 degrees Celsius) warmer than average and areas of the Arctic [more than 50 degrees](#) (30 degrees Celsius) warmer than average.

Nearly all land areas are seeing more hot days and heat waves; [2016 was the hottest year on record](#) and [2020 ranked #2](#). Higher temperatures increase heat-related illnesses and can make it more difficult to work and move around. Wildfires start more easily and spread more rapidly when temperatures are higher.

Hotter temperatures cause changes in rainfall. Water is becoming scarcer in more regions. Reservoirs on every continent run dry. Droughts stir destructive sand and dust storms that move billions of tons of sand across continents. Fertile topsoil blows away, disrupting agriculture. Deserts are expanding, reducing land for growing food. Climate migration has forced millions of people from their lands. Sea levels are rising. By 2025, [two-thirds](#) of the world's population may be facing water shortages.

Meanwhile, we use the oceans and inland waterways as [dumps](#). We fill them with toxic chemicals, and with so much plastic that virtually every animal in the ocean has microplastics in its body. [So do we](#). Microplastics have been found in our [drinking water](#) and even in rain. They are [everywhere](#), causing untold damage to the environment and the animals who inhabit it.

Note well that humans are animals, and we are dependent upon the Earth for our survival.

Much of the damage to the Earth's climate is the result of [greenhouse gas emissions](#) – the release of gases from burning fossil fuels, such as coal, natural gas, and petroleum – for energy use.

The list of problems is too long to put into this document but one fact that stands out is that [just 100 companies](#) have been the source of more than 70% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions since 1988. And it's not just the energy sector. The top 15 U.S. food and beverage companies generate [630 million metric tons](#) of greenhouse gases every year.

Corporations are not the only entities that are befouling the planet. The U.S. military is [one of the largest climate polluters in history](#), consuming more liquid fuels and emitting more CO₂e (carbon-dioxide equivalent) than most countries. To support the global presence of U.S. troops, the military relies upon trucks, planes, buses, armored vehicles, ships and rockets – all burning fossil fuels and emitting greenhouse gases at high rates. A Humvee gets between four and eight miles per gallon; an F-35 requires 2.37 gallons per mile. The U.S. Navy operates [83 nuclear-powered warships \(NPWs\)](#): 72 submarines, 10 aircraft carriers and one research vessel. These NPWs [make up](#) about 40% of major U.S. naval combatants, and they visit over 150 ports in over 50 countries. This presents its own ecological nightmare.

U.S. military operations range from training, infrastructure building, military exercises, blockades, covert and overt acts of war, “humanitarian” missions and the occupation of other countries. It includes the development, testing and manufacturing of weapons, ammunition, and other materiel. Consider also how much particulate matter is thrown into the air every time a bomb or other munitions explode. Another significant source of pollution is from burning obsolete munitions and other unwanted materiel.

The United States spreads this pollution all around the world. [According to](#) the Defense Manpower Data Center, the United States military is deployed in most countries around the world, with between 150,000 to 200,000 of its active-duty personnel stationed outside the United States and its territories. The United States spreads this pollution all around the world.

Outside of active combat, U.S. personnel are typically deployed as part of several peacekeeping missions, [military attachés](#), or are part of embassy and consulate security. [Nearly 40,000](#) are assigned to classified missions in locations the U.S. government refuses to disclose. The U.S. controls about [800 bases in at least 80 countries](#) worldwide, and has “advisors,” embassy guards, and other personnel stationed in many other nations.

This bloated military machine – larger in scope and cost than the armed forces of the next ten countries combined – is a huge consumer of everything: food, clothing, building materials, fossil fuels, consumer goods, water, chemicals, weapons, nuclear materials, minerals, and more. All of this comes at a huge cost to our environment. The U.S. military has a carbon footprint [larger than all of Australia](#); if it were a country, it would rank #47 in emissions worldwide. Clearly, one of the prices the world pays for U.S. militarism and neocolonialism is a planet teetering on the brink of disaster.

The tipping point

“We have reached a tipping point on the need for climate action. The disruption to our climate and our planet is already worse than we thought, and it is moving faster than predicted,” [according to](#) data gathered by the United Nations, which states that “we now have five times the number of recorded weather disasters than we had in 1970 and they are seven times more costly.” Several key metrics of planet Earth have already crossed the tipping points, meaning that it is too late to change those conditions; they have passed the point of no return, [according to](#) new research signed by over 13,900 scientists from 153 countries.

Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets, warm-water coral reefs and the Amazon rainforest may already have been degraded past the point where nothing we can do will change the damage that has already occurred. These systems are vital to the ecology of the planet. The ice sheets, ice caps and glaciers hold [68.7%](#) of the fresh water in the world.

If they melt, not only will sea levels rise, but changes in salinity could also [stall the Gulf stream](#) – the phenomenon that makes northern Europe and much of the U.S. temperate – and would cause untold harm to the ocean’s ecosystem, worldwide weather patterns, and the face of the earth itself.

[Coral reefs are essential](#) to the ocean's health and are home to thousands of species of plants and animals. They also protect shorelines from storms and erosion. They are a source of food and new medicines. Over half a billion people depend on reefs for food, income, and protection.

The giant Amazon rainforest had previously been a [carbon sink](#), absorbing the emissions driving the climate crisis, but is now causing its acceleration. Most of the emissions are caused by fires, many deliberately set to clear land for beef and soy production. But even without fires, hotter temperatures and droughts mean the southeastern Amazon has become a source, rather than a sink, of CO2. The government of Brazil's current president, Jair Bolsonaro, has been harshly criticized for [encouraging more deforestation](#), which has [surged to a 12-year high](#), while [fires hit their highest level in June since 2007](#).

Who pollutes most? Who suffers most?

In another article of our [Human Rights Report](#), we discuss environmental justice and how poor, Black and Brown people suffer most when the planet is despoiled. The poorest people, primarily in the Global South and small island states, are the least responsible for the climate crisis yet have the fewest resources to deal with its consequences.

[The top ten emitters](#) of greenhouse gases are the United States, China, India, Russia, Japan, Germany, Iran, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia. It's important to note that nations emerging from colonial, neocolonial or feudal societies often have little choice other than to use the cheapest and most readily available fuels, even though they're dirty. Industrialized wealthy nations like the U.S. have a moral responsibility to put the survival of the ecosphere ahead of corporate profits and a bloated military. They should lead by example by using their resources to improve the health of our planet. Pollution doesn't respect borders!

Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Mongolia and Afghanistan suffer from the [most pollution](#). It's no surprise that poorer, larger countries are higher up this list than their richer counterparts. There simply isn't the infrastructure to be quite so pioneering when it comes to protecting their air quality, while their large populations mean that there are more vehicles on the road (many of which are second-hand and emit more emissions than newer vehicles).

Nicaragua [is highly vulnerable](#) to climate disasters. Because of its geography, the country experiences powerful storms whose frequency and magnitude have increased due to global warming, which drives the effects of *El Niño* weather patterns. When weather patterns switch to the La Niña phase, downpours give way to drought; this destroyed 90% of maize and 60% of bean crops in 2016. Political decisions have heavily influenced these conditions: Nicaragua's Sandinista government under newly re-elected President Daniel Ortega is taking bold and decisive steps to mitigate damage from the climate crisis.

Africa, despite its low contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, [is the most vulnerable continent](#) to climate change impacts under all climate scenarios above 1.5 degrees Celsius. Africa faces exponential collateral damage that poses systemic risks to its economies, infrastructure investments, water and food systems, public health, agriculture, and livelihoods. The climate crisis threatens Africa's development gains and will drive higher levels of extreme poverty.

Communities of color in the U.S. [fare no better](#). The people who suffered most from hurricanes Katrina, Isaac, Maria and others were poor, Black, Brown and Indigenous. The people of Detroit, Flint, the Navajo Nation, the Bronx, Chicago, Milwaukee, Alabama, Mississippi and elsewhere suffer and die due to environmental toxins, poisoned water and polluted air. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), addressing environmental injustice, [says](#):

"Climate change is the new normal of more severe storms, like hurricanes Sandy and Isaac, which devastated communities from Boston to Biloxi. Our sisters and brothers in the Bahamas, and Inuit communities in Kivalina, Alaska, and communities in Thibodaux, Louisiana and beyond, will risk property losses to rising sea levels in the next few years."

What can we do?

Many well-meaning people do what they can to ease the threat of climate destruction.

Yet all the individual actions like recycling our refuse, riding bikes or carpooling instead of driving, reusable shopping bags, and other personal actions [have a tiny effect](#) on stopping catastrophic changes in the earth's climate or the despoiling of the land, air and water on which we all depend. These individual actions are a [band-aid](#) we're slapping over a knife wound to the heart. Actual improvement to climate destruction [requires massive changes on a worldwide governmental scale](#). It's imperative that we stop adding fuel to the fire that is threatening us and take measures now to repair what can be fixed and get ready for what is to come: rising sea levels; drought and flood cycles that devastate lands, crops and people; and the vast humanitarian crises that will result.



Source: The Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice

The struggles we engage in are not driven by an abstract desire for justice. Our very survival and the survival of our siblings and all other life in this world are at stake. Despite our technology and our hubris, we are animals living in a closed ecosystem on the only planet that we have access to. Our future depends on ceasing “business as usual” and changing the way we live and act. Global capitalism, consumerism and exploitation of the environment and people are a danger to our very existence. We must act now to save ourselves, our future generations, and virtually every animal and plant on the earth.

It's all connected: racism, poverty, environmental assault

July 6, 2022



Cancer Alley. Source: Sophia Germer (The Times & The Advocate)

We invite you to examine environmental racism and racialized assaults on the most fundamental elements of all life: air, water, and land.

By Camille Landry (National Co-Coordinator)

Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Fair treatment means no group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental and commercial operations or policies. It includes the equitable distribution of environmental harm and environmental benefits.

Environmental racism is the disproportionate impact on the lives of Black, Brown and Indigenous people caused by living near hazardous pollution. Black and Hispanic communities and Indigenous lands are [exposed to more](#) air pollution, landfills, lead poisoning, water pollution and industrial pollutants than their white counterparts.

BIPOC communities also experience a higher degree of neglect than white communities have. They're [more likely](#) to have old, flawed water and sewage systems, to live in shabby structures with lead-based paint or roaches, and to have fewer public services altogether – except for police. There is always [plenty of law enforcement](#) present in communities of color.

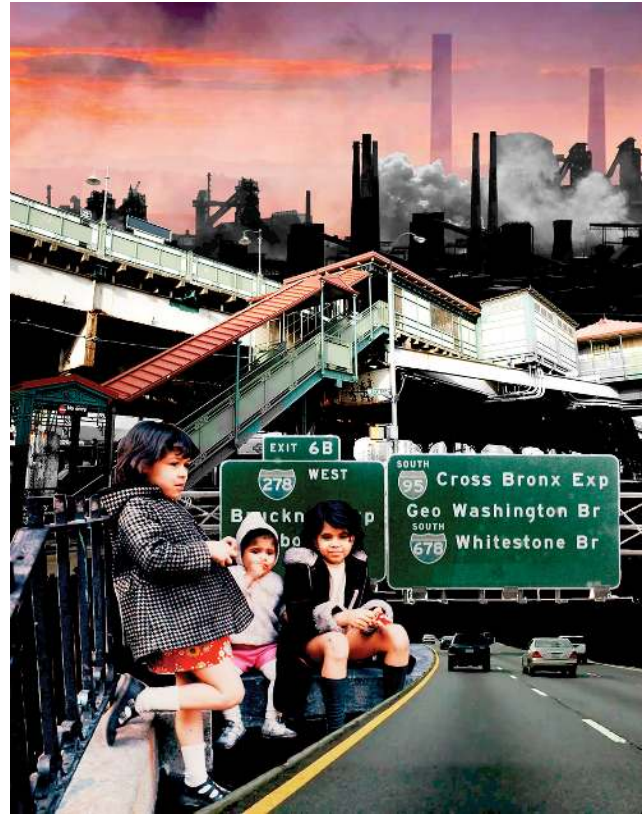
Non-Hispanic whites have the [lowest exposure](#) to air pollution. [Over half](#) the people who live close to toxic waste sites are people of color, according to a report from the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA [identified](#) high levels of automobile fumes, smog, soot, oil smoke, ash, and construction dust, all of which have been linked to serious health problems. These substances are a [definite carcinogen](#) and contribute to several lung conditions, heart attacks, and possible premature deaths. The pollutant has been implicated in both asthma prevalence and [severity, low birth weights, and high blood pressure](#).

As human rights violations go, environmental racism ranks high. Ask the people of [Cancer Alley](#) what life is like along the 85-mile stretch of land between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, LA that's lined with oil refineries and petrochemical plants. The predominately Black residents of this area are 50 times more likely to develop cancer than the average U.S. citizen. Rev. William Barber, who has been helping members of this community, referred to these conditions as a new kind of slavery.

Consider also the people of Kingston, Tennessee, where [over a billion tons](#) of deadly coal ash ended up in the Emory River near their town. People who were exposed to it [contracted](#) brain cancer, lung cancer and leukemia at high rates. A few years later, the Tennessee Valley Authority transported some of the coal ash to Uniontown, Alabama, a predominately low-income Black community, whose residents now suffer the same illnesses as the people of Kingston, TN experienced.

Artist: Alina Kwiatkoski

These issues are not confined to rural areas. The Bronx, NY has a [disproportionate level](#) of pollution. The air is so bad that in some neighborhoods, [more than 20%](#) of children have asthma – so many that the South Bronx is called “Asthma Alley.” Kids in this area are [70% more likely](#) to be hospitalized than the rest of NYC, and 700% higher than the rest of New York State. Kids in this area are [70% more likely](#) to be hospitalized than the rest of NYC, and 700% higher than the rest of New York State. The Bronx is considered the [most unhealthy county](#) in the entire



state, and is home to the [poorest congressional district](#) in the country. Not coincidentally, the Bronx is [majority](#) Black and Brown.

Most people have heard of the catastrophic lead poisoning of the people of Flint, Michigan. City management refused to take action to correct the water pollution, which was caused when the city changed water sources and [failed to](#) adequately treat the water. Thousands of children and adults were poisoned. You may not know about the [dire situation](#) that the people of the Navajo Nation are also experiencing. Scientists measured arsenic and uranium concentrations as well as other hazardous substances in Navajo wells, ground and surface water, making much of the water unfit to drink.

Every year, more than [484,000 pounds](#) of toxic chemicals are released from 21 different toxic facilities near a Houston Texas neighborhood that is 98% Hispanic. Pollution was so bad that the local elementary school had to be closed down.

There is more – far more – to this story, and its chapters include environmental assaults on many communities in the U.S. and globally, frequently by U.S.-owned corporations that [extract the wealth](#) from this and other nations, leaving our land, air and water [poisoned](#). The ultimate irony is that this planet is a closed system and the pollution that kills our BIPOC kinfolk disperses into the environment that everyone shares. We do not have a “Planet B.” This one is all we’ve got. Protect the rights of Mother Earth.

Over 530 years of struggle and solidarity: Indigenous resistance in the U.S.

November 25, 2022



Source: Manuel Ceneta (Associated Press)

None of us are free until all of us are free!

By Camille Landry (National Co-Coordinator)

Any analysis that originates in the United States claiming to accurately and fairly address issues pertaining to the human rights of Indigenous people must begin with the acknowledgement that we occupy land that is the ancestral home of Indigenous peoples, stolen from them at gunpoint, watered with their blood and tears. We therefore stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples' struggles for justice and human rights, in this hemisphere and throughout the world. We pay respect to the people, past and present, who have resisted oppression in all its forms. We declare that their struggle is our struggle, for none of us are free unless all of us are free.

INDIAN LAND FOR SALE

GET A HOME

OF
YOUR OWN

EASY PAYMENTS



PERFECT TITLE

POSSESSION
WITHIN
THIRTY DAYS

FINE LANDS IN THE WEST

IRRIGATED
IRRIGABLE

GRAZING

AGRICULTURAL
FARMING

IN 1910 THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR SOLD UNDER SPECIAL BIDS ALLOTTED INDIAN LAND AS FOLLOWS:

Location.	Acres.	Average Price per Acre.	Location.	Acres.	Average Price per Acre.
Colorado	5,211.21	\$7.27	Oklahoma	34,654.00	\$19.14
Idaho	17,013.00	24.85	Oregon	1,020.00	15.43
Kansas	1,684.50	33.45	South Dakota	120,445.00	16.53
Montana	11,034.00	9.86	Washington	4,879.00	41.37
Nebraska	5,644.00	36.65	Wisconsin	1,069.00	17.00
North Dakota	22,610.70	9.93	Wyoming	865.00	20.64

FOR THE YEAR 1911 IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 350,000 ACRES WILL BE OFFERED FOR SALE

For information as to the character of the land write for booklet, "INDIAN LANDS FOR SALE," to the Superintendent of U. S. Indian School at any one of the following places:

CALIFORNIA: ——— BANGS COLORADO: ——— DENVER ILLINOIS: ——— LAPEL KANSAS: ——— KANSAS KANSAS	MONTANA: ——— BUTTE MONTANA: ——— BUTTE MONTANA: ——— BUTTE MONTANA: ——— BUTTE MONTANA: ——— BUTTE	NORTH DAKOTA: ——— BISMARCK NORTH DAKOTA: ——— BISMARCK NORTH DAKOTA: ——— BISMARCK NORTH DAKOTA: ——— BISMARCK NORTH DAKOTA: ——— BISMARCK	OREGON: ——— PORTLAND OREGON: ——— PORTLAND OREGON: ——— PORTLAND OREGON: ——— PORTLAND OREGON: ——— PORTLAND	SOUTH DAKOTA: ——— SIOUX FALLS SOUTH DAKOTA: ——— SIOUX FALLS SOUTH DAKOTA: ——— SIOUX FALLS SOUTH DAKOTA: ——— SIOUX FALLS SOUTH DAKOTA: ——— SIOUX FALLS	WASHINGTON: ——— PORT BLAIR WASHINGTON: ——— PORT BLAIR WASHINGTON: ——— PORT BLAIR WASHINGTON: ——— PORT BLAIR WASHINGTON: ——— PORT BLAIR	WISCONSIN: ——— MILWAUKEE WISCONSIN: ——— MILWAUKEE WISCONSIN: ——— MILWAUKEE WISCONSIN: ——— MILWAUKEE WISCONSIN: ——— MILWAUKEE
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WALTER L. FISHER,

Secretary of the Interior.

ROBERT G. VALENTINE,

Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

Advertisement from 1911 offering “allotted Indian land” for sale.

Capitalism cannot be separated from the exploitation, enslavement and dispossession of the Indigenous and African peoples. The very existence of the United States of America as a sovereign nation is rooted in these heinous acts. Without the theft of land and its resources; the forced removal, murder and subjugation of Indigenous people; and the stolen labor represented by centuries of slavery, sharecropping and Jim Crow exploitation; the United States would not and could not

be the largest economy on the planet. The \$20.94 trillion annual GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of the United States was paid for in Indigenous and African blood and suffering.

Yet the people resist, despite the enormous disparities in power, in finances, in military might, in cultural and religious and other institutional measures of oppression.

Indigenous resistance can be summed up as Indigenous communities asserting and protecting their human and treaty rights while powerful white citizens, with the backing and authority of the state, attempt to stop them. This has not changed much since the appearance of European colonists on these shores.

From Columbus' genocidal encounters with the Taino people and subsequent centuries of settler colonialism (a type of colonialism in which the Indigenous peoples of a colonized region are displaced by settlers who permanently form a society there) to officials of North Dakota [deploying tear gas and water hoses upon countless Lakota people](#) and their allies peacefully gathered in the freezing winter weather to protect their land and water, European presence in the Americas has been deadly to the Indigenous peoples of [Turtle Island](#), [Abya Yala](#) and the Caribbean region.

Struggles for human rights

The destruction wrought by diseases, wars, genocidal violence, enslavement, forced relocations, the destruction of food sources and subsequent starvation, the devastation of ways of life, declining birth rates, forced sterilization, removal of children and other factors in the Indigenous Holocaust between 1492-1900 [destroyed more than 12 million Indigenous lives](#) in what is today the United States.

Indigenous peoples of the Americas have experienced many different forms of domination and continue to resist them through a wide range of decolonizing processes that are commonly misidentified, ignored or misstated by U.S. political and social analysts. Indigenous peoples' legitimate concerns about structural inequality and oppression have been cast as cultural or ethnic issues rather than as intrinsic elements of an economic, social, institutional, legal and governmental system whose very origins are rooted in the removal of Indigenous peoples from their land and the commission of genocide against them.

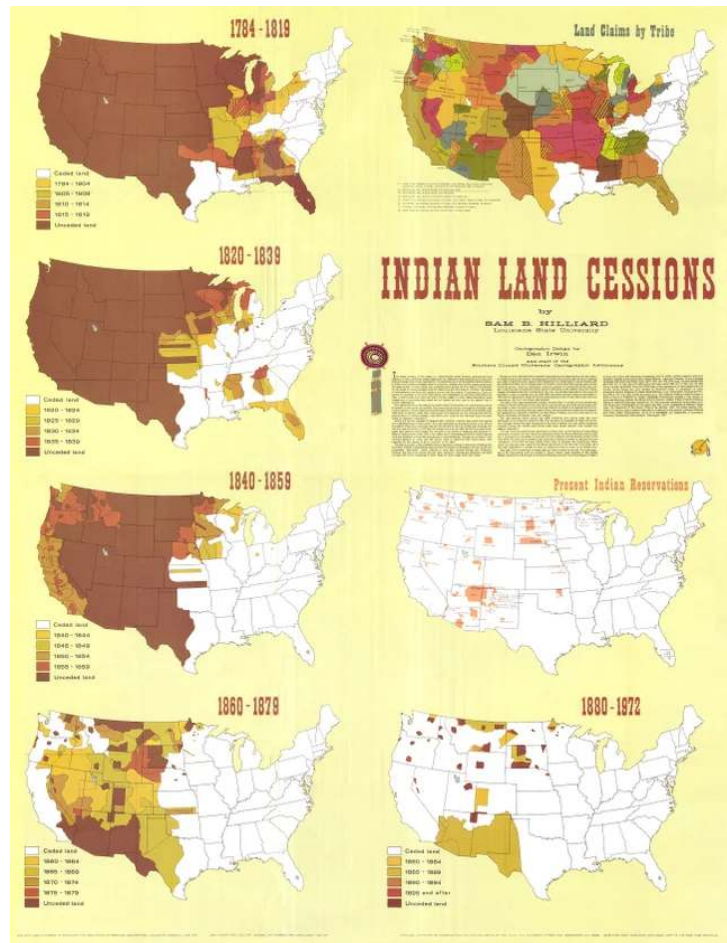
Indigenous peoples are members of nations that existed long before the United States and other nation-states in this hemisphere existed. Yet Indigenous peoples in many instances do not even get to define membership in their own nations. They are forced into a servile position under the thumb of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other federal entities that control many of their affairs. Of the thousands of Indigenous nations that existed in what is now the United States prior to contact with European settler colonists, [a mere 573 are currently recognized](#) by the U.S. government.

Tribes that are not recognized by the federal government can own land as a corporate entity, but the federal government will not put these lands into trust for the tribe. They do not have nonprofit status. Their members are not eligible for health services, scholarships, or whatever meager benefits that accrue to “recognized” tribes.

Source: Sam Hillard and Dan Irwin
(Louisiana State University and
Southern Illinois University)

Some [368 treaties](#), many dating back to colonial times, dictate the relationship between Indigenous nations and state, local and federal governments. [According to](#) the Bureau of Indian Affairs, “tribes possess all powers of self-government except those relinquished under treaty with the United States, those that Congress has expressly extinguished, and those that federal courts have ruled are subject to existing federal law or are inconsistent with overriding national policies.” The entire history of Indigenous people and federal and state governments is filled with treaty violations and the “extinguishment” of Indigenous rights in the courts and legislative bodies of this nation. These violations began during the colonial period and still persist today.

Even when Indigenous nations win in the courts, such as the landmark *McGirt vs. Oklahoma* decision, federal, state and local governments go to great lengths to counter those victories. In July 2020 the United States Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that a large chunk of eastern Oklahoma remains an American Indian reservation.



The decision meant that Oklahoma prosecutors lack the authority to pursue criminal cases against Indigenous defendants in parts of Oklahoma that include most of Tulsa, the state's second-largest city. The *McGirt* decision [also potentially affects](#) land ownership, taxation and other issues. State and local governments in Oklahoma and the federal government, including agencies like the FBI, are fighting mightily to overturn the *McGirt* ruling. The Indigenous nations of eastern Oklahoma are fighting harder to enforce the treaties that were signed with the blood of their peoples.

Historical resistance

Indigenous resistance during the period prior to the United States' War of Independence was persistent and found Indigenous peoples resisting colonialism through large and small episodes of armed conflict. After the war, the new U.S. government's dealings with Indigenous nations resulted in multiple conflicts; murderous actions including deliberate infection of Native people with diseases to which they had no immunity; plus a host of skirmishes, wars, broken treaties and broken promises. In its early years the U.S. government recognized the tribal governments as sovereign nations and negotiated treaties with them for land, water and other rights. Many of these treaties were ratified at gunpoint, with the government resorting to military action, kidnapping, mass incarceration and mass murder to force tribal leaders to sign them.

One such treaty, the Greenville Treaty of 1795, was forced upon Indigenous peoples after they lost a war. It resulted in their removal from what is now Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan and most of Ohio. Later, the War of 1812 demolished remaining Indigenous resistance in the northeastern portion of the USA.

As U.S. expansion pushed west from the original 13 states, conflicts with Indigenous peoples escalated. Using tactics similar to those that justified slavery based upon the declaration that African people were inferior and subhuman, concepts such as Manifest Destiny proclaimed that the United States is destined by God to expand its dominion and spread its form of government and capitalism across the entire North American continent and beyond, negating the personhood and human rights of the land's original inhabitants.

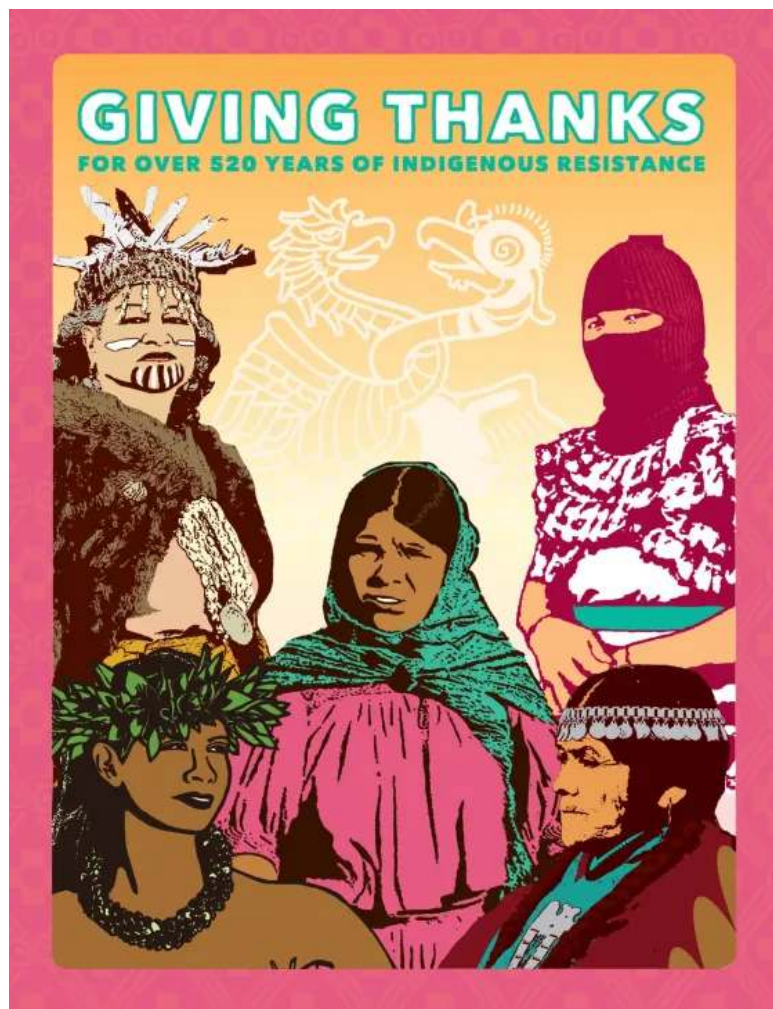
Indigenous peoples were declared to be fundamentally inferior and uncivilized, mere obstacles standing in the way of the “proper and appropriate” exploitation of the vast land and resources that European settlers found when they landed on these shores. They claimed that the land and its bounty were being wasted by “lazy Indians” – people who did not believe in land ownership, in exploitation or despoilment of the land, or in the brutal and punitive social and moral codes of conduct exemplified by the U.S. government, white settlers and their churches.



Source: Nicholas Pfosi (Reuters)

Indigenous nations formed alliances to negotiate with and ultimately fight the encroachment of European settlers on their lands. They were met with overwhelming genocidal resistance. Beginning around 1811, Tecumseh, a Shawnee chief, and his brother Tenskwatawa tried to unite Indigenous peoples east of the Mississippi into a giant confederacy. The two men believed that if the Indigenous nations banded together and refused to sell land to European settlers they could hold back American settlement.

These efforts were met by further wars, genocidal actions, land grabs and treaty violations. In 1830 President Andrew Jackson oversaw the passage of the Indian Removal Act, which gave the U.S. government the power to force Indigenous people from their lands in the southeastern U.S. and force-march them to Indian territory in what is now the eastern portion of the State of Oklahoma. These removals – 11 in all, of entire nations of people – came to be known as the Trail of Tears, in which thousands of people were forcibly marched for four months during a bitter winter, drenched springtime and burning summers, resulting in the deaths and injury of [around 4,000 people](#) – and that figure is widely believed to be under-reported.



Artist: Dignidad Rebelde

During the early 19th century Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa encouraged their people to renounce European ways and return to their traditional lifestyles, free of dependence upon settlers and their goods and money. The governor of Indiana, William Henry Harrison, led thousands of soldiers to Tecumseh's village. Fighting broke out but neither side won a decisive victory. Harrison then claimed that his men had found British weapons in the Indigenous camp. This caused a national uproar that ultimately led to the

War of 1812. Tecumseh and his brother sided with the British in the war and later fled to Canada, thus ending their dream of an alliance of the tribes in the northeast that could counter the settlement of their lands by European colonialists.

Massacres of Indigenous people by the U.S. Army began during the colonial period and persisted well into the 19th century. General George Armstrong Custer rode to fame for slaughtering infants, women, children and men of the Lakota Sioux Nation at Wounded Knee in 1890. In an act of supreme resistance in 1876, Buffalo Calf Road Woman, a Cheyenne warrior, knocked Custer from his horse and killed him as he attacked a Lakota village. Her actions exemplify the continuous, tenacious resistance of Indigenous people to oppression by the government and by individuals. The massacre of Cheyenne and Arapaho people by the U.S. Army on November 29, 1864 in Colorado Territory is one of many acts of genocide. This was lauded as progress by the U.S. government, despite the fact that [children, women and the elderly comprised the majority of deaths](#).

The resistance to these actions did not consist only of self defense. The telling, retelling and holding-to-account of this government by people of good conscience is a major form of resistance.

There are countless other stories of Indigenous resistance to settler colonialism in the early years of this country. They were all met with gruesome brutality. Even after the vast majority of Indigenous people had been remanded to reservations or tribal lands, the war against Native people continued in the form of child removal in which Indigenous children, some as young as two or three years of age, were forcibly removed from their families and sent to brutal “Indian Schools,” whose motto was “kill the Indian and save the man.” They lived with great privation, cruel punishment and a lack of adequate medical care and were force fed a curriculum that focused on separating them from their culture and instilling shame and disdain toward their own people. The Indian Schools, run by the federal and state governments and various Christian sects, oversaw the systematic eradication of their imprisoned students’ native languages, cultures and, not incidentally, their power.

Indigenous people did not universally gain U.S. citizenship and the right to vote until the Snyder Act of 1924 admitted them to full U.S. citizenship. Though the 15th Amendment, passed in 1870, granted all U.S. citizens the right to vote regardless of race, it wasn’t until the Snyder Act that Indigenous peoples could enjoy the rights granted by this amendment.

Today Indigenous communities suffer from the same type of voter suppression that disenfranchises millions of other BIPOC people.

Modern-day resistance

In “Indian Country,” very little has changed. Indigenous peoples fall victim to the vestiges of settler colonialism in many different ways. Native Americans have the [highest poverty rate](#) among all minority groups. The national poverty rate for Native Americans was [25.4%](#), while the Black or African American poverty rate was [20.8%](#) and the Hispanic poverty rate was [17.6%](#).

The United States Census Bureau [states](#), “at 71.8 years, American Indian and Alaska Native individuals have the lowest life expectancy compared with other races and ethnicities.” The rates of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, stroke, diabetes, cancer and other maladies are [far higher](#) in Indigenous people than in any other group. Substance abuse disorder, depression, suicidality and other mental health disorders exist at [high rates](#) in Indigenous communities. And Native Americans are the group [most likely](#) to be murdered by police.

Indigenous nations have protested their oppression through the courts and in state legislatures, for which they were often met with brutality and little in the name of progress. Nevertheless, the American Indian Movement (AIM) has persisted in its struggle for human rights and justice.

The American Indian Movement (AIM)

In 1964 and again in November 1969 Indigenous activists used wooden boats to occupy Alcatraz Island in the San Francisco Bay with the intention of turning it into a cultural center and university. Their occupation [lasted for 19 months](#) and brought national and international attention to the oppression of Indigenous peoples.

In 1970, members of AIM and United American Indians occupied Mount Rushmore to reclaim the sacred land that had been promised in perpetuity to the Oceti Sakowin (The Great Sioux Nation) in the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie.



Source: Darryl Dyck (Canadian Press)

On November 26, 1970, AIM activists occupied Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts and declared a National Day of Mourning on the very site that saw the beginning of British settler colonialism.

One of the most famous resistance actions was the 71-day occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973, led by members of AIM, on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Reservation. AIM members converged on the village where General George A. Custer perpetrated the Wounded Knee Massacre upon helpless people. Activist leader [Leonard Peltier](#) still languishes today in a federal penitentiary for his actions at Wounded Knee. Federal officials have refused him compassionate release despite his advanced age and compromised health.

The Longest Walk was the last major event of the Red Power movement. In 1978, several hundred Indigenous activists and supporters marched for five months from San Francisco to Washington, D.C. to protest threats to tribal lands and water rights.



Assistant U.S. Attorney General is escorted into Wounded Knee by Native Americans of AIM on March 13, 1973. (Source: Associated Press)

These and many other symbolic actions served to bring the systemic and persistent violations of Indigenous peoples' human rights into the public sphere.

Cultural resistance



Artist: T.C. Cannon, "Two Guns Arikara." (1973/1977)

One of the main forms of Indigenous resistance in 21st century USA is cultural. Indigenous people have organized and worked to regain their languages, customs and ways of living in a way that is sometimes a direct antidote to an oppressive capitalist system. Artists such as T.C. Cannon, a painter from Oklahoma, presented Indigenous people in a way that eschewed tokenism and emphasized the power and persistence of his people. His portrait "Two Guns Arikara" is one such image.

Activist Roberto Mendoza, a Mvskoke Creek man living in Tulsa, Oklahoma, talked about his earlier actions of resistance, including helping to organize the Alcatraz occupation, and being a leader of the San Francisco Bay Area AIM.

“Those actions, although they served to call attention to the atrocities that are still being committed against our people, did not change anything much,” Mr. Mendoza said. He explained that the Wounded Knee action was an armed rebellion in which a lot of people got killed. He decided to stop directly confronting U.S. power from a military basis and to start building communities that stand in clear opposition to capitalist and imperialist principles. His group, Cooperation Tulsa, is a coalition of Indigenous, Black, Latine and poor white people that operates on a collective, consensus model. They grow and distribute food, build housing for unsheltered people, collect and give away clothing and household goods and engage in other activities that serve the people’s needs. “The most important thing we’re doing is teaching Indigenous values,” Mendoza told us. He explained:

“We show people how to live without being capitalists, without exploiting other people or the Earth itself. We stress cooperation vs. competition. Community instead of individualism. Respect for the land. Giving back to the land in some way. And in doing this, we start chipping away at the oppressive system that robs all of us of our humanity.”

Standing Rock, one of the greatest acts of Indigenous resistance in this century, was an example of Indigenous values acting counter to capitalist exploitation. Mendoza explains:

“We not only stood in opposition to a pipeline that threatened our health and safety; we created a community in that place that was based upon a consensus model of decision making, which is the way our nations worked before colonization. Everyone worked, according to their talents and abilities. We provided our own food, shelter, medical care and entertainment. We made sure that nobody did without those things. We created a community for everyone there, of all races. And we stopped the pipeline for a while and made sure that the entire world knew how vicious, damaging and wrong it was for the government to build it across Native land.”



Standing Rock. Source: Rob Wilson

Rejecting tokenization

Few things are as demeaning as having yourself, your culture and your ancestors treated as tokens and exploited for the amusement and profit of others. This is the case when it comes to Indigenous peoples. The use of sacred or culturally significant names, images and features for sports teams, school mascots and tourist attractions is a profound insult to the people whose very lives are being misused in this way. The ultimate irony may be the use of Indigenous nations' names for U.S. military hardware used to wreak death and destruction upon other oppressed people. Tomahawk missiles, Apache, Cheyenne, Lakota, Chinook and other helicopters are just a few examples. The U.S. military has named at least 20 aircraft, helicopters and missiles after Indigenous nations and symbols.

Although Indigenous people have struggled for years to end the use of their symbols and names as school and sports mascots, there is considerable pushback. Many of the names remain, and many people persist in using "dead names" despite new, non-offensive names having replaced them.

How many Washingtonians still refer to “The (Red)Skins” instead of calling them The Commanders? How many young children still stick fake feathers in their hair and stomp around church gymnasiums all over the U.S., whooping and making tomahawk chop movements, as part of Boy Scout rituals? How many Indigenous children are forced to sit quietly in schools where their ancestors are reduced to a cartoon on a flag that’s waved during ball games and school assemblies?

The irony of misusing Indigenous people and symbols is sometimes overwhelming. The State Capitol building in Oklahoma features a statue of a Seminole man who is ostensibly guarding the state where his people and thousands of others were marched at gunpoint and made to occupy the lands of other Indigenous people during the Indian Removal of the 19th century.

The continued honoring of Columbus in official government circles and civic celebrations in the United States and elsewhere is in reality celebrating the genocide of Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples’ resistance to this form of disrespect and cultural appropriation is far more than a matter of political correctness. It is essential to the process of recognizing the fundamental human and civil rights of the people from whom this land was taken.

Movement for missing and murdered Indigenous peoples

One of the worst vestiges of settler colonialism is the ongoing violence perpetrated upon Indigenous peoples, particularly women, [two-spirit](#) people and young girls. This constitutes an epidemic of violence against Indigenous women in Canada, the United States and Latin America. They are murdered at a rate more than 10 times higher than any other demographic group. The FBI’s National Crime Information Center [reported](#) 5,203 missing Indigenous girls and women in 2021 – disappearing at a rate equal to [more than two and a half times](#) their estimated share of the U.S. population. Indigenous women are at least two times more likely to be victims of rape compared to white women.



Source: Kris Nagel (North Coast Journal)

Indigenous groups place that number far higher. This violence is partially due to the fact that non-Indigenous people cannot be prosecuted by tribal governments for crimes committed on tribal land, and local and state governments often choose not to prosecute perpetrators of violence upon Indigenous people.

Around 2016, Indigenous communities started organizing around the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous peoples. They started using the acronym MMIW (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women), and staging protests, die-ins and sit-ins at state capitols and law enforcement offices. They demanded that unsolved cases be followed up on and that laws be changed to prohibit prosecution of non-Native people by tribal courts. Much of this work was carried out by Indigenous women and two-spirit people.

Matriarch is an organization led by Indigenous women who share a common goal and commitment to empower other Indigenous women through education, community building and direct services to create positive change within their communities.

Matriarch unifies women from many different Indigenous nations and is creating the kind of power base that is increasing Indigenous representation in government and fostering real change. Sarah Adams-Cornell, one of the founding members of Matriarch, says:

"By empowering Indigenous women, we also empower our children and build leaders within our homes and communities. This leadership has a positive impact upon Indigenous lives, creates stronger communities and decreases rates of violence and abuse."

Solidarity with anti-colonial movements

The Black Lives Matter movement



Source: Annette Bernhardt (Flickr)

Indigenous peoples joined with African Americans and others to protest the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other Black and Brown people at the hands of police.

This echoes the roles that many Indigenous communities have historically played in giving shelter and citizenship to enslaved African people who managed to escape bondage – which was not only a humanitarian act but also an act of resistance to the intersected wrongs of colonialism and slavery.

Indigenous people are murdered by police at a rate higher than any other ethnic group, [according to](#) the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In streets throughout the land, Indigenous and Black people joined forces to demand an end to the extrajudicial murders of Native and African people by law enforcement.

Border wall resistance

Indigenous communities have been greatly affected by U.S. efforts to close the southern border. For many tribal nations, the border cut through their communities, isolating people who had been one united group by proclaiming that those north of the border were “Americans,” while those south of the border were “Mexicans.” From the California coast to the Gulf of Mexico and the Texas border, those imaginary lines drawn by European settlers have contributed to the oppression of Indigenous peoples who have occupied that land for thousands of years. As a result, many Indigenous communities have joined the struggle against militarization of the border and the border wall.



Source: Megan Jelinger (Getty Images)

In 2021, demonstrators from the O’odham Anti-Border Collective and Defend O’odham Jewed, a network of Akimel O’odham, Tohono O’odham and Hia-Ced O’odham activists, were at the center of recent demonstrations that blocked border

wall construction on ancestral tribal land across Central and Southern Arizona. The border wall would have blocked springs that are a rare source of fresh water in the Arizona desert. In other actions, Indigenous peoples living near the border also engage in rescue efforts for people crossing the border, such as providing water, shelter and transportation.

Defenders of the Earth

In fact, Indigenous resistors have been at the forefront of the struggle to protect the environment. From battles against pipelines to protests of offshore oil rigs and Cancer Alley petrochemical plants, Indigenous resistors have led the way. In the process of defending the planet, these activists have created alliances, forged political and social bonds, gained political power and changed the dialogue about the environment, economy and political processes, all while struggling against entrenched racism and the crushing forms of neglect and abuse heaped upon them by a system that values them only as tourist attractions.

Source: Jolanda Kirpensteijn

Indigenous peoples have protested pipelines; mining; drilling; mountaintop removal; encroachments on waterways and wetlands; degradation of air, soil and water quality; destruction of habitats; and the endangerment of many species, including our own.



Ongoing resistance

There are many ways to evince a warrior spirit. Taking up arms to defend your people and land is certainly one. The warrior spirits of ancient and contemporary Indigenous peoples take many forms. Resistance against oppression and efforts to create a more just and equitable world, and the defense and preservation of that world and all of its inhabitants, is a supreme act of resistance.

The acts of protecting, preserving, and passing on to future generations the languages, spirituality, and cultures of their peoples are acts of resistance. The struggle to end the tokenization of their peoples as mascots and tourist attractions is an act of resistance. The act of building businesses that funnel money into Indigenous families, communities, and nations is an act of resistance.

The act of joining in solidarity with Indigenous peoples across borders and throughout this hemisphere and the world is an act of resistance. The act of recognizing their common oppression with other BIPOC people in this nation and globally is an act of resistance.

The act of building political power and autonomy by tribal governments and growing participation in local, state and federal governments is an act of resistance. The act of creating schools that teach and nurture their young in the ways of their ancestors and providing them with the tools for success in contemporary life are acts of resistance.

Source: Josue Foto (Amplifier)

The countless acts of resistance to oppression are acts of resistance. The acts of fierce and steadfast resistance to the destruction of our environment are acts of resistance.



The simple act of thriving, growing, becoming strong and living despite 530 years of genocidal oppression being committed against Indigenous peoples is resistance in its most profound and abiding form. Indigenous resistance started with the first incursions of settler colonists in this hemisphere. It will persist as long as oppression, degradation and exploitation of the planet and its inhabitants continue.

Part 4: Labor exploitation & the repression of workers' rights



Source: Alliance for Global Justice

Overview

As the force that keeps society moving, the organized labor movement in the United States has been targeted in every way since its inception. Today, the movement is small (comprising just 10% of the total workforce), it's frayed, and has faced insurmountable pushback from corporations. There are many reasons why unions have struggled to stay afloat. Organizing workers doesn't come naturally or easily within the confines of the our repressive political apparatus. However, things *are* changing. As extreme economic inequality continues to multiply, so has the recognition among working people that unions, and union organizing, provide a safety net and protection from human rights violations in and outside of the workplace.

Throughout 2021, strikes and campaigns for unions spread fervently across the U.S. If 2021 taught workers anything, it's that the owners and regulators of production will continue to betray them as long as profit-making and the exploitation it necessitates remains foundational to economic production.

The confluence of late capitalism and COVID-19 has magnified issues already well on their way, chiefly the hyper-exploitation of blue collar “essential workers”, the gig economy labor force and undocumented workers without legal protection by mega corporations that cashed in on the pandemic.

Corporate profiteers and their allies in government know they're in violation of the rights inherent to all humans and workers. The rights owed to workers are unrecognizable in today's workforce. The ongoing, systemic and far-reaching violations of workers' rights attests to the foundational role of class oppression in most human rights violations. It brings to the forefront the struggle for collective liberation of all poor and working people and the importance of building a stronger and more unified labor force capable of transforming class relations in the U.S.

This section analyzes case studies of present-day labor struggles and the movement to advance workers' human rights in the United States:

- **Labor organizing in the United States in 2022: confronting the anti-union, anti-worker corporate agenda** illustrates the state of labor exploitation and efforts to quell union organizing in the United States in 2022, drawing from the victories and struggles of the organized Amazon labor movement, the United Mine Workers of America (UMW) and California gig workers.

Violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- **Article 1:** that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights
- **Article 2:** that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, class or gender
- **Article 3:** that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security
- **Article 5:** that no one should be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

- **Article 6:** that everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law
- **Article 7:** that all are equal before the law and entitled without discrimination to equal protection of the law
- **Article 10:** that everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing in the determination of their civil rights and obligations
- **Article 12:** that no one should be subject to arbitrary interference with their privacy, family, home or correspondence
- **Article 16:** that everyone has the right to found a family, and that the family is the most fundamental unit of society that is entitled to protection by the state
- **Article 22:** that everyone has the right to social security and the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable to their dignity and the full realization of their human development
- **Article 23:** that everyone has the right to employment, equal pay and economic conditions sufficient for a dignified existence
- **Article 24:** that everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including the reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay
- **Article 25:** that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of themselves and their families, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, social services and security in case of loss of livelihood caused by circumstances out of their control

Violations of international human rights treaties

- The **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** establishes a universal framework for the protection and preservation of the most basic economic, social and cultural rights inherent to all human beings, including the right to work in just and favorable conditions, to social protection, to an adequate standard of living and to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health. The United States has not ratified this treaty.
- The **Declaration on the Right to Development** protects the inalienable human right of every person to participate in, contribute to and enjoy the economic, social, cultural and political development in which all human rights can be fully realized. The declaration affirms the right of all people, as the creators of wealth, to enjoy equal benefits of development. It has been **vocally opposed** by the United States.

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- The **International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families** establishes a universal framework of minimal standards for protecting the rights of migrant workers and their families, with a focus on eliminating the exploitation of workers in the migration process. The treaty has been signed and ratified by a number states, most in the Global South, the United States not being one of them.

Labor organizing in the U.S. in 2022: confronting the anti-union, anti-worker corporate agenda

May 1, 2022



Source: Katelyn Petrin (St. Louis Public Radio)

By Maya Hernández (National Co-Coordinator)

This past year, profit-over-people ideology and anti-union efforts were particularly prevalent in sectors that demanded the most labor. Millions of dollars went into campaigns to stop union organizing at the same time that several anti-worker policies passed into effect, painting a grim future for workers across the United States. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) is the single most important federal entity where workers can supposedly go for legal protection. In recent years, particularly following the Trump Administration's maneuvering, pro-corporate appointees and anti-labor judges have taken over the NLRB.

Late capitalism has exposed the drastic inequalities inherent to our neoliberal economy. While mega billionaires got richer from the demands created by COVID millions in the U.S. suffered excessive levels of debt, unemployment, poverty and overwhelming loss.

These are clear violations of people's human rights – all the while, corporations' anti-worker agenda continues to charge powerfully forward.

This past year in labor set a concerning precedent for the future of workers across the country. The union-busting and structural policy changes that have taken place are on track to pressure unions to prioritize the interests of their employers over the rights of workers. The power of corporations over working people is being cemented into policy as we speak to further promote the exploitation of workers and obstruction of unionizing efforts. Our only way out is for workers to gear up for the fight of their lives to push back against these building blocks of corporate interest.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics' [2021 report](#) revealed the effectiveness of corporate anti-union tactics. The report showed [241,000 fewer union members](#) than the previous year, which means just one in 10 workers is part of a union. In the private sector, it's one in 16. Without a sturdy base, unions are no match for the union-busting strategies of their employers.

Labor exploitation & union-busting: the case of Amazon



Source: William Thorntown (AL.com)

Amazon, often referred to as the white whale of the labor movement, is among the most notorious union-busters today. Still, when an Amazon warehouse opened in Bessemer, Alabama in 2020, it took a little under a year for workers to push for a union election. Among their reports were descriptions of abusive productivity expectations across the frenzy-filled pandemic summer. The Amazon behemoth is the world's fourth-most-valuable company, and Jeff Bezos, its founder, is one of the world's richest people.

Amazon employs a little over a million people and is the top American e-commerce platform. It's an example of what a successful business model looks like in the 21st century. It's also a temperature check for labor conditions today.

As fundamentally anti-worker and pro-capital, Amazon's priority is first and foremost to maximize worker productivity and minimize labor costs, which is done by tracking its workers' every movement. In Bessemer, Alabama, Amazon touts paying workers double the minimum wage, which in the state is \$7.25, but workers still struggle to meet the demands of their industry let alone get their basic needs met. Until this past year, little public attention was paid to the working conditions fostered by Amazon. The Bessemer Amazon workers changed the name of the game by calling attention to the drastic conditions they're expected to work under. Workers revealed [urinating in bottles while on their shift](#) because they don't have time to use the bathroom. This goes beyond inhumanity and points to the lengths that Amazon will go to in order to control workers and guarantee rapid fulfillments.

The worker-led unionizing campaign that arose at the end of the summer sparked a lot of attention because it was in the South and because organizing within Amazon was unexpected. Immediately following the announcement that workers would push to unionize their warehouse, Amazon shot back with an anti-union campaign, employing several aggressive tactics to discourage unionization. This included hiring the anti-union law firm [Morgan, Lewis & Bockius](#), forcing employees to sit through mandatory meetings that emphasized the company's anti-union position, anti-union signage such as "Vote No" signs in bathrooms and pestering workers while in the workplace.

The "just and favorable" working conditions defended in Article 23 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR) are far from represented at the Amazon Warehouse in Bessemer. And yet, organizing workers to fight union-busting has proven incredibly difficult. Though Amazon workers are still in the process of pushing to unionize the Bessemer warehouse, their severe working conditions have not decreased.

Neither has the union-busting for that matter. Targeting workers from the most in-demand sectors ensures that millions of workers remain submissive to their employer's control.

The sustained anti-union agenda



Source: Brendan McDermid (Reuters)

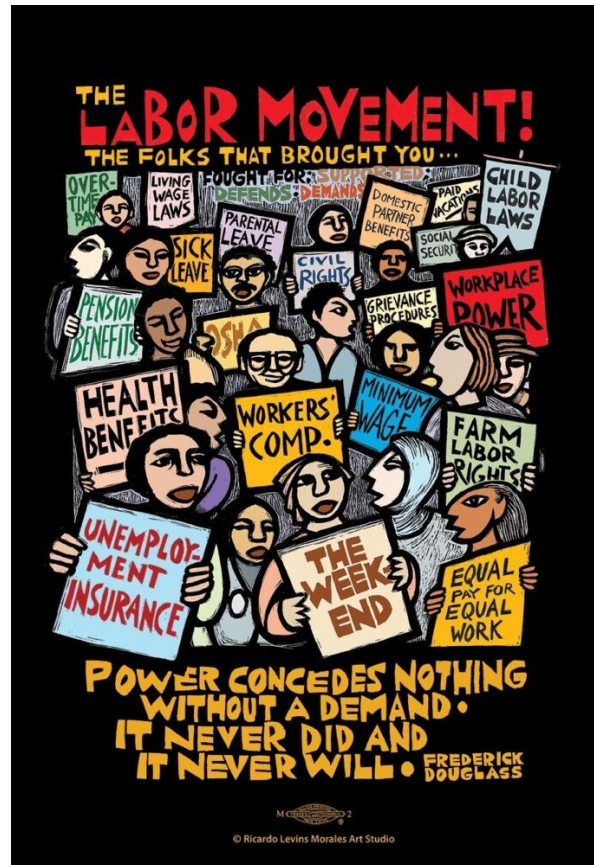
Efforts to quell union organizing are not only prevalent in newer work sectors; in fact, one of the longest strikes of 2021 featured workers from a coal mine in Brookwood, Alabama. On April 1st, 2021, 1,100 union coal miners in Brookwood, Alabama [began striking](#) against the unjust labor practices headed by Warrior Met Coal. Mining in Alabama dates back to the 19th century. The miners at Warrior Met who carry on that history of working under grueling conditions with long-lasting effects on their health and physical well-being are demanding a new and fair contract that includes better pay and more time off.

Warrior Met Coal is a multi-million-dollar coal mining company. It was founded to buy the assets of Walter Energy after it declared bankruptcy in 2015. Workers took on cuts to wages and benefits in the aftermath, promised to regain their income and then some once the company regained solvency.

The United Mine Workers of America (UMW) have calculated that as per their agreement with Warrior Met, miners are owed over [\\$1.1 billion](#) in pay and other benefits.

Artist: Ricardo Levins Morales

In 2021, Warrior Met Coal reported a net income of [\\$150.9 million](#). Last December the company hired the firm Sitrick and Company to improve its public image. One of its tactics was to launch a smear campaign against the miners by feeding stories to the press that described the miners as lawless and violent. At the same time, multiple miners who were striking were hit by cars and trucks driven by company employees while they were on the picket lines. Warrior Met's publicity team also created a [Twitter account](#) called WarriorMetCoalFacts that includes videos and written posts painting miners in a bad light while uplifting the image of the company.



The unionists have been on strike for over 10 months. This has presented many financial struggles for the miners and their families, and they have seen little to no headway or success. The [human right](#) to fair payment, to equal pay for equal work, is not being realized by any means. At Warrior Met Coal, workers are permitted to unionize, but their union is not respected, nor is it protected from attacks by its employer. These are clear violations of workers' human rights.

Exploitation & repression of gig workers

Workers for food delivery services and rideshare drivers for billion-dollar corporations like Uber, Lyft, and GrubHub were in high demand this past year.

They were also some of the most neglected workers to date, regularly robbed of their most basic human rights. [The onset of the gig economy](#) has normalized short-term labor contracts that disallow unionizing, paid time off, hazard pay and other significant benefits. Short-term labor contracts and the hiring of workers as independent contractors lets corporations sidestep nearly all of the responsibility and cost that is fundamental to protecting employees. It essentially dismisses corporations from being held accountable for overworking their workers.

The gig economy's normalization of protocols that violate workers' best interest and dismiss their right to protest against such protocols is disturbing and sets a concerning precedent for the future of labor law. Any employer that withholds the right to a safe and dignified work environment is violating workers' fundamental human rights. Gig workers are prevented from organizing themselves, another tactic aimed at undermining their autonomy.

Anti-worker policy-making

In addition to the union-busting and anti-worker organizing by corporations, we've seen a strategic effort to cement anti-worker policies within the structural framework of today's labor force. Once those policies become part of labor law, violations against the rights of workers become next to impossible to regulate. One such example of a policy pushed forth in 2021 was California's [Proposition 22](#).

In a win for Californian gig workers, lawmakers passed the [Assembly Bill 5](#) (AB5) that re-classified gig workers as employees in 2020. The legislation meant that gig companies could no longer classify their workers as independent contractors. If gig workers were required by law to be hired as employees and not contractors, then these companies would have to increase their expenses to accommodate employer-paid insurance, unemployment insurance, severance and reimbursements for fuel and other job-related costs. The reclassification of gig workers as employees would obliterate the gig economy's business model.

Immediately following the legislation announcement, Uber and Lyft, among other app-based companies, launched a \$200 million campaign to support the [Prop 22](#) ballot initiative, which would exclude them from that law. Their campaign included “Vote Yes” ads that told voters consumer prices would rise and that drivers would suffer if the initiative did not pass. Their campaign was successful; the measure passed, and [all gig companies in California raised their prices](#) regardless of what they had previously promised voters.

The Prop 22 ballot measure allows corporations like Uber to continue exploiting workers as independent contractors. It also incentivized businesses such as the California grocery chain, Albertsons, to lay off their in-house unionized delivery drivers and hire DoorDash contractors instead. [According to](#) Idrian Mollaneda from the California Law Review, “Proposition 22, financed almost entirely by gig companies, is a case study in how businesses can purchase new laws.” The win for gig companies in California will likely have a ripple effect across the country, a very concerning prospect for workers who will need to fight even harder to resist this policy-making agenda.

Victories of the labor movement



Source: Alejandro Durán (The City)

The [PRO Act](#) is the most important and encouraging policy to be introduced to labor law in a long time – maybe ever, when considering the contemporary issues of the gig economy. If passed, the PRO Act would provide significant labor protections for all workers and restrictions against labor [misclassification](#). The PRO Act would also strengthen unions, protect the right to strike and protect digital organizing.

While passing the PRO Act should continue to be an immediate priority, it certainly isn't enough to transform labor relations in the U.S. Furthermore, it's unlikely that the PRO Act will become law any time soon, considering the excessive lobbying power that corporations have to dictate legislation. Only an organized labor force can fundamentally shape policy outcomes and the conditions of workers in the U.S.

This past March, following two years of organizing, [workers at an Amazon warehouse on Staten Island voted to unionize](#) and become part of the Amazon Labor Union (ALU), a historic and monumental win for the e-commerce labor movement and one of the largest labor forces in the world. Immediately following this landmark win, unionization efforts at other Amazon locations in New York City began snowballing. The success of this worker-led struggle against the Amazon behemoth carries important stakes for the future – most notably, the question of whether workers' ability to build a revolutionary labor movement is possible.

We need all-hands-on-deck, worker-led organizing. We need motivated unionizing efforts to continue. We need consistent worker-to-worker solidarity. And we need voters to read the legislation and advocate for policies that will uplift workers' rights. The issues workers are confronting today have nothing on the issues workers will confront in the coming years if we don't resist the institutionalization of corporate agendas that undermine workers' rights, democratize our labor force and build working class power from the bottom up.

Part 5: The struggle for disability rights



Source: Alliance for Global Justice

Overview

Approximately [40.7 million people](#) in the United States and more than [one billion people](#), or 15% of the world's population, lead self-affirming lives and define themselves above and beyond what others may term their disability. In fact, the term “disability” is laden with factual, prejudicial, and emotional baggage that serves to further marginalize the people to whom it is applied. Regardless of the stigma and alienation they face, people who are differently abled share the same human rights as everyone else.

Since the mid-1900s, people with disabilities have pushed for their basic human rights. These include the recognition of disability or divergence as an aspect of identity that influences the experiences of an individual, not as the sole-defining feature of a person.

They also include their rights to education, housing, employment, medical care, and accommodations in both the public and private spheres.

The ongoing struggle for social, cultural, economic and political rights in the disabled community reflects the blatant and systemic disregard for human life that permeates U.S. policies and institutions and violates the most foundational tenet of human rights: that all are born free and equal. The systemic exclusion and oppression of people with disabilities in capitalist societies such as the U.S. is compounded by its foundations in white supremacist, patriarchal and classist constructions of inherent superiority weaponized to dehumanize entire groups of people and legitimize their oppression. That supremacist ideology made its way back into mainstream discourse around the late 19th century with the [birth of the eugenics movement in the U.S.](#) and its special targeting of people with disabilities.

It should come as no surprise that many differently abled people remain more likely to experience adverse economic outcomes, prejudice and discrimination; and for people who are already marginalized by their race, gender, ethnicity, or poverty, being differently abled than others diminishes their opportunities to live life to its fullest. The law allows them to be paid less than minimum wage, while their employers reap the benefits of what amounts to slave labor.

This section examines the struggle for inclusion and overwhelming marginalization that characterizes the struggle for disability rights in the United States:

- [Speaking of disability](#) introduces readers to the lived experiences of people with disabilities under capitalism as “a daily confrontation with society and its prejudices.”
- [Disability rights are human rights – and they affect ALL of us](#) explores the intersecting struggles of people with disabilities against profound human rights violations compounded by race, class, homelessness, police violence and mass incarceration.

Violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- **Article 1:** that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights
- **Article 2:** that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as disability
- **Article 3:** that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security
- **Article 4:** that no one should be held in slavery or servitude
- **Article 5:** that no one should be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
- **Article 6:** that everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law
- **Article 7:** that all are equal before the law and entitled without discrimination to equal protection of the law
- **Article 13:** that everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within a state
- **Article 16:** that everyone has the right to found a family, and that the family is the most fundamental unit of society that is entitled to protection by the state
- **Article 21:** that everyone has the right to political participation in their country, directly or through freely chosen representatives; that everyone has the right to equal access to public services in their country; and that the will of the people should be the basis of the authority of government as expressed through periodic elections and universal suffrage
- **Article 22:** that everyone has the right to social security and the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable to their dignity and the full realization of their human development
- **Article 23:** that everyone has the right to employment, equal pay and economic conditions sufficient for a dignified existence
- **Article 24:** that everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including the reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay
- **Article 25:** that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of themselves and their families, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and social services

- **Article 26:** that everyone has the right to an education and the full realization of their human development
- **Article 27:** that everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancements and its benefits

Violations of international human rights treaties

- The **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** establishes a universal framework for the protection and preservation of the most basic economic, social and cultural rights inherent to all human beings, including the right to work in just and favorable conditions, to social protection, to an adequate standard of living, to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, to education and to the enjoyment and benefits of cultural freedom. The United States has not ratified this treaty.
- The **Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment** prohibits torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The treaty requires states to take legislative, administrative and judicial measures to prevent such acts from taking place during activities that often target people with disabilities, such as arbitrary arrests, detentions and incarcerations, as well as in the training of police (civil or military) and other officials involved in the arrest, detention or interrogation.
- The **Declaration on the Right to Development** protects the inalienable human right of every person to participate in, contribute to and enjoy the economic, social, cultural and political development in which all human rights can be fully realized. The declaration affirms the right of all people, as the creators of wealth, to enjoy equal benefits of development. It has been **vocally opposed** by the United States.
- The **Convention on the Rights of Child**, the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history not ratified by the United States, establishes a universal framework for the protection and advancement of the rights of children to grow, learn, play, develop and flourish with dignity. It affirms the responsibility of the state to protect children by ensuring that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for their care and protection conform with acceptable standards of safety and health necessary for the full realization of their human development.

- The **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** is known as the “first comprehensive human rights treaty of the 21st century” to protect and ensure the full and equal access of all people with disabilities to their fundamental human rights, widely recognized by the international community. The United States has not ratified this treaty.

Speaking of disability

September 27, 2022



Source: Philosophographlux (Flickr)

By William Camacaro (National Co-Coordinator)

One of the most offensive expressions used to talk about people with disabilities is the term “handicapped.” Author David Mikkelsen [describes](#) the origin of the word:

“In 1504, after a brutal war in England, King Henry VII had an idea. King Henry knew that the war had left his country with a large number of disabled veterans. He proclaimed that begging in the streets is legal for people with disabilities. So into the streets, with their ‘cap in hand’, went King Henry’s disabled veterans, to beg for money.”

In other words, cap in hand refers to “beggars,” a term often used to describe people perceived to hold no value in society.

Around the beginning of the 20th century the word “handicapped” became solely and exclusively used to describe people with physical and mental disabilities.

While the term “handicapped” continues to lose validity, today we still see “handicapped” parking permits, “handicapped” toilets, “handicapped” dating sites, “handicapped” seats, “handicapped” apartments, “handicapped” hotels, “handicapped” vans – the list goes on.

It’s important to use language that reflects the dignity, respect and human rights every being is entitled to. There is a growing movement to rethink disability. As many now say, “we see true ability where others only see disability.” As my colleague James Jordan [says](#), the language is evolving. Nonetheless, the harsh realities people with disabilities experience in their marginalization, exploitation and oppression remain the same. That will not change until we rethink the way we treat people with disabilities.

The marginalization of people with disabilities in capitalist societies such as the U.S. [is expressed in different ways at work](#): lower labor participation rates, very high unemployment rates, high temporary employment rates and low wages. Discrimination against people with disabilities [remains a common practice](#): one can be denied a job simply because they require a more expensive medical service, because they need special physical equipment, or because they don’t have the technological aid necessary to do their job.

In the book *Capitalism and Disability* author Marta Russell paints the stark reality of people with disabilities. Disabled people are nearly three times as likely to live below the current poverty line: 29% live in poverty, compared to 10% of non-disabled people. At least one third of adults with disabilities in the U.S. live in households with annual incomes of less than \$15,000, [according to](#) the Disability Funders Network. [Around 800 million](#) disabled adults living in so-called “developing” nations exist in abject poverty, with little employment opportunities and usually no social safety nets to fall back on.

Poverty can bring other elements of suffering such as depression, homelessness, loneliness and mental health issues. Capitalist society maintains a permanent war against people with disabilities that leads many to dead ends.

In my personal experience, I can testify that people with disabilities are among the most discriminated against in society. A disabled person can be discriminated against by people of all races, ethnicities, genders, nationalities, sexual orientations or other identity markers. Years ago I won a prize from the Latin American Poetry Institute of New York. Some people asked me what I'd done to win the award, as if it was impossible for me to be recognized for my talents. There are people who ask me if I've ever been in a relationship. I married a woman who worked as a doctor at a hospital in New York and we lived happily together for ten years until we divorced. The questions inevitably arose. "How could you marry such a woman?" "Was it because you couldn't function as a partner?"

The life of people with disabilities is a daily confrontation with society and its prejudices. We are people first, and we do the same things as everyone else. We enjoy life, we make friends, we fall in love, we embrace our strengths and talents, we pursue our hopes and dreams and we contend with life's hardships. We're human beings like everyone else and we need to be treated as equals.



Source: The Daily Californian

Disability rights are human rights – and they affect ALL of us

April 22, 2022



Source: Laundry Workers Center United

By James Patrick Jordan (National Co-Coordinator)

Talking about disability

Language matters, and in the case of people with disabilities, it matters a lot. Ableism, exclusion, and misconceptions are held up by a foundation of words that are still abundant in U.S. society. The very concept of “ability” is a continuum that varies from person to person and, in fact, varies greatly through the life of any one individual as they make their journey from cradle to grave.

The idea of “people with disabilities” refers to such a broad swath of people that it borders on being ridiculous, lumping those with blindness, those with a learning disability, those who use wheelchairs, those suffering bipolar disorders, those with hearing problems – all into one category.

The reality is that many would describe what most call “disabilities” as “traits,” and in some cases, these traits are binding components for specific and vibrant cultures. For instance, there is a [deaf culture](#) built around shared language, experience, and creative expression, a culture defined by its richness and diversity. Fundamentally, we are all people with abilities, and those abilities are what best define us. While recognizing the validity of this position regarding the broad category of disability, for the sake of this article we will accept and talk about disabilities less to categorize the peoples concerned than to identify and discuss the categories of human rights abuses against those perceived as living with disabilities. The struggle for the basic human rights of people with disabilities is a struggle for inclusion.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there are [61 million people](#) in the United States who are living with disabilities, a rate of 26% of the national population. Looking at it from another angle, one out of four persons in this country is living with a disability.

People with disabilities endure multiple forms of oppression

There is a high correlation between human rights abuses towards people with disabilities and racism. [African Americans in the U.S. have the highest rate of disabilities](#) of any other group. People with disabilities are victims of police shootings, incarceration and homelessness [at higher rates](#) than the rest of society. People of color with disabilities are literally the [most likely](#) persons to be shot and killed by the police.

Ableism is a form of privilege and source of oppression that is so ubiquitous it is widely tolerated and frequently goes unnoticed. Ableism has a close relationship with the racial and class oppression that has driven and defined so much of the history of the United States.

People with disabilities are generally the most vulnerable to a series of social ills, for instance, [pollution and climate change](#). Industrial contamination has been [shown to impact](#) prenatal development, and air pollution has been [linked to](#) the development of intellectual disabilities. The scourge of war has resulted in the maiming, both physically and mentally, of thousands and thousands of young people sent off to fight for the barons of industry.

Disability & class

As workers, [according to](#) a study published by the Pew Research Center, “those with a disability earned a median of \$21,572 in 2015, less than 70% of the median earnings for those without a disability (\$31,872), according to the Census Bureau. Both figures are for the civilian, non-institutionalized population ages 16 and older, measured in earnings over the past 12 months.”

Many workers with disabilities are [victims of extreme exploitation](#), working in what are called “sheltered workshops” and training programs for fractions of the minimum wage. This exploitation takes place with the approval and support of the United States government and therefore constitutes a clear violation of human and labor rights. Rabbi Ruti Regan of the direct action disability right group ADAPT writes:

“There is a lot of money to be made in exploiting people with disabilities[...]

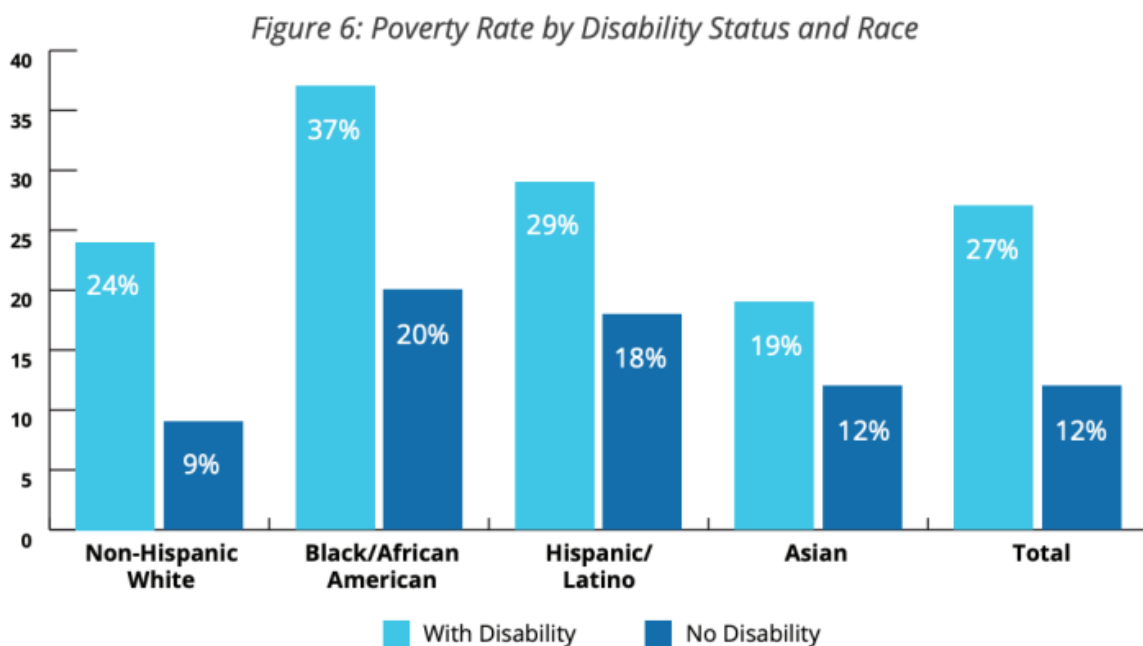
For example, Goodwill Industries (among many others) notoriously takes advantage of Section 14(c), a 1930s era provision in the Fair Labor Standards Act that allows so-called sheltered workshops, work centers that only employ disabled people, to pay disabled workers less than minimum wage. While their executives make six-figure salaries, [they pay thousands of employees with disabilities less than anyone else](#), and some as little as pennies an hour, for their work.

But ‘sheltered workshops’ also receive funding from the government. Workshops receive funding from Medicaid to ‘train’ disabled workers for real jobs, but only approximately [five percent](#) ever leave for work in the community. Such ‘training’ programs often keep disabled workers in their work centers for years or even decades; workshops are most reluctant to give up the most productive disabled workers for community employment.”

Disability & race

Workers with disabilities who are people of color are triply oppressed. A study by the National Disability Institute [tells us](#):

"The poverty rate for adults with disabilities is more than twice the rate of adults with no disability (27% compared with 12%) [Figure 6]. The relationship between disability and poverty is complicated. People with disabilities are more likely to become impoverished and people living in poverty are more likely to have or acquire a disability. Disability causes poverty because people with disabilities may be excluded from the workforce, have limited educational opportunities or face institutional barriers that restrict their earnings. [...] Almost 40% of African Americans with disabilities live in poverty, compared with 24% of non-Hispanic whites, 29% of Latinos and 19% of Asians [Figure 6]."



Source: American Community Survey, 2015

Nearly 6 million African heritage people in the U.S. are living with disabilities and have the highest rate of disabilities of all other segments of the U.S. population. Indigenous peoples have the [highest disability rate among people of traditional working ages](#). Angel Love Miles [explains](#):

“The history, implications, and function of ableism in the Black community are different than in the white community or other communities of color. Hence, ableism is a culturally specific, historically contextual phenomenon. African Americans’ disability is largely constructed in relationship to the history of slavery, Jim Crow, and the racist violence associated with them. This history includes [medical](#), scientific, and labor exploitation as well as the overall othering of Black bodies. These practices and the beliefs that informed them produce disabilities and health disparities in our communities. Today, African Americans continue to experience higher rates and worse consequences of disabilities. These include being more likely than their white counterparts to be further segregated in special education, placed in the prison industrial complex, or worse, killed by the police or otherwise institutionalized as a consequence of their disability. African Americans also tend to benefit less from disability policy even though they have the greatest needs. For these reasons and more, Black people experience disability as not only limiting in the conventional ways it is assumed to be, but also as a reminder of racist oppression and/or as perceived evidence of racial inferiority. Hence disability in the Black community is as much born out of racist, class, gender, and other systems of oppression, as it is a natural part of the human experience.”

People with intellectual & mental disabilities are especially targeted

A segment of the population of people with disabilities that is especially targeted and discriminated against are those with intellectual disabilities and persistent and chronic mental and emotional traumas. Discrimination and misunderstanding of people with these conditions is historic. The closure of total institutions by the Reagan Administration meant that many were cast out with literally nowhere to go. [This contributed to](#) a rise in homelessness and the criminalization of those with mental illnesses. While deinstitutionalization was needed, it was accompanied by deep cuts in social services, including all aspects of healthcare and disability services. These cuts helped the Reagan administration to prioritize nuclear weapons production and the start of a new arms race. Many persons with intellectual disabilities and mental illnesses became homeless, and others entered into a new system of private “care” that garnered profits for owners, where workers were paid low wages and received inadequate training, depleting resources for basic care. That is still the dominant system to this day.

Homelessness & housing discrimination

The problem of homelessness, mental illnesses and other disabilities is misunderstood by much of the general public. Heidi Schultheis [notes](#):

“Coupled with deinstitutionalization, the nation’s growing affordable housing crisis has exacerbated conditions for people with mental health disabilities who experience homelessness. The leading cause of homelessness is a [lack of affordable housing](#). Therefore, the key to ending homelessness for virtually all populations – with and without disabilities – is affordable, accessible, permanent housing. Yet with [climbing rents](#), stagnant wages, and shrinking public housing stock and project-based subsidies, affordable housing is [becoming harder](#) to find. And for people with disabilities, the situation is even more dire because affordable and accessible units are in [shorter supply](#).”

[According to](#) the study The State of Homelessness in the U.S. – 2022 by Smiljanic Stasha, 38.6% of the homeless population have disabilities, and 25% have mental illnesses. [Only 48%](#) of the homeless population are white and 39.8% are Black, [compared with](#) just over 60% of the general population that are non-Hispanic white, versus a Black population of 13.4%.

Closely related to the issue of homelessness, we find that [55% of complaints](#) about housing discrimination regard people with disabilities. One of the reasons [cited](#) for this is that “many apartments – even newly constructed ones – do not meet accessibility requirements and landlords have been known to refuse reasonable accommodations or modifications[...].”

Common crimes, hate crimes & the three categories of human rights violations

Violations of human rights fall into three categories, and all such violations are, by definition, ultimately attributable to the state, the institution that is responsible for protecting the human rights of a nation’s population, and the institution that can systemically impede those rights.

The three ways in which the State violates human rights are: 1) directly, through the active commission of human rights violations; 2) indirectly, by the encouragement of proxy actors, such as paramilitaries, para-police or hate groups who in some way perceive a green light to commit violations from those in positions of political power, or include state actors in their membership, or some way collaborate with State officials; and, 3) via neglect and the failure to protect human rights. We can discern all these aspects regarding people with disabilities, but nowhere are these so brutally apparent as in the areas of crime, punishment and the criminal justice system. When we look at the entire spectrum of criminal justice, we find that in virtually every possible way, people with disabilities are marked for violence and punishment.

According to a study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, from 2017-2019:

- People with disabilities were victims of 26% of all nonfatal violent crime, while accounting for about 12% of the population.
- The rate of violent victimization against people with disabilities (46.2 per 1,000 age 12 or older) was almost four times the rate for persons without disabilities (12.3 per 1,000).
- One in three robbery victims (33%) had at least one disability.
- People with cognitive disabilities had the highest rate of violent victimization (83.3 per 1,000) among the disability types measured.
- 19% of rapes or sexual assaults against people with disabilities were reported to police, compared to 36% of those against persons without disabilities.

Kaira Alfonseca [points out](#), “the data shows that from 2017-2019 disabled people accounted for 26% of nonfatal violent crimes, even though they make up only 12% of the population and are victims of violence at almost four times the rate of non-disabled people.”

People with disabilities are frequently the objects of hate crimes. Since 1997, hate crimes against those with disabilities [have risen ten-fold](#). Since 2016, when [70 cases were reported](#), there has been some fluctuation in reported hate crimes, according to FBI statistics. In 2018, the number [rose sharply to 177](#) compared to 128 reported in 2017. In 2019, the number of reported cases [dropped slightly to 169](#), and [dropped again in 2020](#), to 83.

These counts, however, do not provide a clear picture, and the data maintained by the FBI is compromised. Hate crimes [frequently go underreported](#) because of the hesitancy of victims and lack of training of police officers in the area. [There is no uniform system of reporting hate crimes](#), and many law enforcement bodies do not submit data to the FBI.

Hate crimes, by themselves, as terrible as they are, are not considered human rights abuses if they are committed by individuals or groups that are not in collaboration with or encouraged by state actors. But the candidacy and presidency of Donald Trump provide a vivid example of how a political leader can [encourage prejudice and violence](#). *The Washington Post* [reported](#) that “hate crimes rose the day after Trump was elected.” The FBI reported a [20% increase in hate crimes](#) during the Trump Administration. Within this context, we must consider the increase in these hate crimes as human rights abuses by proxies as they are encouraged by those with political power. Perhaps the most notorious and disgusting example of this is when then-candidate Trump [publicly mocked a reporter with disabilities](#).

Police violence against people with disabilities

People with disabilities are disproportionately the victims of police violence and abuse. [Nearly half](#) of all those killed by police are people with disabilities. For Black persons with disabilities, the issue is compounded. [According to](#) Vilissa Thompson, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress:

“Freddie Gray, Laquan MacDonald, Kevin Matthews, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Charleena Lyles, Sandra Bland, Quintonio LeGrier, Stephon Watts, Korryn Gaines, Natasha McKenna, Eric Smith, and Daniel Prude are all Black, disabled victims of state violence. In the United States, 50% of people killed by law enforcement are disabled, and [more than half of disabled African Americans](#) have been arrested by the time they turn 28 – double the risk in comparison to their white disabled counterparts[...].”

To learn more about what civil rights a person with a disability is entitled to during an arrest, you can visit the resource guide [“What to do if a Family Member or Friend Has Been Arrested.”](#)

Mass incarceration & capital punishment target people with disabilities

The prevalence of people with disabilities in the U.S. system of mass incarceration is further evidence of systemic disregard for those with disabilities, both in terms of incarceration rates and the poor services and neglect they encounter once behind bars. Nearly [two out of five \(38%\)](#) of those held in state and federal facilities are living with disabilities. In 2017, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) reported:

“Although comprehensive data on the number of prisoners with physical disabilities in jails, prisons and detention centers across the nation are currently unavailable, as many as [26%](#) of state prisoners report possessing a mobility, hearing, or visual disability, according to one 2003 estimate. When cognitive disabilities and disabilities that limit a prisoner’s ability for self-care are included, the proportion of prisoners with physical disabilities in prisons and jails [increases](#) to 32% and 40%, respectively. Moreover, as the prison population ages, reports indicate the number of prisoners living with physical disabilities in American prisons will increase significantly.

Despite these known facts, prisoners with physical disabilities are often denied the services they are entitled to under the law.”

Prisoners in the United States’ carceral system are not only living with disabilities – they are dying with them. The death penalty is the State’s ultimate human rights violation. David Perry [reports](#) in the Pacific Standard:

“We know, though, that a high percentage of prisoners are disabled, especially on death row. A recent American Civil Liberties Union report on the abuse of physically disabled prisoners [estimates](#) that 30% of all state and federal prisoners, and 40% of all local prisoners, have at least one disability. [...]

A 2014 study in the Hastings Law Journal examining the social histories of the last 100 Americans to be executed [found](#) ‘that the overwhelming majority of executed offenders suffered from intellectual impairments, were barely into adulthood, wrestled with severe mental illness, or endured profound childhood trauma. Most executed offenders fell into two or three of these core mitigation areas, all which are characterized by significant intellectual and psychological deficits.’”

Sadly, as one might expect, the problem is even worse for Black persons with disabilities on death row. The Death Penalty Information Center [reports](#) that of 130 cases they reviewed that were overturned due to disability issues, 80% involved people of color. The report goes on to say, “two-thirds of the intellectually disabled defendants sentenced to death are African American (87, or 66.4%); 19.1% (25) are white; 13.7% (18) are Latinx; and one (0.8%) is Asian. Eleven (8.4%) are foreign nationals[...].”

The effects of war & militarism



Source: [Murphy.house.gov](https://www.murphy.house.gov)

There is a strong correlation between U.S. militarism and the treatment of those with disabilities. The military-industrial complex contributes significantly to the kinds of contamination already referred to as a root cause of the development of disabilities. Also already mentioned is the effects of a federal government that prioritizes military expenditures over social services.

We must consider the degree to which U.S. wars and proxy wars contribute to the prevalence of disabilities around the world. An example of this is the first invasion of and war against Iraq, followed by more than 10 years of sanctions. During that war, the United States deliberately bombed water purification centers and littered Iraq with depleted uranium shells. Sanctions prevented the repair of the water system and the importation of necessary nutritional and medical supplies.

The result was a huge spike in children born underweight with birth defects and the prevalence of deadly diseases that under normal conditions would have been treatable. During the sanctions, [3-5,000 children under the age of five died each month](#), and new generations of children came of age suffering from and surrounded by an epidemic of disability and the inability to provide even the most basic services. When asked about [more than 500,000 Iraqi children who had died as a result of sanctions on Iraq](#), then-Secretary of State Madeline Albright famously and callously [declared](#), “[...]we think the price is worth it.”

U.S. wars around the world have had a devastating effect on the people sent to fight them. The new form of long-term, permanent and un-winnable wars since the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001 have been especially hard. A report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that [41%](#) of post-9/11/2021 veterans have disability ratings, compared with 25% of all veterans. The National Council for Mental Wellbeing [maintains](#) that:

- 30% of active duty and reserve military personnel deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan have a mental health condition requiring treatment – approximately 730,000 men and women, with many experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and major depression.
- Less than 50% of returning veterans in need receive any mental health treatment.
- The Veterans Administration reports that approximately 22 veterans die by suicide every day.
- Lengths of deployments are associated with more emotional difficulties among military children and more mental health problems among U.S. Army wives.

There is no parallel in the world today to the prioritization the United States gives to military strength. The U.S. spends more on its military [than the next 11 countries combined](#). While it far outspends other countries in support of war, the U.S. lags behind “developed country” peers in benefits for people with disabilities.

How does the United States compare to other countries?

While the United States may have been the [first country](#) to pass civil rights legislation to benefit those with disabilities (the ADA, Americans with Disabilities Act), it has been eclipsed by other wealthy nations. A 2014 [study](#) by the Commonwealth Fund compared general healthcare benefits in the U.S. with those in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The U.S. came in last place. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities [compared](#) the disability benefits of 36 different countries. The United States was [ranked number 28](#).

The conditions of people living with disabilities are often hidden from view of the general public because so many are locked into homelessness or sequestered in sheltered workshops and living situations that isolate them from the rest of society, such as in jails and segregated classrooms.

The reality for people living with disabilities is routine exclusion and systemic human rights abuses. For those who do not identify as persons with disabilities – at least not yet – we make a tremendous mistake if we think this situation does not affect us. This is ableism, pure and simple, and to engage in such thinking does no service to anyone, with or without disabilities. Again, the whole notion of ability and disability is a continuum that we are all on, and our abilities and disabilities will change for most of us over the course of a lifetime.

Our task, then, is to shine light on this problem, to help bring visibility to abuses that are often made invisible. Disability rights are human rights, and the liberation struggles of those with disabilities are struggles for everyone's liberation.

Part 6: Political targeting & the militant repression of social movements



Source: Alliance for Global Justice

Overview

Political repression is the act of a state entity controlling people by force for political reasons, particularly for the purpose of restricting or undermining their ability to take part in the political life of a society. This reduces their standing compared to others in their community and the world. Political repression is often manifested through policies such as surveillance abuse, police brutality, imprisonment, involuntary settlement, lustration and violent action; or through terror, such as the murder, summary executions, torture, forced disappearances and other extrajudicial punishment of political activists, dissidents or the general population; or the stripping of civil and/or human rights. Political repression can also be reinforced by means outside of written policy, such as by public and private media ownership and self-censorship within the public.

By now you'll have noticed a common thread in our accounting of human rights violations; namely, that they are most often suffered by Black, Brown, Indigenous and other communities of color. Evidently, racism and political repression go hand-in-hand as weapons of the fundamentally racist and oppressive status quo. The United States currently incarcerates hundreds of political prisoners, the majority of whom are Black, Brown or Indigenous or in solidarity with the anti-racist struggle.

We make the claim that racism remains the driving force in political imprisonment and other forms of repression in the U.S. This has become strikingly evident since the summer of 2020, when the police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor triggered a surge in mass resistance to racism and state violence [met with militant political repression](#). Hyper-criminalization of protests, militarization of police forces, mass arrests and detentions, a spike in police violence and murders, impunity for right-wing terrorism and bolstered state surveillance has brought in a new wave of political targeting of the anti-racist movement. Despite having identified white supremacists as the deadliest terrorist threat in the U.S., federal law enforcement continues to focus its anti-terrorism training, infrastructure and operations on so-called "Black identity extremists."

We also recognize that the violent repression we witness today involves the same acts of violence used by the Department of Homeland Security against refugees and asylum seekers fleeing imperialist violence in their home countries. The "marine corps of the U.S. law enforcement community," the Border Patrol Tactical Unit (BORTAC), was among the federal law enforcement agencies mobilized to surveil and intimidate protesters during the Black Lives Matter uprisings of 2020. Like other agencies under the banner of "homeland security," BORTAC has its foundations in the historical practices designed and exported by State Department. The notorious School of the Americas (now the Western Hemispheric Institute for Security Cooperation – WHINSEC), founded by the U.S. in the Panama Canal Zone in 1946, is a site of inter-continental training in sophisticated tactics of state terrorism and repression deployed to crush leftist movements for the installation and preservation of right-wing regimes at the service of U.S. hemispheric hegemony.

We recognize that the U.S. Empire – a term Noam Chomsky has described to define an “integrated policy of U.S. military and economic supremacy” – remains the greatest systemic perpetrator of human rights violations within and beyond its own borders.

This section examines the prominence and many forms of political repression in the United States today and its international applications:

- **Voter suppression in the U.S.: if you can't beat 'em, cheat 'em** addresses the ways in which the U.S. electoral system is decidedly undemocratic. It describes the ways in which voting, the most fundamental act of citizenship, is manipulated in a way that disenfranchises large portions of the population. It addresses structural and procedural issues and makes recommendations for improvement of these issues.
- **While claiming to defend freedom around the world, the U.S. has hundreds of political prisoners – and the majority are people of color** examines political imprisonment in the U.S., a massive new wave of political incarceration of anti-racist activists and the intersections of racism, classism and imperialism that lead to imprisonment of those who dare to demand freedom and justice.
- **Security, Empire and life in the USA** introduces readers to the repressive U.S. security model and its export around the world that forms the infrastructure of Empire.

Violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- **Article 1:** that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights
- **Article 2:** that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race
- **Article 3:** that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security
- **Article 4:** that no one should be held in slavery or servitude
- **Article 5:** that no one should be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
- **Article 6:** that everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law
- **Article 7:** that all are equal before the law and entitled without discrimination to equal protection of the law

- **Article 8:** that everyone has the right to an effective remedy by competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental human rights granted to them by the constitution or law
- **Article 9:** that no one should be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile
- **Article 10:** that everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing in the determination of their civil rights and obligations
- **Article 11:** that everyone charged with a penal offense has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty
- **Article 12:** that no one should be subjected to arbitrary interference with their privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor attacks upon their honor or reputation, and that everyone has the right to protection of the law against such interference or attacks
- **Article 13:** that everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the border of their state
- **Article 19:** that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers
- **Article 20:** that everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and that no one may be compelled to belong to an association
- **Article 21:** that everyone has the right to political participation in their country, directly or through freely chosen representatives; that everyone has the right to equal access to public services in their country; and that the will of the people should be the basis of the authority of government as expressed through periodic elections and universal suffrage
- **Article 25:** that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of themselves and their families, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, social services and security in case of loss of livelihood caused by circumstances out of their control
- **Article 27:** that everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancements and its benefits

- **Article 30:** that nothing in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights may be interpreted as implying for the State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or perform any act aimed at the destruction of the human rights it stipulates

Violations of international human rights treaties

- The **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination** requires that countries revise governmental and other public policies and rescind laws and regulations that perpetuate racial discrimination and pass legislation for prohibiting such discrimination, including policies that function to undermine their civil and political rights.
- The **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** elaborates further on the civil and political rights and freedoms listed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The treaty requires states to commit to the promotion and respect of the self-determination of its citizens and a ban on discrimination in access civil and political rights.
- The **Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment** prohibits torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The treaty requires states to take legislative, administrative and judicial measures to prevent such acts from taking place during activities such as extradition; arbitrary arrests, detentions and incarcerations; interrogation; and training of police (civil or military) and other officials involved in the arrest, detention or interrogation. Despite its status as a signatory, the United States continues to promote and permit violations of these guidelines within its own carceral system as well as in its foreign sponsorship of prisons, policing and military regimes.
- The **International Labour Organization Convention 169** sets standards for nation-states regarding Indigenous peoples' rights, including their civil and political rights. It affirms the right of Indigenous peoples to take control of their own institutions, ways of life and economic development. The United States has not ratified this treaty.

- The **Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** establishes a universal framework of minimal standards for the survival, dignity and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples of the world, including their right to self-determination. Only four countries voted against this declaration in 2007: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States.
- The **Convention of the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance** establishes a universal framework for affirming and protecting the victims and families of victims of enforced disappearances, which are defined as any kind of arrest, detention abduction or form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the state or groups acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the state. The United States has not signed nor ratified this treaty.

Voter suppression in the U.S.: if you can't beat them, cheat them

November 17, 2022



Source: Chuck Burton (Associated Press)

An examination of the structural inequalities and anti-democratic nature of the United States government

By Camille Landry (National Co-Coordinator)

The singer Paul Simon told us there are 50 ways to leave your lover. Turns out there are at least 50 ways to suppress the votes of U.S. voters.

What is a democracy? The term democracy literally means rule by the people. The word comes from the Greek: demos means "village" or "people"; kratos means "rule."

Although the government of the United States is generally called a democracy, it's specifically a constitutional republic in which people vote for representatives, who then make laws, treaties and decisions according to a constitution. That constitution is supposed to make it impossible for those representatives to create laws that violate people's rights.

The United States is not truly democratic. It never was because from the very beginning, the rights of citizenship have not applied to all people. At the very time the founders of this nation were writing their enlightened and noble ideas of freedom and individual liberties and creating the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the government was engaging in a wide variety of heinous acts that denied basic human rights to millions of people. This included a land grab of massive proportions, the genocide of millions of Indigenous people and the enslavement and deaths of millions of African people. This represents the most fundamental kind of inequality – policies, practices, laws and social norms that threaten the right to life, liberty and to full participation in the nation based upon race, ethnicity, gender and religion.

The struggle for voting rights

Voting is a fundamental civil right denied to many via our electoral system. The built-in structure of the electoral system in the United States promotes and maintains inequality. At no time in the history of this nation have all residents or citizens had the unobstructed right to vote, to hold office or to experience equality under the law.

The struggle for voting rights dates to the founding of the nation. The original Constitution did not define who could or could not vote. It did, however, grant individual states the power to make regulations and set policies for their elections. Until the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, states could and commonly did deny the vote to large portions of their population.

Until 1870, when the 15th Amendment extended voting rights to men of all races, only white men were allowed to vote.

Some states (chiefly the southern ones but also states with large populations of Indigenous or Latine people) could require that certain citizens (amazingly, the BIPOC ones) had to pass a literacy test or an “intelligence test” in order to be qualified to vote – which was frequently a set of questions that few people of any race, age or educational level could pass, often including ridiculous prompts such as “state how many beans are in this jar?” or to recite the state constitution verbatim. Certain would-be voters – primarily Black people – were often required to pay a poll tax. Women did not have the right to vote in all 50 states until 1920. More than 100 years of struggle for equality culminated in the 19th Amendment, which enfranchised all U.S. women and declared that women, like men, deserve all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.



Source: Universal History Archive – Getty Images

In 1964 the 24th Amendment made poll taxes illegal in federal elections. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, passed by Lyndon B. Johnson, banned the use of literacy tests, provided for federal oversight of voter registration in areas where less than 50% of the non-white population had registered to vote and authorized the U.S.

Attorney General to investigate the use of poll taxes in state and local elections. Poll taxes in state elections were banned shortly after that in 1966 by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The discussion of voting rights and democracy often focuses on what happens within the system – issues like voter access and suppression – and ignores the fact that the basic structure of the United States government is based upon racial and class oppression. There are many ways in which the structures of the United States' constitutional republic cement inequality in access to political participation. The Electoral College is a prime example of that structural inequality.

Structural inequality of the U.S. Republic

The Electoral College

The United States Electoral College is a structure that stands between the popular vote and the outcome of a presidential election. It can award the presidency of the nation to a person who did not win the majority of votes cast. This has happened five times in the history of this country: Andrew Jackson, Rutherford Hayes, Grover Cleveland, George W. Bush and Donald Trump did not win the popular vote yet became president.

The Electoral College is not a place or a building. It's the group of presidential electors required by the Constitution to form every four years for the sole purpose of appointing the president and vice president. Each state and the District of Columbia appoints electors according to the methods described by its legislature, equal in number to its congressional delegation (representatives and senators). That means each state gets two electors (because each state has two senators) plus an additional elector for every congressional seat (which is based on the state's population during the previous census).

"No one likes the Electoral College, except those who were elected because of it. No one likes gerrymandering, except those doing the gerrymandering. No one likes the filibuster, except those doing the filibustering."

– Kevin Bleyer

The U.S. currently has a total of 538 electors. It takes an absolute majority of 270 or more electoral votes to elect the president and vice president. If no candidate achieves an absolute majority there, a contingent election is held by the United States House of Representatives to elect the president and by the United States Senate to elect the vice president.

If this sounds fishy to you, it's because it was planned that way.

The Zinn Project [explains](#) that the Electoral College was created as a solution for giving too much power to “undesirables.” Many of the 55 white men at the Constitutional Convention worried about giving too much power to the people, or as John Stuart Mill once described, the “tyranny of the majority.” Alexander Hamilton said the masses were prone to passion and might use their vote unwisely. Of course, both passion and wisdom are highly subjective terms. James Madison [listed](#) the “wicked schemes” inflaming the people to act so unwisely: “a rage for paper money, for an abolition of debts, for an equal division of property[...].” Madison called voters advancing their own economic interests wicked, but referred to his brethren – who were insulating their own wealth and power in Philadelphia – as “enlightened statesmen.” The Electoral College, which advanced the interests of the country's elite minority, was considered a “solution” to bankers and plantation owners in 1787 but looked like exclusion if you were a poor indebted veteran in western Massachusetts, an enslaved person in Virginia or a Hitchiti person fleeing land-thieving white settlers in Georgia.

There was another issue on the minds of the “founding fathers”: Madison pointed out that a popular vote would deprive the white South of “influence in the election on the score of the Negroes.” He was, of course, referring to the [21%](#) of the United States population made up of enslaved people. Since the men at the Constitutional Convention had already adopted the Three-Fifths Compromise, establishing that enslaved people held 3/5 of the representation of white property owners, the Electoral College became a “solution” to their problem because adopting the compromise effectively inflated the southern elite's influence in presidential elections.



Source: Mark Makela (Getty Images)

Another rationale for the Electoral College was to balance power between smaller, less populous states and larger, often more populous ones. This inequality continues today. Each state has one electoral vote for each senator – and every state has two senators, regardless of population. Additional electors are assigned based upon the number of congressional seats in the state. That means that a state such as Wyoming, which has only 1/8th the population of Los Angeles County, nonetheless has three electoral votes. The entire state of California, with a population [greater than](#) the total population of the smallest 20 states – has only 55 electoral votes. That means the electors of Wyoming, Delaware, Vermont, North and South Dakota, Montana, Rhode Island and other small states have a disproportionate level of power when it comes to choosing presidents.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to overcome this kind of structural bias. It was solidly and cleverly structured to disenfranchise people. The Electoral College and original laws governing who can and cannot vote set the stage for many other forms of voter suppression today.

The Senate & the filibuster

The United States Senate is fundamentally unequal. The Constitution stipulates that every state has two senators, regardless of population. This means that a Californian has just [1/67th](#) of a Wyoming resident's representation in the Senate.

The filibuster, or the longest-winded side wins, is commonly employed in the Senate to impede legislative action. The word filibuster comes from the Spanish *filibustero*, which means “lawless plunderer.” Permitted by law, the filibuster is a tactic used by senators called upon to speak to continue speaking for as long as they can hold forth continuously. Until that senator yields the floor, no further business can be conducted. The record for the longest filibuster is held by South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond. He used the filibuster for 24 hours and 18 minutes to delay a vote on the Civil Rights Act of 1957.

When the structural inequality of the Senate is combined with the filibuster, just 41 Senators – potentially [representing only a fraction U.S. population](#) – can wield veto power over a proposed bill or nominee.

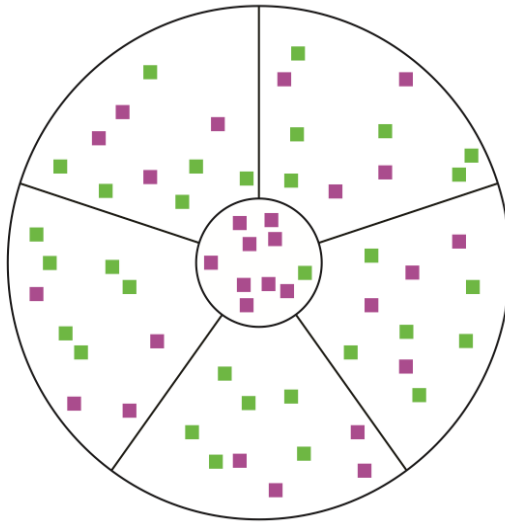
Local forms of voter suppression

There are many other ways to manipulate the system so as to cheat people out of their right to vote. Some methods are aimed directly at senior citizens and poor people who, not incidentally, tend to vote for more progressive candidates.

Hacking, cracking, cheating: gerrymandering

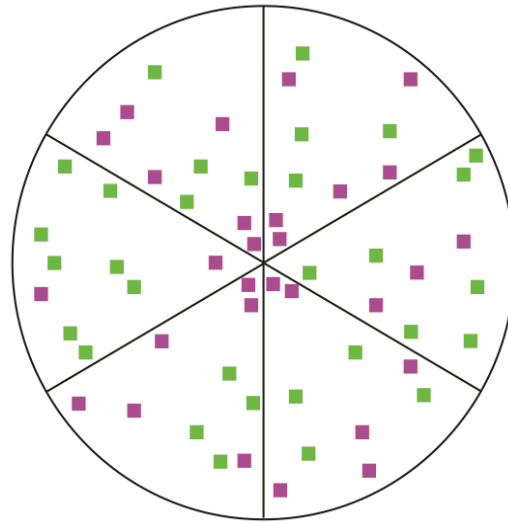
One of the ways in which democracy is denied to many is through gerrymandering. This is the practice of drawing district lines in a way that favors one political group or another. Voters are supposed to choose candidates, but when lawmakers draw district lines to entrench one party's political power, some votes count more than others. Office holders choose who will vote for them by structuring voting districts to affect election outcomes.

Green in charge



5 green districts, 1 purple district

Purple in charge



2 green districts, 4 purple districts

The first image demonstrates the impacts of “packing” many purple voters into one district while “cracking” the rest into a large number of districts where they receive just under 50% of the vote, resulting in a green party victory. The second image represents a more even division of purple and green voters in which the purple party wins the majority vote.

Source: Princeton Gerrymandering Project

The Princeton Gerrymandering Project [explains](#) it this way:

“The goal of partisan gerrymandering is to amplify a political party’s power beyond what it deserves based on their vote share alone. This process is accomplished by two complementary methods: packing and cracking. ‘Packing’ occurs when many supporters of the victim party are jammed into a small number of districts, giving them a few overwhelming wins. The remaining members of the victim party are then ‘cracked,’ spread across a large number of districts, so that they consistently win just under 50% of the vote. Luckily, packing and cracking creates a distinctive pattern of wins for both the perpetrator and the victim parties, wherein the victim party wins its few seats by overwhelming margins and the perpetrating party wins its many seats by considerably lower margins.”

Here is an electoral map of North Carolina. Note how packing and cracking serve to limit the electoral power of Democrats and give votes to Republican candidates. You can check out the Princeton Gerrymandering Project’s [Redistricting Report Card](#) to see how your state scores in gerrymandering.

Partisan gerrymandering packs some communities into single districts...



Source: Princeton Gerrymandering Project

Burdensome voter ID requirements

There are very few recorded instances of people using someone else's ID to vote. Who would risk a prison sentence for an act that will not ultimately decide the outcome of an election? Nonetheless, many states now require specific types of ID in order to vote. [About 11%](#) of eligible voters lack official government ID. The majority of these people are senior citizens, Black, Brown and/or poor. There are many barriers to acquiring an approved ID, including lack of transportation to often distant offices that are only open during certain hours, the cost of the ID and not having the source documents like birth certificates and marriage certificates to prove identification. Some states allow the use of a hunting license to vote while rejecting identification from state universities. This writer took her grandmother to vote, only to have her turned away because she had no driver's license. She was 92 years old. Her Social Security card, Medicare ID card and other ID were rejected. Georgia requires that all identification be precisely identical. Thus, if you have a hyphenated last name but your voter ID omits the hyphen, you are turned away at the polls. Ditto if one ID form has your middle name but a different ID uses your initial.

Address requirements

Some states bar people from voting if they do not have a street address. Many Indigenous reservations and other rural areas do not have street addresses. The Navajo Nation (spanning Utah, New Mexico and Arizona) has [50,000 unaddressed homes and businesses](#), creating complications for hundreds of thousands of people. A federal court in 2020 [found](#) that only 18% of Native American registered voters in Arizona have home mail service.

Inadequate voting options

Manipulation of polling places disenfranchises many voters. The last election cycle saw many polling places closed down, forcing voters to travel longer distances to cast a ballot. This disproportionately affects older and low-income people. Other states passed laws making it illegal to provide food or water to people waiting in line to vote. In some places, the waits were over six hours. Many states also passed laws limiting the ability to vote early. Short waiting times, accessible polling places and early voting make voting possible for people who do not have the luxury of paid time off. Although federal law requires employers to allow time for voting, most employers grant only an hour to do so. That doesn't help much if your polling place is two miles from home and the line is hours long.

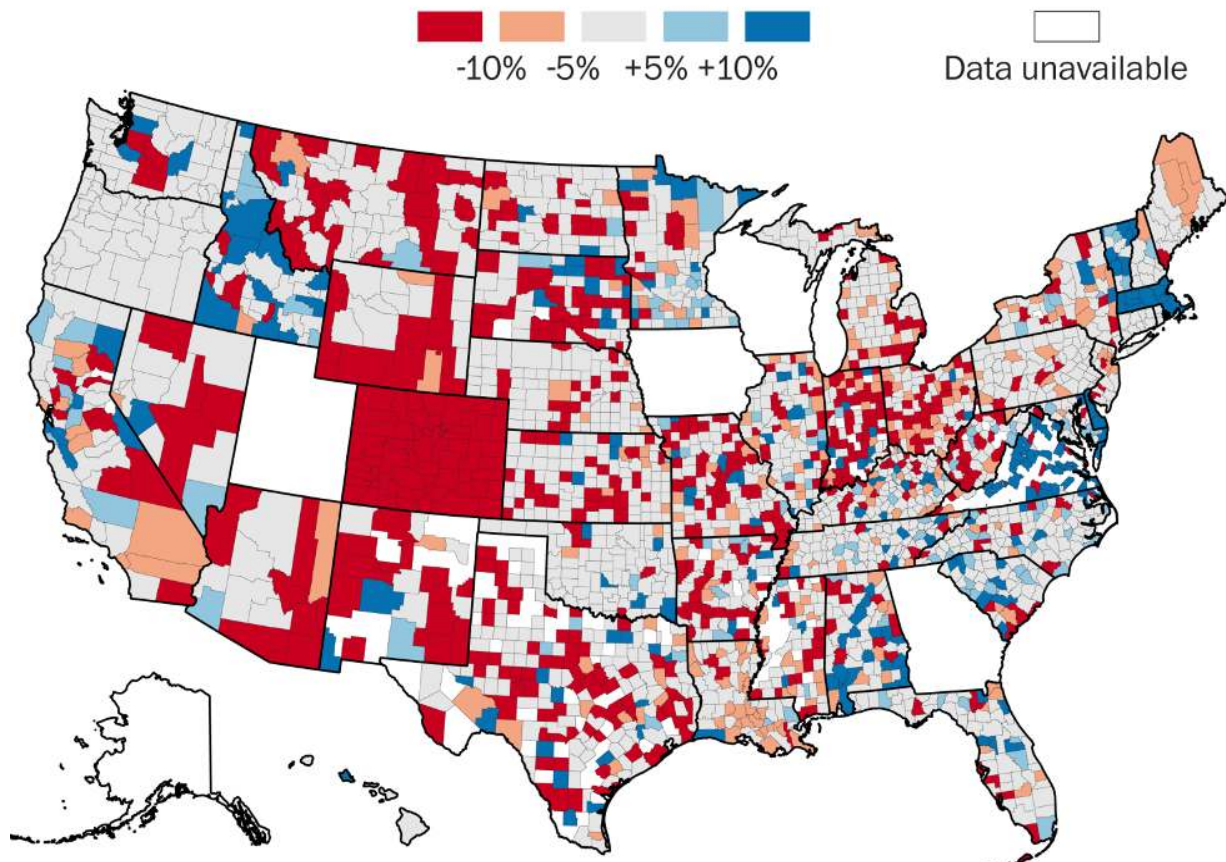
Michigan banned companies from offering free or discounted rides to voting locations and barred advocacy groups from paying for such rides. In Georgia, state police [stopped vehicles shuttling Black voters to polls](#), ordering elderly Black voters off a voting bus shuttle.

Limiting mail ballots is a favorite trick of those who want to choose their voters. Alaska automatically mails ballots to adults over 65, who tend to vote Republican, but makes it difficult for younger people to use mail ballots. Alaska, Alabama and South Dakota require witnessed affidavits for absentee voting. Mississippi has the most restrictive absentee ballot process, requiring an official witness for both the absentee voting application and the completed ballot. Many other states require the mail ballot to be notarized for some if not all voters (some states waive that requirement for people who are homebound). Even if there is a stipulation that this notary service must be free, it is still incumbent upon the voter to find a notary.

Even the amounts of postage required for the ballot can present a burden to voters, especially in an era where fewer people use postal mail and getting stamps requires a trip to the post office.

Poll closures

Percent change in number of physical polling locations reported to the Election Assistance Commission, 2012 to 2016



Source: 2012 and 2016 Election Administration and Voting Surveys THE WASHINGTON POST

Source: The Washington Post

Georgia, Texas, Oklahoma and other states have limited the number of sites where mail ballots can be dropped off and the hours during which these sites operate. Signature challenges for mail ballots [are also common](#). Signatures deemed to be “mismatched” by election officials often [are arbitrary](#), [disproportionately void minority votes](#) and [disenfranchise](#) seniors, women and many citizens of every age.

Voting another's ballot is a rarity and a felony, so signature checks should have a pro-inclusion bias. Yet that is not the case. An Ohio lawsuit maintained that 97% of voters rejected were likely to be wrongly disenfranchised. Bills imposing new signature match requirements are pending in Connecticut, Pennsylvania and South Carolina.

There are many other ways in which states make it difficult to vote. Some polling places have long lines but nowhere to rest while waiting. Others chronically run out of ballots or ballot machines or have an insufficient number of pens to mark the ballots or not enough tables for people to stand at to mark their ballots.

Disenfranchising based on convictions

People who have committed crimes are still citizens of this country. It is unjust to permanently deprive them of the right to vote, yet that happens. Some states require people who have been convicted of a felony to petition the governor or some other agency to have their right to vote reinstated. This is a time-consuming, expensive and difficult process.



Source: Wilfredo Lee (Associated Press and Shutterstock)

In many states, it is legal to vote once the person has completed their original sentence – what the judge proclaimed at trial. This is usually longer than time served. People have been prosecuted for voting before the expiration of their original sentences.

Voter suppression due to convictions plays out in other ways, too. In the leadup to the 2004 election, the State of Florida purged all registered voters whose names, birth dates and races matched those of convicted people. Many Black voters who just happened to share a name with a person convicted of a crime unjustly [lost their right to vote](#) with the push of a button. Most of the affected people did not learn that they had been disenfranchised until they showed up to vote and were turned away.

Overturning the Voting Rights Act

The issues cited above in no way include all the ways in which the right to vote is unjustly stripped from people. Despite staunch and often violent protests by southern states, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibited racial discrimination in voting. It was amended 14 times to expand its scope. Originally set to expire after 10 years, Congress re-authorized Section 203 of the Act in 1982 for seven years, expanded and re-authorized it in 1992 for another 15 years and re-authorized it again in 2006 for another 25 years.

Source: Gabriel C. Pérez (KUT)

Those who would block Black and other voters from the polls continued their battle to do so. On June 25, 2013, the United States Supreme Court ruled by a five to four vote that Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act was unconstitutional because the coverage formula was based on data over 40 years old, making it no longer responsive to current needs and therefore an impermissible burden on the constitutional principles of federalism and equal sovereignty of the states.



Following this decision, [calculated rollbacks of voting rights laws](#) have occurred. Jurisdictions that previously had to seek prior authorizations to change election laws can make them with no restrictions. Examples of these changes discussed above include the closure of polling locations, more stringent voter identification requirements and more voter roll purges. Removing Section 4(b), the key protective element of the Act that proactively prevented discrimination against voters, turned nearly 50 years of advancements in voting rights on its head and created an environment where voters must first suffer an injury to have standing to sue for a remedy. This is an anathema to those who've worked to protect and advance the right to vote.

Creating a semblance of democracy



Source: Associated Press

It would require volumes to address the many and varied issues and obstacles to true democracy in the United States. Voter suppression is intersectional – it has many different aspects that are knotted together in a very wide web of discrimination, including racial, economic, gender-based, ethnic, religious and scores of other attributes that both singly and collectively limit political participation and the full realization of human rights. The fact that there is still disagreement about this and about who has the right to vote is an indicator of how far this nation has to go to reach any semblance of equity. The first step in creating a truly democratic society is the acceptance that unfettered democracy is important.

These actions would move us closer to a just and equitable voting system:

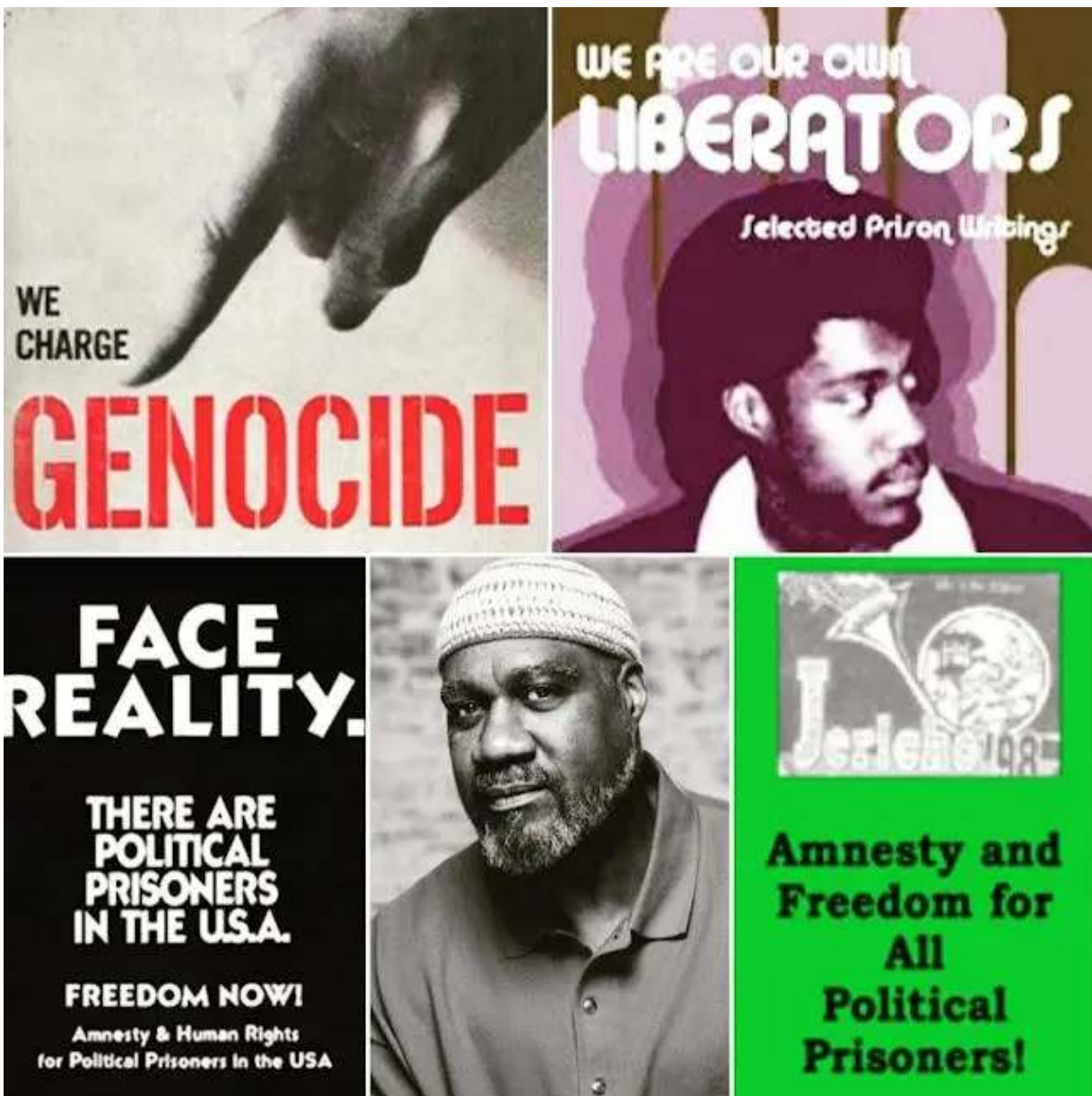
- *Abolish the Electoral College.* It is a remnant of the racist and classist origins of this country and has no place in an open democracy. One person: one vote should be the standard for everyone, everywhere.
- *Make election days public holidays.* This removes barriers to voting for citizens who work odd or unpredictable hours or have other problems accessing a nearby polling place.

- *Remove barriers to voter registration.* People should be automatically registered to vote on their 18th birthday, just as men are now automatically registered for Selective Service when they reach 18. Having an opt-out rather than an opt-in voter registration process would remove many barriers to voting.
- *Remove oppressive voter ID requirements.* Any form of identification provided by a public institution should be accepted. This should include student or work ID badges, state ID cards, professional licenses and other forms of identification. Voters without ID should be permitted to cast provisional ballots, which are then checked and accepted or rejected by a trained bipartisan group of examiners.
- *Make mail-in voting legal for everyone, everywhere, at no cost (and do not require stamps on ballots or notary stamps).* Mail-in voting has proven to be fair, without fraud, and actually costs states less than in-person voting since they don't have to pay poll workers. Fraud is easier to prevent when all votes arrive at and are counted by a trained staff of workers and election observers in a central location.
- *Ensure that there are adequate polling places and that no voter has to travel a great distance or stand in line for more than 30 minutes in order to vote.* Also make sure that there are an adequate number of voting machines, ballots and other supplies at each polling place and that voters know where to go to cast their ballots.
- *Remove laws that prevent people from providing rides to the polls or giving refreshments to people standing in line to vote.* This speaks for itself.
- *Automatically restore voting rights to people convicted of felonies as soon as their sentences are completed.* They are still citizens and reserve the right to participate in elections that impact their lives.
- *Utilize public service announcements in the media to educate voters on the candidates and their platforms.* Candidates' statements should also be publicly fact-checked.
- *End purges of voter rolls except in the case of death.* Even if a person has not voted for decades, they should remain registered unless they ask to be removed from the rolls.
- *Extend the franchise to citizens of the District of Columbia and to residents of U.S. territories.* These people pay taxes and are subject to U.S. laws. They should have full voting rights. The U.S. should either grant them full citizenship or set them free of colonial rule.

Ending blatant vote suppression will not cure everything that's wrong with the United States. That is a task far beyond the scope of this article or the work of any individual or organization – but it's a start. It's kind of like the question, "how do you eat an elephant?" The answer is: one bite at a time.

While claiming to defend freedom around the world, the U.S. has hundreds of political prisoners – and the majority are people of color

December 29, 2022



Source: newblackmaninexile.net

By James Patrick Jordan, Eduardo Garcia, Natalia Burdyńska-Schuurman
(National Co-Coordinator)

Racism is still the driving force behind U.S. political imprisonment

Political imprisonment in the United States exists primarily as a tool of racist repression. It's aimed disproportionately at people of color as well as others engaged in anti-racist struggle. Whether in the fight against racism at home or against racist foreign policies, wars, occupation and colonialism, the overarching purpose of political imprisonment is to intimidate and try to crush militant forms of anti-racist struggle.

By treating U.S. political prisoners as “common criminals,” our criminal justice system individualizes and de-contextualizes these cases, ignoring root causes and impeding the development of political solutions to the underlying causes political prisoners have fought for.

Readers can discern for themselves what is revealed in the findings presented here and in the [political prisoners list](#) this article analyzes. The large number of people of color and others involved in the anti-racist struggle arrested and incarcerated for their activities is sadly predictable. Our entire history and political and economic establishment is founded and advanced squarely on the foundations of racism.

Indeed, it's the entire system that must change. Only when that happens will political prisoners find justice and true liberation in the U.S. We fight for the liberation of Leonard Peltier and Mumia Abu-Jamal. But as wonderful as winning freedom for individuals may be, without a political solution, little is accomplished regarding the causes for which these prisoners have sacrificed their freedom.

Not all U.S. political prisoners are in jail for explicitly anti-racist struggles. There are those in prison for opposing the whole fabric of militarism and war, women who have defended their bodies from abuse, striking blows against patriarchy, and eco-defenders, among others. Recognizing the racism that permeates U.S. political imprisonment does not diminish the validity of the struggles for which these prisoners are incarcerated.

Nonetheless, without exception, racism and anti-racism plays a role in all U.S. popular movements. All anti-war and anti-imperialist struggle has a fundamentally anti-racist aspect. The one existing imperial power in the world today is the U.S./NATO Empire, an Empire centered among mostly white nations, in service to global capitalism and western geopolitical hegemony. That Empire is the primary global purveyor of the exploitation and dispossession of Black, Brown, Indigenous and all colonized peoples in the nations of the Global South.

We further recognize that we can and must look to anti-racist struggles, especially Black and Indigenous liberation, for guidance, lessons and leadership, regardless the area of activity. A political prisoners analysis AFGJ published in August of 2020 [explains](#):

"We are convinced that African people, including the African diaspora, play a leading role in all revolutionary and transformational struggles. African and Indigenous peoples have been specially targeted for repression and exploitation from the very beginning days of the global spread of capitalism. Today in the United States, the movement for the rights and self-determination of Black people has, above all else, shown that it's not a temporary struggle – it has staying power."

There's a thread that connects the struggles of the very first enslaved people through the historic Civil Rights Movement to the Black Lives Matter uprisings today. The struggle for Black liberation in the U.S. is huge, mature yet young: multi-generational, experienced, politically savvy and enduring. The successes of Black liberation struggles have always, in every instance, opened the way for other struggles. The struggles against slavery and for Black voting rights led directly to the women's suffrage movement. The Civil Rights Movement was foundational for the advancement of many present-day struggles, including anti-war, anti-capitalist, women's liberation, Latin American and Asian liberation, disability rights, LGBTQ rights and more. (Indigenous defense of the land and its people is, of course, the oldest movement in resistance to Empire in the Americas.) Thus, we can say that the prominence of political prisoners of African American heritage in the U.S. is a situation that concerns all of us."

AFGJ has maintained a list of U.S. political prisoners since 2013, when Stan Smith of the Chicago Committee to Free the Cuban Five put that list together for the first time, counting 38 political prisoners in the U.S.

Ours is not the only political prisoner list, and we've always consulted the work of others while augmenting those with our research. We've relied especially on the advice and feedback of Claude Marks from the [Freedom Archives](#) and have regularly referenced the [Jericho Movement](#), the [Nuclear Resister](#), [Earth First!](#) and the [Anarchist Black Cross](#).



Source: The Jericho Movement

How we define a “political prisoner” is a classification always open to debate. We note that some organizations, such as the Jericho Movement, do not list people as political prisoners unless they have asked or agreed to be listed. As [noted](#) in our August 2020 analysis:

“There is a concern that prisoners may experience further targeting and harassment as a result of attention brought by well-meaning supporters. We very much respect that. For our purpose, we are trying to build a comprehensive list that reflects the overall extent and reality of politically motivated incarcerations in the United States. We are (for the most part) not involved in direct advocacy.”

We’re not attempting to maintain an exhaustive list of all U.S. political prisoners. Instead, we document political prisoners who are also prisoners of Empire.

There are, for instance, animal rights activists whom we don't include. A person arrested for direct action against the inhumane conditions suffered under the conditions of factory farming, or for the liberation of animals from pens where there is no freedom of movement, is not included unless there is some element of their case directly related to the struggle against the underpinnings of Empire. Even under socialism, under nations in resistance to Empire, sometimes even under locally autonomous communities, there are animals kept and exploited under conditions that can only be described as cruel. But one cannot simply blame Empire for this, even when and if it exacerbates the problem.

How, then, do we define political prisoners who are also prisoners of Empire? Our August 2020 analysis [states](#):

"Our definition of political prisoners refers to people who are incarcerated for alleged crimes related to resistance and liberation from oppression and repression. We believe that these cases should not be treated as isolated, 'common' crimes, but as cases that require a political solution. In many cases, those in jail are there because of false allegations or because they were framed and railroaded through the courts. Our list contains political prisoners who we also consider 'prisoners of Empire.' By that, we mean people who are jailed because of activities that constitute a direct challenge to the national and international dominance of U.S., NATO and transnational imperialist capitalism."

Our political prisoners list [notes](#):

"We define political prisoners as people incarcerated for acts of resistance to domestic and international oppression and repression and whose cases require a political resolution. Political prisoners are imprisoned because of activities that in some way respond to systemic repression and violations of human rights. Whether the circumstances of the alleged crimes are true or false, we strenuously reject the individualized and out-of-context treatment of these cases as simply 'common crimes.' Our listing of these prisoners does not constitute an endorsement of the tactics or immediate goals of every individual. We also recognize that people have a right to resist oppression, and the denial of that right can be, in itself, a crime against the people. In many cases, those incarcerated have been set up, falsely accused, railroaded, and/or denied adequate defense and basic human rights. More often than not, they have received harsher sentences than usual because of the political nature of their activities."

Although the origins of our political prisoners list date back to 2013, this is only the second comprehensive analysis we've published. We admit that what we have could be significantly augmented. We need another major and exhaustive review of the definitions, criteria, and categories we employ. Towards that end we've established a committee that will spend the next year revising all aspects of our list. This is an ongoing process, and if you have suggestions for improvements, we want to hear what you have to say. Feel free to send your suggestions to James@AFGJ.org.

One must also look at the back stories behind the numbers and trends. Our last major update in 2018, before the eruption of the Black Lives Matter uprisings, listed 62 political prisoners. As of December (2022) that total has risen starkly to 120 political prisoners. That's a 94% increase over just four years, despite numerous deaths and releases since then of long-time political prisoners jailed during government crackdowns on the Black Liberation Movement. Defendants of the 2020 Black Lives Matter uprisings comprise 68% of that total (82 people) – representing a massive new wave of anti-racist political prisoners which alone exceeds the total number of prisoners we documented in 2018.



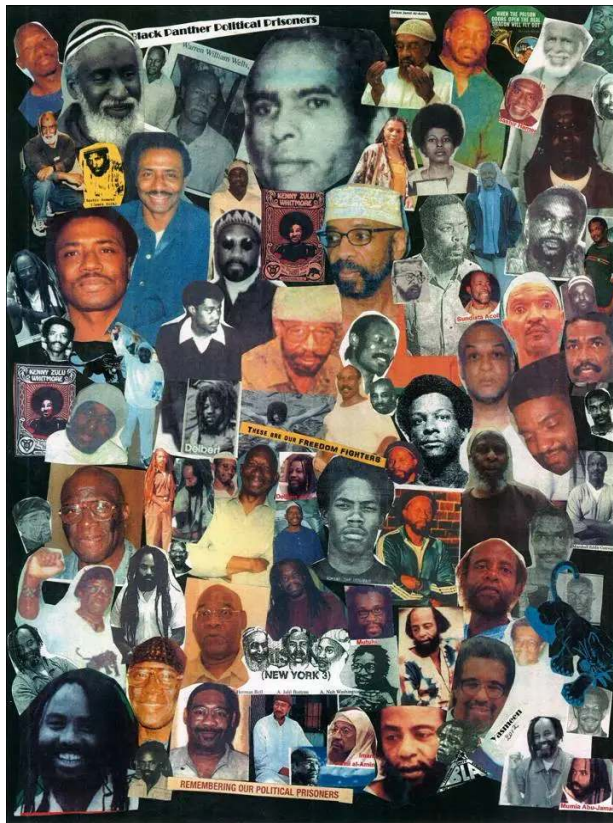
Source: Lucas Jackson (Reuters)

That's also likely an underestimate and falls short of conveying the true magnitude of the latest wave of racist and political repression, as it doesn't include numerous other political prisoners who have since the summer of 2020 already served prison time; nor the thousands who have been arrested, charged and detained as a result of their participation in protests; and likely overlooks dozens of protesters who have been formally sentenced but whose cases have not been made public. In our December 2022 update of our political prisoners list, we [note](#):

"An Associated Press [review](#) of court documents for over 300 federal cases involving protesters following the murder of George Floyd from August of last year (2021) shows that at least 120 people have pleaded guilty or been convicted of federal crimes for their activities, at least 70 have been sentenced an average of 27 months in prison and at least 10 have been sentenced to a minimum of five years in prison. The sheer number of cases, lack of readily available information about them and limited staff capacity prevents us from being able to list every one that meets our criteria for documentation. We have to the best of our ability documented all cases we've found publicized by local and national news outlets and will continue to monitor the situation for new information."

Today Black political prisoners comprise 52% (62) of the total count, while the overall number of people of color who are political prisoners is 80 (67%). Of the other political prisoners who are people of color, nine percent (11) are Latine (one is identified as both Black and Latino); three percent (three) are North "American" Indigenous; one percent (one) are Asian American (non-Arab, Middle Eastern, North African, African Muslim or Central Asian); and 9% (11) are Arab, Middle Eastern, North African, African Muslim or Central Asian (one is identified as both Latino and Arab and six are identified as both Black and African Muslim).

As for the last category, we've grouped these together because we've found it difficult to find statistics related to these specific racial groups. Instead, we find the closest readily available statistics have to do with Muslims in prison – and Muslim is not a race and can include people from all over the world, including those who are not necessarily people of color.



Source: Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network

Although Muslim or perceived-as-Muslim peoples don't necessarily share the same race, they are often discriminated against as if they were, as well as targeted as a class because of their actual or perceived religious identification. Similarly, prison population statistics regularly confuse the count of Latine prisoners by counting most of them simply as "white."

To understand the racism revealed in these percentages, we must compare them to the demographic percentages of the U.S. population as a whole. Respectively, we find

that the U.S. general population is 14% Black, 19% Latine, one percent Indigenous and one percent "Muslim."

The racist application of "criminal justice" in the United States is a feature of the entire political system, not just of political incarceration, which in itself reflects the larger reality of mass incarceration in the country. For instance, we find that Black people are incarcerated at a rate 3.5 times higher than whites.

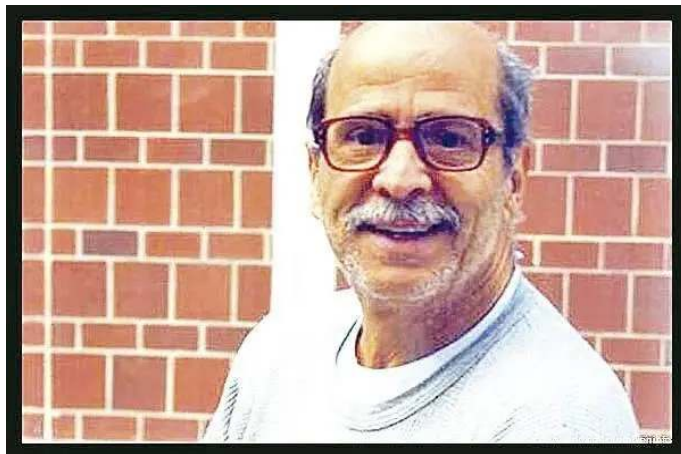
We need to place the differences and the total number of political prisoners within context. Among those we list as political prisoners in the United States, it's significant that just about 68% of the total are those incarcerated for their participation in the 2020 Black Lives Matter uprisings. There are at least two political prisoners that remain in jail for activities related to the Ferguson uprising in 2014 that followed the extrajudicial killing of Michael Brown. If we add those together, we find that about 70% of political prisoners in the U.S. have been jailed in relation to charges stemming from the birth and continued growth of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Political prisoners “Oso Blanco” Byron Chubbuck (left) and Leonard Peltier (right). Source: freeosoblanco.org



How do we determine who and how many are political prisoners of the anti-racist struggle? We count 101 of 120 political prisoners, or 84%, arrested for domestic anti-racist actions. As an international solidarity organization, AFGJ is keenly aware that U.S. foreign policies and international relations are extensions of the same policies, attitudes and actions that drive domestic racism. U.S. wars, sanctions, blockades, and [prison imperialism](#) are overwhelmingly wielded against nations with a large majority of people of color, countries of the Global South.

We count five political prisoners in jail for actions of international solidarity with specific nations targeted by Empire and 11 political prisoners involved in activities of self-determination, liberation and defense of their territories from occupation, war, sanctions and blockades.



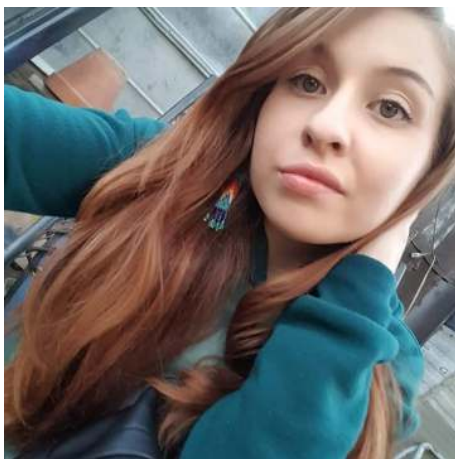
Simón Trinidad. Source: prenasural.com

Among them are Simón Trinidad and Ivan Vargas from Colombia, Alex Saab from Venezuela, the Virgin Island Three, Mun Chol Myong of North Korea and Leonard Peltier (in defense of the Lakota nation in occupied South Dakota). Altogether these represent about 11% (13) of those engaged in struggle directly against the United States' international application of racist and political repression. When we combine those arrested for domestically and internationally, we find that 114 of 120 political prisoners, a striking 95%, are incarcerated for acts of anti-racist resistance.

We also count three political prisoners jailed for eco-defense (3% of the total). Two percent (two) are incarcerated for activities generally or directly opposed to U.S. militarism and wars. Two percent (two) are in prison for generalized resistance to the U.S. political system and global capitalism. We count two women (two percent) for whom we believe political repression and targeting played a role in their incarceration for defending themselves against their abusers or rapists.

As for the last category, the reality is that there are many more we might include in that category. We need to pose several questions and investigations to determine who and how many of these there are and who, if not all, are also considered prisoners of Empire. We ask the reader to be patient with us as we delve deeper into this complex and challenging area of research. For now we include Maddesyn George and Fran Thompson as emblematic cases for which we know there's probably a much higher total.

We also note that there is overlap in some of these categories. For instance, Fran Thompson is included as a woman incarceration for self-defense and as an eco-defender, exacerbating her prosecution and sentencing. We classify Maddesyn George, as an Indigenous woman whose very existence and survival constitutes an act of resistance, as an anti-racist political prisoner in addition to our classification of her as a woman criminalized for self-defense against patriarchal oppression. There are other cases in which people are counted in more than one category.



Maddesyn George, a native woman sentenced to nearly seven years in prison on manslaughter charges after she defended herself against a white man who raped and threatened her life. Source: freemaddesyn.org

At the 2013 Tear Down the Walls conference in Tucson, Arizona, Margaret Prescod of Global Women's Strike argued that all those interned under the inherently racist and classist U.S. model of mass incarceration are political prisoners. That may not be our criteria for documentation, but she certainly has a point.

In our list of classes of political imprisonment, we include those held in immigrant detention centers and those still held in occupied Cuba at the Guantánamo prison. But they are not counted among the 120 political prisoners we analyze here.

We do know this: even if we counted the 35 inmates in Guantánamo, the thousands held in immigrant detention centers and the many other women jailed for defending themselves against the patriarchal underpinnings of the Empire, these inclusions would only underscore what we already know: political imprisonment in the United States is a tool of racist as well as other easily identified forms of repression employed both at home and abroad, and all of these cases require political solutions, not individualized and decontextualized punishment. Ultimately, systemic change is needed, which is another way of saying revolution.

Security, Empire and life in the USA

March 30, 2022



Source: Noah Berger (Associated Press)

By James Patrick Jordan (National Co-Coordinator)

The word “security” conjures a couple of distinctly different and conflicting images. One is of human beings living in safe, viable, and sustainable communities, where individuals can freely develop their full potential, not hindered by threat or assault or exclusion from the daily necessities of life.

This notion of security prioritizes such socially beneficial institutions as housing, healthcare and education. It encourages the arts, maintains infrastructure and sustains ecosystems.

This kind of security also provides for the people’s defense. That defense is not, however, prioritized over social needs, and it is not formed for committing acts of aggression against others. Such a society may take a variety of forms but, in the broadest sense, all of such could be called socialist in that they put people before profits.

More often than not, however, when we talk about security, we are talking about something completely different. This notion of security is rooted in the kind of fear bred in the heart of the thief and the murderer, ever on guard that those to whom they have caused pain might rise against them and take back what has been stolen.

This type of security also results from a desire to manage broken communities and societies through coercion and punishment, rather than addressing root causes. It is the security of those who prefer to fight “wars on crime” instead of “wars on poverty.”

This security is prioritized over every social need. Its primary directives are the protection of the powerful few and the preservation and expansion of their markets and profits. This is the “security” of capitalism and Empire, that is, the United States/NATO Empire.

According to the World Inequality Report, one percent of the world’s population owns 38% of its wealth, while the poorest 50% own just two percent. My former colleague at the Alliance for Global Justice (AFGJ), Jon Hunt, used to say, “the Pentagon is the insurance company of transnational corporations and global capitalism.”



Source: Encyclopedia Britannica

The United States was founded as an empire, and that is what it is today. While its architects once clamored about the “manifest destiny” of U.S. occupation of the continent “from sea to shining sea,” the objective today is U.S. hegemony around the world.

The U.S. Empire wants to dominate other nations, but it is not against the idea that they should be more developed. The United States wants to replicate its political and economic model in many other places while also bringing home lessons learned abroad.

As the wealth gap grows each day in our own country, the ruling political and economic class must find new ways to exercise its control over the nation. Global capitalism depends on the growth of power-elites around the world to facilitate privatization of resources, the expansion of markets and access to cheap labor.

Meanwhile, as resources dwindle every day – especially water resources – and the twin crises of economic collapse and climate change proliferate, the export of the U.S. security model becomes a priority for the control, displacement and dispossession of peoples and, of course, for the repression of inevitable resistance to it.

The United States is unique in this way. The export of our security model across the world is unparalleled. That model represents the very infrastructure of Empire. It is Empire's skeleton. This is why the United States maintains more than 800 foreign military bases, the spine of the imperial beast.

But not only that. We are exporting our police model, our legal model, our border militarization model, our prison model.

As if to underscore the reality that, in the United States, the nation and Empire are one, our Department of Homeland Security is itself an international agency, with [more than 2,000 agents](#) stationed outside our borders.

Security & Empire: the case of Colombia

Colombia is a case in point in terms of a country whose security model has been restructured based on the United States model. And it is more than that. Colombia is a most willing proving ground for the development of new programs, new aspects of security, new partners, subsequently taken to a much wider international stage. In terms of the diffusion of the U.S. security model, Colombia is not just a doorway to Latin America, but also to the world.

Colombia functions as a military colony of the U.S. Empire (and NATO, given its status as Latin America's sole NATO partner). As such, the nation has at least seven U.S. military bases and, truly, the U.S. military has access wherever it wants to go.

U.S. MILITARY IN COLOMBIA

In the fall of 2009, U.S. and Colombian officials signed an agreement, granting the U.S. armed forces access to seven Colombian military bases for ten years.

Details of the bases agreement:

“Opportunity for conducting full spectrum operations throughout South America” against threats not only from drug trade and guerrilla movements, but also from “anti-U.S. governments” in the region.*

The agreement operates from the same failed military mindset that has given rise to the School of the Americas (SOA/WHINSEC). The purpose of the bases is to ensure U.S. control over the region through military means.

*revealing quotes from a U.S. Air Force document about the bases



Source: marxistleninist.wordpress.com

Colombian military officials regularly report to the Pentagon's Southern Command (SOUTHCOM). Colombia's troops have served in Afghanistan and Yemen, and they have patrolled air and sea space with U.S. troops along the coasts of Central America and Western Africa.



Colombian troops serving in Afghanistan. Source: Colombia Reports

I have personally seen Colombian troops in the village of Herrera, Municipality of Rioblanco, Department of Tolima, who were carrying canteens on their belts stamped “USA.” You can be sure that no U.S. soldier has ever been approved to wear any clothing or accessory bearing the insignia of another country’s military, no matter how close an ally that country is.

Today, Colombia’s two largest troop concentrations are in the southwest of Colombia and along its border with Venezuela. Both are frequently visited by advisers from SOUTHCOM. Colombia is a launching pad for any potential military action in the region on behalf of or involving the United States and against progressive governments and movements across Latin America.



General John F. Kelly. Source: U.S. Department of Defense

Colombia has also become a major trainer of military, police and prison personnel internationally, especially in Central America and Mexico. General John Kelly, former commander of SOUTHCOM and former Secretary of Homeland Security, told a House hearing on April 29, 2014, that:

“The beauty of having a Colombia – they’re such good partners, particularly in the military realm, they’re such good partners with us. When we ask them to go somewhere else and train the Mexicans, the Hondurans, the Guatemalans, the Panamanians, they will do it almost without asking. And they’ll do it on their own. [...] But that’s why it’s important for them to go, because I’m – at least on the military side – restricted from working with some of these countries because of limitations that are, that are really based on past sins. And I’ll let it go at that.”

Plan Colombia is the military and security aid project that was implemented by the United States and Colombian governments in the late 1990s, at a price tag of some \$12 billion. One result of that was the establishment of the U.S.-funded and advised ESMAD (Escuadron Móvil Antidisturbios in Spanish), the highly militarized Colombian riot police.

ESMAD and the Colombian National Police are reviled across Colombia for their attacks against people's movements, something I myself [have witnessed](#). As if to underscore the internationality of both the people's resistance and the repression of the people, it is significant that the [first](#) protester killed by ESMAD was [Carlos Giovanni Blanco](#) in Bogotá in 2001 while protesting the U.S. war against Afghanistan.

My colleague, Maya Hernandez, [explains](#):

"The exportation of the U.S. policing model started during the Cold War, when American officials traveled to over fifty countries offering assistance for stemming the spread of communism to local police forces. By embarking on a global campaign to encourage the use of policing to fight communism, the U.S. successfully created a transnational repressive police force. These counterinsurgency tactics are ongoing. Today, the U.S. trains police in 91 different countries, mostly in the Global South, thus internationalizing the targeting of people of color by focusing their efforts in non-white majority countries. According to a recent [article](#) published in The Washington Post, 'U.S. funding for foreign police training expanded from \$4.3 million in 2001 to \$146 million in 2018.' This is a continuation of the domestic root of policing to protect the interests of the wealthy and, especially, the profits secured from the global plunder of transnational corporations and their regional collaborators. In other words, overseas police training is essential to the prosperity of the U.S. Empire."

As a close ally to the United States, Colombia is one of the first countries to use the United States' policing model. In 1999, the Colombian government, backed by President Bill Clinton, created ESMAD. Since its inception, ESMAD has flagrantly violated the rights of thousands of Colombians, consistently escalating violence against social leaders and activists and silencing peaceful protest.

In rural areas ESMAD has been used against protests led by peasant farmers communities, including attacks against mass indigenous consultations known as mingas and communities protesting to be included in voluntary programs of rural development to create alternatives to coca production. Disproportionately, the targets have been Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.



ESMAD. Source: Colombian National Police (Flickr)

Between 1999 and June of 2019 ESMAD was involved in the extrajudicial killings of [34 persons](#). Since then, the number has grown. Many of us watched in horror the news reports depicting the repression by ESMAD and the Colombian National Police against participants in the national strike that began April 28, 2021, in Cali, Bogotá and elsewhere.

Although it received less international news coverage, before that was the massacre perpetrated by the police in Bogotá on September 9, 2020. On that day, in the pre-dawn hours of the morning, Javier Ordóñez was beaten to death by local police before a crowd of witnesses while he pleaded for his life. He was murdered for violating a curfew. Across Bogotá, [thousands of people took to the streets](#) in protest of police brutality and, before the day was done, ESMAD and other police units had [killed 13 more people](#).

For us in the United States, what took place in Bogotá on that day looked all too familiar. As [Javier Ordóñez spoke his last words](#), pleading, “please, I’m choking!” we were painfully reminded of the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis on May 27, 2020. His last words: “I can’t breathe.”



Javier Ordóñez. Source: Semana (Colombia)

In our special report, [A Year in Review: Racism, Repression and Fightback in the USA](#), we note:

“On June 29, 2020, about a month after George Floyd’s murder, USA Today reported protests in at least 1,700 cities and towns, large and small, across all 50 states. In early June of 2020, a poll from the Pew Research Center estimated that at least 15 million people nationwide had participated in protests, with the number growing by the millions into late June. By then, the National Guard had mobilized in at least 25 states, deploying at least 62,000 federal troops on the ground working in cooperation with local and statewide police to ‘dominate the streets,’ as former President Trump has described.”

Likewise, as we looked on at the repression unleashed against Colombian protesters on September 9 and during the national strike, the similarities were clear. The riot gear worn by ESMAD was just like the riot gear worn by U.S. police who attacked protesters in Portland, Seattle and other cities across the United States.

The rubber bullets, the tear gas canisters, the helicopters used to track, threaten and assault protesters that we saw deployed in Colombia? We recognized those, too. After all, they were “Made in the USA.”



Police attacking protesters in Portland, Oregon. Source: Associated Press

Of course, the United States also brings home new ways to repress. Colombians seeing the repression of U.S. protesters would have recognized the presence of local militants working with police ([Kyle Rittenhouse](#)), arbitrary arrests and forced disappearances.

While watching footage of the repression of the National Strike in Cali, I was angered by videos of Colombian National Police helicopters harassing and firing on protesters with live ammunition. I wanted to know more about Colombian police air capabilities and ties to U.S. funding. I learned about one company that is emblematic not only of how the U.S. exports its security model to Colombia and the rest of the world, but also of the multi-faceted aspects of that model.

Between [2012–2017](#), the Falls Church, Virginia-based contractor, Pacific Architects and Engineers (PAE), received at least \$616.7 million from the U.S. State Department to support the air capabilities of the Colombian National Police.

This included support for and development of the Tuluá National Police Air Base, located near Cali, which was used as a base of operations against the 2021 national strike. According to PAE officials, “the company [...] will provide administrative, technical, maintenance, training, safety, logistics and procurement services for 59 aircraft units that include Bell-206 helicopters, C-208 caravans, UH-1HII, UH-60L and UH-60A.”



Colombian National Police in training. Source: GovCon Wire

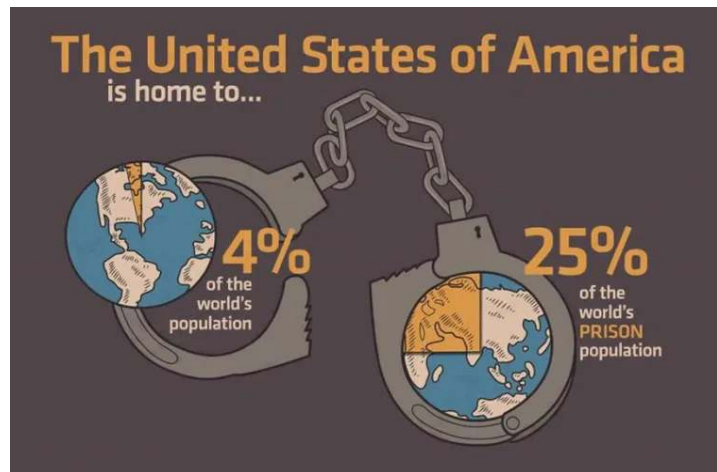
On January 6, 2021 (the same day as the Capitol Hill riot in Washington, D.C.), the PAE announced that it was one of three companies that had been awarded a [\\$3.3 billion contract](#) to process 98% of visas to immigrants and non-immigrants, with operations in 120 countries.

As we can see, the U.S. security model is diverse...and profitable. The PAE is also one of the top 10 contractors for privately run immigrant detention centers in the United States, for which it [received more than \\$801 million](#) between 2013 and the first six months of 2019. From processing visas to jailing immigrants to repressing popular movements in Colombia, the PAE is well-paid to administer key components of Empire’s concept of security.

Militarized policing leads directly to militarized prisons and mass incarceration. It is not enough that here in the United States we have the largest population of incarcerated people in the world.

Source: usprisonculture.com

Among the key characteristics of the U.S. prison model are overcrowding; torture, especially in the form of solitary confinement; long periods being held incognito while in transfer; neglect of healthcare; a prevalence of rape and physical abuse that is largely ignored by prison officials; persons of color and the poor jailed at rates far above their representation in both crime statistics and the general population; and the detention of political prisoners which, in the U.S., is mostly directed against those who resist racism.



The U.S. model of mass incarceration is something we should be ashamed of. Instead, we export it around the world. We call this [prison imperialism](#). It started in 2000 with an agreement between the United States and Colombian governments to restructure Colombia's prison system and extend from there to Guantánamo in occupied Cuba, Bagram in Afghanistan and Abu Ghraib in Iraq. Today the United States is building an [Empire of prisons](#) across the Global South.



Woeful overcrowding at Tramacúa prison, built in 2000 with U.S. funding as a model for the rest of Colombia's prison system. Source: Alliance for Global Justice

But what of the other concept of security – the security, safety and wellbeing of our own people, those who live and work and play and go to school within the borders of the United States?

Many people internationally have a flawed perception of life in the United States, including on the political left. I was recently at an event in Colombia, in Popayan, Cauca. I'm sure everyone there would have described themselves as socialist and anti-imperialist.

At one point, an Indigenous leader came up to me and asked me if it was true that in the United States, there is no poverty. I also spent five weeks in Cuba in 2015, the most humane country I have visited in my life. Even there, I spoke with people who had a distorted view of the United States as a land of opportunity.

An Empire in decline

The reality is that every time a person rises in this system, others must fall. The United States has the largest inequality gap in the developed world. And while workers and the poor and, indeed, everyone but the richest and most powerful have suffered economically and in every other way during the pandemic, the wealth of U.S. billionaires increased by 71%, more than \$2 trillion, [according to](#) the Institute for Policy Studies.

Life in the United States is indelibly marked by pervasive racism, rising inequality, repression of popular movements, rampant climate chaos and the rise in hate crimes and paramilitary groups. The belligerent aspect of the nation's political bosses, police, and military parallels the loss of U.S. prestige and influence in the world economically, as the world becomes more multi-polar and [China challenges the U.S.](#) as the world's largest economy.

The United States is on a downward slide, an Empire in decline. But that Empire retains the most massive monopoly on destructive power in the world, and it will use it at home and abroad to protect the interests of its wealthiest citizens and benefactors.

The starting point of any discussion about reality in the United States has to be around the topic of racism. [One of every 1,000 Black men](#) can expect to be killed by a police officer. Likewise, class oppression and racism are deeply intertwined in the United States. Homelessness is part of our national fabric and identity.

Driving Indigenous nations from their homes, kidnapping Africans for enslavement in another land, the dispossession and poverty that are the lot of our nation's poor: It is upon this more than anything else that the so-called American Dream is built.

Homeless people are [far more likely](#) to be victims of hate crimes than the general population. The problem is greatly compounded if one is a person of color.



Homeless row at Venice Beach, California. Source: KTLA

[According to](#) the Population Reference Bureau, “estimates of homelessness in the United States range from fewer than 600,000 to more than 1.5 million people, and the estimates vary by source.”

I would like to mention some of my own experiences. When I was a young man, I worked with the homeless for about five years in the cities of Chicago and Tucson and have continued to support the movement for their rights. My comrades and I were equally involved in the movement against war and nuclear weapons. We saw these struggles as one and the same: the state had abandoned its duties to the poor and workers in order to increase an already ridiculously bloated military budget.

When I was engaged in this work, I couldn't begin to count the times we heard about police beatings of homeless people, how often we treated their wounds. Where I lived in Chicago, it was common knowledge that the police would beat, torture and even kill victims, especially Black, Latino and homeless Chicagoans.

One police detective and commander, Jon Burge, a veteran of the United States' Phoenix Program in South Vietnam, was found to have tortured at least [118 people](#) between 1972-1991. Homeless people are not only the victims of police violence, but also of para-police and paramilitaries. Between 1999-2019, there were [1,852 reported incidents of violence against the homeless](#), 515 of which resulted in fatalities.



"Captain Torture" – Jon Burge. Source: The Chicago Reader

Nationwide, homelessness has [increased](#) each of the past four years. Meanwhile, funding for the military has increased. Instead of homes for those with no home, we house soldiers in our 800+ international military bases. We build prisons that hold [2.7 million](#) of our people behind bars, the majority of whom are people of color, and we build squalid immigrant detention centers that incarcerate some [tens of thousands](#) of people per year, including children tragically separated from their families.

Security for Empire: inequality at the point of a sword

What the United States wants for the world is inequality, for the elite to rise to the top and for the rest of us to serve them. This is obvious. Let me repeat again: among the so-called “developed nations,” we have the largest wealth gap. Our top allies in South America, Brazil and Colombia, are the [first and second](#) most unequal countries in the Western Hemisphere.

The moment any person or people cease to be useful, or resist, the Empire attempts to bomb us, starve us, jail us, displace us or disappear us. What the Empire hates the most is the threat of a good example. The United States Empire will use any tactic or trick possible to destroy that threat. The sanctions and blockades against Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela are designed to cripple these nations and destroy the alternative examples they offer to the U.S. security model.

While the United States seeks to be a destroyer of some nations, it also seeks to reinforce others. Its approach to nation-building is fundamentally a military strategy. First destroy, then occupy, then rebuild the country as a vassal state, and perhaps eventually replicate the U.S. reality there in the name of development.

The United States spends more on its military [than the next 11 countries combined](#). But that is only part of the story. All aspects of United States government are in some manner subservient to the Pentagon and the overarching militarism that pervades this society.

Likewise, U.S.-style democracy promotion and nation-building is included explicitly as part of a total spectrum Pentagon strategy known as [DIMEFIL](#). DIMEFIL refers to the components of Diplomacy, Information, Military, Economic, Finance, Intelligence, and Law Enforcement as applied to the concept of nation-building.

Marc Plattner is the editor of the Journal of Democracy, published by the U.S. government-created and funded National Endowment for Democracy.

The NED is a leading supporter and instigator of U.S.-sponsored regime change. [Plattner states](#), quite openly, that:



Source: C-SPAN

"Globalization has fostered democratization, and democratization has fostered globalization. Moreover, both trends generally have furthered American interests and contributed to the strengthening of American power. [...] Liberal

democracy clearly favors the economic arrangements that foster globalization – namely, the market economy and an open international trading system. [...] Liberalism is based on the natural rights and the desire for property [...] It is worth emphasizing that the international order that sustains globalization is underpinned by American military predominance."

What, then, is the nature and tactical objective of United States military predominance? It cannot be fit into such simplistic and traditional concepts as victory or peaceful resolution – especially not resolution.

Resolution requires concessions of land rights, security for the political opposition, healthy and independent labor institutions and other such troublesome ideas. Instead, perpetual war has become the new reality. Manageable conflict may be ongoing for long and perhaps endless periods of time. But it allows for continued privatization without respect for the demands and sovereignty of others.

Victory certainly has not been the unitary objective in either Afghanistan or Colombia. It is too easy to talk about the recent events of Afghanistan and the return of the Taliban as a defeat for U.S. imperialism, which it was.

But if that is all we focus on, we forget that the reason the U.S. began its involvement in Afghanistan in the first place was precisely to overthrow a socialist government, and to set in motion the events that would help lead to the eventual fall of the Soviet Union.

Former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski [explained](#) in a 1998 interview that:

"According to the official version of history, CIA aid to the Mujahideen began during 1980, that is to say, after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan on December 24, 1979. But the reality, closely guarded until now, is completely otherwise: indeed, it was July 3, 1979, that President Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. And that very day, I wrote a note to the president in which I explained to him that in my opinion this aid was going to induce a Soviet military intervention. [...] That secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap and you want me to regret it? The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter, essentially: 'We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam war.' Indeed, for almost 10 years, Moscow had to carry on a war that was unsustainable for the regime, a conflict that brought about the demoralization and finally the breakup of the Soviet empire. [...] What is more important in world history? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire?"

Thomas A. Drohan, a retired U.S. Air Force (USAF) brigadier general and Professor Emeritus of military and strategic studies at the USAF Academy, [writes](#):

"Effectively, we are at war and peace all the time. [...]"

When peace fails – that is, war is not deterred – the DoD's [Department of Defense] job is to prevail in the resulting conflict. For the grey zone in between, military strength is to reinforce 'traditional tools of diplomacy, ensuring that the President and our diplomats negotiate from a position of strength.' The problem with this viewpoint is that we also tend to assume, 'war is an act of violence.'

Misapplied to warfare, this assumption overlooks effective methods of waging war in our densely interactive security environment. [...] Confusion about what constitutes legitimate competition thickens the fog of war in a boundless battle-space of weaponized information. What's clear is that warfare is hybrid conflict marked by cooperation and confrontation. [...]"

We are in arenas of warfare that are all-domain, all-instruments-of-power, and all-effects. Conflict involves cooperation and confrontation. How will we fight?"

Karl Marlantes is a Vietnam war veteran who commanded a Marine rifle platoon. He has written three books that were best sellers, two of which are taught at West Point, Annapolis, the Naval War College, the Air Force Academy, and various other military schools. Reflecting on U.S. endless and un-winnable wars in light of the defeat in Afghanistan, he [writes](#) in an editorial for *Time Magazine* that:

"The question no one is discussing is why for decades successive administrations of both parties continue to involve us in wars that not only we don't win, but that for years we keep on fighting even when we know we can't win and our objectives in those wars are confusing and malleable. If you look back over the history of our war in Afghanistan, it was clear as early as 2002 that we didn't fully understand what we were doing there anymore or how to go about doing it. Yet we remained for nearly 20 more bloody years.

Why do we keep doing this? How can we stop? [...]

Most Americans don't seem to care about any of this until, after a series of escalations, the national pain crosses some hard to define threshold and the American people want out. The policy makers usually do not want out. Their reasons range from genuine belief in the war's objectives to self-serving fear of being blamed for failure and the ensuing damage to their political or bureaucratic careers. [...]

Unleashing the awesome and massive power of the American military should only be done to defend against threats to our democracy and the values and hard-won rights of its citizens. Since World War Two, we have repeatedly used this power unwisely, resulting in a humiliating cycle of wasted lives and money. [...]

In Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq we sacrificed our young and spent massive amounts of money fighting to build nations that look and think like we do, a goal that most Americans don't really care about, especially when they don't face getting drafted. In those wars there was no direct threat to Americans that our fundamental values would be taken from us. The reason we lose these wars is that our opponents are fighting for something they care about very much indeed."

Who among our own people truly cares about the objectives of the Empire and U.S. militarism? I think again about those two kinds of security. Where I live in Tucson, Arizona, I am only three blocks from the Casa Maria soup kitchen I used to be part of back in the 1980s. It is still operating, every day passing out hundreds of free lunches, providing a few showers and a place for the poor and the homeless to just sit and relax and not be harassed.

The neighborhood I live in is a poor and mostly Latino neighborhood. When I walk down the alley next to my house, I see the trash, the human excrement, the discarded blankets and clothes, the discarded syringes of those who can only imagine relief in this cruel world at the end of a needle.

If it is early enough in the morning or late enough in the evening, I will see the homeless huddled in storefront doorways, under trees, on benches, or sleeping on the hard concrete and ground, even in the coldest or the hottest parts of our desert weather.

Meanwhile, military aircraft from the nearby Davis-Monthan Air Force Base fly overhead, perhaps on test runs to drop Tomahawk missiles made by our city's top employer, the defense contractor Raytheon. These planes, these missiles, cost U.S. taxpayers hundreds of millions, billions of dollars.

Davis-Monthan Air Force Base.
Source: airplane-pictures.net

What is the United States security model? The U.S. security model is inequality – inequality at the point of a sword. At the end of the day, the homeless man sleeping in the winter cold a few blocks from the White House in Washington, D.C. and



the homeless youth sifting through garbage a few blocks from the Plaza Bolívar in Bogotá, Colombia both represent the putrid fruits of the same Empire. Wherever we live, within the United States or outside of it, our struggle must be one as we reach across borders and boundaries to dismantle the Empire and achieve liberation. Therein lies our security.

Conclusion by Margaret Kimberly

Executive Editor & Senior Columnist, Black Agenda Report

April 10, 2022



Source: Kay Hickman Photography

The words human rights are used quite frequently but conditions around the world prove that they are rarely taken seriously. The United States, which claims to be a protector of human rights, has more people imprisoned, some two million, than any other country on earth. Yet it routinely accuses other nations that won't bend to its will of being human rights abusers. The term has become a weapon of coercion, a means of intimidation. So much so that it will lose all meaning unless those of us who are serious about protecting human rights take up the charge.

Human Rights in the United States: 2022 Report

The [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR) is a good starting point to determine when and how human rights should be respected and protected. The UDHR confirms that human beings have the right to life and liberty, fair trials, the presumption of innocence, freedom of thought and opinion, living wage work, housing, healthcare, and free education. It condemns arbitrary detention, torture, and any form of discrimination. The U.S. doesn't do well by any of these metrics. It doesn't support the rights of its own citizens and routinely deprives others of what it claims to lift up.

Warfare is the ultimate violation of human rights. The United States ended its 20-year long occupation of Afghanistan and immediately confiscated that country's assets. They bizarrely claimed that families of September 11 victims were entitled to money from a country that didn't attack the U.S., and they claim that NGOs will provide humanitarian relief that the government there is capable of giving. Poverty-stricken Afghans face hunger and are driven to [sell their kidneys](#) in order to survive.

Afghanistan is not alone in being targeted in this fashion. Sanctions, unilateral coercive measures, are imposed upon 39 nations, including Cuba, Iran, Syria, Venezuela, Eritrea, and Nicaragua. Citizens of targeted nations are deprived of food and medicine and therefore the "security of person" that the UDHR describes. At least [40,000 Venezuelans](#) lost their lives as a result of just two years of the Trump Administration's sanctions regime.

Even in what it claims is an effort to bring peace to the conflict in Ukraine, the U.S. uses sanctions against Russia, and admits that in so doing it also seeks to damage [Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua](#) in the process. As a Biden Administration official said, "sanctions against Russia are so robust that they will impact those countries that have a relationship with Russia. That is by design." He added that these nations will "feel the squeeze."

Human rights cannot exist in a vacuum. They must be an integral part of society. A country like the United States, founded as a settler-colonial state, has a domestic and international history of conquest and aggression. Therefore any claims of adherence to human rights norms are inevitably performative.

The United States is not a signatory of the Treaty of Rome, which brought the International Criminal Court (ICC) into being. Not only is the U.S. not a member state; in 2002 Congress passed the [American Service Members Protection Act](#), popularly known as the Hague Invasion Act, that gives the U.S. the right to extract any American held at the court in the Hague. The removal part isn't even necessary because the act prohibits the extradition of Americans to the ICC.

It isn't surprising that a nation that would claim such rights for itself would not follow international law, but would instead follow what it calls a "rules-based order." This vague term means anything that one wants, and it is therefore dangerous. A claimed "responsibility to protect" led to the destruction of the nation of Libya in 2011 and an ongoing humanitarian crisis. A claim of protection of human rights was a ruse used to commit inhumane acts.

I traveled to Nicaragua as an election companion, acompañante, in November 2021 along with an international solidarity group of more than 200 people. The United States has targeted Nicaragua in vicious ways, during the Contra War of the 1980s, and by instigating a coup attempt in 2018. The RENACER Act passed before the election is intended to harm the Nicaraguan economy and its people. The Biden Administration accuses that government of practicing human rights violations while simultaneously committing its own in order to undo the will of that country's people.

We see that human rights must be foundational to nations. When they are not, wholesale societal change is required, of the kind seen in the liberation movement of the 1960s. What is often called the Civil Rights Movement was in fact a human rights movement. That is our charge, to make human rights foundational, to put them in the forefront, and not leave them to be cynically twisted for ignoble purposes. Human rights cannot fall victim to the whims of the powerful, who make a mockery of a very high ideal.

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