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# Citizens and Criminals: Mass Incarceration, "Prison Neighbors," and Fear-Based Organizing in 1980s Rural Pennsylvania

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**CITIZENS AND CRIMINALS: MASS INCARCERATION, “PRISON  
NEIGHBORS,” AND FEAR-BASED ORGANIZING IN 1980S RURAL  
PENNSYLVANIA**

A Thesis Presented

by

ERIKA ARTHUR

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
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Department of History

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UMass Amherst Department of History

## **DEDICATION**

For Tiyo Attallah Salah-El

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## **ABSTRACT**

# **CITIZENS AND CRIMINALS: MASS INCARCERATION, “PRISON NEIGHBORS,” AND FEAR-BASED ORGANIZING IN 1980S RURAL PENNSYLVANIA**

MAY 2012

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Throughout the 1980s, the Citizens’ Advisory Committee (CAC), a grassroots group of “prison neighbors,” organized for tighter security at the State Correctional Institution at Dallas (SCID), a medium security prison in northeast Pennsylvania. Motivated primarily by their fear of prisoner escapes, the CAC used the local media to raise awareness about security concerns and cooperated with the SCID administration to acquire state funding for projects at the prison that they believed would improve security. Their work coincided with the widespread proliferation of “tough on crime” rhetoric and policies, and the inauguration of the most intensive buildup of prisons ever witnessed in the United States. This phenomenon, now known as mass incarceration, has disproportionately impacted urban communities of color, due principally to the highly racialized nature of the War on Drugs, while the majority of prisons have been located in white rural communities. By imagining themselves as a population under threat, conceptualizing prisoners as potentially dangerous regardless of the nature of the crimes of which they had been convicted, and positioning the prison administration as a potential ally that needed constant supervision, the CAC contributed in complex ways to the

solidification of a racially- and economically-skewed, intensely punitive criminal justice system. The CAC's organizing helps expose an aspect of mass incarceration that has remained relatively unexplored thus far: the role rural communities that surround prisons played in the historical processes that moved the practice of punishment from the relative periphery of U.S. society to its present position as a central apparatus for political, economic, and social organization.

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## INTRODUCTION

### “GOOD FENCES MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS”

“Good fences make good neighbors...  
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out...”  
Robert Frost, “Mending Wall”<sup>1</sup>

“To put up a fence is to suggest difference when there is none (though there will be)...”  
Rebecca Solnit, “Thirty-Nine Steps Across the Border and Back”<sup>2</sup>

Prisons now dot the landscape of the United States so densely that almost everyone in the country lives within an hour or two's drive of at least one (see *Figure 1*). In 1970 it would have been rare for someone to count a prison among the institutions in his or her community: the local school, the local hospital, the local library... the local prison? But the rapid and widespread expansion of the U.S. prison system that began in the late 1970s has meant that many Americans have had to develop relationships with these often sprawling, brightly lit institutions. With 2.3 million people behind bars, clearly more people in the U.S. have had direct contact with the criminal justice system than did just a few decades ago, whether they were locked up in a jail or prison, visited a friend or relative, or worked in one of the many arms of the criminal justice system.<sup>3</sup> The

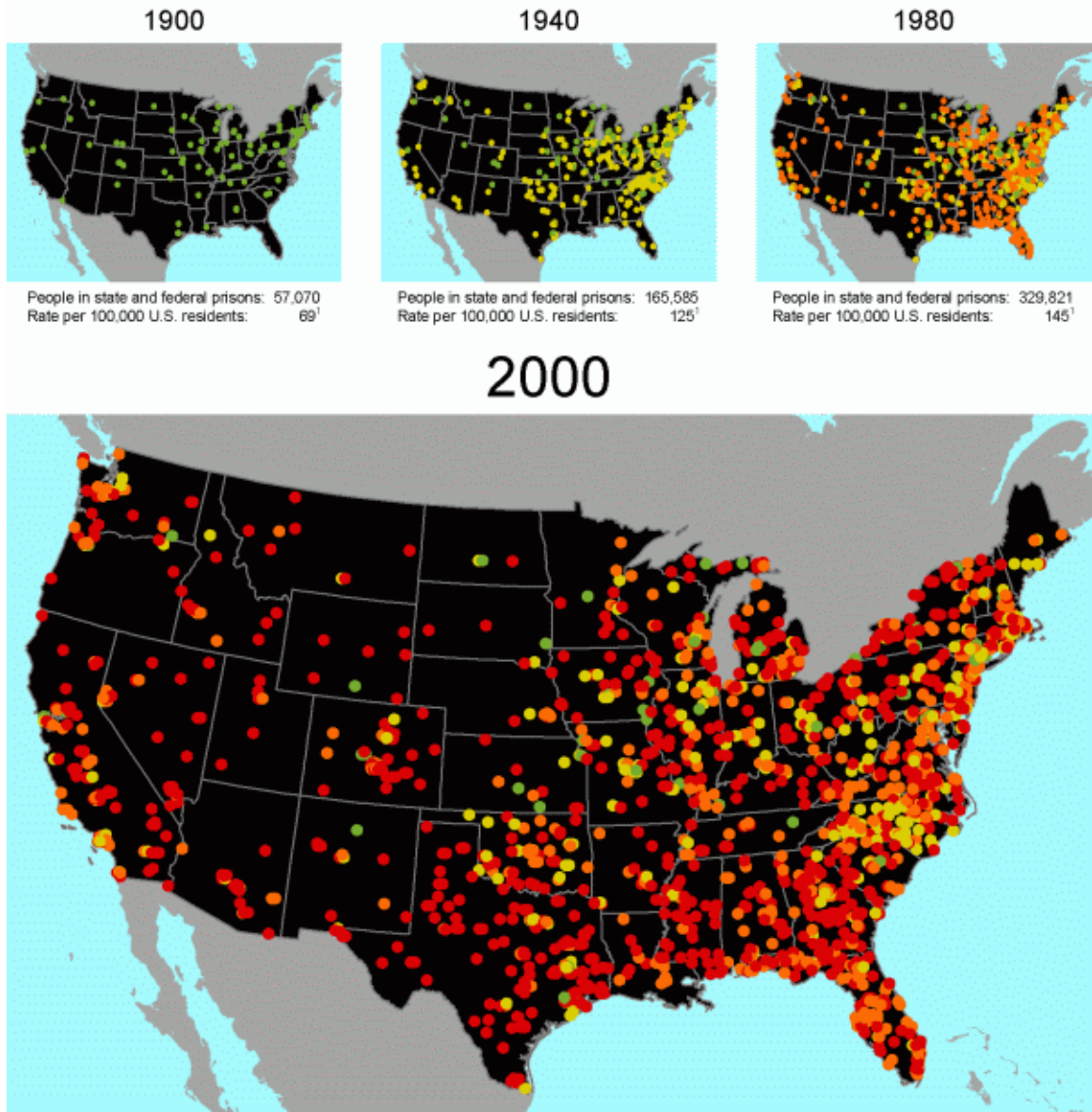
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<sup>1</sup> Robert Frost, “Mending Wall,” in Jeffrey Meyers ed., *Early Frost: The First Three Books* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1996), 47-48.

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 79.

<sup>3</sup> This figure includes people in prison or jail, but does not count those on probation or parole. When these two populations are included the number jumps to 7.3 million people under some form of state supervision, as of 2008. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Populations, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/tables/corr2tab.cfm> (accessed December 17, 2010). Mass imprisonment is different from imprisonment as it has been used in other comparable nations, according to David Garland (2001). Garland articulates two defining features of this phenomenon: sheer numbers – both in terms of the size of the population and the rate of incarceration; and the “social concentration of imprisonment’s effects.” *Mass Imprisonment: Social Causes and Consequences*, (London: Sage, 2001), 1. In her definition of mass incarceration, Michelle Alexander importantly emphasizes the larger “web of laws, rules, policies, and customs” that govern those who have been labeled “criminals,” both inside and outside of prisons. *The New Jim Crow* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 13.

# U.S. Prison Proliferation, 1900-2000

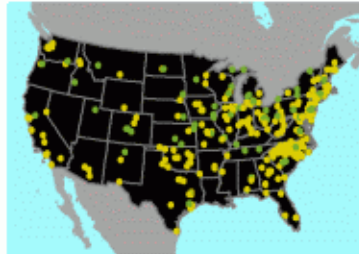


1900



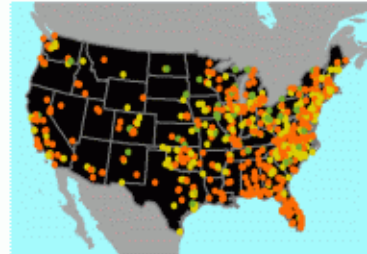
People in state and federal prisons: 57,070  
Rate per 100,000 U.S. residents: 69<sup>1</sup>

1940



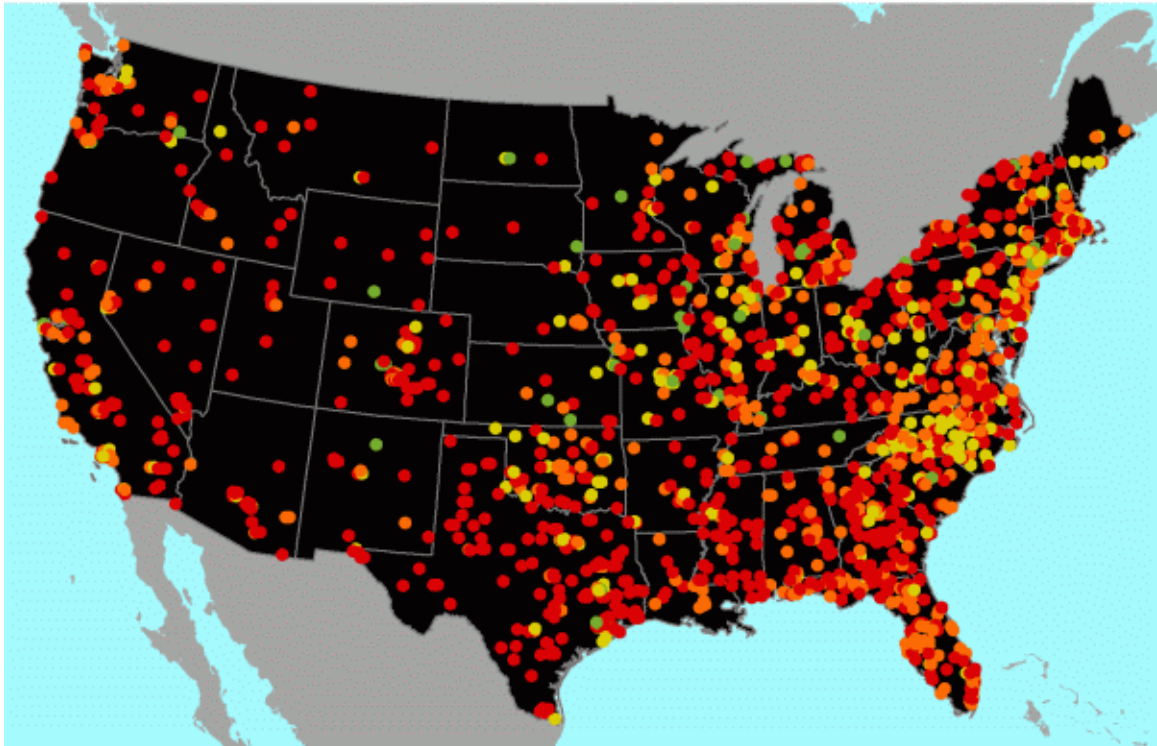
People in state and federal prisons: 165,585  
Rate per 100,000 U.S. residents: 125<sup>1</sup>

1980



People in state and federal prisons: 329,821  
Rate per 100,000 U.S. residents: 145<sup>1</sup>

2000



People in state and federal prisons: 1,312,354. Rate per 100,000 U.S. residents: 478

In addition to the prisons represented here, the United States has more than 3,000 jails holding people awaiting trial or serving short sentences.  
Overall, the United States incarcerated over 2 million people (one in every 143 U.S. residents) in prisons and jails at yearend 2000.<sup>2</sup>

Year Prison Opened: ● 1778 - 1900 ● 1901 - 1940 ● 1941 - 1980 ● 1981 - 2000

Designed by Rose Heyer for PrisonersoftheCensus.org

Created March 28, 2005. Data Source: U.S. Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Census Of State And Federal Adult Correctional Facilities, 2000*. Conducted by U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. ICPSR ed. Ann Arbor, MI, 2004. Cartography Source: Environmental Systems Research Inst.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Historical Corrections Statistics in the United States, 1850 - 1984*, Dec. 1986.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Prisoners in 2000*, Aug. 2001.

**Figure 1: U.S. Prison Proliferation, 1900-2000**

prison boom of this period had a specific spatial character as well. The majority of new prisons built in the 1980s and 1990s, were in rural areas of the country.<sup>4</sup> So as these institutions have been filled overwhelmingly with residents of urban areas, the prison system has come to serve as a bizarre bridge between urban and rural, uneasily connecting these two geographic realms within the landscape of mass incarceration.<sup>5</sup>

In between the rural prisons and the urban communities from which the majority of prisoners are drawn are the “prison neighbors,” the people who live in the immediate vicinity of institutions of confinement. And if the scale and nature of incarceration have changed so dramatically since the 1970s, it would follow that the relationships between prisons and prison neighbors have also changed. Geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore has commented on the ways that, in the age of mass incarceration, people in prison have been imagined as the violent, irredeemable criminals most often portrayed by mainstream media, even though most of them have not been convicted of violent crimes. In the highly racially and economically stratified U.S. political economy, neighbors can become dangerous strangers. This formulation is the result of specific historical and political developments and has become central to American cultural production.<sup>6</sup> Further, if the foundational binary of the prison boom has been that of ideal citizen/criminal, then the place where these two “worlds” meet should be a fruitful one for exposing how this historic growth has unfolded and how these relationships have shifted over time.

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<sup>4</sup> Tracy Huling, “Building a Prison Economy in Rural America,” in Marc Mauer & Meda Chesney-Lind, eds., *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment* (New York: New Press, 2002), 197; *Yes in My Backyard*. Video, dir. Tracy Huling, (Freehold, NY: Galloping Girls Productions, Inc., 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2007), 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

In this thesis I take the Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) of the State Correctional Institution at Dallas, Pennsylvania – formed in 1982, in the very early years of the United States' prison boom – as a window onto the interface between prisons and their neighbors. Made up of people who lived in the immediate vicinity of the prison and their elected officials, and eventually granted official advisory status by the prison administration, the CAC rallied for two and a half decades for tighter security at SCI Dallas. I use the prison neighbors' rhetoric during the first decade of the CAC's twenty-five year life as an opportunity to examine the shifting discourses surrounding crime, safety, and incarceration at this pivotal historical moment. I ask, what did the CAC want, and how did they think they could get it? And how did they come to see the secure confinement of huge numbers of people as a way to ensure their safety? In “Citizens and Criminals,” I demonstrate that this group's motivations and actions help expose what historian Lee Bernstein has called the “cultural epistemology of crime control” – how we have come to know what we know about crime and how to respond to it.<sup>7</sup> The CAC and its strategies must necessarily be understood in the context of a specific time and place, but they can point us toward a fuller understanding of larger trends throughout the U.S. As I attempt to reveal below, the attitudes and desires expressed by this group, standing in for the “community” at large, were shaped by the media, the broader political climate, local/global economic changes, and personal and collective experiences of, and ideas about, violence as they relate to race, class, and gender.

In contrast to the prison neighbors who started the CAC, the majority of people in the U.S. know prisons more from a distance, even though these institutions are in their midst all the time. The actual workings of prisons are kept largely hidden from view,

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<sup>7</sup> Lee Bernstein, *America is the Prison: Arts and Politics in Prison in the 1970s* (UNC Press, 2010), 42.

despite their ubiquity. People see them from the highway, surrounded by glistening razor wire. They read about them in the newspaper. They watch prison-themed television shows and films. Due to the highly skewed racial contours of mass incarceration, however, white people are much more likely than people of color, particularly blacks and Latinos, to have the privilege of maintaining this distance. This privilege is enhanced when the insulating effects of wealth are added to the mix. Thus differential access to structural power has produced physical and psychic distance from the practices of incarceration for some people and communities, namely white middle and upper class people.

Critically though, the privilege of this distance has been qualified by the law-and-order rhetoric that has, since the late 1960s, worked largely through the mass media to center crime victims and potential crime victims as ideal citizens.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps analogous to the yeoman farmer who was the focus of republican governance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the crime victim and potential crime victim became model subjects of governance in the second half of the twentieth century. Policy-makers and media producers did not mold these ideal citizens out of thin air, however. Rather they reformed the identities of citizens who already occupied privileged positions within existing race and class hierarchies and capitalized on gendered notions of vulnerability. Or, as Paul Wright has pointed out in his critique of the victims' rights movement, "not all victims are equal" – some receive validation by way of media and the law, some are not even presented as victims at all.<sup>9</sup> This centering of certain kinds of risk has meant

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Simon, *Governing Through Crime: How the War on Crime Transformed American Democracy and Created a Culture of Fear* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007), 77.

<sup>9</sup> "'Victims' Rights' as a Stalking-horse for State Repression," in Tara Herivel and Paul Wright, *Prison Nation: The Warehousing of America's Poor* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 61. Wright specifically refers

that, even if crime itself did not come closer to most people's lives, the imagination-limiting, anxiety-producing effects of racialized fear of crime have shaped the political language and actions of white Americans, particularly, in significant ways.<sup>10</sup> This politically manipulated fear has helped mobilize both local and national efforts ostensibly aimed at bolstering a sense of security for white people by locking up huge numbers of black and brown people, overwhelmingly men, but a growing number of women as well.<sup>11</sup> Over the past several decades, these efforts have contributed to the solidification and naturalization of an exceptionally repressive, unabashedly retributive system of mass incarceration.

While the CAC's demands and strategies did not fall cleanly into line with the growth of conservatism underway at the same time that the group was active, it cannot be analyzed outside of this context. In the late 1960s, backlash against radical social movements, along with the shifting needs of capital helped usher in a wave of conservative law-and-order politics that continue to play out along racialized lines to this day. As Bernstein has noted, “[b]y drawing on seemingly universal ideas of citizenship, personal responsibility, and community control, conservatives explicitly invoked and avoided a language of race while engaging in a pattern of racial control.”<sup>12</sup> While not necessarily the only voices audible at the time, conservative communication strategies certainly shifted the national discourse around crime and punishment. Bernstein goes on

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to the lack of validation for victims of corporate or state crimes. On the role of the victims' rights movement in the growth of the law and order state, see also Marie Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows: The Politics of Mass Incarceration in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 11

<sup>10</sup> Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 18. Gilmore notes that in fact, by the time the massive increase in incarceration rates began, crime rates in the U.S. had already begun their steady decline, so statistically it became less likely that citizens would be victimized, not more likely, as mainstream media would have had it.

<sup>11</sup> On reducing “fear of crime” as a distinct policy goal, separate from reducing crime itself, see David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 10. On the “social waste management model” of incarceration, see Simon, 142.

<sup>12</sup> Bernstein, 24.

to remark, “[i]f 1968 was the beginning of the end of postwar liberalism, it was also when a consensus began to coalesce around abandoning rehabilitation for more purely punitive criminal justice.”<sup>13</sup> By the 1980s, this abandonment was well underway. The infrastructure necessary for carrying out harsh and lengthy sanctions, quickly becoming the norm, was being erected across the country.

Throughout the period of explosive prison growth of the 1980s and 1990s, prison neighbors forged relationships with local prisons. The possible permutations of these relationships are myriad, based on regional, political, social, and economic differences among communities. More case studies of prison communities will have to be conducted in order to fully grasp the localized patterns that grew out of this moment. If prison neighbors considered the prison an industry, a provider of jobs and revenue, then they might have defined themselves in relation to the prison as they had in relation to a factory that used to operate there, or to the mines that had employed locals for decades. Perhaps this relationship was characterized by a mixture of resignation, pride, gratitude, and antipathy.<sup>14</sup> If neighbors saw themselves primarily as taxpayers, and the prison as something they had paid for, then it could have been considered a thief or a squanderer of hard-earned money if it failed to deliver the promised goods.<sup>15</sup> The prison could also have been viewed as a vital service-provider, a potential safeguard against crime and violence, a protector of citizens against the threats inevitably emanating from within its walls. It would follow then that depending on its performance of these services, it could have been viewed by its neighbors as either benevolent or dangerously inept. More likely,

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<sup>13</sup>Bernstein, 20.

<sup>14</sup>Huling, *Yes in My Backyard* and “Building.” Below, I briefly explore the history of industry in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania, where SCID is located.

<sup>15</sup>Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 9.



and in the case of the CAC, neighbors formed complex relationships with the prison next door, which incorporated several of these dynamics simultaneously.

I argue that the relationships that prison neighbors formed with the institutions in their midst during the first decade of the prison boom were shaped and constrained by a number of interlocking factors. The ways in which local residents interacted with and imagined these institutions and their inhabitants were wrought from historically specific ideologies of race, class, and gender as they had been linked to crime, citizenship, and safety. Beyond ideology, these relationships contributed to a web of political and material consequences as well, both for the prison neighbors and the millions of people who, over the next several decades, found themselves caught in the ever-widening net of the U.S. criminal justice system. By imagining themselves as a population under threat, conceptualizing prisoners as potentially dangerous regardless of the nature of the crimes of which they had been convicted, and positioning the prison administration as a potential ally that needed constant supervision, the prison neighbors who formed the CAC helped naturalize and solidify, in a small but significant way, the most repressive and pervasive prison system in the history of the United States.<sup>16</sup>

As criminologist Elliot Currie has argued, “[s]hort of major wars, mass incarceration has been the most thoroughly implemented government social program of our time.”<sup>17</sup> “Tough on crime” rhetoric, first advanced in a sustained way by the Nixon administration, helped lay the groundwork for the unprecedented buildup of prisons and other apparatuses of coercion and control that reached fever pitch in the 1980s and

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<sup>16</sup> Simon, 265. Simon refers to a “global archipelago of prisons,” after Foucault.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories, 2003), 11.

1990s.<sup>18</sup> Politicians and scholars have advanced many theories that have attempted to explain this explosion. Most of these theories have been preoccupied with crime rates and have variously focused on increasing drug use, popular reactions to the political and social upheavals of the 1960s, and the dramatic economic transformations of this period as the sources of increased criminality.<sup>19</sup> In other words, these theories assume that the growth of prisons was the natural outcome of society-wide insecurity. But if these few decades are viewed in the larger arc of United States history and within the wider field of criminological thought, it becomes clear that crime and prisons must be de-linked. It has only been through social theory and practice – a political process – that crime and prisons have become wedded to one another in a seemingly unbreakable partnership.<sup>20</sup> Gilmore notes that the history of this period should accurately be explained as “crime went up; crime came down; we cracked down,” rather than the widely accepted “crime went up; we cracked down” ordering.<sup>21</sup> Though statistics for crimes other than homicide are famously unreliable over the long term, many criminologists agree that crime markedly declined between 1980 and 1985 and again beginning in the 1990s. However, imprisonment rates steadily climbed.<sup>22</sup>

Within this context, the success of tough on crime rhetoric can be measured by the level to which the imaginations of “decent citizens” became inhibited over this period. A whole array of possible responses to social problems was obscured when law and order boosters moved harshly punitive sanctions to center stage in policy debates.

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<sup>18</sup> Bernstein, 49.

<sup>19</sup> Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 17-19.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> John Hagan, *Who Are the Criminals? The Politics of Crime Policy from the Age of Roosevelt to the Age of Reagan*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 57, 62-63.

Similarly, Angela Davis has argued that the use of torture and the phenomenon of mass incarceration have “domesticat[ed] the civic imagination of white Americans.”<sup>23</sup>

Domestication implies constraint, but also conjures the private, and ostensibly “safe” space of the home.<sup>24</sup> It is also particularly relevant to the CAC since their messaging often centered around keeping their homes and families safe from harm. Increasingly throughout the 1980s and 1990s, in mainstream media and in criminal justice rhetoric, safety came to mean taller fences, more gun towers, and more police. The language of law and order was fully appropriated by “citizens” acting on behalf of their communities.<sup>25</sup> The security of one group of people came to depend wholly on the secure confinement of another group. The sheer volume of “tough on crime” messages and the material effects of economic and political restructuring drowned out possibilities for many people to discover what might really make them safer.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> This is Eduardo Mendieta’s paraphrase of Davis’ argument in Angela Y. Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture* (New York, NY: Seven Stories, 2005), 14.

<sup>24</sup> Domesticity also necessarily conjures traditional notions of the home as a female space, away from the public realm. See Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18:2 (Summer 1966), 151-174. And as many scholars have pointed out, this “private” domestic space also had a racial dimension since the attempted maintenance of the public/private divide for wealthy white women historically depended on the outside-the-home labor of black women. In the present context, domesticity as a frame also offers the opportunity to examine the irony of the home as a safe place, when so many women and children particularly (and especially LGBT people) experience the home as an extremely violent space.

<sup>25</sup> The National Sheriffs’ Association started the National Neighborhood Watch Program in 1972, an excellent example of the ways the state has attempted to enlist citizens to fill in where formal control organizations (the police) cannot always be. After September 11, 2001 the organization expanded in order to help communities with “disaster preparedness, emergency response, and terrorism awareness.” *USAonwatch - Neighborhood Watch/National Sheriffs’ Association*, <http://www.usaonwatch.org/about/history.aspx>, accessed May 1, 2011. More work needs to be done to integrate these kinds of efforts into the larger picture of tough on crime policies and mass incarceration. See for example, Eve Darian-Smith, “Neighborhood Watch – Who Watches Whom? Reinterpreting the Concept of Neighborhood,” *Human Organization* 52:1 (1993).

<sup>26</sup> In the last decade, many communities of color across the country have developed inspiring community accountability strategies that work outside of the criminal justice system to combat violence since the police, courts, and prisons have amply demonstrated that they do not necessarily serve the needs of people/communities of color. Three organizations that provide examples of such alternatives are Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA), Seattle, Washington; Sista II Sista, Brooklyn, New York; and Creative Interventions, a clearinghouse for non-state anti-violence resources.

In the middle decades of the twentieth century, when the major goal of prisons was ostensibly to make functioning members of society out of so-called criminals, commentators and policy-makers drew a correlation between the internal operations of the prison and the safety of the broader community. Over the span of the 1980s and 1990s, as the warehouse model of the prison took hold, treatment of prisoners and quality of programming offered inside became less important, and maintaining the impermeability of the boundaries between the incarcerated and the free became the priority.<sup>27</sup> Victor Hassine illustrates this turn in his chronicle of life in a maximum-security Pennsylvania prison in the eighties and nineties:

Through this gradual process of deterioration, Graterford the prison became Graterford the ghetto...Reform, rehabilitation, and redemption do not exist in a ghetto...Crime, punishment, and accountability are of little significance when men are living in a lawless society where their actions are restrained only by the presence of concrete and steel walls. Where a prison in any real or abstract sense might promote the greater good, once it becomes a ghetto it can do nothing but promise violent upheaval.<sup>28</sup>

Concerns with the treatment of the prisoners and the quality (or mere presence) of programming came to be viewed as soft on crime, which was also interpreted as an actual threat to the security of those who had not been convicted of crimes. Anything beyond the bare necessities came to be seen as a drain on the resources of law-abiding taxpayers.<sup>29</sup> The business of punishment became a zero-sum game between victim or

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<sup>27</sup> Sociologist Loic Wacquant describes the ‘warehouse’ prison as “geared solely to neutralizing social rejects by sequestering them physically from society,” these “social rejects” most commonly being poor, urban, people of color. See “Deadly Symbiosis: When ghetto and prison meet and mesh,” *Punishment & Society* 3:1 (2001), 109.

<sup>28</sup> Victor Hassine, *Life Without Parole: Living in Prison Today* (Boston: Roxbury Publications, 1999) 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, cited in Wacquant, 2001, 112.

<sup>29</sup> For example, Pat Rusiloski of the Citizens’ Advisory Committee remarked on the quality of the law library and gym equipment she saw when she toured SCI Dallas. She thought the law library was probably better than the ones the lawyers use. Interview with author, July 24, 2010.

potential victim and criminal.<sup>30</sup> This individuation of the public good points to a convergence of the longstanding individualist tendencies of American liberal democracy with the particular late twentieth century trends of neoliberalism: privatization, deregulation, and the gutting of social welfare programs.

As prisons have become the dominant sanction for a broader set of criminalized activities, they have become naturalized, taken as given in the American landscape, both literally and figuratively.<sup>31</sup> This process has mirrored and played off of the ways that in a white supremacist society, members of that society, especially those who occupy privileged positions, come to see whiteness (the dominant) as empty of racial meaning, devoid of the workings of power. In order to counter this materially significant misconception, scholars of race have sought to restore a history to whiteness.<sup>32</sup> This history is necessarily relational and dependent on specific political, economic, geographic, and cultural contexts. The political project that accompanies this scholarly one involves calling attention to the ways that white people have upheld racism by capitalizing on the set of unearned privileges they have been granted as a result of the structural disadvantages experienced by people of color.

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<sup>30</sup> Gottschalk, 77, 166.

<sup>31</sup> The history of alcohol use in the U.S. is an excellent example of the fact that prison is but one possible response among many to social problems. During the period under examination here, the grassroots organization Mothers Against Drunk Driving (originally Mothers Against Drunk Drivers) - MADD, founded in 1980, contributed greatly to the enhanced criminalization of driving under the influence of alcohol. The increased attention, both popular and legislative, that drinking and driving received during this period did not coincide with an increase in accidents of this nature, but rather illustrates a convergence of charismatic grassroots efforts, the rise of the larger victims' rights movement, and an increasingly punitive climate at the state and federal levels. See Craig Reinerman, "The Social Construction of an Alcohol Problem: The Case of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers and Social Control in the 1980s," *Theory and Society* 17:1 (January, 1988).

<sup>32</sup> For example, George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple U.P., 1998); David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010).

Likewise, scholars have gone a long way toward de-stabilizing the givenness of incarceration by tracing the ascendance of prisons in the late twentieth century.<sup>33</sup> Residents of the urban communities of color most ravaged by mass incarceration, along with engaged scholars, have also offered analyses of the effects of these trends on their lives and cities.<sup>34</sup> And journalists have brought these conversations to wider audiences.<sup>35</sup> One aspect of prison history that has not yet been explored in enough depth, however, is how the communities that have surrounded prisons in the age of mass incarceration have shifted over time: their attitudes and actions in relation to the prison; their sense of identification or antagonism; and the roles they have played in either undermining or

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<sup>33</sup> For a uniquely synthetic analysis of the relationships between the origins of the urban crisis, the decline of organized labor, the eclipse of postwar liberalism, and the rise of conservatism, see Heather Ann Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History," *Journal of American History* 97, no. 3 (2010); Also see Alexander; Bernstein; Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*; L. Mara Dodge, *Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind: A Study of Women, Crime, and Prisons, 1835-2000* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002); Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*; Alan Eladio Gomez, "Resisting Living Death at Marion Federal Penitentiary, 1972," Ethan Blue and Patrick Timmons, eds., *Punishment and Death*, Special issue of *Radical History Review* 96 (Fall 2006): 58-86; Marie Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows: The Politics of Mass Incarceration in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Marc Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate* (New York: The New Press, 2006); Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (New York: Verso, 1999); Robert Perkinson, *Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire* (New York: Henry Holt, 2010); Simon; and Julia Sudbury, *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex* (New York: Routledge, 2005) for examples. Other scholars have offered studies of earlier periods that provide important insights into the foundations of mass incarceration: see Kali Gross, *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Cheryl D. Hicks, *Talk With You Like a Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890-1935* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Rebecca McLennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment: Protest, Politics, and the Making of the American Penal State, 1776-1941* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Kahlil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> For a global perspective see Sudbury; for impacts on women, their families, and communities see Rickie Solinger et al. eds., *Interrupted Life: Experiences of Incarcerated Women in the United States* (Berkeley: Univ. of CA Press, 2010); for impacts on LGBTQ people see Joey L. Mogul et al, *Queer (In)justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Sasha Abramsky, *American Furies: Crime, Punishment, and Vengeance in the Age of Mass Imprisonment* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007); Ted Conover, *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing* (New York: Random House, 2001); Jennifer Gonnerman, *Life on the Outside: The Prison Odyssey of Elaine Bartlett* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004); Mumia Abu-Jamal, *Live from Death Row* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996)

strengthening the legitimacy of the prison system.<sup>36</sup> The examination of the Citizens' Advisory Committee that follows provides a glimpse into a few of these dimensions.

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<sup>36</sup> Tracy Huling's work on rural economically depressed communities that welcomed prison construction in the 1990s and early 2000s opened up the conversation about the relationship between rural economic decline and the criminalization of urban communities of color. The CAC does not fit cleanly into the economic picture Huling describes, nor were they involved in a siting process, therefore their story adds a different dimension to this dynamic. Also see Gilmore, *Golden Gulag* and *Up the Ridge*. DVD, dir. Amelia Kirby and Nick Szuberla, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop/Thousand Kites, 2008).

## CHAPTER 1

### “EVEN A LOW-RISK MAN BECOMES DESPERATE”: THE CITIZENS’

#### ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Patricia Rusiloski had not thought much about the realities of living near a prison when she and her husband bought their home in Jackson Township (Luzerne County, PA) in 1981. It was very close to where her husband had grown up; his parents still owned their farmhouse down the road. Pat, who had grown up in Hanover Township, near Wilkes-Barre, was just glad to be closer to town again, having lived a more isolated life further out in the country for the first few years after she got married and gave birth to her daughter. It was not until there were multiple escapes, not long after they moved in, that Pat became fearful and concerned.<sup>37</sup> Her first reaction was, “someone [isn’t] doing their job.”<sup>38</sup> In fact, the steam whistle that was supposed to warn neighbors of an escape, was not even audible from her house, just two miles from the state prison, which at the time held around 1300 inmates.<sup>39</sup> The first indication that something was amiss was the presence of guards wandering through her yard and searching cars down at the corner.

Not one to stand idly by, Pat began asking questions. Why had the escapes occurred? First she tried her local board of supervisors. They told her there was nothing they could do. Next she moved on to her state senator. He was at a loss as well. So she mobilized her neighbors by gathering “a couple thousand” signatures on a petition and

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<sup>37</sup> The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections reports that in 1981 and 1982, nine inmates escaped from SCI Dallas. This figure includes those who breached the walls of the prison as well as those who escaped during work details, work or educational release, or furlough. Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Statistical Report 1980-1985, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Patricia Rusiloski interview with author, July 24, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> “Official says security tightened at Dallas prison,” *Times Leader*, February 15, 1983.



calling a meeting at the Jackson Township Fire Hall.<sup>40</sup> She invited her legislators and put some heat under them by also inviting the media: radio, newspapers, and television. And she got results. Her senator asked that a committee be formed, with seven members and two alternates, to meet with the prison administration every three months. An announcement was made at that meeting that anyone who might like to serve on the committee should call Pat Rusiloski. Rusiloski accepted the first seven people who volunteered and the group that would eventually be called the Citizens' Advisory Committee was formed in 1982.

Throughout the next 25 years, Pat Rusiloski's name would show up in many newspaper articles, quoted as the committee's spokeswoman. These articles chronicle the committee's frustrations with the slow pace of change, as well as their successes in tightening security at SCI Dallas, known locally as Chase prison due to its location within the small community of Chase. From its inception, the committee lobbied for funding for more correctional officers, taller fences, better lighting, and warning sirens, based on their fear of prisoner escapes and the violence they imagined could result from them. A \$1.5 million project was approved by the legislature in 1984 that was to incorporate all of these measures. Four years later the work was still not completed and the committee was exceedingly anxious to see it finished. "There have been so many completion dates and it's still not completed...[i]t's terrible," Rusiloski is quoted as saying.<sup>41</sup>

In the eighties and nineties the pace of prison population growth increased rapidly, as it did across the country during this period due to the inauguration of the War on Drugs and the implementation of policies like "three strikes" and mandatory minimum

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<sup>40</sup> The first meeting was held October 20, 1982. "More than 1000 residents" signed the petitions. "Some precautions promised at prison," *Times Leader*, November 13, 1982.

<sup>41</sup> "Dallas jail security system nearly ready, officials say," *Times Leader*, January 7, 1988.

sentencing. Joseph Ryan, SCI Dallas superintendent for most of those years and a frequent critic of prison overcrowding was Rusiloski's major ally in the administration. In a 1983 article Ryan says there are 1334 inmates, whereas eighteen months prior there were only 1014.<sup>42</sup> Two years later, Ryan puts the count at 1629.<sup>43</sup> By 1990, according to Ryan, there were 1907 prisoners being held at SCI Dallas.<sup>44</sup>

The staff to inmate ratio was a concern that the Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) shared with the guards' union. Rusiloski makes clear though that the committee worked *with* the union, not *for* it: "we didn't want them to use us for everything that they wanted." Her remark implies that the committee had common cause with the union on some fronts, but that on other issues they diverged sharply. According to Rusiloski, Guards would secretly leave notes in her mailbox so she could share them with the committee, since staff was forbidden from talking to the CAC. The committee found out about incidents on the inside this way and could use them to illustrate the need for tighter security and more guards.

The main reason Pat Rusiloski and her neighbors organized the committee was concern for their own safety and the safety of their families. Following one escape, Rusiloski was so afraid that she did not leave the house for days. Finally, she had to go out to get groceries. On the way back, Rusiloski's fear was so intense that she could not go back in her house. It had occurred to her that some inmates knew where she lived: she had received letters from them. She was close with the police chief so she stopped at the station and asked him if he would go through her house to make sure there was no one hiding in there. The chief walked through the house and assured her that all was clear.

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<sup>42</sup> "Official says..." *Times Leader*, February 15, 1983.

<sup>43</sup> "Prison Construction Ahead of Schedule," *Citizens' Voice*, March 2, 1985.

<sup>44</sup> "40 guards to be added at Chase," *Times Leader*, January 3, 1990.

During that same incident Rusiloski's daughter, home from college for the weekend, was so scared that she slept on the floor in her parents' room: "it's the first time she said she was ever so scared," Rusiloski recalled.<sup>45</sup>

When asked if she would feel differently about the presence of the prison if it were a women's prison, like SCI Muncy in central Pennsylvania, Rusiloski says that it is really more the nature of the crimes for which the prisoners are serving time that shapes her fears. "I never thought of it that way," she says, "but if there's murderers [and] there's quite a few up here...I don't care if it was women or not, if they were up here for murder... it'd be the same way. And if they were escaping, I mean that's why we got involved..."<sup>46</sup> Similarly, when asked whether she has thought about the fact that most of the guards and people in the surrounding community (including Rusiloski) are white and the majority of the inmates are black and Latino, Rusiloski expresses a "colorblind" attitude: "no, I mean there's good and bad in everyone - blacks, whites - there's good and bad in everything. I don't think of it that way, no." One of the letters she had received was from a white prisoner who "had murdered three people." This particular inmate had written letters to the local newspaper, the *Times Leader*, connecting Pat Rusiloski's work to secure more funding for prison security to the lack of state funding for other concerns, especially education. He then wrote Rusiloski a letter inviting her, presumably in a sarcastic tone, to be one of his two allowed guests at the annual Lifers' Picnic at the prison. When she failed to reply he wrote her again and expressed his disappointment. Then, Rusiloski says, he told her that he had friends in nearby Kingston. She called Superintendent Ryan and he told her to bring the letter up to him. When Ryan saw that

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<sup>45</sup> Patricia Rusiloski interview with author, July 24, 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. (edited for clarity).

the prisoner had told her he had friends in Kingston, the superintendent read it as a threat. According to Ryan, this was justification for the inmate to be transferred to another facility and he took action. This incident seems to have contributed to Rusiloski's "colorblind" fear: "I mean that one that wrote, he was white and he had murdered three people."

The possibility of murder loomed large when Pat Rusiloski imagined the worst case scenario that could follow an escape from Chase. Like many white people in the U.S., Rusiloski was hesitant to candidly discuss the role race might have played in the development of this fear and her response to it. She also did not feel that it mattered whether the "murderers" were men or women, they were "murderers" just the same. What she discussed clearly and openly was the fact that she felt under siege in her own home and community. She felt that her family was threatened, and she felt that this threat emanated from a poorly managed institution filled with people who had undoubtedly committed acts that warranted their incarceration. Seen in this light, it is not hard to imagine, then, why Rusiloski would so persistently organize with the CAC. To her mind, her fear was unnecessary; it could be remedied, if only people would do their jobs and invest money and time where it was needed. It was not that she harbored particular animosities toward the growing numbers of black and Latino, largely poor and working class men locked up at SCI Dallas. What she knew was that she and her neighbors deserved safety. And given the facts as she knew them, the way to that safety was through the strengthening of security at the prison.

In August 1983, not long after Pat helped form the CAC, Chase prison held a media tour in conjunction with the thirtieth anniversary of the State Bureau of

Corrections. At the time, the prison's total operating budget was \$12,557,000 and the cost of incarcerating one inmate was \$12,556 per year. The average inmate was twenty-six years old and called the Philadelphia area home. Twenty-eight months was the average length of time served. Robbery, burglary, and murder made up sixty percent of the convictions that brought prisoners to Chase. About fifteen percent of the population was serving life sentences. Inmates were confined to seven by nine foot cells. These are some of the statistics reporters contemplated as they walked through the prison in the late summer heat.<sup>47</sup>

It would be reasonable to assume that prison officials in Pennsylvania and specifically at SCI Dallas felt the need, at this particular moment, to do some damage control. Prison populations were rapidly rising in the state due to the passage of mandatory sentencing laws, exacerbating existing overcrowding and lowering guard to prisoner ratios. The 1981 hostage crisis at Graterford Prison outside Philadelphia, led by Black Liberation Army fighter Joe-Joe Bowen, had exposed the fact that the Bureau of Corrections had no media plan in place. Even more recently, in April 1983, another hostage crisis in a Pennsylvania prison, this time at Western Penitentiary in Pittsburgh, made national news and further emphasized the need for media strategy in case of emergencies.<sup>48</sup> At the local level, Chase had experienced yet another escape the previous September. Serving time for murder, William McConnell had walked away from the prison and was apprehended later in Philadelphia. Also probably worrisome to some

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<sup>47</sup> Gene Skordinski, "All You Ever Wanted to Know About SCID," *Citizens Voice*, September 1, 1983, 20. Tellingly, this article does not disaggregate the sixty percent figure for its readers. Robbery, burglary, and murder are obviously very different crimes, but they get lumped into one figure here.

<sup>48</sup> "Surrender Discussed in Prison Hostage Case," *New York Times*, April 18, 1983. <http://www.nytimes.com/1983/04/18/us/around-the-nation-surrender-discussed-in-prison-hostage-case.html> (accessed October 23, 2010); "Newspeople get glimpse of state prison," *Citizens' Voice*, June 26, 1986.

Chase administrators, Pat Rusiloski's oversight committee had recently formed and seemed to have overwhelming support from the local community. The Citizens' Advisory Committee's organizing and the media attention it was drawing had the potential to expose the workings of the prison in a way that implicated the administration. It must have seemed that some public relations work was in order.

Throughout the tumultuous history of prisons in the United States, use of the media has been an important tool manipulated by prison administrators, reformers, and prisoners alike in their attempts to maintain control, make policy changes, or raise awareness about prison abuses. In 1983, SCI Dallas used the occasion of the anniversary of the Bureau of Corrections to engineer a tour that would reassure the surrounding community that the administration had the institution under control. One official made sure to clearly articulate to reporters a particularly timely element of the department's mission: "to protect the community through adequate security designed to prevent escapes and the introduction of contraband." Notably, the object of the Bureau of Corrections' mission was located outside the prison's walls; it was not the prisoners, at least not as it was presented at this media event.<sup>49</sup> Given SCI Dallas's careful orchestration of this tour, one has to wonder which parts of the prison were not toured, which aspects of prison life were not exposed to public scrutiny.

Twenty-four years earlier, Chase prison had opened its doors to the public for the first time and had also intentionally highlighted certain aspects of the facility. In December, 1959, 5000 area residents lined up to get a look inside the new and as yet empty prison in Jackson Township. The occasion was clearly significant if it drew this many people. The turnout for the tour was so much larger than administrators had

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<sup>49</sup> "All You Ever Wanted to Know About SCID," *Citizen's Voice*, September 1, 1983.

expected that their plans for personally conducted tours had to be scrapped. Instead of walking through the institution with guides, visitors meandered through the prison and came upon correctional officers stationed throughout, presumably to answer any questions residents might have had, despite the fact that many of these officers probably had not yet worked in a prison.<sup>50</sup> One of the pioneering practices at the prison was the issuance of knives, forks, and spoons to each prisoner in the mess hall, to be returned when the meal was through. According to a reporter who participated in an inaugural tour of the institution especially for the media, held the following summer, this was “the only prison in the country which issue[d] such eating utensils.” Due to safety concerns, other prisons distributed only spoons. Likewise, prisoners were trusted with pepper shakers, rather than just salt. The cafeteria was also outfitted with tables made in another Pennsylvania prison. Cleanliness was a major priority in the new facility and the modern laundry equipment guaranteed that at least the clothes and linens would be spotless. With the machines in full swing prisoners could process about 3000 pounds of dirty laundry a day.<sup>51</sup>

This emphasis on hygiene and cleanliness indicates the legacies of Progressive era eugenic criminology that were still evident at this point in many institutions across the country.<sup>52</sup> In fact, the prison at Chase was initially opened as an institution for “defective delinquents,” a term that, when first put to use, denoted the combination of “feble-mindedness” and criminality. The term was most likely coined in 1910 by eugenicist Orlando F. Lewis, executive director of the Prison Association of New York, though other like-minded reformers of the time could have uttered the phrase first. The

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<sup>50</sup> “5000 Visitors Tour Chase Institution,” *Times Leader*, December, 1959.

<sup>51</sup> “Here’s the First Glimpse Into New Correctional Institution at Chase,” *Times Leader*, July 15, 1960.

<sup>52</sup> Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

category was a product of contemporary Progressive criminological thought combined with older notions of deviance.<sup>53</sup> Influential Progressive penologist Katharine Bement Davis used “defective delinquent” to refer to the “unreformable” women under her watch at the Bedford Hills Reformatory for Women in New York. Davis was instrumental in the development of intelligence testing for inmates, the avenue by which most of them would become known as “defective delinquents.”<sup>54</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the U.S., notions of crime and criminality have been expressly gendered and racialized, and have been dramatically shaped by class politics. Thus classifications like defective delinquent, as they were developed and implemented on the ground, necessarily followed these contours, affecting people differently depending on where they were located within these social hierarchies.<sup>55</sup> Poor people, immigrants, black people, women, and especially those existing at the intersections of these groups were disproportionately targeted by these policies and practices. Reformers and administrators made “scientifically-based” arguments in favor of indeterminate, up-to-life sentences for those inmates they deemed incorrigible, whose presence in their reformatories was seen as hindering these institutions’ rehabilitative capabilities. As a result, some inmates would live out the duration of their lives in institutions long after this particular classification fell out of favor in criminological thought, a testament to the ways that theories of crime and criminality have the potential to outlive their authors.<sup>56</sup> This is particularly consequential

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<sup>53</sup> Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals*, 156-157.

<sup>54</sup> Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals*, 150.

<sup>55</sup> On the gendered use of “defective delinquent,” Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals*, 150-152.

<sup>56</sup> Rafter offers the example of Fenix Whipple who spent forty years, eventually dying, at Napanoch Institution for Defective Delinquents in New York, the first eugenic prison in the country. *Creating Born Criminals*, 2.



when those theories lead to the construction of imposing buildings of stone and razor wire meant to confine human beings, and the formation of intricate bureaucracies meant to serve the needs of the state.

With the exception of New York, Pennsylvania was the only state in the country to build an independent institution specifically for defective delinquents, the State Correctional Institution at Dallas, opened in 1960.<sup>57</sup> In the end, its life as an “IDD” – institution for defective delinquents – as these prisons were known, turned out to be quite short and it is unclear if it was used strictly as such even during its tenure under that name. The U.S. Supreme Court decided in 1966 in *Baxstrom v. Herold* that defective delinquent laws - Pennsylvania passed theirs in 1937 after a protracted lobbying effort - did not afford inmates their constitutional right to due process.<sup>58</sup> After this decision took effect, Chase became an “adult institution” and this local vestige of eugenic criminology was eclipsed by the language of contemporary criminal justice.<sup>59</sup>

This particular moment in Chase prison’s life provides an opportunity to see how the relationship between criminal justice theory and practice played out on the ground, and offers a telling snapshot of the distance that often existed between the ideals of prison reform and the everyday realities of life inside prison walls. For example, the same year the Supreme Court decided to do away with the classification of “defective delinquent,” a “riot” broke out at SCI Dallas, the second in two and a half years. The previous violence, in June of 1963, had been attributed to “Black Muslims.” This time it seems that a group of unaffiliated prisoners was responsible for the agitation. If prison administrators and

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<sup>57</sup> Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals*, 226.

<sup>58</sup> On PA’s DD law see Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals*, 226. On *Baxstrom v. Herold* see same, 221.

<sup>59</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Corrections website: [http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/hidden\\_dallas/11325](http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/hidden_dallas/11325) (accessed September 30, 2010).

correctional officials considered this institution's form and disciplinary practices inventive, the prisoners made clear their views of this kind of reform. They used the very building blocks and implements of innovation against their keepers, allegedly attacking guards with window bars and forks.<sup>60</sup>

The convergence of these seemingly unrelated events is significant. One of the events, the Supreme Court decision, emanated from the highest court in the country but had local effects. The second, the prison riot, was a local event but indicated a national phenomenon, the intensification of prisoner-led agitation that would reach its apex just a few years later with the uprising at Attica Prison, 200 miles northwest of Dallas in New York state. As part of a concerted but locally specific political movement, Attica prisoners and prisoners across the country, including those locked up at SCI Dallas, generated lists of demands to improve prison conditions and address the racism and abuse they had experienced at the hands of police, guards and administrators (See APPENDIX A). This confluence reveals SCI Dallas's location in the shifting political landscape of incarceration in the U.S. and offers historical context for the ideas and activities of the Citizens' Advisory Committee in the 1980s and 1990s.

The list of demands from inside SCID came by way of two prisoners, Richard Mayberry and Kenneth Owens. In 1972, a local newspaper featured an interview with Mayberry and Owens, in which they were asked to outline the reforms they wanted to see instituted at Chase (See APPENDIX B). They resonated sharply with the requests put forward by prisoners across the country. Apparently, at the time Mayberry and Owens were interviewed, SCI Dallas had just undertaken a series of reforms, including changes to visitation policies. Based on Mayberry and Owens' list, they did not, however, address

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<sup>60</sup> "Riot at Chase Institution Puts 3 in Hospital," *Dallas Record*, February 9, 1966.

many of the prisoners' major concerns. Ironically, they did not meet prison staff's approval either. Some staff members circulated a petition that accused the administration of lax treatment of "maximum security prisoners" which they believed compromised their safety. On the contrary, Mayberry asserted that most of the tension at the prison was caused by the staff and called specific attention to the ways guards used race to divide the prisoners and pit them against each other. Owens also named "institutionalized racism" as a major force at play inside Chase. Notably, this rare instance, when prisoners were able to speak publicly through a media outlet about conditions within the prison, also included explicit acknowledgement that race and racism played huge roles in the internal dynamics of SCI Dallas. On the contrary, when administrators, volunteers, or staff spoke about the prison, race and racism never came to the surface.<sup>61</sup>

If the lists of demands issued by prisoners at Attica and SCI Dallas have much to tell us about the political, social, and economic milieu of the 1970s, the list put forward by the Citizens' Advisory Committee holds numerous insights about the climate of the 1980s. The first meeting of the group generated a list of "recommendations" for improving security at SCI Dallas. Handwritten in Pat Rusiloski's block letters, the list contains eight different recommendations, with some items broken down to provide more detail (See APPENDIX C).

Number one on the list requests that the population of the prison be frozen until the facility could expand and more correctional officers could be hired. As I will discuss

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<sup>61</sup> On Attica prisoners' demands see Larry E. Sullivan, *The Prison Reform Movement: Forlorn Hope* (Boston: Twayne, 1990), 103. On Dallas prisoners' demands see William Scranton 3<sup>rd</sup>, "Dallas State Prison: An Inside View," *Dallas Post*, May 11, 1972. The Attica uprising was met with brutal state violence; 43 people died, 39 of whom were confirmed to have been shot on the orders of Governor Nelson Rockefeller. The impact of this event reverberated across the U.S. throughout the next few decades as the entire criminal justice system moved in a harshly punitive direction. Asha Bandele, "After the Attica Uprising," *The Nation*, September 9, 2011, <http://www.thenation.com/article/163270/after-attica-uprising> (accessed September 12, 2011).

further below, overcrowding was a concern across the board at SCI Dallas – for staff, administration, and prisoners. The fact that the newly formed community group requested that the double cell be eliminated indicates that they recognized that crowding two prisoners into a cell made for one created the potential for more violence. But their framing of this request, and those that follow, reveals their priorities. Their concern was for the safety of prison neighbors and guards. The fact that the congestion of the prison could have compromised the health and well-being of those locked inside did not seem to cross their minds.

Number four on the group’s list reads “Eliminate prisoners of violent crimes from becoming trustees [trusties] and getting outside of compound work privileges.” Notably, this request had already received attention by the time the group of residents met for the second time, in November 1982. The administration had pulled two lifers off of outside work details “in response to the sentiment of fear in the local community.” Deputy superintendent James Ryan told the approximately fifty people who attended the second meeting that it had been difficult to bring one particular “model prisoner” in off the detail. The superintendent at the time, G.R. Jeffes, went on to say that the administration used a “highly sophisticated” system to determine who would work outside the fence, and that they would never put the community at risk by allowing dangerous inmates to work on those kinds of projects. But the township solicitor, Blythe Evans, was present at the meeting and was not satisfied with this approach. In her opinion, even a model prisoner could become desperate if he were on the run.<sup>62</sup>

The fact that the prison changed its practice of allowing lifers to work outside the prison based on the fear-motivated demands of local citizens becomes more significant

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<sup>62</sup> O’Connor, Claire, “Some precautions promised at prison,” *Times Leader*, November 13, 1982.

when considered within the context of the shift toward harshly retributive criminal justice policy, the victims' rights movement, and media coverage of violent crime and the threat it posed for "everyday" people. It should not be taken as given that such a change would have been made, and made so quickly, had the larger institutional, political, and economic contexts been different. The deputy superintendent's hesitation to bring certain prisoners in from outside work details also indicates the confluence of conflicting penal ideologies at this particular moment. If it were up to him, it seems, rehabilitation would not be declared dead just yet.<sup>63</sup>

The fact that it was a woman asking for these changes is also significant. SCI Dallas is a men's prison. In the U.S., where mainstream masculinity has been discursively constructed around violence, fear of crime is necessarily gendered. Rape and other forms of gender violence are realities that dictate the choices women make about where they will go and with whom, what employment they will pursue, where they will live, and other fundamental aspects of everyday life. However, sensationalized media coverage and lack of appropriate education on gender violence have led to misguided fear and efforts to address it that often have not actually made the most vulnerable people safer.<sup>64</sup>

At the time the CAC formed, it had been merely a decade since feminists brought awareness of rape fully into mainstream American consciousness.<sup>65</sup> But in that decade,

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<sup>63</sup> Garland (2001) has noted that some criminal justice practitioners who were trained before the 1980s experienced the complete overhaul of their professional world with the implementation of tough on crime policies and did not necessarily accept all the changes they witnessed with ease. (4)

<sup>64</sup> Kristin Bumiller, *In An Abusive State: How Neoliberalism Appropriated the Feminist Movement Against Sexual Violence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 19.

<sup>65</sup> By the 1970s, African American women had already been fighting for decades to bring white men's sexual violence against black women to the attention of the general public. Many of the white women of the second wave feminist movement who were most vocal on the subject of rape undoubtedly built on these traditions of resistance. See for example Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women,*

for multiple complicated reasons, the heart of the anti-rape movement had migrated from the grassroots to the penal wing of the state. And while radical feminists had emphasized the need for society-wide changes – the end of the violent patriarchal domination of women – primarily white liberal anti-rape activists and the allies they made in the law-and-order state were more interested in policy changes that bolstered the burgeoning criminal justice system. Although at the time they could not have foreseen the impending prison explosion, by choosing the route of increased criminalization, these political actors contributed to the precipitous rise of the U.S. penal state.<sup>66</sup> Again, alternative strategies to combat the extraordinary harms of gender violence were obscured by the normalization of incarceration as the only reasonable response to “crime.” While they did not organize explicitly based on their fear of rape, it stands to reason that the CAC was impacted by this discourse. For instance, Pat Rusiloski’s only memory of crime that touched her life before her work with the CAC was of a classmate who was raped by two inmates who she remembered as having escaped from the Luzerne County Jail. While I cannot claim that this memory directly affected her later organizing, it stands to reason that rape, and its criminalization, influenced her ideas about who commits violence and how one achieves safety.<sup>67</sup>

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*Rape, and Resistance – A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010) and Dayo F. Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads: African American Women Activists in the Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 75-99.

<sup>66</sup> Importantly, Gottschalk draws attention to the fact that the lack of an effective welfare state in the U.S. meant that opportunities for funding anti-rape work and support for battered women were often limited to criminal justice sources (125). Bumiller also reminds us that the figure of the “rapist” in this discourse was highly racialized and directly related to the historical specter of the “black rapist” used to justify violence against black people in the form of lynching (5, 22).

<sup>67</sup> Pat Rusiloski interview with author, October 14, 2010.

Significantly, in the first two years of the CAC's life, the Pennsylvania Bureau of Corrections recorded an unusually high number of escapes.<sup>68</sup> But numbers dropped in 1984 and did not again come close to reaching the level of escapes recorded in 1982 and 1983 until 1996.<sup>69</sup> Also, throughout this period, SCI Dallas was among the state's institutions with the lowest number of escapes. But the fact that the CAC was born during a short period of increased escapes shows that discrete incidents at the local level can serve to tap into deeply held fears that resonate on much broader scales. A few escapes, none of which had violent consequences, catalyzed community members who had been primed as potential victims by mainstream media and tough on crime political rhetoric.<sup>70</sup>

Escapes, though rare, of course garnered a great deal of media attention. Other less sensational issues showed up repeatedly in local media coverage of SCI Dallas between 1982 and 1993 and also motivated responses from a variety of actors. The burgeoning problem of overcrowding was one of the issues that drew significant interest. Responses to this issue varied. Top-level state officials, administrators in the Bureau of Corrections/DOC and at SCID, correctional officers, prisoners, and prison neighbors all had different responses to the increasingly unavoidable fact that the prison population in the state was exploding and there was not enough room to lock everyone up, even as new prisons were being built across the commonwealth. This is a testament to the fact that, while there is certainly precedent for overcrowding in prisons and jails, the scale of growth at this point was indeed unprecedented. There certainly was no consensus about

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<sup>68</sup> Due to a change in its status, the BOC changed to the Department of Corrections in 1984.

<sup>69</sup> Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, "Statistical Report 1980-87," Table 52 & "Statistical Report 1996," Table 34 and Table 35.

<sup>70</sup> Popular culture also played a role in shaping ideas about crime, fear of crime, and punishment, however an examination of its impact is beyond the scope of this paper. See for example, Nicole Rafter, *Shots in the Mirror: Crime Films and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

how to deal with what would eventually become a major crisis in the state and throughout the country.

In 1984, SCID was already at 161 percent capacity. Notably, in remarking on this state of affairs, superintendent Joe Ryan located the impetus for the state's growing prison population in the public's desire for more punitive policies: "We're getting more people and they're staying longer. That's apparently what the public wants." At that point, Pennsylvania's Republican Governor Thornburgh had already embarked on a massive prison expansion and construction project. Over 3,000 beds were to be added to the state's correctional system over the next several years and the 1984-85 budget included an increase of ten million dollars for prisons.<sup>71</sup>

One of the ways the CAC cooperated with the prison was to pressure legislators for funding for security-enhancing projects at SCID. So when some of Thornburgh's prison budget was directed toward expanding Chase, they were very pleased, though impatient for "improvements" to take effect. In March, 1985, at the semi-annual meeting of the CAC, State Representative George Hasay acknowledged the role the group had played in making change at SCID: "We've been very successful with improving conditions within SCID. The citizen's committee has been fundamental in helping legislators get funding for these projects."<sup>72</sup>

But the level of success indicated by Hasay seems somewhat dubious when the actual conditions in the prison during this period are taken into account. By the spring of 1985 the infirmary had become temporary housing for thirty-nine prisoners, 584 prisoners were double-bunked (two to a cell), more fights were breaking out, mealtimes

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<sup>71</sup> "Chase Prison to Hire More Help," *Citizens' Voice*, July 25, 1984, 10.

<sup>72</sup> Debby Higgins, "Prison Construction Ahead of Schedule," *Citizens' Voice*, March 2, 1985, 30.



took longer, and less time was available for recreation. And at this point superintendent Joe Ryan located the reason for overcrowding somewhere other than public desire for more punishment. Judges, he said, were handing out longer sentences, and parole was not being granted as readily as it had been in the past. Furthermore, he did not believe the 200 new cells under construction at SCID would ease the cramped conditions. Ryan thought perhaps they would help the state's overall situation, but would not significantly ameliorate the circumstances at Chase.<sup>73</sup>

In covering the issue, then, the press had to try to make sense of the different stories that were circulating about why prisons were overcrowded. Since media both echo and help create larger ideologies, they reveal in this case the ways public understanding of criminal justice issues was limited by the politics of law and order and the logic of capitalism. These limitations are understandable considering that officials at the top levels of state government seemed to suffer from this same sort of political astigmatism. At a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the two new cell blocks at SCID, Governor Thornburgh explained the motivations behind his criminal justice initiatives:

The goal of this administration has been not only to reduce crime through vigorous law enforcement, prosecution and sentencing, but also to provide the additional cells needed for those who defy our commitment to making Pennsylvania communities safer places in which to live and work... The number one priority of my administration is reform and progress in the correctional system and I feel we have developed one of the most comprehensive anti-crime stances in the nation... The new toughness the commonwealth is projecting would not be credible without emphasis on the corrections side.

Thornburgh's language is revealing. His reference to "those who defy our commitment" implies a social contract that, when breached by individual criminals, must be met with punishment at the hands of the state. A reporter who covered this event for one of the

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<sup>73</sup> Bill Schackner, "New jail cells won't solve overcrowding: Official," *Time Leader*, May 23, 1985, 34.

local newspapers picked up on this framing device and explained to his readers that prison expansion was a remedy for overcrowding and an effort to make room for “those who wish to defy the law.”<sup>74</sup> This word choice points to the larger tendency toward the “individualization of disorder,” and away from the location of responsibility for crime in societal shortcomings.<sup>75</sup> In this framework, people’s freely made choices land them in prison, therefore they are solely responsible and solely deserving of punishment. Furthermore, according to Thornburgh’s rhetoric, “progress” and “safety” are achieved by adopting an “anti-crime stance.”

Thornburgh also makes reference to his “commitment to making Pennsylvania communities safer places in which to live and work.” To the governor, communities were not only places where people made their homes, but where the activities of the market occurred. As historian Alice Kessler-Harris has argued, the U.S. has a long tradition of distributing the benefits of citizenship based on one’s (gendered and racialized) status as a wage-earning worker, rather than disbursing services like healthcare, old age pensions, and unemployment benefits based on more universal criteria.<sup>76</sup> The relationship between this long-standing political-economic principle and Thornburgh’s policies becomes even starker when one considers that it was his welfare reform project, known as “Thornfare” to welfare advocates, that provided the model for the sweeping reforms Clinton enacted on the federal level in the 1990s that did away with “welfare as we [knew] it.” In Pennsylvania, Thornfare “established stringent work requirements on “able-bodied” welfare recipients... irrespective of labor market conditions or recipients’ family status

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<sup>74</sup> Jerry Kishbaugh, “Governor opens 2 new cellblocks at Chase,” *Citizens’ Voice*, September 5, 1985, 8.

<sup>75</sup> Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Cited in Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 25.

<sup>76</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4, 12.

and job skills.” Ninety thousand people lost their cash benefits due to these policy changes.<sup>77</sup> As I will discuss in the next chapter, the trends of punitive welfare reform and massive prison expansion could not be more closely connected.

Notably, and perhaps predictably, Thornburgh’s emphasis on work did not translate to policies that upheld workers’ rights. On the contrary, his “toughness” seems to have extended to his treatment of organized labor. Just a few months before he traveled to the northeast part of the state to dedicate the new cell blocks at SCID, and in the middle of his decade-long, multi-million dollar prison expansion, Thornburgh was the target of the SCID staff’s ire. Employees at the prison who were members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the Pennsylvania Social Services Union (PSSU), and the Pennsylvania Federation of Teachers (PFT) threatened to strike due to the concessions they had been asked to make. The administration had proposed a series of “takebacks” involving workers’ compensation, medical benefits, holidays and sick days, scheduling, and pay rates.<sup>78</sup> Notably, there is no evidence that the CAC stood in solidarity with union members during this conflict, which indicates that they did not necessarily make the connection between workers’ rights and the state of security at SCID, nor between the quality of workers’ lives, the quality of prisoners’ lives, and the quality of their own lives.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 321.

<sup>78</sup> Mike McGlynn, “Prison workers ready to rumble: SCID employees decry gov’s tactics,” *Citizens’ Voice*, June 29, 1985, 3.

<sup>79</sup> Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 123. The relationship between mass incarceration and organized labor is a complex one. Gilmore has written extensively about the role the California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA) had in the “biggest prison construction program in the history of the world.” Huling has shown that while white rural workers gained from the growth of prison-based employment in ways black workers could not, these gains fall short of the wages and benefits they had access to at the height of organized labor in the U.S. (“Building,” 203, 204, 211). Thompson builds on both Gilmore and Huling and

Thornburgh's explanations of overcrowding and its solutions reveal the ways that law and order policies produced their own logic. In justifying the massive amounts of capital his administration funneled into the state's prison system, Thornburgh attributed overcrowding to the fact that "more criminals entering prison are staying for longer periods of time."<sup>80</sup> This framing makes it seem as though prisoners were checking into prisons like they were hotels and then just not leaving. It obscures the reality that the changes to sentencing that Thornburgh oversaw were the result of political processes carried out and consented to by actors at many levels of the government and civil society.

Economic factors also helped naturalize prison construction and expansion as a response to overcrowding. When these projects were presented not only as necessary to alleviate strain on the correctional system, but as public goods, they became even more tightly woven into popularly held notions about crime, safety, and personal and economic security. The two new cellblocks opened at SCID in 1985 were reason for celebration not only because they were ostensibly going to ease overcrowding but because they were also providing a "shot in the arm for economic development in Luzerne County," according to the governor. "Most" of the new employees would come from the local area, so "more than \$800,000 in annual salaries and benefits" would invigorate the local economy.<sup>81</sup> Even more impressive was the fact that the state's department of general services, which oversaw state construction projects, had completed this construction five months early and \$1.4 million below the projected cost, putting the bill at \$7.8 million. The business of

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asserts that the decline of organized labor was both cause and consequence of the rise of mass incarceration. "Why Mass Incarceration Matters," 716.

<sup>80</sup> Kishbaugh, "Governor opens 2 new cellblocks at Chase."

<sup>81</sup> Although it remains unclear whether this promise was realized, research has revealed several significant examples of similar promises made by correctional officials which remained unfulfilled. See Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 163.

locking people up was conducted within the logic of capitalism like any other business the state undertook: minimize cost and maximize efficiency.<sup>82</sup>

Two years after Thornburgh cut the ribbon for the new cellblocks at SCID, Pennsylvania had a new governor, conservative Democrat Robert P. Casey, and a new Commissioner of the Department of Corrections, David S. Owens, Jr. Owens visited Chase in 1987 and discussed the still growing problem of overcrowding. Like Ryan, Owens was doubtful about the effectiveness of building new prisons. Instead he advocated a three-pronged approach: lowering the security classification of many people who were convicted of non-violent crimes, improving educational and training programs, and changes to the judicial system (ie sentencing).<sup>83</sup> But Owens was clearly trying to balance his desire for different kinds of reform with the fact that his department had just undertaken an unprecedented prison expansion program. Lest the public think that their state had just spent millions of dollars on solutions that would not address the DOC's problems, Owens had to at least make it seem like new construction would make a contribution to the solution.

Owens' visit to SCID also provides an opportunity to hear the loud silence around race in these discussions, as well as the intense difficulty of working against the current of mass incarceration at that particular historical moment. Owens was the first African American to hold the top position in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. The percentage of the state's prison population was certainly disproportionately black by the time Owens took office. At SCI Dallas, the ratio of white to non-white prisoners was 512

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<sup>82</sup> Kishbaugh, "Governor opens 2 new cellblocks at Chase."

<sup>83</sup> Debby Higgins, "Corrections chief visits area state prison," *Citizens' Voice*, July 30, 1987, p. 23.

to 485 in 1980. In 1987 that ratio had flipped to 777 to 1,206.<sup>84</sup> The fact of his appointment, combined with the fact that he advocated for alternative sentencing and other reforms may have given black inmates a shred of hope for change. Reporters took note of the different kind of reception Owens received when he visited prisons across the Commonwealth. Prisoners greeted him with handshakes, congratulations on his new position, hugs, and even requests for his autograph. Corrections department spokesman Kenneth G. Robinson chalked this treatment up to Owens' straightforwardness.<sup>85</sup> But for Pennsylvania's prisoners of color who dealt everyday with the overwhelmingly white rural guard population, and who undoubtedly knew that the upper levels of administration also did not share their experience of race in the world, Owens most likely embodied a welcome change. It stands to reason that his reform agenda also contributed to the unusual greetings he received.

But Owens was not long for the DOC. In the wake of the October, 1989 riots at SCI Camp Hill, the state's most overcrowded prison, Owens resigned from his post. Owens had proposed that Camp Hill prisoners whose belongings had been confiscated during the shakedown should be marginally compensated. According to imprisoned journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal, this proposal did not go over well with politicians who were gearing up for a gubernatorial election and did not want the issue of prisons or the mishandling of Camp Hill to sully their chances at the polls. Owens' resignation was accepted by Governor Casey.

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<sup>84</sup> Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, "Statistical Report 1980-87," [http://www.cor.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/research\\_statistics/10669/annual\\_reports/567085](http://www.cor.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/research_statistics/10669/annual_reports/567085), Table 43, (accessed March 3, 2011).

<sup>85</sup> Mary Ellen Alu, "Prison chief gets unusual reception," *Times Leader*, July 30, 1987; Mumia Abu-Jamal, "B-Block Days and Nightmares," *The Nation*, April 23, 1990, 559-560.

Owens had not been alone in his calls for reform. In April 1987, before the Camp Hill incident, the Governor's Interdepartmental Task Force on Corrections, made up of eight Cabinet-level secretaries, issued a report in which they recommended, among other reforms, that the misconduct system, "good time" procedures, and visitation policies should be revised; that death row prisoners should not be kept in the Restricted Housing Units; that the DOC should continue to pursue its "one man/one cell policy"; and that substantial educational and drug and alcohol rehabilitation programming should be introduced. But it was not time for the comprehensive changes the Task Force recommended for Pennsylvania. As of March, 1988, the Department of Corrections had not formally responded to the recommendations, nor did they have a timeline in place to evaluate the issues the Task Force had highlighted. And in 1990, Mumia Abu-Jamal asserted that the report had "died a pauper's death, its biggest promises unfulfilled."<sup>86</sup> Resources continued to be funneled into new prison construction and the addition of more cells to existing facilities.

Importantly, Abu-Jamal also notes that it was not overcrowding alone that caused Camp Hill, as well as Huntingdon and Holmesburg prisons, to erupt in violence. These were not acts of aggression at the hands of inmates, he asserts, but rather acts of desperation. Abu-Jamal calls attention to global contexts at this moment: walls were falling in Eastern Europe, agents of these epic changes cheered on by the West. Meanwhile prison walls in the U.S. were growing taller and more impenetrable as the criminal justice system swelled. Abu-Jamal notes that it was not just the slamming of literal prison gates that drove prisoners to hopelessness, but the "slamming of the doors to

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<sup>86</sup> Abu-Jamal, "B-Block Days," 560; "Report of a Performance Audit of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections," Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, A Joint Committee of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, April, 1988, 160-166.

the courthouse, gates of legal recourse chained.”<sup>87</sup> From his vantage point, Abu-Jamal could see clearly the trajectory of the U.S. prison system. It remains unclear, however, whether the prison neighbors of the Citizens’ Advisory Committee felt that the violence at Camp Hill, Huntingdon, and Holmesburg during this period was relevant to their own work at Chase prison or whether it indicated a particular trend that might concern them. In hindsight we can see that they were, in fact, in the midst of an unprecedented event in U.S. history: the dawn of the age of mass incarceration.

How is it that Abu-Jamal and the CAC came to occupy these different positions vis a vis mass incarceration in Pennsylvania? What economic, social, and political developments created the conditions in which these actors envisioned the relationship between safety and confinement? Abu-Jamal has written extensively about the “black urban pressure cooker” and accompanying state repression that shaped his outlooks and actions and that led to his decades-long imprisonment.<sup>88</sup> His writing lays bare the relationship between the divestment of resources from urban black communities, the criminalization of poverty and political dissent, and the massive expansion of the Pennsylvania prison system. While Abu-Jamal’s Philadelphia was reshaped by these shifts, other regions of the state weathered the events of the late-twentieth century in different but intimately related ways. To add another dimension to this historical arc, and for the purposes of understanding the CAC’s motivations and actions more fully, it will be useful to turn now to a brief exploration of the regionally-specific political, social, and economic milieu in which they were born.

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<sup>87</sup> Abu-Jamal, “B-Block Days,” 559.

<sup>88</sup> *Live from Death Row*, xx.



## **The Rise of Mass Incarceration in Regional Historical Perspective**

Northeast Pennsylvania, specifically the anthracite coal region in which SCI Dallas is located, followed a social and economic trajectory that did not fit the general pattern experienced by other industrial regions of the northeast United States during this period. The contours of this region's unique development help explain the context in which SCI Dallas was built mid-century and in which the Citizens' Advisory Committee was born in the 1980s. They also offer a sense of the region's twenty-first century possibilities.

The Pennsylvania anthracite region experienced industrial decline before most other parts of the country. Historian Thomas Dublin and others have asserted that it was in fact the first site of major deindustrialization in the U.S.<sup>89</sup> After 1920 the anthracite industry experienced continuous decline and went from a workforce of 151,171 in 1930 to only 3,429 in 1980.<sup>90</sup> As with later instances of decline, these changes had dramatic effects on the region's economy and on people's lives.<sup>91</sup> Notably, unlike later waves of deindustrialization, the anthracite industry's departure was not the result of a search for cheaper labor and operating costs (though, in part, the lower production costs of the alternative fuel sources that took its place served a similar function). The obsolescence of the entire industry, rather than its departure for other locations, was due to management's intentional decisions to avoid innovation and diversify their assets and labor's response

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<sup>89</sup> Thomas Dublin, *When the Mines Closed: Stories of Struggles in Hard Times* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 5; Kenneth C. Wolensky et al., *Fighting for the Union Label: The Women's Garment Industry and the ILGWU in Pennsylvania* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Dublin and Walter Licht, *The Face of Decline: The Pennsylvania Anthracite Region in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 203.

<sup>91</sup> Wolensky et al., 34.

(or lack thereof) to operators' profiteering.<sup>92</sup> By mid-century, coal's share of northeast Pennsylvania's economy had shrunk and other industries tried to capitalize on the available low-wage workforce. The garment industry was the most prominent new presence. The "runaway shops," as they were called, had left New York City in search of cheaper, non-unionized labor, and employed primarily women, a marked reversal of the strictly male world of coal mining.<sup>93</sup> The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) eventually had a powerful presence in the region and challenged the abuses workers suffered at the hands of factory owners, just as the militant union coal miners in the region had challenged their bosses earlier in the century. In a fashion that more closely resembled national trends, this industry eventually found even cheaper labor in sweatshops in the Southern United States, and even further south, in Latin America.<sup>94</sup>

The Pennsylvania anthracite region did not follow the most common national migration patterns. From the beginning of the industry's life in the region, a shifting mix of immigrants from Europe and their descendents worked in the mines. This pattern continued until anthracite's demise. Unlike in bituminous coal mines further south in Appalachia, African Americans never constituted a significant proportion of the coal workforce in Pennsylvania. In fact, as of 2005, African Americans had never comprised more than one percent of the anthracite region's population.<sup>95</sup> Southern black migrants certainly made Pennsylvania's urban centers their destinations in large numbers, but since anthracite was already in decline during the major waves of migration from the South,

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<sup>92</sup> Dublin and Licht, 186; Donald L. Miller and Richard E. Sharpless, *The Kingdom of Coal: Work, Enterprise, and Ethnic Communities in the Mine Fields* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 287-289.

<sup>93</sup> Wolensky et al., 33-35.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>95</sup> Dublin and Licht, 186.

there was no draw to the region. It also stands to reason that since there was virtually no established African American presence in the anthracite region, it was not very appealing to people looking not only for work, but also community and the security that came with it.

In fact, it was more common for people to leave the anthracite region than to arrive throughout this period. The five counties of the Pennsylvania anthracite region - Carbon, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Northumberland, and Schuylkill - have experienced a steady decline in total population since the early twentieth century. Between 1930 and 2000, the population in this region dropped by 29 percent, while the United States at large experienced a population increase of 129 percent over the same period.<sup>96</sup> The convergence of these two trends in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries resulted in a relatively racially homogeneous population, one that is also older than the country's overall averages.

Despite some economic and political similarities, the region does not necessarily conform to the patterns scholars and activists have exposed in rural central Appalachia, which has experienced intensive prison-based development in the wake of industrial restructuring.<sup>97</sup> In the 1990s and early 2000s, the intimate relationship between rural and urban poverty, the restructuring of the mining industry, and the criminalization of communities of color came to the surface in a wave of prison construction throughout central Appalachia, touted by its promoters as the key to the region's economic redevelopment.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 201

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>98</sup> *Up the Ridge*, dir. Amelia Kirby and Nick Szuberla.

Unlike central Appalachia's bituminous coal region, however, endemic poverty has not characterized the anthracite region of Pennsylvania. Certainly coal miners and their families suffered intense hardship, especially during slumps in the industry, but due to early economic development in the region, endemic poverty has largely been held at bay, with a few exceptions. Pennsylvania undoubtedly built its fair share of prisons in rural, economically-depressed areas during this same period, but the different histories of these two regions most likely had a bearing on communities' various responses to mass incarceration and their states' investments in the larger law and order project. In the case of the Citizens' Advisory Committee, the prison in their region was built decades before the nationwide prison building boom, but these specific economic and political histories still shaped their ideas and actions. To the prison neighbors of the CAC, safety and freedom from fear looked like taller fences, brighter lights, and the restricted movement of SCID's population of incarcerated men. Perhaps their visions would have been different had their relationships to the prison been different, if the men locked inside were their brothers, sons, fathers, or uncles, for instance. But this was not the case. The prevailing patterns of mass incarceration produced and maintained important distance (and perceived difference) between the people and communities who were most impacted by growing rates of imprisonment. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Pennsylvania's prisons, like those across the country, were disproportionately filled with the state's black and brown residents, most of them from urban areas.

Between 1980 and 1987, nearly half of all commitments to the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections came from Philadelphia and Allegheny counties, home of Pennsylvania's two largest cities, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and its highest

concentrations of people of color.<sup>99</sup> As in other regions, incarceration rate increases in Pennsylvania during this period were racially disproportionate.<sup>100</sup> At SCI Dallas, by 1987, non-white prisoners made up sixty-four percent of the population, whereas just seven years earlier whites had constituted the majority of prisoners.<sup>101</sup> This reversal did not coincide with patterns of overall population growth, nor did it correlate with dramatic shifts in crime commission along lines of race. Rather, it is a clear illustration of the highly racialized nature of mass incarceration, particularly the devastating fallout of the War on Drugs, explored further below. Indeed, the Pennsylvania prison population as a whole exploded during this period as well, growing by 109 percent in the first seven years of the 1980s. However, this number does not tell the full story either. During the same period, the number of women in Pennsylvania prisons grew by 143 percent, again mostly due to the War on Drugs.<sup>102</sup> A major factor in overall growth was the decrease in paroles granted, a useful indicator of the punitive philosophy that underwrote most criminal justice policy of this era. In 1980 the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole granted 81 percent of parole applications. In 1987 that number had dropped to 65 percent, and continued to plummet.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, as prosecutors sent more and more people to prison, fewer and fewer people were heading through the gates in the other direction. Logically, this pattern contributed greatly to the problem of overcrowding that the CAC and administrators were so worried about, and made life much more precarious

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<sup>99</sup> Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, "Statistical Report 1980-87," [http://www.cor.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/research\\_statistics/10669/annual\\_reports/567085](http://www.cor.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/research_statistics/10669/annual_reports/567085), Table 9 (accessed March 3, 2011). For portraits of these two cities that shed light on their postwar social and economic trajectories see Countryman, *Up South* and Dale A. Hathaway, *Can the Workers Have a Voice? The Politics of Deindustrialization in Pittsburgh* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

<sup>100</sup> Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, "Statistical Report 1980-1987," Table 42.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, Table 43.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, Table 42.

<sup>103</sup> "Statistical Report 1980-1987," Table 46.

for prisoners. However, the CAC did not take up the strategy of reforming probation and parole policies; and as in the case of Commissioner Owens, politicians risked their careers when they advocated for “leniency” on these fronts. The line, or perhaps *wall*, between “citizens” and “criminals” was growing more robust.

## CHAPTER 2

### CREATING “DECENT CITIZENS” AND “CRIMINALS”: GOLDWATER TO CLINTON

There are now more than 2.3 million people behind bars in the U.S.<sup>104</sup> Beginning in the late 1970s, the U.S. prison system began to expand at a speed and scale that eventually led activists and scholars to distinguish this era from earlier ones by using the term “mass incarceration” to describe its contours. Criminologist David Garland differentiates this phenomenon from imprisonment as it has been used in other comparable nations and at other times in the U.S. by articulating its two defining features: sheer numbers – both in terms of the size of the population and the rate of incarceration; and the “social concentration of imprisonment’s effects” – in other words, social and economic inequality.<sup>105</sup> Also critical to the phenomenon of mass incarceration is the larger “web of laws, rules, policies, and customs” that govern those who have been labeled “criminals,” both inside and outside of prisons.<sup>106</sup>

This is the context in which the Citizens’ Advisory Committee must be understood. When mass incarceration is placed at the center of analysis, the United States’ most important postwar historical developments, such as deindustrialization, suburbanization, mid-century social movements, the rise of conservatism, and the enduring effects of racism, are fundamentally altered. Local and regional histories are also transformed. In Pennsylvania, the vast expansion of the prison system shaped the specific contours of economic decline and responses to it, the relationship between urban

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<sup>104</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Populations, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/tables/corr2tab.cfm> (accessed December 17, 2010).

<sup>105</sup> *Mass Imprisonment: Social Causes and Consequences*, (London: Sage, 2001), 1.

<sup>106</sup> Alexander, 13. For example, probation, felon disfranchisement, social stigmatization, and discriminatory hiring practices.

centers and rural regions, the history of migration, and the local politics of race, gender, class, and ethnicity. In particular, the CAC exposes the local manifestations of the ideological and political shift toward harshly punitive criminal justice policies that took place in the late twentieth century U.S. Of course this shift could be analyzed from any number of angles, but the story of the CAC demands that we look specifically at the avenues by which incarceration came to be the central response to the “disorders” of the late twentieth century. In other words, how did the “law and order/tough on crime” state gain the consent of enough of the U.S. American public to create the most intensive prison buildup the world has ever witnessed? The CAC’s rhetoric and the tenor of the media coverage they received uncover partial answers to this question.

In this chapter I will explore some of the political maneuvers at the national level that helped usher in the age of mass incarceration, with particular attention to the role of the media, the impact of the War on Drugs, and the ways crime and fear of crime were redefined by race even as they were rearticulated in race-neutral terms. As I argued in the introduction, following Jonathan Simon, these redefinitions and rearticulations were also redefinitions and rearticulations of what constituted a citizen and in whose name criminal justice policies should be enacted. I have used presidential administrations to organize this exploration in the hopes that this slice of the history of mass incarceration will complement the local-level history of the Citizens’ Advisory Committee I have offered above.

Richard Nixon’s 1968 presidential campaign ads explicitly employed “law and order” rhetoric and conflated political protest and violent crime. They called for an end to



“domestic violence,” which signified a return of order to the homefront.<sup>107</sup> States’ and the federal government’s adoption of highly racialized “tough-on-crime” policies meant that more people served more time for more “crimes,” and fewer people gained early release due to changes in the administration of parole in the decades that followed. In the 1980s, the Reagan administration accelerated this trend and aimed intensely punitive policies at the ostensible “crisis” of drug use in the United States under the banner of the War on Drugs. As statistics have shown, drug offenses have constituted the majority of crimes that have filled the United States’ jails and prisons throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. In 1970 there were only 322,300 drug-related arrests in the U.S. That figure jumped to 1,375,600 in 2000.<sup>108</sup> And due to mandatory minimum sentencing laws that had been passed throughout the country, more people served more time than ever before following these arrests.

As historian Heather Ann Thompson and others have noted, Nixon was not the first to advance law and order rhetoric, nor was this language solely the purview of conservatives – an important fact since critics of the harsh criminal justice policies that have been implemented since Nixon have tended to attribute this kind of discourse and its material manifestations to Republicans alone. Earlier in the sixties, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations had also responded to “urban unrest” with a call to wage a War on Crime. And though the Reagan administration advanced the War on Drugs most aggressively, it was Clinton who oversaw the most intensive prison construction boom the U.S, or the world, for that matter, has ever experienced.<sup>109</sup> Importantly, the various incarnations of the War on Crime waged under these administrations have been advanced

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<sup>107</sup> Bernstein, 25.

<sup>108</sup> Thompson, 708.

<sup>109</sup> Alexander, 55.

using ostensibly “race-neutral” language, evidence of the successes of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Contrary to the more explicitly racialized language of crime used during the first half of the twentieth century, from the sixties on, ‘crime’ itself was reformulated in a way that simultaneously “invisibilized” and “reactivated” race.<sup>110</sup> Ironically, this absence of explicitly racist language helped naturalize the dramatically disproportionate incarceration of African Americans and Latinos over the next several decades and gained the political consent of whites who might otherwise have objected to institutionalized racial discrimination.<sup>111</sup> In other words, late twentieth century criminal justice policies and practices that were “colorblind” on the surface were actually intensely saturated with racial meaning and had radically unequal effects along lines of race and class.

Scholars agree that Barry Goldwater laid much of the rhetorical groundwork for a law and order push in his 1964 presidential campaign, even though at that point Johnson still had widespread support and capitalized on Goldwater’s extremism to win the election in a landslide.<sup>112</sup> But Johnson easily picked up the issue and made it central to his own platform. In fact, in many ways it was merely a continuation of his War on Poverty.<sup>113</sup> According to legal scholar Jonathan Simon, Johnson’s strategy to address crime had three important and lasting elements. First, he allied himself with crime victims by repeatedly acknowledging the harm caused by violent crime, thus elevating the victim to a privileged position as a special subject of legislation and policy. Second, through the creation of his Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of

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<sup>110</sup> Wacquant, “Deadly Symbiosis,” 98.

<sup>111</sup> Alexander, 178-179.

<sup>112</sup> Hagan, 22; Katherine Beckett, *Making Crime Pay: Law and Order in Contemporary American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 31.

<sup>113</sup> Bernstein, 45.

Criminal Justice, Johnson further extended to the criminal justice system the New Deal logic of reliance on social science expertise to solve social problems. Third, Johnson's strategy funneled money from the federal level to local law enforcement agencies, largely aimed at improving technology and data collection.<sup>114</sup> The pinnacle of this strategy was the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act, enacted on June 7, 1968, the day after Senator Robert Kennedy was assassinated. Ironically Kennedy had been a vocal critic of the bill due to the provisions included within it that facilitated the use of wiretapping and interrogations by local police forces. Despite these objections, however, as Simon notes, the Safe Streets Act was the first time that crime legislation united representatives from across the ideological spectrum.<sup>115</sup> The Safe Streets Act systematized existing crime-fighting infrastructures and created new organizations and coalitions in order to create a coordinated criminal justice system at the federal, state, and regional levels.<sup>116</sup>

Despite the incumbents' clear commitment to addressing the problem of crime, Nixon harshly attacked the Democrats during the 1968 election for being "soft on crime," a term that would later become a staple in the American political lexicon, hurled at any candidate seemingly not fully on board with punitive criminal justice policy. Of course the antecedent to "soft on crime" was "soft on Communism," a favorite phrase in Nixon's political vocabulary earlier in his career. Indeed, some scholars have asserted that liberals did not respond strongly enough in the late sixties to whites' fear of crime until it was too late. For instance, historian Michael W. Flamm has argued that liberals partially dug their own grave by refusing to define crime control as a federal issue when they had defined

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<sup>114</sup> Simon, 91.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>116</sup> Shahid M. Shahidullah, *Crime Policy in America: Laws, Institutions, and Programs* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008), 66-67.

almost every other prominent social ill as such.<sup>117</sup> But it would seem that passing the Safe Streets Act was as strong a validation an administration could give to those who desired a federal response to crime.

Of course it is important to note that the numerous mid-century social movements, particularly African Americans' struggles for social and economic justice, were also major forces in shaping the national political lexicon around crime and punishment. In recent years historians have drastically revised the first wave of historiography about the 1960s and have suggested a new frame for evaluating black freedom struggles of the mid-twentieth century: "the long civil rights movement."<sup>118</sup> This approach gives credence to Heather Ann Thompson's claim that mass incarceration – and its "law and order" building blocks – should be seen as both cause and consequence of larger postwar developments. Police brutality and repression, and the criminal justice system more broadly, figure prominently in these revisionist histories. Many of the key figures of these movements spent time in jail or prison, often before the period usually attributed to the Civil Rights Movement. For some, like Malcolm X, time behind bars was politically formative.<sup>119</sup> Referring to the rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California, historian Donna Murch writes, "[b]rought together by the shared experience of police violence, authoritarian schools, and all too frequent stints of juvenile incarceration, activists in the Party's first two years drew from this well of anger and

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<sup>117</sup> Michael W. Flamm, *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>118</sup> Countryman, *Up South*; Robert O. Self, "The Black Panther Party and the Long Civil Rights Era," in *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2009); Jeanne Theoharris and Komozi Woodard, *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>119</sup> Bernstein, 104.

pain.”<sup>120</sup> Many black activists drew direct connections between the conditions inside of prisons and those in their urban communities and the liberation of black prisoners was high on their political agendas.<sup>121</sup> Most importantly, a focus on the criminalization of urban space and the swelling criminal justice infrastructure makes it clear that any narrative seeking to explain the “demise” of the Civil Rights movements by demonizing violent black radicals and dysfunctional urban masses misses a critical layer of this history.

Like the important scholarship that has exposed the racial and gendered exclusions of New Deal, Great Society, and War on Poverty policies, a focus on criminal justice rhetoric and policies demands a more complex narrative about the civil rights era and its effects. President Johnson’s investments in the law and order state cast a shadow on his support of legislative change on the civil rights front. In addition, the widely accepted notion that white northerners widely supported earlier incarnations of the Civil Rights movement but were driven to abandon the cause by the more radical demands of Black Power in the late 1960s appears problematic when this era is viewed through the lens of criminal justice.<sup>122</sup> Without a doubt, the legislative changes and radical organizing carried out by African Americans and their white and brown allies dismantled many fundamental barriers to the realization of full (economic and political) citizenship in the U.S. They literally changed the terms of the debate about what freedom means and how democracy is enacted. Over the next decades, however, the potentially expansive language of rights was very nearly drowned out by the watered-down notion of

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<sup>120</sup> Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 167.

<sup>121</sup> Bernstein, 105.

<sup>122</sup> Self, 17.

colorblindness. As Alexander has shown, this linguistic and political shift paved the way for a racially skewed criminal justice system. Politicians and practitioners also adopted the language of civil rights in sometimes surprising ways to advance the very policies that directly undermined the real accomplishments of movements for social justice. For example, Nixon's presidential campaign ads successfully appropriated the language of the Civil Rights movement and deployed it to advance the law and order agenda.

In one ad that appeared on the heels of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, made by Eugene Jones, the documentarian responsible for *A Face of War* (1967), Nixon named the "first civil right of every American" as freedom from "domestic violence." As Lee Bernstein has noted, "[t]hese advertisements marked more than a shift in political campaign strategy, they provided the core means to reframe political protest and street crime as fundamental issues in need of repressive "law-and-order" solutions."<sup>123</sup> Nixon tapped into a growing sentiment of unease within certain segments of the population, namely whites who were disturbed by the "race riots" that had rocked the country in recent years. Importantly too, although he was critical of how the Democrats handled the Vietnam War, Nixon certainly did not ally himself with the anti-war movement. Instead, he deliberately conflated anti-war protest with violent crime on the homefront and the adulteration of the democratic process. In one ad, he took direct aim at protestors: "Dissent is a necessary ingredient of change, but in a system of government that provides for peaceful change, there is no cause that justifies resort to violence."<sup>124</sup> In other words,

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<sup>123</sup> Bernstein, 25-26.

<sup>124</sup> *Museum of the Moving Image*, transcript "The First Civil Right," Richard Nixon, 1968. <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1968/law-and-order-democrat> (accessed February 10, 2011).

“decent citizens” make change by voting, in this case, for Nixon. “Criminals,” on the other hand, start riots and protest in the streets.

According to several polls, a significant portion of the voting public responded well to Nixon’s law-and-order rhetoric. The Gallup Poll in 1968 showed that half of all voters thought the police should “shoot on sight” people found looting during “race riots.” Two years later, the Harris poll found that 75 percent of registered Republicans and 61 percent of registered Democrats agreed that the courts were too lenient with criminals.<sup>125</sup> But while criminologists, activists, and prisoners debated the efficacy of rehabilitation in institutions designed for punishment, the rehabilitative ideal is what the general public seemed to have in mind when they expressed a desire for more punitive courts.<sup>126</sup> In 1970, polls showed that over 70 percent of both Republicans and Democrats thought that prisons’ main focus should be rehabilitation, less than ten percent agreed that punishment should be the main goal, and less than fifteen percent thought the protection of society should be their central objective.<sup>127</sup> It is significant as well that starting in the 1970s, researchers who have looked at the relationship between racial attitudes and support for “tough on crime” measures have found that they are closely correlated.

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<sup>125</sup> Hazel Erskine, “The Polls: Politics and Law and Order,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1974-75): 634. Cited in Bernstein, 29. The racialized “disorder”-borne “shoot-on-sight” or “shoot-to-kill” response was disturbingly resurrected immediately following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, issued by the President and the Governor of Louisiana, directed at black New Orleans residents who were “looting” local businesses. See Joy James, ed., *Warfare in the American Homeland: Policing and Prison in a Penal Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), xii.

<sup>126</sup> It is important to note that public opinion surveys on crime and punishment are necessarily limited in what they can reveal. There is usually a very small number of simplistic questions, often only asking about punishment oriented policies and practices, not alternatives that might be considered more progressive. Thus imaginations and responses are limited. Some analysts of public opinion about crime and punishment have concluded that in fact “the public” is both progressive and punitive in their attitudes on these issues, depending upon how complex the questions are and how much information respondents are given about particular cases and options for different responses to the crime. See Francis T. Cullen, Bonnie S. Fisher, and Brandon K. Applegate, “Public Opinion about Punishment and Corrections,” *Crime and Justice* 27 (2000): 8.

<sup>127</sup> Erskine cited in Bernstein, 189 (n. 28).

Whites “expressing the highest degree of concern about crime also tend to oppose racial reform.”<sup>128</sup>

Four years after Goldwater made “law and order” a centerpiece of his campaign, the political ground had shifted. Nixon and other conservatives took the opportunity to trumpet the failures of Great Society programs that they despised, like welfare. They did so by blaming urban violence on the deviant students and black city-dwellers who had been “rewarded” by the liberals for disobeying the law and being lazily dependent on the state. Notably, conservatives turned their traditional view of federalism on its head in order to counter Johnson’s and the liberals’ purported hands-off stance on local crime control. In their view, the federal government should have a significant role in municipal law enforcement.<sup>129</sup>

But this is exactly what Johnson was promoting with the Safe Streets Act, and particularly with the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), the act’s centerpiece. Its block grant format allowed local police departments to enhance their weaponry, improve their training methods, and develop their technological infrastructures, and to do this in ways that conformed to their local needs. Hubert Humphrey had also taken up the issue of crime control in his campaign speeches: “I put it very bluntly – rioting, burning, sniping, mugging, traffic in narcotics, and disregard for the law are the advanced guard of anarchy and they must and they will be stopped.”<sup>130</sup> Despite these indications that the Democrats had crime on their radar, the Republicans

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<sup>128</sup> Alexander, 53. The potency of this statistic is compromised, however, by the fact that white people were not disaggregated by class or any other factor.

<sup>129</sup> Flamm, 3.

<sup>130</sup> *Museum of the Moving Image*, transcript “Every American,” Hubert Humphrey, 1968. <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1968/law-and-order-democrat> (accessed February 10, 2011).



effectively persuaded many Americans that liberals like Humphrey were weak on crime. But as Bernstein has noted, “the two major institutions now widely associated with Nixon’s law-and-order campaign were already in place when he arrived in Washington” – the LEAA and the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs (BNDD), which Johnson had formed out of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics.<sup>131</sup> This fact is obscured when later conservative tough-on-crime developments take the spotlight. Just as the CAC does not fit into the category of conservative or white-supremacist citizens’ groups that multiple historians have illuminated, Johnson may not immediately register as an important figure in the punitive turn in U.S. criminal justice policy and practice.

As with other instances of political transformation, there remains the question of causality: did a fearful public demand a crackdown on “crime”? Or did politicians, with the help of the media, engineer public sentiment to match their agendas? If one accepts at face value the link between crime and punishment and if the category of “crime” itself is left undisturbed, then it would appear that crime went up, the public demanded a punitive response, the state responded, and the rest is history. But even if the public did demand a crackdown on crime, carried out by a financially and legislatively beefed up criminal justice system, statistics show that they got what they wanted before the major prison growth spurt even got underway.<sup>132</sup> This leaves open the possibility that it was the “extra-penological” functions of incarceration that drove the growth of mass imprisonment. As outlined above, scholars and activists, Michelle Alexander and Angela Davis for example, have made strong cases for prisons as apparatuses of racial control and repression. Others have written on the ways that certain corporations and individuals

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<sup>131</sup> Bernstein, 44.

<sup>132</sup> Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 18; Hagan, 63.

have profited immensely from the complex of industries that has grown up around mass incarceration, as well as the proliferation of private prisons.<sup>133</sup> And as Simon has spelled out so clearly, “fear of crime” has proven itself to be a powerful concept around which practices of governance can be organized.<sup>134</sup> The nineteen seventies, eighties, and nineties offer ample opportunities to see the shortcomings of narratives that treat mass incarceration as if it had a direct and unproblematic causal relationship with crime rates.

Compared to how many scholars of crime and incarceration have written about the changes that took place under Nixon and Reagan, few have devoted attention to the Ford and Carter administrations and to the developments that took place during the years when these two presidents were in office. According to criminologist Katherine Beckett, the salience of crime diminished markedly after Nixon left office. She notes that neither Ford nor Carter mentioned crime in their State of the Union addresses, nor did they take much legislative action in this realm.<sup>135</sup> Nonetheless, this is clearly a period that calls out for more historical analysis. The 1970s was a critical decade for criminal justice in the U.S. since these years served as the bridge between the first sustained articulations of and structural investments in the repressive law and order state, and the full flowering of such a state. Given the articulate criticism of prisons and policing that circulated in the late 1960s and early 1970s, emanating from within prisons and larger movements for social justice, and from the new radical arm of criminology based at U.C. Berkeley, criminal justice policy certainly could have gone in a different direction at this crucial juncture. In fact, in the realm of crime policy, John Hagan marks the moment of transition from what

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<sup>133</sup> Tara Herivel and Paul Wright, eds., *Prison Profiteers: Who Makes Money from Mass Incarceration* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007).

<sup>134</sup> Simon, *Governing Through Crime*.

<sup>135</sup> Beckett, 44.

he calls the Age of Roosevelt to the Age of Reagan with the closing of Berkeley's School of Criminology in 1976.<sup>136</sup> With consequences that should by now be clear, the momentum of "tough on crime" continued to build, unevenly perhaps, even if these two presidents did not approach crime as zealously as Nixon had.

In a rather admiring essay on Ford's criminal justice policy positions, criminologist George T. Felkenes argues that it was the presidential imperative to ensure "domestic tranquility," found in the preamble to the Constitution, that Ford felt should guide his approach to crime. According to Felkenes, Ford believed that "law and order" should be just one element of his criminal justice agenda.<sup>137</sup> Further, Ford did not adhere to the position that blamed environmental causes for the problem of crime. He rejected that longstanding liberal standpoint, which had been so vehemently criticized by conservatives and blamed for the "unrest" of the previous decade. Rather, as was typical of his fellow conservatives, he thought crime was more a matter of individual responsibility and a breakdown of authority.<sup>138</sup> Ford championed victims' rights. He pushed for mandatory sentencing in order to guarantee "sure and swift justice." Although no major changes were made on this front while he was in office, during Ford's tenure in office the groundwork was laid for the incredibly consequential sentencing changes that took place in the late 1980s.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Hagan, 103. According to Hagan, it was at this point that criminology broke off as its own separate field of study. Academic programs in criminal justice, law enforcement, and criminology blossomed in the Age of Reagan. Since the mid-1970s, multiple generations of scholars and practitioners have been produced in these departments which emphasize crime control, a carryover of their early funding source, the LEAA. Hagan acknowledges, however, that there was no solid line between these two eras, that they overlapped in various important ways.

<sup>137</sup> George T. Felkenes, "Domestic Tranquility: President Ford's Policy Positions on Criminal Justice Issues," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 23:3 (Summer 1993): 525.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 525.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 526-530.

Notably, and of particular importance to the context of the CAC, just prior to becoming governor of Pennsylvania, Dick Thornburgh served as Assistant Attorney General in the Ford administration. Thornburgh also later served as Attorney General of the United States under Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. Threads like this one that run through multiple administrations make clear the connections between state and federal policies and offer additional ways to trace the development of mass incarceration, beyond simplistic examinations of presidential views on crime and punishment. As mentioned above, during his tenure as governor of Pennsylvania, Dick Thornburgh played an important role in the twin developments of welfare “reform” and prison expansion.

Unlike Ford, Jimmy Carter made connections between poverty, high unemployment, and crime. In a campaign speech in Detroit in 1976, Carter tellingly opined that “poor people aren’t the only ones to commit crimes, but they seem to be the only ones who go to prison.” He decried the corruption that had been uncovered in the two prior Republican administrations and the prevalence of corporate crime that had gone un-prosecuted in recent years. He advocated a renewed emphasis on violent crime and a shift away from punitive responses to non-violent crime.<sup>140</sup> Based on these comments, Carter’s understanding of the sources of crime is wholly different from the one indicated in Ford’s rhetoric. A thorough examination of how Carter instrumentalized this understanding is beyond the scope of this paper. It is critical, however, to recognize that the president and other critics of the “tough on crime” trajectory were unable to steer policy off the punitive course at this point. The law and order state was working too well

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<sup>140</sup> Jimmy Carter, “Crime is Unacceptable,” *A Government as Good as Its People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 219-221.

for the conservative forces which continued to gain momentum as the new decade neared. More scholarly attention should be paid to the different voices that weighed in on criminal justice policy in the late 1970s in order to understand the structural and ideological landscape on the eve of the “Reagan Revolution” and the explosion of mass incarceration. For as with any revolution, crucial foundations had already been built and reinforced that made the political and economic realignments of the 1980s possible, particularly on the criminal justice front.

If the issue of crime had largely left the spotlight at the federal level during the 1970s, Reagan brought it back with vigor. Like his conservative predecessors and contemporary colleagues, Reagan rejected poverty and unemployment as causes of crime. He repeatedly blamed individuals’ choices to disobey the law coupled with liberal leniency, in the form of welfare and “soft” criminal justice policies, for the so-called “epidemic” of crime sweeping the country.<sup>141</sup> Notably though, evidenced by Carter’s views outlined above, as well as by surveys of popular opinion on the issue, widespread political consensus did not exist on the causality of crime during this period.<sup>142</sup> Like Nixon’s “law and order” discourse, Reagan’s framing flew in the face of many long-held ideas about the problem of crime, its causes, and how the government should respond to it. It would take major investments in media outlets and law enforcement agencies to bring the “get tough” vision to fruition. These were investments the Reagan administration was more than willing to make; their larger political endeavor would benefit immensely from these developments, as Thompson has suggested. By reframing the welfare state as the source of crime rather than an ameliorative force, and presenting

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<sup>141</sup> Beckett, 50-51.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

policing and punishment as the legitimate role of government, Reagan “articulated the central premise of the conservative project of state reconstruction.”<sup>143</sup>

With unprecedented force, Reagan focused his “tough on crime” rhetoric and policy efforts on the “crisis” of drug use in the U.S. As with earlier drug scares, the War on Drugs, officially inaugurated in 1982, was molded around the contours of race, class, and gender and facilitated elites’ larger political endeavors, both within the government and the private sector. As Alexander has noted, “joblessness and crack swept inner cities precisely at the moment that a fierce backlash against the Civil Rights Movement was manifesting itself through the War on Drugs.”<sup>144</sup> Media portrayals and policing practices associated certain drugs with certain groups of people and sentencing guidelines for drug-related crimes were accordingly disproportionate.<sup>145</sup> The connections media and politicians drew between crack cocaine and urban poor black communities offer the most dramatic illustration of the barely masked racial subtext of the War on Drugs. “Crack babies,” “crack whores,” and “gang-bangers,” all bore black faces in news stories and personified the supposedly innate danger of the drug. These images obscured the ways the criminalization of crack actually created the very violence these media campaigns decried. They also gave the false impression that white people did not use drugs at the rate that black people did and that other forms of cocaine were inherently not as dangerous as crack.<sup>146</sup>

The now-famous one hundred-to-one quantity-based sentencing disparity – which punished defendants who possessed five grams of crack cocaine with the same sentence

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>144</sup> Alexander, 51.

<sup>145</sup> Beckett, 45-46.

<sup>146</sup> Alexander, 51-52.

as those with one hundred times that amount of powder cocaine – was perhaps the most egregious legal outcome of the highly racialized War on Drugs.<sup>147</sup> The crusade against the “demon drug” was carried out by a newly robust drug-crime-fighting infrastructure. Between 1980 and 1984 FBI funding for anti-drug efforts rose from \$8 million to \$95 million, while budgets for drug treatment, prevention programs, and education shrank considerably.<sup>148</sup> The treatment of crack during the war on drugs offers stark evidence of the ways that nominally “colorblind” policies in fact funneled black and brown people into prisons and jails and ushered in the era of mass incarceration.

In 1986, the war gained momentum with the help of major mainstream media outlets. In June of that year, *Newsweek* announced that crack was the biggest story since Vietnam and Watergate. Two months later, *Time* declared that crack was the “issue of the year.” Major newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* ran story after story about the “epidemic” of crack.<sup>149</sup> This was the climate in which the Citizens’ Advisory Committee mobilized.

This combination of national media coverage, ostensibly “colorblind” rhetoric and policies, and intensive financial inputs at the federal level moved drugs and drug-related crime to the center of governing practices and the popular imagination, and did more to shape mass incarceration than any other factor. As I have tried to demonstrate above, the Citizens’ Advisory Committee exposes a similar set of interactions at the state and local levels and offers a look at the interplay between politics, media, race (and the silences

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<sup>147</sup> This disparity, which sent thousands of people to prison to serve extremely long sentences, was not officially ameliorated until 2010 when President Barack Obama signed the Fair Sentencing Act, which reduced the gap in federal sentencing guidelines. Many states have yet to follow suit, however, which has limited the effects of this legislative change. Nicole D. Porter and Valerie Wright, PhD, “Cracked Justice” (The Sentencing Project, 2011), 1; Alexander, 109.

<sup>148</sup> Beckett, 53.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 56; Alexander, 51-52.

that surround it), infrastructural investments in the crime-fighting apparatus, the mobilization of fear, and desires for safety.

In the late 1980s and the 1990s, these trends continued. Even before he was elected president, George H.W. Bush found it politically useful to deploy racialized messages about crime in order to advance the “law and order” project. His most famous rhetorical maneuver was the Willie Horton campaign ad, which featured a dark-skinned black man who had escaped from a Massachusetts prison while on a work furlough. After his escape, Horton raped a white woman and brutalized her fiancé. Bush used this case to attack his opponent, Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis, for overseeing the furlough program, which Bush presented as a weekend pass program for rapists and murderers. The ad was controversial but ultimately successful because, in the punitive climate of the day, it helped spoil Dukakis’s chances of winning the office of president and established an important political precedent for future candidates: at all costs, avoid the label of “soft on crime.”<sup>150</sup> Bush’s criticism of the Massachusetts furlough program also brought scrutiny upon similar programs across the country and provided welcome evidence for those who sought to dismantle them.

Ironically, but perhaps not surprisingly given earlier Democrats’ clear support for punitive social policy, the desired resolution of a decades-long conservative push was carried out by a Democrat. When Bill Clinton took office in 1993, the U.S. undertook the most concerted prison construction boom in the country’s history. The vast majority of the U.S.’s present prisons were built under his administration. Most critically, he championed the passage of the Omnibus Crime Control Act of 1994, the “most costly

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<sup>150</sup> Alexander, 53.



criminal justice package ever voted in world history.”<sup>151</sup> Vitally connected to these developments at the level of criminal justice policy, Clinton also oversaw the “end of welfare as we know it.”<sup>152</sup> The changes Clinton made in the 1990s more fully merged the realms of social welfare policy and criminal justice policy and laid bare the fact that the frame around crime and punishment had shifted. “Tough on crime” did not follow party lines anymore, if it ever really had. By the middle of the 1990s, “no serious alternatives to the War on Drugs and “get tough” movement were being entertained in mainstream political discourse.”<sup>153</sup>

Sociologist Loic Wacquant has remarked that “[t]o the deliberate atrophy of the welfare state corresponds the dystopic hypertrophy of the penal state: the poverty and decay of the one have as their direct and necessary counterpart the greatness and insolent opulence of the other.”<sup>154</sup> Between 1975 and 1995, the segment of the U.S. population officially classified as “very poor” (surviving at less than 50 percent of the poverty level) had doubled in size.<sup>155</sup> Clinton’s conservative, intensely punitive “reforms” responded to this reality with measures that increased work requirements for recipients of aid and implemented lifetime caps on how much assistance people could receive. Also under this policy, anyone convicted of a felony drug offense was banned for life from receiving welfare benefits and food stamps, and was often banned from public housing.<sup>156</sup> Notably, these changes also coincide with the fact that mainstream media and many white political commentators associated welfare with black mothers, whose rolls had grown since the

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<sup>151</sup> Loic Wacquant, *Prisons of Poverty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 140.

<sup>152</sup> Martin Carcasson, “Ending Welfare As We Know It: President Clinton and the Rhetorical Transformation of the Anti-Welfare Culture,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9:4 (Winter 2006): 655.

<sup>153</sup> Alexander, 56.

<sup>154</sup> Wacquant, *Prisons of Poverty*, 58.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>156</sup> Alexander, 56.

welfare rights movement of the 1960s succeeded in gaining black families' access to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).<sup>157</sup> Black welfare mothers served as the corollary of the hyper-criminalized black men who were being sent to prisons at remarkable rates during this period. Notably, the lives of women of color, in particular black and Latina women, were also increasingly circumscribed by the criminal justice system since they were (and are) disproportionately incarcerated for nonviolent drug offenses and prostitution, and are most often charged with supporting children alone when male partners are incarcerated.<sup>158</sup>

Presidential politics only offer a limited view of the broader political climate out of which the phenomenon of mass incarceration grew. It may in fact be more revealing to look closely at certain members of presidents' cabinets, namely attorneys general. More insight might also be gained from a close analysis of congressional support for punitive measures throughout the era of mass incarceration. As well, the tradition of social history and popular movements for social change have clearly demonstrated that the maneuvering that takes place at the level of the state does not necessarily expose the complex terrain where power is produced and operates, and where ideas and identities are forged. The relationship between policy and popular opinion/action is reciprocal and multi-dimensional. I hope that the macro-level history I have recounted here does, however, reveal some of the ways the terms of the U.S. debate around crime, incarceration, fear, and security shifted over time. I also hope that it illuminates the avenues by which the major structural changes that vastly altered the possibilities for

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<sup>157</sup> Dorothy Roberts, "Feminism, Race, and Adoption Policy," in *Incite! Women of Color Against Violence*, *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006), 46.

<sup>158</sup> Beth E. Richie, "The Social Impact of Mass Incarceration on Women," in *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 138-139.

justice in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries were opened up. Most importantly, I hope it helps explain the significance of the Citizens' Advisory Committee and sheds further light on how the debate played out at the local level.

## EPILOGUE

### SAFETY IN THE SHADOW OF RAZOR WIRE?

Just as the narrator of Robert Frost's famous poem, "Mending Wall," questions his neighbor's reliance on the maxim, "good fences make good neighbors," we must question why it is that, as a country, we have come to embrace a logic that says that, in fact, razor wire, armed guards, and high-tech security systems make good neighbors. Frost's narrator is right to interrogate just who the fence is meant to keep out and who occupies the inside space, the home, the community. The same questions can be asked of prisons in the current age of mass incarceration. The answers to these questions will necessarily echo with familiarity to those who have considered the histories of colonization, slavery, immigration policy, labor repression, and Jim Crow because United States history is filled with examples of how racialized exclusion and violence have been in conversation with safety and security, and how the latter have not been served by the former. These legacies are fundamentally about insides and outsides, privates and publics, homes and wildernesses, "us" and "them." Western logic loves binaries. But as many oppositional scholars, activists, and everyday resisters have shown, these binaries never tell the big messy stories that, taken together, make histories.

Stone walls in various states of disrepair run along the borders of old farm fields on the rolling hills that surround SCI Dallas. I imagine these walls to be similar to the ones Robert Frost wrote about, made up of stones of all shapes and sizes pulled from the earth when it was plowed up the first times. It is a beautiful place, to my eye, with fast-moving streams and flocks of wild turkeys; remnants of an old orchard intermingling with various outbuildings. The prison always looks stark to me, up on top of its own hill:

the coils of razor wire glistening in the sun, layer upon layer of imposing chain link fence, brick buildings trimmed with various shades of institutional gray and blue. Cars filled with families and friends come and go from the visitors' lot during visiting hours, and correctional officers wave to each other in the staff parking area at shift changes.

In Frost's poem, the earth heaves with the cold and sends the top stones of the wall tumbling. The narrator and his neighbor mend it each spring because, like all fences, borders, and walls, it creates, by its very existence, what is on each side of it. But the shape of the wall matters: a stone wall between farm fields is different from razor wire. Razor wire produces particular kinds of neighbors and particular kinds of relationships. With this thesis I have attempted to illuminate one corner of the "razor wire nation" the U.S. has become, to explore some of its constitutive relationships, and to lay out the historical context from which it has grown. I have also tried to take a deeper look at the roles we have all played in the growth of mass incarceration, whether these roles have been active, passive, or violently coerced.

I came to this project because I have a relationship with SCI Dallas that dates back to my childhood. Although I grew up in the next county over for most of my life, two of our closest family friends lived within a few miles of the prison, and so did I for one year in middle school. From that house at night we could see Chase's bright lights punctuating the otherwise dark landscape. I had no sense then what happened inside the prison, who lived and worked there, or what its larger historical significance was. I certainly did not know about the work of the Citizens' Advisory Committee.

Many years later, when I was no longer living in Pennsylvania, my relationship to SCID changed; it became more intimate. I had developed a political interest in

imprisonment after learning about the history (and present realities) of racism in the U.S. and coming to the conclusion that mass incarceration was the most egregious contemporary example of the harm caused by racial injustice. I was peripherally involved with prison-related political organizing. One day at the gym I ran into a former co-worker who corresponds with people in prison all over the country. She knew where I grew up and told me that she was writing with someone at SCI-Dallas in Pennsylvania. “SCI-Dallas!” I said. Like many people who grew up in small, unheard-of places, I am always excited to hear someone even utter the place names of my childhood. But in this case, my interest was deeper. My friend told me that her pen-pal had been locked up for thirty years – longer, at that point, than I had been alive. I was immediately struck by the physical proximity of our two lives, and by the immense distance between our experiences. This man, whom I had never met, had spent all those years in a little cell so close by, while I went about my childhood days. I decided that I had to write to him. So I got the address from my colleague and introduced myself to Tiyo Attallah Salah-El.

From then on, I related to the prison differently. It was the place where my friend – and that is what Tiyo very quickly became – had been confined for over three decades, where, as an African American man in his seventies, he struggled to get his basic needs met, to receive appropriate healthcare and food, to be warm in winter and reasonably cool in summer. It was a place where this talented musician and former star athlete encountered the everyday violence of incarceration: guards’ racism, fights among prisoners, the humiliation of strip searches before and after visits, the tyranny of one’s own thoughts. It was a place that I visited twice a year, where I interacted with corrections officers who seemed like they could have been my classmates in middle

school, all grown up – twenty- and thirty-something white men, with that subtly particular northeast Pennsylvania accent. It was the first place where I witnessed the on-the-ground reality of mass incarceration - the ways it wears down on the people locked inside, the families and friends who come to visit, and the people who work there – as well as the stark racial and class disparities that define this phenomenon. I also saw the indomitable human spirit in action, and the ways that under such harsh circumstances people do not just try to cut each other down, as mainstream media would have us believe. They also bring each other oranges when they are sick and pick each other up when they fall. Lifelong friendships form there, and incredible spiritual and intellectual growth happens there.

I have learned a great deal from Tiyo Attallah Salah-El. He is living and learning and cultivating relationships with the knowledge that he will die within the walls of SCI-Dallas. He is on “slow death row,” as he calls it, serving a life sentence in Pennsylvania, where “life means life.” He persevered through invasive cell raids and the challenges of communication via the U.S. postal system so that he could earn Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees while incarcerated. One of his advisors and mentors was the late Howard Zinn, with whom he corresponded until Zinn’s death in 2010. Tiyo has published articles on prison abolition and an autobiography.<sup>159</sup> His collected papers are archived in the Special Collections and University Archives at the W.E.B. Dubois library at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and include letters to and from people around the world as well as records from the lawsuit he brought against the Pennsylvania prison system in the

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<sup>159</sup> “A Call for the Abolition of Prisons,” *The New Abolitionists: (Neo)Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Narratives*, Joy James, ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 67-76; *Autobiography of Tiyo Attallah Salah-El*. New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2006.

hopes that prisoner-workers might unionize.<sup>160</sup> The fact that he lived inside the walls of SCI Dallas the whole time the Citizens' Advisory Committee organized for tighter security throughout the eighties and nineties provided me with a different perspective on this work than if I had never met anyone inside. The word "lifer" is not an abstract term to me anymore, so when the CAC deployed it in their demands for tighter security, I had to dig deeper into what it meant to them.

I intended to write my thesis about Tiyo Attallah Salah-El, and about the inner workings of the prison. But when I started looking at newspaper coverage of SCI Dallas from the last thirty years and I came across Pat Rusiloski and the Citizens' Advisory Committee, it occurred to me that these were "my people," demographically, at least: white, rural, working and middle class people. I realized that I had not heard much about this slice of the U.S. population in all that I had read on mass incarceration. If we accept the dominant binary frameworks of race and geography, white rural folks are the polar opposite of the black urban folks who, understandably and rightly, have most often been the focus of recent thinking about mass incarceration. I wondered, what was the CAC's, and more broadly, prison neighbors' role in the United States' unprecedented trend of prison expansion? What did they really want? And how had they come to envision their goals as directly tied to the secure confinement of thousands of other human beings? I have partial answers to these questions now; but the story continues to evolve. There are still thousands of people locked up at SCI Dallas. The prison neighbors are still negotiating their relationships with local manifestations of mass incarceration.

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<sup>160</sup> Tiyo Attallah Salah-El Papers (MS 590). Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst.



In 2007, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections proposed that the state ease prison overcrowding by expanding SCI Dallas, or rather, by building an entirely new prison that would hold 2000 more inmates, right next to the existing one. If the D.O.C. was successful in acquiring funding, this would be one of three such projects in the state. In a move that linked them to other rural residents around the country who had, for various reasons, fought prison construction in their communities, Pat Rusiloski and her neighbors resisted this proposed development. The CAC no longer formally existed – they had disbanded earlier in the decade when they felt the new administration was no longer cooperating with them – but they still made their voices audible using the time-tested amplifiers of the media and local legislators.<sup>161</sup> They were still not satisfied with how the already-existing prison was run, and they did not want the additional traffic and water use that would come with thousands of new inmates and staff who would work on top of the hill if the new prison were built.<sup>162</sup> And fear still ruled the day. “They’re not building a superstore,” said Jackson Township planning commission chairman Paul Niezgoda, “this is a warehouse for very bad, nasty people. We don’t need this in our backyard.”<sup>163</sup> Niezgoda’s use of the term “warehouse” is telling as well. There are no illusions here: this is not a place where “very bad, nasty people” go to become productive, valued citizens; it is a place to store them, to keep them out of “our backyards.”<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Barbara “Bonnie” Dombroski interview with author, October 26, 2010.

<sup>162</sup> Skrapits, Elizabeth, “Mundy, Residents – Build new prison elsewhere,” *Citizens’ Voice*, June 25, 2007, T4.

<sup>163</sup> Skrapits, Elizabeth, “Mundy says prison plan pulled,” *Citizens’ Voice*, June 29, 2007, T4.

<sup>164</sup> On NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) views regarding four rural prisons in Pennsylvania, see Kevin E. Courtright, Susan H. Packard, Michael J. Hannan, and Edward T. Brennan, “Prisons and Rural Pennsylvania Communities: Exploring the Health of the Relationship and the Possibility of Improvement,” *The Prison Journal* 90:1 (March, 2010): 69-93.

The money did not get allocated after all and the project at SCI Dallas did not go forward. Construction did go forward elsewhere, however. SCI Pine Grove, an institution for “young adult offenders,” was built in Indiana, Pennsylvania, and modular units were added at SCI Rockview. By 2014, if all goes as planned, the state will add an additional 5,000 “beds” to the prison system.<sup>165</sup> In addition to building more modular units, the state will build a brand new prison in Centre County (2000 beds, on the grounds of an existing prison) and two new facilities to replace the aging SCI Graterford in Montgomery County, outside Philadelphia. Each of these prisons comes with a price tag of \$2,000,000. Nonetheless, the Department of Corrections projects that by 2016, they will still be operating at 113% of capacity, with 55,000 people locked up throughout the state, roughly the same number the entire U.S. confined in prisons and jails in 1900.<sup>166</sup>

Meanwhile on the other side of the state, in 2010, the Pittsburgh chapter of the grassroots organization the Human Rights Coalition (HRC), otherwise known as FedUp!, issued a lengthy and graphic report on the human rights abuses they had documented at SCI Dallas and other prisons through correspondence with people incarcerated there as well as their families and friends. The report, “Institutionalized Cruelty: Torture at SCI Dallas and in Prisons Throughout Pennsylvania,” portrays sexual and physical abuse, medical neglect, retaliation by guards, systemic racism, and unsafe environmental conditions within the prison. The narrative is punctuated with quotations from prisoners who have experienced abuse and torture inside SCI Dallas. The vast majority of

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<sup>165</sup> “Beds” is the term commonly used in the corrections world to describe the capacity of a prison. Since widespread overcrowding has meant that many people in prison are sharing small spaces intended for one person, this term has become bitterly ironic when there is not much room for more than a bed in a “double-bunked” cell. Like the word “inmate,” “beds” also tends to erase the humanity of people in prison.

<sup>166</sup> PA Department of Corrections, “Costs & Population,” 2011, 5.  
[http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/research\\_statistics/10669](http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/research_statistics/10669) (accessed October 3, 2011); Rose Heyer, *U.S. Prison Proliferation 1900-2000*, Prison Policy Initiative, <http://www.prisonpolicy.org/atlas/proliferation1900-2000.html> (accessed October 6, 2011).

complaints came from those who were confined in Chase's Restricted Housing Unit (RHU), or solitary confinement unit.<sup>167</sup> The HRC has yet to receive responses to their report from the Department of Corrections or state legislators. In August, 2010, the Pennsylvania House Judiciary Committee held a hearing on solitary confinement in the state. According to an HRC member who testified at the hearing, when the SCI Dallas report was cited, the D.O.C. representative, Michael Klopotoski, walked out of the room. Klopotoski, now Deputy Secretary of the Eastern Region, was superintendent at SCI Dallas during some of the most disturbing incidents the HRC's report outlines.<sup>168</sup>

Given more time and resources, and openness to opposing views, perhaps the SCI Dallas prison neighbors and the Human Rights Coalition could collaborate under the banner of safety and well-being for all, regardless of criminal status. For now, the wide expanse of central Pennsylvania stretches between the two groups and this kind of transformative coalitional work has yet to happen. Nonetheless, the "naturalness" of the tough on crime/law and order approach may be on shaky ground in Pennsylvania and across the U.S., which may make more space for work like the HRC's and provide openings for this kind of organizing. Pennsylvania Commissioner of Corrections John Wetzel recently remarked, "[t]he fact that our [2011-2012] budget is \$1.86 billion has a lot of people rethinking some of the assumptions we've made in the past...When we

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<sup>167</sup> Human Rights Coalition/FedUp!, "Institutionalized Cruelty: Torture at SCI Dallas and in Prisons Throughout Pennsylvania," 2010, 8, <http://www.thomasmertoncenter.org/projects/prisoner-rights/fedup/scidallas.htm> (accessed October 3, 2011). Also, see Solitary Watch, <http://solitarywatch.com/> or American Friends Service Committee Stopmax Campaign, <http://afsc.org/campaign/stopmax> for more on the growing movement to end the use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons (accessed October 3, 2011).

<sup>168</sup> Bret Grote, Human Rights Coalition member, phone interview with author, October 9, 2011.

over-incarcerate individuals...we're not improving public safety, quite the opposite."<sup>169</sup> Budget shortfalls like Pennsylvania's are driving many legislators across the country to examine the issue of mass incarceration more closely, but this is not the only factor motivating government scrutiny, which is a good thing since budget crises come and go. News of the conditions within prisons, like those described in HRC's report, have reached the highest echelons of judicial power in the United States and will hopefully have significant impacts on policy as well. In May, 2011, the Supreme Court of the United States ordered California to shrink its grossly overcrowded prison system by over 33,000 inmates in two years. In presenting the court's decision, Justice Anthony M. Kennedy movingly remarked on the grim effects of the fact that the California system detains roughly 60,000 people more than its intended capacity.<sup>170</sup>

In a recent article, author and prominent sentencing reform advocate Marc Mauer presents a well-documented case for "guarded optimism" in the realm of prison reform. He outlines the convergence of a number of developments – federal reform of the crack/powder cocaine sentencing disparity, fiscally-driven state prison population reductions, the success of re-entry programs, effective grassroots state-level reform efforts, and bi-partisan support for sentencing reform at the federal level, among others – and argues that taken together these changes indicate a more receptive climate for reform on a broad scale. He adds, however, that it would be premature to declare the end of the "tough on crime" era. Rather, it is more accurate to conclude "that we have reached a

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<sup>169</sup> Joelle Farrell, "Pa., N.J. officials question costs of tough sentencing," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 27, 2011, [http://articles.philly.com/2011-07-27/news/29820943\\_1\\_prison-population-tough-sentencing-nonviolent-offenders](http://articles.philly.com/2011-07-27/news/29820943_1_prison-population-tough-sentencing-nonviolent-offenders) (accessed October 3, 2011).

<sup>170</sup> David G. Savage and Patrick McGreevy, "U.S. Supreme Court orders massive inmate release to relieve California's crowded prisons," *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/may/24/local/la-me-court-prisons-20110524> (accessed October 14, 2011).

point where the policies and political rhetoric emanating from that time now have considerably less salience,” not that they have lost currency altogether.<sup>171</sup> Importantly, Mauer goes on to argue that a critical aspect of mass incarceration around which reformers must strategize is the question of race.<sup>172</sup> As long as it is possible for large swaths of the population to believe that the gross scale of the prison system is someone else’s problem, reforms to sentencing or parole policies will have limited impact. In the U.S., that scenario looks like white people, particularly middle and upper class whites, believing that mass incarceration does not affect their lives, but rather is an issue with which black and Latino people must contend.

While the CAC surely recognized the fact that the prison in their midst affected their lives, the way they responded to this recognition was not inevitable. They acted within a climate of pervasive racialized fear and the growing normalization of intensely punitive criminal justice policy. Alternately, geographer and prison activist Ruth Wilson Gilmore presents what I would contend is a more hopeful framing of the possibilities that inhere in the geographic patterns of mass incarceration:

...edges are also interfaces... even while borders highlight the distinction between places, they also connect places into relationships with each other and with non-contiguous places. So too with prison: the government-organized and -funded dispersal of marginalized people from urban to rural locations suggest both that problems stretch across space in a connected way and that arenas for activism are less segregated than they seem.<sup>173</sup>

It is within this framework that I see the greatest potential for change that does not pit the needs and desires of one community against those of another.

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<sup>171</sup> Marc Mauer, “Sentencing Reform: Amid Mass Incarcerations - Guarded Optimism,” *Criminal Justice* 26:1 (Spring 2011), 30.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>173</sup> *Golden Gulag*, 11.

Historians have engaged in many debates about the ideal of objectivity and the need for balanced scholarship. However, it seems clear that none of us is unbiased or politically detached, and in fact, the production of knowledge is always a political act.<sup>174</sup> Indeed, for some of us, reading, writing, and teaching history are integral to our activism and work for social change. My desire to write this thesis grew out of deep distress and longing for something different. I am horrified by the fact that the U.S. has gone down this path of mass incarceration. I am angered and saddened that so many people's lives have been eaten up by the criminal justice system and the broader prison industrial complex. As I write this, the fortieth anniversary of the Attica Uprising has just passed without official recognition of the lives lost there; prisoners in solitary confinement in California have resumed their hunger strike; and Troy Anthony Davis has just been executed by the state of Georgia, despite an extraordinary level of doubt in his case and worldwide protest. Detached writing on this subject would be disingenuous, politically irresponsible, and for me, spiritually vacuous. The U.S. justice system has failed; unless its goal is to hobble millions of people, mostly poor and of color and increasingly immigrants, to deny them their right to realize their full humanity, or just to live, in which case, it is working perfectly. This is not paranoid conspiracy theory, but rather an honest, informed assessment of the histories of racism and economic injustice in the U.S., as they have played out in the realm of criminal justice. I have tried to trace threads of these histories here in order to better understand the genealogy of our present.

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<sup>174</sup> Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 203; Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (New York: Random House, 1994); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Eds. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.

Last time I spoke with Pat Rusiloski she told me that there were people in the community who were thinking of reviving the Citizens' Advisory Committee. It seems to me that the HRC's report should be required reading for anyone concerned with safety in the vicinity of SCI Dallas, or in the communities from which prisoners have come, since there is no such thing as safety on one side of the wall without safety on the other. Or, more accurately, there is no such thing as real safety, for anyone, in the shadow of razor wire. Recently, a coalition of organizers named their event commemorating the fortieth anniversary of Attica "Attica Is All of Us." Their message was clear: the events of Attica are not over; the racism and abuse that culminated in a bloodbath that September day in 1971 continues unabated and requires concerted action if it is to end.<sup>175</sup> Likewise, the story of the CAC reminds us that the history, present, and potential futures of imprisonment in the U.S. belong to all of us. In the age of mass incarceration, we are all prison neighbors. What kind of neighbors do we want to be?

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<sup>175</sup> "Attica Is All of Us," Riverside Church, New York City, September 9, 2011, <http://atticaisallofus.org/> (accessed October 4, 2011).

## **APPENDICES**



## APPENDIX A

### ATTICA PRISONERS' FIFTEEN PRACTICAL PROPOSALS, 1971<sup>176</sup>

1. Apply the New York State minimum wage law to all state institutions. STOP SLAVE LABOR.
2. Allow all New York State prisoners to be politically active, without intimidation or reprisals.
3. Give us true religious freedom.
4. End all censorship of newspapers, magazines, letters, and other publications coming from the publisher.
5. Allow all inmates, at their own expense, to communicate with anyone they please.
6. When an inmate reaches conditional release date, give him a full release without parole.
7. Cease administrative resentencing of inmates returned for parole violations.
8. Institute realistic rehabilitation programs for all inmates according to their offense and personal needs.
9. Educate all correctional officers to the needs of the inmates, i.e., understanding rather than punishment.
10. Give us a healthy diet, stop feeding us so much pork, and give us some fresh fruit daily.
11. Modernize the inmate education system.
12. Give us a doctor that will examine and treat all inmates that request treatment.
13. Have an institutional delegation comprised of one inmate from each company authorized to speak to the institution administration concerning grievances (QUARTERLY).
14. Give us less cell time and more recreation with better recreational equipment and facilities.
15. Remove inside walls, making one open yard, and no more segregation or punishment.

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<sup>176</sup> Rethinking Schools, "What We Want, What We Believe," [www.civilrightsteaching.org](http://www.civilrightsteaching.org) (accessed November 20, 2011).

## APPENDIX B

### SCI DALLAS PRISONERS' LIST OF REFORMS, 1972

Richard Mayberry and Kenneth Owens, SCI Dallas Inmates<sup>177</sup>

1. Due process at disciplinary hearings.
2. Uncensored mail, both incoming and outgoing.
3. Close down the dungeon (subterranean solitary confinement which constitutes cruel and unusual punishment).
4. Conjugal visits.
5. The right to receive political papers, books, and magazines without official censorship.
6. Community involvement in the prison.
7. The right to communicate with the news media without restriction.
8. Prisoner self-government within reasonable limits.

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<sup>177</sup> William Scranton III, "Dallas State Prison: An Inside View," *Dallas Post*, May 11, 1972.

## APPENDIX C

### CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Handwritten by Patricia Rusiloski  
Per Public Meeting, October 20, 1982

#### "Security SCID"

1. Freeze the prisoner population at its current level until the number of corrections officers is increased and the prison facility is expanded. (Eliminate double cell)
2. Increase the number of security officers to eliminate double shift overtime, sick leave problems and security officer assignment to jobs with which they are not familiar.
3. Add proposed perimeter fence. Also fence work areas such as power plant, sewer plant, and garbage processing area.
4. Eliminate prisoners of violent crimes from becoming trustees [trusties] and getting outside of compound work privileges.
5. Transport all prisoners to and from work details in closed vehicles. Eliminate all possible traffic of work details on public roads – utilize prison property roads.
6. Have correction officers assigned to all work details outside the compound and require periodic head counts. (Or fence the work area.)
7. Alert the community immediately if escape occurs.
  - A. Alert State Police. Request State Police helicopter to announce escape, request all available manpower for immediate search.
  - B. Sound prison siren and mobile auto sirens through community.
  - C. Phone residents *with description*
  - D. Alert news media – provide photos to TV and newspaper, request media helicopters.
8. Consider implementation of the following deterrents (sic):
  - A. Use dogs to patrol perimeter.
  - B. Use dogs to track escapees – *immediately*.
  - C. Eliminate prisoners' use of civilian clothes inside the prison.
  - D. Use highly visible (orange) clothes for trustees on outside work details.
  - E. Cut back woods 600 feet from existing perimeter fence to improve visibility and utilize *all* towers.

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