

* * * * *
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
* * * * *

DATE: May 1, 2019

CONTACT: Email: decarceratelouisiana@gmail.com
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100015779203681>
Website: <https://decarceratelouisiana.com>
Mike Lukash, Outside Member, Decarcerate Louisiana / Phone: 330-714-3464

ANGOLA PRISONERS AND SUPPORTERS CALL FOR CHANGE

On May 8, 2019, incarcerated citizens at Louisiana State Prison at Angola, their families, and other supporters will mark the anniversary of a nationally-reported* prison strike and work stoppage on that date in 2018, calling the commemoration “Mayday” to highlight the sense that it is a distress call to everyone that believes all people have human rights. Members of Decarcerate Louisiana admit that prison administrators have made limited efforts to address some of the prisoners’ grievances, but little has actually occurred to meet the demands put forward a year ago.

As a result, the members of Decarcerate Louisiana are now renewing their demands as outlined below, while also connecting their struggle to a larger movement for social justice by standing in solidarity with Louisiana state teachers who have been waiting for more than a decade to see their pay reach comparable levels with the rest of the country. While the Louisiana Governor’s office reports that the state spent roughly \$12,000 per public school student in 2018, the Vera Institute of Justice reported that the Louisiana Department of Corrections spent more than twice that (at \$25,310) per prisoner.

Decarcerate Louisiana, a movement that focuses on the rights of prisoners and their families, originated in Angola, but has since spread to other institutions in the state. Members are pledged to continue to make public their concerns related to, among other things, the use of incarcerated citizens as slaves, which is currently sanctioned by the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Decarcerate Louisiana supporters point out that forcing prisoners to work for as little as four cents per hour under the threat of severe punishment, including solitary confinement, is slavery pure and simple and should be abolished completely.

Movements calling for the abandonment of this practice have risen in recent years across the nation, supporting each other and organizing across state borders in an effort to increase public awareness of the issues raised by the wording of the 13th Amendment, which was ratified in 1865: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”

Many believe that this wording was drafted the way it was in order to provide a process to develop a system so a nation that had been widely dependent on the use of literally millions of slaves could continue to access free labor. After the 13th Amendment became law, convict leasing systems quickly developed and then turned into state-run prisons. But more recently, correctional systems in America have added privately-owned for-profit prisons, as well as the widely used practice of making sweetheart deals between prisons and corporations that regularly use incarcerated citizens as workers for a tiny fraction of the cost of workers outside the walls. As if in support of this suggestion, Louisiana Department of Corrections statistics report that seven out of ten prisoners in Louisiana are Black.

Aside from the underfunding of public education which has exacerbated the nationally researched School-to-Prison Pipeline, Decarcerate Louisiana is also concerned and expects to make future statements about the use of excessive force by prison guards, the excessive and inappropriate use of chemical agents, the housing of mentally ill prisoners in situations that routinely become violent and sometimes fatal, the lack of adequate mental health services in general, the overuse of solitary confinement for punitive reasons or no reason at all, the exorbitant cost of the current phone system available for prisoners to remain connected to their loved ones (which is ranked 43rd in the nation in affordability), the more than 7,000 geriatric prisoners that pose no safety problem to the public, and the many prisoners who remain incarcerated despite their being convicted by non-unanimous juries, a practice that is no longer legal.

As a result of these concerns, the members of the Decarcerate Louisiana movement are reiterating their original demands made public on May 8, 2018:

(1) We believe that all living human beings are created equal and have inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, regardless of the social status.

(2) We believe in human rights and human dignity and that government has a fundamental obligation to protect all its citizens from slavery and human degradation.

(3) We are demanding a national conversation inquiring how state prison farms across the country came to hold hundreds of thousands of people of African descent against their will.

(4) We are urging that local, state, and federal governments who currently hold hundreds of thousands of African Americans on prison farms across the country be investigated for antebellum criminality, involuntary servitude, and slavery.

(5) We are demanding an end to the systematic oppression and exploitation of prisoners and their outside family and supporters for profit.

(6) We are demanding classrooms for our education and rehabilitation, not slavery.

* “Angola Inmates Halt Farm Work, Demand ‘Slavery’ Investigations of U.S. Prisons,” Benjamin Fearnow, Newsweek, 5-9-18 <https://www.newsweek.com/louisiana-state-penitentiary-angola-work-stoppage-inmates-prison-guards-fight-917675>

*“Louisiana Prisoners Demand An End To ‘Modern Day Slavery,’” Bryce Covert, The Appeal, 6-8-18 <https://theappeal.org/louisiana-prisoners-demand-an-end-to-modern-day-slavery>