Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. and National Lifers of America, Inc.

Michigan

Lifers Report

DECEMBER 2022

Newsletter

PSYCHOGENIC THEORIES OF CRIME

Psychology, Biology, Sociology, and Criminology

Willis X. Harris

Readers may ask: "What are you talking about? I've never heard of any such theories. What are the pschogenic theories of crime?"

Psychogenic theories of crime propose that criminal behavior is caused by the mind of the offender or lawbreaker. These theories focus on the mental working of the human mind and how they affect the behavior of the individual. Psychogenics also emphasizes the individual difference between people, that some of the factors associated with the criminal behavior are not entirely under the control of the offender and describes criminals as abnormal, with the malfunction causing the behavior "centered in the mind." These psychogenic theories are divided into psychoanalytical and behavioral.

Psychoanalytical theories are rooted in psychoanalysis--a treatment method based on concepts of neurologist Sigmund Freud, who hypothesized that all of us are affected by our unconscious mind, whereas, behavioral theories hypothesize that all types of behaviors are learned based on experiences associated with the behaviors. John B. Watson once said, "Anyone can become a criminal if they grow up in an environment conducive to criminality." Saying it another way means if a convicted criminal had been raised in a different environment, they may not have become a criminal at all.

I contacted Joseph Abramjtys, Ph.D., a former warden and assistant warden in the Michigan Department of Corrections at the Muskegon Correctional Facility and ... (Cont. on p. 3)

Highlights

MICHIGANS LIFERS REPORT NEWSLETTER

Michigan Lifers Association, Inc.
4417 2nd Ave., Ste. 211
Detroit, MI 48201-1214

National Lifers of America, Inc.
P.O. Box 18023
River Rouge, MI 48218

Willis X. Harris
President
Michigan Lifers Association, Inc.

Gina DeAngelo
Executive Assistant
Michigan Lifers Association, Inc.

Carlton Banks
Chairman, National Board
National Lifers of America, Inc.

Constance Garner
Vice-Chairwoman, State Board
National Lifers of America, Inc.

Jamie Meade
Editor

Writers
Mario Cavin
Michael Fletcher
Dwight Henley
Richard Kilbourn
Jerry Metcalf
Bruce Micheals
Bryan Noonan
Sybil Padgett
Scott Wynne

Cartoonist
Terry Young

Send articles to:
Michigan Lifers Association, Inc.
Attention: Willis X. Harris
4417 2nd Ave., Ste. 211
Detroit, MI 48201-1214
(Limit articles to 600 words)

FROM THE EDITOR...

Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Happy Kwanzaa, and Happy New Year! May you, your family, and your friends have a safe, joyous, and blessed Holidays.

Another year in the books, but one that doesn't quite count towards a life without the possibility of parole (LWOP) sentence. For those of you who have not personally met me, 2023 will be 30 calendar years I have spent in prison. I was 19 years old when I entered Riverside in 1993. The road has been a long one, but one I believe will be coming to an end soon.

With both Houses in the Michigan Legislature changing from Republican to Democratic majority, our chances to achieve change in the criminal justice system has dramatically increased. In January 2023, the Second Look Sentencing Bill should be introduced with bipartisan support. Hopefully, we will also see some movement with the Disciplinary Credit/Earned Credit Bills and the Juvenile Bill aimed at eliminating LWOP sentences completely for those 18 and under. In addition, Governor Gretchen Whitmer will be starting her second term so hopefully we will see her more willing to entertain granting commutations for lifers.

For those of you who are on the inside, you should have recognized a serious staff shortage at your facility you are housed at. While this may cancel programs and a little yard, in the end, this is helpful. There is no doubt the "Defund the Police" movement is affecting corrections. The department's budget can only rise. Corrections officials are being mandated to work overtime every day. When mandated they are paid time-and-a-half. The bag is wet right now, but will quickly be soaked and that is when the bottom will fallout.

Change is inevitable! Mass incarceration and the Prison Industrial Complex in Michigan is coming to an end. Keeping people in prison for decades is costing the state too much while having no affect on the safety of society. This is why we need to start stepping up and pushing harder than ever for change. The resentencing of 18 year olds under Parks and Poole will cost the state millions, just as it did for the juveniles 17 and under after the Miller ruling.

For those of us who have already spent decades in prison, freedom couldn't have come any sooner.

-- Jamie Meade

(Psychogenic Theories, from p. 1) ... E.C. Brooks Correctional Facility. I asked him three questions: (1) What psychological and social factors cause or contribute to a person 'going crazy,' 'losing his/her mind,' or a 'total collapse of his/her ego mechanism'?; (2) Are these the same factors that contribute to robberies, rape, assaults on innocent people, or murder?; and (3) Why aren't our criminal justice and correctional experts addressing these factors?

(ABRAMAJTYS) Your first question asks "What psychological and social factors cause or contribute to a person 'going crazy,' 'losing his mind,' or a 'total collapse of his/her ego mechanism'?"

What this question is really asking is: What causes mental illness? And the answer is a whole lot of things. Far too many for one article or Q and A session to answer. In fact, the fields of psychology and psychiatry are in large part devoted to answering this question and addressing what can be done.

But basically, researchers have identified three causal categories of mental illness: (1) **Psychological Trauma** (such as, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, loss of a loved one, neglect, etc.); (2) **Biological** (such as, genetic abnormalities, brain disease, prenatal damage, long-term substance abuse, poor nutrition, exposure to toxins, etc.); (3) **Social/Environmental** (such as, death, divorce, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, isolation, eating disorders, substance abuse, etc.).

As you can see, these categories are not mutually exclusive, but can and do interact to cause mental illness, or at least a lack of mental health.

Your second question asks, "Are these the same factors that contribute to robberies, rape, assaults on innocent people, or murder?"

Sometimes with some people. For instance, we know that individuals growing up poor, abused, and addicted commit crimes at a higher rate than those more fortunate. The problem is that other individuals who are also poor, abused, and addicted do not commit crimes. In fact, those so situated who don't commit crimes far outnumber those who do. So how to tell the difference on an individual case-by-case level when it comes to criminal justice effectiveness and equity? As far as I can tell, nobody has an answer. Add to this the fact other people who are not poor, have not been abused, and are not addicted, i.e., have experienced few, if any, negative psychological, social, or biological influences, also commit crimes leads me to think that factors life greed and the need for power (both personal and political) also are at work.

WE KNOW THAT INDIVIDUALS GROWING UP POOR, ABUSED, AND ADDICTED COMMIT CRIMES AT A HIGHER RATE THAN THOSE MORE FORTUNATE

Your third question asks, in part, "Why aren't our criminal justice and correctional experts addressing these factors?"

I'm not a legal expert, but I do know that mental illness is directly addressed in Michigan through the option of two types of verdicts: Not guilty by reason of insanity (NGRI) and guilty but mentally ill (GBMI). A person sentenced as NGRI is sent to the Forensic Center for an initial 60-day testing period, but because it is unlikely staff there will say a person doesn't need treatment, people with such a verdict will likely do more time than if they entered a guilty plea.

The other direct mental health sentencing option, GBMI, gets the person sent to prison where he/she is supposed to get treatment but often gets poor quality treatment or none at all. A person so sentenced will have a hard time getting parole (how can they prove they're no longer mentally ill?), and once paroled, they will be on mandatory, five-year parole with a mental health evaluation every three months.

Unless a person has a life sentence, either direct option can land a person in prison for longer than if he/she had plead guilty.

Because we don't know how to otherwise directly address ... (Cont. on p. 7)

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF LONG-TERM IMPRISONMENT

Herman Bell

Loneliness is a prominent fixture in a long-termer's life. S/he wakes with it and beds with it. It can lead to mental depression that is marked by sadness, inactivity, difficulty in thinking and concentration, to a significant increase or decrease in appetite and time spent sleeping, to feelings of dejection and hopelessness, and sometimes to suicidal tendencies. In such a state the will is fragile. Your hair might come out in clumps. You might pick at your skin, at your nose, or at both. Your lack of hygiene may cause noses to fair, people to talk about you, and even to avoid you. Another prominent feature of prison life is tension, which is so rife that it is worn like an extra layer of skin. Anger is yet another feature, an unpaid debt, a slight--real or imagined--a look, an unguarded work and it flares-up like a volcanic eruption. A person could well take a life or lose his or her own, or wear some hideous, disfiguring scar because of it.

I write this not as a critique of the practice of imprisoning human beings, which I believe is an unacceptable form of punishment, but as a commentary on my observations and experiences in prison. Years ago I read a behavioral science report that said to confine a person in prison beyond five years is potentially damaging to his or her mental health. I knew this pig would not fly. Given the stiff prison sentences meted out to the poor and people of color in America, a five-year stretch is like doing a day. A twenty-five-to-life sentence is more like the norm than the extreme. When judges sentence people, they have no discretionary sentencing power. For the most part they read from a legislated script. (Not to say they would be more lenient. In some cases judges rely on a legal-proviso called "enhanced sentencing" and add even more time to the sentence imposed.) The scale of American justice tilts toward political and corporate interests rather than toward social justice or rehabilitative ones.

Getting out of prison is far more difficult than getting in. From the streets to detention centers, to the courts, and finally to prison. Yours rights, or what you imagined them to be, were unquestioned. Now everything is different. Even your family, friends, children, wives, girlfriends, former employers and the like are different. The noblest intention may have inspired you to commit your crime. You may have not even committed a crime or think yourself undeserving of the sentence imposed. It matters not. You are here now, alone, behind bars, and you may be here for the rest of your life.

As I think about the psychological effects of long-term imprisonment, I can only think of it in terms of day-to-day existence. Some days are better than others; none are ever great. In truth, I hate writing about prison. I hate reading or seeing movies about prison. Yet people need to know what goes on in them. Many prisoners and people on the outside fail to discern the political and economic interests that prisons serve. Unfortunately, the economics of prison will not be part of this discussion. While some prisoners see prison as a way of life, people on the streets see it as a necessary evil. But in the main, as regards prison, education, and health care in particular, the nation's citizenry has grown woefully lax in its civic duty. And as regard to administrations, the current one has embarked on a unilateralist doctrine coupled with a misguided foreign policy that has embroiled the nation in an unjustified war, which depletes precious economic resources and lets pressing domestic needs go unfulfilled. Our nation, as well as our uniformed young men and women who stand in harms way, deserve better. We all get in trouble and suffer when we fail to fulfill our duties and responsibilities.

... (Cont. on p. 5)

(The Psychological Effects, from p. 4) ...

I have been in prison 31 years. I am not sentenced to "life without parole", yet I can be here for life. Denied parole at my first parole hearing, I reappear in '06. If I am denied then, I reappear every two years after that until I am released on parole or by death. How does one grapple with a predicament like that and still feel optimistic? It is as much a physical blow as a psychological one. I cannot think about it. I cannot feel it. I can only "keep it moving."

I am keenly aware of my time spent in this menagerie, aware of each step I take and of having to decide what to do next. Through the years I have witnessed behavior reminiscent of my youth, the bully, the posse--both inmates and guards--the strong preying on the weak. I have known days when depression sagged my spirits, days when men gave themselves to violent acts against their fellow man, days when the law of the jungle superseded all others. Days that I considered a success because I made it through the day.

Often I have found myself having to choose between what I believe to be right as opposed to what is expedient. The choice taken defines who I am and what I think of myself. Because the conditions of confinement take everything else, all we have in here is out self-respect and "good word." To lose one is to lose the other. Life in jail is comprised of one decision-making episode after another, some large, some small. In this confusing, intricate network of pathways, the choices we take, what we decide to do in each one, leaves a lasting impression on the psyche. And the individual is compelled to choose how he will live his life in here (or someone will do it for him). Fence straddling is a non-option.

Locked behind gates and cares too numerous to count, the contact we have with the outside world sustains our sanity. Visits from family members and the occasional attorney provide a respite from the tedium. As our visitors provide mental snapshots of life on the outside, people you know--an ex-wife, an old girlfriend, an ailing relative, your son or daughter--we live in the moment with them. A visit is like a dream and when it's over you wonder if it ever happened. But the "life-giving" force inside you affirms that the smiles, the tears, the holding of hands, the style of dress, and the perfume were real. You hate to see your people go and they hate to go. But the portal connecting one reality to another remains open only for a short while. Then suddenly, like ripples form a stone cast into water, they disappear as though they never were.

When my cell door suddenly unlocks and guards stand in front of it, hands sheathed in rubber gloves, ordering me to step-out for a cell search, crashing waves, instead of ripples, rush over me. The search is routine they tell me; it's never routine to me, regardless the number of recurrences. My private space is violated each time I go through this. It transforms me into a non-person, as if I were an object, to be lifted-up and set aside, during the search, and the disconnect magically vanishes when I am allowed back inside.

We prisoners are "trained" to be obedient to authority and "conditioned" to obey it. "Trained," which suggests, "however long it takes to achieve the desired mental state," bears more of a sinister connotation than does "conditioned." The "training" process is fixed in the management of prison operations: "Hands on the wall and don't move until ordered to do so"; "I order you to..."; "For violating rule #..., I hereby sentence you to segregation... with loss of phone and commissary privileges." The "conditioning" process presents itself through prison operations: that is, through rules, enforcement of rules, giving and withholding of privileges and the like. With everything else remaining equal, the jail runs itself. Authority and obedience to it plays big in jail. In absence of one's liberty, obedience or non-compliance to authority is the main of contention inside of prison--how much do you concede to authority weighed against how much it demands of you. ... (Cont. on p. 8)

LIMITING INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

A Form of Oppression

Dwight Henley, MBA, & Jamie Meade

For decades the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) utilized a warehousing approach, deploying suppression techniques to control prisoners. Incarcerated people followed rules because they had to, not because they wanted to. Unfortunately, incarcerated people failed to internalize new values and attitudes, and once released on parole they reverted back to being the person that they were prior to incarceration and more than half returned to prison.

In response to perpetual recidivism and a $2 billion MDOC budget, citizens and legislators want incarcerated people rehabilitated. This makes sense because research shows rehabilitation is a more cost-effective approach to corrections than warehousing. Nevertheless, the MDOC has yet to fully buy into this idea. In fact, the MDOC appears to be implementing tactics to resist rehabilitation and to limit intellectual development of incarcerated people as a form of oppression.

The MDOC has compiled over 60 pages of restricted books that are prohibited form entering prisons across the state. These books include topics covering rehabilitation to business to basic computers. One would have to ask why the MDOC would not want people incarcerated to know how to start and operated a small business or a limited liability company, how to invest in stocks and bonds, or how to use the Microsoft Office program (i.e. Word, Excel, and Powerpoint).

A close look at MDOC programming reveals their resistance to rehabilitation and intellectual development. Many prisons offer very little programming, and at "programming" facilities, staff set such stringent criteria for enrollment that most incarcerated people are ineligible. The MDOC promotes its Vocational Villages, yet there Villages exist in 3 or 4 housing units in the entire prison system--each of the 29 prisons in Michigan has 5 to 8 units.

Many professors and educated prisoners submit proposals to teach educational classes, but they continuously get denied. The MDOC offers tablet technology for video games and music downloads but not for e-books or college classes. Most prisons show movies on an intra-institutional television channel but refuse to show educational lectures. The MDOC offers an Edovo educational system with over 150 course topics on a tablet to "special" populations but not to the general population.

Recently, the Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS), United Church of Christ Michigan Conference, and the Peoples Church of Flint have been trying to convince the MDOC to allow Jamie Meade the opportunity to participate fully in an Online Master of Divinity (MDiv) program while at the Macomb Correctional Facility. Although MDOC's Policy Directive 01.01.104 on Internet Access permits incarcerated persons to be approved for online educational programming, this permission has never been given since its inception in 2009. Corrections officials have continued to place structural hurdles in the way to impede the efforts to bring this opportunity to fruition.

The reality is that the MDOC has yet to buy into the idea of rehabilitation, and they continue to use subtle tactics to limit intellectual development of incarcerated people. The MDOC is successfully slowing the rehabilitation movement, and the 70 percent of the prison population that lacks access to substantive programming is proof.

DEATH BY INCARCERATION

The United States condemns one in every seven prisoners--more than 200,000 people--to die in prison. Over two-thirds of them are people of color. In September 2022, several human rights organizations submitted a 31 page complaint to the United Nations, pointing out that the United States is committing torture and violating the prohibition against racial discrimination by condemning people death by incarceration through extreme sentences of "life" and "life without the possibility of parole (LWOP)".

As we know, death by incarceration is the devastating consequence of our cruel and racially discri- ... (Cont. on p. 8)

(Psychogenic Theories, from p. 3) ... the three categories of mental illness casual factors, we try to indirectly address them by how certain criminal laws are defined and structured. For instance, some crimes have structured penalties, such as 1st degree murder, 2nd degree murder, 3rd degree murder, and through definitions, such as voluntary manslaughter, involuntary manslaughter, and criminal negligence. It's a far from perfect approach, but lacking the tools to determine the extent a mental illness contributed to a criminal act, it is better than nothing.

The second part of your third question asks: "How do we effectuate reform or rehabilitation of offenders if we ignore the root causes of criminal thinking and behavior?"

The simple answer is that we guess. We know education is related to recidivism, as is job training, and group therapy, so we offer programs to deliver these services. Sometimes, such programs are at the mercy of funding cuts, and social movements such as flat sentencing (which takes away a judge's ability to tailor sentences to circumstances, and handcuffs the discretionary power of parole boards). In addition, the deinstitutionalization of mental health services, destroyed mental health facilities and sent about a third of formerly institutionalized mentally ill into prisons ill-equipped to deal with the mentally ill beyond stabilizing them with medication or medicating them into a stupor.

Please keep in mind that the justice systems have no direct authority to end poverty, deliver decent community health care, or provide community mental health services. These justice systems work with what they're given in resources, criminal legislation, and above all, types of prisoners. Some prisoners are so damaged psychologically, socially, and biologically, they are beyond the justice system's ability to be rehabilitated, while some need few or no rehabilitation services at all beyond post-release support to succeed once released. The problem is how to differentiate between those who can benefit from rehabilitation services, those who cannot, and those who don't need any in the first place.

One thing is certain however, criminal justice systems can and are used to increase or decrease poverty and future levels of incarceration. Consider this from the CATO Institute:

"Politicians love to portray themselves as 'tough on crime.' But there are real consequences to heavy sentencing in terms of poverty. A study by scholars at Villanova University concluded that mass incarceration has increased the U.S. poverty rate by an estimated 20 percent. Another study found that a family's probability of being poor is 40 percent greater if the father is incarcerated. Since an estimated 1.5 million children had a parent in state or federal prison as of 2016. This is an enormous problem. Minority children are particularly at risk. Rates of parental incarceration are two-to-seven times higher for African American and Hispanic children than white children. An African American child whose father does not have a high school diploma faces roughly 50/50 odds that the father will be in prison by the child's 14th birthday. In addition, children of incarcerated parent are at high risk for several adverse life outcomes, including antisocial and violent behavior, mental health problems, dropping out of school, and unemployment. Harvard University political scientist Robert Putman points out that there is a 'spill-over effect' in areas of high incarceration affecting even children whose parents are not incarcerated." (https://www.cato.org/study/poverty-criminal-justice-reform).

Though reducing mass incarceration is a positive step, it is again only an indirect way of addressing the links between mental illness and criminality.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Joseph Abramajtys holds a Bachelor Degree in Zoology, a Master Degree in Labor and Industrial Relations, both from Michigan State University, and a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Union Graduate School. He is an ABD in International Economics.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

HAPPY HANUKKAH!

HAPPY KWANZAA!

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

(The Psychological Effects, from p. 5) ...

Because of its violent and coercive nature, authority, in prison, is tolerated at best. A prisoner soon recognizes that a certain look from a guard, hand gesture, facial expression, jangle of keys, and the like are a language that is as coercive as a verbal order. The prisoner even learns the unspoken "I'll get you later look." In this light, how much you concede to authority, weighed against its demands, is no small deliberation in the mind of a prisoner. Depending on the choice s/he makes, a slow methodical "weeding out" process begins. At this point a prisoner affirms or gains some sense of who s/he really is as a person. At that point, whatever part of himself or herself s/he wishes to hold onto, s/he has to fight to keep it.

For a black prisoner, his or her choice is like the Sword of Damocles suspended over his/her head by a hair. The historic enslavement of blacks in America and their maltreatment by white slaveholders is well documented, though much of it still remains to be told. When Lincoln freed U.S. slaves, vestiges of the slave system remained firmly in place, and blacks remained subordinate to white authority. And while the intervening years and subsequent battles won black civil rights victories, some would argue that the more things would seem to change for blacks, the more they remain the same. For blacks, taking this history into account--arrested by white police, prosecuted by white prosecutors, sentenced by white judges, and confined in American jails and overseen by white guards and administrators--how much to concede to authority weighed against its demands is no small consideration indeed. This very construct evokes strong imagery of overseer and slave on the plantation and its psychological underpinnings.

Against this backdrop are people inside U.S. prisons who have fought long and hard against American social and economic injustice. They are political prisoners (PPs) whose spirit is cast in the tradition of Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner, John Brown, and Malcolm-X, to name a few. In some quarters they are called Freedom Fighters. They display cat-like independence in prison, which is taboo in an environment that cultivates dependence and insecurity. Therefore, special treatment for them is foreordained. They are imprisoned not for social crimes--robbery, murder for hire, extortion, drug sales, and the like--but for fighting the racist, unjust laws and insensitive social and economic policies that ignore the needs of the poor, disenfranchised, and marginalized.

Already sentenced to the maximum allowable time and severely penalized for prison rule violations, the PP as well as everyone else is damaged by the prison experience. And the longer they are in, subjected to years and years of unremitting anguish, the deeper the scars and, hopefully, the stronger the resolve....

EDITOR'S NOTE: While Herman Bell's article was written many years ago, I found it intriguing and applicable as if written today.

(Death By Incarceration, from p. 6) ...

minatory criminal legal system. As a person with such a sentence points out: "These sentences of death by incarceration are disproportionately handed down to people of color of limited education, with fewer resources and they have failed to make communities safer. Death by incarceration sentences have not reduced crime ... and they create prison environments of hopelessness which is a danger in and of itself. The recidivism rate of those who were paroled from death by incarceration sentences is lower than any other group of 'offenders'."

Black and Latino people are disproportionately sentenced to death by incarceration nationwide, with significant racial disparities in rates of release and parole. There are also considerable racial disparities at the charging and trial states, which, in turn, impact sentencing.

The Committee Against Torture is the official body that administers the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which the United States has ratified. When the U.S. ratifies a treaty, its mandates become part of domestic law under the U.S. Constitution's Supremacy Clause.

Both the Committee Against Torture and the UN special ... (Cont. on p. 9)

(Death By Incarceration, from p. 8) ... rapporteur on torture have recommended the abolition of LWOP for juveniles. The United States is the only country that allows the sentencing of youth to life without parole--of which 70% so sentenced are children of color.

After the police murder of George Floyd, the International Commission of Inquiry on Systemic Racist Police Violence Against People of African Descent in the United States issued a 188 pager report documenting racial profiling at every stage of the criminal legal system. As we know, both traffic and street stops are common precursors to police killings and uses of excessive force which have a disparate impact on people of African descent, Indigenous Peoples, persons of Hispanic/Latino origin and Asian descent and undocumented migrants.

In the United States, people of color are charged with the death penalty, sentenced to death and executed in disproportionate numbers compared to "white" people. The methods of putting people to death amount to torture. Brutal physical torture was used almost exclusively against Black suspects in Chicago for 20 years beginning in the 1970s and sanctioned at the highest level of the Chicago Police Department, the Cook County State's Attorneys' Office and Mayor Daley's office.

Torture survivors still remain behind bars because of coerced confessions, as are many other predominately persons of color who have been and continue to be, subjected to all forms of physical and psychological torture--throughout the United States.

In 2011, the UN special rapporteur on torture called for a prohibition on solitary confinement beyond 15 consecutive days--but it remains common in the U.S.

Resources

Consortium News, 2200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 102-231, Arlington, VA 22201

Center for Constitutional Rights, 666 Broadway - 7th Floor, New York, NY 10012; 212-614-6464

Abolitionist Law Center, P O Box 8654, Pittsburgh, PA 15221

People's Law Office, 1180 N. Milwaukee Ave , Chicago, IL 60642; 773-235-0070

National Lawyers Guild, 132 Nassau St , New York, NY 10038

The Innocent Project, 40 Worth St , Suite 701, New York, NY 10031; 212-425-2345

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was originally published in the Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter (September 2022) Vol. 47-D, No. 9, P.O. Bos 1911, Sante Fe, NM 87504. No changes were made to the original article.

MICHIGAN FEMALE PRISONERS SUFFER SEXUAL ABUSE AT THE HANDS OF D.P.D.

Dyanna McDade

For decades, prisoners have dealt with abuse inflicted upon them by those elected by the community to protect them. It is a common practice, when arrested, for officers to use coercion tactics, and other methods of intimidation in order to retrieve information for a possible crime. Unfortunately, it has become a practice of the Detroit Police Department (DPD), while under the direction of Prosecutor Kim Worthy, and former Governor Jennifer Granholm, to sexually abuse female suspects held in custody.

With ages ranging from 20-25 years old, several female prisoners, who at the time were not even under arrest, were deprived of food, bedding, and sleep. Those women suffered from the constant harassment of detectives tag-teaming them during the interrogation process in order to obtain a statement or confession. Mainly these women dealt with male detectives who violated them--touching them inappropriately. In an age of #METOO and #BlackLivesMatter movements, where do the voices of women behind barbed wire fences come in at?

One woman stated, "He tried to go in my jeans while I was in handcuffs. There was no one else in the room to get for help." These officers abused their positions and authority given to them in order to take advantage of women who were already in a fearful and vulnerable situation. It is well known many women commit crimes out of fear and intimidation of their boyfriends and husbands. The same fear and intimidation of male police officers causes many women to confess to crimes they did not commit. Many detectives are no longer employed by DPD due to various forms ... (Cont. on p. 10)

(Michigan Female Prisoners, from p. 9) ... of misconduct. Some of these women, however, are still incarcerated and housed at Michigan's only women's prison, Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility in Ypsilanti. In a time when police brutality is at an all time high, how can justice prevail for these women who suffered years ago?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dyanna McDade (Prison ID No. 434139) is currently incarcerated and housed at the Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility, 3201 Bemis Rd., Ypsilanti, MI 48197.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter does not agree nor disagree with Dyanna McDade's article. We merely provide those incarcerated in Michigan a voice to express their experiences of incarceration.

NATIONAL LIFERS OF AMERICA, INC. UPDATE

Greetings NLA Family,

It is my deepest prayer that this missive finds you well and existing in the highest abode of peace and tranquility.

As you all should have been informed, our formal Chairman Carlton Banks resigned due to his current legal plight that requires one to be laser focused. The work, the agenda, and the mission must continue. As guardians of an Organization that so many men and women have put so much blood, sweat, and tears in to building for the past 40 years, we are pensively obligated to ensure that their work is never in vain. With such being said, I am deelpy honored to take on the position of Chairman with the hopes of appointing a Vice Chairman real soon. I trust that whichever one of you who is appointed to the Office of the Vice will be eager and ready to work.

Contrary to what Mrs. Shirley Bryant and those who sought to thwart the NLA, the structure alleged about the current NLA "new" leadership, we have accomplished more in the last 2 years than what the previous leaders had accomplished in over a decade (facts).

It is now time for all of us to turn up in terms of getting back focused on our mission and purpose. The current Executive leadership in the State of Michigan is majority Democratic which means that the issues that we have been striving so hard for decades to achieve pertaining to criminal justice reform can now be looked at in a criminal way. We are the ones who must push and promulgate an agenda that holds the newly elected politicians accountable for primarily two things: (1) upholding the promises and words that they made in their quest to be elected and (2) taking drastic steps to vastly reform the criminal justice system.

In light of what I have expressed above, I am hereby informing all you you that by January 15, 2023, we shall have completed the NLA National Agenda and have it sent to all NLA Local Chapters and all legislators for review. In brief, our agenda will consist of the issued that we as well as other organizations have been advocating for. I am encouraging all of you to participate at the local level to brainstorm and take part in helping us complete our agenda by submitting issues to my office for review. The deadline for submissions is January 1, 2023. Time is of the essence, so I advise you all to get to work.

In closing, I look forward to seeing all the great things that the NLA will accomplish for prisoners statewide as we are the last voice for the prison population.

Respectfully,
Eddie (Malijah) Gee
National Chairman, NLA

CALVIN REMEMBERS JAMES MARTRICE BROWN

June 3, 2022 | Matt Kucinski

On Monday, May 9, James Martrice Brown's name was read in front of hundreds of people. He then was handed his degree by Calvin University provost Noah Toly, shook the hand of Calvin University president Michael Le Roy, and walked back to his seat hearing the applause of his classmates, friends, and even a couple of family members.

A significant day

On this beautiful ... (Cont. on p. 11)

(Calvin Remembers James, from p. 10) ... day, Brown was participating in a historical moment, the first-ever bachelor's degree ceremony held inside a Michigan prison.

"We rejoice that two of his family members attended the ceremony, where they could see Martrice in person and celebrate the culmination of five years of study, challenge, and growth," said Christina Haven, student success specialist for the Calvin Prison Initiative.

Being able to see his family and celebrate with them in-person would hold extra significance for Brown. On May 16, just one week after this momentous event, Brown suffered a stroke. And three days later, on May 19, he died from complications.

"His death has left many people feeling shaken and deeply saddened," said Brian Noonan, a 2021 graduate of the CPI program. "Trice was only weeks away from a decision he's been waiting for in the courts that would have likely made it possible for him to leave prison."

An advocate for prison reform

Brown, 47, had served nearly three decades of his life sentence. And he was keenly aware that new legislation was being considered this summer that would make him a likely candidate to be released.

"While all guys want to get out, he kind of stood out to me in terms of wanting to pave a way that would allow guys doing life sentences to be considered to be released if they were indeed rehabilitated," said Todd Cioffi, director of the CPI program. "This was a passion of his."

Cioffi said Brown tracked what was going on in the courts, in politics, and socially. And said "he'd keep me up to date on that. He was an activist in the best sense, but if you didn't know him that well, you wouldn't know that about him."

While Brown was concerned with helping guys get out, he didn't miss the opportunities to help men flourish where they were currently planted.

Elevating others

Leon Williams, a peer of Brown's in the CPI program, first met Brown while serving time at Objibway Correctional Facility in Michigan's upper peninsula. Brown was a recreation official overseeing basketball games.

"I was a young, hot-headed ball player who always gave him a hard time," recalls Williams. "I was wild and always into something. Martrice took me under his wing and showed me that I had value, could be anything that I wanted, and I didn't have to submit to prison life. To me his legacy will be service."

Brown's service to others was often under the radar, but definitely didn't go unnoticed. One of the ways he served students is an a consultant in CPI's Rhetoric Center.

"My students who worked with him on their writing in the Rhetoric Center loved and admired him because he was smart and selfless," said Dean Ward, an emeritus professor from Calvin University who taught in the CPI program. "I once was looking at the record sheet for the Center, and I noticed that he had been holding sessions that often lasted two to three hours. I asked why he'd let those sessions go so long, and he said, 'Well, they had a lot of problems, and I just didn't want to make them leave.'"

DeAngelo Eady was one of the students who shared with James that he desired to one day become a great writer. "Martrice had all the characteristics of a professor. He was studious and he had the biggest personality that drew people to him. He was someone who would go out of his way to help you."

It's because Brown was never done learning himself.

Physically and intellectually strong

"He loved discussing ideas and sharpening his ability to debate different sides of an argument," said Noonan.

"He had pride in beating information into himself," said Mario Collier, a peer in the CPI program. "It was important to balance education with strength for James. The strong man was capable of representing himself in an intelligent fashion."

Leaving hope

Brown will be remembered by his peers in many ways. They describe him as honest, ambitious, loyal, caring, unselfish, determined, direct, strong-willed, complicated, funny, dependable, diligent, patient, stern, and as a hard worker. They say he loved music, basketball, exercising, reading books, and ... (Cont. on p. 12)

(Calvin Remembers James, from p. 11) ... telling jokes.

But what he loved most was his family and the men he walked alongside for decades. The greatest gift he's left them is hope.

"For the 20-plus years I'm known Martrice he has always stayed on me about never stop trying to get out of prison and back home to your family," said Jenero Osborne, a peer in the CPI program.

"As a lifer, James taught me to never give up fighting for my freedom," said Ahmad Nelson, a peer in the CPI program.

"To rise above this prison and not to continue to have a criminal mentality," said CPI student Shannon Keys, of a lesson he was taught by Brown.

"A life lesson that Martrice taught me was everyone is not against you, and everyone needs help at some point. Learn how to ask for help and always be willing to help others," said Williams.

While Brown was a student in the CPI program for five years, he really doubled as a teacher and these lessons he taught will be carried forward through his peers, his friends, "his students."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Calvin Remembers James Martrice Brown was originally published on Calvin University's web page News & Stories. CPI program student Raymond C. Walen, Jr., shared Brown's story with the Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter. As the Editor, Brown's story is one that the world needs to read about.

THE POET'S CORNER...

Deaths

I remember the first time I died...
long before Columbus invaded America.

The Gallows forever haunting
the coarse rope endlessly itching
(ever after I never worse a tie).

Another death in Auschwitz
it's very name now telling the story
but in my time, it was just another town.

Another - the firing squad so inept
you'd have thought they were the ones
wearing the black hood.

I'll never forget the sharp sting of the
needle injecting society's venom
more painful than any cobra.

Old Sparky
Soldering body parts together
and lighting my thinning hair on fire.

And now the longest death
is the one I'm still living:
Lifetime Civil Commitment.

By: Matthew Feeney
1111 Highway 73
Moose Lake, MN 55767

NOTICE
ATTENTION CIVILIANS

Charlie Sullivan, president of NATIONAL CURE, needs someone to establish CURE Chapters in South Caroline and in Georgia.

If any reader/civilian in these two states feels qualified to head/lead state chapters, please contact Charlie Sullivan at the following address:

NATIONAL CURE
P.O. Box 2310
Washington, DC 20013
(202) 789-2126

Charlie will explain to you how to start the chapter. Call or write to him now.

NOTICE
TO OUR INCARCERATED READERS

We are receiving calls from prison officials, civilians, and prisoners wanting to know if the Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. is a law firm.

Please be advised that we are not a law firm nor a research firm. Do not send us your court papers. We do limited research that is necessary to support comments in our articles. We provide information designed to inform you to help yourself.

We are pleased to learn that our articles are widely read, not only in Michigan, but across the nation. Our mission is to educate life without the possibility of parole prisoners and other classes of lifers on/about issues they never considered or knew.

-- Willis X. Harris

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

The expressed purposes of the Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. and the National Lifers of America, Inc. to publish the "Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter" are to educate and uplift the lifer population, to seek changes in laws that restrict clemency and parole, to educate the general public, and to encourage criminal justice reform, especially in corrections.

PRISONERS

PRISONER'S FULL NAME: _____ Number: _____

NAME OF CORRECTIONAL FACILITY: _____

COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ Zip Code: _____

CIVILIANS

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____ APT. _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ Zip Code: _____

PHONE NO. ( ) _____

SUBSCRIPTION RATES
(Yearly Subscription 10 to 12 Issues)

PRISONERS: _____ $15 Yearly CIVILIANS: _____ $20 Yearly

ORGANIZATIONS: _____ $25 Yearly LIFE MEMBERS: _____ $100

DONATIONS: _____

SEND SUBSCRIPTION PAYMENTS & DONATIONS TO:

Michigan Lifers Association
4417 Second Ave.
Suite 211
Detroit, MI 48201-1214