Prisons are there to isolate people, so we must be actively keeping the link to the outside world open.
REACHING THROUGH THE BARS

A Prisoner Support Handbook

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(The essays in this book were written between 2003-2005.)

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Prisoner Support is about the fight for civil rights, freedom, human rights, race & class equality, and truth in justice.

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LINKS AND RESOURCES

There are many organizations that address prison issues. Here are some I have run across:

★ EARTH LIBERATION PRISONERS


http://www.spiritooffreedom.org.uk – Earth Liberation Prisoner Support

http://www.freefromnow.org – A site dedicated to political prisoner Jeff “Free” Luers.

http://www.womensprisoners.org/ – California Coalition for Women Prisoners

http://www.prisonsfoundation.org – Nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC that promotes the arts and education in prison and alternatives to incarceration
When a person is charged with a crime in the criminal justice system, the system presents a false storefront of "equal representation" by offering the poor a Public Defender (PD). PDs came to be when a poor man in the South wrote on a napkin, in pencil, his argument that he never had even a chance to represent himself and now he was in jail, and mailed it to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court read this and instituted the Public Defender system, a system that is so degraded and crippled now, that it barely resembles the original legislative intent.

Legislators continually approve twice the working budget for prosecutors that they approve for PDs. Often young lawyers take their first jobs at PD's and pay for PD's is so low, few good attorneys stay on at PD's. Suffice it to say, the system is dysfunctional as an old Russian nuclear reactor.

Once you are charged with a crime, you are assigned a PD. But the PD never returns your calls, never has time to meet with you or explain to you the charges, the evidence, or your personal options. In addition, there is a mass of evidence against you that your PD can see, and YOU CAN'T. So the day of trial, your PD finally has time to meet with you, right before trial! He tells you to meet him in the law library at the courthouse instead of the courtroom. He shows up at the last hour with a "plea bargain" offer from the Prosecutor. The Prosecutor now is offering to charge you with a lesser crime, a misdemeanor instead of a felony. If you admit guilt to the misdemeanor and waive all rights not to a trial, but to any appeal also. THAT in a nutshell is the plea bargain system.

You are not allowed to see a mass of the "evidence" against you, so you have to rely on this third party, the PD, for advice. You weigh it out. This incompetent, unavailable, overworked, unprepared PD going to TRIAL to save you against a felony charge, or give up and take the misdemeanor. Many people give up and take the plea bargain, and admit guilt, but not because they are guilty.

They say they are guilty because they are SCARED, bullied, lied to and kept from making their own informed choices, dependent on a PD who never answers any calls or returns messages. To many, it is worth feigning guilt to a lesser charge to get the hell out of the criminal justice system.

How is this different than torturing for a confession? Squealing the living daylight out of low-income folks with trumped up charges, lack of representation, and plea bargains is less than a noble system. Guilty pleas all over America are now suspect, due to the way they were negotiated. If Prosecutors cannot charge people initially with a reasonable charge, and get guilty pleas with an "arm's length" bargaining, instead of this current bullying bargaining, then the system is laughable, at best. So the next time you hear someone admits guilt, and then retraces it, it probably means they finally got a private attorney, as opposed to a Public Pretender, to represent them! I am ashamed of how the American criminal justice system is currently functioning, criminalizing the poor and minority populations, bullying for guilty admissions, thereby rendering the admissions useless. I do not believe there is any good in torturing for confessions or bullying for guilty pleas.

Laws Reflect a Society

It is amazing how much you can tell about a society from its laws. Laws give us a glimpse into social order from eras and civilizations long past. Some of the oldest known written laws that we've found so far, are in the Code of Lipit-lahar. Lipit-lahar, was a shepherd and farmer from Nippur, Iraq, who became the ruler of Sini from about 1868 B.C. to 1857 B.C. Four broken stone tablets were discovered in the 1930's, written in the Sumerian language, during the rule of Lipit-lahar. One law from that Code was, "If a man renteth an ox and injured the flesh at the nose ring, he shall pay one third of its price."

Another one of the oldest written legal texts we have discovered, found in 1901 in Syria, is from the Code of Hammurabi, codified around 1792-1750 B.C., under the reign of Babylonian King Hammurabi. One of his laws was, "If an ox passing through the street gore a man and bring about his death, that cause has no penalty." From the Puritanical Blue Laws of 1650 in Connecticut, to the surveillance-obsessed Federal Patriot Act in 2001, historians draw conclusions based on unique legal codes within societies. Centuries from now someone will discover our old law books and make documentaries of how we lived, based upon those laws.

The Code of Lipit-lahar gives the following legal instructions, "If a man's sheep has not borne him children but a harlot from the public square has born him children, he shall provide grain, oil, and clothing for that harlot; the children which the harlot has borne him shall be his heirs, and as long as his wife lives the harlot shall not live in the house with the wife." The Code of Hammurabi was written in ancient Sumerian, preaching an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a bone for a bone, etc. It also had a very strict rule regarding criminal accusations. Basically, if you accused someone of a crime, then the conviction did not stick, whether you were a judge or common man, under very serious consequences. These laws say that a man charged with sorcery shall go to the "sacred river" and throw himself in. If the river overcomes the man, the accuser goes home scot free. But, if the accused survives the river, then his accuser must be put to death.

These laws also included, "If a man or priestess who is not a resident in a convent open a wineshop or enter a wineshop for a drink, they shall burn that woman." This same society had a law that said if you run into someone's house during a fire to extinguish it, and then stole some of the valuable things inside during that time, you were to be thrown into said fire.

Also of interest is the progression of what is considered bad and worse in these laws. If you stole a sheep, ass, pig or ox, and it belonged to the palace, you paid thirtyfold. If you stole from a private person, you paid ten fold. If the thief could not pay these fines, he was put to death. Sounds like our current accelerated laws regarding shooting police officers. Apparently a cop's life is more valuable than the rest of our lives, based on the legal readings. The Hammurabi Code also included this oddity, "If a man, after the death of his father, lie in the bosom of his mother, they shall burn both of them."
The Blue Laws in Connecticut during the mid-1600's were quite telling in their topics. If you were to "Inhabit with Indians," you incurred 3 years jail time. Laws also banned such things as tovens, directly or indirectly, to American Indians, as well as all trading with American Indians, "at or about their wigwams, or at their own horses."

They had laws outlawing idleness. These laws said "no person, husband or other, shall spend his time idly or unprofitably under pain of punishment." It called those prone to idleness names such as "common cooter," unprofitable fowlers, and tobacco takers. The prescribed legal punishment for "open contempt of God's word and messengers thereof," was to pay 5 pounds to his ecclesiastical treasurer, and to stand 2 hours on a stool 4 feet high with a sign affixed to the breast. The sign had to be "written with capital letters," and was to say "AN OPEN AND OBSTINATE CONTEMPTOR OF GOD'S HOLY ORDINANCES," so that others might be ashamed of breaking out into the like conduct.

The U.S. Patriot Act is heavy on the words "terror" and "Arab," and is heavy on acts of surveillance, as well. And tracing the laws as they change in America after city preparing for protests, during Bush's Iraq war, will be a connect the dots history problem in centuries to come. In recent history, the 2001 post-9/11 terrorist attacks against America, declared a state of emergency due to the planned protests, over a week before they began. Repressive measures under the guidance of the Department of Homeland Security were being put in place in Georgia, just like they were in Miami before the FTAA protests began, a few years back. The工作的 Summit has given us governmental plots to ban standing on a public sidewalk with a sign, among other things.

In Miami, in 2003, in preparation for the FTAA protests, officials tried to ban "parades" with "any length of metal, plastic or hard material," "glass bottles, jars and containers of any kind," "balloons filled with anything other than oxygen, helium or air," and the possession of marbles, golf balls, batteries, as potentials for causing damage as projectiles. The Miami model also tried to make it "unlawful for any person to carry, possess or wear any gas mask or similar device designed to filter all air breathed and that would protect the respiratory tract and face against irritating, noxious or poisonous gases." Miami also wanted to make it a crime to wear or possess a bulletproof vest or any "other improvised body armor." Improvised body armor was defined in Miami as gear "worn for the purpose of enabling the wearer to engage, or attempt to engage, in unlawful activity."

The police wanted to outlaw anything that would protect the average citizen from outrageous police brutality and weasenry! Basically, all the things they were accusing prosecutors of potentially doing in Miami, they were saying the police were going to do, and they wanted to keep citizens from protecting themselves!

The same thing has been going on in city after city in 2003-2004, you can follow it. NYC also proposed all kinds of insane anti-free speech and anti-free assembly laws in preparation for the RNC protests in Aug. 2004.

So, if you want to know something about a time, a people, a country, you can look at the law books to see what the law was, and thus what made outlawed, in different eras of history. It is wild to see what persons different civilizations have had, how they legislated their gender and race affairs, how they instituted embargoes and manipulated economies through laws, how they addressed the issues of the poor, etc. I would assume you'll make pieces of the puzzle centering on only the laws of a society to understand its daily functioning routines. But it is still an interesting look at who had power at a certain time, as well as when and how they exerted that power, and how they maintained it. Our 20th century American laws right now are as telling as any.

WEBSITES ABOUT PRISONER RIGHTS

Truth In Justice

[/http://www.truthinjustice.org]

TruthInJustice.org is a great resource for anyone desiring concrete and recent evidence that serious problems exist within the criminal justice system in the U.S. today. For those people who still live with their heads in the sand, insisting only "criminals" plead "guilty," and that only "guilty" people end up in prison, this site is here to burst that insulated bubble. Long lists of actual names and court cases on this site document a wide swath of abuse from the state that no one can deny. The site says, "The cases profiles here consist primarily of media reports, the majority of which are accounts of wrongfully convicted persons who have been exonerated. The articles profiling the innocent who remain imprisoned provide details of compelling evidence of innocence. The reason is simple: People just don't believe that anyone who is innocent can be convicted of a crime he or she did not commit, much less that it can happen to them. It is our hope that the number and strength of the cases presented here can erode the wall of denial. Then we can all get down to the business of rectifying the errors that have destroyed so many lives."

I am very impressed by the thoroughness and professional presentation of this site. It is an educational site and should be required reading by all high school students. The site says its purpose is to "educate the public regarding the vulnerabilities in the U.S. criminal justice system that make the criminal conviction of wholly innocent persons possible. When we say "wholly innocent," we mean a person who had absolutely no part in the crime charged. An innocent person is deprived of life, liberty and the opportunity to contribute to society, while the guilty party is free to commit more crimes against unsuspecting victims. In many instances, no crime was committed in the first place -- a suicide is charged as homicide, or an accidental fire is mistaken for arson. How does this happen? Faulty eyewitness identification, torture vision investigators, over zealous prosecutors, bad science, compromised experts and a politicized judiciary are major factors, along with a credulous public. Why should you be concerned about wrongful conviction? The cases here make the answer clear: it can happen to anyone, including you. What can you do? Educate yourself. Ask questions. Think Stop rewarding malfeasance. It starts with just one person. It starts with YOU."

A "sampling of recent cases" displayed on this site, demonstrates "both the potential for injustice and the difference that individuals can make in preventing it." The "Recent Cases" page includes approximately 200 cases, mostly from the last 5 years, from across the U.S., where people served long prison terms for crimes they did not commit, and these people are now walking free after years of trauma and abuse, released to their lives which were shattered by the state. But we must not just blame the prosecutors. Also, the public defenders *could have* stopped the wrongs as well, that was their job, and many of the prosecutors' mistakes, that later lead to the release of these victims, were obvious at the time of trial. Also complicating the picture is the fact that these coerced bookings barreisng charge to the right an appeal, prolonging the rectification of these abuses. The listed reasons that these cases were overturned are amazing. They are widely varied, from new DNA evidence, to journalists digging up evidence the prosecutors overlooked, to obvious misconduct by prosecutors and outright lying by police. If you ever needed evidence that the criminal justice system fails innocent people, this is a good page to refer people to.

Their "Innocent Imprisoned" page says, "Some fears are universal: Death. Disease. The loss of a child. Going to a jail for something you didn't do. The people listed here are living the last one, their lives wasting away in prison for crimes they did not commit." This page lists approximately 70 names from across America, including specific information about their cases. A "Wrongfully Convicted Cops" page lists cases where cops had odd convictions. One highlighted case is about a cop who let an innocent cop sit in jail for 4 years for a crime the guilty cop committed, and the guilty cop just turned himself in, supposedly due to conscience. But now, the innocent cop cannot get his job on the police force back, etc.

This site's "Death Penalty" page addresses serious issues and problems with death penalty cases. This page has a very haunting picture of Gary Graham, pictured in his prison uniform, with his fist mixed, inside the jail. He was executed by Texas, even though there were "serious doubts about his guilt." There is a wealth of information here for anyone desiring intelligent critique of the death penalty in America. The page also gives over 50 examples of problematic death penalty cases.
"Eyewitness identification is one of the most potent and effective tools available to police and prosecutors. It is compelling, and time after time, it convinces juries of the guilt of a defendant. The problem is, eyewitness identifications are WRONG at least 50% of the time! The site then gives actual cases and arguments about wrongful convictions based on faulty eyewitness identifications.

"Junk Science in the Courtroom" is another area this site covers, saying, "Juries usually believe expert witnesses. Unfortunately, juries rarely understand the expert testimony they hear, and don't know what weight — if any — to give to terms like "consistent with" and "match" and "virtually excluded." The lawyers have known for some time that a prejudiced jury is more likely to disregard the scientific understanding that is presented by these experts, either. Our criminal justice system is adversarial and often dog-eat-dog. When the expert falls short of the minimum standards of the profession, or worse, is an outright fraud, it can spell disaster for the wrongly accused." The Junk Science page then lays out a list of cases where bad science has wrongly convicted people.

Wrongful conviction of arson, oddly, has its own page. "When there's that fatal fire and someone survives, the survivor will be charged with arson and murder." — Gerald Heurt, Ph.D.," the page says. There is also a page for "False Child Abuse Claims," which is the only controversial part of this website that I saw. This is a serious and thorny issue, and one that perhaps cannot be reduced to a page in the manner it has been here. Or rather, perhaps this site's owners do not have proper experience and expertise in this area to address this issue with the respect and dignity that it deserves. I noticed lacking on this page were cases of children abused by the state, in various forms, such as child protection institutions, foster care, etc. This page seemed to have too many familial, comedic, and divorce, components, that were questionable, for my comfort, in all honesty. And the discouragement of reported sexual abuse has gone on for so long, that we must think about throwing the "false accusations" term too lightly, in my opinion. But, as I said, this is the only weak link on this site.

There are many innocent and/or ignorant souls out there who still believe police do not lie. Yet one visit to this site's extensive "Police, Prosecutorial and Judicial Misconduct" page should throw up some serious topics for debate. Their "How the System Works" page (http://www.truthinjustice.org/systemworks.htm) is fabulous. It is packed with testimonies from people whose lives have been ruined by faulty criminal prosecutions and

inhumane treatment by the criminal (in)justice system. Misrepresentations, outright misconduct by prosecutors, coerced plea bargains, and more, fill this educational page.

The site also is a resource for Innocence Projects around the country. "Innocence Projects provide representation and/or investigative assistance to prison inmates who claim to be innocent of the crimes for which they were convicted. There is now at least one innocence project serving each state except Hawaii, North Dakota and South Dakota. Most of these innocence projects are new and overwhelmed with applications, so waiting time between application and acceptance is long. Wrongfully convicted persons should not be dissuaded from applying to Innocence Projects because of this, but should be realistic about the longevity that it takes for the process to go through."
The site also offers an excellent "recommended reading" list, a discussion board, and a monthly online newsletter on this site.

But most importantly, this site has its own "Life After Exoneration" (http://www.truthinjustice.org/tlf.htm) page. That is not in isime not talked about nearly enough. The page says, "The wrongly convicted face further injustices when they are exonerated. Unlike parolees, they are entitled to no social services, no job training and placement, no counseling to help them adapt to living in a dramatically different society than the one they left years earlier. In many instances, family and friends who supported them have died. Few states offer any financial compensation for their ordeal, and employers are weary of hiring them. Just as innocence projects were formed across the country to free the wrongly convicted, so are resettlement programs being formed to help them after they have been released." One can easily see how a person could become a victim of the state's abuse by becoming a victim of the situation of wrongful incarceration for years of your life. We must help these people, even though the state just chews them up, and then just spits them out. How broken must a soul be after such trauma? These people deserve our help, they are bettered, for sure. This website is a good place to find ways to hook up with information and organizations addressing these issues of dire import, such as "Life after exoneration" and "junk science in the courtroom."

A Practical Guide to Prisoner Support

"Prisons are there to keep people, so we must be actively keeping the link to the outside world open."

Not long ago, someone in a Books for Prisoners program mailed me a tiny zine entitled, "A Practical Guide to Prisoner Support." The zine gives practical advice about writing prisoners and interacting with prisoners inside and outside prison walls, and lists prison activist networks. Many people are intimidated by the idea of writing someone they do not know in jail. People are not sure what to talk about, nor is the process for sending prisoners correspondence clear either.

Good advice contained in this zine, directs people who are writing to support prisoners to check in with the prison, itself, for its own guidelines. Some prisons allow stamps or stamped envelopes to be mailed to prisoners, some don't. Letters can be "stamped, read, delayed, diverted, or destroyed by prison authorities," so do not antagonize a prisoner's position by sending politically sensitive material. You are advised a return address behind bars, so some prison won't take mail without return addresses, but also advised to use a P.O. Box or neutral address, not your home address. The zine advises that the prison officials are just as capable of getting ahold of your address and abducting it as other inmates, etc. and advises you put your return address on the envelope and the letter, as the two may get separated. You should ask the prisoner about any mail restrictions in the first correspondence.

According to this zine, if you are writing a prisoner, it is good to identify any group affiliations you may have with

outside organizations that support the prisoner, and also tell them when you learned of their case. The zine recommends even a postcard as an appropriate first correspondence. "Some people are afraid of talking about their lives, what they are up to, etc., thinking this may depress people banded up for years or that they are not interested in your life. Although in some cases this may be true, on the whole, a letter is the brightest point of the day for most prisoners. Prison life is dead boring, and any news that lives it up, whether it's about people they know or not, is generally welcome."

"They're in there for us, we're out here for them..."

This zine reminds us that it's vital to keep them involved or in some instances to introduce them to ongoing resistance. Telling them about actions, sending them magazines if they want them," but use your head. "Do not discuss potentially illegal political action with a prisoner."

"Don't make promises you can't keep." "If a prisoner is getting out in the near future, do not offer your place to stay (no matter how desperate they sound) unless you have corresponded for a significant amount of time and are in constant writing both a parole officer and a prison intermediary." But the text goes on to advise that it is much more helpful to an ex-prisoner just getting out of jail to help him secure a job and his own housing, than to offer dependent situations.

"Do not romanticize prisoners or prisoners. "Be patient. Prisoners may not write back or it may take a while. They may be unnaturally sound cynical, angry or disinterested in their words... Responding to an angry letter with more anger is not helpful." Prisoners "are people just like you and me and have strengths and weaknesses." "Do not accept to place judgment on prisoners' experiences. . Do not argue with or insult a prisoner because of their religion (or lack of), preferences, or experiences. It's best to just break off contact if you are unable to continue constructive dialogue due to extreme differences in opinion. It is a very bad idea to get into trade insults or threats with a prisoner."

The Real Cost of Prisons Project is "dedicated to reducing over-reliance on incarceration." They offer workshops on the topics of War on Drugs, Incarcerated Women and Children, and the Financing and Siting of Prisons. They create and distribute educational materials about the "costs of incarceration on the individual, his/her family, community and nation." Their website says, "The goals of the Real Cost of Prisons Project are to strengthen and deepen the organizing capacity of grassroots prison/jail activist and to broaden the public's understanding of the economic and social consequences of mass incarceration."

The website is pretty meager, honestly, except for the books/videos and links pages. The books/videos page (http://www.realcostofprisons.org/books.html) has links to many excellent resources. Their links page (http://www.realcostofprisons.org/links.html) has links to resources for incarcerated women, activists, the issue of capital punishment, other prison reform/activist organizations and sites, information about the corrections industry, and a list of the websites for all state departments of corrections. Some of the extensive resources listed on this page include:

- The Sentencing Project (http://www.sentencingproject.org/about.cfm)
- The Justice Police Institute (http://www.justicepolice.org)
- The Drug Policy Alliance (http://www.drugpolicy.org/homepage.flp)
- PrisonSucks.com (http://www.prisonsocks.com/)
- Prison Legal News (http://www.prisonlegalnews.org)
- The Prison Activist Resource Center (http://www.prisonactivist.org)
- Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers (CLAIM) (http://www.a-cl-i-m.org)
- Critical Resistance (http://www.criticalresistance.org)
- Prison Moratorium Project (http://www.nonorencarcerate.org)
- The Western Prison Project (http://www.westernprisonproject.org)
- Coalition for the Abolition of Prisons (http://www.noprisons.org)
- Postcards from Prison (http://www.postcardsfromprison.com)

One of the quotes on the realcostofprisons.org site: "The number of women incarcerated grew by 92% from 12,279 in 1977 to 85,031 in 2001. In 1977, there were 23 men for every woman in state and federal prisons. In 2001 there were 15 men for every woman in prison." Source: Women's Prison Association and Home, WPA, Focus on Women & Justice, August 2003. Another quote from their site:

"By the end of 2001, one in every 37 adults in the U.S. has either done time in a prison or were incarcerated in a state or federal prison. If current incarceration rates hold, 6% of all Americans, 11% of all men, 17% of Hispanic men and 32% of all African American men born in 2001 are likely to end up in prison at some point in their lifetime." National Resource Center on Prisons and Communities.

I met a former prosecutor in Seattle, Wa. who said if a defendant showed up in a courtroom without any family or friends, and a public defender, he simply assumed guilt and went for the jugular. I did not have time to talk further with him in our short passing, but what he said has haunted me. Why do people who assume guilt when a defendant showed up alone in court with a public defender? Is he assuming someone who was innocent would have a whole community of support arise for personal criminal prosecutions, especially if the charges seem absurd? Or is it assumed that popular people do not commit crimes? What is the logic there?

Honestly, if the activist community attended all hearings of people who were wrongly charged for petty crimes by biased prosecutors, there would be no time or money for broader issues such as stopping nukes, saving the forests, and peace. When people get very ill, they often sit alone in hospital rooms abandoned by family and friends. And how many single moms have found themselves trapped on welfare with no family support and no childcare for a social life? Many segments of society are in a certain state that does not lend itself to large showings in courtrooms. People who are living day to day cannot afford several family members taking days off from work for court, for instance. Nor can they afford travel expenses. And if single moms want to come in support of one another, they do not just show up. First, transportation and any arrangement or childcare must be arranged. Judging guilt or innocence upon one's showing of popularity is very dangerous and inherently prejudiced, in my opinion.

In Evidence class in law school, we were taught that "fleeting" a scene is not permissible as evidence of guilt. Simply running away from a scene does not provide a high enough bar to prove a wrongful doing for our criminal justice system. The logic is that people run from police and situations for many reasons, not just guilt. Yes, often fleeing is brought into the courtroom to sway the jury, but on the whole, it has to be brought through a backdrop of sorts and fleeting, alone, is just not enough to convict someone of a crime. For instance, they could not have convicted O.J. Simpson for simply fleeing in the Bronco alone. You would hope that same train of logic would be applied to popularity. Simply because one person packs the audience seating with family members and friends, and another comes to court alone, does not mean the one with more people in the audience is innocent. And the Law "should" know that. But in reality, how many friends and family you can display in a courtroom for a judge "is" consequential and influential.
I asked some attorneys about their take on this situation. All three attorneys I talked to said that it “did” matter whether you brought family and friends to court as a show of support. Yet public defenders do not routinely tell their clients this. And also, the logic of this needs to be reviewed. One attorney noted, “Remember, local judges are elected and they may be swayed to a degree in making their rulings by a large turnout in support. I do think that having family members appear in court day after day is helpful to show the judge that a criminal accuses care about the outside world, and no one cares about them, deserve a fair trial.” That is much of the underlying purpose and intent of a legal system such as ours. Frankly, to ensure the guys with no friends still get a fair trial.

Two of the attorneys I talked to said that this popularity situation was definitely slanted to prejudice certain populations. And one attorney said she did not feel there was any inherent prejudice, but just felt it was more factual, that yes, presenting support for a defendant is good for many logical reasons. I see this as a serious problem. A true hole in the fabric of society, even. How many people are in jail simply because they had no one who cared about them, not because they committed crimes?

Another attorney echoed the sentiment that the logic in bringing people into the courtroom to show support was about humanizing the defendant, and showing that the “defendant is a person with contacts on the outside world with no one to take care of him or her.” This attorney said that part of the job of a criminal defense attorney (or public defender) is to stop the objectification that begins with labeling the accused as the “defendant.” And indeed, I think using the word “victim” for the other side, before guilt is even proven in the guilt proving stage, even, is prejudiced. This attorney also pointed out that the “defendant” is often reduced to an identification based on the criminal charges, or what brought the defendant into court, such as prostitution, and so bringing in family and friends can show more sides to a person than stereotypes. This lawyer also said that the more the judge or jury can sympathize or empathize with the accused, the better it will be for the defendant.

I would like to go back to the comment that bringing people into court with you shows you have “connections to the outside world” and that it makes a difference. That sentiment is the most troubling for me. That literally leaves the most vulnerable in society, as the most vulnerable in the criminal justice system. That is obvious. The homeless, who already are dealing with societal isolation, should not be prejudiced in the courtroom too, based on nothing more than lack of popularity. The law “should not” be a popularity contest. I am concerned that people who can show up in the courtroom with an entourage will get a far different trial than a guy who is down on his luck and many miles from his family. But the purpose of the law system was “supposedly” to equalize the playing field for all, rich and poor. This invisible popularity clause is really at the root of some serious inequities in our justice system. I think that even people with “real” connections to the outside world, and no one cares about them, deserve a fair trial.

Protesting Prisons: Rights and Reforms

Jail is a place where dehumanization is high on the agenda of the state and guards, and thus humane interactions from the outside are greatly needed for the preservation of prisoners’ sanity. This necessary jail and prison support can take on many forms. You can visit prisoners, organize legal help, write press releases, and prisoner books, phone cards, money letters, organize rallies, help translate testimonies, and more. A wide variety of organizations are devoted to prison abolition and reform, and prisoner support. Just as there are many ways to help prisoners, there are many distinct populations with specific problems in jail, as well.

In December 1942, a transport of 2,000 prisoners arrived by train, at night, at Treblinka death camp. Normally transports arrived in daylight. As the usual processing class began, and people began to be herded into the chambers, they began yelling, “Don’t Die! Don’t Die! Don’t Die!” Suddenly people from the transport got the message and took sticks, produced knives, and attacked the German S.S. and Ukrainian guards on site. These brave souls actually produced a GRENADE and threw it at the S.S. and guards, who opened fire in the dark on the crowd with rifles and machine guns. People ran at the barbed wire fences that surrounded the camp, but since no one could get out, they suffered an inevitable death. In all that, only 3 S.S. men and guards were injured. After this event transports only occurred during daylight. The Nazis refined their techniques through trial and error. And due to this refinement, most of the escapes from Treblinka happened in the early months of its existence.

While the Nazis were trying to hide the extermination purpose of these camps, to quell rebellion from prisoners and outside, the public from the public, prisoners were able to escape and tell people in nearby areas, such as Warsaw, about what they saw. Several escapes from Treblinka were involved in the Warsaw ghetto uprising. In January 1943, a man who escaped from Treblinka was attacked and injured by the owner of an outdoor market. In Fall 1943, 2 Treblinka prisoners escaped on the train carrying the possessions of those killed in the camp. In Winter 1943, 7 prisoners who worked on the railway platform were caught trying to escape. They were killed, and the S.S. announced that for each escape, 10 Jews working in the camp would be shot. Yet escapes were still attempted. By Dec. 1942, it was obvious that these escapes were costly, and organized prisoner resistance was considered, and implemented.

At the Nazi extermination camp at Sobibor, lessons like those at Treblinka in prisoner solidarity were also being learned. Nazi operations began at Sobibor in April 1942.

Operations ended after the inmates pulled off one of the most successful concentration camp revolts in history. On Oct. 14, 1943, an organized prisoner resistance halted S.S. officers and Ukrainian guards systematically to their deaths. When the organized resistance announced to the rest of the prisoners (many of whom had no idea the revolt had been planned) that most of the Germans in the camp had been killed, and that the revolt was over, they asked that anyone who lived to tell, make sure to bear witness to the crimes at Sobibor and the revolt. A resistance leader supposedly said, “Forward comrades! Death for the fascists!” leading the camp forward, as prisoners were igniting the news. Unfortunately, the fields around the camp had land mines, and the resistance was going to use bricks and wood to touch them off, but did not have time, so prisoners were dying in the fields before escape, while running under enemy fire. S.S. men and guards left running into forests and the darkness of night, as had been planned, approximately 300 prisoners escaped that night in October, 1943. 100 were caught or killed shortly thereafter. 47 lived to tell the story of Sobibor after the war. Sobibor was little known after the war until the prisoner revolt in 1943. An estimated 250,000 people were murdered at Sobibor death camp between 1942 and 1943.

The arrogance of authority is often shown in uprisings, as the oppressors stand like Americans after 9/11, saying “Why us?” as if they are innocent victims. Often slave owners felt betrayed when they found their own slaves had undermined, or even poisoned, them! And the present experience for Sobibor’s uprising in stood in shock, unable to understand how this could have happened. They even theorized the rebellion must have come from outside partisans, just as slave plantations often blamed outside abolitionists for slave revolts that literally came from the slaves, by themselves, for themselves. It has been said that the oppressed know more about the oppressor than the oppressor knows about the oppressed, which is exactly why its important to engage me in the struggle for freedom. The oppressed is often the one who has more about their oppressors, since they are the ones in the dependent positionality.

Revolt is never static, and oppression refines its techniques, as revolt shifts to penetrate the weaknesses of authority. Revolt requires constant revalidation to accommodate new oppressive upgrades. Certainly after the Attica prison revolts, routines at prisons changed all over the country.
When Child Protection Looks Like Jail

(No author provided)

In 1969, I was an 8-year-old child in MacClaren Hall. MacClaren Hall is a notorious child protection custody institution serving Los Angeles county, in California. MacClaren Hall is supposed to be a protective place, a repository for the children police encounter during the day, with dangerous parents, and nowhere to go. You would assume a place you take children to, children who are innocent victims of child abuse, who are coming out of trauma, would be comforting and soft and warm. But MacClaren Hall was an institution, an asylum, really. It was shiny and cold and angular, with guards, and guns at the fences that had barrets and barbed wire. And everything looked the same: the beds, the toilets, the rooms, the dishes we ate on, the towels we used... It was understaffed and it resembled a jail, or asylum for mentally disturbed children, more than any type of protective custody for minors.

The whole ordeal that led to police taking me from my parents began at around 3 pm. By the time police drove me down that long driveway into MacClaren Hall, it was about 9 pm and dark out. When they were not ready inside, they took all of my things (my school books, etc. I had with me when they took me) and locked them away in “the locker” until I would be released. I was then taken to a nurse. She looked nice, weighed me, and basically looked over my naked body like I was a casting being inspected. I was humiliated and scared to death. Alone in this strange place at night, I was so frightened I couldn’t even cry. But on the other hand, I also knew I could not live to be alive with my parents either. As an 8 year old, I was facing HUGE life dilemmas, as 8 years olds cannot just leave out on their own. A guard took me from the nurse’s station down a dark linoleum hallway, and then into a large walk-in closet. She told me to strip. I began to cry and shake, she demanded I strip. She then took my clothing and gave me a uniform, a toothbrush and a sheet. She said my clothes would go in “the locker” and I would get them when I got out. She walked me down the dark halls, and I could hear the snores of children moaning and crying, echoing off the linoleum floors, as we walked past doors toward my room. They woke up a guard in the room, and she assigned me to a cot, telling me to go to sleep, with the 20 other girls on their cots, after one of the most horrific days of my life.

I laid in the bed, looking out past the bars and grates on the windows, to the street, past the big fences with armed guards as girls slept around me. Headlights drove on the streets outside, in the rain, and for the first few hours, I watched the cars, each time hoping it was dad coming to get me. I wondered how I ended up there, and where I was. I wondered how long I would be held there. Part of me believed my parents would come get me by morning, another part of me worried I would never see my parents again, and was becoming an orphan. But I was in an abusive home situation with my parents too, so I did not know what the options were, but I did not particularly want to go back home with my parents, but they were preferable to this jail.
Prisoner Support as Civil Rights Activism (A 3-Part Series/ Part 3)

I asked ABCN activists what they needed most, as far as support, to expand their work. Mr. Twicht said that they needed money, as he was paying out of his own pocket and it was truly a strain. He said it is a challenge to get enough money to organize benefits to raise enough money for all of their postage expenses that are required to get their work out. The author also said there was also a need for more committed prison support workers. Tony also echoed that money was crucial, but also echoed, "but what we think really need are more anarchists to be doing this type of work. I think most of the work being done against prisoners right now is not coming from anarchists." Chantel also added that money was a need, "because we run a literature distribution, we use a lot of stamps and paper and photocopy toner and other things that cost money. Those could be saved. Moreover, for the long-term success of the prison abolition movement, we need to go beyond a larger number anarchists getting involved with the movement and doing the hard work required to bring down the prison industrial complex. Everyone group of anarchists in this country needs to be doing some sort of prison abolition work. Individuals can make a difference by educating themselves so they are able to educate others. Groups can make sure that they show the links between whatever issues they are addressing and the prison system. We can all be doing something to help destroy the prison system."

I asked what three things people could do right now to educate themselves more fully on this topic? Mr. Twicht recommended visiting the ABCN website, as well as the Prison Aid and Resource Center. He also recommended checking out Anarchist People on Facebook (http://www.facebook.com), the Chicano Mexican Prison Project (http://indiehotelbarrio.com), and in San Diego and the MFLU-support website in Belgium run by ABC Anarchist. Tony runs a vast distro of zines, with tons of contact information in them. You can write him at

South Chicago ABC Zone Distra, P.O. Box 721, Homewood, IL 60430, and if you give him an idea of what you are interested in, he can hook you up with zines to meet your interests. Another thing Anthony recommends is writing letters to prisoners. This will prove to be a most compelling area of education and humanization! Get the truth out of the gulag from those most oppressed - not the lies in the government and sympathetic media!

Tony said "the best way for someone to learn about life inside prison is to contact those who are there. I try to encourage people (especially anarchists) to write to prisoners. But writing letters isn’t always easy. The ABCN website has lots of info about prisoners. Critical Resistance (www.criticalresistance.org) is a strong, prison abolition organization that published a really good organizing toolkit. It is highly recommended for anyone interested in writing against prisons. I just learned of the Friends and Family of the Incarcerated (www.friendsoftheimprisoned.org), a group that is organizing in August March in D.C. Both Tony and Chantel recommended the books, "Lockdown Americas" by Christian Parenti and "Are Prisons Obsolete?" by Angela Davis. Chantel recommended Prison Slacks (www.prisonslacks.com) for statistics on prisoners and Chantel also encouraged people to write to prisoners to learn more about prisoner issues.

I asked for the names of prisoners these activists would like us to get educated about. Mr. Twicht recommended "Alvaro Luna Hernandez, anti-imperialist Chicano-Mexican Texas political prisoner, (www.freelovex.org)" and Jeff "Free Lovers, former Michigan political prisoner in Oregon (www.freefreelovers.org). Anthony said, "I guess I would say, first and foremost, is Kevin (Rashid) Johnson (Kevin Johnson #185192, Red Onion State Prison, P.O. Box 1900, Pound, VA 24279) locked down in a brutal supermax in Virginia. Not only is he the most well-loved political artist in the world today, but he is also one of the most brilliant revolutionary tacticians, analysts and strategists. The other prisoner who offers such insightful is Clarence Anthony (Tayl R. Rasheed) Taylor locked in Indiana (Clarence A. Taylor #136066 - 173), Indiana Department of Corrections, Pendleton Correctional Facility, P.O. Box 36, Pendleton, IN 46064-0030)."

Tony said he has been writing Josh Gunter, who is a Buddhist punk anarchist. You can write Josh at Joshua Gunter #6871573, 264 FM 3478, Huntsville, TX 77320-3322. Tony said he also writes Hyung-Rae, an

amazing revolutionary artist. You can write Todi (Hyung-Rae) Taeiellty #0025.175 Progress Drive, Wayneburg, PA 15370-8094 or contact Lawrence ABC at todi@independent.net to view his artwork.

Chantel recommended Cassidy Wheeler. She said Cassidy "is an anarchist prisoner who was convicted under Oregon's Measure 11 sentencing policy. He basically shepelled a pair of socks while he was drunk. Once he was in the store's parking lot, he pulled out his walking knife and yelled some things at a few workers who had come out of the store. He wasn't even close to the worker! For this mistake, he was convicted of two counts of Robbery in the First Degree and got a seven-year sentence in prison. Cassidy has managed to make radical reading material available to other prisoners. Because of his outspoken anti-war views, he is a target of white superstars. Last year he was identified by the prison officials as one of the "prison stars" of a boycott of the chop suey, commissary, and phone systems by the prisoners. Because he is seen as a leader, he has been in solitary confinement for over a year. He is housed in the IMU, the most locked-down area of the Oregon State Penitentiary, the prison within the prison. Despite all this, Cassidy is a positive and upbeat guy who finds the best in even the most trying situation. He truly cares about his fellow prisoners and about people in general. He enjoys reading, writing letters, and receiving photographs of nature." You can write Cassidy at Cassidy Wheeler #1824258 DSP, 2605 State Street, Salem, Oregon 97310.

Chantel also recommended we learn about Charles Hoke. "Charles is also an anarchist prisoner, convicted of committing various kinds of robberies and using the money to help pay the mortgages of family farmers who were in danger of losing their homes or land. Charles has also come under the fire of white supremacists because of his anti-racist views, but he is adamant that he is a friend people likes, despite the color of their skin. Charles loves animals and tries to raise his own vegetarian diet, so easy task in prison. He loves reading and corresponding with folks around the world. He really enjoys receiving photographs of nature and can receive three photos per envelope of correspondence. You can write Charles at Charles Hoke #875485 COC, LCI, P.O. Box 56, Lebanon, OH 45139. Chantel points out that "neither of these fellows has a website and most prisoners don't. It has been extremely difficult for Lawrence ABC to find people willing and able to build and maintain websites for prisoners."
Public Defenders Need to Go On Strike

The situation with underfunded public defenders, and plea bargains being thrown around more often than not, with poor people caught in the mix, denied the rights given them legally, to fair and proper representation, needs to stop. Now. This is no longer a situation where public defenders can stand around and keep pointing fingers at those funding them, usually the state. At a certain point, public defenders become accomplices in these crimes against the poor of inadequate, insufficient, incomprehensible, defense for serious crimes, America's Criminal Justice System.

Something must be done and I think what needs to be done is Public Defenders need to go on strike. Seriously. Or else they are now accomplices. In Washington State's Superior Courts, about 85 to 90 percent of defendants tried on felony charges are considered low-income, and therefore entitled to court-appointed counsel. This affects almost every person charged with a felony in the criminal justice system.

Public defenders take their frustrations and anger about being overworked and underfunding on innocent clients who just want to understand what is going on with their cases. It is no longer acceptable for public defenders to keep pretending they are giving a service all agree are needed. It appears quite standard knowledge that if you use a public defender, you have a much greater chance of going to jail if you use a private attorney. And looking at who is actually charged with felonies, one can only wonder that you have a greater chance of being "charged" with a felony."It is you are poor, as the prosecutor immediately sees he will benefit from insufficient representation from public defenders, and sees that a plea bargain will be easy. None of these things are the fault of the poor who get entrapped in the criminal justice system. It is the duty of the courts to provide fair and equal representation to the poor. That goal has failed in America with flying colors.

In a recent article by Phillip Dawdy in the Seattle Weekly (http://www.seattleweekly.com/bouquet/44935415_28_new/defense.php), he says that the Metropolitan King County Council has approved a $1 million cut in the county's public-defense system for 2005. Dawdy calls the public defender system that just received these cuts a "traditionally underfunded program that provides court-appointed attorneys for low-income and indigent people accused of crimes." Dawdy says that one of the contracted non-profit public defense law firms that the county works with, Northwest Defenders, will be running at a deficit next year, due to the 2005 budget and may need to fold. And do not think that that stress remains within the locked boardrooms of the Northwest Defenders Association either. No, it comes spilling out onto the phone and into the hallways of the County's Courthouses as well.

The clients are yelled at for wanting to understand their cases. The clients are barked at and told to be quiet and speak when spoken to, while in the middle of serious legal battles, as these public defenders yell at clients that they are overworked and they have more clients than they can handle.

I have seen his behavior from employees and public defenders in King County with my own eyes.

When I worked at the Kent County Law Library, I had many mothers come in with swollen red eyes, asking me to explain the charges that just incriminated their sons. I was given explicit instructions by the law library staff that "may not" explain any charges to people who ask like that, as it was considered honing in on the legal field, as legal advice. So, the best I could do was lead these desperate women to books that explained the crimes in as close to plain English as possible. It broke my heart that women were losing their children, and public defenders did not even have the time to explain to the mothers what the actual charges meant or what was going on. These public defenders not only do not deserve to their clients that by providing insufficient and incomprehensible legal representation, but they also yell at their clients if their clients dare try to demand more. This is not a healthy situation for anyone, and certainly is not blind justice by any stretch.

Dawdy's article says that county officials approved the $1 million cut to public defense because they predict it will be handling less complex aggravated-murder cases in 2005, and they predict that prosecutors will be charging minor felons as misdemeanors. And even if those were believable reasons to predict need less for funds in 2005, that does not take into account the glaring reality that the public defense agencies have been functioning below par for years now, and something must be done. If the need for services was reduced, and funding stayed the same, then maybe, just maybe, we could move one half step forward towards getting some equal representation in courthouses in Washington's criminal justice system. But it isn't happening anytime soon.

Dawdy's article quotes a City Council member saying, "Our system of justice is tremendously weakened when we fail to live up to our promise for a fair and competent defense for all who stand accused of a crime. So, apparently these people 'get it.' They just don't want to actually do anything about it." The trial of complaints from clients and public defenders themselves about this terrible situation is long and public.

An in email entitled "Urban Politics #11," dated June 20, 2004, City Council member Nick Licata says that he authored, and his colleagues Councilmembers David Della, Jeann Gotteden and Peter Steinbrueck co-sponsored, a new law that "creates standards for public defense services," acknowledging a problem clearly exists here that the poor, myself included, have paid for and continue to pay for daily in King County jails, and courts, as well as King County Coalition of Offices. This email from Licata says, "Case load and standards for provision of services: In 1982 the King County Bar Indigent Defense Services Task Force developed a 300 case per attorney, per year guideline. Subsequently the Seattle City Council adopted Resolution 27670 in 1987, adopting a framework and schedule for implementing recommendations contained in the 1987 Public Defender Salary and Case Load Review conducted by City Council staff. This led to the Council passing a 1989 City Council Budget Intent Statement establishing a 340 case per attorney, per year limit. The standard set by the City in 1987 may not be the optimum standard established by the King County Bar Indigent Defense Services Task Force, but it is critical that in contracting for these there be not further erode this limit. This bill amends the caseload standards established in the Council's 1989 Budget Intent Statement. Specifically, this bill states that City agreements with indigent public defense service providers shall require caseloads no higher than 380 cases per attorney per year and is also affirmed the Washington State Bar endorsed supervision standard of one full-time supervisor for every ten staff lawyers." So as recently as June 2004, Seattle reaffirmed the 1989 Seattle City Council Resolution 27670.

I remember very clearly, and have written in that day's notes, an incident where an employee named Sam with SCRAP, a King County Public Defender agency, yelled at "me" because "she" said she had 84 people (we represent) and you will not see me until the hearing date. If you do not like it, hire an attorney." I remember this woman Sam pacing the floor outside the courtroom, taking out her anger and hostility on clients, not the state or people who created that system, but instead on us, the indigent she was representing the organization of that day, I watched Sam play stupid games over and over due to her annoyance with their case load.

When I first arrived, I asked Sam, whom I did not know or recognize, as she would not meet with me by actual hearing (!), but she asked me for authority and legal files, so I asked her if I knew where the list of who was on that day's SCRAP roster was. She quipped me to go to the 12th floor. I asked if she was a SCRAP attorney. She said no. I asked if they were representing me, so could she tell me if I was on that day's SCRAP representation roster. Her response was, "No, only the attorney can tell you that." As I said, I took notes in the courtroom of her actions. I told her I was never told who my attorney was, nor did I meet to my attorney, so I knew SCRAP as my attorneys that day. She said I should have to talk to my attorney. I repeated I did not know who that was, so if she worked for SCRAP, could she please tell me WHO my attorney was so I could tell HER if IT was an issue. On the roster, this is apparently some kind of needle in a haystack game. She said my attorney would call my name eventually if I was on the roster...Is this type of treatment of clients necessary? Would I continue to employ a private attorney who represented me in such a fashion? No way.

In a Seattle Times article from May 2004, by Ken Armstrong, entitled, "State Bar Association Puts Urges Urban Reforms," (http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/localnews/2001923262_defense1.html) it cites indigent defendants who have been "poorly served, even victimized, by those entrusted with protecting their civil rights," according to a
Interest Statement. Specifically, this bill states that City agreements with indigent public defense service providers shall require claims from in excess of 380 cases per attorney per year.

We have now the Bar Association, the Seattle City Council, the public defender organizations themselves, a W. Supreme Court judge, The Seattle Times, The Seattle Weekly, and more, echoing that these services the public defense services providing are inadequate. Yet every day more poor folk are locked up, due to what we all acknowledge is inadequate representation. It is sickening.

There is legal precedent for public defenders to go on strike right now. First, they have Constitutional precedent. Most of the agencies involved echo that this erosion of public defense funding and services is an erosion of integrity to the entire judicial system. There is indeed a Constitutional right to fair representation and that right is being squelched currently due to inadequate public defender budgets. Second, in Seattle, the public defenders could go on strike than due to the violation of the City Council's resolution on maximum attorney caseloads per year, as they affect clients' Constitutional rights. It appears from where I sit, that these limits are violated in every county with a significant population, that contracts public defenders across the state, from Cowhill to King County. It is time that the public defenders quit pretending they are giving a service they are not. And it is time they quit blaming others. If they cannot do their jobs, they need to admit it. Rather than half assed job, where people go to jail for the payment for that half assed job. There are laws being violated by the state, city, and county, from where I can tell, regarding these measures of public defender organizations used by the state.

I feel the only conscious thing for public defenders to do is to go on strike, and to burst the myth of equal representation. It is fair that the poor pay in jails for this mess. This is not. Seriously, public defenders need to go on strike. And demand a legitimate way to provide equitable legal services to the poor. But they should not continue to provide questionable legal services, yelling at clients under their pressure. They should stop now, and fight for the rights of the poor. Beginning with a right to fair and equal representation. Everyone from The Seattle Times to the Seattle City Council to the Washington State Bar Association publicly admits this problem exists. How long are the poor going to be wrongly incarcerated for these crimes by attorneys and the state? How many families broken, how many criminals created, due to the lack of

CopWatch Explosion in the U.S.

It is now a phenomenon. CopWatch organizations are being set up all over America, by ordinary citizens, driven to police the police, in grassroots community efforts. Portland (http://portlandcopwatch.org), Austin (http://www.rosecitycopwatch.org), Austin (http://www.geocities.com/austinecopwatch), NYC (http://mediafilter.org/MFP/CopWatch.html), Santa Cruz (http://www.santacruzcopwatch.org), Cincinnati, Phoenix (http://www.phoenixcopwatch.org), Berkeley (http://www.berkeleycopwatch.org/), Denver (http://www.denvercopwatch.org), and more, have CopWatch organizations in their cities. And CopWatch groups are networking with each other. Berkeley CopWatch came down to Santa Cruz to help their community start a CopWatch. Texas CopWatch (http://www.security.org/projects/police/copwatch) describes CopWatch as a 'group of ordinary people who observe and record police activity on the streets. We do this because we believe that police brutality is widespread in our communities and that the only way to stop it is to challenge it directly.' Berkeley's CopWatch describes itself has community based citizen organization that "monitors police activity in the Southside neighborhood, and elsewhere, in an effort to defend the rights of all citizens, especially those who live on the street, who are people of color, or are otherwise disenfranchised. Everyone has a right to treatment under the law. CopWatch also carries out campaigns and distributes educational material geared toward ending institutionalized injustice and police misconduct in our communities."

Some of the CopWatch organizers are mothers whose sons were brutally murdered by police, and have been given no justifiable reason for their sons' deaths. Their sons' deaths haunt them daily, hourly. Their sons' shadows follow their
of this interview, GFPX was still looking for 12 cops to photograph to complete the deck. Once that is done, they will disturb and rearrange when there is a public outcry for a revision, the same way they came together, via Indiana.

Portland's Worst Cop Card Deck started with a "most rotten cop" contest, and an Indiana threat requesting nominations. In no time, they had 100 worst cop nominees. GFPX said, "Narrowing it down was hard; many names were thrown out with no accusation, many were of former officers, retired, many names were thrown out because (the only complaint was) "this cop is a real asshole, he gave me a ticket."" GFPX took the 100 names, threw out the categories above, then ran the names through local newspaper writers and one Indiana gazette and google.com. "Valid complaints came up for a large number of them, and we just drank a lot of coffee and typed the list into a rough draft listing all the names and what we were able to find. We then threw this fact up on indymedia and in about five hours, most of the blanks were filled in.

We then had a list of about 70 bad cops, and what they had done. Then we assigned reasoning behind the cards' suits (suits were behind the scenes manipulators, kings were ultraviolent, queens were almost violent, jacks were wanna-be-aces, and the 2-10 cards in spades ones that targeted protestors, hearts mess with people (like taking homeless sleeping bags or screwing with people in parks), diamonds were on the take or otherwise corrupt, and clubs were the most violent). Originally we were going to divide the suits up into north, east, west and south sections, but our city's geography doesn't make that easy. East and north could work (south would be known as the 
identify the officer doing XXX atrocities in this photo" posted all over Indiana..." They also said "Visual ID is the primary reason, a kind of permanence also will come of this. Too many of our cops are good for things like stealing from the city, there are quietly retired 3 months later. This deck will give people the chance to carry around 52 rotten cops at all times, and keep their crimes from fading into memory. Great tool to have on hand when the city council hearing says the latest atrocity was an "isolated incident.""

After several turnovers of different groups of people using the same identifier, "GFPX", the project was steered towards this card deck theme. The difference between talking about it and actually doing it was 36 hours," said GFPX. The rough draft of 52 cards was done in about 36 hours, about three weeks after conceiving the idea, and the deck is still not finished, from what I can tell. At the time that citizens would know their first names. GFP used the roster to mark which police officers carried machine guns, and tactical weaponry vests, tracked their movements throughout the protests with the rosters, etc... For instance, the violent cop in front of the Red Lion, later reassigned as one of the front cop lines spraying chemical weapons down the street later in the evening. This will give you an idea of how to COLLECT BAD COP NAMES in your area. Portland's indymedia requests for abusive cop names, combined with googling and police records, gave GFPX the correct spellings, badge numbers, etc. pretty easily, but then they needed the photos.

Oregon passed a new law last year prohibiting state agencies from giving out officer's photos without their written permission. Originally, the group thought of filing an open records request for police ID cards, academy graduation pictures, and official department photos after they checked to see if the department or police academy keeps yearbooks on hand. This tactic apparently works in most states, but the one in Oregon does not. So, GFPX appealed to the Indymedia for pictures. And pictures came flooding in, from old yearbooks, protest footage, old newspaper articles... one even came in from the TV show Copshops. GFPX commented, "You would be surprised how many indymedia readers have cop photos sitting at home."

They then made a list of officers they still needed pics of, took extras, and went to protests in Portland to find and photograph them! Berkeley's CopWatch has some good videotaping advice for those videotaping police during a protest. Remember the footage could be used in court, so keep only the cop and the incident you are in focus, be aware that any noise (including your voice over the footage and in fact it can be influenced so be quiet as you record, make sure to date and time stamp the videoclip while filming, try to get identifiers in the picture, such as street signs or landmarks, and finally, label the tape with the location, preferably the intersection, the date, and time.

I asked the GFPX group how they dealt with security and if they had been threatened in any way for producing this deck. They said they never email one another, they do not know who each other are, and most everything is done through threads on the indymedia. A thread such as "Ace of Hearten identified" would be posted and someone with that card will download it, another will edit it, another will post it to the website... they said this card deck is their only project. When I asked how many of them there were, they answered, "none of us has any idea." Regarding threats, they have gotten the usual internet rants about being sued and going to jail, etc... but as GFPX says, "all we have really done is reprint news stories, court cases and police press releases." Even though GFPX does not know of any laws that would have been broken by producing this deck, they suggest requesting changes for others doing such a project. They recommend anyone that makes content with authorities in your group, such as in researching and picking up a police name roster, have that be the first and last and only thing that person does with your group.

I asked if anyone in particular was complaining about this deck. GFPX responded, "Only trends we see seem to have something to do with Texans hating the deck, I have no idea why so many Texans read Portland Indymedia (until you get confused with the tiny ass town of Portland, TX). Everyone else seems to love the idea, we over hear murmurers about it all over town and have to work to keep a straight face." I asked if police have responded yet. GFPX responded, "two or three... they say they do. Most of these rogue cops on the deck are cops that even the POLICE hate, cops that other cops have arrested, investigated, fired, etc. One cop on this deck has used the police department several times, whenever he runs short of cash. The "good cops" HATE this guy. Lots of these cops are so crooked that even the PPB calls them criminals in their press releases (they hate the fact that they are not allowed to hide the old cop)."

As is the case with too many fabulous radical projects, there are some problems with keeping these cards available online. Since GFPX is an illusory group, a paid website is highly unlikely. They pointed to the cards that were done on Georgia (www.ghan.org/geocities/policedeck), but they got so many hits, the site usually shuts down by noon every day due to exceeding its limits on the free webserver, among other problems. As of right now, the cards are in a PDF's. MAYBE, read:

http://portland.indymedia.org/media/pam/2004/05/27/12764 zipper, but you may have to google or look on Portland IMC to see where the whole deck lands permanently. The site holds all 52 cards, 35 pages (the PDF and the police chief), an "about the deck" card, and a card for a citizen witness to use to write badge numbers, etc., etc. for necessary. The card deck can be printed out for free on your home or office computer, it comes in 3 colors, (100 DPI). After printing, just cut out the individual cards and let the fun begin! Play the game "memory" that we played as kids with the cards. Hell, play memory with them WITH YOUR kids, save them some hassle on the streets!
Many in the CopWatch movement advocate for open accessibility of all police personnel records, the removal of all profit motives (such as money generated from traffic tickets for the force, and mandates as to ticket minimums for those profits), strict drug and alcohol testing for all officers, the prohibition of puffed up charges as leverage for plea bargained confessions, the repayment of all costs to victims who are criminally charged and later found innocent, public acknowledgement that police are public employees on the public dime, consistent and equal law enforcement, the coming down of the police code of silence regarding police abuse, the requirement of an objective reasonable standard for the use of force, the banning of all "less-lethal" weaponry on the streets, and improved and expanded police training.

And you get school credit for participating in CopWatch in Berkeley! The Berkeley CopWatch website says, "UC Berkeley CopWatch Class for credit, every Monday night from 6 to 7:30pm (open to public)." And people think school can't be fun! Berkeley's CopWatch is also facilitating a free hands on workshop called "Know Your Rights Training," on May 29, 2004, from 11 am - 2 pm, at 2022 Blake Street in Berkeley. The ad for this workshop says it will cover your rights when stopped by cops, what to look for when others are stopped, staying safe while CopWatching, what to do if police violate your rights, training in video taping and using a police scanner and more! Berkeley also hosts online incident reporting regarding Berkeley Police abuse. All of these organizations and activities above can only increase the safety of American streets... Do you have a CopWatch in your town? Who will start one? If not you, who? If not now, when?

http://october22-ny.org/national - October 22 Coalition is an organization about police accountability and deaths from police

http://www.breakthechains.net - Prison abolitionists, prisoner rights activists

http://www.criticalresistance.org - "Join the struggle to end the prison industrial complex"

CHICAGO ABC
PO BOX 1544
CHICAGO, IL 60690
E-mail: CHICAGO-PRISERUP, NET

http://www.prisonersucks.com - Self-explanatory title...

http://www.prisonersucks.com/links/pen_pal_service/ - A list of organizations devoted to writing prisoners

http://www.green anarchry.org/index.php?action=viewprisoners - Political prisoner listing

http://prisonerswithchildren.com/ - Legal Services for Prisoners with Children

http://www.prisonradio.org/ - Prison Radio

http://www.prison.org/ - Art made by prisoners

http://dictionary.prisonwall.org - Art made by prisoners

http://www.allosforsomeone.org - An organization of prisoners, former prisoners and friends working to combat the many forms of discrimination people face as the result of felony convictions

http://www.breakthechains.net/links.html - Northwest Anarchist Prisoners' Support Network

http://www.anarchistblackcross.org - Anarchist Black Cross, prison support...


http://www.prisonactivist.org/ - Prison Activist Resource Center

http://www.stolenlives.org - This site deals with people who were killed by cops

http://www.copwatch.com - This site deals with policing the police