

A lot of people in the United States will tell you that crime rates are soaring, that more prisons and longer sentences are the solution, and that young Black men are all dangerous criminals...

Don't believe the hype.

Dostoevsky once wrote that if you want to know about a society, you should look into its prisons. Today, U.S. prisons incarcerate more than one million people. This results in a higher imprisonment rate than has ever existed in any country in the world at any time in history. That's the equivalent of the eleventh largest city in the United States. If you add to that the number of people being held in jails in the U.S., it's greater than the population of 13 states.

While these numbers are shocking in themselves, closer examination reveals how we have been duped by politicians and the media. Consider the fact that murders in this country comprise less than one percent of crime. Indeed, over half of the people currently being sent to prison are being sent for petty crimes which involve no violence whatsoever. The most frequent crime resulting in a prison sentence is drug possession, and 53% of all drug offenders are sentenced to prison for possession of one gram or less of an illegal substance. Is this consistent with what you've been hearing from the mainstream media and public officials?

Analyzed in terms of race, the statistics shock the conscience. One in four Black men between the ages of 20-29 is either in prison or jail or on parole or probation on any given day. One out of four Black men will go to prison in his lifetime. One out of two Black men will be arrested in his lifetime. Black people are four times as likely as white people to be arrested on a drug charge, even though the two groups use drugs at the same rate. A Black woman is eight times more likely to go to prison than a white woman.



violation of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

In Chicago, the public schools, which are 80% Black and Hispanic, could not open on time last year due to lack of funding, yet in the same legislative session, the Illinois General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to spend 100 million dollars to build a "supermax" prison in Illinois. Why wasn't the public outraged at such a massive expenditure?

Prisons, the warehousing of young people of color, has quickly become one of the fastest growing industries in this country. Local governments, and private business, desperate for local jobs and long term contracts, clamor for the chance to build prisons. Indeed, National Public Radio recently revealed that much of the organized support for harsher sentences, mandatory minimum sentences, and "three time loser" statutes is coming from the ranks of those who are financially and economically invested in the prison industry.

At the same time that we are spending literally billions of dollars to imprison people of color, one out of every two Black children and one out of every three Hispanic children is living in poverty. The Black infant mortality rate is twice the white rate. 80% of Black, Latino, and Native American children in the United States have not been adequately vaccinated. What do these facts say about our priorities as a society?

Virtually everyone who has ever studied the subject

Criminologists have recently predicted that under the new federal crime bill, 55.8% of all Black men between the ages of 18 and 44 will be in prison on any given day in this country. What does it say about our society that we are willing to imprison over half of the adult Black male population?

Not only are more and more prisons being constructed, but they are becoming more and more brutal and repressive. Thirty-six states now have control unit, "maxi-maxi," or "supermax" prisons. These institutions hold prisoners in strict and permanent isolation conditions, employ extreme behavior modification and control techniques, and are frequently located near toxic waste sites. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have consistently criticized and condemned these prisons for



crime rates. Yet prison construction continues unabated across the country. Anyone with an ounce of common sense knows that the only way to reduce crime is to invest the money up front, in education, jobs, housing, drug treatment, and healthcare. Why would a society refuse to spend a couple of thousand dollars to better educate our children, and then turn around and spent \$30,000 per year to imprison a person, more than it would cost to send that person to Harvard?

What's going on in this country in the name of law and order is unprecedented in history. The effect that the imprisonment binge and the cuts in social spending are having on people of color in the United States is genocidal. We must confront this new face of racism. **You're on notice now.** Do you really want to say someday that you didn't do anything about it?

It's not enough to just think it's wrong. Demand real solutions - fight for racial justice.

To find out more, attend the program:

"Law and Order Hysteria and the U.S. Imprisonment Binge"

7:00 p.m. Saturday, October 22, 1994. DePaul University, Schmitt Academic Center, Room 154.

Speakers:

Jerome Miller: Executive Director of the National Center on Institutions and Alternatives; Former Commissioner of the Massachusetts Dept. of Youth Services and Director of the Illinois Dept. of Children and Family Services.

Randolph Stone: Clinical Professor of Law & Director of the Mandel Legal Clinic at the University of Chicago Law School; former head of the Public Defender's office of Cook County, IL and was Deputy Director of the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia.

Carlos Vega: Director of Community Affairs for the Prison Action Committee, an organization devoted to pursuing alternatives to incarceration; spent 13 years in Illinois prisons.

Suggested donation \$3 - \$10. Wheelchair accessible.

Sign language interpreters will be present. Childcare provided.

For more information or to get involved, contact: (CCRIB)

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Campaign to Confront the Racist Imprisonment Binge
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