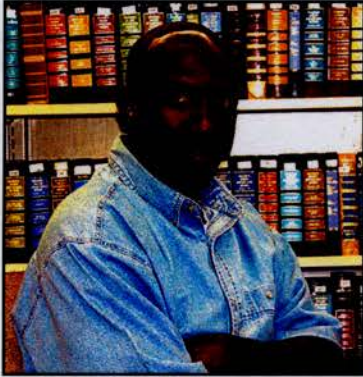


Get Off the Count!



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by Ronald Marshall



In the Department of Corrections (DOC), the head count is the most sensitive and important aspect of the entire prison ordeal. Wherever an offender is located during count time, the offender does best to be located on a correctional officer's count. An offender could likely talk himself

out of a disciplinary report for a number of rule infractions, except messing up the count. When the head count is messed up, everything stops: offender traffic, movement, phone calls, showers, defecation, microwaves, prayers, cooking, talking, watching television, etc. Maintaining an accurate count is the first order of DOC business, and some super powerful, prestigious and wealthy associations have a financial incentive to keep you on the count. The Sheriff's Association, for instance, repeatedly blocks modest legislative attempts to reduce sentences for non-violent offenses or attempts to increase the possibility of earning additional good-time (Connor, 2012). By doing so, the sheriffs ensure that their jails are filled to capacity and offenders remain on the count.

Persons incarcerated must understand from the very beginning of their sentence that the end purpose of serving time is simply to get off the count. In the same moment you arrive on the count, you should be formulating a blueprint on how to get off the count. Your blue-print may consist of burning the midnight lamp to master the laws that govern your case; bumping your head on the floor five times a day; acquiring certificate after certificate to show yourself official before the parole board; relying on supportive family or attracting the attention of sympathetic persons to finance an attorney on your behalf. If your plan of action can undercut the amount of time imposed to serve on the count, mega-power to you for you will need all the power in the universe to detach yourself from the magnetic pull of the count.

If you've been around awhile reading prison magazines--Angolite-LSP, The Walk-Talk-Hunt, Chainlink-RCC, The Winning Edge-Winn-- you probably can recall the many obituaries of both the ambitious and less ambitious men who entered the count decades ago only to die on the count. Despite the character evidence of deceased offenders, their collective memories produce a collage of death by incarceration, synonymous to overdosing on raw, uncut time. Too much potent hard labor will

weaken the body, eventually killing it. Each person incarcerated has a duty to preserve himself from the onslaught of a deadly count; if he does not preserve himself, he is committing suicide. Do the math: the more you find yourself being counted in passing years, the closer you are approaching death by incarceration.

No matter how brilliantly smart, intellectual, witty, religious, moral, your mind might be, if your mental capacity is not equipped with a specialized knowledge to get off the count, then you are colluding with the machinery of justice in keeping your own self on the count. If any one attempts to draft your time for activities other than getting off the count, get away from them. They are serving the machinery of justice which does not serve you.

Ask yourselves one question, "How many years of potent, raw, uncut hard labor can my body withstand before my memory becomes collaged with death by incarceration." While you're brainstorming an answer, keep in mind that the machinery of justice is not in the business of releasing its' offenders. If you are short, of course you will go home unless you catch a new offense or lose significant good time credits. But if you are serving a life sentence or virtual life, habitual offender numbers, you will have to claw at your freedom everyday. Make it personal to get your message across to the court or the parole board. That way you stand a far better chance of being taken seriously and make no mistake about it: being taken seriously in the criminal justice system or before the parole board marks the difference, the only difference, between staying on the count or getting off.

Every offender bearing teeth and clawing to make parole or secure reversal of conviction or to prove actual innocence or a constitutional violation or to have an illegal sentence corrected, will not get off the count, the brutal truth. But you deserve the strength that comes from your struggle. Trying to get off the count when the alphabets or numbers or aggravated circumstances are double stacked against you will likely feel as if you are being victimized by the criminal justice system, parole board or victim advocate groups. You will experience severe emotional trauma: anger, anxiety, depression, shame, humiliation, despair, or even spurts of fear at the prospect of facing death by incarceration. You may even attempt to invoke the spirit of George Jackson (The infamous San Quinton offender known for his radical activism) and move something. In whichever mind state you find yourself on the incarcerated journey, quitting is not an option when there is a better life just across

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the tracks. So, keep the struggle alive and healthy in your heart. To struggle is to never know defeat, only progress, and eventually victory. Until you have achieved the highest victory any offender can possibly achieve, continue to strive and chant down Babylon, "Get off the count, Get off the count, Get off the count."

About the Author: Ronald Marshall was wrongfully convicted for armed robbery and is serving a 50 year sentence in Louisiana's Department of Corrections. He has entered his seventeenth year on incarceration; he's a self-taught legal assistant and unpublished author of several urban novels. Upon his release, he plans to publish his books and launch his own paralegal service, specializing in criminal law, post conviction relief and federal habeas corpus practice. He hopes to create a relief generating engine for deserving prisoners and eliminate the practice of duplicitous

attorneys who exalt financial gain over ethical obligations owed to the legal profession. He intends to partner with a licensed attorney whose passion and commitment for criminal justice is strong and determined as his own.

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