

Conscious Prisoner ~ The Evolution of Uhuru

Life At Sussex 2 State Prison

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By Uhuru B. Rowe
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e-mail: uhururowe76@yahoo.com

Its been 95 days since I was transferred to Sussex 2 State Prison, which opened in 1998 to house what the state deemed "the worst of the worst." Prisoners here are anything but! Its main purpose, as with most prison construction, was to create jobs and to control the population of the Black communities.

Inside this prison are numerous electronically operated razor wire topped fences which are designed for optimal controlled-movement. There are barking K9 dogs which snap and drool at us when we leave our housing units. There are armed guards positioned above on the catwalk poised to shoot down at us at a moments notice.

There is a gym and library which we are denied access to on a regular basis and two cafeterias in which we are intentionally fed low-calorie, nutritionally-deficient food to keep us in a consistent weak and feeble state and to entice us to spend maximum money on food items at the prison commissary to supplement our diet.

There is a school/vocational trade area for short-timers (prisoners on the verge of going home). Lifers and those of us with long sentences, which constitute the majority of us here, are passed over for enrollment and are even discouraged from signing up to be placed on the waiting list. So, absent any productive/constructive programming, we sit and rot and wait for the inevitable- a slow, agonizing death in a prison cell where we spend 18 to 20 hours of our day. Mumia Abu-Jamal calls this "the other death penalty," which serves the same function as lethal injection.

This prison is divided into two halves. Each half consists of two housing units (HU) with four tiny recreation yards, each separated by razor wire topped fence. Each HU has two floors with two pods on each side of the floor separated by a brick wall and a watchroom where armed guards are stationed, called a control booth. Each pod houses 88 prisoners in 44 two-man cells on two tiers and has a dayroom; two antiquated televisions; ten metal tables; six metal benches; two kiosks; two water fountains; six wall-mounted telephones; and six showers that are infested with mold and bugs and wreaks of urine and mildew.

The cells have steel doors with narrow Plexiglas-covered observation panels (instead of bars) which are controlled electronically by the guard in the booth. The cells are measured approximately 12 ft. in length and 5 ft. in width (heel-to-toe), with both the length and width of the cell obstructed by the presence of a metal table and seat attached to the back wall and a double bunk bed on the side wall. There is a stainless steel conjoined sink and toilet which allows only two consecutive flushes per hour; a stainless steel mirror above the sink/toilet which gives off a distorted reflection; a small plastic trashcan; two plastic containers to store our possessions; a long narrow, Plexiglas covered window with no opening which we can barely see out of because of the accumulation of scum on the exterior; and a tri-panelled light on the wall opposite the bunk which includes a blinding "security light" which stays on 24 hours a day. The security light was installed to cause sleep deprivation which is a form of torture. The air conditioning here provides us relief during the hot summer months but allows no fresh air to circulate throughout the HU.

Almost everything done to us here is designed to exacerbate the suffering and misery inherent in our incarceration. If animals were subjected to similar treatment, it would be publicized in the media and the perpetrators likely would be charged with a criminal offense.

Prison were not always a place of great dread and suffering. It was actually a place where one could become educated, learn a new skill, discover our talents, get our heads right, become better men and women, and redeem ourselves in the eyes of our family and the public.

When I came to prison in the mid-1990s, I could leave my cell in the morning, participate in school and treatment programs all day, and not return to my cell until the evening! Those days are long gone! With the current increased rate of incarceration, overcrowding, and the sheer size of the U.S. prison population-the largest on the planet- there have not been a comparable increase in state and federal funding for prisoner education and treatment programming, and other services. As a result, living conditions in prisons have deteriorated because the prison system in general has shifted from a model of rehabilitation and treatment to a warehouse format that is abusive, torturous, and punitive in nature.

To justify this shift, the public was fed biased images of violent crime and drug use that was rampant in the inner-city ghettos during the 80s and 90s, and people were convinced that prisons should be focused on punishment, not rehabilitation. And soon, highly oppressive prisons like Sussex 2 were constructed all over the country using YOUR tax dollars! Tax dollars that should have been earmarked for public education.

The movement to abolish the plantation slavery system would not have been successful without the united efforts of both anti-slavery activists and rebel slaves who valiantly resisted their captivity to their death.

Similarly today, we need a unified prison abolition movement which combines the struggles of prison abolitionists on the outside together with those incarcerated rebels who are actively resisting the shackles of the prison industrial slave complex. The recent September 9th nationwide prison protests which took place inside prisons and as well as on the streets, and the successful resistance of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in North Dakota and their allies against monopoly capitalists and their Dakota Access Pipeline is instructive and indicative of the potential of real multiracial class solidarity and Peoples' Power! Together, we can and will win!

ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE!!