

July 2020

① Pandemic And PRISON Reform. Most prisoners will tell you that they were scared in prison. Now There is another fear: Covid-19.

We are, as Americans, distracted. We are distracted by a doubling of Coronavirus 19 cases in The U.S. monthly. Funeral Homes cannot keep up with the funerals. Americans are distracted by international political and military tensions, by the disappearance of species, the rise of the oceans, racial protests, social divisions, economic uncertainty, education system deficiencies, personal safety in home and on the streets, Change: Threats to status quo.

I'm an American, too. And sometimes I worry that people confined to prisons, rest homes, and mental institutions are somehow thought of as immune to the stress and strain of the distractions that Americans outside this fence face everyday.

We are part of this country, too. The broader issues of social unrest reach deep into the hearts and minds of prisoners. What kind of America will we be released into upon completion of our sentencing. Jobs for released prisoners are hard to find now - how about during a Pandemic where millions

2 are unemployed. Every issue of conflict, consensus, and concern of the average American is of concern to the prisoner. Our separation, or lack of public communication, obscures that fact. We are The Disappeared Ones in this nation, but most of us care about the path our nation follows.

My knowledge of the effect of Coronavirus is limited by personal experiences in prison, and in the media. On 27 July, I can honestly state that the experience of another state prison - like SAN QUENTIN - is very different from my cloudy knowledge of Corona related events here at NC Prison #4.

I hope the situation here does not repeat the horrors of some other prisons in the US. To place these observations in perspective, here is my opinion of a comparison between events at San Quentin and this much, much smaller prison site in NC, in July 2020.

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Comparisons

San Quentin - based on NPR
prisoner interviews.

① In July 2020, 1200 San Quentin residents tested positive for Corona virus.

Only 19 (est.) prisoners at NC Prison #4 were tested positive, with 19 (est.) staff and 1 death (a nurse.)

② Showers for prisoners at San Quentin were limited to once a week, in crowded (40?) showers with 18 nozzles.

Showers at Prison #4 were only limited to once a day during a 18 hour period.

③ Prisoners at San Quentin received a 6 oz. bottle of hand sanitizer. Prison #4's access to hand soap was not limited and located in every bathroom.

④ San Quentin prisoners received two masks, Prison #4 distributed three.

⑤ San Quentin "First Responders" were supplemented by a dorm of prisoner first responders. Prison #4 nurses have been proactive.

⑥ San Quentin prisoners were limited to rare phone use. Prison #4 prisoners had no limitations on regular schedule phone use.

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The prison's phone system provided allows each NC prisoner two free phone calls a week - for five minutes each. The Prison #4 administration allowed one free photograph for inmates to send to concerned friends or relatives, with the message: "I Am Fine."

⑦ Prison #4 blocks are "guaranteed" with no more than 34 per block. Each block is allowed 30 minutes of yard time outside the units. Efforts at increased cleanliness in blocks are ongoing at NC prison #4.

⑧ San Quentin prisoners received 3 "box" meals per day in their double-bunk (34 man) cell. Prison #4 prisoners receive three styrofoam container meals per day delivered to their blocks. Quality and quantity are not the same as when the dining hall/kitchen were open.

⑨ 100 officers at San Quentin tested positive. Staff at NC Prison #4 are stretched thin. Transfers of prisoners to regular "outside" doctor appointments are rare, or to other prisons, at #4. TV time has increased.

⑩ Visitations (contact) by Prison #4 families, lawyers, or friends are suspended.

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The emotional stress at San Quentin is a serious physical and psychological burden.

Here, at Prison #4, in N.C., many inmates make an effort to understand the nature, causes, transmission, and effects on their families, neighbors, and environments on the outside. Viewership of TV News and Radio/Newspaper accounts have increased. Prisoners want more information.

We worry about the same issues as any American: Will our children be safe at school? Will our laid-off family members get their jobs back? Will friends be evicted? Will my family be homeless? Will my elder relatives die in a rest home? Will my loved ones die; alone, in a hospital? We prisoners know the pain that comes with considering death alone in a institution. It is never far from our thoughts.

Will equal-rights efforts create a more unified nation? Will Health Care ever be affordable? Are we in the midst of another Great Depression but don't know it? Will the Pandemic ever end? Will America ever be the same again? We are Americans, Too.

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Why should you care about what we feel, or how the Pandemic affects us?

Because we are better in sum than the worst thing we ever did.

Because we are part of your family: your fathers, sons, sisters, brothers, cousins, neighbors, friends...

Because we care about you.

All of the prisoners here at NC #4 were recently tested. Few admit it, but the possibilities scare us, too.

David Roger Thomas

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NC Prison # 4