

TO: The Michigan Humanities
Collaboratory, Attn: Carceral
State Project (Conditions Team)

FROM: Jack S. Copeman

Re: Self-Initiated Initiative -
The Coronavirus Experience 2020
Within the MDOC

Dear Reader,

Welcome to another installment of a series created to record and report on the COVID-19 pandemic while incarcerated within the MDOC. This will be my seventh submission in a project started two months ago, around ~~April~~ ^{March} 20 or so. The purpose being to inform, explain, to contemplate and reflect on the actions and response of prison officials and the conditions now created while incarcerated. The following is based on my experience, both past and present, as well as research through

prints and visual media—so the numbers, ~~and~~ dates and other stats are as accurate as they are reported to me. Names will not be changed either so as ^{to} remain verifiable through your own diligence. With that said, I now forge ahead into this paper so that YOU, Dear Reader, will have heard from someone on this side of the blue and orange fence. Learn what this shit life (in here) is like for yourself. Hope this is informative. Enjoy.

If I Die In A Corrections Zone... (Seven)

(Thu. 5/14/20) **L**atest I Pay Representative message:
 "The department has been partnering with the Michigan National Guard to do facility-wide testing for COVID-19 at various facilities. On Friday, May 15, 2020, all prisoners here at Saginaw Correctional Facility will be tested."

—Warden Winn

Of course we are reminded that this is a proactive measure that is "to our benefit"... which will allow them "to provide the appropriate monitoring and care you need." *ibid.*

As there has always been a certain amount of disbelief and skepticism when it comes to the MDOC's motives. Having been misled and deceived by them more than once has made us all ^{a bit} wary, while it is also a by-product of institutionalization to become paranoid. Thus anything we are told is suspect and automatically ~~seen~~ scrutinized against veracity—especially when they use governmental double-speak on us. Being we know full well what "appropriate monitoring" really means. We're poorly educated and uninformed but certainly not stupid!

Positives are going straight to the hole—without shifts to do all day long—until you no longer test positive. No doubt after being transferred to some COVID only joint where you will be further stigmatized as infected. Treated as such.

That's just the way it is and always has been for the convicted.

(Fri. 5/15/20) To no surprise at all, they activated the emergency count protocol after breakfast. Running the siren to drive us into our cells, top-locking doors and ordering us to put on our prison blues (uniforms) when it was time to be swabbed.

Now they're at my door. Had to show my

I.D. to be checked-off the list. Went through the line to be told by National Guard troops wearing protective garb that they were just going to swab one nostril. Apparently I must have narrow turbinates because I ended up drawing samples from both sides of my nasal passages.

Not that I moved my head or anything, but my septum is definitely deviated. (Time used: Started at 8:30, done by 13:00.)
 Anyway, that's over with so...

Was watching the PBS News Hour and they had a piece on called "Covid Behind Bars." Playing a montage of voices of those incarcerated describing conditions in various state prison systems. From the over-crowding to the lack of sanitization supplies, the aged and infirm, the poor quality of services, these same complaints and concerns that I've described for the past several weeks were all reiterated.

They interviewed Dr. Homer Venters next. He just finished writing Life and Death Behind Bars, mainly about Riker's Island, for his opinion about the topic. He basically confirmed all the above reasons—the overall unsanitary and dreadful conditions that are prisons—their "operational structure" and "health practices" that make such places almost a guaranty to promote the spread of any virus. And especially a highly communicable one as COVID-19.

(Sat. 5/16/20) The latest overall numbers are 50,079 positive cases with 4,825 deaths in Michigan. As the embattled governor concedes to ~~some~~ political pressure by agreeing to open up some manufacturing and construction. While protestors gather around the Capital about once a week now, toting their long guns, rebel flags and snarky signs pointing out that they're "not prisoners." (And yes, I did see that in the crowd.) Meanwhile, the mad barber of mid-Michville just had his license pulled for non-compliance. This guy becoming a cause célèbre for right-wing, beer drinking factory rats.

There are two new JPay messages on the kiosk. The first one is from the warden, a thank you to the prisoners for our cooperation with the swab testing. The other is a MDOC update. Current results of both positive and negative stats from around the state. It appears that there were no positive cases discovered in last week's U.P. raids. There were, however, 2,837 negative findings. Which I don't really understand as important, indicative or even relevant toward updates. Maybe someone can explain it to me sometime.

As it stands, there were also eight negative

tests reported here at SRF. Fully expect that number will soar once the entire facility gets added.

Myself and another prisoner were wondering if the MDOC is going to conduct antibody testing as well? As he broached the subject to me, I asked "Why, did you have the flu in February?" He did. My follow-up question was then: "What leads you to believe it was something else?" Response—"I lost my sense of smell."

This was also a symptom I had. Along with some serious congestion, a nagging dry cough that worsened at night, headaches, blood-shot eyes, high blood pressure and the weirdest thing of all—a small sore between my toes that turned into a hole. Strange.

And then there was the timeline of this illness. It lasted a week, maybe more, then I started to feel good again before going back down with worsening symptoms for another week.

All together I was sick for almost three weeks.

That's never happened to me before. Really strange.

It's all documented in my health records as I did submit a Medical Request (kite) to be seen for these complaints.

Now, the nurse, after waiting a week to be seen, told me this: "I've had a cough for a month. It's 'the crud' that's been going around."

Hmmph, I thought, "the crud." What kind of diagnosis is that? Then again, I wasn't really surprised by such service, it's typical and expected. Next step was to tell me to drink plenty of fluids and to buy my own meds out of the store. (Which held true)

"What about my cough?" I asked. "It's waking me up in the middle of the night. And I cough so hard - it hurts!"

That's when she told me about her cough. Also adding that "we don't have Mytussin on the formulary."

So apparently I was out of luck. And yet I have learned through years of these encounters to keep pushing and to ALWAYS request to see the Wizard (the Real Powerful One) because the PA (or doctor) writes prescriptions, orders tests, X-rays, issues details for medical devices, and can push my complaint on to the next step. Thus I am currently and still waiting for a "Breath Test", which, I didn't even know existed. The doctor having smiled at me when I told her that. No doubt making the connection between ignorance and imprisonment. (Pre-Covid freeze)

8.

(Sun. 5/16/20) The latest update. There were 2 positive cases at Gus Harrison Corr. Facility.

And talk about coincidence. There is a section of this message headed—Antibody Testing. Writing:

The COVID-19 IgG antibody test looks to see if you have developed defenses to fight COVID-19.

The text going on to explain what this means in detail but leaves out ^{the} how or why it relates to us in the context of purpose for prisoners.

They don't answer the question of testing us for antibodies—maybe there's more to come on this front. We'll see.

As a side project, I did write a little paper on this coronavirus pandemic and how it impacts us within the MDOC. Essentially covering ^{everything} discussed in this series, I condensed and submitted to Michigan Quarterly for their consideration. Not that it was my first attempt to be published with them, having received prior rejection a few years ago, but from my understanding—“While we enjoyed your (poem, essay, research paper, ...), unfortunately we are not...” — these NO letters are all just part of the gig as a writer. Better learn to embrace that!

I know that I have. It's part of the reason I'm still churning out papers. The rest being to improve my style and overall quality. Learn to get better by doing. That's always a sound method.

If I were out in society, I would blog about my experience, giving my perspective and opinion regarding aspects of the criminal justice system. Having learned a lot of hard-gained knowledge about the legal (both criminal and civil) branch and corrections, hell... I could give sound advice and tips on these matters. For example, here's one:



Never waive anything in the legal department. No matter what! A preliminary exam; a hearing; a response to a motion; advanced notice— whatever— Never waive a right. That's a big mistake that the courts, along with the cooperation of incompetent attorneys (usually public defenders) are always pulling on lay persons. Happens a lot! What you want to do is attend and look for any reason to voice an objection for the record. That's super-important. That's, in fact, why you are there. To get things entered on record. That's how you win appeals! Period.

When you waive things, what you are really giving up are opportunities. (And a whole lot of related rights.) All gone because of bad advice. That's the system, greasing the tracks and throwing switches, just makin' it easier — for them.

(Tue. 5/19/20)* There are now 51,915 reported cases with 4,943 deaths attributed to COVID-19 in Michigan. The reporter adding that of the 589 recently identified, that 450 of new positives come from correctional facilities!

As we, the prisoners, keep asking staff what's the deal with our results? When will they be posted in a kiosk message? We're told Thursday or Friday. That will be a week from swabbing. Once again making us wait longer than anyone else, guess that's the one constant of being a prisoner.

Michigan Reformatory (M.R.). The status of the Reformatory today is akin to the notoriety of what Jackson was throughout history. Just bad! Currently the worst prison to be housed in due to rampant and unmitigated violence; the Department uses it as a collecting pool for all their behavioral problems. There's nothing there but

Sociopathic assholes who can't get along with anyone and drug dealing dip-shits that join gangs for power and security. The majority of these guys are STG'd (classified as Security Threat Grouped, either I or II).

So when a prisoner makes it through the Reception Center (Quarantine), they are sent to a prison according to their appropriate security and management level, from minimum (level-1) to max (level-5). Most prisoners belong to medium (level-II) or "close custody" because of our tractability.

And yet there are always those who are going to do what they want to do, when they want to do it. These types are basically oppositional and drawn to conflict as part of their personalities. They actively seek out ways to break rules, and for them the bigger-the-better maxim applies. The pull toward dysfunction eventually leads them toward multiple misconduct reports and that is how you get sent to M.R. as a "problem child." As I said, it used to be Jackson (behind the Wall), now it's M.R. It's the place for dickheads. It's also the place where they send you when they want to punish you for pissing someone in the "higher-ups" off. Mostly grievance writers and law-suit filers.

Accusers of staff misconduct. M.R. is how the MDOC retaliates.

The problem with loading up one basket with nothing but bad apples is what is going on there in Tonia, at M.R., now. It's the prevalence of violence and instability that brings about frequent lock-downs.

What we are hearing and what has been reported on the local news is that a prisoner has been shot and the Reformatory has gone into containment mode. We don't know what created the unrest and if it is related to the pandemic, but here is the latest Jay Representative message:

On May 18, there were 830 positive cases and 1,589 negative results. They include:

Gus Harrison Corr - 612

Thumb Corr (Lapeer) - 207

With 57 prisoners in MDOC custody to succumb to the virus. (* Don't know if this is an overall total or not)

So there are a couple of new hot spots or spikes from around the state's prisons. And out of ~~most~~ total cases in Michigan, most of them are now coming out of these facilities.