

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

FROM: Jack S. Cofeman

Re: Self-Initiated Initiative, The Corona-
Experience of the Incarcerated

Dear Reader,

This is another installment, a dispatch if you will, from inside the fenced-in 'crowd' isolated within by the MDOC. As I have made it a personal mission to report on conditions as they develop and occur for those of us with no control, no input, and absolutely NO say in the running or direction of our lives. These are my observations and thoughts ~~of~~ the matter during the time of a global pandemic. One that has been taking lives, with no end in sight, as it gets closer and closer with every passing day.

Sat. (4/11/20) If I Die In A Corrections Zone...
(Four)

When I first returned to the States after a brief deployment to the Middle-

East, having served in Desert Storm, I ~~was~~ quickly began to melt-down and lost control of my mind. I could no longer sleep. Found no pleasure in food, or sex or even alcohol as a social lubricant. Though I used it heavily just to be able to tolerate being myself anymore, drinking ~~a means~~ became a means to function after the war. Besides, I quickly learned that I could pass out eventually and that—in itself—was some form of ~~rest~~ relief.

The problem with this approach is that it quickly leads to further disruption. Mainly that fuels anger and erratic behavior, which, for a veteran, is dangerous.

Long story short is that I became a combination of suicidal and homicidal and as a result of personal problems, wound up sentenced to 32-48 years in the state prison system.

A sentence, I would like to add, was fashioned way beyond my so-called "guidelines score" for offender variables. The judge being able to do this simply by filling out a piece of paper known as a ~~departure~~. However, none of this would be possible without the full cooperation of my "defense attorney". A guy the court appointed that turned out to be part of the prosecutorial team.

Now I recognize this simplified explanation no doubt sounds self-serving and maybe a tad "Woe is me" to the crime-fighters and hard-liners, but I have done the majority of my time regardless. So...

Stats. As of Friday, April 10, the latest JPay message from the MDOC informs there were 28 positive cases identified at eight separate facilities throughout the state. Surprisingly, the Department has added a new paragraph with the heading: Prisoner deaths. It seems as this section of the text will be a regular feature from now on. Stating:

Sadly, we are reporting two prisoner deaths today related to COVID-19. This brings the total number of prisoners who have passed away from the virus to seven.

There's another new section for COVID-19 Hotlines. It appears as the MDOC has established some numbers for the public to call regarding questions about what the department is doing during this pandemic, specifically urging:

Please encourage your family to call these numbers rather than calling the facility or the parole board."

Apparently they must be receiving a fair amount of calls, enough to cause them to set up separate numbers to handle the traffic.

One other new heading is labeled Recovery.

This paragraph is highly interesting for a couple of reasons. First, because ~~it~~ it is the rather slippery way the Department drops the fact "there have been more than 300 prisoners in the MDOC that have tested positive since the pandemic began..." Continuing on by mentioning that "about 40 prisoners have recovered and are doing better." Furthermore, "Recovered prisoners are now being moved to a newly opened step-down unit at Gus Harrison Correctional..." (Which, I believe, is in Adrian or Ionia. Somewhere like that.)

News that has been withheld up until this point. As I have every one of their messages, paying careful and close attention to all of them; and not once did they ever mention how widespread the infection has become. It appears the MDOC has reported daily positive test results rather than the net total of cases to date. That is clearly disingenuous to the point of being dishonest. By using there has been 1 reported case here and 1 case there gives a false impression that the rate is low.

When in fact, it's not. That the rate of transmission, while varying at different facilities, is actually comparable to so-called "hot spots" in cities and other congested areas where people live. Because the reality is, and everyone knows this, that jails and prisons are super-accelerators when it comes to spreading communicable illnesses.

But no one in politics or government is willing to acknowledge it because then they would have to solve it. And there's really only one way to do that, which they are always loathe to get into. The R-Word being upsetting to any modern ethic as the N-Word.

To see a perfect illustration of this in action, look up Gov. Whitmer's response to the question of releasing prisoners ~~or~~ during her "Virtual Town-Hall" Q&A session on 4/2/20, or Gov. A. Cuomo's response to same on 4/11/20. Nothing clears out a room faster, you know.

It appears that even enlightened, compassionate people have limits to their humanity. So that's where we are in our society.

Hmm... in my opinion, de Tocqueville gave the Americans more credit than they deserve for their penal system. He was obviously

misinformed badly! (or drinking absinthe)

Sun. (4/12/20)

It is Easter Sunday and there is an interesting dichotomy currently at work between the people who want to attend church service and those who support the stay-at-home orders of state governments. As I was just tuning in to C-SPAN, listening ~~in~~ to callers on both sides state their opinions regarding the matter. The devout, of course, believe the pandemic is a leftist conspiracy to discredit Trump while simultaneously using it as an opportunity to pass their God-less agenda.

For the social-distancers, they have been listening closely to the doctors and specialists in their fields, being reassured this strategy is working and necessary to "flatten the curve" and slow the rate of infection (ROI). These people are following the science and staying informed.

It was interesting to hear both sides. One can really get a sense of just how divided people are, even in the face of such evidence, our Country is sorely fragmented. It's too bad, really. As we were a Nation that used to be able to pull together during a crisis.

That's not very apparent anymore. Another item of interest learned from the program was the highlighted newspaper article the moderator read. By which pointed out a segment of the population even worse off than inmates and prisoners — the assisted living residents of nursing homes. Yes, indeed.

As the banner of a headline referred to ~~the~~ elderly as "Sitting ducks due to various reasons. Specifically, they're old, their health is shaky, they have to have close contact with their caregivers, which, don't have the protective equipment and are now scared to show up for work.

So that business is experiencing a slew of problems. And once the virus gets in there it devastates the residents, attributing to a high mortality count.

This information is grim, depressing and very troubling to learn. I am saddened by their situation and hope that some solutions are found soon!

(Mon. 4/13) Latest figures. The JPay Updates are starting to come fast & furious now. We had two on 4/10, the first reporting five deaths and the second added two more. One of which was the first female COVID-19 death from Women's Huron Valley.

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And another two added on 4/12, bringing the total to nine casualties within the MDOC. Around the State we are nearing 25,000 plus infected with close to 1,500 dead.

Gov. Whitmer will be on t.v. later on today to inform everyone on the current situation and what the government is doing about it, I'm sure.

- So far there have been only minimal contacts here at SRF Saginaw. Known and confirmed cases of three staff members and one prisoner have been identified. The prisoner was immediately REMOVED by transport to a mystery facility somewhere. Possibly this "Step-down site" at Gus Harrison. This is interesting because at one point there was this half-baked idea (so we heard) of the Warden's plan to house 15 Level-4 prisoners in the 3 Level-2 Units. In the dayrooms that is, where we could stare at them like freaks. The purpose being to free up an entire wing over at Level 4, where the doors are controlled by an officer pushing buttons, to quarantine the infected and contagious.

This notion (so we also heard) was quickly nixed by Lansing as locking ill prisoners in cells to quite possibly die, would be outrageous and indefensible.

Now ill prisoners, I presume, are sent to a secure location where they are, hopefully, monitored by health care staff.

It is now later and I have just been put through more prison drama, as my former bunkie was just moved because two other dog handlers were not getting along and complained about each other. So I end up having put with a poached bunkie while also having to make adjustments to a new situation. All while waiting for the next thing to drop in this pandemic. Once again, that's institutional living for you. Always.

The latest stats presented by Governor Whitmer are 25,306 infected and 1,620 deaths due to Coronavirus. During her speech, Gov. Whitmer announced that ^{she} had joined a consortium with 12 other governors to consider when the appropriate time would be to open the State back up. Which seemed ~~a~~ rather ~~to~~ poorly timed when you consider the State hasn't reached it's peak yet. As a matter of fact, the Governor didn't even mention where we are on the chart. Hell.. her charts aren't as clear or understandable as Gov. Cuomo's graphs. She's not very polished or inspiring. There are problem areas in this State and she didn't say one thing what's going to be done

about it? What the current status on equipment is? Or bed capacity and where that's at? Again, I'm a Democrat. I want her to succeed. But right now, during this crisis—she appears clearly overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of all the problems to solve. That's what I think.

Please find attached a copy of the MDOC's latest JPay Message. You may find it interesting. Again, like I've written, I'm making it my mission to keep you informed of what ~~our~~ our experience (or mine anyway) is: like on this side of the fence. From someone just watching and waiting.

Oh... and hoping not to end up on the freezer floor as well.

Submitted,

J. Copeman

April 14, 2020