



POST OFFICE BOX 110034 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11211

Updates for September 22nd

7 Sept - New Writing & Updates From Eric King

The appearance of the following poem in Hard Crackers, a journal of examining ordinary people striving to improve the world.

MORE:

We are midway through Black August and I've been doing lots of thinking, fasting, and trying to grow as a person and as a radical anarchist. Lots of fitness, reading, mentally taking stock.

This is my third Black August in SHU. I was thrown into segregation two years ago on August 17th and was kept within for a year pending prosecution, then after they brought these new charges, we've done another year pretrial. It's been a rough two years filled with restrictions, violence, abuse, but also love, strength, and friendship. Resistance is strong.

Last years Black August was spent partially at USP Lee, where I met Thomas Smith (aka Mad Dog) a blood leader and revolutionary who was also participating. He had been in SHU at that point for 18 months pending an ADX transfer. We fasted together, had long conversations on resistant strength and what it means to be a revolutionary today. I still think of Mad Dog often and encourage everyone to write and send reading material into him.

This year I began with the basics, I fast to feel the hunger, to remember the pain and sacrifices of those before me, those fighting today. To fast I cutoff breakfast, eat a full lunch and then only half my dinner. And then I add another hour of fitness...this is difficult sometimes because the dizziness of the head trauma is always there, but I keep moving. Every chance I get to be active, I am active. Then mentally I've dedicated 30 minutes in the morning before breakfast, and an hour at night, to think about what this all means. What it means to be a political prisoner and how I can be an ally while inside. Also though, what it means to be a person, to be kind, to strive for decency in a world of repression and savagery. To be a good husband, father, and comrade.

Black August to me isn't just about George Jackson...It's about Jaan and Sundiata, Dr. Shakur and Oso Blanco...it's about Mad Dog and Sean Swain it's about everyone who dedicated their lives to their ethics and found themselves fighting for dignity and humanity. It's about those outside who will fight selflessly for us. It's about George Floyd but also it's about all of us who have learned that the cops inside don't wear bodycams...Supporters are our reporters. (btw can we get people to protest actual prisons instead of just jails? Shit is serious inside it can't just be overlooked, can it?)

I value Black August because it helps refocus my thoughts and energies. Reminds me I'm not the first to go through this, the hardest or longest. Reminds me of my privilege even within the terror they inflict on me. Since there have been prisons out there, there has been prison abuse and prisoners that have been traumatized, beaten, raped, deprived, killed. Prisoners have fought back, organized, and shown solidarity; gone on strike, resisted, rioted, fasted...Our resistance is long in history and powerful in memory and spirit.

My love goes out to the political prisoners throughout the country and the world, those who resist on any terms, those who have gone through it and been released and survived, and those in the street who won't let us be buried.

September 7th - September Update

It is pretty impossible to count the amount of retaliatory disciplinary write-ups since Eric has arrived at FCI Englewood that the prison has attempted to send to the FBI for investigation. These are some of the latest rejections that the FBI determined there was no grounds for prosecution.

In addition, the write-up that Eric received after he was attacked by an officer On April 3rd 2020 in the showers of FCI Englewood was not only rejected for investigation by the FBI, the BOP's own disciplinary system expunged the disciplinary write-up that claimed Eric assaulted this officer. The "court" within the BOP, that requires little to no evidence could not even proceed with the disciplinary process.

We would hope that since it has been proved beyond reasonable doubt that Eric had no part in his own assault the Captain and Warden will decide to actually investigate this officer's behavior towards Eric leading up to the assault and the complaints that were filed, as well as the harassment from this officer after the assault. However no one is going to hold their breath.

7 Sept - Consistency, Rhythm, Resonance: A Report From NYC & a Proposal for an Endless Summer

A report and analysis from New York on the recent wave of revolt and rebellion and why it has managed to continue past its initial explosions.

MORE:

On September 4th, a black bloc of roughly two hundred people stormed through downtown Manhattan, leaving a trail of barricades, broken windows, and burning trash in its wake. When riot police finally mounted a charge, the bloc dispersed as quickly as it had materialized. There were eight arrests. The next morning, the *New York Post* reported \$100,000 in property damage.

Before May 2020, this night would have felt historic. (The last black bloc in New York was probably in 2014, but one would be hard pressed to name when the last approaching this magnitude and intensity occurred). Today, it felt a bit nostalgic. "This almost felt like The Uprising!," old friends exclaimed, bumping into each other as the crowd dispersed. The fact that so much is still possible after so many months should be enough to shake off the despair so many of our comrades have lately fallen into. This is not yet the moment for despair, but simply an occasion to clarify our perspectives, sharpen our weapons, and perhaps catch our breath. This brief upsurge in activity provides us with an opportunity to hone our perspectives of the situation, and how we might build a revolutionary force within it.

On July 25th, cities across the country responded to a call for solidarity with Portland. The day revealed the emergence of a new layer of militants across the country. These actions were distinct from both the spontaneous rioting of late May and early June, and the mass social movement that followed it. They showed that, in many cities, a cohort had formed of people shaped by the struggle, and who were now getting organized and groping for methods to push the struggle forward and constitute a revolutionary pole within it. Many of them have few to no ties with preexisting radical milieus in their cities. While the identity of "abolitionist" seems to have as much currency as "anarchist" amongst these militants, they show little interest in either the policy proposals or coalition-building that preoccupied earlier abolitionist formations. This is perhaps why some have begun to refer to this cohort as the "new abolitionists."

In New York City, both July 25th and September 5th bore witness to a constellation of two hundred or so militants who have been developing a shared intelligence in the streets together and organizing themselves in crews for the last year. In the years immediately before and after Occupy, there were hundreds of anarchists in the city that would reliably respond to a call for militant action, but it has been years since this was the case. If these militants first made their presence felt on July 25th, September 4th showed that this layer is capable of taking its own initiative, and not simply waiting for external events. It further showed that the confidence and trust these militants have in each other and themselves is increasing.

Struggles either intensify, extend, and generalize, or else they exhaust themselves. In this light, the appearance of this militant cohort is a welcome sight. To effectively fill their role and to actually advance the struggle, New York City's new abolitionists will need to adopt consistency, rhythm, and resonance as their watchwords.

Consistency: These new militants will need to try to find each other, deepen what they have in common, and develop shared projects, perspectives, and debates. This is neither about building an organization or scene, nor is it about heightening sectarian feuds. Rather, it is about building an ecosystem of revolutionary perspectives with room for both debate and collaboration. A revolutionary force is not simply a fighting machine that manifests itself from time to time on the battlefield, but must also be a building, thinking, and living-force. The more circulation there is between points on a network, the more resilient the network is. In the lulls between action, the question will be what can be done to intervene with more strength next time. There will be lulls long enough that comrades will need to find projects to work on, building infrastructure and skills, to keep them organized and prepared over the long haul.

Rhythm: Cities that have kept the fires burning the longest have found a consistent rhythm or pace to their actions. This allows momentum to build up. But having a rhythm also gives the movement something towards which to orient itself. If there are hundreds in New York City that have begun to develop a shared tactical sensibility and a desire to act together, they are still waiting for others (crews with more credibility, resources, confidence) to take initiative. Having a shared rhythm allows for much broader self-organization as militants have a framework to take initiative within. Having something they can anticipate and plan around will allow much wider layers of the movement and city (those not already in the know) to participate.

Every struggle that has sustained itself over the last two years has found its own cadence of action. Portland, famously, has developed a rhythm of coming out every night since the beginning of the uprising. The Gilets Jaunes movement in France would converge in Paris for a mass action every Saturday. The struggles in Chile and Hong Kong last year similarly found their food in a shared rhythm. Daily actions may be beyond the capacity of our city's militant networks for now, but setting a weekly or twice-monthly rhythm may be possible. A bottleneck so far has been that the groups or coalitions that have called previous actions are unsure whether they have the capacity for more frequent actions. This could be resolved by an informal agreement between different networks to rotate responsibility for putting out calls along the same rhythm until that rhythm has been internalized by the movement.

Resonance: The only real power that struggles have is their capacity to disrupt society through direct action. To actually be disruptive, these actions will need to involve and resonate with more than just committed militants. How can this militant pole attract wider layers of society? In particular, how does the struggle extend to the hood?

At the highest points in this wave of struggle, young black proletarians were at the tip of the spear; its avant-garde, before they began to feel themselves marginalized and withdrew from the streets. Their initial presence, to some extent, can probably be attributed to the national mood: people all over the country watched the burning of the Third Precinct and looting in Minneapolis and wanted to do the same where they lived. But first, they had to believe it was possible; the spell of law and order had to be broken. For the first days of the uprising in NYC, a militant multiracial crowd proved themselves willing to take the offensive against police and property, thereby proving that doing so in that moment was possible. It was then that the black proletarian youth came out in a concentrated, organized fashion, storming Manhattan and looting in a dispersed way throughout the boroughs. While it is unlikely this would have happened outside of the national context, it is also unlikely this would have happened without the initiative of a militant minority acting within the city.

An intensification of the struggle will likely have to involve a new encounter between these black proletarian youth and these new abolitionists. Lacking organic ties, this encounter will have to be the product of each acting in a way that resonates with the other.

Through this developing consistency, rhythm, and resonance, through the encounter between the militant minority and the proletarian avant-garde, the contours of the party of insurrection, of anarchy, of communism, becomes legible. In the context of an economy staggering towards collapse, it is through this sequence of riots developing, intensifying, and generalizing, that the question of revolution will be raised in a meaningful way. The only revolutionary perspective today is thus: from riot to insurrection, from insurrection to communism. In this unfolding sequence, those of us who today don the ski mask to feel the warmth of the proletarian community have a small, but significant, role to fulfill.

It may be September, but this long, hot summer is far from over.

8 Sept - Solidarity with Anarchist Prisoners

Another report back from an action for the International Week of Solidarity with Anarchist Prisoners, this one from Paris.

MORE:

On August 29, 2020, we cracked flares, unfurled banners and made a photo in response to the solidarity call of ABC Belarus.

This initiative follows the rebellions against the government, the dictatorship and the imprisonment of fellow anarchists in Belarus. In the last few days, after the solidarity appeal of ABC Belarus, actions have bloomed on the usual information pages: Belarusian embassies and consulates in Paris and Berlin have paid dearly.

The week of August 23 to 30 was also the week of international solidarity with anarchist prisoners. We took the opportunity to send warmth and solidarity to all our compas behind bars: Carla, Soheil, Thomas Meyer-Falk, the compas affected by repressive operations Scintilla, Bialystok, Prometheus, Scripta Manent and the others, the two compas from the Park Bench in Hamburg, Francisco and Monica, all the compas locked up in Greece, Indonesia, the Philippines, the United States and everywhere else.

Solidarity also with all political prisoners, anarchists or not, here or elsewhere!

9 Sept – 77 Letters for Russell Maroon Shoatz

Maroon Party for Liberation are launching their 77 letters in 7 days campaign this #MaroonMonday for political prisoner Russell Maroon Shoatz.

MORE:

Maroon was our sensei, Fred Ho's comrade, and organized multiple campaigns to Free Maroon. We were successful in obtaining his freedom from solitary confinement, yet not from behind enemy lines.

As a commitment to Fred Ho (ibaye asé), to Maroon, and our liberation movement, the maroon party for liberation is launching this support letter campaign to wish him a happy b'earthday and to keep his energy and spirits up as we continue to strategize on ways to liberate our elders and freedom fighters. FREE THEM ALL!

Please follow the link below to submit your letter. We will print it out and mail it to him once we receive our goal of 77 to flood the mail waves and to fill his spirits with love. <http://tiny.cc/77forMaroon>

10 Sept - 3 Arrested for Alleged Felonies During De'Von Bailey Protest

Members of the Colorado Springs Police Department (CSPD), Fountain Police Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation conducted a raid at the home of Sherrie Smith on the morning of Sept 10.

MORE:

by Heidi Beedle (*Colorado Springs Indy*)

Smith is a local activist and former member of the John Brown Gun Club, a politically left-leaning, armed activist group.

According to a press release from CSPD, “Detectives from the Colorado Springs Police Department’s Metro, Vice, Narcotics, and Intelligence Division arrested three people in connection with the August 3, 2020, riot that targeted a CSPD sergeant’s residential home in the Pulpit Rock neighborhood.” Those arrested were Smith of Fountain, Charles Johnson of Colorado Springs and Lloyd Porche of Denver.

“[The police] came like a week ago,” said Smith during an interview with the *Indy* at the scene of the raid, “and my husband came outside and talked to them.” According to Smith, CSPD had identified her as being involved in an incident during the Aug. 3 protest in which a vehicle was damaged while protesters engaged with the driver in the Pulpit Rock neighborhood. The police, she said, wanted to ask her some questions.

Smith attended the protest while open-carrying a firearm, and she believes that also contributed to the raid. “They’re 100 percent here for our guns,” she says, “that’s what they keep mentioning. They grabbed me, put me in zip-ties. Made me sit up against the SWAT truck with my kids.” Smith claims the warrants indicated that there was suspicion of illegal activity, and that CSPD told her husband she “started a riot with a firearm.”

CSPD Sgt. James Allen told the *Indy* on-scene, “We’re just executing a search warrant here today as part of an ongoing, active criminal investigation. We can’t get into specific details. The case detective is inside right now.”

When asked about the presence of an officer in an FBI windbreaker, Allen responded, “It’s a joint investigation, that’s all.”

Amy Meyer, the FBI Denver public affairs officer, says, “It’s very customary for us to assist our local partners with investigations as they need assistance. If there is a federal component we would not be able to provide comment at this time. It isn’t common for us to comment on active investigations or even confirm or deny if there is a federal investigation.”

Smith believes the raid is a response to her activism and presence at recent protests. “It’s retaliation” she says. “My firearm’s legal. Every firearm we own is legal. I was carrying, legally. The protest was moving constantly — that’s the regulation for protest in a residential area. This is an attempt to scare me and stop me from what I’m doing.”

Smith was charged with felony menacing, felony possessing a dangerous or illegal weapon, felony engaging in a riot and additional misdemeanor offenses, according to CSPD’s press release.

A search warrant was also executed by the Denver Police Department for Porche, who also allegedly took part in the Aug. 3 protest in Colorado Springs. Porche was not present at his Denver home when police arrived to execute their warrant, but his housemates — three adults and one toddler — were.

“I heard the bullhorn and we all just huddled upstairs,” says housemate Mike Seers, “and then they started shooting these foam bullets through the window. I came out [of the house] first and they zip-tied my hands and led me away.”

An email from the Denver Police Department public information office said, “The Denver Police Department was executing a warrant for the Colorado Springs Police Department. Officers on scene gave repeated orders for the people inside the residence to exit, to which they would not comply. Less-lethal means were used to break some windows and gain compliance. None of the residents were injured during this incident.”

Porche was charged with felony menacing, felony engaging in a riot and additional misdemeanor offenses, according to CSPD's press release. Johnson was charged with felony attempted robbery, felony inciting a riot and additional misdemeanor offenses.

While several charges involve allegations of inciting or engaging in a riot, no dispersal order was given during the Aug. 3 protest. CSPD did issue a shelter-in-place order to Pulpit Rock residents during the protest.

CSPD's press release also noted, "we do anticipate additional arrests in the near future."

September 19th - Solidarity with the Political Prisoners of the Anti-Racist Struggle

The movements and member organizations of the International Peoples' Assembly make an international call for solidarity with the political prisoners of Denver, USA, arrested on September 17, for leading in the massive anti-racist protest movement that has taken to the streets demanding justice for George Floyd, Elijah McClain and other victims of racist police brutality in the United States.

In complex and repressive operation, four people who have helped organize large Black Lives Matter protests have been arrested: Russell Ruch, Lillian House, Joel Northam, and Eliza Lucero. They are still in jail, except for one person. All four face multiple felony charges and many misdemeanors (including the bizarre and ridiculous charge of "kidnapping"), which can sentence them to many years in prison.

These political prisoners have not committed crimes. They are being criminalized only for exercising their right to protest for justice and because they have worked closely with other activists and relatives of victims of police brutality to expand their cases.

Their imprisonment is a trap aimed at stopping the anti-racist movement in Denver, which is part of a wave of nationwide repression against the Black Lives Matter movement, promoted directly from the White House, in coordination with the governors and local police chiefs and police departments across the country.

Furthermore, this is a political attack against the entire international anti-racist movement. Therefore, it is essential that we mobilize solidarity with the political prisoners of the anti-racist struggle in the United States in all regions of the world, demanding the immediate release of the people arrested and the dismissal of the multiple charges against them.

10 Sept - Welcome home, Red Fawn!

Red Fawn Fallis is free!

MORE:

via Lakota People's Law Project

Last night, I and a few others joyfully met her at the airport in Bismarck to welcome her home. Over the past four years spent in prison, Red Fawn made a great sacrifice for all of us. Red Fawn was the person incarcerated the longest after our NoDAPL stand. She didn't deserve that. A well-loved Oglala activist, she served as a medic at our Oceti Sakowin protest camp before being targeted by intelligence operatives and falsely imprisoned.

As with Chase Iron Eyes, Red Fawn was singled out by law enforcement at Standing Rock — and, sadly, she wound up bearing the brunt of police and state anger over our resistance. Of course, we know the real criminals are the oil companies and those in government and law enforcement who aid and abet their destruction of Mother Earth.

I am, and have always been, proud to stand at Red Fawn's side. Though she's now back with her community, this cannot be called justice. While she spent years behind bars, DAPL has operated without adequate environmental review.

Always, the benefit of the doubt goes to white men and their industry, never to Native people who stand to protect the natural world. If we stop fighting, that pattern will never change. We must continue to protect our water, our sacred lands, and our future.

For those who continue to resist, we will be there with you and have your back. For example, we stand in solidarity with a civil lawsuit — Thunder Hawk vs. Morton County — to protect our freedom of speech at Standing Rock. We'll also continue telling the real and full story of our resistance. Right now, our digital media team is teaching a class at Loyola University in Chicago. Each of the 25 students is helping us prepare content for our DAPL Archive, which will ultimately be the most comprehensive storehouse of DAPL-related footage available to the general public, anywhere.

We remain ever grateful to you for your support. Together, we're creating a repository of information useful to resisters of every stripe: educators, journalists, attorneys, anyone who wants to apply the lessons of the recent past to what comes next.

What comes next for Red Fawn is re-entry in our culture after nearly four lost years. We intend to do everything we can to support her, love her, and honor the sacrifice she has made for all of us. We know you are in this fight with us. Please join us in welcoming our sister back by resolving to keep your heart open and your commitment to justice firm.

12 Sept - Trump brags about Bill Barr's DOJ killing: 'That's the way it has to be'

President Donald Trump praised the killing of Michael Forest Reinhoehl by a Department of Justice fugitive task force.

MORE:

by Bob Brigham (*Raw Story*)

He was wanted for the fatal shooting of Aaron "Jay" Danielson, who was a member of the far-right group Patriot Prayer, which had organized a Trump caravan through Portland. Reinhoehl had claimed the shooting was in self-defense.

"When police last week surrounded Michael Forest Reinhoehl, a self-described anti-fascist suspected of fatally shooting a member of a far-right group in Portland, Ore., the wanted man wasn't obviously armed, a witness to the scene said Wednesday," *The Washington Post* reported Thursday. "In fact, according to Nate Dinguss, Reinhoehl was clutching a cellphone and eating a gummy worm as he walked to his car outside an apartment complex in Lacey, Wash. That's when officers opened fire without first announcing themselves or trying to arrest him, Dinguss, a 39-year-old who lives in the apartment complex, said in a statement shared with *The Washington Post*."

Trump discussed the shooting during an interview with Fox News personality Jeanine Pirro that aired Saturday evening.

"This guy was a violent criminal, and the US Marshals killed him. And I will tell you something — that's the way it has to be. There has to be retribution when you have crime like this," Trump argued.

12 Sept - Demand Freedom for Ed Poindexter!

Ed Poindexter finally filed his application for commutation of sentence on August 17.

MORE:

At the August Pardons Board meeting, Dr. Topolski, a new supporter, asked the governor to expedite Ed's application because of the risk of covid19.

The governor said he wasn't inclined to let anybody "jump in line" (there are 49 other applications for sentence commutations) but he also said that didn't mean that Ed would not be on the agenda in October.

Please write a letter to the Pardons Board (and forward this), and sign the online petition:
chnng.it/vctskKv49k

Ed would be very grateful. We would also appreciate if you could send us a copy of your letter to:
freedomfored@gmail.com

Thank you so much for your decades of support for Ed, and for Mondo we Langa!

Ed's Story

In April of 1971, Edward Poindexter and Mondo we Langa, formerly David Rice, were sentenced to life in prison for the death of an Omaha police officer—a crime they did not commit. The two were targeted by law enforcement and wrongfully convicted due to their affiliation with the Black Panther Party, a civil rights and anti-fascist political group.

Nearly 50 years later, Ed is still in prison and maintains his innocence. He has earned several college degrees, taught anti-violence classes to youth, authored screenplays, and more. His last chance for freedom is to receive a commutation of sentence from the Nebraska Board of Pardons. At age 75, he is at high risk for COVID related health complications. He must receive an immediate and expedited commutation hearing from the Board.

Take Action Now

Write, email and call the Nebraska Board of Pardons. Request that they expedite Ed's application, schedule his hearing for the October 2020 meeting and commute his sentence.

WRITE:

Nebraska Board of Pardons
Post Office Box 95007
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509

*please email a copy of your letter to freedomfored@gmail.com

EMAIL:

ne.pardonsboard@nebraska.gov

CALL:

Governor Pete Ricketts: 402.471.2244
SoS Robert B. Evers: 402.471.2554
AG Doug Peterson: 402.471.2683

Sample Letter

Dear Pardons Board:

I am writing in regards to Edward Poindexter, #27767, who has served nearly 50 years in prison with exemplary behavior and many accomplishments. He is 75 years old and at high risk for COVID-19 related medical complications, which have been amplified by the increased COVID transmission rate among prisoners. I am therefore requesting that the Board expedite Ed's application, schedule his hearing for the October 2020 Board meeting, and commute his sentence to length of time served.

15 Sept - ABCF Warchest Increases Support to PP/POWs

Due to the tremendous support received as part of this year's Running Down the Walls, the Anarchist Black Cross Federation is now able to increase its monthly Warchest stipends.

MORE:

Effective in November, all 19 political prisoners supported by ABCF Warchest will receive \$50 every month.

It is imperative that we recognize that the ABCF was able to make this adjustment because of the support received by the larger community. For more information, please check out abcf.net/warchest-program

16 Sept - Department of Retaliation: Inside Missouri's Prison System

No surprise, but the Missouri Prison System has a sexism problem (among many others).

MORE:

by Ryan Krull (*Riverfront Times*)

Screw Up, Move Up

On July 12, 2018, April Hudgens, a corrections officer at Southeast Correctional Center in Charleston, Missouri, was in one of SECC's housing units when the inmate she was writing up for a conduct violation violently attacked her. As another corrections officer at the prison made a copy of Hudgens' report, the inmate sprinted at her and started beating her. He hit her once on the side of her face and she immediately fell to the ground. It took 30 seconds for the other officer to pull the inmate off. Hudgens needed to have the wound between her ear and the back of her head glued shut. This left her with post-traumatic stress.

But when Hudgens quit the Missouri Department of Corrections this June, after six years on the job, it wasn't because of the assault. She'd been working through that with the help of therapy. She says she quit because of the way her bosses made her life "hell" after she brought a sexual harassment complaint against a lieutenant corrections officer.

That's not surprising, say current and former corrections employees. Across Missouri's prison system, allegations of disturbing misconduct — and retaliation — are pervasive. Details of the accusations occasionally leak out through lawsuits and increasingly through anonymous Twitter accounts run by ex-guards and family of inmates.

During the past two months, the *Riverfront Times* has interviewed fifteen MODOC staff members and ex-staff members about the culture & conditions within the system of 11,000 employees spread across 90 sites.

They describe a department plagued by cronyism, in which employees in the good graces of administration can get away with serious misconduct whereas those who speak out against it are likely to be punished.

One corrections officer talked about being mocked and hazed because of a speech impediment, at one time put in a chokehold by his coworkers. Multiple people attested to wardens fixing promotion procedures to ensure romantic partners moved up the ranks. Time and again people interviewed used the phrase "screw up, move up" as a shorthand to describe the department's practice of promoting employees accused of misconduct to new positions in hopes they would do better there. The fifteen current and former employees stated this is all common knowledge in the department, but it is equally well known among MODOC employees that to file complaints with supervisors or otherwise speak out is perilous business. They described the majority of the corrections officers and other MODOC employees as upstanding but say the inability to remove the well-connected bad ones, particularly management, makes the job at times unbearable.

After Hudgens was attacked by the inmate, she stayed dedicated to the job, earning a promotion in 2019. Not long after, a lieutenant began commenting on how sexy she looked, she says.

"One day he said that it was a good thing I don't wear street clothes to work because he'd seen me in my street clothes and I looked sexy," Hudgens says in an interview. Later this lieutenant said something similar to Hudgens about her eating a pickle she'd brought as part of her lunch.

She laughed off the comments at first and tried to forget about them. Then, she says, the lieutenant unlocked a bathroom for her one day and made as if he was going to follow her in. Hudgens says she filed a complaint with the prison's warden, Jason Lewis.

A few weeks later, Hudgens received an email from Lewis saying he had spoken to the lieutenant who had apologized and wouldn't joke around like that again.

But Hudgens says she felt her claims hadn't been taken seriously.

A week later, according to public records, the lieutenant was promoted to captain.

"It wasn't fair. It was a slap in the face for me," Hudgens says. "That's what it was."

At SECC, Hudgens worked the overnight shift in the segregation unit, an area often referred to as a "prison within a prison" where offenders spend all but one hour every other day in solitary confinement. The inmates in the segregation unit knew Hudgens had been attacked and several of them mocked her for it. It was re-traumatizing. Then COVID-19 moved her children's school online, her husband got a new job working overnights, and what had been a rough shift became impossible with her family's new schedule. Hudgens says she went to Lewis and asked for a different assignment. She took a voluntary demotion in May to try to make it easier to get out of the late nights in the segregation unit. One night, as her shift was starting, she made a direct appeal to the warden: "Don't put me in seg. It's really messing with me."

The next morning she received a message stating she'd been approved for a "new" position: overnights in the segregation unit.

Hudgens says that her supervisors made it difficult for her to leave segregation in retaliation for her complaining about the sexual harassment. She vented her frustration in an email to her state representative, which led to a Zoom meeting with Anne Precythe, the director of corrections in Missouri, and Precythe's second-in-command, Division of Adult Services Director Jeff Norman.

Precythe took charge of the 11,000-employee department in 2016, appointed by then-governor Eric Greitens, who said at the time, "Missouri's Department of Corrections is broken, and ... our corrections officers struggle in a culture of harassment and neglect, in a department with low morale and shockingly high turnover."

The day Precythe was officially made MODOC's director she appeared before a committee of state representatives who had been investigating allegations of harassment in the department. Precythe promised "a new day," "a new direction" and "a new culture." Soon thereafter she issued a memo outlining a zero tolerance policy for employee harassment. "Any allegations of improper behavior in the workplace will be swiftly investigated and appropriate sanctions will be administered to true wrongdoers," she wrote.

The Zoom call wasn't Hudgens' first time meeting Precythe. In 2019, Hudgens says the director came to SECC for a town hall with employees. She remembers Precythe saying that there wasn't any "good old boys" system in her DOC. Hudgens also remembers one of her coworkers politely challenged the director on this point. Hudgens says that coworker was later written up with a violation for doing so.

On that Zoom call, Precythe and Norman listened politely to Hudgens' concerns about her harassment claim not being taken seriously, then took no action. Nothing changed in SECC.

Well, almost nothing.

In May, Jason Lewis, the warden, was promoted to deputy division director, a position that oversees the management of multiple prisons.

Hudgens says it was "devastating" to see the man who had harassed her and the boss who had swept it under the rug move up in the department. To her, it was just two more examples of "screw up, move up." The following month she quit.

The underground complaint system

Her first official day on the job, Precythe said she wanted to shake up the ways that employees moved up through the department's ranks. When it came to promotions, she wanted less emphasis on seniority, stating, "I do not subscribe to the next-in-line promotional opportunity ... I am all about taking a two-year employee over an eighteen-year employee all day long."

The following year, Governor Mike Parson signed into law SB 1007, which made state workers "at will" employees, giving MODOC more freedom in promotion, hiring and firing.

Employees say that even before the new law, many MODOC wardens wrote up inconvenient employees for violations seemingly concocted from thin air then used those blemishes on their records as reasons for dismissal. Jerry Govreau, a former employee at Bonne Terre, says he was written up and later fired for "over familiarity" with inmates. Paperwork viewed by the RFT showed that one of Govreau's specific infractions was allowing inmates to call him "Mr. G" when they struggled to pronounce his Francophone last name. Govreau says that the real reason for his termination was a complaint he filed against his supervisor. The "over familiarity" infraction, employees say, is what supervisors resort to when they want to fire someone who hasn't done anything wrong. Another current corrections officer says that he recently picked up a violation for "over familiarity" for handing an inmate official documents related to offender work duties. Prior to 2018, employees like Govreau could file a grievance and, however slim, had a chance for redress and to get their jobs back. Due to SB 1007, that is now gone.

Tim Cutt, the executive director of the Missouri Corrections Officers Association, a union, said that SB 1007 also gutted the grievance system for MODOC employees. "As of August 2018, there is no process to redress employee grievances," he says. "It's a horrible situation. Retaliation has always been an issue, but the grievance process kept it in check. Now it's running rampant and employees can't do anything about it, except call this hotline."

The hotline Cutt refers to is the 24-hour "C.L.E.A.R." line, another of Precythe's initiatives, created as a way for employees to report workplace issues and misconduct.

MODOC spokesperson Karen Pojmann says the hotline is totally anonymous and that "all complaints are addressed by trained human relations officers and resolved through conversation, mediation or investigations."

According to Cutt, "Wardens use it as surveillance, a way to know who is talking bad about them."

Joni Light made no secret of what she thought about her employers when she talked to Fox 2's Chris Hayes in 2018. She'd been with the MODOC for twenty years when she went on the record with the TV reporter about the hostile work environment she was experiencing as a unit manager at Farmington Correctional Center. When the piece aired, Light says, the department retaliated. A back and forth played out over months, but the end result was that in March 2020 Farmington's warden issued an order that Light, demoted to a corrections officer, was now "prohibited entry into Farmington Correctional Center and entering all department premises." Light says that as far as she knows she's the only person to be banned from all Missouri prisons (she wonders what would happen if she were to be sentenced to hard time), and this is something of a point of pride for her. The warden's notice banning her hangs on her fridge.

A lack of faith in official channels (and, as Light's story shows, a reason to be leery of official media) has led to unorthodox ways of whistle blowing taking root among the ranks of the MODOC. Since at least 2017, the anonymously published Hard Facts Newsletter: MO DOC Underground Publication has arrived regularly in the mailboxes of an unknown number of staff. The newsletters, several editions of which have been obtained by the RFT, report on rigged promotions, covered-up harassment complaints and staffing shortages unacknowledged by department leadership.

Sherry Fish, who left the department in March after 32 years and now works for the Missouri Corrections Officers Association, says the workplace culture in the state's prisons has only gotten worse since Precythe became director. Officers with the right relationships who are accused of misconduct get off scot-free after a cursory investigation, and the officers bringing allegations are the ones more likely to be punished, Fish says. In other instances when connected officers are found to be guilty of misconduct they are "punished" by being transferred to a different facility, sometimes with an accompanying promotion.

Fish says that when she was still a corrections officer at the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Bonne Terre she reported a lieutenant who was sleeping with an employee under his direct supervision and who had rigged a promotion in her favor. Fish's complaint was ignored — and she was pulled from her post. A major also erroneously accused her of assaulting a fellow officer. Fish says video of the alleged assault, which showed her handing a set of keys to a coworker, ultimately absolved her, but that she still had to endure four months of being under investigation.

One day, not long before she left the department, Fish says she was in an outdoor area of the prison near some inmates when she slipped on a patch of ice and fell. "I'm laying there surrounded by offenders," she says. "And a captain who was nearby radioed someone on the other side [of the prison] for help, but he just kept walking."

Retaliation against corrections officers who call attention to misconduct is common, Fish says. "That's the DOC way."

Pojmann, the MODOC spokesperson, says Precythe inherited a department with serious widespread problems. However, under Precythe's tenure, Pojmann says, "the department has made significant and unmistakable progress toward its goal of fundamentally transforming the culture of corrections in Missouri, in part through deliberate and systematic approaches to combatting discrimination, harassment, retaliation and unprofessional conduct. Eliminating all unprofessional conduct within a workforce of more than 10,500 people distributed throughout Missouri might take time, but our movement toward this goal is yielding positive results, including declines in employee conduct complaints and civil rights complaints [as well as] marked increases in reports of employee satisfaction."

Caroline Giammanco worked for two and a half years as a teacher in the South Central Correctional Center in Licking, Missouri. Later, she wrote a memoir, *Inside the Death Fences*, about her experiences. She says that cronyism in MODOC is enabled in part by the fact that many of Missouri's prisons are in rural areas, where corrections work is the only work in town.

"These are like mining towns, in a lot of cases," she says. "If there's a power structure set up with nepotism and cronyism, even if you don't fit into it, you start turning a blind eye because if you speak up you could lose your job. If you lose your job then you move your family out of what might be your hometown."

She adds, "The resources that should go into rehabilitating inmates, preparing them to re-enter into society, instead go into these employees being paranoid that someone is going to stab them in the back."

Given how vulnerable MODOC employees become when they speak out against misconduct, it's no surprise how perilous it is for inmates to do the same.

In 2014, Teri Dean entered an Alford plea, conceding that there was enough evidence a jury might convict her for her role in the murder of a Southwest Missouri man, as part of an agreement with state prosecutors that her sentence would not be greater than 23 years.

Incarcerated at the Chillicothe Correctional Center for women northeast of Kansas City, she claims in a lawsuit she endured repeated sexual assault at the hands of four male corrections officers.

Dean's lawsuit outlines dozens of instances of the four corrections officers rubbing up against her in out-of-the-way areas of the prison, rubbing their faces between her breasts, groping her, digitally penetrating her and subjecting her to unnecessarily thorough pat-downs.

Dean's suit says that after Chillicothe staff got wind that she was contemplating legal action, she had legal mail confiscated from her and on numerous occasions was arbitrarily put into solitary confinement. While she was in solitary, a calendar on which she kept track of the dates of her assaults was taken from her and destroyed. She was pulled away from a visit with her son because staff told her she had an "appointment." The medication she takes for Crohn's disease was withheld from her.

One of the officers named in Dean's lawsuit, Edward Bearden, had been accused of sexual assault by four other inmates prior to Dean. Those four other women waited until they had been released from prison to make their allegations, saying that inmates who brought such complaints were put in solitary confinement.

Precythe is listed as a co-defendant in Dean's lawsuit, which claims she knew of the accusations against Bearden and allowed him to continue working in a women's prison. Bearden left MODOC in August 2018, at least seven months after John Amman, an attorney representing Dean, says the department was made aware of the allegations against him.

Bearden's departure came less than two weeks after he turned 62, the age when most of the state's retirement plans kick in for normal pensions.

The scandal-marred prison guard was a two-time state employee. Prior to being hired in the prison system in 2008, he had worked for eighteen years with the Missouri Department of Transportation. The exact circumstances under which Bearden left the MODOC are unknown, and there are different plans that govern retirement benefits, but it appears he likely walked away with a bigger pension by being allowed to stay through his 62nd birthday than he would have had he been forced out one pay period earlier.

When asked about Bearden, MODOC spokesperson Pojman stated, "The department does not decide when a staff member retires; the staff member makes that decision. Proximity to retirement age has no bearing on disciplinary decisions."

The "DOC way" costs taxpayers millions

As the Missouri Department of Corrections defends itself against Dean's lawsuit as well as the others stemming from allegations against Bearden, the department is also contending with a host of suits brought by its own staff for harassment, retaliation and discrimination.

The suits are different in their specifics, but each fits the pattern of retaliation that Sherry Fish calls the "DOC way."

Sana MacClugage is a Pakistani American who became a naturalized citizen in 2013 and began working at the Jefferson City Correctional Facility the following year. She alleges in a lawsuit that a coworker regularly called her a "terrorist" and a "Pakistani motherfucker," and after Donald Trump's election told her "she had better pack her bags because she was going to be 'kicked out of America.'"

MacClugage filed a complaint against the coworker and, according to her suit, soon thereafter her supervisor began shouting at her in front of other corrections officers and offenders. The suit also states she was directed to do tasks that were beneath her position, including collecting prisoners' laundry, which is usually work done by an inmate.

When MacClugage's complaint fell on deaf ears, she filed a charge of discrimination with the Missouri Commission on Human Rights in September 2018. Since then, according to public records, the coworker accused of calling her a terrorist has been promoted twice. The supervisor who MacClugage says retaliated against her has been promoted as well.

Wendy Dashner worked for MODOC for 23 years before leaving in 2019. A lawsuit she's brought against the department claims that prior to her departure Dashner filed an age discrimination complaint and then was soon transferred to work in the same unit as a coworker her bosses were aware was stalking her.

Kimi Moore, a probation and parole officer in the Cape Girardeau area, also complained to her supervisors about age discrimination and later, according to her lawsuit, when she helped a police officer detain an unruly suspect, it was Moore who was terminated for having a firearm with her during the incident. Moore has a concealed carry permit and has the authority to carry a gun as part of her job.

Paula Reed is also suing the department. She was a deputy warden at SECC, the same prison where Hudgens worked, in 2018 when she filed a complaint against a coworker who she says consistently harassed her. The coworker was subsequently promoted, whereas Reed, despite being a deputy warden, says she was relegated to secretarial duties.

According to Pojmann, the MODOC spokesperson, "The majority of these types of suits filed or litigated in recent years stem from alleged events that began under a different administration. ... In the last five years, 57 percent of the allegations pre-date Director Precythe's administration. Even among the current active cases, 42 percent involve allegations from before the current administration. Most suits reflect neither the department leadership now in place nor our evolving programs, processes and initiatives."

When asked, Pojmann clarified that a lawsuit alleging harassment that occurred before and during Precythe's time in charge would be categorized in the above statistic as something that occurred "before the current administration." The RFT requested the database of lawsuits brought against MODOC but hasn't received it. Most of the individuals whose stories appear here — including MacClugage, Light, Dashner, Moore, Reed, Hudgens and Fish — worked at MODOC, at least in part, after Precythe became the director.

And the litigation seems to only increase. Last month, a former Jefferson City probation and parole worker named Stephen Ben-Naimah filed a discrimination lawsuit saying that he was consistently ridiculed by his supervisor on the basis of his being from Liberia. The suit also alleges one of Ben-Naimah's coworkers "regularly called him a mass murderer" and attempted to sabotage his citizenship application. Ben-Naimah's suit says he filed complaints that went unheeded and was retaliated against for doing so by having an application to a different position discarded and his request for a transfer to St. Louis denied.

For years, lawsuits against MODOC have been costly to Missouri taxpayers, with the state paying out \$9.8 million in settlements from the general revenue fund in 2018 and 2019, according to the Kansas City Star. This January the state paid out \$2 million to Richard Dixon, a white intake officer who said he faced racial discrimination.

The state attorney general recently announced his office had been more aggressively litigating cases in order to keep the state's payouts as low as possible. However, with the state of Missouri's coffers in uncertain shape due to the coronavirus pandemic, it has been suggested that departments start paying their own legal liabilities.

If implemented, this change would be an expensive one for MODOC. Among its potential liabilities is a \$114 million judgment — about a fifth of the department's annual budget — awarded to thousands of employees who sued over unpaid wages. The jury attached a 9 percent interest to the judgment, meaning that for every month the suit stays in appeals, MODOC potentially adds another \$850,000 in fines.

Unending Consequences

Given the hostile work environment, dangerous nature of the job and the fact that Missouri has the lowest paid state workers in the country, it's no surprise the MODOC is struggling with staff shortages. Multiple employees who have worked at the department for more than a decade say that when they began it was the norm to be surrounded by coworkers with twenty years on the job. Now, one current employee at Bonne Terre says that he'd guess the average new hire stays for about two months.

In April, COVID-19 began spreading through Missouri's prisons, and after a recent spike, the department had recorded nearly 2,000 total cases among inmates and staff. The prison in Bonne Terre accounts for more than a fifth of those cases. Employees say that at Bonne Terre the pandemic has caused staff shortages to turn dire. One current corrections officer there says that "industry" employees who manage inmates at their manufacturing jobs are doing the jobs of corrections officers, as are "rec officers." I asked who "rec officers" were and was told, "They're PE teachers basically."

If you didn't think too much about this, you might assume that all these staffing issues would be good for inmates. You'd be wrong. Staff shortages jeopardize inmates' access to recreation and communication with the outside and can severely delay the delivery of medical care and food. In understaffed prisons, inmates have reported not being let out of their cells until early afternoon and being allowed infrequent showers. Inmate safety also becomes more precarious. A corrections officer currently working at Bonne Terre says that this summer one inmate committed thirteen sexual assaults in one week but no action was taken against him other than altering his meals.

Giammanco, the former prison teacher turned author, says that when it comes to prison reform, she refers to herself as a "hybrid" in the sense that she has worked in prisons but she also has an incarcerated spouse.

"It's important to fight for better conditions for employees," she says. "Because better conditions for employees makes for better conditions for inmates."

Because corrections officers spend as many as twelve hours a day in the same facility where offenders spend all day and all night, their fates are intertwined. Especially during a pandemic.

These past few months, offenders' families have complained that inmates who tested positive for the virus were not being properly quarantined. They say that inmates who required health care were unable to see doctors or get their prescriptions. Likewise, corrections officers say they didn't have proper personal protective equipment, and coronavirus protocols they received were often confused or not followed.

Both inmates and staff have complained that offenders who test positive are still being transferred from one facility to another. One inmate in Boonville says that facility recently had four or five COVID-19 positive inmates transferred there from Fulton.

"They got them all mixed in with us," he says. "They're not quarantined. It's not possible for us to be even really quarantined, to be really social distanced, because we're so close together. We're packed like sardines. This is an open-based camp, so we're like one foot away from each other. I can reach my arm out and touch the next [guy]."

Many similar complaints have surfaced anonymously on Twitter, which has become the preferred whistleblowing method in Missouri prisons. However, unlike the Hard Facts Newsletter, the Twitter accounts serve as outlets for both corrections officers and offenders' families, the former fearing reprisal if

they attach their names to complaints and the latter worried about public criticism being traced back to their locked-up loved ones.

Daily, sometimes hourly, the Twitter account @MissouriPrison reports information sent to it by inmates and staff. Oftentimes, MODOC will release an official statement only to have @MissouriPrison tweet information in direct contradiction. After the MODOC employees began getting in touch with her to tell her about what was going on in their places of work, the woman behind the account began posting that information as well.

"I'm overwhelmed because I never thought this would get as big as it's gotten, that I'd get so many followers and have so many people sending me information," she says in an interview. "I think right now, in terms of who's following this, it's about an even number of family members who have someone incarcerated and Department of Corrections staff members."

Despite the MODOC's stated purpose to "foster rehabilitation," all this dysfunction makes it more likely that people leaving the institutions will be changed for the worse. Several studies have shown that offenders released from prison suffer PTSD at rates far higher than average. The woman who operates @MissouriPrison says that her incarcerated loved one has PTSD from his time locked up. "He has dealt with so much in life that he doesn't get easily shaken," she says. "But this virus spreading through the facilities and the way the department is handling it is getting to him."

And then there are people like Lynda Miller, who came to the prison in Bonne Terre for the reliable paycheck. In June 2016, while working her shift as a correction officer, she says, an inmate used her "like a punching bag." While she was in the emergency room she got a "a hundred and fifty" missed calls and text messages from people worried about her. Instead of replying to each one, she says, she posted two photos of herself with a note about what happened. "I just took some pictures and sent it out and said, 'This is me, this is what's going on.'"

Miller says her bosses perceived the social media post as her trying "to take the shine" off the department. A few weeks later Miller was scheduled to have a surgery, and it was around that time she got an ultimatum: "They said that if I'm not coming to work the next day I need to come in and sign resignation paperwork." That was the end of her MODOC career and she's struggled to pay for the medical care she needs ever since.

Today as a result of the beating Miller has headaches, rapidly deteriorating eyesight and depression. She worries she'll be blind by the time she turns 60.

Then there's the anger, too.

"I've got some really bad anger issues," she says. "I don't like it. There's nothing I can do about it."

19 Sept - Pre-sales of *Certain Days* (Freedom for Political Prisoners) 2021 calendar have begun!

Our friends with Certain Days have announced that their new calendar is now available for pre-sales!

MORE:

We are happy to announce that pre-sales for the 2021 *Certain Days* calendar (OUR 20th EDITION) have begun! Order now and calendars will ship soon.

In the U.S., order from Burning Books in Buffalo. In Canada, order 1-9 copies from Left Wing Books. Order 10 or more copies (and raise funds for your own organizations and projects!) via certaindays.org

Certain Days 2021:

The *Certain Days: Freedom for Political Prisoners Calendar* is a joint fundraising and educational project between outside organizers in Montreal, Hamilton, New York and Baltimore, with two political prisoners being held in maximum-security prisons: David Gilbert in New York and Xinachtli (s/n Alvaro Luna Hernandez) in Texas. Founding members Herman Bell and Robert Seth Hayes were happily welcomed home from prison in 2018. Learn more about them at certaindays.org

Your group can buy 10 or more for the rate of \$10 each and sell them for \$15, keeping the difference for your organization. Many campaigns, infoshops and projects do this as a way of raising funds and spreading awareness about political prisoners. Use the discount code “BULK” to get 10 or more calendars for \$10 each. In Canada, you can order at our bulk rates at certaindays.org.

This year’s theme is “A Generation of Support Through the Bars” and features art and writings by Grae Rosa, Herman Bell, Veronza Bowers, David Campbell, Saima Desai, Damon Locks, Tom Manning, Monica Trinidad, Nidal el-Khairi, David Gilbert, Gord Hill (aka Zig Zag), Eric King, Jaan Laaman, Paul Lacombe, Joy Powell, Richard Rivera, Laura Whitehorn, Linda Evans and Susan Rosenberg, Xinachtli and more!

While COVID-19 makes its way around the world causing massive shut downs, prison officials make measly attempts at controlling the spread to the most vulnerable inside. Let’s raise the voices of prisoners, now more than ever.

Proceeds from *Certain Days 2020* were divided amongst Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association (Palestine), Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP), Civil Liberties Defense Center and the Rosenberg Fund for Children. This year’s proceeds go to some of the same grassroots groups and more.

26 Sept - ¡Filiberto Vive! South Bronx Freedom March for Puerto Rico!

WHAT: March

WHEN: 1:00pm, Saturday, September 26th

WHERE: Meet at Hostos Community College, South Bronx

COST: FREE

MORE:

In the Spirit of Filiberto Ojeda Rios and of El Grito de Lares, join us for the ¡Filiberto Vive! South Bronx Freedom March! Bring El Grito de Lares to the South Bronx! In memory of El Comandante Filiberto Ojeda Rios, let's take it the streets!

15 years ago: On Friday, September 23rd, 2005, the U.S. government assassinated El Comandante Filiberto Ojeda Rios, one of the leaders of the Revolutionary Clandestine organization known as Los Macheteros.

152 years ago: On September 23rd, 1868 in Lares, Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rican people rose up against Spanish colonialism, chattel slavery, and declared Freedom for the Puerto Rican Nation.

In the Spirit of El Grito de Lares and in loving memory of El Comandante Filiberto Ojeda Rios, join ProLibertad as we take the streets! Lares was a revolt of the people and Filiberto was a man of the people. Join us as we march through the heart of the Puerto Rican community! We will be educating, chanting, and demanding INDEPENDENCE, SELF DETERMINATION, AND LIBERATION FOR PUERTO RICO!

Bring your flags, noise makers, banners, and panderetas!