

CRACKS AT

HOTEL CALIFORNIA

EXPOSING THE REALITIES OF COOK COUNTY JAIL

Issue #1

Nov-Dec 2024

A modified interview with Vicki Willis (Alteriq Pleasant Foundation) mother of Alteriq Pleasant, who died in Chicago Police custody at Cook County Jail.

The last time I spoke with my son was July 19, 2022, and he called to tell me he got arrested. Somebody was trying to hurt him and he called the police. He was on State & Van Buren where he would normally hang out at. The last time I saw him was July 18th and it has been a living nightmare ever since.

I didn't even know he was dead until Mount Sinai hospital declared him dead, they didn't even reach out to me. They, being the investigator (I found out later that that was one of the same officers who was actually on the scene of the Laquan McDonald murder), called Alteriq's father who's been residing in Florida since I was 5 months pregnant. And of course he didn't have my phone number so he reached out on Facebook.

I drove to Mt. Sinai Hospital in the early hours of August 3rd. At 3AM he was declared dead. I didn't even know he was in the hospital at Mt. Sinai.

My mother and I had been calling up to Cook County Jail and they never bothered to tell us that Alteriq could have had some kind of medical emergency on July 21st. Cook County Jail lied and said that they did not have my contact information. I have Al's personal possessions and my phone number, and the number of the lady whose apartment he was staying in was in his personal possessions. Anyone who knew Alteriq knew that I was his mother, what my social media was, what my phone number was, that he was asthmatic, that he was a father, and that he was special needs. He would tell you that. So for them to tell me that they didn't have my contact information I knew was false.

Something happened to my son while he was with the Chicago Police officers from July 19 at about 1pm is when they arrested him, that's what they say, because he was not brought to Cook County until the next day with burns on parts of his body. The coroner never addressed or explained to me why he had burns. I reached out to congress people right? Robin Kelly: "I can't do anything because I work at the federal level, this is state and city level." I reached out to Danny Davis: "I can't do anything Ms. Willis because I work at the federal level, and this is at the state level."

I filed my complaint against the police officers with COPA (Civilian Office of police Accountability) who never responded to me until I went down there. One white guy said, "What do you want". I said, "I want to know what happened to my son while he was with the Chicago Police?". He said to me, "Well he died in the jail so we sent Illinois State Police to investigate." So we got police investigating police. Yeah, that makes sense. I have been calling and complaining on Toni Preckwinckle, she doesn't do anything.

I found out that there's been close to 370 plus individuals who have lost their lives under mysterious situations or circumstances in Cook County Jail in the time my son was born and went home to God, or in the last 27 years, from 1995 to 2022. After Al crossed over, there are several more deaths inside Cook County Jail. Around that time I was calling every office and telling them, "My son's blood is on your hands," because people get paid. I pay taxes right? And in the city of Chicago, we pay some of the highest taxes in the country. But yet, you can't get any information from anybody from anybody. The only reason I have anything that I have for Al is because there were some investigative reporters who decided to listen to me.

Continued on the back

I called lots of organizations, grassroots organizations, for help with assistance. People really don't want to mess with the jail because they don't get the video footage. It took the Illinois State Police 16 months to even look at the footage and they said, "Well, we have 170 some hours to look at." I said, "I'm not asking you for 170 some hours. I'm asking you for the 36 hours of what happened to Alteriq."

See, people think if you get arrested, you're scum and your family is scum. My son was there for a failure to appear in court and he didn't make it into day two. He came there (Cook County Jail) with blood on his clothes and nobody there stopped to ask what happened or give him medical treatment. My son had burns on him when I saw him. They were already two weeks old. Nobody stopped to look at that.

My thing is people inside of jails and prisons, they don't receive any kind of real, true medical treatment or care. And while my son was there, Cook County Jail, the people who work inside that building, and Thomas Dart, because he's the sheriff, he's the head person in charge, they don't take care of their inmates, the detainees, however they want to frame it to make it sound nice. There are rats and roaches in there. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) needs to go through there.

I really have been outside protesting, trying to bring attention to things that happen to people inside of the jail. The only reason Cook County jail even responded to me is because I was saying you all murdered my son and burned him while he was in there. They told me initially that Al had a heart attack. He's 27 years old. How do you have a heart attack? Then they said, "Oh we're sorry. He died of a drug overdose." But no drugs were ever tested in his system. For four hours, he's laying still. Come to find out there is a guard 5 to 10 feet away from him. My son was in the \$100 million mental health division. It was not overpopulated. He walked up to a guard and said something, and me knowing Al all my life, he would have said "I don't feel well". So my son needed medical treatment while he was there. Thomas Dart runs that jail, and Toni Preckwinkle helps him run that jail.

You can go to jail for parking tickets. That doesn't mean you're a terrible person. My son never murdered anybody, he struggled. But he knew that I loved him in his life. I'm not ashamed of my boy.

This is a human rights violation. What happened to my son? We have a right to life. We have a right to be treated fairly and equitably. My son didn't get that. It's not just about my kid, it's about everybody that my son represents. I want justice for Al. I want justice for everyone like Al, because we all could be Al.

I believe all families should speak up for their loved ones. Do not be discouraged. Do not be frightened. Do not be bullied into silence, because we all could be a victim, every single last one of us, regardless of your social class, your ethnicity, or your religious background. That's why I'm apart of this movement because I represent not just Alteriq Pleasant but 370 other souls who no longer have a voice. And if we don't speak up and save each other, who's going to save us?

**Find the full interview at
daretostruggle.org**

**Send us your story about Cook
County Jail. Email us at
[daretostrugglechicago
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CRACKS AT

HOTEL CALIFORNIA

EXPOSING THE REALITIES OF COOK COUNTY JAIL

Issue #2

Jan-Feb 2025

"Hell On Earth": A glance inside Cook County Jail by Dare to Struggle - Chicago

On any given day there are roughly 6000 people held in the Cook County Jail. Despite bail reform some have been held for more than a year, and many have not yet been convicted of a crime. Since October 2024, Dare to Struggle has been going out to talk to the visiting friends and family outside the jail, recently released inmates and some inside. Here's some of what we've learned:

ABUSE OF POWER

Correctional officers often raid inmates' cells, confiscating food and other items in the process. Some COs will look the other way if someone is getting jumped or instigate conflict by locking enemies up together in the same cell. For more than a year, inmates have been unable to easily get mail from their loved ones, often being confiscated and families having to flip the bill when things like books don't get returned. Some COs are known to be brutal and abusive, taking advantage of opportunities to physically assault inmates.

MEDICAL NEGLECT

When inmates tell the correctional officer they need medical attention, they are assumed to be lying and are often ignored. Inmates go weeks without getting their prescribed medications & inhalers causing a deterioration in their health. Some are ignored all together, with inmates having to deal with infections and injuries on their own.

Inmates with purple feet or walking around with broken jaws are not uncommon. Out of the 18 people who died inside the jail in 2023, at least half were due to medical neglect.

INHUMANE CONDITIONS

Mice, rats, roaches persist inside the cells. The jail is kept at a cold temperature and inmates are only provided 1 sheet & 1 blanket. With moldy showers, sinks, and toilets, inmates begin to get infections. Contaminated water makes people sick and spreads quickly. Your choice of daily food is baloney or PB&J sandwiches. Inmates rarely get to go outside (if ever) and are never taken to the recreation areas. Depending on the division, you may only get a couple hours out of your cell a day.

EXTORTION & MISTREATMENTS OF LOVED ONES VISITING

Families and friends visiting their loved ones inside are often treated like shit, looked down upon and made to feel like criminals themselves. Physical touch during visitation can be punishable by bans from visitation. Visitors can wait up to four hours to see their loved ones or get turned away during their allotted time. Families are spending upwards of \$400 a week putting money on inmates accounts so they can eat the food and get hygiene products from commissary at inflated rates. Visitors have to pay to park during the week and are sometimes ticketed while waiting for visitation.

COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT

When an inmate "breaks the rules" or if two inmates get into a fight, everyone gets punished. "Privileges" like tablets (devices primarily used to communicate with the outside) or the shared microwave (the only way people can eat food from commissary) are typically revoked for everyone in the division, and sometimes other divisions as well. Lockdown can be used for weeks, where inmates only get an hour out of their cell a day. These kinds of punishments only create tension and build animosity between inmates.

The only way to permanently end this inhumane treatment at Cook County is for people on the inside and outside to stand together and demand it. Dare to Struggle is going to the people out of the jail on the regular, collecting these stories, building contacts with family members, distributing our newsletter, and organizing people to stand up these every day injustices! Hit us up to get involved!



Interview with Lucy, mother of 22-year old inmate in CCJ.

My son was arrested June 2023 on an attempted murder. They arrested him and put him in general population, and that's where the harassment began. The inmates pick a fight with everybody that's coming in new, and when you complain about it, the jail's response is, "Well, it's jail". He was sent to Super Max Division 9, which everybody says that's the worst division ever. There were stories about people getting attacked, getting beat up, held for ransom. And he experienced all those things. My son's not in a gang so when they find out you're alone, the harassment gets worse. So one time he defended himself and fought back, and that's when he got jumped in the bathroom and they broke his jaw. He would call me maybe once a day and I didn't receive a phone call for about a week. I grew very worried and concerned so I looked online and found out he was in the hospital. So I went down to the hospital and it turns out they didn't have surgery for his jaw. It took about another week. He told me a horror story of when he went to the hospital wing, there were a couple of guys who'd be walking around with their jaws hanging off their face. They had gotten into a fight and their surgery wasn't scheduled until weeks away. I couldn't believe it. **Continue on back**

We are just trying to get him home. The lawyer situation is that they don't really want to work until they get paid in full, so they will drag out the case. Every time we go to court the lawyer says he never got the paperwork and the state says they sent it. Every court date. I know my lawyer is stalling to get paid. I wish I got a public defender, but then when you get the public defender you wonder should I have gotten a regular lawyer. Both are a waste. The evidence takes forever to come back. It took us a whole year to get a video tape of someone supposedly walking in and out of a red center. Which to me is totally ridiculous.

He's been in there for over a year and they still haven't found any evidence against my son. The police towed my car and took the radio out, saying their was GPS that showed where my car was during the time of the shooting. There was nothing found on the GPS. The dusted for gunshot residue, there was none. There was no bullet casings and there was no gun. To me, there's no evidence. They said my car was in the area of the shooting, which we live in the area of the shooting so of course my car would be in the area. But the lawyer is trying to tell me that that is damaging to his case, which is ridiculous because it's all circumstantial. He's trying to get my son to take a plea deal. It's a lesser sentence, reckless endangerment with a firearm, which carries 4 to 30 years and you can do 4 at 50%, so he would do at least 6 more months. But it would still be a felony on his name instead of them dropping the charges because there is no evidence. We feel like the lawyer is working with the state to convict him.

The other guys in there will say if they offer you less than 5, take it. Because to try to go to trial and fight it that can take up to 5 years. So they make it not to your benefit to even fight it, you will want to go with a lesser charge. And if he tries to fight the attempted murder charge and loses, his life is over. It's really unfair. It's a lose, lose situation.

Hopefully he will come home soon, but his mood is up and down. He gets depressed about being in jail, about the conditions, and being without his freedom. They just don't supply them with the correct things. When he first went in, he didn't have socks. His feet were black from the shoes he had there. They didn't give him underwear. If you don't buy these things, you don't get them, like toothpaste, toothbrush, t-shirt. Then it gets really cold in there.

If you don't have someone who loves you on the outside sending you money then you really suffer. Then the mail. I try to keep his spirits up and get him some books he would like. I have sent him 5 books, directly from Amazon, that have been confiscated. They don't even return them to me. They will give my son a slip of paper saying they suspect drugs contaminating the paper. If the jail suspects the books have drugs on them, why don't the call me or investigate me or say something to me? Anytime there is a good book I send him, it disappears. That's all they have in there. And it's just unfortunate they take away the last source of entertainment. They will return pictures we send to him, saying they think they are contaminated, but won't return the books. It's totally unfair. And it gets expensive.

He had his own apartment, his own car, nice things; he lost all of that. When he gets depressed, I can hear it in his voice and I try to give him a little pep talk. We come to visit him every weekend but it's hard. They always say, the county jail is the worst of the worst.

Cook County's Finest: CCJ CO Reginald Roberson, who beat inmate using handcuffs, wants to return to work. by DtS - Chi

On December 29, 2021, video footage captured the moments 29-year old Jamiah Stuckey was brutally beaten by Correctional Officer Reginald Roberson inside the Cook County Jail intake room. Stuckey was asking for a medical evaluation before he was beaten.

Roberson punched and shoved Stuckey back into the cell. Stuckey can be seen putting his hands up to surrender. Roberson proceeds to slide his handcuffs over his fist to use as a weapon and continues to beat Stuckey until other COs join in to detain the defenseless Stuckey. As a result, Stuckey had deep cuts along his face and head, requiring stitches.



Roberson was relieved of his duties and was later charged with aggravated battery and official misconduct. On November 22nd 2024, Roberson was found NOT GUILTY in a bench trial. Both Stuckey and Roberson testified. The judge sided with Roberson claiming self-defense and accused Stuckey of fabrication. Roberson, now a free man, wants to return to his job at Cook County Jail.

While Roberson's reinstatement remains to be seen, he represents the typical attitude toward law enforcement: Always "above the law", their lives elevated to superhuman status, while poor and oppressed people on the inside are deemed subhuman. This can be seen not only in their living conditions, mistreatment, and abuse at the hands of COs, but also when they go in front of a judge to plead their case, while abusive guards get off with no consequence.

However, Roberson is the exception. In the course of our social investigation at the jail, we have heard a number of stories of abusive COs who beat inmates with impunity. They are cunning and tactical, taking note of blind spots in the jail so they can't be seen on cameras. They had to make an example out of Roberson, to keep up the illusion that all abusive guards are dealt with by the jail.

The only way to stop abuse by COs is to get organized to end it. No amount of watch dog groups or oversight agencies will stop it. Mass resistance, on the inside and outside, will.

If you or your loved ones have been abused, assaulted, or mistreated by Correctional Officers at Cook County Jail, we want to know about it. Hit us up and share your story. Leave us a voicemail at 312-612-0258. Send us an email at daretostrugglechicago@protonmail.com

Antwand on Collective Punishment.

If there's a fight on the deck and they apprehend the two people on the deck, they still punish the entire deck. They'll put the entire deck on lockdown because of a fight. They will remove the two people fighting from the deck, but still punish everyone. I don't think that's fair. That causes tension on the deck. So now we on lockdown, some people was fighting, they messed up, they got them off the deck. But now you still want to lock us down? So now that creates more tension. So when they come back out, another fight happen or something else happen, because everybody mad. Then they come and they take away the games. If even one person does something, they punish everyone. I don't think that's right.

They put us on lockdown for a day, couple days, a week, couple weeks. Some times they will do half and half, where the top deck gets out for three hours, then the bottom. But we also got nothing to do. They give us tablets where we can go on and watch movies, make calls, play games, earn certificates too. But that's only if we get them because sometimes they will put us on tablet restriction where we can't use the tablets. Like if there's a fight, they punish the whole deck for other people's problems. They will take away the tablets or they will take away the microwave. And I think that's real unfair because we go to commissary to buy food the requires a microwave. So if there's a fight or somebody get caught smoking, you shouldn't take away the microwave for 30 days, because how we eating our commissary? You can't cook it. I don't think everyone should suffer like that.

And then they have gym rooms they never let us use. They never let us play basketball or go to the gym. they might take you outside, sometimes, depending on your division. But all that stuff they get money for like the gym they don't let us use it. They just use them for zoom court.

We already don't have a lot. They will come through like every week or every other week and do a shakedown where they take everything extra you got, food, sheets, tissue. It don't be right. Then we don't be getting a sheet exchange, we should be getting one every week. Their rules I just don't agree with.

People inside be doing everything else in there. That's why everything else is going on, like smoking, because their minds ain't focused on nothing else. Ain't nothing else to do. Just walking around the deck all day. TV barely work. Some divisions they have games. But there really no activities. And then they barely give you enough to get by in there, locking people down, creating problems, then people take it out on each other, steal from each other, and all type of shit. I really think something needs to change.



Fred, inmate for 13 years, talks conditions, SAFETY ACT, and violation of rights.

My name Fredrick. I've been locked up 13 years now. 12 of them have been in Cook County. As far as conditions, this place always been fucked up. There's always big ass roaches, rats, mice. We got all type of pests in here. The food they giving us here is nowhere near enough, let alone nutritious. We only get half the food we are supposed to. Other divisions will get things like fruit cups, apples, oranges, Division 9 gets none of that. I don't drink the food here because it made me sick. All I eat is bread and from commissary, I eat oatmeal. We supposed to have people, cooks, coming in to cook our food, not other inmates. They don't even have the proper products to sanitize the things they using to cook. We only get two bars of soap, no shampoo or conditioner, nothing to take care of our hair. Everything when it comes to our hygiene is null and void when it comes to Cook County. They might have it in Division 11 or 5, but Division 9 doesn't get it.

They have been giving people a little more time out because people have been killing themselves. But they typically lock us up in the cells. When you have cells like that, we are supposed to have call buttons on the cells so we can always call and officer or medical staff and let them know what's going on, if we are having a problem or something is going wrong. Even if our cellie is beating us or finna kill us. We don't have call buttons in Division 9, and that type shit happens.

A lot of people turn a blind eye to how to officers treat us. They don't know or understand a lot of people in here are doing this psych shit. Hanging themselves, trying to overdose, cutting themselves because the officers be playing mind games with motherfuckers. For instance, I just lost my grandma. It's very hard to figure out how your going to set up funeral arrangements to see your people. It's very hard to even get a visit. The way they doing it they be treating us like we have been found guilty already. Our people have to give up their names, ID's, emails, they want the smallest details of our families so if something goes wrong, we won't ever be able to see our family again. Like every time they sign up for a visit they'll deny you or say something wrong.

They playing with our mail, they taking it for no reason. If they suspect something, they take it, and a lot of times they won't even tell you. This lady sent me a letter I haven't received it in months, she sent me books I never received. I haven't gotten a yellow form saying they sent it back to Amazon or why they sent it back. They been doing this since I went pro-se and representing myself for awhile in 2020. They just taking my mail. I don't know if it's because of what going on around the jail or targeting me personally. But they do it to a lot of people.

The things people are donating to the jail like decks of cards, oatmeal, shampoo; they are selling at the commissary. Things at Stateville they be giving out for free, like a small shampoo packet, they are making us pay 80 cents. This place crazy man. There's no way for us to do anything because our grievance process also have to go through them. And once our grievances reach a certain higher up, they'll say "we'll look into it." Then no reply. We appeal it, they write back saying "response sent". So their is nothing we can do with the process on the inside. We need people on the outside to start raising complaints.

I'm probably one of the last ones here that's been going for this long fighting my case. Mostly other people have been in here 4 or 5 years, some 7 years, that haven't been to trial. It takes years for them to go to trial. They don't follow the protocols where your discovery is supposed to be closed within 12 to 18 months. And then they supposed to have a certain amount of time before they take you to trial. They really violating everyone's speedy trial rights. And when it comes to you speaking up for yourself, they really try to deter you. They got all power over us and can't be violated for the things they do to us. They don't be held responsible for violating our rights, they constantly violating us. It's going to take a lot of people standing together and do something about it.

The SAEFTY Act is supposed to be something to keep these people out of the situation I'm in. You being incarcerated for over the amount of time you're supposed to be in jail or held without bond, and no cash bail anymore so it's supposed to alleviate that and give people room to come home and fight their case from the world and be active in it. It was suppose to make people who haven't been found guilty able to live their life. It depends on the severity of your case, the evidence against you, and the safety of the people around you. They have 90 days to figure this out or they are supposed to release you with stipulations because you're innocent until proven guilty, not guilty until innocent.

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Therefore them just denying you SAFETY Act is saying we just denied you bonding out with cash. So everyone they say "we don't feel like you are a proper member of society, we just gonna hold you. You just got to sit here and wait." You just stuck in jail now. You wasting away. Now all it takes is for someone who's not trying go home to do something to you, and you do something to them, and catch a case.

I've been in jail all this time and still haven't been found guilty. I haven't caught any new cases. They find some stipulations to not put me on house arrest. I've applied for three SAFETY Acts, all been denied. I got some fighting tickets but people be getting killed or jumped on, and there's nothing you can do to avoid defending yourself in this place. Either you're going to be prey or you're going to defend yourself. The way they're forcing people to live in here, you don't have no choice. They even taking away the little things like playing chess and checkers. They not even letting people get books. This system is making people lose themselves and lose they mind.

CCJ Inmates & Their Families Demand DIGNITY & RESPECT Inside Cook County Jail!

1. We demand the right to a fair and speedy trial. Many inmates have been inside Cook County Jail for years without being found guilty of a crime. Many inmates are pressured into taking plea deals because of this. Due to the conditions of the jail, some people will catch more charges while inside waiting for their day in court.

2. We demand decent meals fit for human beings, everyday, for every prisoner. We demand clean drinking water free of contaminants which make inmates sick.

3. We demand adequate access to our loved ones inside and outside of the jail, and an end to the criminalization of visitors. We also demand an end to the confiscation of mail sent to inmates under the false guise of safety. Withholding letters & denying visitation is a form of psychological torture.

4. We demand the jail allow industries to enter the institutions and employ inmates. Many families are extorted by the jail to provide for their loved ones on the inside and are driven to the brink of bankruptcy. Inmates should be able to provide for themselves and their families.

5. We demand adequate medical staff and change in medical policy. The jail is prejudiced in its treatment of inmates and often denies medical care for those in need. There are often numerous "mistakes" made many times; the denial of medication and improper medication administered.

6. We demand regular use of the recreational facilities and time outside. We also demand regular educational activities inside the jail that stimulate the mind.

7. We demand an end to collective punishment. Inmates should not be denied "privileges" like use of the microwave or be placed on lockdown for days or weeks because of a rules violation. Collective punishment only creates more tension.

8. We demand clean and decent living spaces inside the jail. Inmates are denied sufficient cleaning supplies so they can properly upkeep their cells. Common areas, especially the showers, are not properly and regularly cleaned. There are units that get too cold at night where inmates are only provided one thin blanket for warmth. Some showers are scalding hot and can't be used.

Join the campaign to fight for these demands and more. Tell your friends, tell your family. Get organized and fight back.



DARE TO STRUGGLE

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EXPOSING THE REALITIES OF COOK COUNTY JAIL

Issue #3

March 2025

The Women's Edition: How CCJ Impacts Women by DTS - Chicago

For this month of March, and in honor of International Women's Day (March 8th), Dare to Struggle has decided to dedicate this issue of Cracks to the women affected by Cook County Jail. CCJ houses roughly 250 women inmates, hovering around 5% of the total inmate population. This issue will feature interviews from women inside and their families, highlighting their conditions and struggles we do not often hear about. Furthermore, CCJ negatively affects thousands more women outside the confines of its walls: the mothers, sisters, wives, girlfriends of the inmates themselves. They are a testament to Women's resilience and strength -- holding shit down in the face of immense pressures.

Over the last 6 months, Dare to Struggle has had a consistent presence outside the jail, talking to the people visiting their loved ones. The vast majority of these visitors are women, many caring for children while they head inside Cook County. As we prepared to publish Issue #3, we asked women how they were particularly impacted by the jail and having their loved ones taken from them. Here are some things we heard.

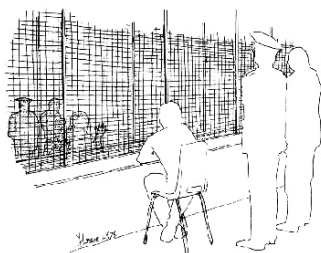
A Woman Inside the Walls of CCJ

I've been in Cook County for 7 months, before that I was in jail in Florida for 11 and a half months. I was human trafficked to Florida and had broke my bond because of I left the state. When I wound up in jail down there, I was extradited back up to Chicago. My time in Florida was nothing compared to this. This is the worst.

I was supposed to go directly to an inpatient DDT program for trauma. You know with some of the things that happened to me, I was human trafficked, deal with depression and trauma, but the judge remanded me here (CCJ) verses letting me go to treatment, stating I was dangerous. During my time in Florida, I received no medical treatment so my health had deteriorated drastically, I cannot walk without a mobility aid anymore. I was in better condition before I went in to jail, I used to run 3 miles a day and exercise, now I can't walk without a cane or walker. I was also severely underweight. The program would have helped me with physical & psychological treatment, but you know CCJ gets paid to keep people here so of course they would want to get rid of something like bonds or many of us wouldn't even be here.

Profiting from misery: as we noted in Issue #2, people supporting their loved ones inside the jail face a high level of exploitation from the jail itself. From putting money on their loved ones' books for commissary to phone calls, we have heard people spending more than \$1000 a month just get their loved ones basic necessities. Black and Latina women (who are usually relegated to some of the worst paying jobs our society has to offer) are forced to work more as a consequence of this; picking up more hours at work or finding second jobs, not only for their own survival and the maintenance of their loved ones inside, but oftentimes to support children or other dependents as well. "What affects them on the inside affects us out here," the wife of an inmate told us, "Sometimes his commissary gets taken by other inmates, and he can't get it back. So I have to put up more money. That's me flipping the bill twice." Similar stories of extortion have been brought up, one in particular of a mother whose son was threatened by inmates to get his family to put money on their books. Even in these instances, the jail is the one that ends up on top profiting from the entire situation, while the women who are struggling to provide wind up at the bottom. These same women are also exploited by the lawyers and courts, who drag out cases and demand more payment in order to keep them moving, dangling their loved ones potential freedom above their heads like a carrot on a stick.

Childcare: many of the visitors at CCJ are children visiting their fathers inside. Mothers are usually the ones bringing them in for the visit, some having to handle 3 or 4 young children at a time. Many families want their kids to visit as it's important time between a father and child (20 minutes one time a week), but some have conflicting thoughts. "I don't want my baby to see him like this," the mother of a toddler told us outside as the child slept in her arms, "It can be a lot of work too, bringing children here."



Since I got here I have faced discrimination and abuse from the COs. Because of my religion I was forced to pray in the bathrooms by guards. I wrote a complaint about this and was thrown in the hole for 20 days as retaliation. They never brought my correct tray of food there so I couldn't eat it, and in the hole they don't replace it, so I went 7 days without eating and ended up passing out on the cell floor. I have been sexually assaulted twice by COs since I've been here. I have been made to urinate on myself because I've been locked in a holding cell without a wheelchair and can't walk to the toilet. When I asked the COs for help they said "It's not my job to get you a wheelchair you entitled little bitch." Every week they raid our cells, looking for contraband, even though on my tier we never leave. How would we get contraband if we don't leave our tiers? They will confiscate everything down to the projects we make at art therapy. They do this to assert control over the inmates. There is no respect at all. It's unbelievable how much abuse we are under by the COs.



Even those who would prefer to leave their kids at home when visiting CCJ, many don't have the necessary childcare and have to bring them anyway. Depending on the scheduled time for visitation, children sometimes are pulled out of school early to see their fathers or loved ones inside (usually accompanied by a mother or grandmother who sometimes has to take off work early as well). With delays up to 4 hours inside the waiting room, children can easily get restless and sometimes can risk visitation entirely, if a child is making too much of a ruckus and the COs decide to kick the family out. The "literacy nook" in the 10th Division, a corner with toys and books for children, is often dirty. One mother explained to us how she doesn't want her child playing in the nook because he's anemic and can get sick from it.

Visitation: we have seen plenty of people (many mothers, grandmothers, wives and girlfriends, some with children) be turned away at the gates trying to see their loved ones. The COs will tell them a number of excuses: they didn't fill out the visitation form correctly, they're late, the jail doesn't have the staff so they can't visit today, etc.

Continued on back

In the women's wing, where I am in Protective Custody, we can't meet for programs so the programs have to come to us, which isn't often. The women in general have way less than the men in terms of programs. The men get together and write proposals for things they want, the women can't get together like this, mostly because of pettiness and infighting between the inmates themselves.

CCJ is a men's jail through and through. We have to buy men's clothing and products through commissary. The men have the numbers to band together to get programs, basics, and to enforce their rights. For women it's more isolating, the staff can easily play favorites, dividing us further. It's all more of an emotional thing for us and we take out our grief on each other.

As a woman in CCJ, I wake up everyday worried not just about my dignity as a person but as a woman. Am I safe from assault at the hands of male guards? Do I have access to feminine hygiene products today? How many times will the staff call me "bitch"?

Read the demands of families and inmates against Cook County Jail.



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How CCJ Impacts Women continued

Some families enter for their visitation only to find out the wait time is hours long, then having to leave to go to work or other responsibilities, missing their visitation. These instances have an immensely damaging affect both on the families and the inmates not being able to see one another. Mothers, girlfriends, and children can be seen in tears after these instances. We know that this visitation system isn't how it's always been. For instance, during COVID, people didn't have to sign up for a specific time. They could just show up. This is one of the most egregious policies CCJ holds over inmates and their loved ones.

Submission from a Transgender former inmate at CCJ

While I was in police custody in cook county there was a guy who I think was withdrawing and was wretching and vomiting for hours on end and the CO's refused to get him help, they didn't even care. Me and the other people held in there thought he was going to die.

Also, I am a trans woman and they put me with all the men. The guards would loudly announce that I was trans in front of other prisoners, they humiliated me with searches and talking about me being trans in front of large groups of prisoner's. They were making fucking "Deez nuts" jokes about me. My friend who was in with me heard them making fun of me while they did paperwork. Things like "I don't even know what to put for it, man or woman oh jeez" and laughing about it.

They also did not feed me for a pretty extended period of time (more than 10 hours) and also, they held me in the like, separate little fence cage by myself but with that, I had to ask permission to be let out of the cage to go to the bathroom or get water, and when I asked about this, the CO's said "oh yeah I'll ask someone about that" and then I never heard back. My food was withheld, not allowed to get water and not allowed to go to the bathroom when I needed. The CO's also seemed to insinuate that they could put me in with all the men whenever they wanted, as some sort of punishment or to scare me.

DRAW OR MAKE ART?

Help us by making art related to your experience at CCJ. Mail or email submissions to be included in future issues of Cracks!

Send us your story about Cook County Jail.

Email us at
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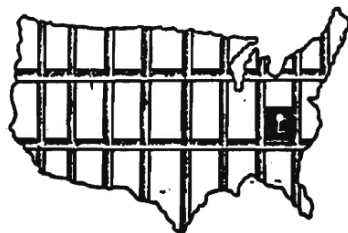
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When asking women about the impact the jail has had on them, a young mother visiting her boyfriend replied that the problems of women at CCJ are treated mostly as non-issues, responses to complaints are "non-chalant", and the COs disregard them. The common reply when families complain about CCJ: "this is just the way it is", and thus, the particular issues facing women is also "just the way it is." But it's not the way it has to be. We have also heard many stories of defiance from these women, mothers who snuck in edible food to give their loved ones or calling attention to their mistreatment, emphasizing their humanity. Women who raise their voices to the COs against injustice, unafraid to speak truth to power, regardless of the repercussions. These same women instill hope for their loved ones inside, coaching them to stay positive and focused in their dire situation.

Inmate's Mother Talks COVID at CCJ

Towards the end of January, I hadn't heard from my daughter for several days. When she finally called, she said she had tested positive for COVID-19, and that's why I hadn't heard from her. She said she was put in a room, handcuffed by her ankle to a bed, no toilet, no shower, no phone for three days, and she was in that room with somebody else that they claim had also tested positive for COVID. So I asked her, 'Well when you had to use the bathroom, what did you do?' She said she used to work for a hospital, so she said she knew how to break the bed down, do something to the bed, and make the bed move so that she could drag it with her ankles to the door to knock and let somebody know that she had to use the bathroom. That's so inhumane. You wouldn't even treat a dog like that.



My daughter has pre-existing health conditions, so if they swabbed her nose and said she has covid, they should have taken her up to the emergency room because she has preexisting conditions and heart problems. Even though it was covid, they should have taken her out to see what was going on, because she's prone to fainting, and if she fainted and hit anything in there that was metal or anything, she could have died. That was something that bothered me. At the end of the day, she hasn't been found guilty. The COs should still have to treat her and other inmates like human beings. I'm glad that, you know, I ran into you. I'm kind of glad about that because things do need to be exposed because inmates are still human beings. COs can't just treat anybody like that and get away with it.

Inmates Mother Talks CO Abuse

My son's facing a murder charge. He got locked up at Glenwood and was immediately moved to Cook County last September. He's never been in a situation like this. Someone was coming at him, and he defended himself. The person, unfortunately, lost their life, and my son got into this situation. Now, you know, it's costing 40 grand for a lawyer, and then I have to worry about his safety in there when I shouldn't have to worry about his safety, you know.

In Dare to Struggle, we seek to harness this defiance into organized, mass resistance to the policies and conditions people face inside and outside Cook County Jail. Only through this will the people be able to justice for their loved ones and fight these conditions. Only through this kind of resistance will women be able to get the weight of this system off their back once and for all.

Dare to Struggle is committed to standing with all those who are facing Cook County Jail and stand up against it. We seek to organize people inside and out against these injustices, turning this strength and determination of these women against the system. If you are sick and tired of CCJ, hit us up to get involved.



And it scares the hell out of me because I have a friend; I know, a lady whose son, maybe, like, two years ago, he was in the county, and he was killed in the county. He was beaten, and that scares me all the time because no one stopped it. It was either the COs that did it or they let that happen to him.

My son tells me that the COs just don't know what's going on in the minds of inmates trying to fight their cases. They come to the jail and take out their issues on the inmates, and then wonder why some of the inmates snap; you are talking to them any type of way, and you're doing all these things and verbally and mentally abusing them unnecessarily and then you wonder why they snap and they fight, and they do all these things when they already have a lot going on in their minds. It's like the COs don't have any control outside, so they come into the jail and abuse their authority. It's just not right.

My son's an artist, and he expresses himself in that way. He told me he felt targeted by the COs, and so he drew a target on the back of his uniform to represent that. He said that afterwards he got into it with one of the COs and got two write-ups. He was initially in Division 9, and they moved him to Division 11 for no reason. I think they punished him for expressing himself. He said division 11 is even worse than division 9. It's dark, it's gloomy and he still feels targeted. I try to keep his hopes up but it's hard. Books don't get in and that's the best way to stimulate the brain.

My son, he's my only son and my oldest. I only have two children, and it's really heartbreaking that he's in this situation. It bothers me all the time. I'm not in jail with him (physically), but I feel like I'm in jail with him. It's frustrating. But I believe in a higher power and believe my son will be vindicated.

Cracks At Hotel California is a newsletter that exposes the daily reality of torture, murder, and mistreatment inside of the Cook County jail. We believe that the people who can best tell the truth about what's happening are the people on the inside and their loved ones on the outside. This newsletter is produced by Dare to Struggle, an organization committed to standing with the people subjected to the horrors of the American nightmare. Send us your story...

CRACKS AT

HOTEL CALIFORNIA

EXPOSING THE REALITIES OF COOK COUNTY JAIL

Issue #4

April 2025

Tom Dart: CCJ's Great Reformer
by Dare to Struggle - Chicago

Cook County Jail (CCJ) is nicknamed "Hotel California," not only as a signal to its location on 26th and California but as an ode to the darker realities faced by inmates who "check in" or get locked up behind its walls. With abhorrent conditions, abusive COs, and inmates dying on the inside, for its predominately Black and Latino male inmates, life in CCJ is hell on earth. Yet whenever CCJ comes under fire for inhumane conditions, you can be sure there will always be a PR campaign that follows. On the heels of CCJ's most deadly year in recent decades with 18 inmates dying inside in 2023, Sheriff Tom Dart, the jail's head, has gone around in recent months telling the media about how great life is inside "Hotel California." Dart, who has run the jail since 2006, has consistently positioned himself as a great reformer, someone who is radically changing CCJ for the better. "Life is short," Dart said in a 2024 interview, "and I want to create something meaningful in this broken world that is getting worse and worse so that my descendants can one day say: 'At least he tried.'"

INMATES SPEAKOUT!

Letter from an inmate at CCJ

Dear Cracks At Hotel California, I do feel disrespected by CCJ. In many ways, I feel my rights have been violated. The living conditions at CCJ has been inhumane. The jail is infested with bed bugs, lice, mice, and roaches. I been on different tiers where inmates complained about bugs biting them. I seen so many individuals cut their locks because of lice they got from being incarcerated at CCJ.

In April 2024, I was bitten by a spider. I told multiple correctional officers who act like they didn't care. I wrote to medical but they said they never received my request. It took almost a week before I got medical attention. The infection started spreading, my arm started to swell like a balloon, and pus was oozing out. I had a bad fever and could barely move my arm. One officer finally took me serious and called medical to take a look at my arm, and I was finally given antibiotics.

The staff have no respect for the inmates. Anytime we complain about something, they tell us to "shut up," "don't come to jail," or "deal with it, this jail." Some times I wonder if we humans.



Dart frequently talks about the plight of inmates, an unfair justice system that people get caught up in, and how he's making the jail a place for people to change themselves for the better. From the same 2024 interview, he says he wants to make sure inmates' "long time spent behind bars isn't pointless." But his tenure at CCJ shows that Dart's "great reforms" are just false hopes designed to make apologies for a jail system whose function in society is to lock up Black and other oppressed groups and brutalize them behind bars.

In his 19 years as the head of CCJ, Dart has had millions of dollars in lawsuits filed against his administration due to life inside CCJ (conditions and human rights violations so bad the feds had to step in from 2010 - 2017), mishandled the COVID-19 outbreak which took the lives of at least 13 people from 2020-2021, and has been at the center of many cover-ups relating to inmates dying inside the jail (google Alteriq Pleasant or Cory Ulmer to start).

In the winter, some cells feel cold like outside. CCJ don't give tier workers proper utensils to clean to keep germs down. The showers have mold and one inmate caught a life threatening infection. The water in Division 6 have lead, you can see it in the water and even taste it sometimes. I don't feel safe because I smell smoke and notice there are no fire sprinklers in the cell or outside the cell.

CCJ are always short staff and the COs have to cross watch leaving tiers unattended for 45 minutes to an hour and a half. Anything can happen within that time frame. My cellmate has asthma, what if he has an asthma attack? It's hard to get the COs attention if they not on tier.

As inmates, we are always wrong in the CCJ staff eyes. They treat us as prisoners who have been found guilty of the worst crimes. We are detainees and not convicted prisoners, we are still entitled to our constitutional rights. CCJ has no respect for us inmates. They treat us like wild animals.

The food here is horrible and the commissary is way too pricey. \$1 for a noodle, \$2.50-\$3 for a bar of soap, and \$2 for a bag of chips. 90% of the food they serve here at CCJ is not edible. I've seen roaches and gnats on trays. I actually had a gnat inside my food. It's like we are forced to buy their expensive commissary which we got to protect from mice and insects. The 14 months I been here been a living hell.

To give people a "point" to living inside CCJ, Dart frequently touts three of his greatest achievements for inmates at Cook County: chess, civics, and dogs. His shelter dog program, Tails of Redemption, brings in local shelter dogs up for adoption to be trained by inmates in order to teach the inmates about "empathy." From our time talking to people both outside and inside CCJ, we have yet to meet anyone who has heard of this program, let alone participated in. We find it hard to believe Dart cares too much about empathy when his COs continually ignore pleas from inmates for medical attention, deny mail and visits from families, and throw people in the hole for speaking out. Dart also points to his voter registration drives as a kind of ground breaking reform for inmates, like any elected official has ever really given a damn about the oppressed or people behind bars.

Continued on back

Drop the Bogus Charges Against Cadarrow Patton-White!

Cadarrow Patton-White has been locked up in Cook County Jail (CCJ) for nearly two years, fighting multiple charges, including a felony. Like many young Black men before him, Cadarrow is facing all the brunt of the crooked US legal system from racist cops and predatory traffic laws to pro-police judges. Dare to Struggle has been fighting alongside Cadarrow and his family to demand that the bogus charges are dropped and he is allowed to return home to his family in Indiana. We call on those willing to stand up against the system to join Cadarrow and his family in this fight.

Driving while Black

On November 30, 2023, while driving through Chicago, Cadarrow and a passenger were pulled over by Chicago police for driving with an obstructed license plate. But by the end of this seemingly minor interaction, Cadarrow and his passenger were booked and charged with the possession of marijuana and an unlawful weapon. Cadarrow's case is an all too familiar account of the Chicago Police Department's (CPD) use of pretextual traffic stops as a tactic to "find crime"; their racist stop-and-frisk policy targeting Black and Latino drivers 3.75 and 2.73 times more than white drivers for the same traffic offenses.

Continued on back

Read the demands of families and inmates against Cook County Jail.



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Tom Dart continued

Another one of the Dart's favorite programs is the Cook County Jail Chess Program, which teaches inmates the game of chess and even has a team that competes against other inmates around the world in online tournaments. He really can't stop talking about it. Started in 2013, the program has allegedly engaged 3,000 inmates at the jail, allowing them to meet up to play weekly, and is about "trying to change people's mindset," according to Dart. He states he wants this program to expand, showcasing statistics that participants have a lower rate of coming back to CCJ. Dart forgets people in jails and prisons have been teaching each other and playing chess since forever, and it shouldn't be some big thing because some guy in charge gave inmates a chess board. While he pats himself on the back, inmates are thrown in solitary and denied visitation. Is this the changing people's mindset he's referring to?

Like so many "enrichment programs" at CCJ, Dare to Struggle has yet to meet anyone who has actually participated in, been offered, or even heard of these types of reforms at CCJ. These types of programs are essentially used as propaganda for the jail's public image, benefiting a select few inmates in the sense they get a little relief from the mundane life and horrors inside CCJ, while painting a picture to the public that the majority of inmates get access to these kinds of programs (which Dart claims are somehow transformational).

CCJ Inmates & Their Families Demand DIGNITY & RESPECT Inside Cook County Jail!

1. **We demand** the right to a fair and speedy trial. Many inmates have been inside Cook County Jail for years without being found guilty of a crime. Many inmates are pressured into taking plea deals because of this. Due to the conditions of the jail, some people will catch more charges while inside waiting for their day in court.
2. **We demand** decent meals fit for human beings, everyday, for every prisoner. We demand clean drinking water free of contaminants which make inmates sick.
3. **We demand** adequate access to our loved ones inside and outside of the jail, and an end to the criminalization of visitors. We also demand an end to the confiscation of mail sent to inmates under the false guise of safety. Withholding letters & denying visitation is a form of psychological torture.

Send us your story about Cook County Jail.

Email us at
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The reality on the ground is much different. The vast majority of inmates at Cook County Jail are essentially wasting away inside with little or nothing to do, subjected to the brutal conditions inside the jail (dirty cells and showers, freezing temps, shitty food, to name a few). If the COs are in a good mood, inmates will get to watch old DVDs, briefly access tablets where they can text loved ones, or play cards. But often, even these "luxuries" are restricted. Dorms are frequently locked down due to collective punishment, and inmates have to remain in their cells for days. The only enrichment inmates consistently have access to is the law library which CCJ is legally required to offer. Inmates report there is often nothing to do, which can lead to tensions boiling over in the form of fights. "Ain't nothing else to do," a former inmate Antwaud told us, "They barely give you enough to get by in there, locking people down, creating problems, then people take it out on each other."

Even reforms for less punitive treatment is a smokescreen. In a May 2019 op-ed to the Washington Post, Dart claimed that "Since May 2016, we have not housed any detainee in a solitary setting, not for even one hour." What Dart calls an end to solitary confinement, referred to now as the Special Management Unit (SMU), is a bold faced lie—covered up by a new name but no new conditions. Rather than spend 23 hours of the day locked in a cage, Dart is happy to announce that inmates can spend only 20-21 hours locked away (pending that tyrant COs let them out at all) and when they leave their cells, they're shackled from head to toe and often to a table. Aside from Dart's great reforms, inmates face isolation from loved ones (only able to call their families for 15 min per week) and are unable to access commissary food—forcing them to rely on the inedible jail food. Inmates can spend 29 consecutive days in solitary but this is not a celebrated restriction—any kind of solitary confinement is torture. The truth is solitary confinement is alive and well at CCJ.

4. **We demand** the jail allow industries to enter the institutions and employ inmates. Many families are extorted by the jail to provide for their loved ones on the inside and are driven to the brink of bankruptcy. Inmates should be able to provide for themselves and their families.

5. **We demand** adequate medical staff and change in medical policy. The jail is prejudiced in its treatment of inmates and often denies medical care for those in need. There are often numerous "mistakes" made many times; the denial of medication and improper medication administered.

6. **We demand** regular use of the recreational facilities and time outside. We also demand regular educational activities inside the jail that stimulate the mind.

7. **We demand** an end to collective punishment. Inmates should not be denied "privileges" like use of the microwave or be placed on lockdown for days or weeks because of a rules violation. Collective punishment only creates more tension.

8. **We demand** clean and decent living spaces inside the jail. Inmates are denied sufficient cleaning supplies so they can properly upkeep their cells. Common areas, especially the showers, are not properly and regularly cleaned. There are units that get too cold at night where inmates are only provided one thin blanket for warmth. Some showers are scalding hot and can't be used.

Join the campaign to fight for these demands and more. Tell your friends, tell your family. Get organized and fight back.

Cracks At Hotel California is a newsletter that exposes the daily reality of torture, murder, and mistreatment inside of Cook County Jail. We believe that the people who can best tell the truth about what's happening are the people on the inside and their loved ones on the outside. This newsletter is produced by Dare to Struggle, an organization committed to standing with the people subjected to the horrors of the American nightmare. Send us your story...

If Dart cared so much about "changing the mindset" and making people come out of CCJ "a little better," why is the jail taking people's books away? Why do the weekly raids take inmates' pictures of children and loved ones? Why does the jail frequently neglect people's medical needs? Why do they drain the bank accounts of people's families on the outside who have to sustain their loved ones on the inside? The problem with CCJ is not the mindset of the inmates, it's that the jail's role in society is to keep oppressed people locked away, out of sight, out of mind, and at the bottom. The reality is this: no amount of dog training, vote drives, or chess classes will change the system that keeps millions of people across the country continuously trapped inside the jails and prisons. Similar to the recreation areas, only used when the media comes to the jail but never for inmates to actually use, these programs are simply an illusion for the outside world to believe that shit is sweet at CCJ, or at least changing for the better.

The only way people can make real changes is when we defiantly step out against the system, expose the lies peddled by the likes of Tom Dart, and build a movement that fights back against the conditions and abuses at CCJ. If Tom Dart wants to focus on things that would improve the lives of inmates, he can start by meeting the demands articulated by inmates and families (outlined in the bottom of this newsletter).

Have you or your loved one participated in these programs? How was your experience? Tell us about it by writing to our PO Box.

Drop the Bogus Charges Against Cadarrow Patton-White! Cont.

Cadarrow's co-defendant would take a plea for the gun and marijanna in July 2024, but Cadarrow remains behind bars for these same charges. For Cadarrow, "driving while Black" has taken nearly two years of his freedom away and has prevented him from returning home to Indiana to be with his family. As Cadarrow prepares to go to trial and fight the charges against him, he must also contend with pro-cop judge: Domenica Stephenson.

Judge from Hell

Judge Domenica Stephenson cemented herself in the pro-cop hall-of-fame as the judge who acquitted officers Joseph Walsh and Thomas Gaffney alongside detective David Marsh of trying to cover up the brutal police murder of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald at the hands of Walsh's partner, officer Jason Van Dyke. While these three officers were merely lambs offered up to slaughter by their superior CPD officers and career politicians to deflect their role in the larger cover up, the evidence against Walsh, Gaffney and Marsh should have pointed to only one clear verdict: guilty. But Stephenson thought otherwise. Not only did she acquit the three officers but she released a lengthy 28-page ruling touting their innocence. By her judgment, crooked cops should go free. Now Stephenson lords over Cadarrow. Rather than dismiss the bogus charges against him, Cadarrow has only two options: take a deal and a felony charge or fight. Cadarrow is adamant that he doesn't want Stephenson's deal. He wants to fight. But he can't face this nightmare alone.

Fighting the American Nightmare

Cadarrow is one of many inmates locked up in Cook County, pressured by our crooked legal system to take a plea, rather than fight their cases - ensuring he and other Black and Latino men get stuck with felonies that bind their future opportunities and tie them to this fucked up system. This only ends when those with the most to lose - those on the inside, like Cadarrow, and their families are given the support needed to fight back.

Stand with Cadarrow and his family. Stand with everyone facing the American nightmare!

7th District Guinea Pigs

In more recent developments, CPD has begun rolling out new patrol protocol in the 7th district that grant cops the authority to directly file felony gun possession charges as opposed to having to go through the prosecutor's office for approval. This initiative introduced by pro-cop State's Attorney Eileen O'Neill Burke grants cops the full power to pull over, search without warrant, arrest, and file level 3 and 4 felony charges. A predominantly Black and Latino neighborhood covering Englewood and Chicago Lawn, CPD is treating its 7th district residents as guinea pigs in an experiment to expedite their domination over people deemed the most disposable to society.

CRACKS AT

HOTEL CALIFORNIA

EXPOSING THE REALITIES OF COOK COUNTY JAIL

Issue #5

May 2025

INMATES SPEAKOUT!

A letter from Mark

I've been in CCJ since July 2024 on my first alleged gun case, but I'm currently charged as an "armed habitual criminal" which is 6 to 30 years at 85% due to my background. I would like to first add to the few claims I've seen as far as abuse of power by CCJ and state / court, inhumane conditions, collective punishment, medical neglect, extortion and mistreatments of loved ones visiting. Every division suffers the same conditions, I've been to almost all of em, 6, 11, 10, 9, and division 2 dorms.

Molded showers, mice and bugs in cells. Same food, cold from sitting for so long. We be shackled like slaves from approximately 5AM til we get to court around 9:30-10AM which is painful. Shackled every time we leave the building, for visits, court, Cermak (medical center). One person mess up, the whole deck, sometimes the whole building, gets punished.

CCJ STOLEN LIVES: WHAT HAPPENED TO SERGIO CORDERO JR.?

Sergio Cordero Jr. was 23 years old when he was sent to Cook County Jail in March 2017. Remembered fondly by his friends and family as a fun-loving guy who was just getting things in his life together. "He always had people laughing," his sister Yessi recalls, "People will always tell me 'We miss your brother.' He was the life of the party, that's just how he was. He walked into the party just his goofy self. He was always fun." Sergio lived with his sister throughout his teenage years and was more like a son than a brother to her she says. While inside, Sergio would talk to family and friends almost everyday, checking in on him and shooting the shit. He knew he would be home sooner than later, able to take care of his children and see his nieces and nephews who he had grown close to over the years. "A lot of people really miss him and still talk about him. I thought people were going to forget about him but my family and friends still think about him."

In the early hours of December 9th, 2017, two Cook County sheriffs arrived at the home of Sergio's mother to tell her he was found dead. They told her he had died by suicide in his cell. But the family was immediately skeptical. "We didn't believe them because he didn't have that much time," Yessi told us, "He didn't have any reason. He never suffered from any mental illness, never had any issues, wasn't on medicine, nothing. It was very hard for us to believe."

Our rights in court are being violated every day. Most gun charges are violating our constitutional rights to bear arms! We are being denied pre-trial release due to judges discretion of our backgrounds. I wasn't committing a crime, no victim, or any history of not coming to court, but got denied twice and am still detained. We're being provided bogus counsel from these same courts.

My girlfriend waits long past our actual scheduled visitation time. I've wrote grievances with no response, I've asked sergeants / white shirt officers [to look into] CO abuse of power, and nothing was done, not even an investigation, instead locked me in a cell and disregarded my complaint. I'm so mentally disturbed by the system that I really didn't have confidence in writing this letter due to the fact of no responses in past grievances and complaints. So I'm writing in hope of some help on our problems with CCJ.

We don't have bonds, we're being denied pretrial release due to our backgrounds. No proper food, hygiene, or humane living areas. We use the sheet we sleep on as a shower curtain. People died and killed themselves due to this place and the cruel punishment officers dish out. Help us please and thank you.



The family went down to the sheriff's office to get answers and try to find out what had happened to Sergio. After getting little help from the sheriff's office, the Cordero family started to look for lawyers to help them.

When they went to the jail to collect Sergio's belongings, they uncovered a note that was stashed in his things, wrapped around two woven cross necklaces that read: "He had this on when he passed away. Get a lawyer ASAP. They weren't doing their daily night routine!!" The family later received the toxicology report which noted Sergio had fentanyl in his system. "It's like how did that get in his system?" said Yessi, "He never did drugs like that."

But after some time looking for lawyers, showing them the note they received and the autopsy, the family couldn't find anyone who would go up against the jail. Eventually, they stopped looking all together. "I feel like this is going to be the rest of my life, always wondering because I don't know what happened."

Every year people lose their lives inside CCJ, at least 10 people died in that hellhole in 2024 alone. Inmates have died from medical complications after asking COs for help or being left alone for hours (in the case of Daniel Colon and Alteriq Pleasant). Inmates are placed in cells with people they shouldn't be with, and guards leave people alone for long periods of time or seemingly looking the other way (in the case of Raheem Hatter and Pedro Ruiz). Or in other cases, inmates dying at the hands of COs themselves (in the case of Cory Ulmer).

Read the demands of families and inmates against Cook County Jail.



JOIN
THE
FIGHT

EXPOSE COOK COUNTY JAIL'S LIES!

The people's tribunal of
Sheriff Tom Dart

Join us in putting CCJ's
head on trial for crimes
against the people!

June 1st, 12PM
2900 S California Ave

CCJ routinely reports inmate deaths as suicide, including outright medical neglect by their own staff and other suspicious deaths. Areon Marion, who died in 2021, was initially assigned to the psychiatric unit due to psychosis; he was moved to the maximum security wing where he was found hung after a correctional officer hadn't conducted a safety check. The family of Michael O'Connor, an inmate who Cook County Jail says died by suicide in 2023, have stated that his body showed signs of being beaten. It's also worth noting that COs had left him alone for an hour rather than the standard 30 minute rounding period. Trumell Holmes, an inmate declared dead by suicide in 2020, was looking forward to being home soon according to family, who adamantly deny he took his own life.

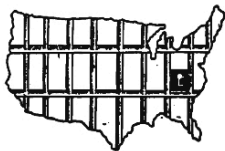
Sergio's story is all too routine for people locked up inside Cook County Jail. His life is one of the hundreds that have been stolen by this hellhole, and his family deserves answers. In nearly every instance, from the medical neglect to the outright murder of inmates, the jail itself is the primary culprit in the taking of these souls through the conditions of life they impose on those inside. Through neglect, mistreatment, and outright torture, Tom Dart's CCJ has given itself the right to impose the death penalty on inmates every year, people who haven't even been found guilty of a crime yet. Dare to Struggle stands with the Cordero family in their pursuit for answers and justice for Sergio and with all those who have had loved ones' lives stolen by the jail. In order to stop the Cook County death trap, people impacted by CCJ, on the inside or out, need to come together and expose the realities of CCJ. Families and inmates need to stand up for one another against the injustices they face and build a movement to put an end to the hell on earth known as Cook County Jail. Join us.

HELL ON EARTH: CCJ CO SEXUALLY ABUSES INMATE, USES REPRESSION TO SHUT HIM UP.

On May 1st, a lawsuit was filed against the hellhole known as Cook County Jail and its head, Sheriff Tom Dart, claiming a correctional officer had sexually assaulted a male inmate "on numerous occasions" while inside the jail in January 2025, and that the guard's supervisors were aware of this pattern. The inmate subsequently submitted a complaint to the Sheriff's Office of Professional Review about the alleged assault.

That inmate faced harsh retaliation and brutality for speaking up. Shortly after, a second CO encouraged another inmate to attack the complaining inmate in retaliation, beating him with a tablet. Then in late April, a third inmate was moved into his cell. Only hours later, the third inmate allegedly used toothbrushes and a wadded-up milk carton to jam the cell door shut, took out a concealed knife and threatened to cut out their eyes. He tied up both men with "shredded sheets" and assaulted them both while holding them in a chokehold, with the knife in his other hand.

FROM NY TO CHI: NY INMATES WRITE BACK TO DARE TO STRUGGLE - CHICAGO



On March 15, Dare to Struggle - Chicago wrote letter to inmates at Midstate Correctional Facility in New York who spoke out to the New York Times to expose the brutal murder of 22-year-old Messiah Nantwi at the hands of Correctional Officers on March 2nd. A group of COs viciously beat Nantwi to death. After removing him from the room, they made Nantwi's cellmate mop up the blood.

COs regularly retaliate against prisoners who report abuses and mistreatment. Despite this, inmates chose to publicly come forward about Nantwi's killing. Dare to Struggle wrote these inmates letters of support and encouragement for speaking out. We received letters back, including drawings of the scene of Messiah's murder, one featured here (he refers to as Messi). We asked these inmates: why did you come forward? Shortly after receiving these letters, two of the COs were charged with Messiah's murder. Here is a letter we got back:

Send us your story about
Cook County Jail.

Email us at
daretostrugglechicago
@protonmail.com

Write to **PO Box #25087,**
Chicago IL 60625

SUPPORT THE NEWLETTER! VENMO: @DTSCHI
READ ONLINE AT WWW.DARETOSTRUGGLE.ORG

Sheriff's staff members arrived to discuss the original complaint against the assaulting CO the next morning. The lawsuit alleges that the third inmate stood out of the investigators' sight with the knife and threatened the complaining inmate with consequences if he did not "make them go away as soon as possible." The sheriff's office said in a statement that it "strongly disputes the allegations" in the suit, which names neither the detainees represented in the complaint or the officers allegedly involved.

This story is just the latest of heinous abuses of power inside jails and prisons across the US. COs not only get away with abusing inmates themselves, but can easily use inmates to do their dirty work by turning them against one another. All the while, those in charge look the other way. It only becomes a problem when these abuses are exposed, but if kept under wraps, it's exactly how those in charge keep the jail running: through fear, abuse, and violence.

It parallels the stories of Pedro Ruiz in 2019, killed after being put in a cell with a known rival gang member, and Raheem Hatter in 2022, thrown in a cell after getting into it with a CO and being killed by his celly hours later. Those with the literal keys to the cells have the power of force against inmates, sometimes the literal decision of life or death. What happened to Raheem and Pedro could have easily happened to this plaintiff too.

March 26, 2025

Dear KB,

I wanna say thank you for reaching out to me. I wanna say I agree we need to expose this corrupt broken system and all those who are in it because they are just as corrupt and broken as the system.

My advice to all those who are too scared to speak up well you should have kept that ass in church it's too late to be scared. Yes I understand the oldest and strongest emotion is fear but what follows that emotion... Flight? Fight?

So what happens when you can't run you fight for survival. So why fear when you can't run and all you're left with is fighting for survival.

In the end, as simple as it was Mr. Brooks (Robert Brooks was killed by COs in a NY prison in December) and Messi it could have been anyone of us in this corrupt broken place where brutalization and violence is a norm by and used by correctional officers.

By you allowing that fear to rule you and not allowing you to speak up, what's to stop you from being the next victim in this corrupt broken system? If you don't stand for something you will fall for anything.

Why is it important to report horrific acts like the murder of Messi? Simple really to stop them from happening to anyone. To expose those who think they are above the law (correctional officers). To expose the world how corrupt and broken this system is. There is no rehabilitation just brutalization and violence.

Thank you KB if you would like to stay in contact you can call me on Securus Mobile using my name and DIN #

Thank you

Michael Hummel-Parker

ATTENTION CORRECTIONAL AUTHORITIES: PLEASE READ CENSORSHIP NOTICE

As the distributor of Cracks, we retain a First Amendment right to correspond with inmates, just as inmates retain a First Amendment right to correspond with the outside world. While a rational basis test is allowed for the censorship of publications entering a prison system, such allowance does not allow a blanket ban on publications entering because prison authorities do not agree with the message or content, which may be political or religious in nature. Censorship regulations must first be rational and impose censorship only in furtherance of "an important or substantial governmental interest not related to the suppression of expression" and relate to "legitimate penological interests." The federal courts have rules unequivocally that a prison agency censoring inmate publications and mail must provide the distributor or publisher notice of censorship. This notice must provide articulate reasons

Additionally, the story highlights the real repression inmates face for speaking up, especially when they go through the "proper channels" to resolve problems or abuses. Instead of addressing inmates concerns, the "proper channels" are used to identify specific inmates to go after. Because of the disunity among inmates, desperate people can be easily used against one another. Despite how some inmates may claim they run certain decks or sections of the jail, the COs are the ones really running the show, and those at the top have all the real power. Absent a movement against the horrifying conditions of life in CCJ, a movement that extends both inside and outside of the jail, inmates will be continuously trapped in this cycle with no way out.

We at Dare to Struggle are building this movement. Families, loved ones, and visitors need to be organized to support those who speak out and expose the crimes inside. Inmates themselves need to stop beefing over petty shit and need to come together against their common enemy: the jail and those who run it. The "proper channels" aren't saving anyone. The only solution is to build a movement with teeth outside of those channels. So there's two options: stand up and fight or sit down and take it. You in?



A drawing by a witness of the murder of Messiah Nantwi

for such censorship with specific references to the objectionable material. The distributor/ publisher must be given a meaningful opportunity to appeal the censorship to a person not involved in the censorship decision. Notice and opportunity are required by due process. We encourage you to carefully read and understand your agency's policies and procedures, as well as federal case law related to the censorship of incoming mail and publications addressed to individuals in custody.

If you have any doubt, you should consult your agency's legal counsel. Failure to adhere to federal law, Illinois administrative regulations and your agency's policies and procedures is evidence of malicious intent to violate our rights. PLEASE GOVERN YOURSELF ACCORDINGLY.

Cracks At Hotel California is a newsletter that exposes the daily reality of torture, murder, and mistreatment inside of Cook County Jail. We believe that the people who can best tell the truth about what's happening are the people on the inside and their loved ones on the outside. This newsletter is produced by Dare to Struggle, an organization committed to standing with the people subjected to the horrors of the American nightmare. Send us your story...

CRACKS AT

HOTEL CALIFORNIA

EXPOSING THE REALITIES OF COOK COUNTY JAIL

Issue #6

June-July 2025

We have written this special Summer issue of Cracks At Hotel California featuring a longer piece written by Dare to Struggle, our Mission Statement, and our CCJ List of Demands as a challenge for both inmates and their supporters on the outside to get serious about changing the conditions and stopping mistreatment at CCJ. We encourage all readers to respond to this issue of Cracks with any thoughts or criticisms, but more importantly, take up the call to get involved with us. If you dare to struggle, you dare to win. If you don't dare to struggle, you don't deserve to win.

For more than 6 months now, Dare to Struggle - Chicago has been going out to Cook County Jail, talking with inmates and their loved ones about the horrors behind its walls. The conditions people are forced to endure are deplorable. Food and water that make inmates sick, scalding hot showers, mold infested toilets, and freezing temperatures in the night time are just the start. Mice, rats, and roaches run rampant through the cells in nearly every division. And the list goes on. This alone would drive any normal person to the brink of insanity. But to make matters worse, if inmates wanted to try to distract themselves from this reality through any kind of mental stimulation, most are often only provided limited access to the law library. Classes and programs are considered a privilege only for a select few out of the 5000 plus inmates, who are paraded in front of the news cameras and become the face of CCJ when politicians and higher ups come in for a tour. For the vast majority of inmates, their days inside CCJ are spent doing nothing at all. Pictures of loved ones, drawings inmates make for things like art therapy, and books sent in from the outside are often confiscated. Inmates are often shackled like slaves for no justifiable reason.

DARETOSTRUGGLECHICAGO@PROTONMAIL.COM



WHAT HAPPENED TO ATTICA?

A call to action from Dare to Struggle - Chicago

On top of these conditions is the rampant, unchecked mistreatment and abuse from the COs. Inmates are verbally abused by COs trying to act tough on the daily. Inmates are punished in a whole host of ways by COs, denying them "privileges" like visitations, phone calls, and using the microwave. They throw inmates into segregation or the hole for nothing, while the head of the jail, Tom Dart, tells the world CCJ doesn't have solitary. If COs can't get their licks in on an inmate that's pissed them off, they can throw an inmate in a cell with their opps or bribe other inmates to attack them. COs not only get away with physically assaulting inmates but sexually abusing them too.

Every day is a humiliation ritual for those inside. Men and women can spend years of their lives living with this reality, while they wait and wait for their day in court. As the jail tries to break inmates mentally, the mental health they offer is a joke, if inmates even get access to it or are believed by COs when they say they need help. Inmates medical needs are often ignored or neglected, leaving inmates with injuries or infections to worsen, or for them to succumb to medical problems and die. When we step back, it becomes clear as day who the oppressed are and what the oppressive system is. Yet, inmates will often turn on each other instead, bringing in beef they have on the street with another inmate, picking fights over petty shit, parasitically extorting their fellow inmates, and at worst: raping, torturing, or killing one another.

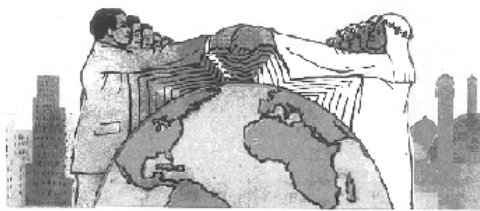
So what are we going to do about this? People inside live the above reality, a hell on Earth. Their loved ones on the outside hear the stories and worry about them. *What's stopping people from coming together and figuring out how to fight back?*

A lot of people have been conditioned to have faith in the system, they are hopeful that politicians will suddenly care about the plight of inmates in the jail, or appeals to their conscience will change their minds. There's also the fear of reprisal and COs coming after inmates in retaliation for speaking out. But mainly, it's a deep-seated nihilism that holds people back, the idea that there is no point in struggling and striving because nothing ever changes. This thinking is exactly what the jail authorities, the politicians, and the people at the top of society want us to believe. They train people in this type of thinking to keep people dependent on their system and from getting out of line. Part of how they have engrained this thinking in people's heads is stripping them of any historical memory of people standing up to oppression, and inmates standing up to the conditions they suffer under. The fact is, *there is a rich history of inmates taking a stand, fighting back against conditions and injustice, and forcing the system to concede to their demands.* Through difficult struggles, inmates were not only able to make significant changes in the jails and prisons, but also transformed themselves in the process, from a criminal mentality to a revolutionary mentality.

**DARE TO
STRUGGLE**

WHEN YOU DARE TO STRUGGLE, YOU DARE TO WIN.

There's a hidden history of prison struggles going back to the Nation of Islam (NOI) in the 60's. From its inception in the 1930's, the Nation saw the prisons and jails as an arena of political struggle. Coinciding with the Great Migration, when masses of Black people moved to urban centers in the North fleeing the Jim Crow South, police, prisons, and jails became the main tools of oppression against Black and other oppressed people. The Nation quickly identified this systematic oppression and its members inside the prisons began organizing themselves. As the prison populations grew, so did the Nation's membership and influence inside the prisons (Malcolm X was recruited while in prison by his brother, where he then met other NOI inmates and began his transformation from a petty criminal to a Revolutionary activist for the NOI). Muslim inmates faced discrimination from prison authorities in a number of ways, such as prohibiting prayer, banning religious texts, and neglecting to serve halal meals (the religious diet of Muslims). The NOI inside, able to transcend the bullshit and come together, took up early fights against these discriminatory practices through acts of resistance including hunger strikes, sit-ins, disruptions of solitary confinement, and litigation against prison officials.



Not only did they fight for the Black Muslim inmates, but also forced the hand of prison authorities to allow inmates to get access to legal texts (if you use the law library, you can thank the NOI for that), recognize and respect the rights of prisoner organizations, create educational opportunities and programs for inmates, and address poor living conditions. Organization on the outside allowed for the NOI to publicize these struggles to a wider audience among the masses of Black people through their newspaper *Muhammed Speaks*, exposing both the realities of prisons and jails and the struggles against them. NOI members left the prisons to become activists in the streets like Malcolm, transforming themselves behind the prison walls and leaving any kind of criminal life they may have had in the past.

ATTICA MEANS FIGHT BACK!

In the 1960s-70s, the population in jails and prisons began to explode. Aggressive policing of Black and Latino neighborhoods in the cities coupled with unemployment, the growing drug economy, and continued racist discrimination, threw thousands of young people into the prison system. New revolutionary organizations, inspired by Malcolm's example, had emerged, such as the Black Panther Party (BPP) and Young Lords Organization (YLO), a Puerto Rican revolutionary organization. The politics of these groups influenced the great mass of prisoners inside, with the BPP even establishing its own prison chapters at the directive of BPP leader George Jackson. At this time, inmates across the board were more organized, whether it be on lines of religion, nationality, or ideology. In some instances, this would lead to conflict among inmates, with prison organizations operating more like gangs beefing with one another.

In 1971, inmates in the Attica State Prison in upstate New York rose up against the prison authorities, their poor living conditions, and repression of their political rights, exploding to the world they were being "treated like beasts." On September 9, 1971, 1,281 of the approximately 2,200 men rebelled against the prison authorities, taking control of the prison, and holding 42 staff members hostage. During the four days of negotiations, authorities agreed to 28 of the prisoners' demands, but refused to fire the warden and grant amnesty for those engaged in the prison takeover. The governor of New York, Nelson Rockefeller, refused to meet with inmates at their request, and instead ordered armed officers to invade the prison, massacring 10 correctional officers and 29 inmates in the process.

There are plenty of things we can learn from the Attica rebellion. The rebellion occurred during a time of intense political struggle across the US (and world) against the Vietnam war and racism at home. People were identifying with the people of China, Vietnam, and other struggles around the globe against colonialism and imperialism. Inmates leading the



uprising were steeped in this political climate and were organized along these political lines, having drawn up demands and engaging in political protest inside the prison prior to the rebellion. Lying underneath, the conditions of life in Attica were beginning to worsen. The prison, only built for 1,200 inmates, had reached a total of 2,243 by the time the rebellion had popped off, with inmates living on top of one another. In describing the conditions of life, historian Howard Zinn writes, "Prisoners spent 14 to 16 hours a day in their cells, their mail was read, their reading material restricted, their visits from families conducted through a mesh screen, their medical care disgraceful, their parole system inequitable, racism everywhere." All of this and more were the conditions that led inmates to revolt. So on that September day, when some inmates had an argument with a guard and COs later came to throw two of them into solitary, other inmates resisted and began the takeover.

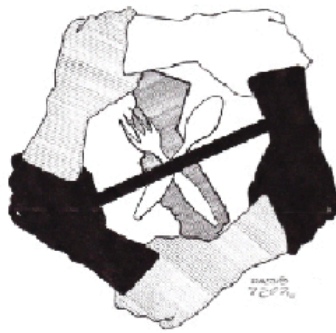
We remember Attica today because of the courage of the inmates, and because it shined a light on to the brutal conditions prisoners in the US face. During the uprising, inmates spoke out on live TV about the torture at the hands of COs, inhumane living conditions, and brutal treatment of inmates by both the prison and legal system. Attica sparked more rebellions elsewhere and a national movement of people on the outside to take up the cause of prisoners. It put the prison struggle on the map for the whole world to see. Not only did it force the system to make substantial changes to the treatment of prisoners and general prison conditions, but also to make changes to things like parole. And while the rebellion was violently put down, those inmates took a bold stand and made the ultimate sacrifice that inspired millions in the decades to come. *Today, Attica holds a special place in the hearts of the oppressed across the globe.*

THE SHU AND PELICAN BAY

The prison movement made both advances and retreats in the years following Attica. While the system was forced to make changes that respected the rights of inmates, it also took precautionary measures to try and prevent inmates from again becoming a force they had to reckon with. In the 1980s, California prison authorities began to massively expand their prison system. The so-called War on Drugs launched in the 70s-80s created an explosion in the prison population, with Black and Latino men being targeted in police arrests and hit with long sentences for non-violent drug offenses. California was no stranger to the prison movement and uprisings, and knew very well that if too many inmates got together, they would start to rebel against the system. One way to try and prevent this was California prisons' long time policy of dividing and segregating inmates by race, leading to stoked racial tensions inside the prisons, but increasingly, authorities began to use solitary confinement as a means to keep inmates divided.

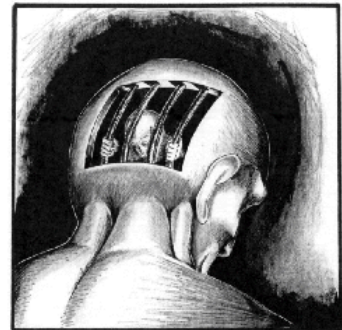
In 1989, California opened the Pelican Bay State Prison, a so-called state of the art prison with a new kind of indefinite solitary wing known as the SHU (Security Housing Unit). The SHU was designed to hold prisoners who were determined by authorities to be members of "prison gangs" and posed an "internal security threat" to the prison authorities. These inmates would be removed from the general population and placed in solitary for the remainder of their sentences, many in solitary for decades. Black inmates caught reading books like *Soledad Brother* or *Blood In My Eye* by Black Panther leader and prison activist George Jackson, or Latino / Chicano inmates found with drawings or symbols of Aztec warriors, would be classified as internal threats, transferred to Pelican Bay, and placed in the SHU. Thousands of inmates not only suffered from the decrepit conditions and abuse, but also the psychological torture of the SHU, having no human contact for years besides COs who would move, restrain, or beat them. Visitors couldn't even be in the same room as inmates. Usually having to drive hours to see their loved ones inside, families could only talk through glass to inmates for their one-hour visit, once a month.

Despite their solitary confinement, inmates in the SHU devised ways to communicate with one another, through coded messages



and passing small hand written notes between cells. After some years of planning, inmates in the SHU managed to organize a hunger strike in 2011, demanding an end to their indefinite solitary confinement, and another strike in 2013. Inspired by the 1981 Irish Republican Army (IRA) hunger strikers who fought inside British prisons against conditions and violations of their rights, SHU inmates saw the tactic of a hunger strike as a way to not only bring prison authorities to meet demands but also to get more public attention on the struggle of prisoners. News of the strike spread, and inmates in other prisons began to join in, adding demands like clean facilities, better food, and better access to books. At its peak, some 30,000 inmates across the state of California joined the 2013 hunger strike which lasted for approximately 2 months with different degrees of engagement. The strike gained national attention and put a spotlight on California's use of solitary confinement and its poor prison conditions. The California strike inspired others to take up the struggle even after it had ended. In 2014, over 1000 immigrants, detained by US Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) at the notorious Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington, went on a hunger strike for 56 days to protest their confinement and the horrific conditions in the facility, exposing people to the struggle of migrants captured by ICE who were forced into the same conditions as inmates in the jails and prisons. In 2015, due to the struggle of prisoners, California was forced to terminate indefinite solitary confinement and greatly reduced the number of individuals in solitary as a whole.

While horrific conditions inside California jails and prisons persist, the hunger strike dealt a blow to the system and forced it to concede to inmates' demands. Even under the harrowing and nearly impossible conditions of solitary, inmates were still able to organize themselves to fight back. Prisoners in Pelican Bay, who would normally be considered enemies, got together to draft an "Agreement to End Hostilities" document stating inmates would not fight each other. An outside support network helped spread the word to other prisons and raise the demand of prisoners in the streets. This kind of coordinated inside-outside strategy built a broad movement among different sections of society, a movement much needed and severely lacking today.



WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

All of the above mentioned examples are really one historic continuation of the prison movement. Organizations come and go, capitulate, and can be sabotaged by the enemy. Inmates who stand up and speak out can be retaliated against. These are the realities of the struggle to change the world and fight oppression. But one thing remains certain: no one besides the masses of people will make the kind of change we need. Inmates in the above examples were never begging for changes to be made, they were organized to fight against the prison authorities and the conditions they imposed.

Today, we are sorely lacking the kind of organization required to deal a real blow to the mass incarceration machine. However, we are not lacking historic examples and conditions that continue to force inmates into action.

Recently, in the Winter of 2025, inmates inside New York prisons stood up and rebelled against conditions in several prisons across the state, requiring the National Guard to be called in to stop the unrest. As far as we are aware, these rebellions were mostly spontaneous reactions to the conditions inside and didn't raise a coherent list of demands or have much outside support. *What is required is the kind of organization that can lead both inmates and people outside to really challenge the conditions and mistreatment prisoners face.*



If inmates at Cook County Jail and their families are ready to put an end to the misery, the horrific conditions and mistreatment they face, an organized movement is needed. This summer, Dare to Struggle is issuing this challenge to inmates and their loved ones to take up the call to build this kind of organized movement.

Even though the above examples were mainly about prisons, let's be real: Cook County Jail is a prison pretending to be a jail. CCJ is the largest single site detention center in the US, with many of its inmates spending years inside waiting for trial. The jail population is projected to increase under state's attorney Eileen O'Neill Burke's so-called "war on guns," where she intends to pursue detention and harsh sentences. CCJ calling itself a jail is not an excuse for inmates to bow out of organizing themselves, especially if they want shit to change.

The first step in building a movement that challenges CCJ is speaking out. Families and loved ones of inmates need to start publicly speaking out against the jail and the crimes they are a witness to. Tom Dart gets away with selling all of his "programs" for a small number of inmates when the suits and news cameras are walking through, but we need to expose the reality of the vast majority of men and women inside CCJ. Families need to defiantly oppose the bullshit standards and policies CCJ imposes like the denial of visitations or the confiscation of mail and care packages. Thousands of people in Chicago and in Cook County, former inmates and their families, have been negatively impacted

by the jail and need to be brought forward in the fight against it as well. People on the outside must identify and go after the people who hold the levers of power at the jail, namely Sheriff Tom Dart and his cronies. In the Fall of 2024, Dare to Struggle drafted a list of demands based on our conversations with inmates and their families that can be used to fight around. The outside needs to have meetings to figure out how we are going to move, how we are going to embarrass and expose the authorities if they don't meet our demands, and how we are supporting those inside. The outside needs to be built to support the inside, and begin to see itself as an essential component in the struggle against the jail.

Inmates at CCJ need to come together and distinguish friends from enemies. People come inside from different blocks of neighborhoods or different parts of the city. People are different nationalities, straight or gay, different religions etc. The CO's use these differences to pit people against each other. We all know the stories about COs throwing people in cells with their opps or people they have problems with in order to stoke this tension. But everyone on the inside has a common enemy: Tom Dart and CCJ. Settling petty beefs between inmates is essential, and the disunity only serves the jail by keeping people divided and fighting one another. Inmates should create a collective culture among one another, and unite against inmates in the jail who prey on others and don't stop when instructed. Inmates should be brought together on the basis of having a common struggle against



the jail. Get together with people, read and discuss the Cracks At Hotel California newsletter and other pamphlets sent in by Dare to Struggle. Let us know what you think. Send us reports about the conditions on your deck and in your division, what people are up against, and let's make noise together. If you are transferred to another jail or prison, spread this organization to the other places inmates might go to. If this is something you want to do, get in contact with Dare to Struggle and we will work with you.

FROM THE CRIMINAL MENTALITY TO THE REVOLUTIONARY.

Most importantly, inmates must transform themselves and commit to the struggle. Whatever people did or didn't do on the outside, everyone inside CCJ is encouraged to act and think like a criminal. The desperate conditions force inmates to turn on each other, rob, steal, and extort one another. For oppressed people, the entire system encourages and fosters a criminal mentality, a "get mine," "me first," dog-eat-dog world. This has got to change, and it can only change through an intense personal struggle with oneself. Before Malcolm became Malcolm X, he was a petty criminal who stole, robbed, pimped, and sold drugs (going by the name of Detroit Red). It was during a stint in prison where Malcolm was recruited into the NOI and began the process of deep, personal, and political



Photo of prisoners at Attica during the uprising, 1971

transformation, changing himself from Detroit Red to Malcolm X, who left the prison and would become a revolutionary leader that shook the system to its core. George Jackson, the revolutionary Black Panther leader in California, went into prison for allegedly robbing a gas station for \$71. He would enter the California prison system and learn revolutionary ideology, reading Marx, Lenin, and Mao, stating "they changed me." He would go on to be a central figure in the prison movement and was later assassinated by prison authorities due to his organizing efforts. And to get a little closer to home, in 1968 a young Puerto Rican gang leader named Jose "Cha Cha" Jimenez entered Cook County Jail for a 60-day stay for possession of heroin. During this time, Cha Cha began to read revolutionary literature and decided he would dedicate himself to fighting oppression. While inside Cha Cha stood up for other inmates, helped translate for Spanish speaking inmates inside, and educated inmates on their rights. Cha Cha left CCJ and would go on to turn his street gang into a revolutionary organization called the Young Lords Organization. He continued to fight against oppression until his passing at the beginning of this year.

This kind of transformation is not just personal, it's political, and one where people are transforming themselves not only to help themselves but to help others change as well. This transformation is about clarity: seeing what's really going on and helping others see clearly in the process.

We know we have our differences. But we have a common struggle against the people who captured you, serve you shit food, the people who humiliate you, the people who neglect you, beat you, and set you up. It's time to make real change at CCJ. You in? Hit up Dare to Struggle to get involved.



GEORGE JACKSON LIVES!



Dare To Struggle: Mission Statement

Over the last decade, powerful protests and rebellions, on the one hand, and the vicious cruelty of those in power, on the other, have laid bare the American nightmare that so many people are subjected to. Police brutality and the police murder of Black and oppressed people continue at epidemic proportions, even after promises of reform and the election of "progressive" district attorneys. Over two million people languish in prisons and jails today after Republican and Democratic administrations spent decades targeting Black and other oppressed people for punishment and imprisonment. Immigrants continue to be exploited in essential jobs, detained and deported, and vilified by a virulent anti-immigrant racism. American patriarchy, whether in the form of Christian fundamentalism, rape culture, or crass objectification, continues to subject women and LGBTQ people to subjugation, discrimination, and violence. And American empire rains down death and destruction on the world in the form of drone strikes and support for oppressive regimes, with the danger of future wars on the horizon. On top of these and other longstanding injustices, we confront sharpening existential crises. Capitalism-created climate change intensifies

hurricanes, floods, and wildfires that destroy homes and lives while threatening the existence of humanity. The oil industry has become the driving force in the United States' longstanding theft of Indigenous land. Gentrification is displacing working-class people from their homes and destroying Black, Latino, and immigrant neighborhoods. The growing ranks of homeless people are left to fend for themselves, or, worse yet, pushed off the ground they sleep on when it catches the eyes of real estate developers. People are struggling to pay rent, put food on the table, pay off debt and student loans, and get decent healthcare, with the government's (mis)handling of the COVID-19 pandemic only making these struggles all the more difficult. A massive fascist social base amped up during Trump's presidency continues to rally in the streets and commit violence in the name of white supremacy. And the warped culture of American social relations continues to give rise to mass shootings, often driven by fascist ideology.

Our starting point for stopping any of these injustices must be to organize sustained and audacious resistance based among the people under attack and uniting all who can be united. It's only when we dare to struggle that we can win victories and get a taste of our potential collective power. Dare to Struggle is a multinational organization open to anyone who wants to resist and stop injustice no matter who holds political office. We don't lobby politicians. We don't use insular activist lingo. We don't chase social media fame. We don't seek careers or corporate sponsorship through activism. We're committed to standing with the people subjected to the horrors of the American nightmare. We go to the neighborhoods facing police brutality, ICE raids, poverty, and evictions, talk to people about the problems they face, and organize people in collective struggle. We know that radical change only happens when people step outside of routine protest or expecting politicians to do it for us and take bold, collective action.

**CCJ Inmates & Their Families
Demand DIGNITY & RESPECT Inside
Cook County Jail!**

1. We demand the right to a fair and speedy trial. Many inmates have been inside Cook County Jail for years without being found guilty of a crime. Many inmates are pressured into taking plea deals because of this. Due to the conditions of the jail, some people will catch more charges while inside waiting for their day in court.

2. We demand decent meals fit for human beings, everyday, for every prisoner. We demand clean drinking water free of contaminants which make inmates sick.

3. We demand adequate access to our loved ones inside and outside of the jail, and an end to the criminalization of visitors. We also demand an end to the confiscation of mail sent to inmates under the false guise of safety. Withholding letters & denying visitation is a form of psychological torture.

4. We demand the jail allow industries to enter the institutions and employ inmates. Many families are extorted by the jail to provide for their loved ones on the inside and are driven to the brink of bankruptcy. Inmates should be able to provide for themselves and their families.

GET INVOLVED!

Email us at
**daretostrugglechicago
@protonmail.com**

Write to **PO Box
#25087, Chicago IL
60625**

5. We demand adequate medical staff and change in medical policy. The jail is prejudiced in its treatment of inmates and often denies medical care for those in need. There are often numerous "mistakes" made many times; the denial of medication and improper medication administered.

6. We demand regular use of the recreational facilities and time outside. We also demand regular educational activities inside the jail that stimulate the mind.

7. We demand an end to collective punishment. Inmates should not be denied "privileges" like use of the microwave or be placed on lockdown for days or weeks because of a rules violation. Collective punishment only creates more tension.

8. We demand clean and decent living spaces inside the jail. Inmates are denied sufficient cleaning supplies so they can properly upkeep their cells. Common areas, especially the showers, are not properly and regularly cleaned. There are units that get too cold at night where inmates are only provided one thin blanket for warmth. Some showers are scalding hot and can't be used.

Join the campaign to fight for these demands and more. Tell your friends, tell your family. Get organized and fight back.

THE POWER OF THE PEOPLE
IS THE FORCE
OF LIFE

**ATTENTION CORRECTIONAL
AUTHORITIES: PLEASE READ
CENSORSHIP NOTICE**

As the distributor of Cracks, we retain a First Amendment right to correspond with inmates, just as inmates retain a First Amendment right to correspond with the outside world. While a rational basis test is allowed for the censorship of publications entering a prison system, such allowance does not allow a blanket ban on publications entering because prison authorities do not agree with the message or content, which may be political or religious in nature. Censorship regulations must first be rational and impose censorship only in furtherance of "an important or substantial governmental interest not related to the suppression of expression" and relate to "legitimate penological interests." The federal courts have rules unequivocally that a prison agency censoring inmate publications and mail must provide the distributor or publisher notice of censorship. This notice must provide articulate reasons for such censorship with specific references to the objectionable material. The distributor/ publisher must be given a meaningful opportunity to appeal the censorship to a person not involved in the censorship decision. Notice and opportunity are required by due process. We encourage you to carefully read and understand your agency's policies and procedures, as well as federal case law related to the censorship of incoming mail and publications addressed to individuals in custody.

If you have any doubt, you should consult your agency's legal counsel. Failure to adhere to federal law, Illinois administrative regulations and your agency's policies and procedures is evidence of malicious intent to violate our rights.
PLEASE GOVERN YOURSELF ACCORDINGLY.

Cracks At Hotel California is a newsletter that exposes the daily reality of torture, murder, and mistreatment inside of the Cook County Jail. We believe that the people who can best tell the truth about what's happening are the people on the inside and their loved ones on the outside. This newsletter is produced by Dare to Struggle, an organization committed to standing with the people subjected to the horrors of the American nightmare. Send us your story...



CRACKS AT

HOTEL CALIFORNIA

EXPOSING THE REALITIES OF COOK COUNTY JAIL

Issue #7 August 2025

COMMEMORATE BLACK AUGUST 2025 AT COOK COUNTY JAIL!

A call to action from Dare to Struggle - Chicago

Black August (BA) is a commemorative month which recognizes the sacrifices and struggles of Black people in the ongoing fight for freedom and real liberation from the American nightmare. It's a month-long observance for reflection, study, and self-discipline, in honor and memory of those who came before us and showed us the path forward: struggle by any means necessary. Not to be confused with Black History Month, a system-approved, general celebration of Black people in the US, Black August is about resistance—how the oppressed have fought back against their oppressors, and must continue the struggle today. Having its roots in the prison movement, BA is a time for inmates to condemn the conditions of Black and oppressed people both inside and outside the prisons and jails, highlighting mass incarceration as

one of the primary tools by which Black people are oppressed by the system today. While it has its roots in the Black Liberation Movement, BA is significant not only for Black people but all oppressed people fighting for liberation, and has special significance for prisoners locked away.

August is a month that just so happens to be a time in history which contains many historic events important to the Black liberation struggle. From the beginning of the Haitian Revolution on August 22, 1791, when African slaves stood up and pushed out the colonialist French from the island, to the Watts Rebellion on August 12, 1965—a rebellion against police brutality which shook the US to the core—the month of August contains many significant events that capture the historic struggle of Black people against oppression.



The commemoration of Black August started in the late 1970s, when inmates at San Quentin Penitentiary in California organized the first commemoration to honor their former comrades who had given everything for the struggle, and the events leading up to the death of George Jackson at the hands of prison guards. *Continue on page 3*

A LETTER TO THE OUTSIDE

Written by a group of inmates in Division 11

The following is an excerpt of a letter written to Dare to Struggle from a group of inmates in Division 11. They have requested the letter be published in full (which you can read on our website, it is too long to fit here) to further expose the conditions inside the jail and the problems people are facing. The group of 19 inmates signed their names and booking number at the end of the letter. We at Dare to Struggle salute their bravery, them coming together, and publicly speaking out against CCJ. We will do our part to make sure this letter travels far and wide.

June 7, 2025

We - individuals here in custody at Cook County Department of Corrections (CCDOC) - are in extreme distress, fear, and in need of outside support to combat and help with the torture we endure on a daily basis.

We must popularize desires for justice and increase people's receptivity to the testimonies of the oppressed individuals in custody here at CCDOC, by recognizing embodied, unconscious and conscious structures of racial discrimination, violence, widespread fears of retaliation for practicing our Constitutional Rights, intensified forms of punishment, psychological warfare, inhuman treatment, superior oppression strategies, religious discrimination, and so on!!!

There are many issues we (individually and as a collective) undergo here at CCDOC that go underexposed. Within this letter are issues we experience, which are ongoing. First we want to provide a list of some key issues. Just to give a brief synopsis before we get into full detail.

We forego years of being here at CCDOC still awaiting discovery. There are individuals here in custody 12+ years, discovery still ongoing, and no charges have been verified. CCDOC is also known for holding innocent individuals for years, and IDOC (Illinois Department of Corrections) for 20+ years, only to dismiss their cases on false arrests/charges. We are being held against our will.

Continue on page 2

A Letter to the Outside continued

CCDOC is confiscating our mail. They will lie and say our incoming mail is saturated with drug paraphernalia. Now granted, drug paraphernalia does get into Cook County Jail, but it is mainly transported through and by CCDOC's own employed Correctional Officers, which has been proven. But the problem is they confiscate books shipped directly from Amazon, knowing we all know Amazon doesn't ship or produce drug paraphernalia products. We've even had Correctional Officers inform us their co-workers take our material home and some even sell them. We lose money. And these books aren't cheap. Some even range \$100+.

We are getting sick from the water and air here at CCDOC!

We receive in-person visitations where our loved ones - parents, grandparents, children, and spouses - come to visit us, to give support, inspiration, comfort, and hope. But CCDOC staff make them wait 1 hour and more only for them to see us for all of 15 minutes. And on top of that, they (CCDOC staff) disrespect our family and support systems. They speak to them with aggression, use profane language, and become argumentative, etc. And if a Correctional Officer had a conflict with an individual in custody, whether verbal or because of a written grievance against that officer, that same officer will target that individual's family who came in person, even to the point of ending their visit.

We don't get any proper hair products to properly maintain strong and healthy hair. Everyone's hair is falling out. People with full heads of hair are now bald. We can't maintain proper self-care here at CCDOC. And most people who are forced to cut their hair have become depressed!

The food here at Cook County Department of Corrections is very disgraceful, disappointing, and disreputable! People really need to see the food we have to force ourselves to eat to avoid hunger pains. You wouldn't feed your cat or your dog the food CCDOC provides. It's that bad. Literally, the rats don't even bother most of it. And that says a lot! The flipside to that is CCDOC has the funds for better and healthier meals. CCDOC gets paid roughly \$52,000 for every individual in custody per year. You do the math. CCDOC holds roughly 5,000 individuals.

Then to add to that, to get fruit you have to be on specific religious meal plans. Now why is that? We also receive hair in our food, spoiled milk, cold dinner trays, outdated snacks, and so on.

CCDOC commissary prices are extremely offensive and shameful. The prices for food here at Cook County Jail are 2x, 3x, even 4x the prices at the prisons. And here at CCDOC we haven't even been convicted. It doesn't make any sense! We've also attached Cook County Jail commissary pricing list, so you can see for yourself.

Can you PLEASE do what you can to get this noticed. Please! Life at CCDOC is cruel and inhuman. If this doesn't get exposed it will just continue. The world needs to know. CCDOC is a big business, formed by systemic racism, superior oppression, extortion, punitive punishment, and so much more. WE REALLY NEED HELP!!!

A SUMMER REPORTBACK FROM THE OUTSIDE

On May 18th, we held our first speakout against conditions and mistreatment at CCJ in front of Division 10, where families and loved ones go for visitation. We chose this location to bring the fight directly to the jail, in the face of the guards, and to encourage participation from families and friends headed to or leaving from visitation. A speakout is essentially a kind of rally where people are encouraged to take the mic and "speak bitterness" (share their stories and condemnation directly to the people responsible). Speakouts are a good way to build confidence among the people, give them a platform to talk their shit, and consolidate them. In the lead-up, Dare to Struggle spent a couple of weeks flyering at the courthouse and at visitations, and we reached out to our contacts to invite them to come and speak out.

Continue on page 4.



40 INMATES TAKE ACTION AGAINST CCJ SLOP IN DIVISION 8!

On June 26th, at least 40 inmates inside Cook County Jail's Division 8 stood together and took collective action against one of their biggest concerns: the food. CCJ is known to serve inmates some of the worst food imaginable—a low-calorie diet that often makes inmates sick. Inmates have said in the past they wouldn't feed CCJ's meals to a dog, often forcing inmates to rely on commissary to eat if they're able to access it. "Something has to give," an inmate leading the collective action told us. "Enough is enough. We have to get documentation first. Once we get documentation then, I feel like anything goes, but I need the document first. And I keep saying 'luck' but I thank God at least enough people was willing to take a stand and come together, and now I hope that I can build off that moment in the same dormitory."

Inmates in Division 8 decided they were ready to fight. Standing together, they collectively submitted grievances about the quality of the food. "It's important because enough is enough, and the only way change is gonna happen is if we take a stand. Another stance like that, I believe, will get the attention of the right people down here. If we all say, 'Look, we gon' take a stand right here, and we ain't gonna move unless these conditions are met'—I know that gets power. I believe if we force they hand, then they will do something."

Inmates, through a collective struggle, are learning how to work together and assert their rights and dignity as human beings. This is just the beginning of a larger fight against the conditions inside the jail. Dare to Struggle salutes the inmates in Division 8 who are taking a collective stand against mistreatment and raise the demand that all inmates deserve decent meals fit for human beings—every day, for every inmate. We'll continue to report their efforts, build support for them on the outside, and fan the flames of struggle at CCJ.

Inmates at CCJ are standing up. What will you do to support them? Join Dare to Struggle and build a movement against CCJ's horrible treatment and conditions!

Black August continued

In 1961, 19-year-old George Jackson was convicted by the California prison system for the crime of robbing a gas station for \$71. George was given the sentence of "a year to life" for his offense, meaning the judges and prison officials could dangle his freedom in front of him in a cruel attempt to get George to submit to their authority (again, for the crime of stealing \$71). Even though he initially went to prison as an "everyday lawbreaker," it was his political consciousness and activity that kept him incarcerated for 11 years. George was introduced to the politics of revolution while inside when a fellow prisoner named W. L. Nolen introduced him to the works of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Mao Zedong. Nolen encouraged George to study revolutionary texts, write about his struggle, and organize other prisoners to join the fight against their oppressive conditions. George would eventually join the Black Panther Party (BPP) from inside prison and would be tasked with establishing more BPP chapters inside the California prison system. His name would become more widely known as he became one of the Soledad Brothers, a group of Black prisoners accused of killing a guard in Soledad State Prison after three black prisoners were shot and killed there by a prison guard (one of those killed being W.L. Nolen).

It was during the trials of the Soledad Brothers that an intense struggle ensued. It became clear the Soledad Brothers, particularly George, were being targeted by the system for their political activism, as there was no evidence they had committed the crime, and the BPP on the outside began building a movement to highlight this political persecution and to free them. On August 7, 1970, Jonathan Jackson, George's 17-year-old brother, entered the Marin County Courthouse with guns and demanded the release of the Soledad Brothers. Along with three others, Jonathan attempted to leave with a judge, an attorney, and three jurors as hostages in a van that was waiting for them. Police fired repeatedly into the moving vehicle, killing three Black Panthers, including Jonathan, and the judge. One hostage was paralyzed for life. The lone surviving Black Panther, Ruchell Magee, would go on to spend nearly six decades in prison for his participation in the deadly escape attempt. Writing about his brother in the pages of Soledad Brother, a book of prison letters, George wrote: *"Little Jonathan Jackson knew what he was doing. He was a revolutionary. He gave his life in the struggle, and I will never forget that.... They killed my little brother, but they can't kill his ideas. He was only 17, but he understood more about this system than most people learn in a lifetime."*

Nearly a year later, on August 21, 1971, George would be killed at the hands of prison guards during what appeared to be an attempted prison break, though there are many questions to this day about the circumstances surrounding George's death, and many believe he was set up and murdered by prison guards. After George's death, the group he helped form behind the prison walls would go on to organize struggles on the inside. A leader and comrade of George, Khatari Gaulden, would later die on August 1, 1978, from prison medical neglect. It was after this that members of the Black Guerilla Family (a group founded by George) began to commemorate the Jackson brothers, Gaulden, and the struggle of Black people during the month of August and began to spread the commemoration across the US.

From then on, the commemoration of Black August has taken on many different forms and new meanings to those who participate in it. Though its significance has faded from many people's collective memory, it's still commemorated widely by revolutionaries, nationalists, and prisoners alike. For those who observe BA, it's a time to recommit oneself to the struggle. The founders of Black August wrote 4 tenets for those participating in the month's observance to abide by:

- "1. A fast which historically has been used as an expression of personal commitment and resistance. Hence, from sunrise until evening meal we will abstain from eating. We abstain from consuming any type of intoxicants for the entire month of August. The necessity for this should be self-evident for all serious participants of Black August (BA).
2. We limit our selection of television and radio to educational programs, i.e. news, documentaries and cultural programs, etc.
3. During BA we emphasize political and cultural studies for individuals involved in BA. Participants in BA should pair off with someone else you know to study and share knowledge of African affairs.
4. As an outward expression of BA we wear a black armband on the left arm or wrist as a tribute to those Africans who have died as a result of their sacrifice for African Liberation. The armband can be worn either on the inside or outside of your clothing."

Additionally, there are special days of commemoration during BA—days that mark the historic events of struggle, such as August 7th and August 21st to mark the deaths of Jonathan and George.

This Black August, Dare to Struggle calls on all people inside Cook County Jail and their loved ones to participate in this year's Black August commemoration by committing to the struggle against oppression and joining us for an **August 21st demonstration against the conditions inside CCJ**. Inmates should take the month to make plans for the 21st and how they can hold demonstrations on their decks, in coordination with Dare to Struggle's demonstration outside on the same day. Invite other inmates to participate in Black August, discuss its history and politics, and invite them to demonstrate and speak out against the conditions of the jail on the 28th. Make signs and banners from sheets with slogans about the jail and the struggle against it, invite people to gather at a specific time and location in your division, ask people to make speeches and lead chants. Get creative. Spread the word on your deck: it's time to come together. *Most importantly, write to Dare to Struggle about your experience during Black August—how you and others practiced it—and report to us on your demonstration if you organized or participated in one (what was the program, how many people came out or participated, what was the reaction of the COs and other inmates).*

As we've said before in previous issues of Cracks: enough with the bullshit! Inmates have to squash their petty beefs and come together against their common enemy—those who oppress you every day inside the hell on Earth we call Cook County Jail. Let's make this year's Black August the time to start that process and get people involved in a common struggle. As George Jackson writes: *"Settle your quarrels, come together, understand the reality of our situation, understand that fascism is already here, that people are already dying who could be saved, that generations more will die or live poor butchered half-lives if you fail to act."*

Summer Reportback continued

On the day of the speakout, some sheriffs tried to tell us to move from the sidewalk, to which we replied: fuck off. They backed off and decided to watch the speakout nearby from their cars. We had a few families come and speak out against the conditions at CCJ as well as someone who had been inside before speaking out about how they were treated. Children wrote messages about CCJ in chalk in front of Division 10 which read: "CCJ Hell On Earth!", "Boo Cook County", "Love you Mom". While the speakout was going on, we invited visitors to join us and speak out, and we gave them issues of Cracks.

On June 1st, Dare to Struggle organized a People's Tribunal Against Tom Dart, again outside of Division 10. With Sheriff Tom Dart being the head of the jail, we decided to put him on trial for the crimes committed against inmates and families. We spent time beforehand flyer-ing and trying to build up the event, messaging inmates to invite their families. We set up a life-size cutout of Dart as a set list of speakers gave testimony against him and the crimes the people are charging him for. The tribunal had the testimonies of several individuals whose lives have been ruined by Tom Dart and his jail: Vicki Willis (mother of Alteriq Pleasant) spoke about how CCJ stole her son's life in 2022, Grant Hatter (brother of Raheem Hatter) spoke about how CCJ stole his brother's life in 2021, and family members of people inside gave testimony about the horrors their loved ones are facing on a daily basis. The most impactful part of the tribunal was the playing out loud of recorded testimony from inmates currently inside CCJ who called in to DTS beforehand to record their testimonies against Tom Dart. Visitors coming in and out would stop and listen, joining in occasionally to speak or hold signs that read "Punish Abusive COs," "Jail Tom Dart," and "CCJ: No More Stolen Lives!" Kids got to doing chalk slogans again in front of the jail. The verdict at the end of the people's trial for Tom Dart: GUILTY FOR CRIMES AGAINST THE PEOPLE! We still plan to deliver this verdict soon to the President of the Cook County Board, Toni Preckwinkle. While this was by far our most exciting and well-attended event, many people's families who had confirmed being there (to DTS directly or through their loved one inside) didn't show up. We understand shit can come up for people, but we want to stress the importance of showing up and encourage inmates to talk with their loved ones about the importance of getting involved with DTS.

Lastly, on July 13th, in response to the increases in commissary, Dare to Struggle called for a speakout at the jail to expose and denounce these increases. As we've laid out before, the way commissary works at CCJ is via extortion of families, and inmates are forced to rely on commissary because the provided food is shit. The increases in commissary are a way to bleed more out of those on the outside to provide basic things for their loved ones. Even though we'd heard from the inside that commissary was only increasing on a few items, we still went out to agitate people about the increases, seeing this as an attack on inmates and families. We spoke out in front of Division 10 and distributed our newsletter. We didn't have a great turnout as we didn't do great outreach for the event itself, but nevertheless, we spoke to families about the increases and the need to get organized to fight back. We ended by going over to the

outside of Division 11 (on the 31st Street side) with our megaphones to make some announcements to the inmates there. We told inmates to bang on the windows if they could hear us and agreed with what we were laying down—that inmates need to start to come together, organize themselves, and fight back against the conditions (we had a lot of banging). It's hard for us to know if guys in 11 can hear us when we're out there, so please, write to us and let us know.

A NOTE FROM DTS TO THE READER

Since December 2024, Dare to Struggle has been producing and distributing Cracks At Hotel California (Cracks) with the help of inmates and their families. Since then, we've produced 7 issues and have had wide distribution both inside and outside CCJ, having made hundreds of contacts and readers in the process. Through this effort, we were able to create a list of demands against the jail conditions with both families and inmates, held protests outside of the jail, and put Sheriff Tom Dart on trial with a people's tribunal in June, where families and inmates gave testimony against Dart and the conditions at CCJ.

The initial goals of Cracks was to expose the conditions inside the jail and use it as a tool to give both inmates and families a voice as well as to get people organized in the fight against the horrifying conditions and mistreatment at CCJ. As we continued to meet and talk with inmates and families, we ran into a few different issues. We soon became overwhelmed with stories from people about their individual cases and asking DTS for help. While we've highlighted people's individual cases and fights inside the pages of Cracks and in other material we take out to people and write, it's been difficult for our small crew of full-timers (we all work full-time jobs, but dedicate our time to DTS when we clock-out) in Chicago to manage both the production of material and taking it out to the public. It's important to note: Dare to Struggle is not an organization of lawyers (though we've tried to connect people with lawyers when they ask). We're not a social service agency. We're an activist group whose main objective is to organize people in collective struggle against the American nightmare. Our starting point is going to those facing this nightmare and organizing them in collective action because that's the only way shit is actually going to change.

We also started to notice general trends both in people's stories about how they wound up at CCJ as well as the conditions on the inside. Week after week, we were distributing new issues of Cracks that essentially said the same thing: CCJ is hell on Earth. And while we need to continue to expose the jail and the stories inside, we also don't want to be redundant. People in CCJ already know the conditions they're living in, so what good is it to report on it all the time? While it does still serve the purpose of exposure—letting the world know what's going on behind those walls—we want to take Cracks to another level.



For the last 7 months, we've made substantial inroads inside the jail. Our general strategy is organizing both the inside (inmates at CCJ) and outside (families, friends, supporters) to work in coordination with one another to initiate focused campaigns of struggle around a specific set of demands (they can be the ones we drew up, but those can also change depending on what's going on). At this point, the inside has surpassed the outside. We have numerous readers and leaders in nearly every division. People inside are talking to each other, reading the newsletter together in groups, and writing to DTS about the process of coming together. This has been an important development in organizing inmates in collective struggle, and we want to seize the moment, with hopes that these efforts inside can encourage the outside to step up. So given this, we want to outline a couple of suggestions for the readers, both inside and out.

If you got something to say to DTS, please write to us: Those who have our phones be blowing us up sometimes (which is cool because we love you guys), but we can't get to every call all the time. There are a handful of people who are being brought up as leaders in this struggle and we'd like to get on regular calls with people who are taking this stuff seriously to strategize. But generally, it's much better to write to us.

Cracks is your voice to share with both the inside and outside: When writing to Cracks, think of the newsletter as a way to deliver messages between divisions and to the outside. What do you want others to know? We suggest writing about how you're getting organized in your div/deck, what are some of the obstacles in getting people organized both inside and out, and what are some things you're fighting around and how. Write reports about protests you organize and tell people how they went. These will be useful for others trying to organize themselves and fellow inmates/families. We can't guarantee everything submitted will get published, but we'll do our best to put out the most pressing issues and, if needed, print add-ons for people to read.



Cracks is an organizing tool: The newsletter should be a place we can collectively organize struggle. In our opinion, it's the best way to do so at CCJ. It should be full of ideas from inmates and families on how to organize people and what we should be organizing people around. If there are disagreements or criticism about things put in this newsletter, write to us and we can put it in the next issue. It would be good if there was a debate of ideas going back and forth in Cracks. DTS doesn't hold all the answers—we have a strategy we believe in—but it's the masses of people who make history, and we want to hear from you about what you think is the best way forward when it comes to the collective struggle and liberation of people.

We look forward to continuing to publish Cracks and get it to those who need to read what it lays down. We look forward to hearing from new readers, contributors, and comrades in this struggle. The path ahead is a long one. The enemy is powerful. But we know the people are more powerful, especially when together. In the words of the great Chairman Fred Hampton: *"If you dare to struggle, you dare to win. If you don't dare to struggle, then goddamnit you don't deserve to win."*

DTS MISSION STATEMENT

Over the last decade, powerful protests and rebellions, on the one hand, and the vicious cruelty of those in power, on the other, have laid bare the American nightmare that so many people are subjected to. Police brutality and the police murder of Black and oppressed people continue at epidemic proportions, even after promises of reform and the election of "progressive" district attorneys. Over two million people languish in prisons and jails today after Republican and Democratic administrations spent decades targeting Black and other oppressed people for punishment and imprisonment. Immigrants continue to be exploited in essential jobs, detained and deported, and vilified by a virulent anti-immigrant racism. American patriarchy, whether in the form of Christian fundamentalism, rape culture, or crass objectification,

continues to subject women and LGBTQ people to subjugation, discrimination, and violence. And American empire rains down death and destruction on the world in the form of drone strikes and support for oppressive regimes, with the danger of future wars on the horizon.

On top of these and other longstanding injustices, we confront sharpening existential crises. Capitalism-created climate change intensifies hurricanes, floods, and wildfires that destroy homes and lives while threatening the existence of humanity. The oil industry has become the driving force in the United States' longstanding theft of Indigenous land. Gentrification is displacing working-class people from their homes and destroying Black, Latino, and immigrant neighborhoods. The growing ranks of homeless people are left to fend for themselves, or, worse yet, pushed off the ground they sleep on when it catches the eyes of real estate developers. People are struggling to pay rent, put food on the table, pay off debt and student loans, and get decent healthcare, with the government's (mis)handling of the COVID-19 pandemic only making these struggles all the more difficult. A massive fascist social base amped up during Trump's presidency continues to rally in the streets and commit violence in the name of white supremacy. And the warped culture of American social relations continues to give rise to mass shootings, often driven by fascist ideology.

Our starting point for stopping any of these injustices must be to organize sustained and audacious resistance based among the people under attack and uniting all who can be united. It's only when we dare to struggle that we can win victories and get a taste of our potential collective power. Dare to Struggle is a multinational organization open to anyone who wants to resist and stop injustice no matter who holds political office. We don't lobby politicians. We don't use insular activist lingo. We don't chase social media fame. We don't seek careers or corporate sponsorship through activism. We're committed to standing with the people subjected to the horrors of the American nightmare. We go to the neighborhoods facing police brutality, ICE raids, poverty, and evictions, talk to people about the problems they face, and organize people in collective struggle. We know that radical change only happens when people step outside of routine protest or expecting politicians to do it for us and take bold, collective action.

of economic pressure, but needing a paycheck is no excuse for evicting families, harassing young people of color, or pepper-spraying demonstrators. Those whose consciences can be bought are everyone's potential enemies, not allies.

This fairy tale is more persuasive when it is couched in strategic terms: for example, "Every revolution succeeds at the moment the armed forces refuse to make war on their fellows; therefore we should focus on seducing the police to our side." But the police are not just any workers; they're the ones who chose to base their livelihoods upon defending the prevailing order, thus the least likely to be sympathetic to those who wish to change it. In this context, it makes more sense to oppose the police as such than to seek solidarity with them. As long as they serve their masters, they cannot be our allies; by denouncing the institution of police and democratizing individual officers, we encourage them to seek other livelihoods so we can one day find common cause with them.

Maybe there are some bad apples, but some police officers are good people. Perhaps some police officers have good intentions, but once again, insofar as they obey orders rather than their consciences, they cannot be trusted.

There's something to be said for understanding the systematic nature of institutions, rather than attributing every injustice to the shortcomings of individuals. Remember the story of the man who, tormented by fleas, managed to catch one between his fingers? He scrutinized it for a long time before placing it back at the spot on his neck where he had caught it. His friends, confounded, inquired why on earth he would do such a thing. "That wasn't the one that was biting me," he explained.



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*together we are
stronger than them*

Police are a mere distraction from the real enemy, not worth our wrath or attention. Alas, tyranny is not just a matter of politicians or executives; they would be powerless without those who do their bidding. When we contest their rule, we're also contesting the submission that keeps them in power, and sooner or later we're sure to come up against some of those who submit.

That being said, it's true that the police are no more integral to hierarchy than the oppressive dynamics in our own communities; they are simply the external manifestation, on a larger scale, of the same phenomena. If we are to contest domination everywhere, rather than specializing in combating certain forms of it while leaving others unchallenged, we have to be prepared to confront it both in the streets and in our own bedrooms; we can't expect to win on one front without fighting on the other. We shouldn't fetishize confrontations with uniformed foes, we shouldn't forget the power imbalances in our own ranks—but neither should we be content merely to manage the details of our own oppression in a non-hierarchical manner.

Resisting the police is violent—it makes you no better than them. According to this line of thinking, violence is inherently a form of domination, and thus inconsistent with opposing domination. Those who engage in violence play the same game as their oppressors, thereby losing from the outset.

This is dangerously simplistic. Is a woman who defends herself against a rapist no better than a rapist? Were slaves who revolted no better than slave-holders? There is such a thing as self-defense. In some cases, violence enforces power imbalances; in other cases, it challenges them. For people who still have faith in an authoritarian system or God, following the rules—whether legal or moral—is the top priority, at whatever cost: they believe they will be rewarded for doing so, regardless of what happens to others as a result. Whether such people call themselves conservatives or pacifists makes little difference in the end. On the other hand, for those of us who take responsibility for ourselves, the most important question is what will serve to make the world a better place. Sometimes this may include violence.

Police are people too, and deserve the same respect due all living things. The point is not that they deserve to suffer or that we should bring them to justice. The point is that, in purely pragmatic terms, they must not be allowed to brutalize people or impose an unjust social order. Though it can be empowering for those who have spent their lives under the heel of oppression to contemplate finally settling the score with their oppressors, liberation is not a matter of exacting revenge but of rendering it unnecessary. Therefore, while it may sometimes even be necessary to set police on fire, this should not be done out of a spirit of vengeful self-righteousness, but from a place of care and compassion—if not for the police themselves, at least for all who would otherwise suffer at their hands.

★

Delegitimizing the police is not only beneficial for those they target, but also for police officers' families and police officers themselves. Not only do police officers have disproportionately high rates of domestic violence and child abuse, they're also more likely to get killed, commit suicide, and struggle with addiction than most sectors of society. Anything that encourages police officers to quit their jobs is in their best interest, as well as the interest of their loved ones and society at large. Let's create a world in which no one oppresses or is oppressed, in which no one has to live in fear.

"Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or both."

— Frederick Douglass

Seven Myths about the Police

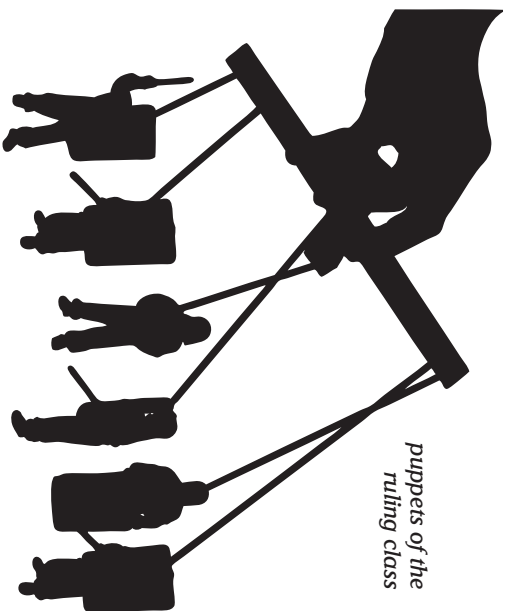
The police exercise legitimate authority. The average police officer is not a legal expert; he probably knows his department protocol, but very little about the actual laws. This means his enforcement involves a great deal of bluffing, improvisation, and dishonesty. Police lie on a regular basis: "I just got a report of someone of your description committing a crime around here. Want to show me some ID?"

This is not to say we should unthinkingly accept laws as legitimate, either. The entire judicial system protects the privileges of the wealthy and powerful. Obeying laws is not necessarily morally right—it may even be immoral. Slavery was legal, aiding escaped slaves illegal. The Nazis came to power in Germany via democratic elections and passed laws through the prescribed channels. We should aspire to the strength of conscience to do what we know is best, regardless of laws and police intimidation.

*protecting and serving
the fuck out of you*



The police are ordinary workers just like us; they should be our allies. Unfortunately, there's a big gap between "should be" and "are." The role of the police is to serve the interests of the ruling class; anyone who has not had a bad experience with them is likely privileged, submissive, or both. Today's police officers know exactly what they're getting into when they join the force—people in uniform don't just get cats out of trees. Yes, most take the job because



Police can win any confrontation, so we shouldn't antagonize them. With all their weapons, equipment, and surveillance, the police can seem invincible, but this is an illusion. They are limited by all sorts of invisible constraints—bureaucracy, public opinion, communication breakdowns, an overloaded judicial system. If they don't have vehicles or facilities available to transport and process a great number of arrestees, for example, they can't make mass arrests.

This is why a motley crowd armed only with the tear gas canisters shot at them can hold off a larger, more organized, better-equipped police force; contests between social unrest and military might don't play out according to the rules of military engagement. Those who have studied police, who can predict what they are prepared for and what they can and cannot do, can often outsmart and outmaneuver them.

Such small victories are especially inspiring for those who chafe under the heel of police violence on a daily basis. In the collective unconscious of our society, the police are the ultimate bastion of reality, the force that ensures that things stay the way they are; taking them on and winning, however temporarily, shows that reality is negotiable.



We need police to protect us. According to this line of thinking, even if we might aspire to live in a society without police in the distant future, we need them today, for people are not ready to live together peacefully without armed enforcers. As if the social imbalances and fear maintained by police violence are peace! Those who argue that the police sometimes do good things bear the burden of proving that those same good things could not be accomplished at least as well by other means.

In any case, it's not as if a police-free society is suddenly going to appear overnight just because someone spray-paints "Fuck the Police" on a wall. The protracted struggle it will take to free our communities from police repression will probably go on as long as it takes us to learn to coexist peacefully; a community that can't sort out its own conflicts can't expect to triumph against a more powerful occupying force. In the meantime, opposition to police should be seen as a rejection of one of the most egregious sources of oppressive violence, not an assertion that without police there would be none. But if we can ever defeat and disband the police, we will surely be able to defend ourselves against less organized threats.



CRACKS AT

HOTEL CALIFORNIA

EXPOSING THE REALITIES OF COOK COUNTY JAIL

Issue #7 August 2025

COMMEMORATE BLACK AUGUST 2025 AT COOK COUNTY JAIL!

A call to action from Dare to Struggle - Chicago

Black August (BA) is a commemorative month which recognizes the sacrifices and struggles of Black people in the ongoing fight for freedom and real liberation from the American nightmare. It's a month-long observance for reflection, study, and self-discipline, in honor and memory of those who came before us and showed us the path forward: struggle by any means necessary. Not to be confused with Black History Month, a system-approved, general celebration of Black people in the US, Black August is about resistance—how the oppressed have fought back against their oppressors, and must continue the struggle today. Having its roots in the prison movement, BA is a time for inmates to condemn the conditions of Black and oppressed people both inside and outside the prisons and jails, highlighting mass incarceration as

one of the primary tools by which Black people are oppressed by the system today. While it has its roots in the Black Liberation Movement, BA is significant not only for Black people but all oppressed people fighting for liberation, and has special significance for prisoners locked away.

August is a month that just so happens to be a time in history which contains many historic events important to the Black liberation struggle. From the beginning of the Haitian Revolution on August 22, 1791, when African slaves stood up and pushed out the colonialist French from the island, to the Watts Rebellion on August 12, 1965—a rebellion against police brutality which shook the US to the core—the month of August contains many significant events that capture the historic struggle of Black people against oppression.



The commemoration of Black August started in the late 1970s, when inmates at San Quentin Penitentiary in California organized the first commemoration to honor their former comrades who had given everything for the struggle, and the events leading up to the death of George Jackson at the hands of prison guards. *Continue on page 3*

A LETTER TO THE OUTSIDE

Written by a group of inmates in Division 11

The following is an excerpt of a letter written to Dare to Struggle from a group of inmates in Division 11. They have requested the letter be published in full (which you can read on our website, it is too long to fit here) to further expose the conditions inside the jail and the problems people are facing. The group of 19 inmates signed their names and booking number at the end of the letter. We at Dare to Struggle salute their bravery, them coming together, and publicly speaking out against CCJ. We will do our part to make sure this letter travels far and wide.

June 7, 2025

We - individuals here in custody at Cook County Department of Corrections (CCDOC) - are in extreme distress, fear, and in need of outside support to combat and help with the torture we endure on a daily basis.

We must popularize desires for justice and increase people's receptivity to the testimonies of the oppressed individuals in custody here at CCDOC, by recognizing embodied, unconscious and conscious structures of racial discrimination, violence, widespread fears of retaliation for practicing our Constitutional Rights, intensified forms of punishment, psychological warfare, inhuman treatment, superior oppression strategies, religious discrimination, and so on!!!

There are many issues we (individually and as a collective) undergo here at CCDOC that go underexposed. Within this letter are issues we experience, which are ongoing. First we want to provide a list of some key issues. Just to give a brief synopsis before we get into full detail.

We forego years of being here at CCDOC still awaiting discovery. There are individuals here in custody 12+ years, discovery still ongoing, and no charges have been verified. CCDOC is also known for holding innocent individuals for years, and IDOC (Illinois Department of Corrections) for 20+ years, only to dismiss their cases on false arrests/charges. We are being held against our will.

Continue on page 2

A Letter to the Outside continued

CCDOC is confiscating our mail. They will lie and say our incoming mail is saturated with drug paraphernalia. Now granted, drug paraphernalia does get into Cook County Jail, but it is mainly transported through and by CCDOC's own employed Correctional Officers, which has been proven. But the problem is they confiscate books shipped directly from Amazon, knowing we all know Amazon doesn't ship or produce drug paraphernalia products. We've even had Correctional Officers inform us their co-workers take our material home and some even sell them. We lose money. And these books aren't cheap. Some even range \$100+.

We are getting sick from the water and air here at CCDOC!

We receive in-person visitations where our loved ones - parents, grandparents, children, and spouses - come to visit us, to give support, inspiration, comfort, and hope. But CCDOC staff make them wait 1 hour and more only for them to see us for all of 15 minutes. And on top of that, they (CCDOC staff) disrespect our family and support systems. They speak to them with aggression, use profane language, and become argumentative, etc. And if a Correctional Officer had a conflict with an individual in custody, whether verbal or because of a written grievance against that officer, that same officer will target that individual's family who came in person, even to the point of ending their visit.

We don't get any proper hair products to properly maintain strong and healthy hair. Everyone's hair is falling out. People with full heads of hair are now bald. We can't maintain proper self-care here at CCDOC. And most people who are forced to cut their hair have become depressed!

The food here at Cook County Department of Corrections is very disgraceful, disappointing, and disreputable! People really need to see the food we have to force ourselves to eat to avoid hunger pains. You wouldn't feed your cat or your dog the food CCDOC provides. It's that bad. Literally, the rats don't even bother most of it. And that says a lot! The flipside to that is CCDOC has the funds for better and healthier meals. CCDOC gets paid roughly \$52,000 for every individual in custody per year. You do the math. CCDOC holds roughly 5,000 individuals.

Then to add to that, to get fruit you have to be on specific religious meal plans. Now why is that? We also receive hair in our food, spoiled milk, cold dinner trays, outdated snacks, and so on.

CCDOC commissary prices are extremely offensive and shameful. The prices for food here at Cook County Jail are 2x, 3x, even 4x the prices at the prisons. And here at CCDOC we haven't even been convicted. It doesn't make any sense! We've also attached Cook County Jail commissary pricing list, so you can see for yourself.

Can you PLEASE do what you can to get this noticed. Please! Life at CCDOC is cruel and inhuman. If this doesn't get exposed it will just continue. The world needs to know. CCDOC is a big business, formed by systemic racism, superior oppression, extortion, punitive punishment, and so much more. WE REALLY NEED HELP!!!

A SUMMER REPORTBACK FROM THE OUTSIDE

On May 18th, we held our first speakout against conditions and mistreatment at CCJ in front of Division 10, where families and loved ones go for visitation. We chose this location to bring the fight directly to the jail, in the face of the guards, and to encourage participation from families and friends headed to or leaving from visitation. A speakout is essentially a kind of rally where people are encouraged to take the mic and "speak bitterness" (share their stories and condemnation directly to the people responsible). Speakouts are a good way to build confidence among the people, give them a platform to talk their shit, and consolidate them. In the lead-up, Dare to Struggle spent a couple of weeks flyering at the courthouse and at visitations, and we reached out to our contacts to invite them to come and speak out.

Continue on page 4.



40 INMATES TAKE ACTION AGAINST CCJ SLOP IN DIVISION 8!

On June 26th, at least 40 inmates inside Cook County Jail's Division 8 stood together and took collective action against one of their biggest concerns: the food. CCJ is known to serve inmates some of the worst food imaginable—a low-calorie diet that often makes inmates sick. Inmates have said in the past they wouldn't feed CCJ's meals to a dog, often forcing inmates to rely on commissary to eat if they're able to access it. "Something has to give," an inmate leading the collective action told us. "Enough is enough. We have to get documentation first. Once we get documentation then, I feel like anything goes, but I need the document first. And I keep saying 'luck' but I thank God at least enough people was willing to take a stand and come together, and now I hope that I can build off that moment in the same dormitory."

Inmates in Division 8 decided they were ready to fight. Standing together, they collectively submitted grievances about the quality of the food. "It's important because enough is enough, and the only way change is gonna happen is if we take a stand. Another stance like that, I believe, will get the attention of the right people down here. If we all say, 'Look, we gon' take a stand right here, and we ain't gonna move unless these conditions are met'—I know that gets power. I believe if we force they hand, then they will do something."

Inmates, through a collective struggle, are learning how to work together and assert their rights and dignity as human beings. This is just the beginning of a larger fight against the conditions inside the jail. Dare to Struggle salutes the inmates in Division 8 who are taking a collective stand against mistreatment and raise the demand that all inmates deserve decent meals fit for human beings—every day, for every inmate. We'll continue to report their efforts, build support for them on the outside, and fan the flames of struggle at CCJ.

Inmates at CCJ are standing up. What will you do to support them? Join Dare to Struggle and build a movement against CCJ's horrible treatment and conditions!

Black August continued

In 1961, 19-year-old George Jackson was convicted by the California prison system for the crime of robbing a gas station for \$71. George was given the sentence of "a year to life" for his offense, meaning the judges and prison officials could dangle his freedom in front of him in a cruel attempt to get George to submit to their authority (again, for the crime of stealing \$71). Even though he initially went to prison as an "everyday lawbreaker," it was his political consciousness and activity that kept him incarcerated for 11 years. George was introduced to the politics of revolution while inside when a fellow prisoner named W. L. Nolen introduced him to the works of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Mao Zedong. Nolen encouraged George to study revolutionary texts, write about his struggle, and organize other prisoners to join the fight against their oppressive conditions. George would eventually join the Black Panther Party (BPP) from inside prison and would be tasked with establishing more BPP chapters inside the California prison system. His name would become more widely known as he became one of the Soledad Brothers, a group of Black prisoners accused of killing a guard in Soledad State Prison after three black prisoners were shot and killed there by a prison guard (one of those killed being W.L. Nolen).

It was during the trials of the Soledad Brothers that an intense struggle ensued. It became clear the Soledad Brothers, particularly George, were being targeted by the system for their political activism, as there was no evidence they had committed the crime, and the BPP on the outside began building a movement to highlight this political persecution and to free them. On August 7, 1970, Jonathan Jackson, George's 17-year-old brother, entered the Marin County Courthouse with guns and demanded the release of the Soledad Brothers. Along with three others, Jonathan attempted to leave with a judge, an attorney, and three jurors as hostages in a van that was waiting for them. Police fired repeatedly into the moving vehicle, killing three Black Panthers, including Jonathan, and the judge. One hostage was paralyzed for life. The lone surviving Black Panther, Ruchell Magee, would go on to spend nearly six decades in prison for his participation in the deadly escape attempt. Writing about his brother in the pages of Soledad Brother, a book of prison letters, George wrote: *"Little Jonathan Jackson knew what he was doing. He was a revolutionary. He gave his life in the struggle, and I will never forget that.... They killed my little brother, but they can't kill his ideas. He was only 17, but he understood more about this system than most people learn in a lifetime."*

Nearly a year later, on August 21, 1971, George would be killed at the hands of prison guards during what appeared to be an attempted prison break, though there are many questions to this day about the circumstances surrounding George's death, and many believe he was set up and murdered by prison guards. After George's death, the group he helped form behind the prison walls would go on to organize struggles on the inside. A leader and comrade of George, Khatari Gaulden, would later die on August 1, 1978, from prison medical neglect. It was after this that members of the Black Guerilla Family (a group founded by George) began to commemorate the Jackson brothers, Gaulden, and the struggle of Black people during the month of August and began to spread the commemoration across the US.

From then on, the commemoration of Black August has taken on many different forms and new meanings to those who participate in it. Though its significance has faded from many people's collective memory, it's still commemorated widely by revolutionaries, nationalists, and prisoners alike. For those who observe BA, it's a time to recommit oneself to the struggle. The founders of Black August wrote 4 tenets for those participating in the month's observance to abide by:

- "1. A fast which historically has been used as an expression of personal commitment and resistance. Hence, from sunrise until evening meal we will abstain from eating. We abstain from consuming any type of intoxicants for the entire month of August. The necessity for this should be self-evident for all serious participants of Black August (BA).
2. We limit our selection of television and radio to educational programs, i.e. news, documentaries and cultural programs, etc.
3. During BA we emphasize political and cultural studies for individuals involved in BA. Participants in BA should pair off with someone else you know to study and share knowledge of African affairs.
4. As an outward expression of BA we wear a black armband on the left arm or wrist as a tribute to those Africans who have died as a result of their sacrifice for African Liberation. The armband can be worn either on the inside or outside of your clothing."

Additionally, there are special days of commemoration during BA—days that mark the historic events of struggle, such as August 7th and August 21st to mark the deaths of Jonathan and George.

This Black August, Dare to Struggle calls on all people inside Cook County Jail and their loved ones to participate in this year's Black August commemoration by committing to the struggle against oppression and joining us for an **August 21st demonstration against the conditions inside CCJ**. Inmates should take the month to make plans for the 21st and how they can hold demonstrations on their decks, in coordination with Dare to Struggle's demonstration outside on the same day. Invite other inmates to participate in Black August, discuss its history and politics, and invite them to demonstrate and speak out against the conditions of the jail on the 28th. Make signs and banners from sheets with slogans about the jail and the struggle against it, invite people to gather at a specific time and location in your division, ask people to make speeches and lead chants. Get creative. Spread the word on your deck: it's time to come together. *Most importantly, write to Dare to Struggle about your experience during Black August—how you and others practiced it—and report to us on your demonstration if you organized or participated in one (what was the program, how many people came out or participated, what was the reaction of the COs and other inmates).*

As we've said before in previous issues of Cracks: enough with the bullshit! Inmates have to squash their petty beefs and come together against their common enemy—those who oppress you every day inside the hell on Earth we call Cook County Jail. Let's make this year's Black August the time to start that process and get people involved in a common struggle. As George Jackson writes: *"Settle your quarrels, come together, understand the reality of our situation, understand that fascism is already here, that people are already dying who could be saved, that generations more will die or live poor butchered half-lives if you fail to act."*

Summer Reportback continued

On the day of the speakout, some sheriffs tried to tell us to move from the sidewalk, to which we replied: fuck off. They backed off and decided to watch the speakout nearby from their cars. We had a few families come and speak out against the conditions at CCJ as well as someone who had been inside before speaking out about how they were treated. Children wrote messages about CCJ in chalk in front of Division 10 which read: "CCJ Hell On Earth!", "Boo Cook County", "Love you Mom". While the speakout was going on, we invited visitors to join us and speak out, and we gave them issues of Cracks.

On June 1st, Dare to Struggle organized a People's Tribunal Against Tom Dart, again outside of Division 10. With Sheriff Tom Dart being the head of the jail, we decided to put him on trial for the crimes committed against inmates and families. We spent time beforehand flyer-ing and trying to build up the event, messaging inmates to invite their families. We set up a life-size cutout of Dart as a set list of speakers gave testimony against him and the crimes the people are charging him for. The tribunal had the testimonies of several individuals whose lives have been ruined by Tom Dart and his jail: Vicki Willis (mother of Alteriq Pleasant) spoke about how CCJ stole her son's life in 2022, Grant Hatter (brother of Raheem Hatter) spoke about how CCJ stole his brother's life in 2021, and family members of people inside gave testimony about the horrors their loved ones are facing on a daily basis. The most impactful part of the tribunal was the playing out loud of recorded testimony from inmates currently inside CCJ who called in to DTS beforehand to record their testimonies against Tom Dart. Visitors coming in and out would stop and listen, joining in occasionally to speak or hold signs that read "Punish Abusive COs," "Jail Tom Dart," and "CCJ: No More Stolen Lives!" Kids got to doing chalk slogans again in front of the jail. The verdict at the end of the people's trial for Tom Dart: GUILTY FOR CRIMES AGAINST THE PEOPLE! We still plan to deliver this verdict soon to the President of the Cook County Board, Toni Preckwinkle. While this was by far our most exciting and well-attended event, many people's families who had confirmed being there (to DTS directly or through their loved one inside) didn't show up. We understand shit can come up for people, but we want to stress the importance of showing up and encourage inmates to talk with their loved ones about the importance of getting involved with DTS.

Lastly, on July 13th, in response to the increases in commissary, Dare to Struggle called for a speakout at the jail to expose and denounce these increases. As we've laid out before, the way commissary works at CCJ is via extortion of families, and inmates are forced to rely on commissary because the provided food is shit. The increases in commissary are a way to bleed more out of those on the outside to provide basic things for their loved ones. Even though we'd heard from the inside that commissary was only increasing on a few items, we still went out to agitate people about the increases, seeing this as an attack on inmates and families. We spoke out in front of Division 10 and distributed our newsletter. We didn't have a great turnout as we didn't do great outreach for the event itself, but nevertheless, we spoke to families about the increases and the need to get organized to fight back. We ended by going over to the

outside of Division 11 (on the 31st Street side) with our megaphones to make some announcements to the inmates there. We told inmates to bang on the windows if they could hear us and agreed with what we were laying down—that inmates need to start to come together, organize themselves, and fight back against the conditions (we had a lot of banging). It's hard for us to know if guys in 11 can hear us when we're out there, so please, write to us and let us know.

A NOTE FROM DTS TO THE READER

Since December 2024, Dare to Struggle has been producing and distributing Cracks At Hotel California (Cracks) with the help of inmates and their families. Since then, we've produced 7 issues and have had wide distribution both inside and outside CCJ, having made hundreds of contacts and readers in the process. Through this effort, we were able to create a list of demands against the jail conditions with both families and inmates, held protests outside of the jail, and put Sheriff Tom Dart on trial with a people's tribunal in June, where families and inmates gave testimony against Dart and the conditions at CCJ.

The initial goals of Cracks was to expose the conditions inside the jail and use it as a tool to give both inmates and families a voice as well as to get people organized in the fight against the horrifying conditions and mistreatment at CCJ. As we continued to meet and talk with inmates and families, we ran into a few different issues. We soon became overwhelmed with stories from people about their individual cases and asking DTS for help. While we've highlighted people's individual cases and fights inside the pages of Cracks and in other material we take out to people and write, it's been difficult for our small crew of full-timers (we all work full-time jobs, but dedicate our time to DTS when we clock-out) in Chicago to manage both the production of material and taking it out to the public. It's important to note: Dare to Struggle is not an organization of lawyers (though we've tried to connect people with lawyers when they ask). We're not a social service agency. We're an activist group whose main objective is to organize people in collective struggle against the American nightmare. Our starting point is going to those facing this nightmare and organizing them in collective action because that's the only way shit is actually going to change.

We also started to notice general trends both in people's stories about how they wound up at CCJ as well as the conditions on the inside. Week after week, we were distributing new issues of Cracks that essentially said the same thing: CCJ is hell on Earth. And while we need to continue to expose the jail and the stories inside, we also don't want to be redundant. People in CCJ already know the conditions they're living in, so what good is it to report on it all the time? While it does still serve the purpose of exposure—letting the world know what's going on behind those walls—we want to take Cracks to another level.



For the last 7 months, we've made substantial inroads inside the jail. Our general strategy is organizing both the inside (inmates at CCJ) and outside (families, friends, supporters) to work in coordination with one another to initiate focused campaigns of struggle around a specific set of demands (they can be the ones we drew up, but those can also change depending on what's going on). At this point, the inside has surpassed the outside. We have numerous readers and leaders in nearly every division. People inside are talking to each other, reading the newsletter together in groups, and writing to DTS about the process of coming together. This has been an important development in organizing inmates in collective struggle, and we want to seize the moment, with hopes that these efforts inside can encourage the outside to step up. So given this, we want to outline a couple of suggestions for the readers, both inside and out.

If you got something to say to DTS, please write to us: Those who have our phones be blowing us up sometimes (which is cool because we love you guys), but we can't get to every call all the time. There are a handful of people who are being brought up as leaders in this struggle and we'd like to get on regular calls with people who are taking this stuff seriously to strategize. But generally, it's much better to write to us.

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CRACKS AT

HOTEL CALIFORNIA

EXPOSING THE REALITIES OF COOK COUNTY JAIL

Issue #8
Sep-Oct 2025

**PROTEST SHERRIFF
TOM DART'S SPEAKING
EVENT 9/23!**

Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart is attending a lunch downtown to lie to donors about the conditions inside the jail.

**CCJ FAMILIES & FRIENDS! COME OUT
AND LET THE HEAD OF THE JAIL
KNOW HOW YOU REALLY FEEL
ABOUT CONDITIONS AND
MISTREATMENT AT CCJ!**

**SEPTEMBER 23 AT 11AM, 111
W GRAND AVE, CHICAGO IL**

OVER 6,000 CHECK-INS AT HOTEL CALIFORNIA

**COOK COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY EILEEN O'NEILL BURKE'S SADIST MISSION TO EXPEDITE DETENTION AT
COOK COUNTY JAIL AND SWELL THE MASS INCARCERATION MACHINE**

by Dare to Struggle- Chicago

On August 4th, the Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice released a report stating that the number of incarcerated persons at Cook County Jail (CCJ) "rose above 6,000 for the first time since March 2022." Responsible for this uptick in incarceration is what we can aptly describe as State's Attorney Eileen O'Neill Burke's personal war on guns.

To wage her war, Burke is empowering her office to seek detention for any individual caught possessing an unregistered or banned firearm, irrespective of the circumstances of an individual case (being at the wrong place at the wrong time, or even if a gun was never even fired).

**022 THE NATIONAL DAY
OF PROTEST TO STOP
POLICE BRUTALITY!**

by Dare to Struggle and Families
Demanding Justice

Since 2020, over 7,000 people across the United States have been killed by police, and every year is more deadly than the last.

The mass rebellion in response to the public execution of George Floyd, which shook the system to its core, was strangled, pulled, and led into the ground by politicians and opportunists.

Since then, a few killer cops have faced charges, trial, and prison time, but most of these murderers with a badge get away with their crimes. The police keep serving and protecting white supremacy and capitalism, and in that role, they are sanctioned to brutalize and kill.

In 2024, police in the US killed 1,375 people, the highest number ever recorded.



The police respond to people in a mental health crisis with taser-guns and bullets. They prey on Black, Latino, Indigenous, and proletarian youth, stalking them in squad cars, brutalizing them and throwing them into the prison pipeline, or just shoot them dead. In response to rising homelessness, homeless people are being criminalized, with police carrying out brutal raids on encampments. Despite the tough talk about Trump's immigration policies from liberal and progressive politicians, the police have assisted in the kidnapping of thousands of people by ICE agents, brutally beating, shooting, and arresting protesters in the process.

Continue on page 3



Burke has entrusted the pigs to carry out her mandate, giving CPD districts in the majority Black neighborhoods of Englewood and Calumet the green light to stalk its residents and issue felony gun charges at their discretion.

By seeking detention for gun possession, Burke's policies hide the circumstances that lead to gun possession in the first place. Talking with guys at CCJ, we've heard the same story about guys getting caught with guns: they live in a bad neighborhood, don't trust the cops, have a record, but have to arm themselves, they get caught with a gun and because of their record, end up at CCJ. These guns are rarely tied to a shooting or murder but they were still locked up.

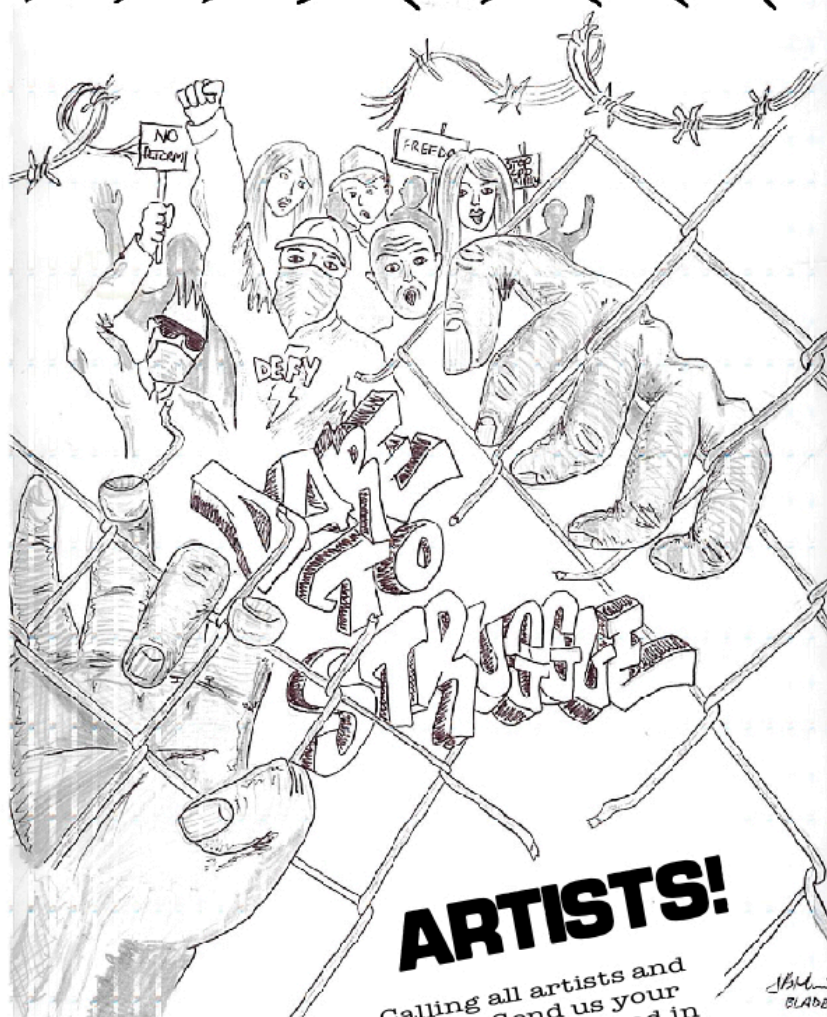
Yet, missing from Burke's lock-em-up mentality is police brutality. In the first five months of this year, CPD pigs have already shot and killed six people, the equivalent of the number of people they shot and killed last year.

6,000 Check-Ins Continued

Included among the dead are 57-year old Timothy Glaze, a terminally ill man experiencing a mental health crisis who was shot 16 times by CPD in the doorframe of his partner's apartment, and 19-year old Nathaniel Fejerang, chased into his neighbor's backyard by tactical team officers for no proven reason before he was pinned facedown and shot three times at point-blank range. While Burke promised that she would "make sure that people who are a danger to the public" are detained, we wonder why killer cops Alejandro Urbano Mateo, Salah Saleh, and Oscar Asilis, are not among the swelling numbers of people locked up in Cook County. The same can be said for 26 year-old Dexter Reed. On August 13th, Burke announced that her office "could not meet their burden" to secure convictions against the tactical team officers that murdered Reed in March of last year. Reed was in his car when the tactical team pulled up him over for a traffic stop and in seconds unleashed 96 rounds at Reed's car, shooting him 13 times. As people sworn in to "protect & serve," cops ought to be held to a higher standard, especially if they fail to fulfill this promise. So if Burke is so "tough on crime," why has she refused to press charges and pursue the detention of these killer cops?

This question gets at a key contradiction of Burke's war on guns and the mass incarceration machine as a whole: killer pigs get a free pass to shoot, kill, and still walk the streets, while those outside law enforcement, some with potentially lesser offenses (like gun possession), are locked up in droves. While Burke's office has failed to seek charges against killer cops, CPD continues to exceed their allotted misconduct budget, with police costing Chicagoans \$164 million dollars in police misconduct settlements, double the allotted \$82 million dollars budgeted for police misconduct and a number expected to grow (1). And while Chicagoans foot the bill of the pigs' dirty work, CCJ makes an average of \$52,000 off of each inmate per year (2). Burke would have us believe that her war on guns will put an end to gun violence, but by letting killer cops roam the streets freely, Burke shines light on the real function of jails and prisons under capitalism: to lock up the oppressed.

In the aftermath of the revolutionary 60s decade, jail and prisons became a key means of social control for the Black proletarians, who chose to push back against the joblessness of deindustrialization and the unlivable conditions they were subjected to by the ruling class. In an effort to condemn these groups and justify their incarceration, the ruling class introduced guns and drugs into Black and



Latino neighborhoods in the 70s and 80s, replacing the revolutionary culture of the sixties with a corporate-hustle culture and "get mine" mentality that soon expressed itself in violence. And so began the crime fighting and incarceration crusade of politicians like Burke. From Reagan's "war on drugs," to the Clinton era Black "super predator" and "three strikes" system, these "tough on crime" policies have led to incarceration of millions of predominantly Black and Latino people in jails and prisons across the U.S.

This is why we at Dare to Struggle are calling bullshit on Burke's push for further incarceration.

The history of jails and prisons in this country show

Calling all artists and poets! Send us your work to be featured in the next issue of Cracks!

To submit, please mail in your work to our PO Box (see last page for address).

The above is a drawing submitted by brother Blade inside CCJ!

that the only true resolution to crime is to overthrow this capitalist and with it the damaging social relations that manifest themselves in proletarian neighborhoods. That means working directly within these neighborhoods and among inmates and their families to organize them to fight back against the system determined to criminalize and keep them locked up!

If you're outraged by the jail population hikes and fuck with our message, join us. We're Dare to Struggle and we got a message for SA Burke: Down with the Mass Incarceration Machine!

O22 Continued

And there is no serious movement in this country to stop this. The protest movement in response to police brutality has been derailed time and time again by politicians promising reforms and grifters using the movement for their personal gain, and without intervention, the same thing will likely happen to the current spontaneous uprisings against ICE.

Justice Department investigations, legislation, police review boards, and other reforms cannot end police brutality because it's baked into the government on all levels and the entire system. It's a fundamental tool, along with mass incarceration, to keep oppressed people controlled and subjugated.

Families Demanding Justice and Dare to Struggle are working to rebuild the movement against police brutality and for justice for Black and other oppressed people on solid foundations by getting people organized for the National Day of Protest Against Police Brutality on October 22 (O22).

The movement we are seeking to build puts families and loved ones of the victims of police murder at the forefront, reviving a powerful weapon against police brutality. We will unite all who can be united in this struggle, regardless of identity. And we will reject begging for reforms from politicians in favor of mass action.

We will be going to neighborhoods under the gun of police brutality throughout the summer and fall to mobilize youth and those who have the courage to stand up and speak for themselves and their communities. We will unite families and loved ones of victims of police murder from around the country to join in and take a leading role in the O22 National Day of Protest Against Police Brutality.

Join us October 22 to demand:

NO MORE MURDERS & BRUTALITY BY THE POLICE!

SEND KILLER COPS TO PRISON!

END THE CRIMINALIZATION OF BLACK, LATINO, & INDIGENOUS YOUTH!

END THE CRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS & MENTAL ILLNESS!

NO MORE MILITARIZED POLICE REPRESSION OF PROTEST!

STOP THE ICE KIDNAPPINGS OF IMMIGRANTS!

*CCJ! Join us for O22! Police brutality extends inside every prison and jail in this country. It's time we come together a speak out against it! **Organize O22 protests on October 22nd! Tell your families and friends to come out strong to the Chicago O22 protest on October 22nd at 5:30PM at 300 E 31st St., Chicago IL. We need masses of people in the streets!***

REPORT: AT LEAST 8 DRUG OVERDOSES IN DIVISION 8 IN AUGUST

According to an inmate source in CCJ, at least 8 inmates overdosed during a two week span at the end of August. He reports:

"There have been 8 overdoses in the past two weeks in Division 8 - RTU (medical unit). 3 guards have been fired for smuggling in contraband in the past month. Most drugs are brought in by the guards, very few come in through the mail anymore..

CCDOC intercepts all mail, and honestly, unless its anything other than a book from Amazon, its confiscated and not returned..

Cross-watching is technically illegal. It's when 1 officer is responsible for double the work. Or when a ratio from officer to inmate goes to 1:78. From the already illegal ratio of 1:39, when it should be 1:20. The ratio is an extensive security concern..."

CCJ exposes itself as a death trap. Not only do the COs bring in drugs (a fact known to many inside and outside of CCJ), inmates are left alone to potentially overdose and die. Cross-watching has led to the death of many inside CCJ, from inmate suicide, overdoses, or inmate's hurting and killing one another, a practice that continues on to this day. When the jail gets more money from the government shore up staffing levels, as they suggest, what happened to the money? In May 2025, a Senior Cook County Sheriff's Office investigator filed a lawsuit against Sherrif Tom Dart, alleging multiple violations of Illinois human rights laws corruption, as well as misappropriation of millions in COVID relief funds from the feds.

Staffing is an ongoing problem at CCJ, but one the jail is ultimately fine with. More money for them, more suffering for inmates. Our question is: How do we break the cycle once and for all?

Write to us about how drugs get into CCJ and how we can stop the epidemic of corruption at the jail.



REPORT FROM 8/21 PROTEST AT CCJ

On August 21st, the 54th anniversary of the murder of revolutionary prisoner George Jackson, Dare to Struggle stood with protesting inmates inside Cook County Jail by protesting outside the walls of Division 8 and 11 to let them know: we got your back!

For months, inmates have been organizing themselves, struggling with each other to put down petty bullshit and beefs, and come together against conditions at CCJ. Despite censorship efforts, inmates were able to pull off several successful protests on their decks in different divisions, standing up against CCJ and the conditions imposed upon them by prison authorities. Here is what some inmates wrote to us:

"Long Live George Jackson! Solidarity. We stood firm with resistance all night!"

"Refusal of dinner trays at lunch in remembrance of George and Jonathan Jackson! BLESS THEIR SOULS!"

Continue on page 4

"A lot of decks on RTU created disturbances, we stood firm for hours demanding changes throughout the night. We stood firm and didn't fold. There were guys who knew how to climb the windows and walls, which added to it. It was definitely powerful because we came together."

"We heard you guys out there! We were most defiantly banging and we appreciate you guys a lot!"

"I saw ya'll yesterday out the window and saw the crowd. We protested here as well and they took our microwave... you can let our people on the outside know we are doing our part as well.. because the word must get out about our conditions in here."

We marched outside, leading chants, making speeches, and lots of noise to encourage inmates to stand together. We had an inmate call in and lead chants from the outside. We could hear banging on the walls from the inside while we rallied. While the sheriffs tried to shut us down outside multiple divisions, we held firm and stood our ground against their intimidation.

Inmates at CCJ are standing up against the hell on earth we know as the jail. Will you stand with them? Join Dare to Struggle to build a mass movement against conditions at the jails and prisons!

COOK COUNTY JAIL CONTINUES TO CENSOR CRACKS AT HOTEL CALIFORNIA!

Over the last several months, we have received a number of reports from inmates inside Cook County Jail (CCJ) that Cracks at Hotel California (Cracks) newsletters are being withheld from them for the stated reason the newsletters "encourage violence". In July, we received word that a handful of Issue #6s were confiscated for this reason and we later received these notices back in the mail. One inmate was told their newsletter was censored because it was suspected to have been contaminated with drugs. Earlier this month, we received word that several more people inside were given notices of censorship for the Issue #7 newsletter, again citing the encouragement of violence.

In August, we received a large package from Cook County Department of Corrections containing at least 63 censorship notices, all citing: "It (Cracks) depicts, describes, advocates, or encourages violence, hatred, or group disruption or poses a risk of violence or disruption." In early September, we received another package of censored mail, totally to more than 90 censored newsletters since July.

This escalation in censorship by jail officials is clearly a sign of political repression against Cracks, Dare to Struggle, and inmates at CCJ.

Not only is everything in Cracks publicly available and is protected free speech, but their accusation that Cracks "encourages violence" is an attempt to deny what inmates and their families already know to be true: The only violence encouraged at CCJ stems from the jail itself. From the COs who beat and pit inmates against one another, those who look the other way or allow for inmates' medical needs to go unchecked, the arbitrary revoking of "privileges" like using a microwave (the only way most inmates are able to eat anything other than slop) or using the tablets, to the punishment

of inmates confined to shackles, it is CCJ that encourages violence inside on a daily basis. What is supposed to be a pretrial detainment facility becomes a death sentence for some: the same way it was for Sergio Cordero Jr., Raheem Hatter, Alteriq Pleasant, and Cory Ulmer, to name a few. They fear Cracks because it tells the truth: The people, especially inmates, need to get organized against the horrid conditions at CCJ.

CCJ continues their selective use of censorship in order to silence the voices of inmates as well as repress attempts by inmates to get organized. While many newsletters continue to make their way inside the jail and in the hands of inmates, CCJ is clearly ramping up their censorship campaign.

During the rebellion at Attica in 1971, prisoners stood together and fought back against the oppressive prison authorities and conditions. One of the main issues raised was around the mail being read by prison authorities. Prisoners in the past rose up against the mere surveillance of their mail, let alone censorship and confiscation by officials happening today. We must embrace this same spirit as the Attica rebels and demand an end to the censorship of Cracks and all mail censorship inside CCJ.

To those on the inside, don't accept the censorship and when you get the yellow slip, demand to get your mail back and tell them they are violating your rights. To the outside, stand with inmates against this blatant violation of their rights and get active to raise up these demands and more.

A NOTE FROM DTS TO THE READER

Since December 2024, Dare to Struggle has been producing and distributing Cracks At Hotel California (Cracks) with the help of inmates and their families. Since then, we've produced 7 issues and have had wide distribution both inside and outside CCJ, having made hundreds of contacts and readers in the process. Through this effort, we were able to create a list of demands against the jail conditions with both families and inmates, held protests outside of the jail, and put Sheriff Tom Dart on trial with a people's tribunal in June, where families and inmates gave testimony against Dart and the conditions at CCJ.

The initial goals of Cracks was to expose the conditions inside the jail and use it as a tool to give both inmates and families a voice as well as to get people organized in the fight against the horrifying conditions and mistreatment at CCJ. As we continued to meet and talk with inmates and families, we ran into a few different issues. We soon became overwhelmed with stories from people about their individual cases and asking DTS for help. While we've highlighted people's individual cases and fights inside the pages of Cracks and in other material we take out to people and write, it's been difficult for our small crew of full-timers (we all work full-time jobs, but dedicate our time to DTS when we clock-out) in Chicago to manage both the production of material and taking it out to the public. It's important to note: Dare to Struggle is not an organization of lawyers (though we've tried to connect people with lawyers when they ask). We're not a social service agency. We're an activist group whose main objective is to organize people in collective struggle against the American nightmare. Our starting point is going to those facing this nightmare and organizing them in collective action because that's the only way shit is actually going to change.

We also started to notice general trends both in people's stories about how they wound up at CCJ as well as the conditions on the inside. Week after week, we were distributing new issues of Cracks that essentially said the same thing: CCJ is hell on Earth. And while we need to continue to expose the jail and the stories inside, we also don't want to be redundant. People in CCJ already know the conditions they're living in, so what good is it to report on it all the time? While it does still serve the purpose of exposure—letting the world know what's going on behind those walls—we want to take Cracks to another level.

Continue on page 5

MESSAGE TO THE COs: HATE YOUR JOB?

Work for Cracks! We know you guys don't like us. We probably don't see eye to eye. But, you can help Cracks too. Write to us about corruption, conditions, and mistreatment at CCJ and help expose this hellhole.

Email us at daretostrugglechicago@protonmail.com

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**CCJ Inmates & Their Families
Demand DIGNITY & RESPECT Inside
Cook County Jail!**

1. We demand the right to a fair and speedy trial. Many inmates have been inside Cook County Jail for years without being found guilty of a crime. Many inmates are pressured into taking plea deals because of this. Due to the conditions of the jail, some people will catch more charges while inside waiting for their day in court.

2. We demand decent meals fit for human beings, everyday, for every prisoner. We demand clean drinking water free of contaminates which make inmates sick.

3. We demand adequate access to our loved ones inside and outside of the jail, and an end to the criminalization of visitors. We also demand an end to the confiscation of mail sent to inmates under the false guise of safety. Withholding letters & denying visitation is a form of psychological torture.

4. We demand the jail allow industries to enter the institutions and employ inmates. Many families are extorted by the jail to provide for their loved ones on the inside and are driven to the brink of bankruptcy. Inmates should be able to provide for themselves and their families.

GET INVOLVED!

Email us at
**daretostrugglechicago
@protonmail.com**

Write to **PO Box
#25087, Chicago IL
60625**

5. We demand adequate medical staff and change in medical policy. The jail is prejudiced in its treatment of inmates and often denies medical care for those in need. There are often numerous "mistakes" made many times; the denial of medication and improper medication administered.

6. We demand regular use of the recreational facilities and time outside. We also demand regular educational activities inside the jail that stimulate the mind.

7. We demand an end to collective punishment. Inmates should not be denied "privileges" like use of the microwave or be placed on lockdown for days or weeks because of a rules violation. Collective punishment only creates more tension.

8. We demand clean and decent living spaces inside the jail. Inmates are denied sufficient cleaning supplies so they can properly upkeep their cells. Common areas, especially the showers, are not properly and regularly cleaned. There are units that get too cold at night where inmates are only provided one thin blanket for warmth. Some showers are scalding hot and can't be used.

Join the campaign to fight for these demands and more. Tell your friends, tell your family. Get organized and fight back.

THE POWER OF THE PEOPLE
IS THE FORCE
OF LIFE

**ATTENTION CORRECTIONAL
AUTHORITIES: PLEASE READ
CENSORSHIP NOTICE**

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If you have any doubt, you should consult your agency's legal counsel. Failure to adhere to federal law, Illinois administrative regulations and your agency's policies and procedures is evidence of malicious intent to violate our rights.
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**DARE TO
STRUGGLE**

CRACKS AT

HOTEL CALIFORNIA

EXPOSING THE REALITIES OF COOK COUNTY JAIL

Issue #9

Nov-Dec 2025

Today, roughly 2 million people in the US find themselves behind iron bars and concrete walls, inside the prisons and jails across the country. Inmates, disproportionately Black and Latino men (Black adults are imprisoned at around 5 times and Latino adults around 2.5 times higher than the rate of White adults, youth comparisons are even higher), fight to survive every day against the brutal conditions of life and rampant abuse by prison authorities while incarcerated. Many suffer for years inside, and when they do eventually leave the prisons and jails, they're typically worse off than they came in: having contracted illnesses (inmates are 17-30% more likely to contract life-threatening illnesses while inside), developing addictions (an estimated 85% of inmates leave with untreated addictions), mental health disorders and traumatic experiences (around 30% of men and 56% of women have symptoms consistent with depression shortly after release; around 16% of men and 31% of women have PTSD symptoms), all accumulated while inside or going on unaddressed. Inmates leave with a record, barring them from stable employment and housing when "re-entering" society. While some jails and prisons offer programs that make life inside less horrific with promises of rehabilitation once inmates leave, recidivism (the rate at which people are re-arrested and return to prisons/jail after getting out) remains extremely high in the US, more than most countries in the world (the US holds 25% of the world's prisoners despite only making up 5% of the world's population). The US continues to hold one of the highest numbers of prisoners per capita (531 per 100,000 people) and the largest absolute number of inmates in recorded history. The combination of mass incarceration across federal and state prisons, local jails, ICE detention centers, and juvenile



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MASS INCARCERATION MACHINE, PART 1

written by Dare to Struggle - Chicago

facilities (not to mention people on probation, parole, or electronic monitoring) represents an unparalleled system of control in size and scope. The mass incarceration machine remains one of the primary tools of oppression used by the ruling class to maintain its position over the oppressed masses. *But how did this come to be? Why? And how do we defeat it? This will be a two-part series that dives into these questions.*

THE ROOTS OF MASS INCARCERATION

Since its inception, the US has used institutions of state power to carry out a war on the oppressed masses in the pursuit of either extracting profit, or to eliminate or control groups it deems expendable or dangerous to its rule. The systematic genocide carried out by the US against Indigenous people and the theft of Mexican land was done in the interests of expanding the US empire, to the benefit of both the US ruling class and their loyal army of white European settlers who had no problem playing the role of foot soldier, as long as they were able to get a piece of the pie. This territorial conquest allowed for the expansion of markets, railways, and industry for the US ruling class who owned and controlled the developing *means of production* (raw materials, factories, machines, transportation, etc. that allow for the production of things for society) and still do to this day.

The mere existence of Indigenous tribes was an obstacle for this crusade, so the US either subjugated them with false promises and treaties, pitted tribes against one another, or outright eliminated them and seized their lands through armed force. African slaves were captured, brought to the US, and sold on auction blocks in the pursuit of cheap labor. Slaves were themselves bought and sold as commodities, held captive on plantations and subject to the authority of the slaveowners, forced to work from sunrise to sunset in the cotton and tobacco plantations in the South and building up the urban cities in the North. This was all done in the pursuit of profit, exploiting the labor of African slaves to sell cotton, tobacco, and whatever else on the global market. African slaves were only seen as useful to the system as much as they could be exploited, where their labor could be turned into profit for the slaveowner and capitalist class.

Now, as a side note, the great oppressed masses of people *didn't just sit down and take all of this shit*. Indigenous people rose up time and time again against US invaders, forcing the US to make compromises, staving off total annihilation for a time. African slaves would rise up, burn down plantations, and escape to freedom, striking fear in the hearts of plantation owners across the US. The ruling class often used ruthless terror tactics in response to these rebellions, public lynchings of Black people, Indigenous, and Chicanos being one of the more horrifying examples in history.

Other times, they would use different means to achieve their goals, such as giving concessions to the oppressed in hopes to put a pause in the rebellion (even convincing some of the oppressed to identify with and defend their oppressors), all the while perfecting a strategy to later tighten their squeeze on the masses even further. We can call this strategy *the carrot and the stick*, a strategic plan to use both reforms and state violence as a way to maintain power over the oppressed, which will be a common theme throughout this piece. As time went on and capitalism expanded across the globe, slavery as a *mode of production* (how things in society are produced) was increasingly coming into conflict with a more capitalist mode of production (paying workers a wage for them to use to buy the products sold to them by capitalists in order to survive). The conflict between these two contending modes of production and the capitalist classes who benefited from them reached a head during the American Civil War (the Union vs. the Confederacy), a war in which African slaves gladly joined on behalf of the Union to decisively smash the system of enslavement in the Confederate South. The Union would have lost on a mere manpower tip if it wasn't for the recruitment of former and freed slaves.

THE INTRODUCTION OF JAILS AND PRISONS

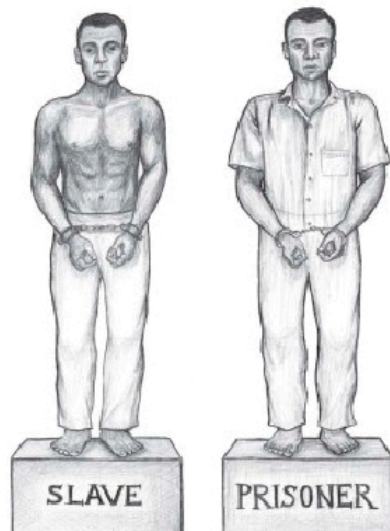
From the post-Civil War society grew two social phenomena. The first, in the former Confederate South, freed slaves enjoyed a brief moment of freedom and sometimes political power over their former slave masters during a period we know as *Reconstruction*. But this newfound freedom was quickly crushed, by a combination of the federal government pulling the rug out from under freed slaves' feet (the closing of the Freedmen's Bureau, removing Union troops who had been sent to the South to suppress Confederate power, and reneging on promises of land distribution) and the racist white supremacist terror that continued to go on unchecked (such as the Ku Klux Klan and other terrorist organizations). Having been only temporarily removed from power, former slave masters regained some footholds and political offices and re-established a society that suited their interests, mainly through the sharecropping system (former slaves working small plots of land, having to give a certain percentage to the owner and keeping the rest for consumption or to sell, sometimes on the very plantations they had previously worked as slaves).

Through this process, however, many former slaves became unemployed, and due to white supremacist laws under Jim Crow segregation, were unable or highly restricted from finding regular work. Many Black people in the South at this time constituted what we call a *surplus population*. No longer deemed necessary in the pursuit of profit, people in the "surplus population" are dispossessed from their means to live and provide for themselves and their families, often forcing people to hustle to get by and pushed into the *informal economy* (illegal activity) to make ends meet. Like the Indigenous people before them, surplus populations are a fundamental part of the capitalist system due to its tendency to dispossess people of their means of survival. This tendency towards *dispossession*, uprooting people from their typical means of survival, can quickly become dangerous to the status quo, particularly when these populations become aware that society has nothing meaningful for them and views them as expendable. This contradiction offers two solutions for the capitalist system on how to deal with these surplus populations: control by physically removing them from society and possibly finding new ways to exploit them in order to squeeze as much profit out of their labor as possible, or eliminate them entirely. Through this we can understand *why the US has been in an almost constant state of war against oppressed people*. The unemployed mass of Black people in the South quickly became subject to white supremacist terrorism from the Klan (who were often formerly or informally connected to the government), as well as institutional forms of white supremacy such as the Vagrancy Act of 1866. Vagrancy laws meant that Black people who had no jobs (because none were afforded to them) would be arrested and thrown into prisons, where, under justification by the 13th Amendment, they could be once again brutally exploited in the cotton fields, building new railways and roads, and working the mines for no pay at all. Slaves once again, this time through convict leasing.



THE GREAT MIGRATION TO THE NORTH

The second phenomenon that occurred was the masses of Black people who left the South and moved to the industrialized northern cities, what we know today as the *Great Migration*. Newly constructed factories and industries in the North became poles of attraction for the working and poor classes and were mostly worked by newly arrived white ethnic immigrant populations (Irish, Italians, Polish, Germans, etc.) whose labor could be sufficiently exploited for a time. When the new wave of migration of Black people from the South arrived, they had next to nothing for survival, and could be paid far less than the white workers to work in these same factories. This reality, coupled with white supremacist ideology bolstered in these white ethnic populations, led to racist attacks against the Black migrants by the white ethnic workers, who they blamed for taking their jobs because they could generally be paid less for the same day's work (sound familiar?). As time went on, these cities began to grow, filled with more poor and oppressed people looking for work. Due to the exploitation in the factories and racist discrimination between communities, urban rebellion would break out, sometimes in the form of militant strikes against the factory owners demanding better pay and jobs and other times against white supremacist terror in the streets. This led to the creation and bolstering of the institutionalized police forces we know today, whose job was to break up strikes, keep poor and oppressed people in line, and maintain the status quo. Along with the cops came their jails and prisons to physically remove and hold rebellious sections of society when they got out of hand. Of course, the social ills of the emerging capitalist society had to also be addressed, but rather than get to the root of these problems (the alienation of capitalist society, the depression and desperation of the masses, and the informal economy created due to dispossession), the US began to construct more and more prisons and jails to house the growing number of the oppressed.



CONCLUSION

This brief history should give us a sense of what we are *really* up against. The jails and prisons we have today are no accident or mere consequence of history, but developed tools of an oppressive system to maintain the capitalist order over the masses of people. For centuries, these tools and methods have been refined and continue to develop as new problems arise for the ruling class. In Part 2, we will dive deeper into how these tools have developed into the modern-day mass incarceration machine. The point, however, is to illustrate how deep this goes. We can't simply reform this system away, only to make it better temporarily for some people, while it comes back around to bite us in the ass later down the line. Appealing to the morality of people at the top of this society won't work either. Imagine the slave on the plantation relying on the slave master to one day grow a conscience and free his slaves. The slavemaster already knows the plight of the slave, but his whole way of life depends on the system of slavery itself. *So why would he go against it?* Even the low-level slave catcher is a stakeholder in the system. In essence, it's the same damn thing today, all we have is each other. The solution we offer here is collective resistance against the system as a whole, one where the great masses of people rise up against their oppressors and remove them from power, and build something better in its place. If we're learning our history, we know this is not an idealist fantasy but a real possibility, and it starts with us. You in?

Write to us about your reflections, thoughts, questions, and comments on this piece. Part 2 will be out in Issue #10 of Cracks At Hotel California.

"BECOMING LIGHT", A POEM BY SHUKRI ABU BAKER

Shukri Abu Baker is a Palestinian political prisoner held inside a US super-max prison. His crime? Feeding the children of Gaza. On December 4, 2001, the Holy Land Foundation (HLF), a US-based humanitarian organization working in Gaza, Palestine, was shut down by President George W. Bush under Executive Order 13224. Federal agents raided the charity's offices and seized all documents, assets, and funds of the organization, as well as personal property of the employees. Shukri was one of the five founders of the HLF imprisoned on terrorism charges, accused of providing funds to terrorist groups. He has been imprisoned since 2004.

Light uproots us from sinkage
Plants us in altitude
Fills all void in us
Liberates us from ghostly insides
Makes us of light, unafraid

Earth's gaze froze behind her veil
a shroud threaded in innocent veins
Big wars, big handshakes, big lies
Earth is ours, her face is us
Face our humanity
Unveil our face, let us
Open up to the colors of light

History speaks of monstrosities
Upheaved as hell then lay cold in ash
What beastly war?
What silence and silencing?
What mass emaciation?
What walls would last? Light lasts forever

Earth's face, our gorgeous face
Full mooned in the waxing light
Her veil burns, ashes away with the
morning wind
Change is us unafraid, we are of light

We tuck our sorrowing nights in deep
Remembrance and we crest our pinnacle
We learn, we teach, we remind
We celebrate the light we have become
Upending, unbending light of all colors

And into every blinding moment we enter
We enter unafraid, we hold hands
We beam with power. We shine

Shukri Abu Baker 9-01-25

Write poetry? Send us some and we will publish online and in the newsletter!

A LETTER FROM COMRADE A

This is an excerpt of a letter sent to us by an inmate inside CCJ who has been working to get his deck organized to make demands against prison authorities. The entire letter is in our website and only written out in partial here to avoid censorship. Here is some of what he wrote:

"When we dare to struggle, we dare to win, and we either STAND for something or FALL for anything. To all the men and women apart of this revolutionay struggle, remain reslient and dedicated to the mission. We organized and took the dayroom during shift change. They couldn't do any roll call and all Correctional Officers reported to the deck. We demanded officers stop the excessive use of force and the officers who have used excessive force be held accountable, we demanded that the commissary and phone call prices be lowered, and for the extortion to stop. We demanded that we stop being forced to live in unsanitary conditions, and demanded 40 grievances. This was an affective takeover, although there was several cans of mace pointed at us, no one was sprayed, and we all remained together and focused. All of us encourage all of you who are apart of this revolutionary struggle in whatever division to join us in solidarity, unite, and organize, and follow through with your demands. When we dare to struggle, we dare to win."

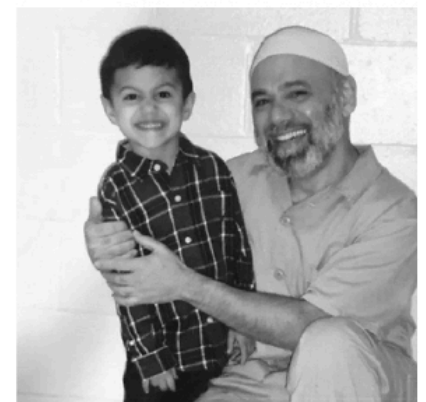


Photo of Shukri Abu Baker

A CALL FOR SOCIAL INVESTIGATION AT COOK COUNTY JAIL

Since we started writing Cracks, we have received numerous letters from inmates describing the conditions inside, as well as actions they have taken against these conditions. In our last newsletter, we sent out a call for inmates to write us about organizing efforts among inmates. However, that newsletter was heavily censored. In the hopes this newsletter makes it to you inside, we want to better systematize our approach. Please write to us and use the following questions as a guide. Send us your answers, and use them to interview other inmates on your deck and send us their responses. This will be helpful for Dare to Struggle to better understand the problems inside to better our approach to both inmates and their families in organizing in collective struggle.

What are the conditions under which the inmates carry out their daily activities? Describe the cells in which they are confined.

How is it that inmates are able to survive the conditions that they have been subjected to?

What goes on day to day in the jail?

What kind of medical attention do they receive?

What kind of illnesses are most often seen?

What is the daily attitude of the inmates that allows them to overcome this situation?

How do inmates confront this situation?

What can you tell us about the judicial process?

What do you think of the SAFE-T Act (end of cash bail)? What are some other policy changes that have affected you?

What should the outside support for inmates be fighting for? How can it unite with inmates organizing inside?

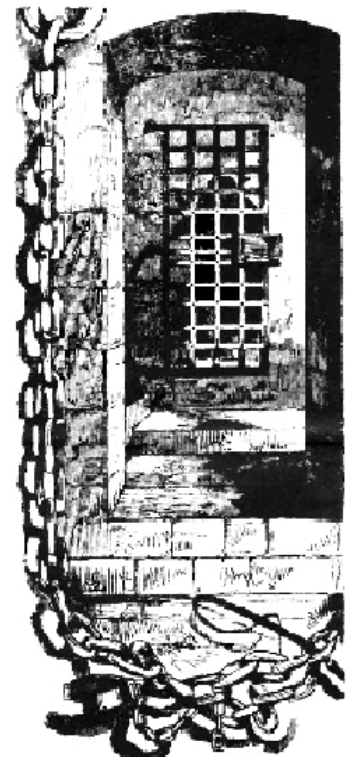
MEDICAL NEGLECT CONTINUES TO RUN RAMPANT AT CCJ!

In recent weeks, multiple inmates across divisions inside Cook County Jail (CCJ) have reached out to report accounts of medical neglect behind its walls. From the denial of menstrual and sanitary products, including a lack of access to these items on commissary, the withholding of inmates' vital medications with no clear answers as to why, and recent reports of the spread of shingles and m-pox among inmates, with 7 confirmed cases of mpox in Division 8 RTU and 50 reported cases of shingles across multiple divisions. Coupled with the disgusting conditions inside, from mold and rats, to ultra-processed foods, there is a clear disregard for inmates' basic medical needs inside the jail, leaving many susceptible to infection or sickness. When inmates do get sick, the neglect continues, as complaints and cries for help are ignored, resulting in a string of preventable deaths like that of Alteriq Pleasant and Daniel Colon.

In 2022, after spending 19 hours in CPD custody, 27-year-old Alteriq arrived at CCJ bloodied and bruised before experiencing a medical emergency that ended his life. A year later, 28-year-old Daniel Colon also died in CCJ. He was found dead on the floor of the jail bathroom after suffering from drug withdrawal. Both Alteriq and Daniel died within days of arriving at CCJ, with visible signs that should have gotten them medical attention. Daniel even told medical staff that he'd been experiencing withdrawal symptoms and he needed assistance. Instead of getting help, the two were left to suffer in isolation until they took their last breaths.

By subjecting inmates to hellish conditions behind its walls, CCJ tells us exactly what it thinks about the thousands who sit inside its walls: expendable. Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart and Board President Toni Preckwinkle have Alteriq and Daniel's blood on their hands. They must answer for why inmates' medical needs are neglected. Inmates and their families must act now to expose and fight back against medical neglect at CCJ. End Medical Neglect at CCJ!

Tell us about medical neglect at CCJ. How have you seen it? What damage did it cause? And what are we going to do to end it?



CALLING ALL JAILHOUSE ARTISTS!

Calling all artists and poets! Send us your work to be featured in the next issue of Cracks!

To submit, please mail in your work to our PO Box (see last page for address).

**DARE TO
STRUGGLE**

FREE ADRIAN!

The following is a letter from 25-year-old Adrian Rucker, the young man arrested "in connection" to the June 5th killing of CPD officer Krystal Rivera, with minor grammatical edits.

Rivera was shot from behind by her partner, Carlos Baker, a Chicago cop with a lengthy rap sheet of complaints against him, including multiple instances of violence against women and his fellow officers. Adrian and another young man were arrested and swiftly blamed as responsible for Rivera's murder, and despite the truth coming out revealing her partner as her killer, the two men are still being pinned as the reason for her killing (though neither pulled the trigger that took her life). The following are his words and testimony from inside Cook County Jail, where he has been held since June 8th.

My name is Adrian Rucker, I'm one of two people who was incarcerated for the incident that occurred on 82nd and Drexel where Officer Rivera was "accidentally" gunned down by her corrupt partner Carlos Baker, who was not even supposed to be working at the time due to being placed on a probationary leave from work! Since the incident occurred, the mayor of Chicago and the Chicago Police Department used my name along with my picture to try and paint me as a bad guy and the one responsible for everything that occurred that night.

They used the news and press conferences to slander my image without even doing a proper investigation at first, then when they did an "investigation" and found out that one of their own, corrupt officer Carlos was responsible and lied about everything that happened, they switched their story round and tried to label it a "tragic accident!" Not once did they use Carlos' name or image on the news like they did me, they tried to keep him out the public image! In Carlos Baker's short 4 years [at CPD] there's been many red flags raised about him, his ability to do his job correctly, and his credibility as a person and as a police officer.

Carlos Baker has been involved in an incident where he flashed a firearm while on a date with someone, it's said that he had been involved in a gun buyback scandal where a firearm was bought back by the Chicago Police Department but ended up on the streets of Chicago and was involved in countless shootings and was later recovered on a teenager in Chicago, and another incident that happened recently where he was caught harassing and assaulting another police officer who was out at a bar off-duty, trying to get [the bar owner] to delete the video footage (which in the court system would be a felony charge of tampering with a witness for any normal person).

Not only me but countless other inmates, other people who have heard of the situation, and Officer Rivera's family believe Carlos Baker is a corrupt officer and should be arrested, face some kind of charges, and be held accountable for what occurred and what happened to officer Rivera. It's not fair that a cop can "accidentally" kill another cop and get a slap on the wrist because it was "in the line of duty", but if it was the other way around, even if it was truly an accident, a regular civilian would most likely be facing life in prison!

It's not fair that I have to sit in Cook County Jail where a lot of us are treated poorly, fed poorly, have to sleep and live in poorly kept rooms and units where mice and rats run rampant, and bathe in showers that don't get hot at all, while Carlos Baker the real person responsible gets to go home and sleep and eat peacefully. While I have to sit and fight 13 outrageous charges, [While they are] trying to make me suffer as I wait for my day in this corrupt court system, Carlos hasn't had a charge or had a day in court pertaining to this incident. He's been able to walk free while he's harmed other female officers and other people, and has not faced any charges or consequences because he's a police officer!

He should be held accountable for his actions just like any regular person would be, no matter their career, their standing, or who they know or associate with. How can any of us trust this corrupt police department or court system to investigate their own, fact check everything, uphold the law to everyone involved, and hold their own accountable for their lies and actions, if they can't truthfully tell the public or Officer Rivera's family, the people who deserve the truth more than anybody in this situation. Her family stated that they were shown an altered and edited body cam footage of the incident that took the life of their beloved family member!

If they are not being truthful with the people who lost a loving mother, daughter, aunt, cousin, etc., how can we expect anything but lies and corruption from those same people, [when] they can't be honest about what happened to one of their own!

I feel this whole case and situation is bigger than me and I'm being used as a pawn, the fall guy, to put the blame on and take the heat for the corrupt police department and Officer Carlos Baker! I feel as they know they made countless mistakes but won't admit to them! The first big mistake was letting Carlos on duty when he shouldn't have been! Not only does the Rivera family believe that if he wasn't working she would be alive, but everyone with knowledge of this case agrees as well! A lot of people think and feel that what Carlos did that night wasn't right or acceptable. If he had followed protocol, a lot could have been prevented.

I feel that there is a lot of unanswered questions, a lot of lies that haven't but should come to light, but a lot of corruption that will unfold as well! Not only should all this happen for me but most importantly for Rivera's family. I send my deepest condolences to her family and friends.

— Adrian



**CCJ Inmates & Their Families
Demand DIGNITY & RESPECT Inside
Cook County Jail!**

1. We demand the right to a fair and speedy trial. Many inmates have been inside Cook County Jail for years without being found guilty of a crime. Many inmates are pressured into taking plea deals because of this. Due to the conditions of the jail, some people will catch more charges while inside waiting for their day in court.

2. We demand decent meals fit for human beings, everyday, for every prisoner. We demand clean drinking water free of contaminants which make inmates sick.

3. We demand adequate access to our loved ones inside and outside of the jail, and an end to the criminalization of visitors. We also demand an end to the confiscation of mail sent to inmates under the false guise of safety. Withholding letters & denying visitation is a form of psychological torture.

4. We demand the jail allow industries to enter the institutions and employ inmates. Many families are extorted by the jail to provide for their loved ones on the inside and are driven to the brink of bankruptcy. Inmates should be able to provide for themselves and their families.

GET INVOLVED!

Email us at
**daretostrugglechicago
@protonmail.com**

Write to **PO Box
#25087, Chicago IL
60625**

5. We demand adequate medical staff and change in medical policy. The jail is prejudiced in its treatment of inmates and often denies medical care for those in need. There are often numerous "mistakes" made many times; the denial of medication and improper medication administered.

6. We demand regular use of the recreational facilities and time outside. We also demand regular educational activities inside the jail that stimulate the mind.

7. We demand an end to collective punishment. Inmates should not be denied "privileges" like use of the microwave or be placed on lockdown for days or weeks because of a rules violation. Collective punishment only creates more tension.

8. We demand clean and decent living spaces inside the jail. Inmates are denied sufficient cleaning supplies so they can properly upkeep their cells. Common areas, especially the showers, are not properly and regularly cleaned. There are units that get too cold at night where inmates are only provided one thin blanket for warmth. Some showers are scalding hot and can't be used.

Join the campaign to fight for these demands and more. Tell your friends, tell your family. Get organized and fight back.

THE POWER OF THE PEOPLE
IS THE FORCE
OF LIFE

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written by Dare to Struggle - Chicago

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THE ROOTS OF MASS INCARCERATION

Since its inception, the US has used institutions of state power to carry out a war on the oppressed masses in the pursuit of either extracting profit, or to eliminate or control groups it deems expendable or dangerous to its rule. The systematic genocide carried out by the US against Indigenous people and the theft of Mexican land was done in the interests of expanding the US empire, to the benefit of both the US ruling class and their loyal army of white European settlers who had no problem playing the role of foot soldier, as long as they were able to get a piece of the pie. This territorial conquest allowed for the expansion of markets, railways, and industry for the US ruling class who owned and controlled the developing *means of production* (raw materials, factories, machines, transportation, etc. that allow for the production of things for society) and still do to this day.

The mere existence of Indigenous tribes was an obstacle for this crusade, so the US either subjugated them with false promises and treaties, pitted tribes against one another, or outright eliminated them and seized their lands through armed force. African slaves were captured, brought to the US, and sold on auction blocks in the pursuit of cheap labor. Slaves were themselves bought and sold as commodities, held captive on plantations and subject to the authority of the slaveowners, forced to work from sunrise to sunset in the cotton and tobacco plantations in the South and building up the urban cities in the North. This was all done in the pursuit of profit, exploiting the labor of African slaves to sell cotton, tobacco, and whatever else on the global market. African slaves were only seen as useful to the system as much as they could be exploited, where their labor could be turned into profit for the slaveowner and capitalist class.

Now, as a side note, the great oppressed masses of people *didn't just sit down and take all of this shit*. Indigenous people rose up time and time again against US invaders, forcing the US to make compromises, staving off total annihilation for a time. African slaves would rise up, burn down plantations, and escape to freedom, striking fear in the hearts of plantation owners across the US. The ruling class often used ruthless terror tactics in response to these rebellions, public lynchings of Black people, Indigenous, and Chicanos being one of the more horrifying examples in history.

Other times, they would use different means to achieve their goals, such as giving concessions to the oppressed in hopes to put a pause in the rebellion (even convincing some of the oppressed to identify with and defend their oppressors), all the while perfecting a strategy to later tighten their squeeze on the masses even further. We can call this strategy *the carrot and the stick*, a strategic plan to use both reforms and state violence as a way to maintain power over the oppressed, which will be a common theme throughout this piece. As time went on and capitalism expanded across the globe, slavery as a *mode of production* (how things in society are produced) was increasingly coming into conflict with a more capitalist mode of production (paying workers a wage for them to use to buy the products sold to them by capitalists in order to survive). The conflict between these two contending modes of production and the capitalist classes who benefited from them reached a head during the American Civil War (the Union vs. the Confederacy), a war in which African slaves gladly joined on behalf of the Union to decisively smash the system of enslavement in the Confederate South. The Union would have lost on a mere manpower tip if it wasn't for the recruitment of former and freed slaves.

THE INTRODUCTION OF JAILS AND PRISONS

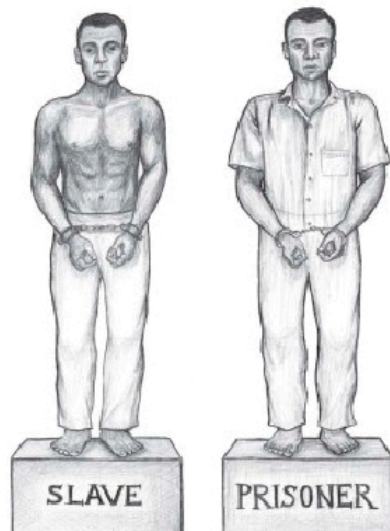
From the post-Civil War society grew two social phenomena. The first, in the former Confederate South, freed slaves enjoyed a brief moment of freedom and sometimes political power over their former slave masters during a period we know as *Reconstruction*. But this newfound freedom was quickly crushed, by a combination of the federal government pulling the rug out from under freed slaves' feet (the closing of the Freedmen's Bureau, removing Union troops who had been sent to the South to suppress Confederate power, and reneging on promises of land distribution) and the racist white supremacist terror that continued to go on unchecked (such as the Ku Klux Klan and other terrorist organizations). Having been only temporarily removed from power, former slave masters regained some footholds and political offices and re-established a society that suited their interests, mainly through the sharecropping system (former slaves working small plots of land, having to give a certain percentage to the owner and keeping the rest for consumption or to sell, sometimes on the very plantations they had previously worked as slaves).

Through this process, however, many former slaves became unemployed, and due to white supremacist laws under Jim Crow segregation, were unable or highly restricted from finding regular work. Many Black people in the South at this time constituted what we call a *surplus population*. No longer deemed necessary in the pursuit of profit, people in the "surplus population" are dispossessed from their means to live and provide for themselves and their families, often forcing people to hustle to get by and pushed into the *informal economy* (illegal activity) to make ends meet. Like the Indigenous people before them, surplus populations are a fundamental part of the capitalist system due to its tendency to dispossess people of their means of survival. This tendency towards *dispossession*, uprooting people from their typical means of survival, can quickly become dangerous to the status quo, particularly when these populations become aware that society has nothing meaningful for them and views them as expendable. This contradiction offers two solutions for the capitalist system on how to deal with these surplus populations: control by physically removing them from society and possibly finding new ways to exploit them in order to squeeze as much profit out of their labor as possible, or eliminate them entirely. Through this we can understand *why the US has been in an almost constant state of war against oppressed people*. The unemployed mass of Black people in the South quickly became subject to white supremacist terrorism from the Klan (who were often formerly or informally connected to the government), as well as institutional forms of white supremacy such as the Vagrancy Act of 1866. Vagrancy laws meant that Black people who had no jobs (because none were afforded to them) would be arrested and thrown into prisons, where, under justification by the 13th Amendment, they could be once again brutally exploited in the cotton fields, building new railways and roads, and working the mines for no pay at all. Slaves once again, this time through convict leasing.



THE GREAT MIGRATION TO THE NORTH

The second phenomenon that occurred was the masses of Black people who left the South and moved to the industrialized northern cities, what we know today as the *Great Migration*. Newly constructed factories and industries in the North became poles of attraction for the working and poor classes and were mostly worked by newly arrived white ethnic immigrant populations (Irish, Italians, Polish, Germans, etc.) whose labor could be sufficiently exploited for a time. When the new wave of migration of Black people from the South arrived, they had next to nothing for survival, and could be paid far less than the white workers to work in these same factories. This reality, coupled with white supremacist ideology bolstered in these white ethnic populations, led to racist attacks against the Black migrants by the white ethnic workers, who they blamed for taking their jobs because they could generally be paid less for the same day's work (sound familiar?). As time went on, these cities began to grow, filled with more poor and oppressed people looking for work. Due to the exploitation in the factories and racist discrimination between communities, urban rebellion would break out, sometimes in the form of militant strikes against the factory owners demanding better pay and jobs and other times against white supremacist terror in the streets. This led to the creation and bolstering of the institutionalized police forces we know today, whose job was to break up strikes, keep poor and oppressed people in line, and maintain the status quo. Along with the cops came their jails and prisons to physically remove and hold rebellious sections of society when they got out of hand. Of course, the social ills of the emerging capitalist society had to also be addressed, but rather than get to the root of these problems (the alienation of capitalist society, the depression and desperation of the masses, and the informal economy created due to dispossession), the US began to construct more and more prisons and jails to house the growing number of the oppressed.



CONCLUSION

This brief history should give us a sense of what we are *really* up against. The jails and prisons we have today are no accident or mere consequence of history, but developed tools of an oppressive system to maintain the capitalist order over the masses of people. For centuries, these tools and methods have been refined and continue to develop as new problems arise for the ruling class. In Part 2, we will dive deeper into how these tools have developed into the modern-day mass incarceration machine. The point, however, is to illustrate how deep this goes. We can't simply reform this system away, only to make it better temporarily for some people, while it comes back around to bite us in the ass later down the line. Appealing to the morality of people at the top of this society won't work either. Imagine the slave on the plantation relying on the slave master to one day grow a conscience and free his slaves. The slavemaster already knows the plight of the slave, but his whole way of life depends on the system of slavery itself. *So why would he go against it?* Even the low-level slave catcher is a stakeholder in the system. In essence, it's the same damn thing today, all we have is each other. The solution we offer here is collective resistance against the system as a whole, one where the great masses of people rise up against their oppressors and remove them from power, and build something better in its place. If we're learning our history, we know this is not an idealist fantasy but a real possibility, and it starts with us. You in?

Write to us about your reflections, thoughts, questions, and comments on this piece. Part 2 will be out in Issue #10 of Cracks At Hotel California.

"BECOMING LIGHT", A POEM BY SHUKRI ABU BAKER

Shukri Abu Baker is a Palestinian political prisoner held inside a US super-max prison. His crime? Feeding the children of Gaza. On December 4, 2001, the Holy Land Foundation (HLF), a US-based humanitarian organization working in Gaza, Palestine, was shut down by President George W. Bush under Executive Order 13224. Federal agents raided the charity's offices and seized all documents, assets, and funds of the organization, as well as personal property of the employees. Shukri was one of the five founders of the HLF imprisoned on terrorism charges, accused of providing funds to terrorist groups. He has been imprisoned since 2004.

Light uproots us from sinkage
Plants us in altitude
Fills all void in us
Liberates us from ghostly insides
Makes us of light, unafraid

Earth's gaze froze behind her veil
a shroud threaded in innocent veins
Big wars, big handshakes, big lies
Earth is ours, her face is us
Face our humanity
Unveil our face, let us
Open up to the colors of light

History speaks of monstrosities
Upheaved as hell then lay cold in ash
What beastly war?
What silence and silencing?
What mass emaciation?
What walls would last? Light lasts forever

Earth's face, our gorgeous face
Full mooned in the waxing light
Her veil burns, ashes away with the
morning wind
Change is us unafraid, we are of light

We tuck our sorrowing nights in deep
Remembrance and we crest our pinnacle
We learn, we teach, we remind
We celebrate the light we have become
Upending, unbending light of all colors

And into every blinding moment we enter
We enter unafraid, we hold hands
We beam with power. We shine

Shukri Abu Baker 9-01-25

Write poetry? Send us some and we will publish online and in the newsletter!

A LETTER FROM COMRADE A

This is an excerpt of a letter sent to us by an inmate inside CCJ who has been working to get his deck organized to make demands against prison authorities. The entire letter is in our website and only written out in partial here to avoid censorship. Here is some of what he wrote:

"When we dare to struggle, we dare to win, and we either STAND for something or FALL for anything. To all the men and women apart of this revolutionay struggle, remain reslient and dedicated to the mission. We organized and took the dayroom during shift change. They couldn't do any roll call and all Correctional Officers reported to the deck. We demanded officers stop the excessive use of force and the officers who have used excessive force be held accountable, we demanded that the commissary and phone call prices be lowered, and for the extortion to stop. We demanded that we stop being forced to live in unsanitary conditions, and demanded 40 grievances. This was an affective takeover, although there was several cans of mace pointed at us, no one was sprayed, and we all remained together and focused. All of us encourage all of you who are apart of this revolutionary struggle in whatever division to join us in solidarity, unite, and organize, and follow through with your demands. When we dare to struggle, we dare to win."

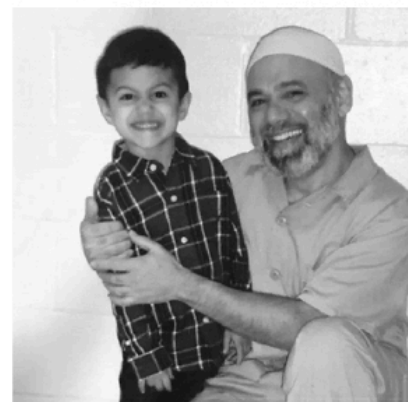


Photo of Shukri Abu Baker

A CALL FOR SOCIAL INVESTIGATION AT COOK COUNTY JAIL

Since we started writing Cracks, we have received numerous letters from inmates describing the conditions inside, as well as actions they have taken against these conditions. In our last newsletter, we sent out a call for inmates to write us about organizing efforts among inmates. However, that newsletter was heavily censored. In the hopes this newsletter makes it to you inside, we want to better systematize our approach. Please write to us and use the following questions as a guide. Send us your answers, and use them to interview other inmates on your deck and send us their responses. This will be helpful for Dare to Struggle to better understand the problems inside to better our approach to both inmates and their families in organizing in collective struggle.

What are the conditions under which the inmates carry out their daily activities? Describe the cells in which they are confined.

How is it that inmates are able to survive the conditions that they have been subjected to?

What goes on day to day in the jail?

What kind of medical attention do they receive?

What kind of illnesses are most often seen?

What is the daily attitude of the inmates that allows them to overcome this situation?

How do inmates confront this situation?

What can you tell us about the judicial process?

What do you think of the SAFE-T Act (end of cash bail)? What are some other policy changes that have affected you?

What should the outside support for inmates be fighting for? How can it unite with inmates organizing inside?

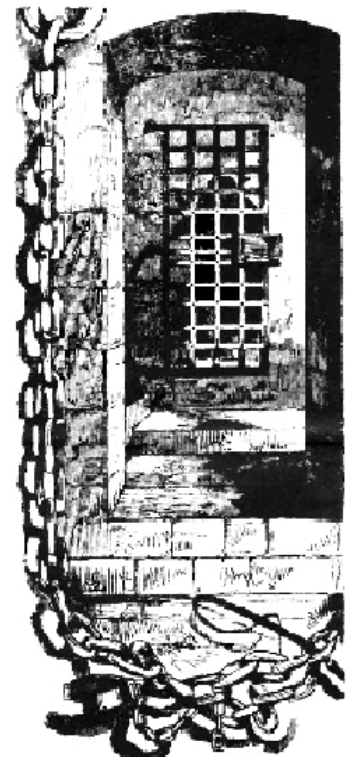
MEDICAL NEGLECT CONTINUES TO RUN RAMPANT AT CCJ!

In recent weeks, multiple inmates across divisions inside Cook County Jail (CCJ) have reached out to report accounts of medical neglect behind its walls. From the denial of menstrual and sanitary products, including a lack of access to these items on commissary, the withholding of inmates' vital medications with no clear answers as to why, and recent reports of the spread of shingles and m-pox among inmates, with 7 confirmed cases of mpox in Division 8 RTU and 50 reported cases of shingles across multiple divisions. Coupled with the disgusting conditions inside, from mold and rats, to ultra-processed foods, there is a clear disregard for inmates' basic medical needs inside the jail, leaving many susceptible to infection or sickness. When inmates do get sick, the neglect continues, as complaints and cries for help are ignored, resulting in a string of preventable deaths like that of Alteriq Pleasant and Daniel Colon.

In 2022, after spending 19 hours in CPD custody, 27-year-old Alteriq arrived at CCJ bloodied and bruised before experiencing a medical emergency that ended his life. A year later, 28-year-old Daniel Colon also died in CCJ. He was found dead on the floor of the jail bathroom after suffering from drug withdrawal. Both Alteriq and Daniel died within days of arriving at CCJ, with visible signs that should have gotten them medical attention. Daniel even told medical staff that he'd been experiencing withdrawal symptoms and he needed assistance. Instead of getting help, the two were left to suffer in isolation until they took their last breaths.

By subjecting inmates to hellish conditions behind its walls, CCJ tells us exactly what it thinks about the thousands who sit inside its walls: expendable. Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart and Board President Toni Preckwinkle have Alteriq and Daniel's blood on their hands. They must answer for why inmates' medical needs are neglected. Inmates and their families must act now to expose and fight back against medical neglect at CCJ. End Medical Neglect at CCJ!

Tell us about medical neglect at CCJ. How have you seen it? What damage did it cause? And what are we going to do to end it?



CALLING ALL JAILHOUSE ARTISTS!

Calling all artists and poets! Send us your work to be featured in the next issue of Cracks!

To submit, please mail in your work to our PO Box (see last page for address).

DARE TO STRUGGLE

FREE ADRIAN!

The following is a letter from 25-year-old Adrian Rucker, the young man arrested "in connection" to the June 5th killing of CPD officer Krystal Rivera, with minor grammatical edits.

Rivera was shot from behind by her partner, Carlos Baker, a Chicago cop with a lengthy rap sheet of complaints against him, including multiple instances of violence against women and his fellow officers. Adrian and another young man were arrested and swiftly blamed as responsible for Rivera's murder, and despite the truth coming out revealing her partner as her killer, the two men are still being pinned as the reason for her killing (though neither pulled the trigger that took her life). The following are his words and testimony from inside Cook County Jail, where he has been held since June 8th.

My name is Adrian Rucker, I'm one of two people who was incarcerated for the incident that occurred on 82nd and Drexel where Officer Rivera was "accidentally" gunned down by her corrupt partner Carlos Baker, who was not even supposed to be working at the time due to being placed on a probationary leave from work! Since the incident occurred, the mayor of Chicago and the Chicago Police Department used my name along with my picture to try and paint me as a bad guy and the one responsible for everything that occurred that night.

They used the news and press conferences to slander my image without even doing a proper investigation at first, then when they did an "investigation" and found out that one of their own, corrupt officer Carlos was responsible and lied about everything that happened, they switched their story round and tried to label it a "tragic accident!" Not once did they use Carlos' name or image on the news like they did me, they tried to keep him out the public image! In Carlos Baker's short 4 years [at CPD] there's been many red flags raised about him, his ability to do his job correctly, and his credibility as a person and as a police officer.

Carlos Baker has been involved in an incident where he flashed a firearm while on a date with someone, it's said that he had been involved in a gun buyback scandal where a firearm was bought back by the Chicago Police Department but ended up on the streets of Chicago and was involved in countless shootings and was later recovered on a teenager in Chicago, and another incident that happened recently where he was caught harassing and assaulting another police officer who was out at a bar off-duty, trying to get [the bar owner] to delete the video footage (which in the court system would be a felony charge of tampering with a witness for any normal person).

Not only me but countless other inmates, other people who have heard of the situation, and Officer Rivera's family believe Carlos Baker is a corrupt officer and should be arrested, face some kind of charges, and be held accountable for what occurred and what happened to officer Rivera. It's not fair that a cop can "accidentally" kill another cop and get a slap on the wrist because it was "in the line of duty", but if it was the other way around, even if it was truly an accident, a regular civilian would most likely be facing life in prison!

It's not fair that I have to sit in Cook County Jail where a lot of us are treated poorly, fed poorly, have to sleep and live in poorly kept rooms and units where mice and rats run rampant, and bathe in showers that don't get hot at all, while Carlos Baker the real person responsible gets to go home and sleep and eat peacefully. While I have to sit and fight 13 outrageous charges, [While they are] trying to make me suffer as I wait for my day in this corrupt court system, Carlos hasn't had a charge or had a day in court pertaining to this incident. He's been able to walk free while he's harmed other female officers and other people, and has not faced any charges or consequences because he's a police officer!

He should be held accountable for his actions just like any regular person would be, no matter their career, their standing, or who they know or associate with. How can any of us trust this corrupt police department or court system to investigate their own, fact check everything, uphold the law to everyone involved, and hold their own accountable for their lies and actions, if they can't truthfully tell the public or Officer Rivera's family, the people who deserve the truth more than anybody in this situation. Her family stated that they were shown an altered and edited body cam footage of the incident that took the life of their beloved family member!

If they are not being truthful with the people who lost a loving mother, daughter, aunt, cousin, etc., how can we expect anything but lies and corruption from those same people, [when] they can't be honest about what happened to one of their own!

I feel this whole case and situation is bigger than me and I'm being used as a pawn, the fall guy, to put the blame on and take the heat for the corrupt police department and Officer Carlos Baker! I feel as they know they made countless mistakes but won't admit to them! The first big mistake was letting Carlos on duty when he shouldn't have been! Not only does the Rivera family believe that if he wasn't working she would be alive, but everyone with knowledge of this case agrees as well! A lot of people think and feel that what Carlos did that night wasn't right or acceptable. If he had followed protocol, a lot could have been prevented.

I feel that there is a lot of unanswered questions, a lot of lies that haven't but should come to light, but a lot of corruption that will unfold as well! Not only should all this happen for me but most importantly for Rivera's family. I send my deepest condolences to her family and friends.

— Adrian



**CCJ Inmates & Their Families
Demand DIGNITY & RESPECT Inside
Cook County Jail!**

1. We demand the right to a fair and speedy trial. Many inmates have been inside Cook County Jail for years without being found guilty of a crime. Many inmates are pressured into taking plea deals because of this. Due to the conditions of the jail, some people will catch more charges while inside waiting for their day in court.

2. We demand decent meals fit for human beings, everyday, for every prisoner. We demand clean drinking water free of contaminants which make inmates sick.

3. We demand adequate access to our loved ones inside and outside of the jail, and an end to the criminalization of visitors. We also demand an end to the confiscation of mail sent to inmates under the false guise of safety. Withholding letters & denying visitation is a form of psychological torture.

4. We demand the jail allow industries to enter the institutions and employ inmates. Many families are extorted by the jail to provide for their loved ones on the inside and are driven to the brink of bankruptcy. Inmates should be able to provide for themselves and their families.

GET INVOLVED!

Email us at
**daretostrugglechicago
@protonmail.com**

Write to **PO Box
#25087, Chicago IL
60625**

5. We demand adequate medical staff and change in medical policy. The jail is prejudiced in its treatment of inmates and often denies medical care for those in need. There are often numerous "mistakes" made many times; the denial of medication and improper medication administered.

6. We demand regular use of the recreational facilities and time outside. We also demand regular educational activities inside the jail that stimulate the mind.

7. We demand an end to collective punishment. Inmates should not be denied "privileges" like use of the microwave or be placed on lockdown for days or weeks because of a rules violation. Collective punishment only creates more tension.

8. We demand clean and decent living spaces inside the jail. Inmates are denied sufficient cleaning supplies so they can properly upkeep their cells. Common areas, especially the showers, are not properly and regularly cleaned. There are units that get too cold at night where inmates are only provided one thin blanket for warmth. Some showers are scalding hot and can't be used.

Join the campaign to fight for these demands and more. Tell your friends, tell your family. Get organized and fight back.

THE POWER OF THE PEOPLE
IS THE FORCE
OF LIFE

**ATTENTION CORRECTIONAL
AUTHORITIES: PLEASE READ
CENSORSHIP NOTICE**

As the distributor of Cracks, we retain a First Amendment right to correspond with inmates, just as inmates retain a First Amendment right to correspond with the outside world. While a rational basis test is allowed for the censorship of publications entering a prison system, such allowance does not allow a blanket ban on publications entering because prison authorities do not agree with the message or content, which may be political or religious in nature. Censorship regulations must first be rational and impose censorship only in furtherance of "an important or substantial governmental interest not related to the suppression of expression" and relate to "legitimate penological interests." The federal courts have rules unequivocally that a prison agency censoring inmate publications and mail must provide the distributor or publisher notice of censorship. This notice must provide articulate reasons for such censorship with specific references to the objectionable material. The distributor/ publisher must be given a meaningful opportunity to appeal the censorship to a person not involved in the censorship decision. Notice and opportunity are required by due process. We encourage you to carefully read and understand your agency's policies and procedures, as well as federal case law related to the censorship of incoming mail and publications addressed to individuals in custody.

If you have any doubt, you should consult your agency's legal counsel. Failure to adhere to federal law, Illinois administrative regulations and your agency's policies and procedures is evidence of malicious intent to violate our rights.
PLEASE GOVERN YOURSELF ACCORDINGLY.

Cracks At Hotel California is a newsletter that exposes the daily reality of torture, murder, and mistreatment inside of the Cook County Jail. We believe that the people who can best tell the truth about what's happening are the people on the inside and their loved ones on the outside. This newsletter is produced by Dare to Struggle, an organization committed to standing with the people subjected to the horrors of the American nightmare. Send us your story...



**DARE TO
STRUGGLE**