# Prison Town

## Paying the **Price**

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# Prison Town Paying the Price

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**The Real Cost of Prisons Project** brings together prison/justice policy activists with political economists to create workshops and materials which explore both the immediate and long-term costs of mass incarceration on the individual, her/his family, community and the nation.

Two additional comic books are part of this series: *Prisoners of the War on Drugs* and *Prisoners of Hard Times: Women and Children.* If you would like copies of these comic books to assist your group in its organizing work, contact Lois Ahrens. Or you can go to www.realcostofprisons.org and download the entire series.

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DUE TO MANDATORY SENTENCING, THREE-STRIKES-YOU'RE-OUT AND HARSH DRUG LAWS THE PRISON POPULATION HAS GROWN BY MORE THAN 370% SINCE 1970. AOST OF THESE PRISONERS ARE JAILED IN RURAL AMERICA. BETWEEN 1990 AND 1999, 245 JAILS AND PRISONS WERE BUILT IN RURAL AND SMALL TOWN COMMUNITIES, WITH A NEW ONE OPENING SOMEWHERE EVERY FIFTEEN DAYS.2 THERE ARE MORE PRISONS IN AMERICA

PRISONS IN AMERICA THAN WALMARTS. THERE ARE MORE PRISONERS IN AMERICA TODAY THAN FARMERS.<sup>3</sup>

> THESE PRISONERS ARE NOW SEEN AS AN ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY.

> > "WHEN LEGISLATORS CRY 'LOCK'EM UP!,' THEY OFTEN MEAN 'LOCK'EM UP IN MY DISTRICT!"" -FORMER NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATOR DANIEL FELDMAN.



CREATING JOBS AND REVENUE MAY WANT A PRISON OR TO EXPAND PRISON DIFFICULT BECAUSE IT'S A NON-POLLUTING, THEIR JAIL, THE GENERAL PUBLIC WELL-PAYING RECES-SION-PROOF INDUSTRY OFTEN NEEDS MORE CONVINCING

THAT GOES 24/7, 365

DAYS A YEAR

TOWN MEETINGS ARE SPONSORED AND COMMUNITY GROUPS LOBBIED. A JUSTICE DEPT. BRIEFING ADVISES "LIMITING THE TIME PERIOD FOR DECISIONMAKING."6

SUCH MEETINGS ARE DONE QUIETLY, OFTEN BEHIND CLOSED DOORS.

ACCORDING TO THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AMERICAN PRISONS,

CAN MAKE SITING A

THE PUBLIC MIGHT FIND

OUT BEFORE THE

DEAL IS SET.5

YPICALLY A PR CAMPAIGN WILL BE LAUNCHED, FLOODING THE LOCAL NEWSPAPERS AND TV WITH POSITIVE SPIN ON THE BENEFITS OF BUILDING PRISON.

I'M JUST NOT GONNA BE ABLE TO MAKE THAT MEETING MORROW NIGHT

IN 1996, OREGON SITED SIX PRISONS IN SIX MONTHS UNDER OREGON'S "SUPER SITING LAW" WHICH MADE PRISONS EXEMPT FROM STATE LEVEL ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW.7

> IN MENDOTA, CA WHERE THE FBOP WANTED TO BUILD A 5 PRISON "CORRECTIONS COMPLEX." THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT WAS AVAILABLE ONLY IN ENGLISH DESPITE THE FACT THAT 86% OF THE LOCAL POPULATION SPEAKS SPANISH. EVENTUALLY A SPANISH-TRANSLATED 10 PAGE SUMMARY OF THE 1000 PAGE DOCUMENT WAS PROVIDED.<sup>8</sup>

A FLORIDA D.O.C. TASK FORCE FOUND THAT LOCAL ZONING LAWS HINDER ACQUISITION OF LAND FOR NEW FACILITIES. IN RESPONSE, THE LEGISLATURE PASSED THE CORRECTIONAL REFORM ACT OF 1983, WHICH GAVE THE STATE THE AUTHORITY TO OVERRIDE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN SELECTING SITES FOR CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES.

REEVES COUNTY, TEXAS ISSUED 3 BONDS OVER 15 YEARS, \$90 MILLION, TO BUILD 3 FACILITIES IN THE DYING OIL TOWN OF PECOS. JUDGE JIMMY GALINDO, THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE DEAL SAYS: "... WE LIVE IN A PART OF THE COUNTRY WHERE IT'S VERY DIFFICULT TO CREATE AND SUS-TAIN JOBS IN A GLOBAL MARKET. [PRISONS] BECOME A VERY CLEAN INDUSTRY FOR US TO PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT TO CITIZENS." **Y LOOK AT IT AS A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT.**\* 10

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MANY MUNICIPALITIES ARE EXPANDING THEIR JAIL FACILITIES IN ORDER TO RENT BEDS TO OVERCROWDED FEDERAL AND STATE PRISONS. SANILAC COUNTY, MI HOPES IT WILL GET ABOUT \$900,000 IN REVENUE THIS YEAR FROM RENTING BEDS."

IN STANLEY, WI PRIVATE DEVELOPERS MANAGED TO SITE AND BUILD A \$60 MILLION 1,326-BED PRISON WITHOUT ONE ELECTED OFFICIAL CASTING A VOTE OR SIGNING A BILL.<sup>12</sup> IN 2001 THE STATE BOUGHT THE PRISON FOR \$82.5 MILLION.<sup>33</sup>

> "IT FLATLY INTRODUCES MONEY AND THE DESIRE FOR PROFIT INTO THE IMPRISONMENT POLICY DEBATE, BECAUSE YOU'VE GOT AN ENTITY IN WISCONSIN, A PRIVATE ENTITY, WITH A STRONG FINANCIAL INTEREST IN KEEPING PEOPLE IN PRISON AND HAVING THEM SENTENCED TO PRISON."

FORMER WISCONSIN STATE CORRECTIONS CHIEF.

TODAY IN MISSISSIPPI, WHERE THE CELL SUPPLY HAS OUTRUN THE CRIMINAL SUPPLY, LAW-MAKERS, LOCAL SHERIFFS, AND PRIVATE-PRISON INTERESTS ARE ALL COMPETING FOR THE SCARCE SUPPLY OF PRISONERS.<sup>15</sup>

ONE WEBSITE,

JAILBEDSPACE.COM, CONNECTS RENTERS WITH SELLERS. "IT'S A GOOD MARKETING TOOL," SAY LT. ROBERT LEFEVER OF THE PUTNAM COUNTY CORRECTIONAL FACILITY, WHICH RENTS OUT AN AVERAGE OF 60 BEDS PER DAY.16

is the st



SO THE PRISON IS BUILT AND THE PRISONERS ARRIVE AND THE TOWN WAITS TO SEE WHAT IT WILL BECOME.

IN ANYTOWN U.S.A., WHERE PRISONS ARE SEEN AS ECONOMIC SAVIORS, LEAD-ERS FIND A WAY TO APPROVE THEM DESPITE WHATEVER RESERVATIONS THE LOCALS MAY HAVE.





What is a bond? A bond is a loan made to a government. Governments pay investment bankers to make the loan attractive ('structure the deal') and find lenders ('issue the bonds'). Governments then pay lenders ('bondholders') principal and interest on the loans.

Governments issue two broad categories of bond: General Obligation (GO) bonds and Revenue Bonds. General Obligation bonds are guaranteed by the taxing power of the state. Most GO Bonds require approval by the voters, and in many states by 2/3 of the voters. Revenue Bonds are designed to be paid off by revenues generated by the project being built, like highway tolls, bridge tolls, student tuition, etc.







WE STILL NEED TO HAVE THAT "COLLEGE" TALK.

YE

PRISONS GENERALLY ORDER FOOD AND SUPPLIES FROM CENTRALIZED STATE WAREHOUSES - NOT LOCAL GROCERY OR HARDWARE STORES.<sup>22</sup>

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CUTTING IT



COMMUNITY WORK PROJECTS PERFORMED BY PRISONERS ARE VERY COMMON AND PRISON OFFICIALS SEE THEM AS GOOD "COM-MUNITY RELATIONS."<sup>23</sup> IN THE PAST, HOWEVER, THESE JOBS EMPLOYED LOCAL RESIDENTS WHO PAYED TAXES AND SPENT LOCALLY.







SO NOW ANYTOWN, U.S.A. IS PRISON TOWN, U.S.A., LIKE THOUSANDS OF TOWNS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.





OVER THE PAST 25 YEARS, MOST PRISON TOWNS HAVE GROWN POORER AND MORE DESPERATE.



PRISONS ARE ANOTHER PROBLEM, NOT A SOLUTION.

WHAT IS UNKNOWABLE IS WHAT THE PRISON WILL DO TO THE HOPES AND DREAMS OF THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE HERE.

> THOSE WHO CAN LEAVE AND THOSE WHO CAN NOT. . .











#### GLOSSARY

Coercive Migration: The movements of people from their neighborhoods, through the courts and jails to prison and back. The concentrations of large numbers of prisoners in certain rural prisons and the fact that their former homes are concentrated in relatively few neighborhoods of urban poverty leads to huge impacts for the urban neighborhoods who deal with constant turnover of their population and disrupt the unity of family and neighborhoods.

**Community Reinvestment:** The alternative to "Million Dollar Blocks." A program that redirects money spent on prisons to investment on the blocks where current or formerly incarcerated men and women live, spending money on health care, job training, education, drug treatment and other services instead of incarceration.

**Corrections:** (as in Department of Corrections) Term used with no apparent sense of irony to describe government departments in charge of prisons and the prison industry as a whole.

Criminalization: the process of making behaviors illegal or of radically increasing the severity of the punishment. Also used to describe the populations targeted by these policies, for example, the criminalization of the homeless or of Black youth.

Development Subsidies: the opposite of mitigation funds. Subsidies are money paid by local or state governments to attract or retain businesses. They can include city or state tax breaks, tax-advantaged financing, investment in roads, housing or transportation funds for industry employees. Such subsidies, often called "Corporate Welfare," rarely pay off for the town.

Industry of Last Resort: those industries who have trouble

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finding host communities because they are unpleasant neighbors, for example: incinerators, prisons, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), toxic waste dumps. Industries of last resort seek communities desperate for jobs and tax revenues and where they believe people will not exercise their political power. For example: poor rural communities and inner city neighborhoods.

Million DollarBlock: A city block in which the state is spending \$1,000,000 or more to incarcerate former residents or to supervise the formerly incarcerated.

**Mitigation:** state money paid to local governments to pay the costs of siting including extending roads, sewage pipes, increased use of courts, etc. Mitigation offered by the state is usually far short of the real costs to the host community, leaving them in a deeper financial hole.

Police State: (1) Any state or country that relies primarily on police and prisons to control some or all of the population. (2) A state dependent on fear to keep people in order. (3) A place in which 'safety' is defined narrowly as security from acts of random violence rather than, for example, freedom to drive a car and not be stopped and searched for no reason.

Prison Industrial Complex: (often PIC): an informal or formal alliance of government bureaucrats, politicians, private industry, bankers, real estate developers and labor leaders who push criminalization, harsher sentences, more police and prisons which increases their political power and/or private incomes.

**Siting:** (Host) The process in which a prison (or other industry) chooses a location and convinces that community to welcome it. The community in which the prison is built is called the "host."

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### the cost of a cage



























