



lock

up

a poetic rendering  
By Riley McDermott

black

out



## A Message from the Commissioner of Prison

As an inmate of the Philadelphia Prison System, you are a citizen under legal restraint. You have lost no rights as a citizen or privileges except those that must give way to the safety and security of other prisoners, correctional personnel, and the community.

This handbook outlines the rules and regulations of the Philadelphia Prison System. It is your responsibility to know and follow them.

During your stay you will have access to the various services offered by the PPS. They include medical, behavioral health, drug and alcohol counseling and recreation.

If eligible, you will be permitted to work, attend school, or participate in vocational training.

I strongly encourage you to make the best possible use of your time while in the Philadelphia Prison System. Please take full advantage of the programs and services available to you in an effort to prepare yourself for your release.

**Louis Giordano, Commissioner**  
Philadelphia Prison System

## Introduction - Prison Reform or Prison Abolition?

In most parts of the world, it is taken for granted that whoever is convicted of a serious crime will be sent to prison. In some countries—including the United States—where capital punishment has not yet been abolished, a small but significant number of people are sentenced to death for what are considered especially grave crimes. Many people are familiar with the campaign to abolish the death penalty. In fact, it has already been abolished in most countries. Even the staunchest advocates of capital punishment acknowledge the fact that the death penalty faces serious challenges. Few people find life without the death penalty difficult to imagine.

On the other hand, the prison is considered an inevitable and permanent feature of our social lives. Most people are quite surprised to hear that the prison abolition movement also has a long history—one that dates back to the historical appearance of the prison as the main form of punishment. In fact, the most natural reaction is to assume that prison activists—even those who consciously refer to themselves as “antiprison activists”—are simply trying to ameliorate prison conditions or ~~perhaps to~~ reform the prison in more fundamental ways. In most circles prison abolition is simply unthinkable and implausible. Prison abolitionists are dis-

missed as utopians and idealists whose ideas are at best unrealistic and impracticable, and, at worst, mystifying and foolish. This is a measure of how difficult it is to envision a social order that does not rely on the threat of sequestering people in dreadful places designed to separate them from their communities and families. The prison is considered so "natural" that it is extremely hard to imagine life without it.

It is my hope that this book will encourage readers to question their own assumptions about the prison. Many people have already reached the conclusion that the death penalty is an outmoded form of punishment that violates basic principles of human rights. It is time, I believe, to encourage similar conversations about the prison. During my own career as an antiprison activist I have seen the population of U.S. prisons increase with such rapidity that many people in black, Latino, and Native American communities now have a far greater chance of going to prison than of getting a decent education. When many young people decide to join the military service in order to avoid the inevitability of a stint in prison, it should cause us to wonder whether we should not try to introduce better alternatives.

The question of whether the prison has become an obsolete institution has become especially urgent in light of the fact that more than two million people (out of a world total of nine million) now inhabit U.S. prisons, jails, youth facilities, and immigrant detention centers. Are we willing to relegate ever larger numbers of people from racially oppressed communities to an isolated existence marked by authoritarian regimes, violence, disease, and technologies of seclusion that produce severe mental instability? According to a recent study, there may be twice as many people suffering from mental illness who are in jails and prisons than there are in all psychiatric hospitals in the United States combined.<sup>1</sup>

When I first became involved in antiprison activism during the late 1960s, I was astounded to learn that there were then close to two hundred thousand people in prison. Had anyone told me that in three decades ten times as many people would be locked away in cages, I would have been absolutely incredulous. I imagine that I would have responded something like this: "As racist and undemocratic as this country may be [remember, during that period, the demands of the Civil Rights movement had not yet been consolidated], I do not believe that the U.S. government will be able to lock up so many people without producing powerful public resistance. No, this will never happen, not unless this country plunges into fascism." That might have been my reaction thirty years ago. The reality is that we were called upon to inaugurate the twenty-first century by accepting the fact that two million people—a group larger than the population of many countries—are living their lives in places like Sing Sing, Leavenworth, San Quentin, and ~~Anderson~~ Federal Reformatory for Women. The gravity of these numbers becomes even more apparent when we consider that the U.S. population in general is less than five percent of the world's total, whereas more than twenty percent of the world's combined prison population can be claimed by the United States. In Elliott Currie's words, "[t]he prison has become a looming presence in our society to an extent unparalleled in our history or that of any other industrial democracy. Short of major wars, mass incarceration has been the most thoroughly implemented government social program of our time."<sup>2</sup>

In thinking about the possible obsolescence of the prison, we should ask how it is that so many people could end up in prison without major debates regarding the efficacy of incarceration. When the drive to produce more prisons and incar-

## INTRODUCTION

### Philadelphia Prison System Mission Statement and Goals

To provide a secure correctional environment that adequately detains persons accused or convicted of illegal acts; to provide programs, services, and supervision in a safe, lawful, clean, humane environment; and to prepare incarcerated persons for re-entry into society in a frame of mind that will facilitate their becoming law-abiding citizens.

Within the context of the PPS mission, the general goals of the PPS are to:

- promote community safety by providing a secure correctional environment;
- affirm the dignities and rights of individuals;
- provide a safe environment for both staff and inmates;
- provide humane treatment in the context of a willingness to learn and change;
- foster healthy interaction among staff and inmates;
- process all persons expeditiously through the system to ensure prompt, lawful admission, detention and discharge;
- provide facilities, services, and programs that are adequate and appropriate for inmates in the system and that meet or exceed accepted correctional standards; and,
- operate an efficient and cost-effective system.

**IMPORTANT!!**

#### STATE OF EMERGENCY!!!

It is expected that at all times, inmates must follow orders issued by staff. However, during any declared emergency (fire, riot, blackout, etc.), each inmate must follow orders of staff **at once and without question**. This is for your safety and the safety of the facility. Failure to follow orders will result in disciplinary action and/or criminal prosecution.

**IMPORTANT!!**

#### SMOKE FREE POLICY

Staff, inmates and visitors are prohibited from smoking or carrying tobacco products inside of the Philadelphia Prison System (PPS). All (PPS) facilities are smoke free. All cigarettes, matches, lighters, chewing tobacco, and other tobacco products are considered contraband and will be confiscated. Possession of these items is a disciplinary infraction and will result in a report of misconduct (SEE Disciplinary Proc)



## I. Intake Procedures

### First Twenty-Four (24) Hours

You have been transferred into the custody of the Philadelphia Prison System. The following is a description of what takes place during your first 24 hours in the PPS.

October 4, 2015

Let me tell you about

the walls

the guards my cell outside

stripped and chained

steel cages constructed inside.

I had room

outside

the cage

you can

see

you can see

view one

high

mist

hung midw

up

nes the light

ma

multiple colors

browns, golds and

religious at times, until

broke

the cover of the mist only to see

both peaceful and

as far as

one could view powerful as

and crashed against the

rocks and s

I wanted to

beneath the

evolutionary beginning to re-experience creation

bye. The water

looked freezing but I knew it would cool the fire in my veins. By the time I was returned

to the prison my mind was exhausted by the visual stimulation but my heart was

overflowing with mental images I will live on for decades to come. After a decade of

incarceration I had forgotten the brutality of imprisonment until I see freedom through a

two inch arc cut in to steel plate of steel. I once again long for freedom.

## WORKS USED

Angela Davis, "*Are Prisons Obsolete?*"  
(pp 2-4)

Philadelphia Prison System  
Inmate Handbook (2012)  
(pp 1,5)

Jack L. Morris, letter to Sheila Pinkel from  
Pelican Bay State Prison SHU, Oct. 4, 2015  
(pp. 6)