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Supplied by Ron Harpelle

Posted: Monday, February 27, 2017 6:00 am | Updated: 9:57 am, Mon Feb 27, 2017.

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When justice takes a back seat to prejudice, the effects are devastating.

In the United States, African-American men represent about half of the prison population, which is six times the incarceration rate of people of European descent.

The Canadian situation is not better because 25 per cent of the inmates in Canadian prisons are First Nations and the number of people of African descent behind bars in Canada has increased by 70 per cent in recent years.

If you are a visible minority, the chances of going to jail in the United States or Canada are much higher than if you are not. And while most people in prison are guilty of a crime, in some cases innocent people are sent to jail and this even more tragic.

Robert King, Albert Woodfox and Herman Wallace spent a combined total of 113 years in solitary confinement for crimes they did not commit. They are known as the Angola 3 and Amnesty International has made their case a cause célèbre.

Robert King was released after 29 years in solitary, Herman Wallace released after 41 years, but died of cancer three days later, and Albert Woodfox was released one year ago after spending 43 years alone in a 6-by-9 cell for 23 hours a day.

In addition to being a terrifying and dehumanizing experience, solitary confinement has long-term mental and physical effects on inmates. Survival in solitary requires constant effort because, as King says, "my soul still cries from what I witnessed and endured . . . it takes every scrap of humanity to remain focused and sane in that environment."

Making sure that people remain sane and are able to overcome the brutality of prison is important to us all because most people who go to jail in Canada are eventually released.



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Last year in Canada, 1,200 people spent 15 days or more in solitary confinement. Moreover, indigenous people, and especially indigenous women, are disproportionately subject to solitary confinement in Canadian prisons.

Solitary confinement is either a disciplinary measure for those who have done something wrong while in prison or it is a means of protecting an inmate from others or themselves, but the fact is the United Nations considers more than two weeks in solitary to be a form of torture.

In Thunder Bay we have the case of Adam Capay of Lac Seul First Nation, who spent 53 months in a plexi-glass cell with the lights on all the time.

His plight came to light last fall when Ontario Human Rights Commissioner Renu Mandhane toured the jail and a corrections officer led her to the cell that housed the 23-year-old man. The commissioner found Capay to be disoriented, losing his ability to speak and showing evidence of self-harm.

Capay was sent to jail at the age of 19 on minor charges. After an altercation resulted in the death of another inmate in 2012, Capay was charged with first-degree murder.

He has been held in solitary confinement ever since, but has not yet faced trial and, in our society that means he is innocent until proven guilty.

Most recently, we learned of the tragic death of Moses Beaver in the same jail and there are reports he did not die of natural causes. An inquest has been called.

Beaver had mental health issues, problems that the prison system is not designed to deal with.

Regardless of their innocence or guilt, people like Adam Capay and Moses Beaver deserve to be treated with dignity and society has a responsibility to ensure their mental and physical wellbeing.

Governments across Canada recognize the problem and are currently reviewing their policies on the use of solitary confinement. It is important for Canadians to understand the issue because it is a matter of social justice.

Since their release, King and Woodfox have devoted their lives to speaking for inmates like Adam Capay, individuals who are hidden from view and whose stories remain out of public discourse. In solitary you do not have a voice because everything you do is restricted.

Fortunately, King and Woodfox are now free to tell their stories and they will be visiting Thunder Bay and Lakehead University to speak about solitary confinement. This is an opportunity to discuss an issue of public concern and a chance to find out how these two men survived the ordeal of long-term solitary confinement.

During their visit there will be two presentations. The first is on Thursday in Lakehead University's Thunder Bay campus and it will be beamed to the Lakehead campus in Orillia.

The second is in the evening. It starts with a film about the Angola 3 and is followed by a panel discussion featuring King, Woodfox and Julian Falconer, a lawyer who represents several First Nation communities in our region and who has represented several victims of injustice in Canada.

All are welcome to attend these events on Thursday:

• 1 p.m., Lakehead University AT 5036

• 7 p.m., Trinity Hall, 310 Park Ave.

- Submitted by Ron Harpelle

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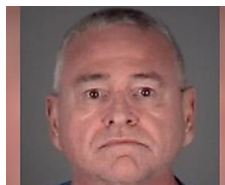
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3 comments:

Penny posted at 9:47 am on Mon, Feb 27, 2017.

Posts: 916

I question a couple of things here. First the writer says: "some of he people are guilty", referring to the prison population. I would sggest most to all are guilty.

Second, The Angola 3, how are they getting into Canada with criminal records like they have? Is this another of Trudeau's "welcoming atms" policies? Remember, that "horrific" criminal Martha Stewart was turned away because of that.

And, as for Capay, speak with his lawyer, there is your delay.

It appears the easiest way to stay out of jail is not break the law. Sorry, not a great deal of sympathy here.

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glyder posted at 10:23 am on Mon, Feb 27, 2017.

Posts: 159

"And while most people in prison are guilty of a crime, in some cases innocent people are sent to jail and this even more tragic."

Maybe it was edited while you were typing? As for questioning how they got into canada, either a google search can help you out, or even better yet, goto their speaking engagement, and ask them yourself.

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RelaxingInMurillo posted at 7:14 am on Mon, Feb 27, 2017.

Posts: 309

Easy enough to get Capay's case moving along.. put him in general population immediately and enforce no more delays from him or his lawyer on his court case.

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