

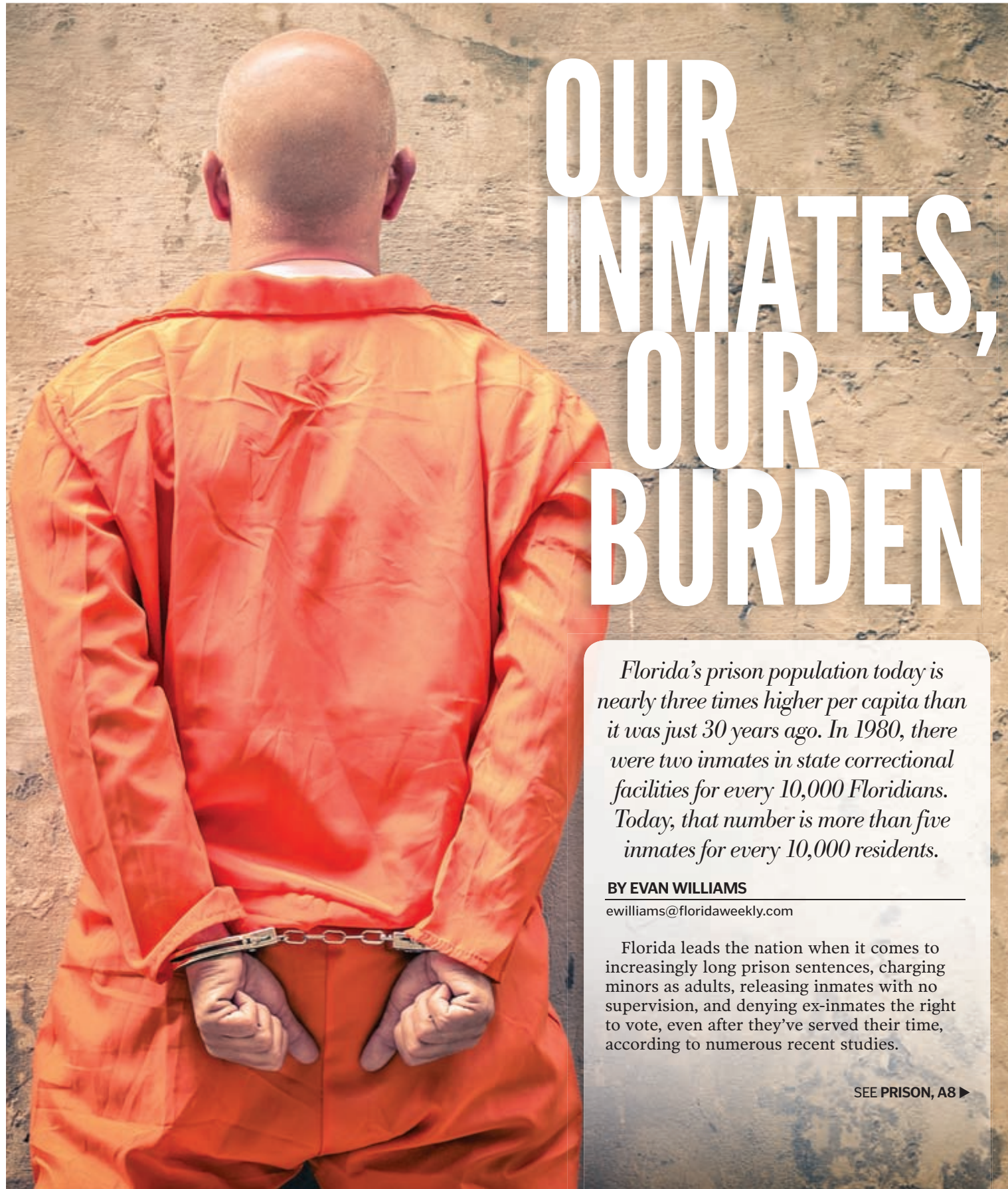
FORT MYERS FLORIDA WEEKLY®

IN THE KNOW. IN THE NOW.

WEEK OF JUNE 26-JULY 1, 2014

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OUR INMATES, OUR BURDEN

Florida's prison population today is nearly three times higher per capita than it was just 30 years ago. In 1980, there were two inmates in state correctional facilities for every 10,000 Floridians. Today, that number is more than five inmates for every 10,000 residents.

BY EVAN WILLIAMS

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Florida leads the nation when it comes to increasingly long prison sentences, charging minors as adults, releasing inmates with no supervision, and denying ex-inmates the right to vote, even after they've served their time, according to numerous recent studies.

SEE PRISON, A8 ►

Schools' experiments with technology paying off

BY ROGER WILLIAMS

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This is not just the latest thing, this new learning technology for students and teachers implemented in the last 18 months at two of Florida's cutting-edge private schools — this is, instead, an unalterably different new thing. This is something that changes the fundamentals of thinking and learning, not just the ease with which they are done.

Now, young students and faculty at Bishop Verot High School and Canterbury School in Fort Myers are using digital pads, interactive boards and classrooms that allow an almost gymnastic flexibility. That means not just that they can get to more information quickly, but that they can think differently.

A couple of years or more in the coming, "now kids don't have to learn the way we used to — we have Google, for

example, which means rote memorization may not be necessary," says Gina Lombardo, Bishop Verot's director of development.

A school benefactress, Mary Q. Eller, helped kick-start the iPad program, which led to 170 freshmen students last year leasing the digital tools, to which textbooks are in turn downloaded, after being leased



SEE TECHNOLOGY, A14 ►

INSIDE



Film transfer

Stage actress plays to the camera. C1 ►

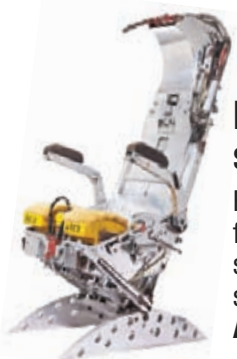
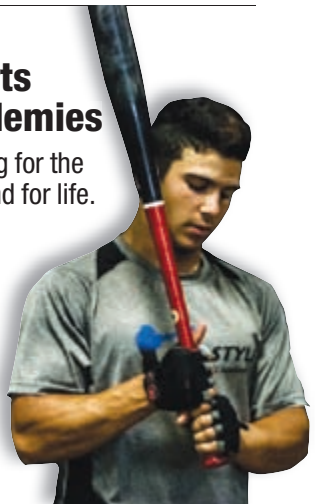


SMART Party

Society shots around town. C19-20 ►

Sports academies

Training for the field and for life. B1 ►



Ejection seat

Funky furniture in search of a sitting room. A20 ►

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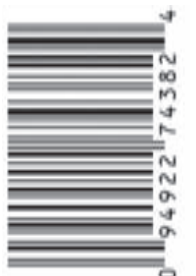


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PRISON

From page 1

With the third largest prison system in the country, Florida taxpayers pay to house more than 100,000 inmates and supervise others at a cost of \$2.3 billion per year.

There are 48 major state-run prisons and seven privately run prisons in addition to work-release centers, according to the Florida Department of Corrections website. One of those is Charlotte Correctional Institution, three miles off U.S. 41 on Oil Well Road in Charlotte County.

We're No. 1

Florida leads the way in several benchmarks:

- **Leading the way in long sentences:** The average prison sentence grew by 166 percent between 1990 and 2009, more than any other state, costing taxpayers \$1.4 billion. That was especially true for non-violent offenders, who served 194 percent more time, according to a Pew Research Center study.

- **Leading the way in charging minors as adults:** in the last five years, a 2014 Human Rights Watch report found, Florida moved more than 12,000 minors from the juvenile to the adult court system, more than any state — with more than half charged with non-violent crimes. This is because the state's "direct file" rule allows prosecutors to move them to the adult system with "no involvement of a judge whatsoever," the report reads.

"If you look at the population of folks who end up in prison, many of them begin with misbehavior of youth and our historic handling of them," said Deborah Brodsky, director of The Project on Accountable Justice at FSU.

- **Leading the way in releasing inmates with no supervision:** a 2014 Pew Center report found 64 percent of inmates left with no monitoring or support, the most of any state. The average among all states was 21.5 percent. Some 33,000 Florida prisoners are released back into the community every year. Most inmates are eventually released.

"You can leave our state prison system having been in solitary confinement directly onto the streets, with no supervision," said Ms. Brodsky. "We're not ready for folks when they return. We have to have stronger models of mentoring and real integration.

"Lets give them all the opportunities we can to be successful because it's in all of our best interests."

While in prison, inmates often lead an idle existence, said Randall C. Berg, executive director of Florida Justice Institute in Miami, a nonprofit law firm that represents the poor and incarcerated.

"We expect these people to succeed when we do nothing for them," he said. "It's kind of a joke.

"So while 88 percent of the prison population eventually gets released, they're serving a long time in the Florida prison system. It's hard time and it's unproductive time for which they do not earn much in the way of an education or life skills to live on the outside."

Florida spends \$37.33 per day on adult male inmates, a Florida Department of Corrections report says. Out of that, most is spent on security, \$5.30 on health, and 84 cents is spent on education.

"If you look at the total state budget where it's devoted is just in locking people up," said Ms. Brodsky. "And these are policy decisions that are made both with our legislature, and (the Florida Department of Correc-



A defense of the status quo

While Florida's prison population has grown exponentially in the past 30 years, the crime rate has dropped considerably. While the data does not make the correlation, it could be argued that higher incarceration rates are a factor in keeping crime down.

Florida crimes per 100,000 population

Year	Violent Crime Rate	Property Crime Rate
1980	984	7,418
1985	941	6,633
1990	1,244	7,567
1995	1071	6631
2000	812	4,883
2005	709	4013
2010	541	3,551
2012	487	3,277



tions) itself. This is the strategy we've bought into and that is to lock people up."

Jessica Cary, director of communications for the DOC, contends that the reformers have it wrong. "The department works diligently to facilitate their (inmates) positive re-entry as good neighbors and contributing citizens. Re-entry efforts begin on day one of incarceration and continue upon release. Program opportunities for inmates include education, vocational, combating substance abuse, inmate transition, chaplaincy services, wellness and betterment programs."

- **Leading the way in denying ex-inmates the right to vote:** One in 10 people here can't vote because they were convicted of a felony — and more than one in five African Americans can't vote in Florida for the same reason. The Sentencing Project, a Washington, D.C.-based research and advocacy group, estimates 1.5 million Floridians with a felony on their record (more than a quarter of the U.S. total) could not vote in 2010. One-point-three million of them are finished serving their time.

"Florida's disenfranchisement rate remains highest among the 50 states," said research analyst Nazgol Ghandnoosh, Ph.D. "Florida doesn't have a much higher proportion of felons than the rest of the country, but rather its restrictive voting policies are creating such high disenfranchisement rates."

In 2007, Gov. Charlie Crist enacted procedures to restore voting rights to ex-inmates more quickly. This process was later reversed by Gov. Rick Scott in 2011 and replaced by a five-year waiting

period, after finishing their sentences, before people with a felony can apply for restoration of civil rights. But in practice, many lose their right to vote for life.

Explains Dr. Ghandnoosh, "All felony convictions in Florida result in a lifetime ban on voting unless rights are restored by the governor. (The) rights restoration process is discretionary and often cumbersome, leaving few individuals who avail themselves of the opportunity to apply."

It is less likely an inmate will end up back inside prison if he or she can vote. While about one in three people released from prison in Florida end up back inside, a report by the Florida Parole Commission found that among inmates released between 2001 and 2008, the rate of recidivism was cut to 11 percent when their voting rights were restored.

State Inmate No. 196374

The Department of Corrections website provides an address where ex-prisoners are headed after being released.

At one such address in Fort Myers, listed for Joseph Cardenas, a thin man with kind eyes and long gray hair pulled back answered the door.

"He's pretty much got himself together now," the man said, telling me where to look for him, at work, at an auto repair shop along McGregor Boulevard.

The next day, Mr. Cardenas was there around 5 p.m., at the end of a day working on transmissions. He sipped an iced tea and talked about his time behind bars, a series of stints, most recently

two years for trafficking prescription painkillers, that ended late last year. He originally started taking pills after a motorcycle accident left him with a wicked scar on his leg and a bad back.

Like other prisoners, they gave him \$50 on the way out the door and he left somewhat disoriented. His sister and a group of friends, all bikers, from Alcoholics Anonymous, picked him up at Charlotte C.I. They took him to a diner; he can't remember where.

"I didn't recognize anything," said Mr. Cardenas, who is 50. "I was totally lost. I had enough support — just enough to make me look forward to tomorrow."

Asked about the recent death of an inmate at Charlotte, he said, "It's true. It happens — I knew every one of those officers."

A female officer, he recalled, would berate one inmate, calling him a "piece of shit" and a "pervert." One day he hit her.

"They beat that dude to sleep," Mr. Cardenas said.

He explained about "sissies," a matter-of-fact sounding term for cross dressers in prison; other inmates were "crazy people, walking around shak-

in the know

BetweentheBars.org is another means of communication for inmates. The blog publishes hand-written letters sent to them by prisoners in the United States via the Postal Service (most don't have any access to the Internet or email). It allows the public to sign up to post comments, as on so many other blogs. Those comments are then in turn sent via the Postal Service each week back to the prisoners, who can then respond again via mail. The idea is to promote dialogue among everyone impacted by prisons: inmates, their families, victims of crimes, and the public.

Between the Bars relies on volunteers to transcribe many of the letters (there is also poetry and artwork) so they're searchable on the Internet. The site aims to give inmates a sense of civic identity in the hopes of keeping them out of prison after their release.

"There is research that shows when people identify as a citizen and not as an offender identity, they are less likely to end up back in prison," said Benjamin Sugar, one of the Boston-based site's operators.

In one post, Gary Field at Century Correctional Institute wrote, "I send greetings from beautiful downtown Century — a 'gated community'; not far from Pensacola's famous beaches!"

ing”; and he said cigarettes sometimes cost a premium, as much as \$5 each. There’s pot, heroin, “every drug you can imagine in prison.”

Dental care is required in prison by law, but leaves something to be desired. There was a six-month waiting list in prison just to get his rotten teeth pulled, he said. And dentures in prison? Not a chance. He pulled out his dentures to show off one of the first things he got when he got out.

“You have no rights,” he said. “If they beat your ass, they’ll hide you ‘till you’re healed. That’s their world and you need to accept that.”

He said Charlotte is one of the more violent, unpleasant prisons because “lifers” are locked up there alongside people like him with much shorter sentences. There is no air conditioning at the prison (like most in Florida), except in the library, he said.

Although Mr. Cardenas is from Miami, he has been held at a number of different locations during his stays. Like many prisoners, he said, he is shuffled around the state so as not to be close to home.

“They move you wherever,” he said. “They don’t want you close to home because then your homeboys can smuggle you something.”

During one of his sentences, at Everglades Correctional Institution, he saw “a couple people killed.” In one case two prisoners — Latin Kings — cornered a third on the second floor and then tossed him over the rail for stealing their heroin, he said. He doesn’t know if the man was dead or not. He was taken away and didn’t come back.

In spite of all this, he said that after his first time in prison, he wasn’t afraid to go back. “You’ve got a roof over your head and three meals a day. It could be worse.”

He seems philosophical and accepting about his time in prison. “Believe it or not the murderers were some of the nicest people I met,” he said. “(They) freaked out for 10 minutes, you know, caught their old lady in bed...”

He’s new to Fort Myers, but has close friends in AA, including his girlfriend. He is also on probation.

“I’m just trying to be happy,” he said. “I’m just trying to be a productive part of society this time around.”

State Inmate No. Y31563

At another address in North Fort Myers, Christopher Carlisle, 32, lives while working for his family’s paint company. In the cool, dark living room, a refuge from days when steam rises off the hot ground in the afternoon rains, he talked about his time at a DOC work camp and in prison.

In high school he used to skip school. He and other kids would gather at his house and smoke pot. Eventually he became addicted to prescription narcotics and started stealing. He was locked up for burglary, grand theft and other charges in March 2011 and released in January.

At a prison work camp, he spent eight-hour days picking up trash along the side of a road. But most days, he said, he would get ahead of the supervisors and panhandle. He was able to collect cigarettes, money, beer, pizza and other things that way. He put his haul in a garbage bag and was able to smuggle it back in to the facility where he was kept, often by throwing it over the gate and coming back later to collect it, he said. Most days he was able to drink as he worked.

“I went through that gate drunk every day,” he said, adding that he even “puked” sometimes, but the officers didn’t care.

Later he was moved to Charlotte



Joseph Cardenas

C.I. “That was the worst place I could have landed,” he said, stuck there with “gorillas and killas.”

Mr. Carlisle is only “130 pounds soaking wet and 5-foot-2.”

“The booty bandits in there,” he said, referring to inmates who rape other inmates, “they’ll go after white guys like me.” He “lucked out” that they didn’t go after him.

“I’ve seen it happen,” he said. “I’ve heard the screaming from a few cells down. What are you gonna do? What are you gonna do when you have four life sentences?”

When he got out the thing he wanted to do most was “come back and take a regular shower,” he said. “See my kid and take a good shower.”

His daughter is 12. Mr. Carlisle hopes to run his family’s paint company one day.

State Inmate No. Y18503

Emmanuel Joseph, 34, is busy these days running his own lawn care and plumbing services and taking care of four children. Both of his parents passed away when he was young. His mother died in 1992 in Haiti, and his father passed away after having his appendix removed, while Mr. Joseph was attending Cypress Lake Center for the Arts in Fort Myers.

“When my mom died and dad died, I thought that was the end of the world,” said Mr. Joseph. “But it’s really not.”

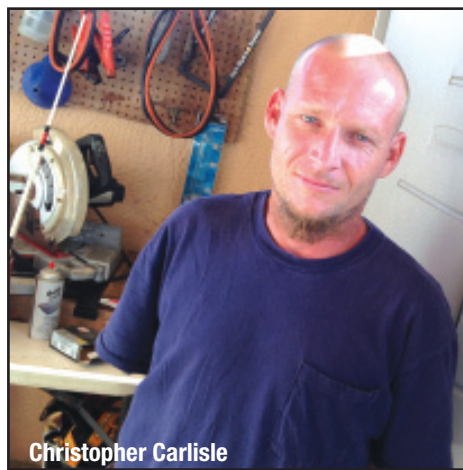
He went to live with his uncle in Naples and finished high school there, but soon became involved in dealing cocaine and was busted for a variety of charges related to drugs, as well as carrying a concealed gun and resisting an officer. He ended up spending the better part of four years in the state prison system, from 2002 to 2006.

When he got out, the only work he could manage to find was as a street-side waiver for a tax service in Fort Myers, dressed as the Statue of Liberty. He put some heart into the job and was even documented entertaining passer-by along U.S. 41 in a triumphant one-minute film on YouTube called “Dancing Black Statue of Liberty.” It is set to the national anthem.

“There’s a lot of things that go on in there behind closed doors,” he said of prison life.

He questions the wisdom of “putting a guy with five years with guys doing three life sentences. They should not be with those types of people.

“Prison is not for no man, no woman



Christopher Carlisle



Haneef Shukur

to be in. It’s disgusting, and it’s not a place for anybody.”

In one fight, he recalled, “Spanish dude had three life sentences. He and a black guy got into an argument. (The Spanish) guy whipped out a big old blade made of lawnmower blade, buried in the dirt on the compound facility, sliced him in half like a piece of chicken right down the center of his body. Next thing his body opened up like a piece of chicken and next thing you know guards see it and everybody’s screaming.”

Surviving the hole

Haneef Shakur is originally from the Chicago area. Now he lives in Naples near his family and found work at a gas station after spending long, hard years in Illinois prisons, incarcerated for murder at age 16. He was part of a gang, Mr. Shakur said. Although another gang member shot and killed someone, he was along for the ride, and ended up being sentenced to 25 years. He served 12 years and three months. Similar to accounts of inmates at Florida prisons, it was a violent place where “we were warehoused like cattle or something,” he said. “Having your freedom stripped away, that and not being able to be with my loved ones — that’s the hardest part of it all.”

Even if some corrections officers taunted prisoners, most of the inmates “with a sound mind” didn’t react to avoid the punishment that would ensue. “I say those with a sound mind because there are a lot of people in prison who really ought to be in a hospital or something,” he said.

First he was kept at Menard Correctional Center, a maximum-security prison known as “the pit” because its levels are built down into the earth. There was no air-conditioning and prisoners each had a small fan. “Every year there are so many people who pass out from heat stroke in there,” he said.

Once, during a random drug test, he said he was dehydrated and couldn’t pee. If you test positive or don’t pee, you get six months in “the hole” he said. He had a few pieces of paper to write with and a few books from the library. Otherwise “you’re literally in a cell with nothing at all,” alone. It drove some people out of their minds.

“We used to call them ‘bugs,’” he said. “We’d say ‘they’re buggin’ up in there,’ meaning they’re going crazy.

“I do consider myself strong men-

tally so I used that time to just try to be more in tune with myself, writing, a lot of reading, exercise. You only get out one time a week for the shower and you can only come out twice a week. To go outside, you go into this little bitty cage area with a pull-up bar.

“And the people that had it the hardest: just imagine someone who is illiterate sitting in there. You can’t really do anything.”

By the time he got out, he’d spent more of his life behind bars than outside them. He moved to Naples to be near family, and struggled to find work. Finally, after about four months, he met the owner of a gas station through the Islamic Center of Naples and has worked there for four years. (Haneef Shakur is his religious name, while his legal name is Jeffrey Lurry).

Because of education programs offered in Illinois, he was able to earn two associate’s degrees, as well as a certificate of business management and computer technology — the best thing about his time behind bars, he said. Professors came to the prison.

“It was the first time that I had been in there dealing with people who were not incarcerated talking to us like we were people, not dehumanizing us or anything.”

Now he’s hoping Florida Gulf Coast University will accept his application, although they are now reviewing his record, he said.

Mr. Shakur joined the Collier County chapter of the NAACP and through the group started a youth council. Now he works with at-risk high school students to motivate them to improve their lives.

“It’s not just you that is incarcerated,” he says. “It’s your entire family. Everyone that loves you is incarcerated. They worry about you, worry about your well-being, how you’re doing.”

Federal inmate No. 80177280

Andrew Vidaurri is at the Federal Correctional Complex in Coleman on a racketeering and conspiracy conviction. Unlike state prisoners, who don’t have access to any electronic communication, let alone the Internet, federal prisoners can communicate through a monitored email system called CorLinks. He contacted me after Write-A-Prisoner.com, which facilitates pen pal relationships, family communication and help with employment upon release, posted a request for comments for this article on Facebook.

Mr. Vidaurri is 33 and was put behind bars in 2011. He lives in a two-man cell, gets up every day at 5:30 a.m. and spends some time working or in education programs. Dinner is at 5 p.m., and around 10 p.m. he reads his Bible before lights out. He’ll be getting out a few weeks after this article is printed, he said, and hopes to start a nonprofit organization that will pair youths with behavioral problems with youths with terminal illnesses.

When he first arrived, the main question on his and other new prisoners’ minds was “What’s the body count in there?” he wrote. “I think that was the hardest time is just not knowing what it would be like. I feel personally that the federal prison offers everybody a fair chance to better themselves if that’s what they desire. They offer everybody different programs about developing life skills in hopes that they discover a positive look at life. Is it a violent place? I’d be lying if I said no. It has its moments... My cell is all brick and steal. It has two lockers and bunk beds, a toilet and sink, with a desk to write.”

PRISON

From page 9

Mass incarceration

Along with the rest of the United States, Florida's prison population exploded in the last 30 years, growing from 20,000 in 1980 to current levels. (Another 65,000 people are locked up in county jails at any one time).

An avalanche of research in recent years has highlighted the failures of mass incarceration in the United States, which has the world's biggest incarcerated population at 2.2 million, "five to 10 times the rate in other democracies," a recent *New York Times* editorial read:

"The research is in and it is uncontestable. The American experiment in mass incarceration has been a moral, legal, social, and economic disaster. It cannot end soon enough."

Matt Taibbi, a contributing editor for *Rolling Stone* and more recently a journalist with First Look Media, reported on this experiment in his book "The Divide: American Injustice in the Age of the Wealth Gap" (April 2014). In it, he recounts how Wall Street executives — their actions having led to a financial crisis that ravaged Southwest Florida — escaped prison while primarily impoverished people continue to be locked up in increasing numbers. He explores the intersection of wealth, race, and a justice system rife with layers of inequity built up over decades.

"With criminal justice I think the overwhelming reason for the disparity has to do with the ease of prosecution," he said. "These white collar cases are

very very hard to make. They require a lot of resources in order to obtain convictions."

Here are also the stories of ex-inmates, and views from researchers, civil rights activists, and others who hope to reform a system they see as locking up too many for too long, often for the wrong reasons, and with little means of repairing prisoners' lives once they get out.

The view from outside

On a recent afternoon at Charlotte Correctional Institute, beyond a big sign and a pond sat squat tan buildings with white tops surrounded by fence and razor wire under a stormy-looking sky. There were close to 1,300 inmates there.

Over the course of two weeks, the Florida DOC did not return numerous phone calls seeking a tour of the Charlotte facility. Communications director Jessica Cary responded to general questions via email and said that a written request for a reporter and photographer to visit Charlotte Correctional Institute is still pending. "The department provides accurate, transparent and timely information to inquiring members of the media and the public, according to current state laws," she wrote.

NBC-2 reporter Lucas Seiler was not surprised by the DOC's slow response to interview requests.

"I spent a year covering Charlotte County," he said. "That's something I struggled with the entire time I was working in Punta Gorda."

He reported in April on the death of an inmate at Charlotte C.I. Sources told him a group of 10 corrections officers

handcuffed and beat Matthew Walker to death, but state agencies mostly didn't respond to requests for information. Sources also told Mr. Seiler there are places where officers can beat inmates while not on video. A month later, the state started a second investigation into yet another inmate death in Charlotte. Both investigations are ongoing.

"There are inmates who have been beaten in Charlotte, and there's very little accountability," said Mr. Berg. "There's no watchdog."

It is "a system for too long that has been from our vantage largely unchecked and not terribly cost effective," agrees Ms. Brodsky of The Project on Accountable Justice at FSU.

"Imagine a \$2.3 billion corporation that has no board of trustees," she said. "There's really no oversight function independent of the agency itself."

However, according to DOC spokesperson Cary, state prisons undergo annual audits to ensure accountability. "The department incorporates all of the 'best practices' nationwide and as developed in the National Institute of Corrections curriculum."

Health-care concerns

The state outsourced prisoners' medical, dental and mental health care to private companies in 2013. Advocates maintain that the care is subpar even by prison standards, said Mr. Berg of Florida Justice Institute.

Corizon has a contract to provide the care in North and Central Florida. Wexford Health Sources provides it in South Florida, including at Charlotte C.I.

"They have a very checkered record



in Florida and nationwide," Mr. Berg said.

"If you're disabled in prison, it would not be unusual for you, if you have an amputated leg, not to be given a prostheses. If wheelchair bound, given a decrepit non-performing wheel chair. If you're deaf, good luck finding interpreters. If you're blind, good luck getting books on tape or whatever."

"As a taxpayer, (prison) would be a great opportunity for people who have drug habits to go through serious drug counseling programs but the legislature just doesn't fund that type of care."

The *Miami Herald* reported last year that Corizon had been sued 660 times for malpractice in the previous five years and that Wexford weathered 1,092 malpractice claims between 2008 and 2012.

According to the Department of Corrections, it exceeds standards of medical performance and requires that state inspectors monitor the health-care services at each prison at least two times a year. ■



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