



Stories of Redemption:
Social Justice for those Serving
Life Without the Possibility of Parole

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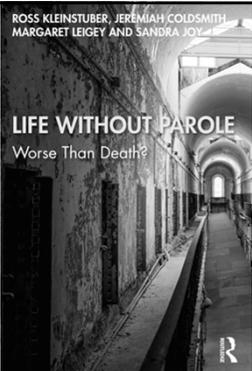
Gary Tyler, Outreach & Engagement
Support Worker at Safe Place for Youth
Edward Rasheed Johnson, Organizer
VOTE (Voice of Experience)

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ROSS KLEINSTUBER, JEREMIAH COLDSMITH,
MARGARET LEIGEY AND SANDRA JOY

LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE
Worse Than Death?



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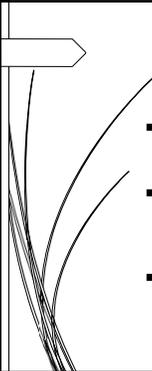
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U.S. Prison Population

- Over 2.3 million people incarcerated in prisons or jails; a 600% increase since 1972
- 140,610 people serving life sentences, representing one of every 11 people (9.5%) in prison
- 41,095 (29%) of those serving life sentences have no possibility of parole (LWOP)
- The number of people serving LWOP increased by 22% between 2003 and 2008 (nearly 4X the rate of growth of the parole-eligible lifers)

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Demographics of Lifers

- In 5 states (Alabama, California, Massachusetts, Nevada, New York), at least 1 in 6 people in prison are serving a life sentence
- The highest proportion of life sentences relative to the prison population is in California, where 20% are serving life. Among these 34,164 life sentences, 10.8% are LWOP
- Two-thirds of lifers (66.4%) are nonwhite, reaching as high as 83.7% of lifers in New York

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Social Workers Advocates and Agents for Social Justice

- Social workers have a sacred trust to care for and advocate for society's most vulnerable members.
- Social work needs our "Wounded Healers," those who have survived injustice/trauma and have found redemption through their lived experience.
 - Allows us to combat stigma and maintain an orientation for recovery, to counter the criminalization of addiction and incarceration.
 - Allows those in recovery to "give back" as they heal from their trauma and shed the stigma they have encountered and too often internalized

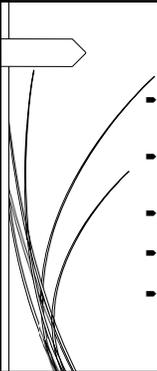
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Action Steps may include....

- Sharing (or developing, if they don't exist) licensing agencies' guidelines or process for enhancing licensing eligibility for those with past convictions
- Schools of social work can make their related policies transparent and discuss potential barriers for field placements and licensing at admission
- NASW and other related professional associations should consider offering guidance for policies and hiring decisions to their constituencies.
- These steps can accomplish two important goals. First, they can allow social work advocates to grant people with past convictions second chances, as they strive to make informed educational and career decisions. Second, they can provide a starting point for discussing the varied ethical issues that arise when developing frameworks for decision-making toward the goal of social justice.

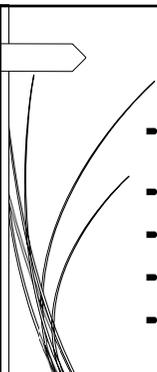
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Major Findings (LWOP book)

- After examining each of the potential justifications for LWOP offered by both death penalty abolitionists and tough-on-crime conservatives, no evidence was found to support any of them.
- Interviews with those facing an execution and those facing dying in prison reveal that LWOP is not a humane alternative to capital punishment and might even produce greater suffering.
- An examination of international legal documents shows that this view is widely shared by the international community.
- LWOP sentences are less likely to result in an exoneration than capital sentences are, increasing the risk to the wrongly convicted.
- Because LWOP is used far more frequently than capital punishment, it ends up costing more.

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Major Findings Continued

- Rather than alleviating the racial biases that pervade capital sentencing, LWOP perpetuates and exacerbates them.
- There is no evidence to indicate that LWOP is an effective method of reducing violent crime.
- From a retributivist perspective, LWOP is unjustly harsh in most instances in which it is utilized in the US.
- LWOP does not afford people the opportunity to change and reform themselves.
- CONCLUSION: LWOP should be abolished, and parole should be more easily accessible to all those in prison.

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