

When Many Hands Carry Together, We Make The Work Feel Light And Joyful. We Invite You To Be Part Of Our Community --- To Write And Share Your Care For the World

Each Of Us Is Capable Of Learning. We Can Be Witness & Vigil To those Who Are Hurting. Working Together Fore Common Cause. We Invite You To Be Part Of Our Community --- To Write And Share Your Care For the World

Our Writing And Our Art Will Not End Capitalism On Their Own, But Without Them, How Can We Ever Imagine Its End?

When Many Voices Speak Together, We Find Solutions To Problems And Close Old Wounds.

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Come Write With Us.

Issue # 11

MOBILE LABOR JOINT

September 2026

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ISSUE #11
Mobile Bay Labor Journal

September 1st, 2026

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WHAT IS FREE SPEECH?

Everything the Right
Fundamentally Misunderstands
About the First Amendment

By Gracchus

The modern American political landscape is largely characterized by the conservative appeal to constitutional originalism. For them, only a return to the government as envisioned in 1787 can truly guarantee life, liberty, and happiness. Putting aside the fact that the republican governance put forth in the early years of the republic would hardly be considered properly democratic by today's standards; and the insistence of the constitution to be a "living" document independent of the tyranny of the dead, originalism is an inadequate descriptor when referring to modern American conservatism.

Their originalism is selective and self-serving, resting on a foundation cobbled together from questionable interpretations, willful misunderstandings, and an overly politicized historiography that borders on outright lies. It is an attempt to erase the meagre gains of the American working classes from the past 250 yrs. of struggle. Far from the restoration of the enlightened bourgeois-liberal republic of 1776, they would instead bring about an oligarchy formed from the alliance of the propertied classes, white Christian nationalists, and alt-right intelligentsia. Their freedom is that of privilege, the freedom of dominion.

Their Trojan horse is, as it always has been, to appeal to the first amendment and invoke a warped perspective of freedom of speech. That most sacred and inviolable of rights entertains no counterargument, supersedes all points or procedure, and is irreproachable by its self-evident virtue. It is, without exaggeration, the lynchpin of a free and fair society. However, the right-wing conservative interpretation of this fundamental right is an infantile regression, even from the enlightened bourgeois-liberal position. It lacks any sense of perspective, barring oneself. It is devoid of nuance, unless an excess of mental gymnastics might be considered a substitute. It is simplistic to the degree that its adherents are hardly indistinguishable from teenage edgelords pining for attention and identity.

The first amendment right to free speech is, in short, a guarantee that an individual or group will not have their speech or expression curtailed or censored by the state or any of its agencies outside of extenuating circumstances that might otherwise injure the public good. An example of such extenuating circumstances would be *Brandenburg v. Ohio* (1969), and the case that it partially overturned, *Schenck v. United States* (1919). Essentially, these cases established that the state may curtail or ban speech that seeks to incite imminent lawlessness, or that one cannot shout fire in a crowded theater. The first amendment is not a carte blanche for one to say anything one wants to regardless of context, nor is it an obligation for private citizens to passively and respectfully listen. It is a constraint on the formal powers of the state, not the informal rules which govern society.

A brief anecdote from an experience that I had with a member of the University of South Alabama's Turning Point USA chapter. In conversation I asked him why he felt that it was important to engage in conservative activism, which in this case amounted to using slurs and other derogatory language to refer to people at Pride. He told me about how he had written a paper for a class which called abortion morally wrong and advocated for a national ban. He presented the paper without issue, however, afterwards a few classmates approached him and reprimanded his presentation. He said that this experience is what convinced him that free speech is in danger, especially on college campuses. He felt that their confrontation infringed on his freedom, regardless of the fact that he didn't like what they had to say. This was not an attack on free speech, but an expression of it. One person's freedom of speech does not preclude another's freedom to respond.

Another example is local right wing darling, Pastor Travis Johnson. Mobile Pride, according to him, is nothing more than downtown activists advancing gender ideology to indoctrinate children and destroy the nuclear family. He has tried for years to chip away at the event, taking every opportunity to alienate collaborators and isolate the LGBTQ+ community. Anyone who publicly denounces his vitriolic homophobia is sure to be bombarded by his sycophantic congregation claiming that you are infringing on his free speech. If he is so offended by a celebration of love and acceptance he is free to not attend, but to try at every opportunity to isolate and demean a marginalized community hardly seems an expression of freedom.

Right-wing conservatives love to claim impunity based on their imagined freedom from consequence. They use this to avoid anything deeper than surface level conversation and claim a kind of moral highground. Yet, they have nothing to say about the Prairieland defendants, a group of twenty two protestors in Texas charged with various trumped up charges. Two of those defendants, Elizabeth and Ines Soto, received fifty years each for "providing material support to terrorists." The material support in question? Zines and flyers. Their other crimes? Participating in a leftists bookclub and owning/operating a printing press. Free speech is certainly under attack, but it is being attacked under the pretense of being saved.

The Prairieland defendants should be at the forefront of your mind. Altogether, the nine defendants have been sentenced to a combined 450 years. The case will be cited as precedent to deprive you of any rights you have by first depriving you of any avenue of legal dissent. Mark my words, whatever semblance of democracy that exists in this country will not be killed by a big name celebrity-politician. It will not be a grand televised event or major speech. Democracy will be crushed like a penny on a train track, where the great clamor and commotion of the deathblow itself will make the victim seem a minor detail. Right-wing free speech activists will deprive you of your rights under the pretense of liberty, all while cloaked in the flag and bearing the cross.

FREE SPEECH

IS

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT

OPEN DISCUSSION

A TOOL OF LIBERATION

IS NOT

SLURS HATE SPEECH

IMPUNITY

A TOOL OF OPPRESSION

What then is our recourse? How should the people defend their liberty? We cannot simply state that individual freedoms exist in an ideal vacuum, devoid of social context. The freedom of speech is not a freedom if what it amounts to is the freedom for one class or group to oppress another, where the former is at liberty to disregard the protests of the latter. While the oppressed are allowed some type of defense, it is futile when the assault bears the sanction of law. In the same vein, at the intersection of freedom of press and the right to private property is the dreaded multimedia conglomerate and the corporate rag, such as the Washington Post. We must begin to ask ourselves what purpose or person certain freedoms serve and move from the fixation on individual freedoms to collective freedoms.

The liberal, individualist conception of free speech collapses under the weight of its own ineptitude. Unable to defend against attacks from within, it is fated to decay from the inside out, a type of decay that is not noticed until it is far too late. Reactionary politics are no longer fringe beliefs held by avant garde intellectuals and bureaucrats filling the ranks of think tanks and university classrooms. These politics are mainstream and continually spreading, becoming policy day by day. Groups like Turning Point USA, Moms for Liberty, Faith Family Freedom Coalition, and the Alabama Policy Institute that perpetuate these politics are not simple gnats to be swatted away as they become a nuisance. They are a malignancy that must be cut out, expunged and burned. The republic is terminal, drastic action must be taken today, not tomorrow.

The only alternative is to surrender ourselves, our neighbors, our communities to the ascendant fascists. We have already seen what they are willing to do to people they see as undesirable, the still unknown atrocities of ICE detention camps aside. How long until citizens, whose rights have been gradually stripped away, are put into similar positions? The answer is that it is already happening.

For more information about the Prairieland Defendants and ways to support them: prairielanddefendants.com

Recommended Reading About Collective Rights and Freedoms:

Repeating Lenin (2001)
Slavoj Zizek

The Ethics of Ambiguity (1947)
Simone de Beauvoir

Relation of the State and Liberty, According to Modern Right (1861)
Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

NO TRANSPARENCY, NO TRUST.

by Cypress

Ocean Springs, Mississippi is a majority white town¹ approximately 55 miles west of Mobile, Alabama. To travel by car, it takes about an hour to get from our city of Mobile to Ocean Springs. On July 4th of this year, 18-year-old **Nolan Xavier Wells** was reported missing after taking a trip to Horn Island off the Mississippi coast to celebrate the holiday with his peers². This tragic and mysterious death of a young, bright, kind, and well loved individual has left the Mississippi community grieving, and the local police department's **initial speedy ruling of an accidental death** is leaving lots of room for public speculation³. More importantly, it has left Nolan's family and friends with **questions that deserve to be answered**. Given the geographical proximity of this unresolved tragedy, it feels important to be covered locally with the goal of **keeping the Greater Gulf Coast Area connected, informed, and organized**. The Ocean Springs community has held multiple **peaceful demonstrations demanding transparency** as the community grieves. Nolan's story has gained national traction as well, particularly through the means of social media.

The historical context of systemic racism in Mississippi, as well as recent events, such as the murder of 1-year-old Kohen Wiley by police in Senatobia, MS on June 14th of this year⁴, play a part in the skepticism the public has about his death being properly investigated.

Beyond that, it was discovered that multiple of the young men last seen with Nolan before his disappearance, and subsequent death, have immediate family connections to judges, lawyers, doctors, and coroners in **Jackson County**. These individuals also have ties to prominent political figures, such as Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves. Three of these potential suspects, **Warren Hudson, Morgan Seymour, & Jax Pitaloand**, are being represented by **Tyler Cox**, as well as **Edward Andrew Paltzik**, who has previously represented Donald Trump⁵. Another man with Nolan the day of his disappearance, **Bart Edminson Jr.** is being represented by **Russell Latino**. The **Wells-Wonsley** family is being represented by **Attorney Ben Crump**, who is also representing Kohen Wiley's family in their ongoing demand for justice⁶.

As concerned community members wait for new information to be released concerning Nolan's death, **the District Attorney has stated that no evidence will be released to the public, and instead presented to a grand jury**. That date has not been determined or released⁷.

There is a recurring, historical pattern of Black deaths being hastily ruled as suicides or accidents by police, not being properly investigated by local & state officials, and lack of media coverage on these cases.

In Nolan Wells' case, the community of Ocean Springs has continued to **stay vigilant and organized**, holding protests **demanding answers & transparency** at places such as the **Jackson County Courthouse and downtown Ocean Springs**. As stated earlier, Nolan's story has spread beyond our neighboring coastal town, reaching national news about a week after his body was recovered. Having national media coverage gives the Wells' family a **platform to voice their hardships, grievances, and concerns to the public**. This helps raise awareness and encourage public engagement **beyond the local community**. Another positive impact of national media coverage is amplifying those voices and helping to hold law enforcement accountable.

I believe if local law enforcement would have handled this case more thoroughly from the beginning, we would not be in a position where the general public felt the need to demand answers, and create speculation, around why this case has been handled the way it has.

Nolan Wells' family deserves media coverage, community support, & transparency from law enforcement.

For the Wells' family, the first can be said but the latter has yet to come to fruition.

For many Black families in America, currently and historically, none of those were given to their loved ones whose deaths were prematurely ruled as suicides or accidents. These tragedies have ultimately been deemed not worthy of thorough investigation or media coverage. This leaves grieving families with questions and no answers, as they beg for help from officials who have already closed the cases.

Considering the existing coverage on Nolan Well's case, I recommend using **sources 1-7** included at the end of the article for further research into details that have already been released.

The ultimate goal of this piece is to cover the other deaths of Black individuals in America whose stories have yet to be given a platform to be amplified nationally.

I understand I may not achieve that by writing here in the local Mobile Bay Labor Journal, but much of this is happening relatively close to home and is, as aforementioned, geographically relevant.



A few weeks ago on August 3rd in Jackson, Mississippi, a woman named **Tasia Fortune** was found dead, hanging from a tree behind a vacant house⁸. She was only **29-years-old** at the time of her death and she was a **mother of 4 children**. Her mother, **Christy Spivey**, told a local news outlet

"I know my daughter, and she did not do this to herself."

A GoFundMe was created for Christy to help raise funds for her daughter's funeral costs, and caring for Tasia's four young children. The QR code is listed at the top of this page. The investigation around Tasia's death is ongoing.



Five weeks before Tasia was found, on June 30th of this year, **28-year-old Jerard 'Jay' Jackson** was found hanging from a tree in a wooded area near the Hart Montague Trail in **Rothbury, Michigan**. Jay was from Illinois and had traveled to Michigan to attend the Electric Forest Festival with a group of friends. He was reported missing June 29th, found dead the 30th, and **less than 24 hours** after his body was found, the police ruled suicide.

His family disputes police ruling, informing the public that Jay "had no history of mental illness".

Due to the **lack of reporting** on Jay's death, I have not been able to conclusively determine who reported him missing, but I believe it was one of the friends he was traveling with. The morning of June 29th, hours prior to Jay being reported missing, **he had contacted the Michigan State Police to report what he believed was a crime being committed involving one of his friends**. Police determined that was not the case, and left the scene. However, his family feels that having more information about the incident, **including the body cam footage from officers**, would be helpful in determining what Jay's final hours looked like. His family stated also publicly that after Jay was reported missing, there were **multiple attempts to access his bank account, credit reports, and Apple Pay**¹⁰. Many questions remain unanswered regarding Jay's death, but his family continues to advocate for him. I have listed the phone number for the Rothbury Police Department below so you can advocate for Mr. Jackson and his family, as well.

(231) 894-2385
police@villageofrothbury.net

Call and/or send an email demanding they continue to investigate the death of Jerard Jackson thoroughly and transparently.

A few days before Jerard Jackson, on **June 26th** of this year, **25-year-old Biloxi, Mississippi resident Joseph Benjamin Posey Jr.** was found. He was far from home, dead, and decomposing in the canal of Hillebrandt Bayou, in **Beaumont, Texas**¹¹. He was unrecognizable, his head shaved, wearing clothes that didn't belong to him, hospital socks, and had none of his personal belongings aside from ID. The Beaumont police swiftly ruled his death an accidental drowning. A family member stated on Facebook that

"the authorities have not provided us the information we need, and the pain of not knowing what happened is overwhelming."

Listed below is the contact information for the Beaumont Police Department so you can **help Joseph's family get the answers they deserve.**

(409) 832-1234

Call and demand a full, thorough investigation of Joseph Benjamin Posey Jr.'s death.



Less than a week prior, on **June 21st** of this year, **21-year-old Justice Kai James** was found hanging in front of the cafeteria at the Turner Job Corps Center in **Albany, Georgia**. He was pursuing a secondary trade certificate there, already having completed his first. He was found by a group of students in a popular meeting place on campus around 9:30 p.m., which is after curfew. **Less than a month later** on July 20th, his death was **ruled a suicide**. Justice's aunt, **Chastity James**, does not agree with that ruling and has been looking for answers surrounding the circumstances of her nephew's death. Students that knew Justice also **do not believe he would take his own life**. His aunt told a local news outlet

"The kids are in uproar because Justice didn't do this himself. They feel he didn't do it himself."

The campus is surveilled, and the police have video footage from the night of Justice's death, but they have not shared the footage with Chasity, despite her asking repeatedly¹². Chastity raised Justice for 20 of his 21 years. She says

"I just want answers, I want to know what happened to my baby."

Listed below is the contact information for the Albany Police Department so you can help Chasity get access to the security footage and find out what happened to Justice.

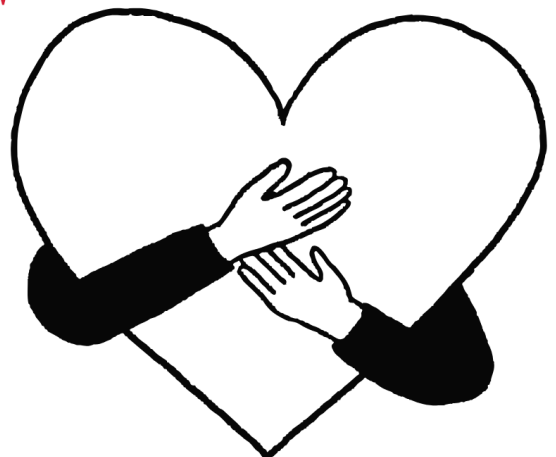


(229) 431-2100
APDPIO@albanyga.gov

Call and/or email and demand the Albany Police Department to release the campus security footage from June 21st, the night Justice Kai James died.

About 3 hours north of Albany in **Marietta, Georgia**, another **21-year-old** was also found hanging. **Kyle Bassinga** was found tied to a tree along a popular walking trail at Fair Oaks Park on **February 18th** of this year. Kyle was originally reported missing from Atlanta on February 14 and by February 23rd, **less than a week after he was found, his death was ruled a suicide**. Like Justice, and many other young men their age, Kyle was also a student. He attended Georgia State University¹³. His family described him as

"a kind, thoughtful, and smart young man who loved nature, music, and the people around him, who was deeply loved and will be profoundly missed."



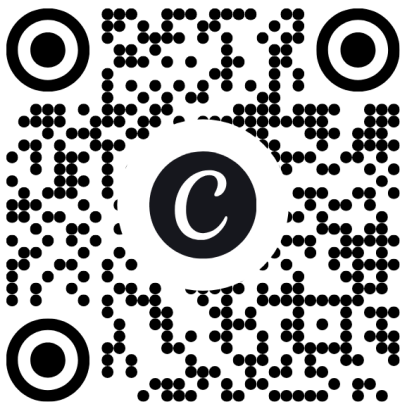
In addition to signing Terri's support letter for her sister, I urge you to reach out to the Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office and **demand they fully examine Tonea Nicole Miller's death.**

(305) 471-3518
sherriffrosie@mdso.com

Only a few weeks before that, on **May 8th** of this year, a **16-year-old** girl was also found dead. Her name was **Juliana Nzita**, and she was hanging from a tree at a church property in **Charlotte, North Carolina**. She was missing for several days before her body was discovered by a man walking his dog. The police never located her phone, and never interviewed the man that found her body¹⁶. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department closed the case after 4 days, stating there were “no signs foul play was involved.” **The young girl’s death was ruled a suicide**. Her family revealed that Juliana had dealt with severe bullying in the past, but still **openly rejected the ruling** and demanded an autopsy. Despite this, **an autopsy was never conducted**¹⁷.

• RACISM HAS NOT GONE AWAY - THE VIOLENCE HAS KEPT HAPPENING - WE ARE JUST TOLD IT SEEMS.
IMPRISONED AND KILLED. WE END UP IN PRISONS. BUT PEOPLE ARE BEING LOCKED IN PRISONS. WHAT IT SEEMS.
NORMAL, AND NOT A PEDAL.

Community Letter of Support for Justice for Tonea Nicole Miller



There is an obvious pattern here. Hasty rulings, lack of coverage, no medical examiner reports released, and an overall lack of transparency, communication, and compassion for grieving family members.

Systemic neglect, abuse, and racism take countless lives across our country each day.

Each and every one of these individuals' stories deserve to be heard. Their deaths **need** to be thoroughly investigated. And if any of these quick, uninformed rulings prove to have been inaccurate, and foul play indeed has been involved, **justice needs to be served** on all fronts. We, as a **community**, have the power to hold these institutions accountable. It is **our responsibility** to hold these institutions accountable.



**Stay compassionate, stay vigilant,
stay organized.**

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WORKERS VS. REFORM

By Michael Kimble



Author Bio:

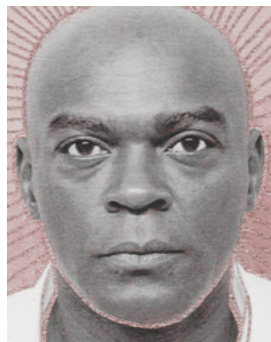
Michael Kimble is a Black gay incarcerated writer and organizer who has been held captive by the state for nearly 40 years after he defended himself and his friend from a racist and homophobic attack.

Since his captivity, Michael has been heavily involved in efforts to free himself and others, assisting in legal defense for fellow inmates, organizing reading groups and Black history events, speaking up for other LGBTQ+ folks behind bars, and helping to organize alongside the Free Alabama Movement.

To provide ongoing financial support to Michael in prison, use the QR to access a GiveSendGo link to donate. If you would like to receive updates or learn more about how to support Michael, please follow his support page on Instagram @freemichaelkimble.



Free Michael Kimble!



<https://www.givesendgo.com/freemichaelkimble>

This is not just an Alabama story nor just a southern story, but one that has played out in many states. The first Trade Unions was organized August 14, 1833 in New York. Carpenters and other trades had fought for higher wages in late 1833 and almost twenty other trades' pledged their support. From this the New York Trades' Union was born.

Ely Moore became president of the union and was the first elected labor representative in Congress. The Trades' Unions wanted to distance themselves from the political labor organizations of recent years. The Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations in Philadelphia of 1828 had acted as a forerunner political movement and the General Trades' Union as a safeguard added to its constitution that "no party, political or religious questions shall at any time be agitated in or acted upon in the Union." Its official publication, the National Laborer stated that "the Trades' Union never will be political because its members have learned from previous experience that the introduction of politics into their societies has thwarted every effort to ameliorate their conditions." The disgust with active politics did not translate into a repudiation of legislative maneuvering or "lobbying."

The first legislative campaign embarked upon by a labor organization was the campaign by the New York Trades' Union "for the suppression of the competition from prison made goods." The state legislature created a special commission on prison labor. Ely Moore, the president of the union was placed as one of the commissioners. Union members bumped heads with prison reformers. The reformers argued that labor by prisoners is a necessary means of their rehabilitation/reform to an honest mode of living.

The reformers was victorious. After convening for a few months the commission released its report that was rejected in a public meeting of workers. It had approved the prison-labor system entirely and recommended only minor changes which Ely Moore signed. This labor history shows the many contradictions in the labor movement, but this must change. Organized labor must see the intersectionality of incarcerated WORKERS and workers out in the so-called free world as the same. Incarcerated workers and organized labor can bring this exploitative existence to an end. In recent years organized labor has made some inroads into the conversation of abolition, namely the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and there has been some real solidarity actions taken in solidarity with prisoners in recent years. We must not continue to allow the arch-capitalists to divide us and make us think that our struggles are not the same. Those incarcerated didn't fall from the sky. We have family who has to supplement our diets and provide for hygiene, phone calls, toilet tissue, etc. Our families are workers too.

In the words of the great unionist ----

WHILE THERE IS A LOWER CLASS:

I AM IN IT.

WHILE THERE IS A CRIMINAL ELEMENT:

I AM OF IT.

WHILE THERE IS A SOUL IN PRISON:

I AM NOT FREE.

- Eugene V. Debs -

WE ARE THE REAL EXPERTS ON PRISONS

by Uhuru Rowe

Author Bio:

After serving 31 years in prison Uhuru was released last year. Uhuru was a Virginia prisoner who was politicized while incarcerated.

Usually, when people talk about the carceral system, they look to “experts” with degrees – professors, criminologists, and policy analysts who often view prisons through the lens of data and text. But,

**There is a big difference
between studying prisons
and living inside one.**

If you want to know what a prison is, don’t ask an academic who has spent years studying and teaching about prisons inside of the comfort of a classroom or study hall. Ask the person who watched their youth wither away behind a steel door or the person who survived the carceral state’s attempt to completely erase their humanity. I spent almost my entire life in prison and some of those years were spent in solitary confinement.

**You cannot and will not
find a peer-reviewed
study that captures the
psychological damage
that I experienced from
being trapped inside a
tiny concrete cell for 23
hours a day.**

On more than one occasion, I came close to hanging myself from the sprinkler inside my cell in order to escape that hell.

The “experts” talk about topics like the history of prisoners and their behavior modification programs, but

**Those of us who have
lived that reality know the
truth: it is State sanctioned
torture designed to break
the human spirit so
thoroughly that there is
nothing left to resist.**

I survived 31 years of systemic abuse and brutality that the general public chooses to ignore. I have seen people on the inside drop dead from medical neglect. I have seen prison guards plant drugs in cells and beat people while they were handcuffed and defenseless. I, too, was beaten while I was handcuffed.

I have seen stiff, dead bodies being dragged out of cells at 3:00 a.m. because of drug overdose. I have seen young men fresh into the prison system get raped by predators who had already been in prison for 30 and 40 years. I have seen childhood friends get beaten and stabbed to death over petty and minor conflicts. I have seen prison officials intentionally place rival gang members into the same cell and dorm together so that the ensuing violence can be used as a justification for locking down the prison and taking away "Privileges". I have seen prison officials retaliate against people for simply speaking up and speaking out about these issues. My eyes have seen so many other horrors.

On the Left, we know that the carceral state is not broken. It is working exactly as designed and is intended. It is a tool of class warfare and social/racial control and dominance.

But even within the abolitionist movement and within the Left in general, there is a tendency to speak for us rather than to us. Real expertise on prisons isn't found and never will be found in a thesis, academic text, or an academic lecture – unless it is authored by a person directly impacted by the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC). It is etched into the scars on our backs and the grief we carry for those who may never make it out. If we are real about dismantling this thing we call the Prison Industrial Complex, we must stop pretending that objective observation about the PIC is superior to lived experience.

The only people who understand the true nature of prisons are those who have been chewed up and spit out by them and had the audacity to survive.

I say all that to say,

The revolution will not be led by those who study the fire: it will be led by those who've walked through it.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE CAPTURED

Arrested In Mobile in 2035

Short Fiction By @aim Egregor

The police drone shot by, flying at almost eighty miles an hour overhead. It stopped on a dime. The camera was already pointing at Mark, and its gaze did not waver as the four circular bladesets turned with minute precision, bringing its body around to face him.

The walk had been uneventful before this, a quick trip to the grocery store down the street to get something flavorful to wrap the dog's meds in. Mark lived mostly on parish rice and lentils, which he baked into buns.

But Sparky needed carprofen, or else he was in too much pain to walk, and he wouldn't eat it unless Mark rubbed a little slice of pork around the bun he stuffed the pills into.

This was all Mark could think about as the drone watched him. A polite voice came from the drone, feminine, saying "Please hold still while we examine you."

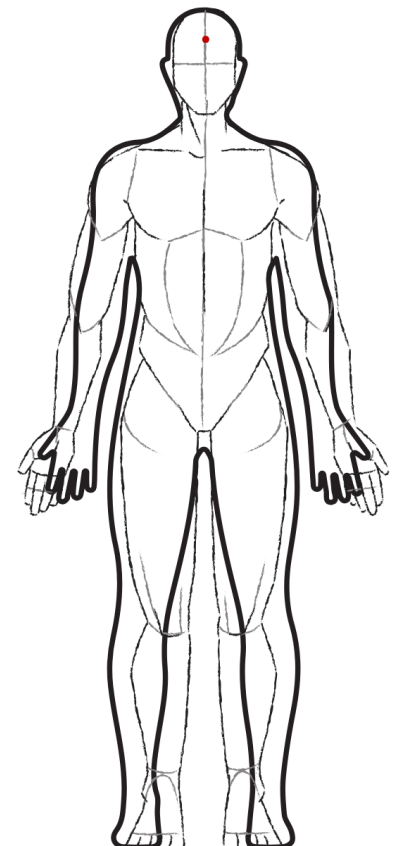
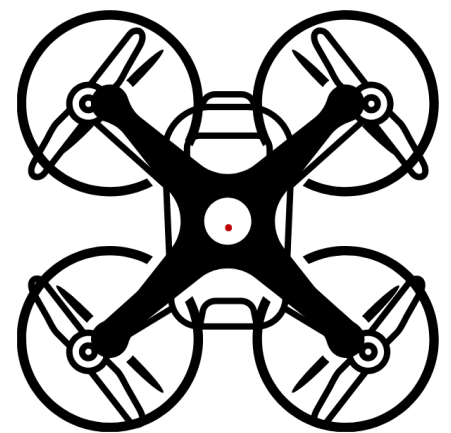
He knew about this. He'd been stopped once before.

The drones opted for capture more often than kill, but he knew that the grocery bags he carried, or the water bottle, or the folding fan, could all be mistaken by the AI as a gun. No different from normal police in that regard.

He had seen one of the drones gun down someone for shoplifting. There was a reason no one wore oversized hoodies anymore - the ruling was that any garment large enough to conceal a gun would be considered automatically as having one. Within a day, it had been implemented, and drones across the state shot people down who were suspected of minor crimes, but dressed in such a way that let the drone switch to kill mode. The safety of police property took priority over all else, and being seen as a threat to the drone was justification enough for slaughter.

Mark wasn't wearing a hoodie, and evidently nothing on his person registered as a firearm. He stood perfectly still. He had been to a community training on this. He opened his mouth.

"Am I free to go?"

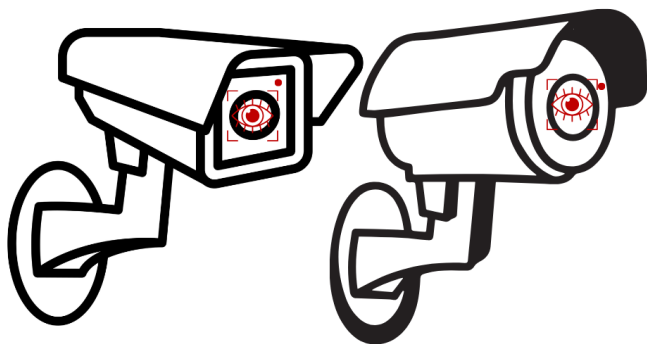


The voice came out. Soft, sweet. He realized the AI had modeled it off of his ex girlfriend. The drones tried to make people calm.

“Please accompany me to the Police Station.”

Not an answer. Old movies showed robots as being pathologically predisposed towards truth telling and answering questions. In reality, the copbots were nothing like that. They had been trained on real police interactions, based off of decades of bodycam footage, plus additional data gathered for the express process of robotic policing. They could dodge questions better than anyone. They were trained for it.

He had the red card memorized. He didn't know if it all applied to his situation.



That voice again. Sounding pleading, sad, came from the bot.

“Please accompany me to the station. If you do not accompany of your own volition, I will be forced to use restraints, and a human officer will carry you to the station.”

He was fucked. He knew he was fucked.

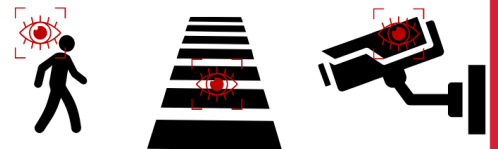


“Okay okay, I'll comply.” One of the selfdriving cars racing past slowed. The door opened automatically. The drone mounted itself to the top. Mark was careful to keep his hands away from his body.

“Please leave bagged belongings here.” The voice came from the car now, the same, beautiful voice. Cara had been dead for two years now. He hated how nice it felt to hear it again, that voice which had sang to him almost every day.

He slowly lowered, placing his bags on the sidewalk. As the car moved on, he sat in utter silence. He wondered why it had flagged him. There were cameras on the shelves with the pricetags of every item in the store, adjusting the prices to the customer. There were cameras in every light post, every passing car, except those few human driven clunkers old enough to not have them. He hadn't stolen anything. He hadn't said any incendiary speech.

Fuck, he thought.



It was the damn jaywalking. It usually wasn't enforced. He had to walk an extra third of a mile to cross the street in a legally designated area, and he had stopped bothering to.

I guess the law changed. Or the enforcement for it?

He knew it didn't matter.



I do not wish to speak with you, answer your questions, or sign or hand you any documents based on my 5th Amendment rights under the United States Constitution.

I do not give you permission to enter my home based on my 4th Amendment rights under the United States Constitution unless you have a warrant to enter, signed by a judge or magistrate with my name on it that you slide under the door.

I do not give you permission to search any of my belongings based on my 4th Amendment rights.

I choose to exercise my constitutional rights.

These cards are available to citizens and noncitizens alike.

He recited it aloud, fully
All that stuff assumed he was at home. He was not at home.

The drone ignored it.



He looked out the window. He recognized the route. They weren't even going to the police station. They were going straight to the jail. He took the last moments of the trip to look at the trees. There were children playing basketball in the park by the community garden. He wondered how long it would be before he'd see the green of plants again.



In reality, it was almost two years. He was herded into the jail by the drone. A screen inside showed he was being charged with jaywalking, but also littering, for the bags he had left on the roadside. He didn't have long to read it before it was gone. Another inmate stripped him of his clothes, and performed a cavity search while the bot looked on. Cameras were everywhere.



For the first year he worked eleven hours a day in the jail. He was technically paid, but the first seven hours of his shift were spoken for. The jail insisted that water was enough to wash his ass, and he had to pay from his pocket for toilet paper. They insisted the infections he constantly got weren't life threatening, so he had to pay for neosporin.

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He tried asking for a lawyer. He asked the screens over and over. Once every week or two he would see one of the few human guards, or an administrator, and he would tell them he wanted a lawyer. They said yes, or they ignored him. It made no difference. Until about a year in, when finally he got a call from his cell. He answered it. He knew the call would take all his spare cash from a days work every thirty seconds, but he answered anyway.

"Im the lawyer appointed to your case. Am I correct that you cannot afford an attorney?"

"Yes" he said.

"You're being charged with animal abuse, littering, illegal crossing, and an escape attempt."

"What? I never-"



"Says here that you rattled the door to your cage continuously on August twenty fifth of last year. System wrote it up as you trying to get out."

"But my dog -"



"Your dog was found without food or water several days after you were brought in. Had to be put down. You're being charged with abuse."

"I -"



"Look, there really is no fighting this. They are willing to cut you a deal and get you out of the littering charge and the jaywalking if you plead guilty. You'll only do seven years, including time served, so your already part way through the sentence. And you can get out early for good behavior - which means you need to be working more, at least fourteen hours a day."

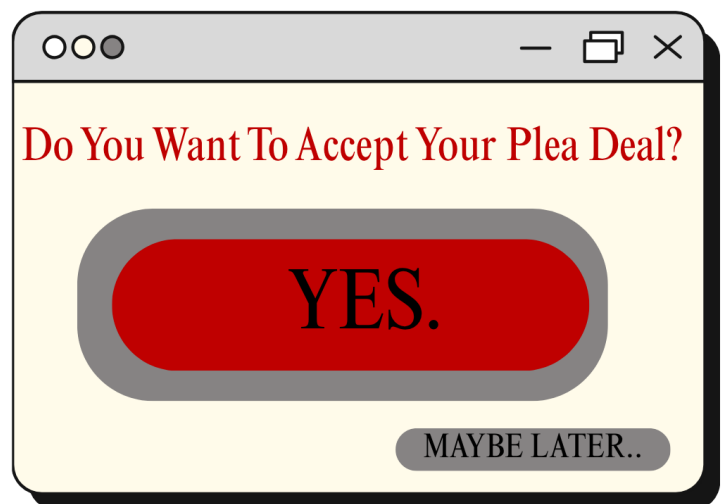
"But can't we at least try to fight this, those charges are bullshit. You know -"

"No one has time for a trial, kid. You go to trial, you're facing twenty years. Take the deal."

The lawyer hung up. Mark was left sitting on the floor by the speaker. He crumpled over. A year to speak, to have his version of things heard - gone in an instant.

The next day, the screen in his room glowed with a message. "Accept Plea Deal?" it said.

His options were yes, and maybe later. He didn't touch it for days, but the light kept him up at night.



Finally, he went to click “Maybe Later.” just to make the screen go dark.

“Confirmed - deal accepted.”

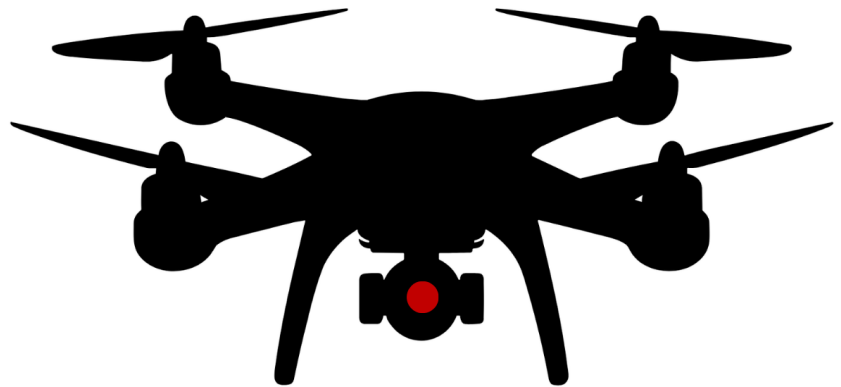
The screen just read it as though he'd said yes. There was nothing he could do.

Another year in the jail before he was transferred to a prison, more than two hundred miles away. The few visitors he had had dried up.

The jail had been a sweatshop, and he had been tasked to sew oversized hoodies every day. He had been swift at it, and could almost get into a rhythm. He almost never spoke to another inmate. The sewing machine was in his room, in a locked separate section of it that opened at 6am, and closed he left it. Occasionally, if it needed repair, he could call a technician, another inmate. There were inmates who took his clothes every few days to be washed, and who took the stacks of hoodies he assembled. There were others who brought his food and took the trays. But everyone was on a clock, and all the speech was monitored. No one wanted to say anything that could be considered riotous, which was almost anything at all. So the jail was largely quiet.



The prison was different. At least there he got to see green again. He started in farm labor. It was almost liberating, to be around other people, to be under fewer cameras than he ever had been, even before the jail, in the city. Surrounding the fields there were plenty, and there were drones overhead. But in the center of the long rows, there was a sense of some small amount of being unwatched.



Then, one day, the screen in his cell said he was to work in the factory. And he did not see green again, not until his release.

Day after day he sat assembling the covers to the tiny little pricetags with their tiny little cameras. Eventually, he worked his way up, and worked to fix the machines that fabricated some of the parts.

Time passed. Release grew close. He heard from others that he would be back. Most people did come back. Parole was nearly impossible without a job, and he couldn't apply until he got released. If he wasn't employed within fourteen days, he'd be back in.

Oh well. Oh well. Oh well.

He knew one guy had gotten a job doing drone repair. He was the person who had trained Mark to be a technician. Mark wasn't sure he could bring himself to work on the machines that watched him, that had captured him. But he also knew that was exactly what he had been doing, the entire time. The system sustained itself. It eased you into working on its behalf, keeping it running, keeping all the little things that let it capture you able to capture someone else. Maybe he would work on the drones. He would find his friend who had taught him before and he would get hired. He would stay out.

Release day came. It shone on the screen in his room. The lights above the doors glowed green when he touched the handle. It was eerie. He simply walked out. His belongings were in a little box. He took them. He changed into his old clothes, now large on him from years of barely enough food and long working hours.

He had saved enough of his money inside that he could get a ride down back to Mobile. But that was all of his money. His sister said he could stay with her, or at least use her address. He wasn't sure how long it would last.

But for two weeks, he would be free. Free to walk along streets lined with live oaks. Free to be around the green. He decided he would spend his days in the community garden, the one by the basketball court. He felt the least watched in the green.

His sister didn't trust him with her dog, and he mostly slept in a hammock in her shed. The bus wouldn't let him on because of his conviction. He walked the extra distance, and crossed the street at the right place and time.

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒
☐	Released	Garden	Job Fair	Drug Test	Garden	
☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parole Meeeeting	Garden	Drug Test	Garden	Garden	Garden	
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parole Meeeeting	Prison					
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

