

# THE OPENING STATEMENT

## *of those who are supposed to remain silent*

Summer 2017 Newsletter

### Let Us Make Man in Our Own Image

HH Gonzales



#### *Post-Incarceration Syndrome*

**M**ass incarceration supporters profess that prisons are a means of keeping society safe from predatory men and women bent on lives of destruction. When in fact it is the ultimate form of chattel slavery. A means to castrate, to put away a solvable problem for lack of interest in solving it, solely due to the financial benefits it amasses.

If that alone is not enough, the entity created by its policies and procedures, supposed to be predicated on laws, have by lack of transparency and accountability created the dull and rusted blade they use to render us impotent!

I've spent 29 years in these dismal crypts, and while not a licensed psychologist I believe, by sheer flight hours, I am qualified to elaborate on the effects of incarceration on the human psyche. And if there are those who don't believe it has an effect then maybe a psychological thesis on delusional episodes is necessary.

A perfect system, where all policies and operational procedures are implemented to the letter would still produce a psychosis that would remain long after a person was released. It is impossible for a prison sentence to produce a well-rounded citizen, because it doesn't mimic society in any way. So what do prisons produce and let out into the free world?

Just what they intend: A man made in the image that produces job security (for others), a man made incapable of coping with the pressure that the parole office will

impose on them, the pressures that society will demand. A man made inept in social development and exhibiting antisocial behavior, underdeveloped in social interaction with women. So he either fears them or views them as sexual objects—a man made hyper-sensitive to rejection, with a learned violent bent for dealing with pressure and problems. A man made easily susceptible to drug use to try to suppress his inability to cope. A man made in the image of Post-Incarceration Syndrome, with institutionalized personality traits, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, antisocial personality traits, Social-Sensory Deprivation Syndrome, and reactive Substance Use Disorders—and that's with everything being done how it's supposed to. Add to it a lack of transparency, no accountability, a totally racially unbalanced workforce with god-complexes, and you can expect a hatred for white male authority figures—sadly, the leaders of the job market—as a product of incarceration.

So in essence, prison produces a man made in the image conducive to its prosperity and sustenance.

#### *Whose Dream Are You Fulfilling?*

**T**o dream is to see yourself or others as you desire to be seen. A dream is a vision, that we hope we'll one day see. Every one of us dreams, and wants to be in a better place or situation, and we strive daily to reach the fulfillment of those dreams.

When we hear the word "dream," we all tend to think good thoughts, magic

moments, and better days, but we fail to consider the fact that dreams are relative to the person and are geared toward individual wishes. While they will always hope for satisfaction, it doesn't mean that they bode well for others.

My point is this: For all my brothers and sisters who are struggling in a real-life fight against oppression, domination, and denial of your rights or beliefs, there are those whose dreams are geared toward our downfall! The dreams they had for their individual selves were not enough to satisfy their needs for more and they are delusional enough to believe that their dreams for more will be fulfilled by squashing yours.

Since these particular individuals have for the most part achieved for themselves what most of our dreams are made of—wealth and position—they have us at a disadvantage in the fight. This along with the fact that we are required to give our attention also to the uphill journey called life, brings them closer to the fulfillment of living their dream of squashing ours.

To do so though they expect some things from us: They need us to lay down and do nothing. They need us to believe that they are too strong, too rich, too smart, and unbeatable. They need us to believe they are better-connected and all-powerful. They need us to never realize that the power is with the people. United, we choose our representatives and thereby become not only connected but *the connection*. They need us to be despaired by a lost battle and give up the fight. They expect for us to lose sight of the fact that

## Let Us Make Man in Our Own Image

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*right* makes *might*, not the other way around. They need us to forget that the spirit and essence of our struggles are infinite; they need us to lose our necessary connection to them. They need us to become blind to the infringement of rights of others, to lose our compassion, or get bogged down by individual problems so much that we believe we can't help anyone else. They need us to forget that in helping others we relieve ourselves, that helping others expands your team and also puts

someone in your fight to beat your problem!

They also need us to do radical extremist type of things, to act without clear strategy, to lose our rationale and give in to emotion, to give them just cause for exercising their strength against us.

So to all my brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, cousins and friends, strangers and the unknown: Never lose sight, never give up the fight, maintain your

compassion and humanity, help and care about others, invest in the future of your dream!

To those who don't like it and do nothing or *too much*, ask yourselves: "Whose dream are you fulfilling?"

*Do not go gentle into that good night  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light*

## Ideas Have to Be Shared

*Lacino Hamilton*



***“New ideas usher in new realities. New ways of understanding ourselves and others. New ways of understanding the world we live in and how it works.”***

**A**s the first issue of The Opening Statement went to press I was ecstatic. It was the culmination of months and months of discussion between the inside and outside around ideas (action) that could be took to contribute to the process of decreasing (ultimately eliminating) the space prisons occupy in our society. The culmination of months and months of discussion about what should be wrote, and who should do the writing. The culmination of months and months of discussion on who should receive The Opening Statement, Michigan prisoners or prisoners in general. The culmination of months and months of discussion on how to best foster a broad and continuing dialogue among the many people who struggle to find more effective ways to challenge the oppressive system of imprisonment. Discussions, among others, that are still on going.

The small group of us that first began having these discussions quickly concluded that the immense task of eliminating prisons will require the collective input of everybody. Therefore, I encourage readers to be active participants in what we are building and not merely consumers of information. Together we can accomplish so much more.

One way to be an active participant is to communicate what you read in the newsletter with other prisoners, as well as with your family and friends. We should not assume that because of someone's

experiences with prison, even if those experiences span a very long time, that they are acquainted with the interconnections among the different forms of oppression that make prison a necessary part of capitalist societies.

Another way to be an active participant is writing letters to MAPS members on the outside so that they may better serve the readership. They will do their best to reply to all criticisms, comments, or ideas you have about the newsletter. The responses may not always be in the form of individual correspondence. What is more likely is your criticisms, comments and ideas will be adopted and incorporated into the philosophy and direction of the newsletter.

I also encourage you to participate by writing articles for the newsletter. It is time to stop waiting on the media to tell our story, or legislators and the courts to lay the groundwork for a de-carceration revolution. Perhaps some suggestions and programs offered by those institutions will be the same used in other places and at other times, but we must never deny the possibility of producing new ideas (actions) that can only be developed from our own concrete conditions end experiences.

I am not making light of the difficulty in developing ideas (actions) to abolish prisons in a society saturated in one form of imprisonment or another. The overthrow of prisons will take a considerably long time; and the road there

## Ideas Have to Be Shared

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will have many twists and turns, false starts, backtracks, etc. But this task, long and arduous though it will be, represents only the first and simplest step in our struggle to be free. Or said another way, this is just "the opening statement."

If for no other reason, then, we need clear ways to define and analyze imprisonment, understand how it operates at individual and institutional levels, historically and in the present. Furthermore, new ideas are the stuff that change derives from. New ideas usher in new realities. New ways of understanding ourselves and others. New ways of understanding the world we live in and how it works. New ways of organizing and resisting the idea that caging people for part or all of their lives is worthy of the name of human civilization.

How prisoners and our friends and supporters approach prison abolition, the problems we identify as needing remedy, the solutions we entertain as viable, and the methods we choose as appropriate far-reaching solutions are all the product of ideas, theoretical ideas as well as practical questions, that need answers. And the newsletter is one of many mediums we can use to share and deepen these ideas.

Sharing ideas not only on how to end mass imprisonment, but imprisonment as a concept, serves several important purposes. First, sharing ideas enables us to think clearly about our intentions and the means we use to actualize them. It provides a framework for making choices about what we do and how, and for distinguishing among different approaches.

Second, at its best, sharing ideas also provides a framework for questioning and challenging our practices, Much more is being done to challenge imprisonment than many of us realize, but most of what is being done is not producing the desired results. Ideally we keep coming back to and refining our ideas as we reflect on our experiences and the experiences of others.

Finally, sharing ideas has the potential to help us remain open to new approaches as we encounter inevitable problems of co-optation, resistance, and insufficient knowledge and changing conditions within and without prisons. Sharing ideas has the potential to help us stay conscious of our position as historical subjects and learn from the past as we try to meet current conditions in more effective and imaginative ways.



## Dregs of Society

*Shannon Roden*

**W**e are the dregs of society. The lowest caste. Yet, we are still human beings. We still possess a potential purpose for which our existence was brought about. Dregs, although from the bottom, do not equate to worthlessness.

As a gardener, oftentimes I would save the dregs of my coffee and tea. In large enough amounts, I would apply these to my garden, a natural way to loosen the denser soil clods into a decent quality of loam for growing flowers and vegetables. Sadly, the vast majority only see dregs as a waste product. Something to be discarded and forgotten. Worse still, the vast majority likewise view us dregs of society in a like manner.

It may be fairly simple, and reasonably so, when it comes to throwing away mundane items such as coffee or tea grounds. But is it, and should it be, so simple to look in the mirror and say to yourself, "I'm throwing away human lives"? Maybe you did not commit an offense. Maybe it's not your son or daughter behind bars. It's not your fault, right, I see how one could feel that way. Can you honestly say you claim no

culpability though? In a way, we are all responsible.

These sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, are the dregs of society for a reason. Nobody was there to help lift them from the bottom and show them that there is a better way. For many, their mothers and fathers were also dregs of society, discarded and forgotten by those before. A vicious, repetitious cycle. Albeit, a cycle that can be broken. A society without prisons may seem far fetched to some. However, a society with *fewer* prisons is most certainly attainably reasonable to strive for, and a laudable endeavor.

Many have asked, "How then, do we break this cycle?" I wish that it were a simple solution, that this epic plan, this magical cure-all existed. Regretfully, there is no simple fix. I can, however, present a few items for consideration. Something that I find to be of imperative importance is simply finding our ability to feel and have compassion. Real compassion does not allow you to gaze upon your reflection, knowing you are casually throwing away human lives. More so when you consider, they did not ask for a hard life to be be-

stowed upon them. They were not given a choice in their surroundings or role models. With this in mind, in the true spirit of compassion, how could you not want to at least try to show us downtrodden souls a better way?

Once you have opened yourself to compassion, you must then believe that it is, in fact, possible to break this cycle. Believe it and want it enough to step up and get out into the fray. If your house were on fire, would you want the fire personnel and neighbors standing idly by discussing how large the fire is? No, you would want them in the fray, putting that fire out with risk and determination. Guess what? This prison beast is your house. It is ablaze, and the longer it just sits and burns, the harder it's going to be to extinguish. And you are those fire personnel, those neighbors, and it is up to you to jump into the fray. It's on you to extinguish that blaze. Are you simply going to watch the flames reach higher as you discuss them? Are you going to turn your backs on it and hope it goes away? The past hundred years shows this won't work. Or will you make an effort to stop the fire before it grows further?

## Dregs of Society

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If you want to be the fire personnel and fight this inferno, or if you want to be that resourceful gardener and make use of those dregs, there is no time like the present to step up. As it stands, the current system takes people already in the dregs and uses any means possible to make their situation worse. Throwing gasoline on a fire, if you will. These embittered people are then released back into society—a society we feel has abandoned us. As society we have not been shown any viable means to function in. Once again, the dregs of society, pariahs, recycling the only lives we have ever known. What nourishment to offer our young? Nothing but the sour milk of animosity and distrust. And—often—for only as long as it takes to return to prison, leaving those after the

same cycle to follow in.

Take the compassion I mentioned earlier. Mix in a little determination and wisdom. Lift these dregs from the bottom and help us find our potential. Educate, teach us to care for ourselves. Teach careers, how to think rationally and make better choices; give opportunity to be more. It is human nature to survive. If you show someone a better way, most will take it and flourish. It's not a fix all, but its a start, and the cycle will never be broken if we do not start somewhere.

## Untitled No. 1

*Kevin Craig AKA Outlaw*

Black Matter White World

It's been 150 years and we still oppressed  
 It's time they pay up on that debt they wrote us out a bad check  
 We can never be free until we break the Willie Lynch curse  
 All we got is each other so put this family first  
 What was promised by America we never got it  
 They made this world an institution everything profit  
 Integration was a lie, we still segregated  
 Civil right wasn't for us, they hide discrimination  
 This American dream was built on exploitation  
 And the oppression of blacks to keep us in the basement  
 They killed our uncles and our father in front of our brothers  
 Raped our sisters and killed our babies in front of our mothers  
 From all the fear that they instilled we still ain't step back up  
 We rather dominate each other let our guns bust  
 Feeling hopeless neglectation by the system got us stressing  
 Our children gotta teach they self to get the real lesson  
 Remember Pac said it—they don't give a fuck about us  
 It's up to us to be aware what's going on around us  
 We need to all come together for the same views  
 We all got the same struggle, sing the same blues.  
 Chorus: [Black rage... this white world made me this way  
 I broke the chains, I couldn't be a slave  
 And they know my mind deadly after breaking the curse  
 I got blood in my eye, I been oppressed since birth.]  
 They say I mastermind a riot and I lead the movement  
 Pictures of me on the frontline in front of the unit  
 Well somebody gotta do it, woke the people up  
 Cops killing us in the street and they don't give a fuck  
 And we ain't got no justice yet from this crooked system  
 Shot Mike Brown, hung Sandra Bland, and we all victims  
 The solution is revolution my heart pump with bravery  
 Lock us in prison make us work, that's the new slavery  
 We built this land with our blood and we still suffering  
 They retaliating against us, more prison corruption  
 Now they using Stono Rebellion Negro Act against us  
 We assemble in any groups, they say it's resistance  
 But I been peaceful long enough I ain't turning my check  
 I got a rebel spirit in me it's burning my feet

I'll be the leader all the  
 time just fall in the line  
 Bob Marley's get up and  
 stand up keep playing in  
 my mind  
 Told me now that I see the  
 light stand up for my rights  
 Told maps to add Outlaw  
 to this political fight.

[Chorus]

Why every leader that we  
 had from Malcolm to King  
 Had to die a violent death  
 to silence they dreams?  
 We was forced into America,  
 this not our dream  
 We all victims of democracy,  
 part of they scheme  
 The black man the burden  
 bearers of this white world  
 They turned our neighborhoods  
 to ghettos with the  
 white girl  
 This ain't the land of the  
 free, they fear Negros with  
 knowledge  
 They rather lock us up in prison  
 than have us in college  
 And they try to silence our  
 revolutionary voices  
 They don't want us woke up  
 so we can make the better  
 choices  
 They know a nigga mind  
 deadly when he really  
 conscious  
 By any means, never  
 ignorant, getting goals  
 accomplished  
 Brainwashed us with  
 whitewash, blacked a lot  
 of us out  
 That demonstration got  
 em scared to let us all  
 back out  
 1100 black men all  
 taking a stand  
 You could feel the power  
 and energy come over the  
 land  
 BLACK MATTER... let my  
 people know they black  
 lives matter  
 But black labor for white  
 wealth, we can't follow  
 that pattern.  
 [Chorus]



# Organizing for Community Accountability

*An Introduction to Community Accountability by \*EXCITE!*

## How do we address violence within our communities?

We are told to call the police and rely on the criminal justice system to address violence *within* our communities. However, if police and prisons facilitate or perpetrate violence against us rather than increase safety, how do we create strategies to address violence within our communities, including domestic violence, sexual violence, and child abuse, that don't rely on police or prisons?

Community accountability is one critical option. Community accountability is a community-based strategy, rather than a police/prison-based strategy, to address violence within our communities. Community accountability is a process in which a community—a group of friends, a family, a church, a workplace, an apartment complex, a neighborhood, etc.—work together to do the following things:

## What does community accountability look like?

Community based responses to violence have a long history in many of our communities and networks, and have often been developed in contexts where we could not rely on the state or larger community to protect us from violence (such as Black communities in the slavery and post-slavery eras, immigrant communities, queer communities and Indigenous communities). But these practices may not necessarily be called “community accountability” and can look very different depending on circumstances.

Community accountability can be about directly addressing violence as well as creating on-going practices within our relationships and broader networks that are opposed to oppression and violence. Networks of people can develop a community accountability *politic* by

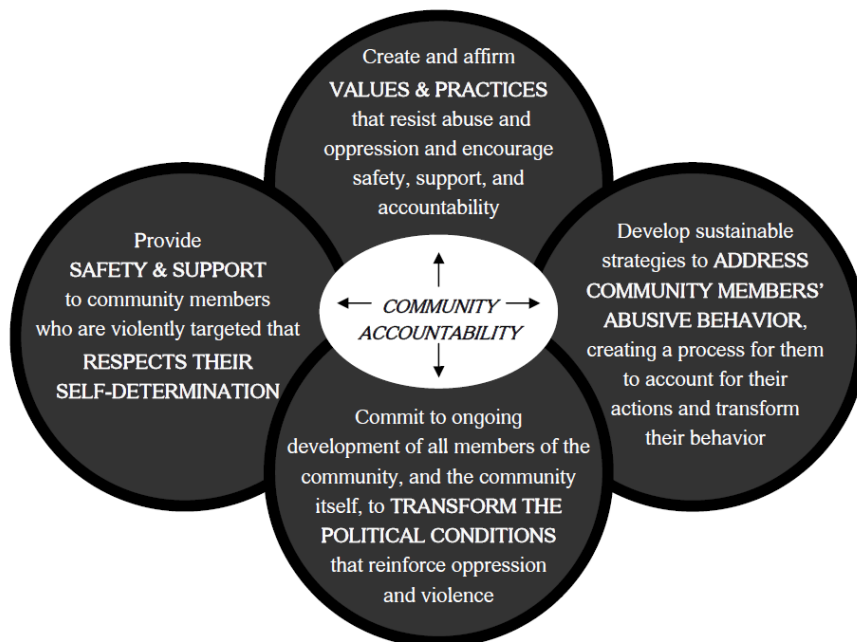
engaging in anti-violence/anti-oppression education, building relationships based on values of safety, respect, and self-determination, and nurturing a culture of collective responsibility, connection, and liberation. Community accountability is not just a reaction — something that we do when someone behaves violently — it is also *proactive* — something that is ongoing and negotiated among everyone in the community. This better prepares us to address violence if and when it happens. Concrete strategies and examples of community accountability can be found in the bullet points below.

## Is community accountability realistic?

Understandably, many of us want a quick fix to end domestic and sexual violence in our communities. However, community accountability work can be difficult and complicated because of oppressive attitudes and beliefs internalized by people within our communities. Community accountability can also be hard because we are often isolated from other people, sometimes because of the abuse itself, making it difficult to work collectively to support one another as well as hold each other accountable. Doing this work can be emotionally risky or even relationship breaking. Sometimes a process can take a very long time. For these reasons, it can be vital to create a support network when doing this work and to *work collectively*. It is also true that engaging in intentional community accountability work can sometimes help to *build* connections with people, strengthening a collective political commitment to respectful, loving, and liberatory relationships.

## Where can I get more information?

There are many groups in the U.S. and abroad who are doing critical community accountability organizing. EXCITE!\* Members and affiliates have mobilized and written about community accountability strategies led by women of color, LGBT/queer people of color and our communities. Write to us to get resources from other groups working on these projects.



- \* *Work with family members of a survivor to enhance support for that person.*
- \* *Use street theater to demonstrate to community members how they could react if they see acts of violence or harassment.*
- \* *Make agreements with your friends about what to do if one of you is in an abusive relationship.*
- \* *Do participatory action research to learn what strategies women of color and LGBT/queer folks of color think might work for them to increase their safety.*
- \* *Organize a “liberated ground,” mobilizing a neighborhood block by block to agree to resist rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment.*

# Transformative Justice and Community Accountability

## Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective Introduction to Transformative Justice

### **Transformative Justice and Community Accountability (TJ/CA) are responses to violence which:**

- \* Do not create more harm/violence (e.g. prisons, the police, the criminal legal system) and that do not perpetuate systemic violence (e.g. oppression, harmful societal norms, vigilantism, criminalization).
- \* Work to meet immediate needs for justice (e.g. safety, healing, connection, accountability); while also working towards a long-term vision of liberation (e.g. a world without prisons and oppression where sexual violence doesn't exist.)
- \* Work to address current incidences of violence in ways that will shift the conditions that allowed that violence to happen, in ways that prevent future incidences of violence and ultimately end violence.
- \* Understand that individual acts of harm do not only have individual impact, but also have collective impact and therefore need to be solved collectively.

Through shared principles, values and practices everyday people have been creatively working to respond to violence within their communities. Many of these communities or people either cannot or do not want to call the police because of risk of deportation, police harassment and brutality, further criminalization, fear of exile from their community, etc.

TJ/CA came out of these communities and more recently, just over a decade ago, community groups and organizations began building a shared framework and language around this work. Some of the pivotal groups recognized for their contributions to TJ/CA during this time are EXCITE!\* Women of Color Against Violence, Critical Resistance, Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA), generationFIVE, and Creative Interventions. Since then, more groups have emerged and contributed work and thinking to TJ/CA work, in particular the actual practice of interventions in interpersonal partner abuse and sexual violence.

Many of these groups understood the deep connections between intimate, communal and state violence and did not see using the police, the prison system or the criminal legal system (i.e. state violence) as a viable strategy to address violence in their communities. Many of these groups recognized that these already violent state systems continue a cycle of current and generational violence and trauma and were created to unjustly target, oppress and control their communities, not to protect them. This was a distinct departure from the mainstream domestic violence and sexual assault movements' decision to work directly with the state as their primary strategy to address intimate violence.

TJ/CA work has looked like: accountability circles, safety plans that leverage community resources (e.g. child care, walking people home), study groups of individuals learning about TJ/CA together, creating community safety for youth, collective resiliency, accessible healing, conflict mediation practices, non-violent language and full-on community interventions in violent situations.

TJ/CA provides opportunities for liberatory responses to violence that actively cultivate healing, safety, accountability, connection, transformation and shared humanity and dignity.

### **Some examples of shared values, principles and practices for TJ/CA work:**

- \* Organize collectively
- \* Community-based
- \* Holistic
- \* Coordinated
- \* Shifting Power
- \* Accountability
- \* Sustainability
- \* Preparation and capacity building
- \* Developing a safety strategy
- \* Recognize humanity of everyone involved
- \* Prepare to be engaged in process long term
- \* Centers on those most affected by violence to create change

**THE OPENING STATEMENT** is an abolitionist newsletter driven by the voices and visions of Michigan prisoners, as well as those on the outside impacted by the prison system. **THE OPENING STATEMENT** hopes to foster ongoing discussion against the violence of incarceration.

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## Thoughts on Being Free

*Freddy X*

I'm thinking about how I want to be free; locked in a cage, but when I'm free I still won't be free – scared to get pulled over by the police.

It seems like from day one this world is against me. God created me to be free, American is the land of the free, but even when my hands up, death still follows me.

Tired of all the pain, the hurt and the tears.

We want justice, we want peace, we march and protest, we want justice, we want peace.

So-called saviors ignoring the signs, like a parent to his child.

Let'em march, let'em protest, let'em cry themselves to sleep.

Time heals all wounds, give'em one of your Oscar/grammy speech.

With words of rhetoric to sooth the pain, actions toward injustice all remain the same.

I'm thinking about how I want to be free; locked in a cage, but when I'm free I still won't be free – scared to get pulled over by the police.



PLATE II.  
*Adiantum capillus Veneris*

**Attention mailroom:** The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects free speech. Regulations that permit the government or its employees to discriminate on the basis of the content of the message cannot be tolerated under the First Amendment (i). Further, prisoners retain free speech rights. Thought control, by means of prohibiting beliefs, would not only be undesirable but impossible (ii). Fact of confinement and needs of the penal institution impose rational limitations on prisoner free speech rights (iii), but those restrictions must have a "valid, rational connection" to "legitimate penological interests" not related to the content of ideas (iv). Regulations and practices can only be justified when the practice "furthers an important or substantial government interest unrelated to the suppression of expression" (v). This means you cannot legally suppress the expression of ideas. Prison walls do not serve to form a barrier separating prisoners from the protections of the constitution (vi). Core political speech is most-zealously guarded and there is a public interest "in having free and unhindered debate on matters of public importance—the core value of the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment" (vii). Thus, exclusion of printed material on the basis of its political perspective amounts to free speech retaliation and discrimination, which is illegal (viii). If you exclude printed material for an unlawful basis, or if you simply conjure up a false pretext for its exclusion, you have broken the law. The prisoner recipient of this mail has cause for bringing a civil rights action against you and has cause for gaining punitive damages—

which means money. You and everyone who permits this action, from your supervisor to the director of the prison system, may be named in those civil actions, and you may also be subject to termination from your employment. Because this primer is included in this mailing, you will not be able to claim you did not know your actions were illegal. For these reasons, we ask that you conform to federal law and refrain from unlawful discrimination against the enclosed materials, permitting mail service of this literature that objectively meets all legitimate criteria set forth in prison regulations. i, *Reagan v. Time, Inc.*, 468 U.W. 641, 648-49, 104 SCt 3262 (1984). "[T]he fact that society may find speech offensive is not sufficient reason for suppressing it. Indeed, if it is the speakers' opinion that gives offense, that consequence is a reason for according it constitutional protection." *Hustler Magazine, Inc. v. Falwell*, 495 US 45, 46, 108 SCt 876, 882. The government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable, *U.S. v. Eichman*, 496 US 310, 319, 110 SCt 2404 (1990). "[A]bove all else, the First Amendment means that government has no power to restrict expression because of its message, its ideas, its subject matter, or its content." *Police Dept. of Chicago v. Mosley*, 408 US 92, 95, 92 SCt 2286, 2290 (1972). ii, *Jones v. North Carolina Prisoners Labor Union*, 433 US 119, 97 SCt 2532 (1977). iii, *Pell v. Procunier*, 417 US 817, 822, 94 Set 2800, 2804 (1974). iv, *Turner v. Safely*, 482 US 78, 107 SCt 2245 (1987) v, *Turner*, supra vi, *Turner*, supra vii, *Pickering v. Board of Education*, 391 US 563, 573, 88 SCt 1731 (1968). viii, *Abu-Jamal v. Price*, 154 F3d 128 (3rd Cir., 1998); *X v. Blatter*, 175 F3d 378 (6th Cir. 1999)