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oatmeal and



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Suggested title – Slaves to Their Mistakes: Why For-Profit Prisons Must Be Eradicated  
A Day in The Life  
In a heartbreaking interview by the Pacific Standard Magazine, one former prisoner recalled his time in prison.

His meals consisted of mostly oatmeal and peanut butter in the morning because that is what he could afford. Unlike what is portrayed in movies, simple living is not always paid for by taxpayers. In Nevada, prisoners have been paying a \$6 per day for meals, as well as other costs of living. While the institution was not listed in this article, it can be assumed that Trevor, the inmate telling his tale, was at a prison in a state where incarceration is already so high that the state can no longer bear the brunt of the cost.

After breakfast, he would start “ work” in the laundry room as a mechanic. For a high-labor job at 40 hours per week, Trevor only makes \$150 a month. Sweatshop Rates in the States  
But, as far as pay is concerned, Trevor considers himself lucky. In non-industry jobs in federal prisons, prisoners earn an average of \$0.

14 per hour on the low end and an average of \$0. 63 per hour on the high end. For-profit prisons and state-owned correctional industries, on the other hand, only pay their workers an average of \$0. 33 per hour on the low end and \$1. 41 per hour on the high end. The Prison Policy Initiative points out that these averages indicated that prisoners are making less money today than they did in 2001. Many advocates of for-profit prisons argue that it is something that inmates “ sign up for” when they commit the crimes that cost them prison time. However, what these arguments don’t take into consideration is that for-profit prisons do not benefit anyone.

A recent Department of Justice memo indicated that using a correctional facility as a place of profit and not as a place for corrections caused higher incidents of inmate violence, inmate mental health issues, and did not provide adequate savings. The memo showed that correctional facilities needed to focus more on rehabilitating prisoners rather than making money off them. Taking the time to address the issues that lead to incarceration not only shows that the justice system values the lives of people who made legal mistakes, but also trusts that their betterment of themselves through not-for-profit correctional methods is profitable to the United States as a whole. The Cost of Being in the System Recently, CBS referred to the United States as a "Nation of Incarceration". This is staggeringly accurate when statistics are considered. Despite the national average for crime dropping by over 40%, there remain 2.4 million incarcerated people in the United States. This has caused rampant overpopulation problems within these systems.

At the base level, this causes inmates to at least be without beds. But in the worst-case scenarios, overpopulation has been known to cause disease, violence, and death. When these scenarios are figured in, the cost of housing prisoners in these facilities not only increases, but also takes a toll on the families and relatives of those being housed in overcrowded prisons. The cost of healthcare in prisons is often so high that it falls on the families rather than the inmate themselves.

For marginalized groups - which make up the highest population of those in prisons - this can take a harsh toll on their day-to-day livelihood. If a prisoner or a prisoner's family cannot afford to pay, who then ends up paying for the medical treatment? Taxpayers in support of for-profit prisons will be

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displeased to hear the truth: they do. At places like the Bernalillo County Metropolitan Detention Center in Albuquerque, NM, if a prisoner cannot afford the \$5 co-pay to see a doctor, they are not charged. In fee-related terms, this is only one part of the average \$31, 286 cost per inmate that taxpayers pay to house prisoners each year. But what do these statistics have to do with For-Profit Prisons? For-Profit Prison Structure Exacerbates Known IssuesThe answer? For-profit prison structure does not allow decent living environments for prisoners, making issues that are prominent in non-industry prisons that much worse. The statistics speak.

For instance, in Mississippi, inmates in for-profit prisons are 2-3 more times likely to be assaulted than in non-industry prisons. This is because, like many other for-profit prisons around the nation, the owners of the prison (GEO) were interested in making a profit, not in rehabilitating customers. Although this hard-work punishment has seemed to be favored by those in prisons, it has cost unthinkable amounts in wrongful death lawsuits, hospitalizations, and restitution for families and harmed inmates. On top of these issues, the profit-before-rehabilitation mindset is what lands offenders back in the systems they already spent time in, which costs taxpayers even more money.

Continuing the Face of Civil RightsWith the horrors that happen in prisons, as well as the cyclic nature of prisoner re-incarceration that comes with for-profit prisons, it is a wonder that the nation that prides itself as a leader in civil rights would allow this to happen. Yet, the abuse of labor and appalling lack of understanding for the plight of prisoners continues. The world notices, and still today the United States holds the record for having the most people  
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per population incarcerated. The United States needs to end-for-profit prisons and work on reforming its correctional programs. Only then will crime reduce, minority populations benefit, and the United States will be a continuing leader in civil rights.