

Against for profit prisons



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Prisons for profit have a different mission than public prisons, they must earn revenue. This means they have an inherent interest in ensuring prisons stay filled, even at the taxpayer's expense. When a state government enters into a contract with a private prison company, it legally binds the taxpayer to pay the company a certain dollar amount per inmate per day. This has led to over incarceration and violence at private facilities nationwide. The relationship between prisons and private industry is not a recent innovation, but rather dates back to our nation's origin.

In the colonial period, incarceration was a rarely utilized form of punishment. Newly formed governments, unequipped to house criminals, looked to private jailers to provide detention services. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, via legislation or private contracts, some states leased prison labor to private enterprises. In other states, private organizations exerted complete control over the prison function. (Robbins, 1989) Prison overcrowding has evolved into a critical social problem. Per capita the United States incarcerates more individuals than any other industrialized nation in the world.

Studies show that private facilities perform badly compared to public ones on almost every instance from prevention of intra-prison violence, jail conditions, and rehabilitation efforts—except reducing state budgets and adding to the corporate bottom line. To keep their gravy train rolling, private prison companies need a few things from state and local government. * Lots of people arrested and convicted (often of essentially victimless crimes) and given long sentences. This most heavily impacts young black males—about one in nine of whom is in prison, many for using or selling marijuana, or, to a

lesser degree, harder drugs. Although whites have comparable drug use rates, their prosecution rates are dramatically lower.) * Opposition to the decriminalization of drug use, which would cut sharply into prison industry profits. (As a result, it isn't going to happen.) * The continued criminalization and detention of undocumented foreigners. Louisiana is the world's prison capital. The state imprisons more of its people, per head, than any of its U. S. counterparts. Which makes America first among the world? Louisiana's incarceration rate is nearly triple Iran's, seven times China's and 10 times Germany's.

One in 86 adult Louisianans is doing time, nearly double the national average. And for African – Americans from New Orleans, 1 in 14 is in prison, parole or on probation. (Baker, 2012) The hidden engine behind the state's well-oiled prison machine is cold, hard cash. A majority of Louisiana inmates are housed in for-profit facilities, which must be supplied with a constant influx of human beings or a \$182 million industry will go bankrupt. Several homegrown private prison companies command a slice of the market. But in a uniquely Louisiana twist, most prison entrepreneurs are rural sheriffs, who hold tremendous sway in remote parishes.

A good portion of Louisiana law enforcement is financed with dollars legally skimmed off the top of prison operations. If the inmate count dips, sheriffs bleed money. Their constituents lose jobs. The prison lobby ensures this does not happen by thwarting nearly every reform that could result in fewer people behind bars. Meanwhile, inmates subsist in bare-bones conditions with few programs to give them a better shot at becoming productive citizens. Each inmate is worth \$24. 39 a day in state money, and sheriffs

trade them like horses, unloading a few extras on a colleague who has openings.

A prison system that leased its convicts as plantation labor in the 1800s has come full circle and is again a nexus for profit. In Louisiana, a two-time car burglar can get 24 years without parole. A trio of drug convictions can be enough to land you at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola for the rest of your life. (Chang, 2012) For profit prisons often try to economize, but even the best run companies have come to recognize that operating with too small or poorly trained staff can spell trouble, and experts say state officials must pay close attention to the level of services being provided.

Even if private – prison corporations succeed in cutting costs, there is unlikely to be sufficient competition in any given community to ensure that the savings result in diminished government budgets for corrections. There is a substantial likelihood that government contracts with prison corporations will fully protect neither the interests of the public nor the prison inmates. (Hogan, 2006) Studies show that private facilities perform badly as compared to public ones on almost every instance from the prevention of intra-prison violence, jail conditions, and rehabilitation efforts—except reducing state budgets and adding to the corporate bottom line. A 2004 report found that private prisons had 50 percent more inmate on inmate assaults and almost 50 percent more inmate on staff assaults. Private prison companies cut costs by hiring cheaper, lower skilled staff and fewer of them. The result is a vicious cycle where poorly trained and poorly disciplined corrections officers are incapable of adequately responding to prison

emergencies. Prison safety conditions deteriorate, and more staff quit, increasing the turnover rate.

There is also less than adequate medical care for inmates, in some extreme cases infirmaries are often closed certain times due to shortage of guards. Other areas to suffer in private prisons are psychiatric care, educational, and meals in order for the prison to earn a profit; these programs seem to get cut before other many others. It is my opinion that privatization undermines sentencing reforms, cost the taxpayer more money, and endanger the lives of prison staff and inmates alike.

Offenders are incarcerated for reasons of their own making; I feel that having their freedom taken away should be punishment enough. They should not have to suffer anymore beyond that, especially for corporate greed. I strongly feel that prisons should be left in the hands of the public sector, which can operate them in a safe and true manner for which they were intended.

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