

Thousand **KITES**



FACILITATION GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

In prison slang to “shoot a kite” means to send a message. Thousand Kites does just that. It uses performance, web, video and radio to open a dialogue about America’s criminal justice system.

This guide is a resource for those looking to use Thousand Kites materials in their communities. Choose from our film, theater, or radio projects, or simply employ them all; they’re interconnected and support each other.

As you work with Thousand Kites, we hope you’ll be kind enough to contribute to our **StoryLine**. Call **(877) 518-0606** to share your experiences with the rest of the Kites community. We just might broadcast your story on our radio show, put it up on the Web site, or include it in a future play or film.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Individuals looking to launch Thousand Kites in their communities should consider teaming up with others to most effectively meet their goals. Thousand Kites can be used with a variety of audiences and is recommended for:

- Groups that deal directly with the U.S. criminal justice system, human rights issues, or economic development in rural communities including, but not limited to, groups like National CURE, Critical Resistance, November Coalition, and the American Friends Service Committee.
- Academic departments or student groups operating at colleges or high schools.
- Faith-based organizations and institutions.
- Arts groups or practitioners looking to engage in socially relevant art-making.

PLANNING AN EVENT

When scheduling a Kites event, it’s important to do some planning. Here are a few questions to consider as you plan. You may want to go over these questions with other members of your group or community.

- How does the event support your goals?
- Will this event be part of a larger effort?
- Are we hoping for a huge turnout, or a small, intimate one?
- Do we need a facilitator?
- Is the event in a neutral space where people will feel safe?
- Will people of different abilities be able to participate?
- Are those directly affected by the criminal justice system able to attend the event?

Tips

- Build your event as part of a meeting, art project, or conference that is already occurring in your community. In other words, don’t try to build things from the ground up if you don’t have to! You can even use your event as an opportunity to work with a group you want to create an alliance with.
- Prisoner stories can be shared in a variety of ways. Through prisoner letters, prisoner art, or prisoner phone calls placed directly to your meeting, those inside can be part of the conversation.
- After a Kites event, participants tend to feel fired up. So it’s good to have some suggestions on hand regarding actions the group could take. But a word of caution—be prepared to follow through on anything you suggest.

FACILITATING A DISCUSSION

Your event will need a facilitator (someone who leads the meeting). A dialogue about the U.S. criminal justice system will draw a wide range of opinions, beliefs, and experiences. The facilitator's job is to create a space in which people feel comfortable sharing and listening to each other's stories, feedback and ideas. Here are some things the facilitator should consider before taking on the job:

Am I the one:

Some good questions to ask yourself are: Am I the one to facilitate this discussion or should I enlist someone else? Can I take a step back from the desire to influence and educate in order to help my audience have a productive discussion? Can I run the event without becoming distracted?

Am I prepared:

It's best to do your homework. As a facilitator, you don't need to be an expert on the criminal justice system—but you should be able to answer some basic questions about it, and then direct people to places and resources where they can find out more. Check out the Background Information section of this guide (p. 20) for a bit of helpful data on the US criminal justice system.

Familiarize yourself with the event material. If there will be a film screening, watch the film beforehand. If you're putting on a play, read the play prior to handing out the script, jotting down notes on your reactions—and the reactions you think others might have.

Get your listening skills ready. You'll need to hear not only what's said during the discussion, but what goes unsaid.

Lastly, practice speaking in "I" statements (I feel...I think...I believe...I hear what you're saying...) to better help others do so.

Preparing the Group

During a group discussion, it's important that people feel they can safely speak their minds. Lay down some ground rules at the onset of your talk. Go over them as a group. Have participants react to them. We suggest the following guidelines (but your group should feel free to establish its own):

1. We'll show each other mutual respect. We'll recognize that every person in our group is opening themselves up to important but potentially uncomfortable dialogues.
2. We'll avoid generalizations about groups of people. My experience is not everyone else's experience.
3. We'll use "I" statements (I feel... I think...I believe... I hear...) as a way of avoiding saying something that will devalue someone else's perspective.
4. We'll trust our deepest feelings and emotions to lead our statements and physical gestures.
5. If someone else's beliefs make us uncomfortable, we'll say so, but in a respectful and thoughtful manner. We'll challenge the ideas and not the person.
6. We'll show love and empathy toward one another—as that's why we're here.

Based on guidelines obtained from SAIF Spaces, Program on Intergroup Relations, The University of Michigan, 2008

THE AUDIENCE – PUBLICITY

- You'll want to build a dialogue, so attracting a diverse audience is crucial. In order to do so, stress that everyone will be welcomed at your Kites presentation. It also helps to have a diverse group of people do outreach for the event. Make sure everyone involved with any aspect of the occasion is brought into play.
- Write a press release. You can use the press guide available for download on the website, filling in the blanks and adapting it to reflect your unique event. You can also download photos or take your own!
- Make and distribute programs for the reading. The programs should include information on the production, your group, and Thousand Kites, in addition to some background info on the criminal justice system. Download the program from our website or design your own.

FACILITATION GUIDE

UP THE RIDGE

**A film by Nick Szuberla
and Amelia Kirby**



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LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKERS

Whitesburg, KY

Dear Friend,

In 1998, as volunteer DJs for WMMT-FM (Mountain Community Radio) we began hosting one of the region's few hip-hop programs. Among other places, our broadcasts reached two nearby maximum security prisons—Wallens Ridge and Red Onion—located in Wise, VA. Soon, we were receiving hundreds of letters from the mostly African-American prisoners housed at those facilities.

The letters described abuse, racism, and human rights violations.

Wallens Ridge and Red Onion State Prison were built in our predominantly white, rural community as a means of propping up a teetering local economy. Having been exploited and then abandoned by the coal industry across the region, financially beleaguered communities like ours have utilized prisons as economies of last resort.

As media artists we felt compelled to explore the unfolding dynamics of culture clash, abuse, and poverty these economies have created. So we picked up our cameras, turned on our microphones, fired up our computers, and reached out.

When we discovered that two prisoners, Lawrence Fraizer and David Tracy had died in Wise under suspicious circumstances, we decided to tell their stories in the form of a documentary. But we needed details, and we found the veil of secrecy surrounding the prisons difficult to penetrate. The Virginia Department of Corrections refused to allow us access to either its buildings or employees. Though we personally knew some of the corrections officers working the prisons, (they were former classmates and fellow pickup-basketball-game players) we learned that if they spoke to us about their work, they risked being fired.

Now, after years of investigative work, *Up the Ridge* is ready to hit your screen. We hope you find the film an informative and useful way to spark dialogue in your community.

Nick Szuberla and Amelia Kirby
Filmmakers, *Up the Ridge*

SYNOPSIS

Up the Ridge is a television documentary (56 or 34-minute length) produced by Nick Szuberla and Amelia Kirby.

Through the lens of Wallens Ridge State Prison, the doc offers viewers an in-depth look at the U.S. prison industry and the social impact moving hundreds of thousands of inner-city minority offenders to distant rural outposts has had on American families. The film exposes agendas that have aligned government policy with human rights violations and pitted poverty stricken small towns against crime beset city neighborhoods with consistently tragic consequences.

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended to assist your use of ***Up the Ridge*** and ***Thousand Kites*** as a community dialogue project. It contains suggestions for organizing events, prompts to help get a discussion going, and suggestions for useful actions you can take following an event and discussion.

KEY THEMES

Up the Ridge is an excellent tool for outreach because it looks at the criminal justice story from many different perspectives and follows a story over a course of years. It touches on the themes below:

Human Rights

Criminal Justice

Corrections

Prison Abuse

Rural Development

Civil Rights

Rural and Urban Relations

Urban Studies

Politics / Political Power

Poverty

Political Organizing

EVENT IDEAS

Use a screening of ***Up the Ridge*** as the jumping off point to:

- Have a dialogue about the U.S. Criminal Justice system in your community.
- Host an event that supports your group's organizing campaign or legislation aims.
- Kick off a Thousand Kites project in your community.
- Bring together a panel of former prisoners, restorative justice advocates, victim advocates, and community members to hold a discussion.

STARTING A DISCUSSION

After a screening give the audience a few moments to reflect. Following the pause ask the audience several questions to get the discussion rolling. Here are some that may work:

- What surprised you about the film?
- Why do you think the filmmakers made it?
- What aspect of the film would you like to know more about?
- Who from the film would you like to interview and what questions would you like to ask them?
- How would you have told the story differently? How did hearing the stories told in the film make you feel?
- Who did you most identify with? Why do you think those interviewed in the film were interested in sharing their stories?

OTHER DISCUSSION PROMPTS

In the film young people in Appalachia attend a job fair to learn about prison employment. Do you think young people in your community would be interested in working at a prison? Why do you think the young men in the film consider prison work an acceptable career path?

David Tracy died while in prison for a minor drug offense. How might you explain his being sent to Wallens Ridge State Prison?

The musical score for *Up the Ridge* blends hip-hop and traditional mountain music. How does this sound track represent those conflicts and connections between rural and urban communities explored in the film?

In the film families protest against the harsh treatment of their incarcerated loved ones. They also ask that non-local prisoners be transferred to prisons closer to home. Should the general public care about prisoner rights? Why or why not? Should we ask politicians to intervene on behalf of prisoners? Why or why not?

What impact does an incarcerated family member have on a family? How have families coped?

One person in the film described the police as, "hunting our children." What might be done to restore safety in our communities without creating tension between citizens and the state? How can communities be safe without overusing law enforcement and incarceration?

After he quit his job, one former corrections officer began cutting lawns for a living. How does poverty impact rural communities? Why are so many prisons being built in rural America?

How do the people you meet in this film challenge or reinforce your image of the criminal justice system? Where do your ideas come from and what might you do to ensure that people in your community have accurate sources of information?

NEXT STEPS

How do we take action?

- Call the toll-free StoryLine to share your reflections, writing, or stories with others. We just might broadcast your story on our radio show, put it up on the Web site, or include it in a future play or film. (877-518-0606)
- Connect with your local radio producers to get stories on the air. Use Thousand Kites radio tools to begin that process.
- Put stories on stage by producing the Thousand Kites plays. Or gather your community together to create an original play.
- Join the efforts of other grassroots groups in your community, and continue the fight for criminal justice reform.

FACILITATION GUIDE

THOUSAND KITES

A play by Donna Porterfield



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LETTER FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

Norton, VA

Dear friend,

In 1998, my mother and I were driving up Route 23, on our way from Norton to Big Stone Gap, when we saw a huge scar forming on the side of the mountain. Our hearts sank. "Oh no," I said, "They're strip-mining up there, and it looks like a really big one."

It turned out that the scar was the site of a super-maximum prison built, the politicians said, to prop-up our flagging coalmining economy. We already had one of these SuperMax facilities in our county, but I never heard much about it in the local news.

For the past 30 years, the theater I work with has voiced our community's joys and concerns by making and performing plays from the stories of our families and neighbors here in the mountains. Since prisons have now become a part of our community, it is essential that we share prison stories as well.

For a year, I worked with prisoners (through the mail, since SuperMax allow no contact), and directly with prison employees, with the families of prisoners and prison employees, and with people who live near our prisons but don't have a direct connection to them.

The resulting play, *Thousand Kites*, has been performed by and for families of prisoners, parolees, employees of prisons, law enforcement officers, preachers, teachers, mothers, fathers, grandparents, teenagers, and everyone else. And, at discussions after the performances, audiences were eager to tell stories brought to mind by the play.

I hope you will use the *Thousand Kites* play in your community to deepen a dialogue about the U.S. criminal justice system. And, when you do, I hope you will let us know what happened so we can pass your stories along to others.

Donna Porterfield

Playwright, *Thousand Kites*

INTRODUCTION

In *Thousand Kites* we hear the real voices of those who have direct knowledge of the prison industry: corrections officers, prisoners, and their respective families and communities. You don't need theater experience to read or perform the play. It can be read at a house party or in an auditorium. It can be performed by the members of your group, your families, friends, and neighbors, or by your local college theater class or community theater group. You can use it along with the Kites video and audio tools or by itself.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Download the play from www.thousandkites.org, read it, and brainstorm how you might use it in your community. Here are a few pointers for two different uses, but don't be afraid to try out your own ideas.

INFORMAL READING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

- Download the play's script and—if you'd like to include it in your reading—its soundtrack.
- Make eight or more copies of the script.
- Get your group together to:
 - Assign each person a character/role and read the play aloud.
 - Talk about what you've read and how it affected you.
 - Share some personal stories about the criminal justice system.
 - Brainstorm about actions the group could take. For example, you may find you want to stage a full production, lead a town meeting, or gather with other community organizations to plan an action.

That's it! Reading the script in your small group is easy and is a great way to start using the Thousand Kites material!



PUBLIC READING

Staging a public reading will take a little bit more work, but is a great way to get the community to engage in the issues.

For a public reading you will need:

A Director

Select someone to be the director or facilitator of the rehearsal. The director will take responsibility for:

- Communicating with the readers and getting them ready for the performance.
- Getting scripts to cast members so they can read them ahead of time.
- Working with readers on reading the script and changing any text as necessary.
- Working with readers regarding blocking: where they stand and how they move on the stage.
- Getting the readers to the rehearsal(s) and the reading.

A Cast

Find eight people who are willing to read in public and who you think fit the character roles in the play, which are:

- Guard – adult male
- Prisoner – adult male
- Chorus 1 – adult female
- Chorus 2 – adult male
- Chorus 3 – adult female
- Chorus 4 – adult male, familiar with spoken word
- Chorus 5 – preferably female, under age 30, familiar with spoken word
- Schedule – adult female with authoritative voice
- DJ – plays recorded music, may sing and play a musical instrument

Rehearsals

- First rehearsal: get everyone together to listen to the audio and read the script out loud. This gathering might be in someone's home, a public space, or even the space in which the reading will take place.
 - o Then talk about the meaning of the script and discuss any questions or issues anyone might have.
 - o If your group discovers that parts of the script need to be changed to fit your local situation, change them.
 - o Set a couple more rehearsal times to get together to work on the reading.
- Get up on your feet with your scripts and decide where everyone will stand or sit during the reading.
- If you decide that characters will move about on the stage, figure out what movement makes sense and what movement might be distracting to the stories being told and to the audience watching.

Music

- If you have singers or hip-hop artists in your group, use them.
- If you don't have singers or hip-hop artists in your group, you don't have to sing the songs in the play – you can read them rhythmically.
- Write your own raps and songs to put in the play, if you wish, and if they make sense within the play's context.
- Use a DJ to play recorded music before the play begins and after it ends, or in other ways you might imagine.

A Facilitator

After the play's first act, audience members are usually eager to tell their personal stories brought to mind by the stories in the play. Through telling these stories, a wide range of experiences can emerge and create an excellent story dialogue about prison issues. The second act of the play is a discussion. Find a facilitator who will be willing to lead the discussion. See "Facilitating a Discussion" section on page 4 for more information.

With the facilitator, decide if you want the whole audience to have a discussion in a large group, or if you want to break into small groups.

A Performance Space

You will need:

- An indoor space
 - o Large enough to accommodate the audience and with a space in front of the audience about 16 ft wide and 14 ft deep to serve as the performance area.
 - o With good acoustics, so the human voice can be heard well without amplification .
 - o With enough light on the play readers, so they can be clearly seen by the audience.
- One microphone and speaker for the "Schedule" character to use.
- Two platforms for the Guard and Prisoner to stand on (each one approximately 3 ft x 4 ft, and 1 ft tall) If you don't have platforms, use colored (or black) tape to make an outline on the floor in the shapes of the platforms for the Guard and Prisoner to stand within.

See "Planning an Event" section on page 3 for more thoughts on choosing a space.

A Recording of a Buzzer

The buzzer audio can be used in the play as the buzzer sound that precedes the Schedule character's part. It should be loud and obnoxious, just as it is in prison.



CHANGING THE SCRIPT

As long as respect for the play's stories is maintained, changing the script to reflect the culture(s) of your community is perfectly acceptable.

Substituting personal stories, writing new music, etc. is great as long as they make sense within the context of the script.

FULLY STAGED PLAY PRODUCTIONS

If you want to produce a fully staged production where everyone has memorized their lines and worked more extensively on their characters, stage movement, etc., go for it. And, if you want to talk to someone who's done it before, email us and we'll hook you up. thousandkitesproject@gmail.com

CHECK LIST

All tools available on www.thousandkites.org:

- **Script of Thousand Kites play**
English language version
Spanish language version
University of North Carolina-Asheville, full production version
- **Audio of the play's songs**
"Thousand Kites"
"Scoundrel's Ball"
"Heard Somebody Callin' My Name"
- **Song sheets for the play's music**
"Thousand Kites"
"Scoundrel's Ball"
"Heard Somebody Callin' My Name"
- **Audio of buzzer sound**
- **Video of public play readings of Thousand Kites**
- **Press release sample**
- **Photos**
- **Sample flyer**
- **Program copy sample**

NEXT STEPS

How do we take action?

- Call the toll-free StoryLine to share your reflections, writing, or stories with others. We just might broadcast your story on our radio show, put it up on the Web site, or include it in a future play or film. (877-518-0606)
- Connect with your local radio producers to get stories on the air. Use Thousand Kites radio tools to begin that process.
- Screen "Up the Ridge" to gather more people to discuss the issues surrounding criminal justice. Or, document your own community's stories through film.
- Join the efforts of other grassroots groups in your community, and continue the fight for criminal justice reform.

FACILITATION GUIDE

MEDIA JUSTICE, CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Making Radio Waves



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MAKING WAVES

The Thousand Kites Team has seen prison walls, expensive phone calls, and soaring gas prices keep prisoners and their families separated. This separation throws up barriers that prevent the positive effect frequent visits can have on a prisoner and a prison. Because people have access to radio, even in places where there is no other means of communication, radio has the ability to transcend prison walls, connecting families and becoming a lifeline to prisoners.

In 1998, we began our weekly radio program, “Holler to the Hood” as a way of reaching out to those encompassed by the burgeoning prison system in our community. The program has grown from being a source of entertainment (we supplied hip-hop music programming) into being a source for organizing around criminal justice issues. Prisoner families, prisoners, and many others who want to see our criminal justice system reformed have been welcomed and become involved.

On the air each week, hundreds of participants educate us, our listening audience, and one another about the criminal justice system. We listen as our audience members send personal messages to prisoners, share information, challenge the morality of prison abuse, and advocate for direct policy change at the local, state, and national political levels.

We also have the privilege of bearing witness to some amazing songs, poetry, prayers, and stories. And since we broadcast the radio program live over the internet, Thousand Kites participants, like you, can tune-in to hear one another’s stories and experience a sense of community.

Using radio we can organize and come together in our communities, across barriers that too often divide us, to create and enact positive change in the criminal justice system.

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to assist your use of the Thousand Kites community radio project, along with a few suggestions on how you might start your own Thousand Kites radio program.

GETTING STARTED

The first step is to share your story—you can share a reflection, read a letter, or talk about an experience you’ve had with the criminal justice system—via the Thousand Kites online radio station.

Call our toll-free line at (877) 518-0606

The Kites team will add your story to our online radio station, weekly radio broadcast, and website. Next, you can use the Kites special radio program to kick start a dialogue in your community. Download the half-hour program from our website, listen to it, and then host an event at your local community radio station to broadcast the project. Hold a discussion afterward.

CALLS FROM HOME - CAMPAIGN

Since 1999, every December, Thousand Kites artists and hundreds of allies and friends produce CALLS FROM HOME, a national call-in show that connects prisoners with their family members during the holiday season. Join us in making CALLS FROM HOME a success. Visit www.thousandkites.org to learn about this campaign.

TAKING IT TO THE AIRWAVES

You can organize your own weekly radio program dedicated to talking, exploring and telling stories about the criminal justice system. We’ve been doing our radio program for ten years and it continues to expand to meet the needs of our community. Rarely do we program content. Our belief is that our program should serve as a line of communication between prisoners and their family members, and between those who want to share criminal justice system stories and the community

at large. Visit www.thousandkites.org and visit our Media Justice, Criminal Justice section to hear some samples of the program and learn more about how to set up your own. Here are a few tips.

- There should be a community radio station that reaches jails or prisons in your community. Set up a meeting with the station manager to talk about doing a program. Be prepared to explain how the program will work.
- The station will provide training on how to run the board, and on various other skills required to run a radio program. You might communicate with prisoners to see if there's a particular time of day when they would be more likely to have access to the time and equipment to listen to a radio show. You might also survey them on what sort of programming would be helpful to them, and any other relevant information. Our prisoner audience makes suggestions all the time, and we do our best to incorporate them.
- Our program is almost entirely made up of prisoner family members calling in. You might use this structure or try something else.

How our show works:

Our program runs from 7-10pm every Monday night. For the first two hours of the program, we play hip-hop music as we pre-record calls. Our callers offer prayers and messages, address issues, and share family stories.

We answer the phone with one of a few simple greetings: "Caller, you're live on the air, would you like to send a message to your loved one?" or "Caller go ahead you're live on the air." If they seem confused we might say, "You can send a shout out, read a poem, or just say hello."

We ask people to speak directly to their loved ones and/or from their experience. We do not allow activists to make long political statements, or people to gossip about, or talk directly to prison staff. We also ask that participants avoid offensive or inflammatory statements so that we may maintain our community standards.

We use common sense as a guiding principle. If we can't understand the intent, story, or communication, we don't broadcast it. Period. This protects the integrity of the program.

Building your Audience:

Prisoners help you to build a listener base. They tell their loved ones and new prisoners about the show, and are usually willing to network. When we were getting started we asked prisoners to mail us the addresses of their loved ones so we could send their family members a letter detailing how the show worked. We set up a toll-free number so those family members could contact us without facing long-distance charges. (This number costs us just a few hundred dollars a year.) In a few months, our phone-lines were jammed.

NEXT STEPS

How do we take action?

- Call the toll-free StoryLine to share your reflections, writing, or stories with others. We just might broadcast your story on our radio show, put it up on the Web site, or include it in a future play or film. (877-518-0606)
- Put stories on stage with the Thousand Kites plays. Or gather your community together to create your own play and put it up locally.
- Screen "Up the Ridge" to gather more people to discuss the issues surrounding criminal justice. Or, document your own community's stories through film.
- Join the efforts of other grassroots groups in your community, and continue the fight for criminal justice reform.

OTHER RESOURCES FROM Thousand **KITES**



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Criminal Justice System in the United States

Summary

The United States is the leading incarcerator in the world, ahead of countries such as China and Russia, holding more than 2.3 million people in state and federal prisons, and in local jails. Thousands more are living on probation or parole. Many of these people, and the countless others who have been released from the criminal justice system, continue to face difficulty due to a lack of accessible jobs and housing, inadequate health care, and voter disenfranchisement.

Since the onset of the "War on Drugs" and the "Tough on Crime" political platform beginning in the 1970s, the rates of incarceration in the United States have sky-rocketed; 600% more people are in prison today than were in the 1975, while the crime rate has only dropped by 22% since 1991. Mandatory sentencing laws, "three-strikes-you're-out" laws, and a plethora of other drug laws have disproportionately targeted people of color and low-income people. In fact, 1 in 9 African American men between the ages of 20-34 are in prison, while 1 in 106 white men 18 years of age and older are behind bars.

Specifics

- There are more than 2.3 million people incarcerated in the United States today.
- 1 in 99 Americans is currently in prison.
- Between 1987 and 2007, the prison population has nearly tripled. In that same time period, the crime rate has decreased only 25%.
- The United States is the Number 1 incarcerator in the world.
- We make up 25% of the world's prison population and only 4.6% of the world's total population.
- Women are the fastest growing prison population. 1 in 100 African American women between 35-39 are behind bars.
- 82% of those sentenced to state prisons in 2004 were convicted of non-violent crimes, including 34% for drug offenses, and 29% for property offenses.
- 1 in 3 African American males have a chance of serving time in prison at some point in their lives.
- In the nation's largest cities, drug arrests for African Americans rose at three times the rate for whites from 1980 to 2003, 225% compared

to 70%. This disparity is not explained by corresponding changes in rates of drug use.

- A child as young as 8 can be sentenced to life without the possibility of parole in the United States.
- In 13 states, young people under 18 are automatically tried in adult courts, regardless of their crime.
- More than 2.4% of Americans have been disenfranchised from voting due to a felony conviction.
- In 2007, state spending on prisons was more than \$49 billion. If current trends continue, by 2011, that number could increase by as much as \$25 billion.
- Five states, Vermont, Michigan, Oregon, Connecticut, and Delaware spend as much or more on corrections as on higher education.
- In 2006, more than 14,000 people were held in immigration detention centers. That number grew more than 79% from the previous year.

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Prisons in Rural Towns

As deindustrialization and mechanization of farming, mining, and other rural industries swept the United States in the 1980s, many rural towns faced an increase in poverty rates. The 1990's prison boom swore to be an answer to the economic failings of rural America. The prisons would generate jobs and stimulate local economies, prison developers promised. In their report on rural prisons in America, Marc Mauer, Ryan King, and Tracy Huling state, "Since rural communities had witnessed a series of failed redevelopment plans, prisons appeared to offer a politically expedient way in which to address the persistent poverty and population out-migration that had plagued them for decades."

Very soon after these prisons were built rural towns came to realize that their economies hadn't received the boost promised to them, that unemployment rates had actually increased in some areas, and that the prisons were having a detrimental effect on the social makeup of communities. In their research, Mauer, King, and Huling found that rural counties that built prisons during the prison boom had no economic advantage over those that hadn't. The state prisons were not hiring locals, and at the public prisons, where local residents were more likely to find jobs, turnover rates were soaring. Moreover, these towns became stigmatized. The prison stigma pushed other industries out, leaving the municipalities with even less options and resources than they had to begin with. Often, these towns resolved new difficulties by building more prisons, effectively making themselves penal colonies. Such towns, now common in the United States, which house 5 or 6 prisons each, show severe increases in alcoholism, domestic violence, and health problems, as well as increasing racism and ethnic prejudice.

Specifics

- The new rural prisons of the 1990s had about 235,000 inmates and employed 75,000 workers at the end of the decade—averaging 30 employees for every 100 prisoners.
- From 1990 to 1999, a prison opened somewhere in rural America every fifteen days.
- From 1988 to 1992, after the initial prison building boom, the unemployment rate rose 55% for counties without prisons and 64% for counties with prisons in New York.



Sources

- King, Ryan; Mauer, Marc; Huling, Tracy., "Big Prisons, Small Towns: Prison Economics in America," *The Sentencing Project*, February 2003 www.sentencingproject.org/Search.aspx?search=rural%20prisons
- Huling, Tracy, "Building a Prison Economy in Rural America." www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/building.html

RESOURCES

Thousand Kites Allies

American Friends Service Committee

The AFSC promotes a national movement to end the use of solitary confinement and related forms of torture in US prisons.

Penal Reform International

Penal Reform International is an international non-governmental organization working on criminal justice reform worldwide.

Critical Resistance

Critical Resistance is a national organization dedicated to opposing the expansion of the prison industrial complex.

Working Films

Working Films collaborates with artists to maximize the impact of their work through coordinated community education efforts, while simultaneously working with organizers to enrich their ongoing grassroots efforts with relevant, vital media.

Arts and Criminal Justice Alliance

Arts in Criminal Justice Alliance is an emerging network of artists, organizations, funders, government agencies, and justice systems committed to partnership, advocacy, and the creation of model arts programs in the corrections field.

Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged

RIHD (Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged) is a nonprofit, all volunteer group dedicated to helping reduce crimes and aid disadvantaged people, with special emphasis on at-risk youth, incarcerated people, and ex-offenders.

November Coalition

November Coalition is a non-profit grassroots organization working to end drug war injustice.

Southwest Correctional Arts Network

Southwest Correctional Arts Network provides support for artists teaching in prisons around the country.

Grassroots Leadership

Grassroots Leadership is a southern-based national organization that works to defend democracy, enhance the public good and stop the erosion of the public sphere.

WMMT

WMMT is Appalshop's non-commercial community radio station, broadcasting a wide variety of volunteer programming and community affairs programs from Whitesburg, KY.

The Gathering

The Gathering: A Movement for Coordination to Engage Organizations in a Common Covenant for Justice and Ending Child Incarceration.

Highlander Research and Education Center

Highlander works with people fighting for justice, equality and sustainability, to take collective action to shape their own destiny.

Advocare

Advocare is a membership organization that is part of a national effort to reduce crime through criminal justice reform.

Mississippi Coalition to Prevent Schoolhouse to Jailhouse

Mississippi Coalition to Prevent Schoolhouse to Jailhouse is dedicated to using cost-effective and humane ways to prevent the funneling of Mississippi's children from its schools and into the juvenile justice system.

Community Arts Network

The Community Arts Network (CAN) is a portal to the field of community arts, providing news, documentation, theoretical writing, communications, research and educational information.

People Against Injustice

People Against Injustice is a grassroots organization in New Haven that works for reforms in the criminal justice system.

Appalshop

Appalshop is a non-profit community media and arts organization located in the coalfields of Appalachia.

National CURE

National CURE is a membership organization for families and prisoners, with the goal of reforming the use of prison, and helping rehabilitate prisoners.

ALTERNATE ROOTS

Alternate ROOTS provides the connective tissue for a distinct segment of the arts and culture field—artists who have a commitment to making work in, with, by, for and about their communities, and those whose cultural work strives for social justice.

National Radio Project

National Radio Project heightens public consciousness, broadens debate on critical social issues and encourages civic participation, by giving voice to diverse perspectives and opinions underrepresented in the mass media.

Criminal Justice Reform

Sentencing Project

www.sentencingproject.org

The Sentencing Project is a national organization working for a fair and effective criminal justice system by promoting reforms in sentencing law and practice, and alternatives to incarceration.

Vera Institute of Justice

www.vera.org

The Vera Institute of Justice combines expertise in research, demonstration projects, and technical assistance to help leaders in government and civil society improve the systems people rely on for justice and safety.

Critical Resistance

www.criticalresistance.org

Critical Resistance seeks to build an international movement to end the Prison Industrial Complex by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe.

California Coalition for Women Prisoners

www.womenprisoners.org

CCWP is a grassroots racial justice organization that challenges the institutional violence imposed on women and communities of color by prisons and the criminal justice system.

Innocence Project

www.innocenceproject.org

The project is a national litigation and public policy organization dedicated to exonerating wrongfully convicted people through DNA testing and reforming the criminal justice system to prevent future injustice.

American Friends Service Committee

Criminal Justice Program

www.prisoneradvocacy.org

AFSC's Michigan Criminal Justice Program serves as a monitor and conscience of the Department of Corrections' long-standing misuse of power, state money, and human resources. We advocate for a more humane approach to criminal justice in the state of Michigan.

Prison Activist Resource Center

www.prisonactivist.org

PARC is a prison abolitionist group committed to exposing and challenging the institutionalized racism of the prison industrial complex. They are also committed to developing and practicing anti-oppression as individuals and in their organization.

Human Rights

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

www.unhcr.org

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees coordinates international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide.

Witness

www.witness.org

Witness uses video and online technologies to publicize human rights violations.

Human Rights Watch

www.hrw.org

Human Rights Watch is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting human rights around the globe. Its website includes annual assessments of "hotspots," including a range of reports on Sierra Leone.

Amnesty International

www.amnesty.org

Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognized human rights for all.

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Call our toll-free line **(877) 518-0606** and record a message or feedback for our website and radio program. We will use the content of your calls to inform our play, video, radio, and web productions. So share a story, ask a question, and let us know how the criminal justice system affects your community.

Thousand Kites is a project of Appalshop, the Appalachian-based arts and education center.

The logo for Appalshop features the word "Appalshop" in a stylized, green, serif font. The letters are outlined in a darker green, and the text is set against a background of wavy, light green lines that resemble a mountain range or a textured surface. The entire logo is underlined with a thin green line.

Thousand KITES

The logo for Thousand Kites consists of the word "KITES" in a bold, white, sans-serif font, enclosed within a blue speech bubble shape that points downwards and to the left.