

Adam Dunbar

ENG100

MLA Research Paper

5/1/2018

## "21<sup>st</sup> Century Slavery"

Imagine opening the door with your own key to your own room that has a refrigerator, television and computer. You have cloths flooded and put into a closet and a nice comfy bed to sleep in. Now imagine you are in this room because you are doing hard time in a maximum-security prison. This is what it's like at a Maximum jail in Norway. Michael Moore shows the way prisoners are treated in a documentary titled "Where to Invade Next." The way Norway has shaped their prison system is what America should take into consideration. Michael Moore also declared in his film about the American prison system and how companies use prison labor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the film Michael says,

"Yes, white America had inadvertently figured out a way to bring back slavery. And they knew that the way to get rich was having all that free labor. Today's masters have found our prisons to be the perfect places to make their products for as little as 23 cents an hour. Yes, that burger you're eating, that airline reservation you've made, the software you're using to watch the pirated copy of this movie, your child's back pack with its five

hours of homework. I always wondered what Victoria's secret was. And now I know. It's one of many companies that have used 21st century slaves."

America today faces more problems than ever, and one major concern is the way we run our prisons. The American prison system should admit they are treating prisoners inhumanly and created a new form of modern day slavery.

In a NPR podcast titled "An American Secret" Andres Resendez says,

"I came up with a list of four characteristics that made this other slavery fit the bill of what I call slavery. And so, one of them was that natives were forcibly moved far away from their place of origin...Second, they were unable to leave their place of work... Third characteristic was the use of violence or at least the threat of use of violence in order to seek compliance. And finally, there was the question of payment, which was often nonexistent. Or if it existed, it was so low that it was practically symbolic."

The resemblance of this definition of slavery and the American prison system show major similarities. Prisoners are forced to move away from their homes and placed in jails in far locations. Prisoners are also confined to jail cells and rules from the prisons for their sentence. American prisons are also highly known for asserting violence to seek compliance. These prisoners get paid almost nothing for their labor in the prison. American prison system and our history on slavery are almost parallel in comparison.

The corrections department said that prison labor was responsible for 3.15 million hours of labor that estimated around 38 million in the state of Florida, and though this is a huge

number and a large sum of money prisoners get less than 10% of these gains nationwide.

Though many prisons give these inmates a shorter sentence time for working labor for them Jacqueline Aziz an attorney with the Florida chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union said, "A lot of times people will work in order to get time deducted, and then the prison guards and officials will find ways to punish someone for what the prisoners are saying are made up reasons that then extend the person's time." Some will think why they need to get paid anyway they already have three meals a day and a bed to sleep in they don't need any money to function. This is true, but Many prisoners have a fear that when they are released and with no income to support them when they get out it will result in them just becoming a criminal again. Prison population is a major role in the way companies run products but with this much income made by prison labor many believe that prisoners should be paid more so they can save up for when they are released.

An article by "CagedBirdMagazine" shows many companies that are using prison labor and gives a list of companies that use prison labor to gain a cheap workforce and gain more profit. Some of these companies include McDonalds, Victoria Secret, At&T, Whole Foods, And BP oil. Leaked documents were found by a journalist named Rebecca Cooper that shows the files of the American Legislative Exchange Councils (ALEC) that explain how they are hiding corporate profit from private prison systems as well as planning to expand the private prison system in three ways. Cooper's first example is to promote greater use of private prison and services. Her second example is to promote the use of prison labor. And Cooper's third example is to increase the size of prison population. In the same article by Rebecca Cooper it says that this organization plans on expanding definitions on existing crimes, create new crimes, and

enhancing enforcement of existing crimes all in the name of profit. These corporations have gained profit off a large free workforce that works long hour days and gets paid nothing which is why they are abusing a method of legal slavery.

Not only does America show signs of modern day slavery in their prison labor force, they also treat prisoner inhumanly in the jail itself. An anonymous prisoner says, "They use wordplay and deceive the public about that really goes on inside the system, and we want to expose these things," in an article by The Intercept that describes the way prisoners are being treated in a Florida prison. The article claims that homicides and suicides in one of the largest prisons in the united states have gone from one hundred ninety-one in two thousand to three hundred in two thousand sixteen. Another article posted by "CNN News" Emanuella Grinberg states that suicide has risen eighty percent in the past decade. She also claims that suicide rates hold up to seven percent of the average death rates in prison. Another article by hrw.org claims that many prisons are overcrowded and tells about the abuse from both inmates and prison guards. One of these prisoners named Randell Aperio was beaten to death and then gassed with chemicals; it was claimed that he was asking for medical assistance and was offered none. Sexual abuse is also a very real fear in these prisons. Hrw.org gives a statement that says, "Prison staff often allowed or even tacitly encouraged sexual attacks by male prisoners." These threats both physically and mentally are harming the inmates and causing inhumane conditions for them.

In Where to Invade Next Micahel Moore visits a maximum-security prison in Norway and then compares the way they treat their prisoners to how American prisons treat their

inmates. Michael goes on a tour around the prison and finds that inmates have their own television and closet space for cloths as well as their own bathroom and shower. Michaels interviews with the inmates shows that none of these prisoners seem to be in any danger from threats or beatings and feel quite comfortable in their own living spaces. The documentary also shows what inmates do during their time which includes philosophy class, art class and a recording studio for inmates to make music in. One officer from the documentary says,

"The main idea is we're just supposed to take away their freedom. That's the only punishment we're giving them. They miss their family, they miss their friends. But also, I think, and I hope when you speak to them, they will also feel that we're trying to help them back to the same society."

Norway recidivism rate is one of the lowest in the world at twenty percent and America has one of the highest at eighty percent. America should reconsider the way they view the prison system and maybe take some ideas from Norway to treat their inmates more humanely.

Prisoners are being put into free labor against their own will and not rewarded with much or any pay. The dictionary term of slave is a person who is the legal property of another and is forced to obey them. Prisoners are called property of the state and are put to work against their own free will. Many willing to work but want the pay to have an income while in prison. These basic freedoms of treating everyone humanly are what America needs to reconsider for their prison system. Our prison system is facing many problems that need to be brought into the general populations attention. They are forced away from their homes and put into small containment cells for extended amounts of time. They also have been subjected to

abuse to maintain order in the prison. Finally, these prisoners are paid almost nothing for their labor. Inmates are subjected to inhumane conditions and hostile environments daily. These characteristics as well as the other information given help shed a light on how the prison system functions. Therefore, prisoners can be indicated as a form of slavery in the 21st century.

“An American Secret.” NPR, NPR, 21 Nov. 2017,  
[www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=565390863](http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=565390863).

Cecchi Gori Home Video. 2016. McGrew, Annie, et al. “It’s Time to Stop Using Inmates for Free Labor.” Talk Poverty, 5 Mar. 2018, [talkpoverty.org/2017/10/20/want-prison-feel-less-like-slavery-pay-inmates-work/](http://talkpoverty.org/2017/10/20/want-prison-feel-less-like-slavery-pay-inmates-work/).

Cooper, Rebecca, et al. "Hidden Corporate Profits in the U.S. Prison System: The Unorthodox Policy-Making of the American Legislative Exchange Council." Contemporary Justice Review, vol. 19, no. 3, Sept. 2016, pp. 380-400. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1080/10282580.2016.118594

Figure 2f from: Irimia R, Gottschling M (2016) Taxonomic revision of Rochefortia Sw. (Ehretiaceae, Boraginales). Biodiversity Data Journal 4: e7720.  
<https://doi.org/10.3897/BDJ.4.e7720>

Grinberg, Emanuella. “Prison Suicides Are on the Rise Nationally and It’s Pretty Bad in Massachusetts.” CNN, Cable News Network, 20 Apr. 2017,  
[www.cnn.com/2017/04/19/health/prison-suicides-massachusetts-trnd/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2017/04/19/health/prison-suicides-massachusetts-trnd/index.html).

Human Rights Watch: Prison Conditions in the United States,  
[www.hrw.org/legacy/advocacy/prisons/u-s.htm](http://www.hrw.org/legacy/advocacy/prisons/u-s.htm).

McGrew, Annie, et al. “It’s Time to Stop Using Inmates for Free Labor.” Talk Poverty, 5 Mar. 2018, [talkpoverty.org/2017/10/20/want-prison-feel-less-like-slavery-pay-inmates-work/](http://talkpoverty.org/2017/10/20/want-prison-feel-less-like-slavery-pay-inmates-work/).

Moore, Michael, director. *Where to Invade Next*.

Peláez, Vicky. “The Prison Industry in the United States: Big Business or a New Form of Slavery?” Global Research, Jan. 2018, [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca).

The intercept. "Florida Prisoners Prepare to Strike, Demanding an End to Unpaid Labor and Brutal Conditions." The Intercept, 14 Jan. 2018, [theintercept.com/2018/01/14/Florida-prison-strike-unpaid-labor-brutal-conditions/](https://theintercept.com/2018/01/14/Florida-prison-strike-unpaid-labor-brutal-conditions/).