

Adam Dunbar

ENG100

21<sup>st</sup> Century Slavery

26/4/2018

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

An NPR podcaster named Shankar Vedantam 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 usually 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.

A webpage named GlobalResearch.ca published an article by Vicky Pelaez stating that in 1861-1865 after the Civil War a way of hiring out prisoners became a method for continuing with a new form of slavery. The article explains how new laws were established that would target a minority with major crimes for minor misdemeanors like petty thievery. They would then hire out these prisoners for labor such as Cotton Picking, Railroad work, and working in mines. Vicky Pelaez then goes into about how America currently holds the world's most prisoners. A statistic shown in the article shows a statistic on how America currently has 5% of the population but it holds 25% of the world's prisoners. Vicky also states in her article on how American prison held 300,000 prisoners in 1978 and now currently holds more than 2 million.

"They use wordplay and deceive the public about that really goes on inside the system, and we want to expose these things," an anonymous prisoner says in an article by The Intercept that describes the way prisoners are being treated in a Florida prison. The same article claims that prisoners are put to hard work for up to twelve-hour days and get paid at the most 1\$ an hour. 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.

In the documentary "Where to Invade Next" Michael Moore says

"Yes, white America had inadvertently figured out a way to bring back slavery. And master knew that the way to get rich was having all that free labor. Today's master 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."

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." This can even be refed to how the ALEC are trying to maintain prison inmates and increase incarceration. Some will think why they need to get paid anyway they already have 3

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.

The 8th Amendment states that "punishments must be fair, cannot be cruel, and that fines that are extraordinarily large cannot be set." An article published by "The Intercept" written by Alice Speri states how prisoners who are put to work are forced to work 12-hour days in savage working conditions for months. This could be classified as a form of cruel punishment for the inmates. In the film "Where to Invade Next" Michael Moore goes to Norway and looks on the prison system there. In the film it shows the way they treat their prisoners and the conditions they live in it's almost looks like a collage dorm instead of what we see from the prisons here in our state. The film also shows how Norway believe in rehabilitation not incarceration and want prisoners to come out of prison a changed person ready to help their community. America does not do this instead from most media and news American prison is extremely brutal and melancholy place to go. Having these working conditions can cause serious mental and physical tolls on a human being and can almost seem inhumane.

Many people could debate that prisoners get a free roof over their head and 3 nutritious meals a day. ABCNews.com journalist Lauren Effron goes into details about how prisoners live comfortably within the prison. An inmate charged with murder named Hembree states "Is the public aware that I am a gentleman of leisure, watching color TV in the A.C., reading, taking naps at will, eating three, well-balanced, hot meals a day." Lauren also states that prisoner have more programs in the system than normal citizens have access too. Though this is true the 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. Also, sexual abuse is also a very real fear in these prisons. Hrwo.org gives a statement that says, "Prison staff often allowed or even tacitly encouraged sexual attacks by male prisoners."

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. Prison system suicide rates have been rising as well as prison abuse from inmates and other guards. 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. 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 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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/).

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

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).

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/).

"Where to Invade Next." 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/).

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>

“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).

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).

Cuomo, Chris, et al. “Convicted Killers Often Live a Life of Leisure, Professor Says.” *ABC News*, ABC News Network, 20 June 2012, [abcnews.go.com/US/convicted-killers-live-life-leisure-professor/story?id=16426138](http://abcnews.go.com/US/convicted-killers-live-life-leisure-professor/story?id=16426138).

*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).

