

Mass Incarceration in the United States: Can S-CAR Play a Role in Prison Reform Programs?

By Tehama Lopez Bunyasi, Assistant Professor of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, tlopezbu@gmu.edu

At the risk of sounding too optimistic, it feels as if the issue of mass incarceration may finally be receiving the groundswell of mainstream attention and critique that it so badly deserves. This is not to say that the decades-old electoral mantra of being “tough on crime” has seen its last days, but with more than 2.2 million Americans behind bars, making



San Quentin State Prison: California's Oldest Prison with a design capacity of 3088. Photo: Flickr user Sean Duan.

are gathering around the water cooler to dissect the latest episode of Orange is the New Black and to lend their copy of Michelle Alexander's best-selling book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color-blindness*.

We here at S-CAR are also thinking and talking a great deal about the criminal justice system—its enormity, its inequities, its complexity—and

the United States the world's leader in incarceration, American politicians on both sides of the aisle are publicly reconsidering the trajectory of our criminal justice system. While Democrats Dick Durbin and Patrick Leahy are finding (rare) common ground with Republicans Rand Paul and Ted Cruz around drug sentencing, ordinary Americans

many of us are wondering where we, as a field, fit into the equation of reform. The possibilities for our contribution have yet to be fully imagined, but one avenue where we may play a role is in the proliferation of prison arts. This October, I attended *Marking Time: A Prison Arts and Activism Conference* at Rutgers University, and was enlightened and inspired by the way incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people are using art to cope with loss, foster hope, practice non-violence, and imagine new futures.

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COMMENTARY

A Hero's Welcome: A Program for Wounded Warriors

By Shirley Souryal, S-CAR PhD Student, ssouryal@masonlive.gmu.edu

Looking back, I realize that two poignant moments served as 'seeds' that would blossom into a program for Wounded Warriors called "A Hero's Welcome." Like bookends, the first coincided with my arrival in Baghdad, and the other with my departure.

No sooner had my feet hit the tarmac than I began to look up, a lot. I looked up in amazement at the way the spectacular sun and clear blue sky greeted me every morning while a blanket of stars ushered me back to my trailer at night. I looked up at the clouds of an impending sandstorm and after the echo of a siren's wail lingered in the air. Most of all, I looked up when I felt the pounding thump and roar of helicopter rotors rattling the ground, my trailer, and my bones. It was constant. I quickly realized that not all helicopters were created equal. Many Blackhawks flew overhead without any markings on their underbelly. It was the ones that bore the bold 'red cross' that caught my eye. They were tasked with carrying injured troops to the military hospital around the corner.

Throughout the day, wherever I was, I looked up. I breathed a sigh of relief and gratitude when the helicopters bore no markings and offered a prayer, within the quietness of my heart, when they did. It was heartbreaking to realize how one moment had drastically altered the course of those men and women's lives, forever. I made a commitment to visit Walter Reed Military Hospital when I got back home and extend my gratitude to the countless injured warriors who had flown overhead.

Unfortunately, while in Baghdad, I battled a life-threatening illness. I braced for the possibility that I would not return home alive. In the blink of an eye, my life completely changed course. In what would be my final departure, I flew over Baghdad in a Blackhawk and eventually returned to the U.S. I was devastated and depleted, but grateful to be alive.

I survived Baghdad's bombs, bullets, and boardrooms yet bore the invisible scars left by the tentacles of war, solitude, and heartbreaking loss.

"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it, because what the world needs is people who have come alive." Reverend Howard Thurman's wisdom inspired me. After a period of recuperation, I reengaged in

labors of love that served to promote healing, justice, and reconciliation.

Returning to photography was instrumental in recalibrating my path and reframing the narrative of my life. With renewed strength, I used my passion to raise awareness about issues of injustice and tragedy, capturing existing narratives and creating new ones in Kenya and Rwanda, as I had done in Bosnia, Northern Ireland, and Israel/Palestine. It is

through images that brave souls were empowered to speak for themselves.

My second chance at life filled me with infinitely more gratitude and empathy for our veterans, particularly our Wounded Warriors whose sacrificial service came to an abrupt halt. I grasped the pain of losing one's health, livelihood, and community in one fell swoop. I intimately understood the challenges of acclimating to life after war, including Post Traumatic Stress. For me, photographing music concerts became my balm.

Prior to my tenure overseas, I had forged professional relationships with musical artists, publicists, and promoters. Those dynamics became instrumental in allowing me to orchestrate opportunities for veterans and Wounded Warriors at Walter Reed to hear and meet their favorite musicians in concert and enjoy respite from the hospital.

Quite organically, the program blossomed, one concert at a time. "A Hero's Welcome" is both an invitation and a celebration of homecoming. Sadly, many veterans and Wounded Warriors never receive the warm homecomings of which they so deserve. One minute they are engaged in combat alongside their buddies and the next they are confined to a hospital bed having endured unspeakable trauma. Many Warriors remain in recovery at Walter Reed for up to two years and then begin the transition into a life they recreate.

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Wounded Warriors with "MercyMe" Photo: Shirley Souryal

Filmmaking for Social Change Class: Conf 795

By Danya Hakeem, S-CAR Alumna and Media Producer at Center for Food Safety, dhakeem@gmu.edu

The Filmmaking for Social Change seminar course was born out of the recognition that the peacebuilding and conflict prevention community needs to better engage with media in order to significantly impact how conflict is represented globally. Traditionally, the field has not placed great emphasis or importance on engaging with traditional media or creating it. We as conflict practitioners have the capacity to provide a unique perspective that is underrepresented in mainstream news and documentary film.

Much of the work currently being produced in the field is presented to the public in the form of reports and journal articles. Film could make our work come to life by allowing the audience to connect to the issue on a personal and emotional level. Media has an ever-expanding presence in our lives. It can be utilized to document human rights abuses, shed light on injustice, elevate a social movement, or even unite the global community. It doesn't need to be shot on the highest quality camera or edited with the nicest equipment to create change. Students leaving S-CAR should be equipped with these fundamental skills in order not to only support their own initiatives but also to train others to do the same.

Professor Michael Shank has pushed for this partnership persistently, leading courses at S-CAR on Writing for the Media, as well as engaging directly by writing and speaking extensively for mainstream news outlets like The Washington Post, CNN, FOX and many others. Danya Hakeem, a graduate of the masters program at S-CAR and a freelance media producer, has been producing films for National Geographic and local grassroots organizations worldwide that support coordination between media and the peacebuilding community. They both recognize that media is a powerful medium for effecting



From Left to Right: Devon Kardel, Danya Hakeem, Mel Weyant and Zack Erwin. Photo: Michael Shank.



From Left to Right: Danya Hakeem, Diana Guillen and Kazim Salvucci. Photo: Michael Shank.

social change and have been collaborating for nearly a year to make this initiative happen.

This course is unlike any offered in the S-CAR or Communication curriculum as it emphasizes peacebuilding and social change principles while providing students with practical hands-on skills in filmmaking. Having completed the course, the students will have learned proper storytelling techniques and essential technical skills including videography, lighting, audio recording, and editing. We want students to understand the importance of completing a thorough research assessment, including conflict mapping and stakeholder analysis to better assess their approach, timing and audience. Additionally, in order to encourage engagement and action on an issue and thus create lasting social change, we emphasize the importance of developing partnerships with peacebuilders and NGOs specializing in the issue.

We recognize that the fastest way to learn to create a film is through practice and experimentation, so students are required to create a short film as their final assignment. While we know that it is impossible to learn everything there is to know about filmmaking for social change in two full-day sessions, our goal is for students to leave feeling comfortable with the fundamentals on how to conceptualize, research, film, edit, distribute, and evaluate their own film. Students will be able to utilize these skills to create not only video, but print media as well. So far, the class has met for one session and the reviews have been extremely positive, with one student going as far as to say, "Thanks for one of the most enthralling classes I've taken to date." We hope S-CAR continues to support initiatives that combine media and peacebuilding in both a practical and theoretical way. Professor Shank and Danya Hakeem plan to continue their partnership through course offerings and organizational workshops for all ages and experience levels. ■

initiatives

26th Annual Lynch Lecture: John Paul Lederach

By Cassie Ammen, Communications and Events Manager, cammen@gmu.edu

EVENTS

26th Annual Lynch Lecture
Reflections of a Pioneer in the Field
John Paul Lederach
Thoughts on a Penny
Challenges to Creative Conflict in a Public Square

Wednesday November 19th; 7:20-9:00PM Founders Hall Auditorium
6:15pm Reception in Founders Hall 126

Poster for 26th Annual Lynch Lecture with John Paul Lederach. Credit: Cassie Ammen.

On Wednesday November 19, 2014, John Paul Lederach, a pioneer in the field of peace building and conflict resolution, will be hosted by S-CAR for the 26th Annual Lynch Lecture. The Lynch Lecture Series began with friends of the School and prominent Virginians Edwin and Helen Lynch, who made several substantial gifts to George Mason University, including a beautiful piece of property on Mason Neck—Point of View—and an endowed Chair in the name of Edwin's parents, Vernon M. and Minnie I. Lynch. In order to bring the idea and theory of conflict analysis and resolution to the attention of the entire University community, and in gratitude to Edwin and Helen, the School established an annual Lynch Lecture

series. Lederach who will present his lecture titled: "*Thoughts on a Penny – Challenges to Creative Conflict in the Public Square*," is well known at S-CAR for such books as *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, and *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. He is Professor of Practice for International Peacebuilding with the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame and works as a practitioner-scholar, providing facilitation, mediation and training/education, with extensive experience at national and community levels in North and Latin America, Africa, and Southeast and Central Asia. S-CAR looks forward to welcoming John Paul Lederach on November 19th to discuss "A wandering, perhaps poetic exploration of contemporary challenges and deficits facing the wider fields of conflict transformation and peacebuilding and how these correspond to the challenges of the ever more divided public square and dialogue-disabled America." We look forward to having you there as well. ■

Upcoming Events

Monday, November 17, 2014

Violence in the Middle East: Are There Alternatives to the War on Terror?
7:00pm - 9:00pm

Wednesday, November 12, 2014

Does Contemporary Armed Conflict Have Deep Historical Roots?
12:30pm - 2:15pm

Tuesday, November 18, 2014

Conference: Conflict Resolution and Civil Rights in U.S. Communities: The Next 50 Years
9:30am - 5:15pm

For more, visit: scar.gmu.edu/events-roster

Opinion: Discriminating Against Minorities with Voting Right Laws

By Randy Painter, MS Student, School of Policy, Government, and International Affairs, rpainte2@gmu.edu



Randy Painter. Photo: Randy Painter.

There is an alarming trend of state governments instituting restrictive voter identification laws, which disproportionately affect racial minorities. Although election administration is in the jurisdiction of state governments, federal protections exist for minority voters that have suffered from a history of exclusion.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965, the most significant civil rights legislation in U.S. history, explicitly prohibits racial discrimination in voting. While contemporary laws may not explicitly cite race, the effective discrimination of minority voters is undeniable. A recent GAO report examined numerous studies concluding that restrictive voter identification laws suppressed minorities, with African-Americans ten percent less likely than white Americans to possess government-issued identification. Even defenders recognize the disproportionate impact of the laws, which suppress a specific voting bloc and tilt elections in favor of one political party. These efforts decrease turnout by the thousands despite actual cases of voter error being only a fraction of a percent. These outcomes demonstrate that such laws clearly violate the Voting Rights Act.

These facts have conveniently been ignored by the strict constructionists on the Supreme Court, who recently decided that Texas could purge its rolls of more than 600 000 voters less than a month prior to an election. In her dissent, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg stated that "racial discrimination in elections in Texas is no mere historical artifact. To the contrary, Texas has been found in violation of

the Voting Rights Act in every redistricting cycle from and after 1970."

This followed a June 2013 SCOTUS decision to gut parts of the Act, empowering conservative groups to quickly enact blatantly discriminatory laws at the state and local levels without appropriate review from the Department of Justice. It also followed efforts by Texas officials in 2012 to threaten the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) with criminal prosecution because they intended to send election observers to Texas. These observations had been regularly performed since 2002, as has been the case with all OSCE participants, but the Texas officials could not be

Recent S-CAR Articles, Op-Eds, Letters to the Editor, and Media Appearances

Detroit on the Brink

Michael Shank, S-CAR Alumnus
The Hill's Congress Blog 10/29/14

Dirty Energy Dollars

Michael Shank, S-CAR Alumnus
U.S. News and World Report
10/28/14

Jobs Index Shows Dismal Outlook for US Workers

Michael Shank, S-CAR Alumnus
Roll Call 10/22/14

Conflict Analysts from S-CAR have appeared on 12 occasions since the last newsletter. These 3 represent a sample of those publications. For a complete list, please visit: <http://scar.gmu.edu/media>



February 2014 Moral March on Raleigh 56 Photo: Flickr user Stephen D. Melkisetian.

both-
ered with details after mistakenly identifying OSCE as a UN affiliate.

The Bill of Rights did not include voting rights, but the majority of amendments afterward relate to voting, including extending suffrage to women and racial minorities. Existing felony disenfranchisement laws in Iowa, Kentucky, and Florida continue to permanently strip rehabilitated citizens of voting rights. Remnants of Jim Crow policies persist as minorities are required to purchase voter identification as a precondition for voting despite such preconditions being abolished since the 1960s.

One may find solace in the Texas Secretary of State's announcement that a record 14 million people have registered to vote in the recently past election. But the question remains: Why does a country that endorses free and fair elections abroad, not live up to the standard? ■

press

Arsen Kyaratyan, S-CAR Alumnus

By Kwaw de Graft-Johnson, S-CAR PhD Student and Newsletter Editor, kdegraft@gmu.edu

Arsen Kyaratyan first discovered the field of conflict analysis and resolution in the 90s, when S-CAR (then ICAR), was involved in projects in the South Caucasus. According to him, "S-CAR was the first U.S. academic institution that introduced peace-building initiatives to the South Caucasus which later grew to include the organization of summer schools and dialogue projects for university students from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia." Arsen participated in some of these programs and from those experiences, he decided to become part of the S-CAR community in order to learn more about the field of conflict resolution.

After completing his master's degree, Arsen moved to Tbilisi, Georgia, which he said "has for the past two decades, become the main safe space for parties to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to try to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict." Together with local and international colleagues, Arsen has been working in peace building projects with Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Georgians, Abkhaz,



Gandhi Foundation of Georgia poster. Photo: Arsen Kyaratyan.

and Ossetians and the theoretic background and practical skills which he acquired from S-CAR have been of great use. "There are also ongoing peace-building initiatives run by S-CAR faculty members in the region, such as the Point of View dialogue between Georgians and Abkhaz run by Susan Allen," he said.

Together with some friends and colleagues from S-CAR Arsen is trying to establish a conflict resolution center in the Caucasus, that will deal with not only the territorial and inter-ethnic conflicts not only in the immediate neighborhood, but in the greater Middle East region as well. "We have already established a non profit organization called Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy in Tbilisi and Yerevan, which is aimed at bringing CR mechanisms and theories taught at S-CAR. This is in addition to the Gandhi foundation of Georgia, which was founded in July 2014."

One of Arsen's current passions is to bring more students from the region to study at S-CAR because he believes it will help them develop skills to help resolve their many conflicts that they are immersed in. ■

Amani Mansour, S-CAR MS Student

By Kwaw de Graft-Johnson, S-CAR PhD Student and Newsletter Editor, kdegraft@gmu.edu

Amani Mansour, an S-CAR MS student, was recently awarded the El-Hibri peace education scholarship in October 2014. The award is given to graduate students who demonstrate a commitment to the field of peace education and conflict management. She was one of three people who received a scholarship in the amount of \$5,000.

Amani joined S-CAR as an undergraduate student and decided to continue and get a graduate degree, as S-CAR matched her passion and ambition for wanting to help build mutual understanding within polarized communities. In her first year at S-CAR, Amani took the *Dialogue and Difference* course and it taught her a lot about the effective role dialogue could have in helping people to understand each other, "to break down harsh



Kevin Avruch, the Dean of S-CAR with Amani Mansour. Photo: Amani Mansour.

enemy images." Amani's research focus is on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and theories involving dialogue, identity, power imbalances, and intractable conflict, that can help resolve the conflict peacefully. "I would like to work on peacebuilding activities in Israel and Palestine when I graduate from S-CAR."

Amani also wants to help build trust between the U.S. government and governments in the Middle East, while encouraging grassroots efforts to implement people-to-people contact projects in order to build trust between the citizens of both regions. One of Amani's passions, is to continue to research about conflict theories and introduce new resolution tools. "In my past research projects, I have found literature to be a valuable tool in building understanding between different groups. In the end, I hope to work with others to implement a positive step towards the widespread use of active listening, open-mindedness, and understanding." ■

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For men, women, and children behind bars, dance, theater, crochet, painting, poetry, song, pottery, model-building, photography, and drawing provide an outlet to express innermost thoughts and feelings that must usually be tucked away behind a tough or stoic façade. These arts are bridges to their humanity, and they are inroads to non-violent dialogue with other inmates. Throughout the conference, I heard prison program coordinators discuss how transformative these mediums are for the attenuation of violence in prison, how the life skills cultivated around the arts are helping reduce recidivism, and how violence inside the prison predictably escalates when programs like arts and other forms of therapy are suspended due to budget cuts.

One of the most memorable presentations at the conference was that of a formerly incarcerated man who had served over five years in a federal prison for non-violent drug charges. As a white man enter-

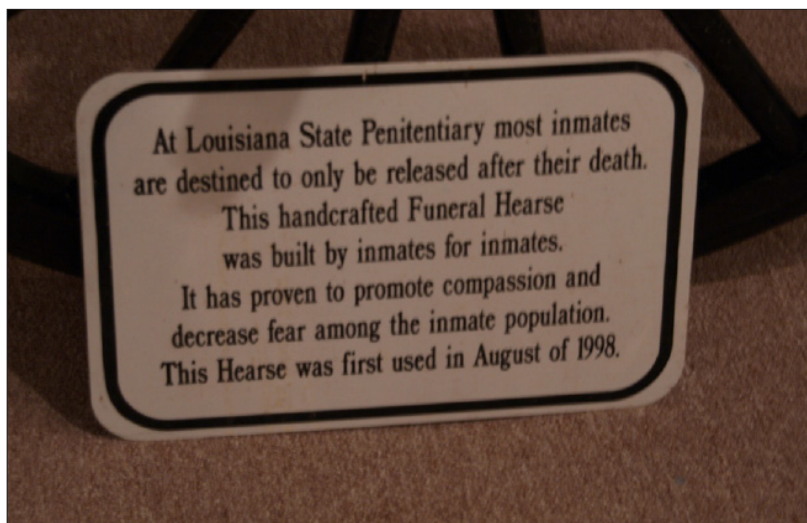


Tehama Lopez Bunyasi, Assistant Professor of Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Photo: Mason Creative Services.

ing the prison for the first time, he knew that most people were expecting him to gravitate to the Aryan Nations prison gangs for protection in this new, racially-segregated environment. Instead, he turned to art and became an “independent.” Though on his own in many ways, this man’s art began to draw curious onlookers, and their questions about his projects turned into conversations about one another. He credits his independent-artist status for facilitating friendships with several men of color who, like him, were resisting the racialized hostilities of prison through their own artistic endeavors. Now freed, he looks back at these art projects as a testimony of what he endured and ultimately transcended, and he advocates for

innovative prison reform by putting a human face on a dehumanizing and often invisible experience.

I look forward to learning more about how the field of conflict analysis and resolution can participate in the process of prison reform, and I am eager to see how we can work with communities that are disproportionately devastated by mass incarceration. Let’s keep the conversations going! ■



Angola The State Farm Louisiana State Penitentiary 2009 Maximum Security Prison Museum. Photo: Flickr user mrchriscornwell.

Special Announcement: S-CAR Alumnus January Makamba, is seeking the ruling party’s nomination to run for President of Tanzania next year. Makamba, a former personal assistant and speech writer to the current President of Tanzania, Jakaya Kikwete, says he will “focus on creating employment with plans including restarting 11 idled textile factories and making greater use of the country’s cotton crop.” Makamba holds a Master of Science degree in Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

- Tanzanian President’s Former Aide Plans Bid to Succeed by David Malingha Doya. Published in Bloomberg Businessweek, October 28, 2014.



A Hero's Welcome: A Program for Wounded Warriors

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Through "A Hero's Welcome," they are given a chance to be embraced by the community they bravely served and from whom they have been separated as they heal. For those few hours, in the company of other fans, surrounded by music they love, Warriors can gradually recharge for the journey ahead. That rush of energy that surrounds them has been transformational, as are the private moments where Warriors connect with the artists whose music accompanied them through combat and recovery. The most powerful moments are those when an artist shines the light on the Warriors' presence from the stage or mentions them by name. Spontaneous applause erupts as the audience rises to their feet in gratitude and support, offering them a hero's welcome.

While the seeds were planted by my experience abroad, my true inspiration is the resilience and



Timothy Donley and Family with "The Newsboys". Photo: Shirley Souryal.

strength of a young Marine named Timothy Donley. Timothy was twenty years old when he deployed to Afghanistan. Tragically, while on foot patrol, he stepped on an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) that instantly claimed his two legs above the knees, and threatened the loss of his right arm. Timothy was transferred to Walter Reed Military Hospital in Bethesda, MD, where he has

remained for the last two years. His journey from service and sacrifice to loss and then healing has been one of the most inspirational examples I have ever witnessed. His faith is strong and his spirits remain high. Despite the devastation, Timothy uses his voice to inspire others through music.

"A Hero's Welcome" is my way of saying thank you to Timothy and countless other heroes that move amongst us every day. I believe that a connection to music helps fuel the Warriors' journeys and their incredible resilience inspires mine. ■



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