

INCARCERATED WORKERS' CO-OPS: NEW FRONTIER FOR THE US COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT?

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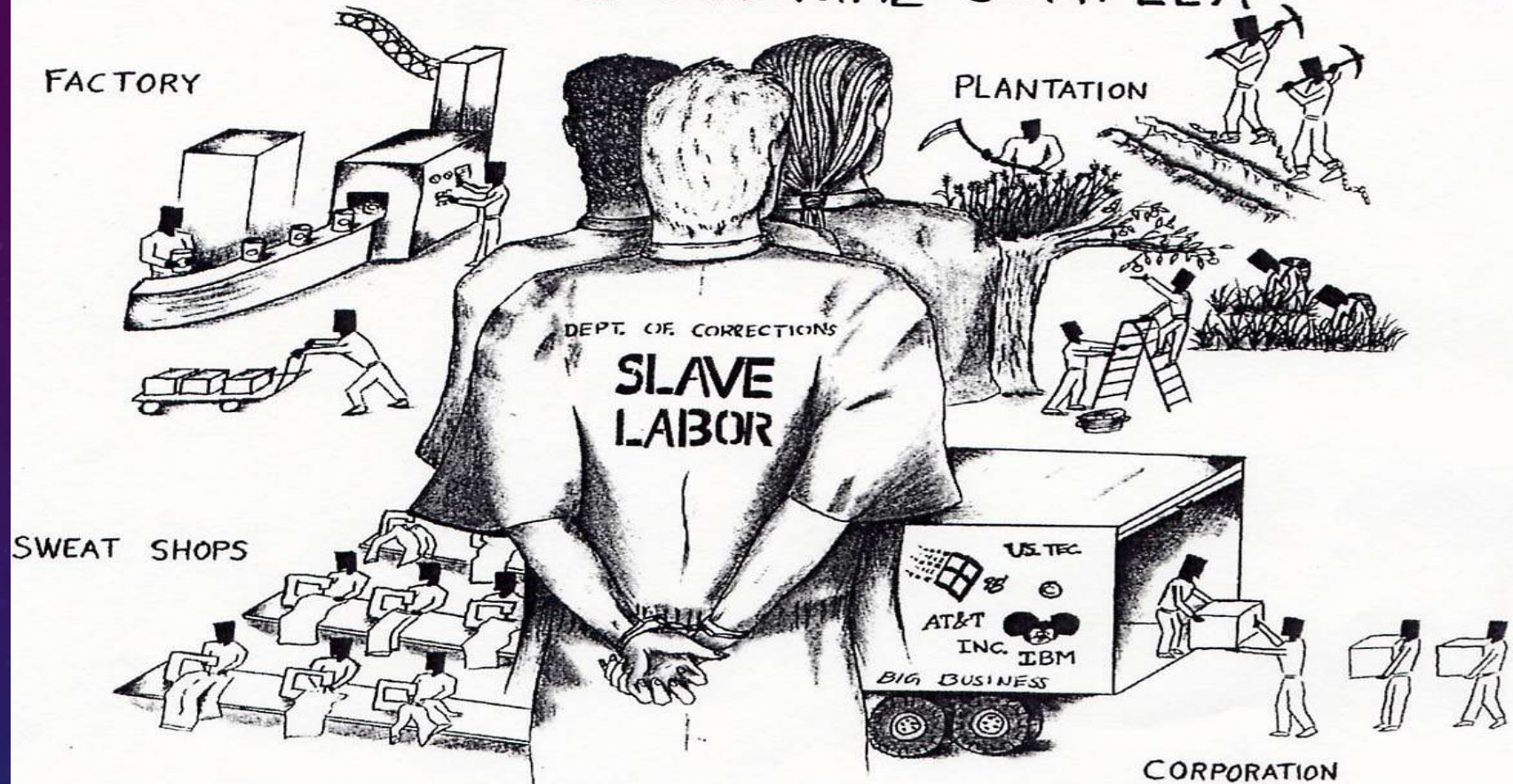
“CO-PRODUCING JUSTICE: INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL ECONOMY NETWORK,” GLASGOW

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US CRIMINAL INJUSTICE SYSTEM

- Early Connection between Incarceration and Race: illegal for enslaved African Americans to congregate, can't testify against a white person, disparate sentencing for violence and murder.
- After Emancipation: 13th Amendment to the Constitution; Convict Lease system
- 1980s to present: Blacks disproportionately arrested and imprisoned; incarceration rates in US higher and higher; women largest growing prison population.
- No jobs for returning citizens.
- US 5% of world population, 25% of world's incarcerated.

PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX



- .19 CENTS AN HOUR
- NO BENEFITS
- NO MEDICAL
- NO VACATIONS
- PENALTY FOR REFUSAL TO WORK -
- SOLITARY CONFINEMENT
- LOSS OF PAROLE
- LOSS OF PROGRAMS

SOURCES

- Previous graphic from:

<http://www.prisonabolition.org/what-is-the-prison-industrial-complex/>

- Vicious cycle/ multiple systems map:

<http://correctionsproject.com/prisonmaps/pic4.htm>

SOLUTIONS?

- Are there community-based approaches to justice that address the PIC?
- Co-ops of incarcerated people and returning citizens with lived experience - are they viable - why or how?

CO-OPS AS A GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY ECON DEV TOOL

- Co-ops address market failure, are both anti-poverty and community building strategies.
- Cooperative ownership helps address underdevelopment, economic isolation and marginality.
- Co-ops anchor the local economy - keep the returns to capital & benefits of production recirculating among those who produce them, service them, and need them.

OTHER CO-OP BENEFITS

- Reduce poverty and costs
- Save or create decent jobs in communities
- Increase income & provide asset ownership
- Earn better prices for locally-made products and/or better wages for labor
- Leadership and Social Capital development
- Use and Values based.

10 Reasons CO-OPS

Rock

1 Cooperatives are **DEMOCRATIC** businesses & organizations **EQUALLY OWNED & CONTROLLED** by a group of people. In a cooperative, **ONE** member has **ONE** vote.

There are
★ worker co-ops
□ consumer co-ops
+ producer co-ops
⊖ financial co-ops,
○ housing co-ops,
and more.

6

Cooperatives are **more resilient & IN ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS & IN IMPOVERISHED COMMUNITIES.** When other businesses may shut down or lay off workers, **co-op members pull together TO WORK OUT SOLUTIONS.**

7

Cooperatives are an **INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT.** There are **thousands upon thousands** of cooperatives around the world that are making **major differences GLOBALLY & LOCALLY.**

Because cooperatives are democratically owned by community members, co-ops keep **MONEY & JOBS in their communities.**

3 Cooperatives aren't a far off theory. Cooperatives offer **achievable and practical solutions** to many **ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL & SOCIAL PROBLEMS** that can be implemented **RIGHT NOW.**

8

Cooperatives strive to make people's **LIVES, COMMUNITIES, AND ECONOMIES** more **JUST, EQUITABLE, & DEMOCRATIC.**

9

There's no **one right way** to do a co-op. They can be flexible to fit **DIFFERENT COMMUNITY & INDIVIDUAL NEEDS.**

4 **COOPERATIVES AREN'T CHARITY;** they're an **empowering** means for self-help **& solidarity.**

10

Cooperatives are **VIABLE & JUST ALTERNATIVES** for meeting our social and economic needs in contrast to **CORPORATIONS THAT EXPLOIT** the people and the planet.

5 Members **equally share** **THE BURDEN IN HARD TIMES & THE BENEFITS IN GOOD TIMES.**

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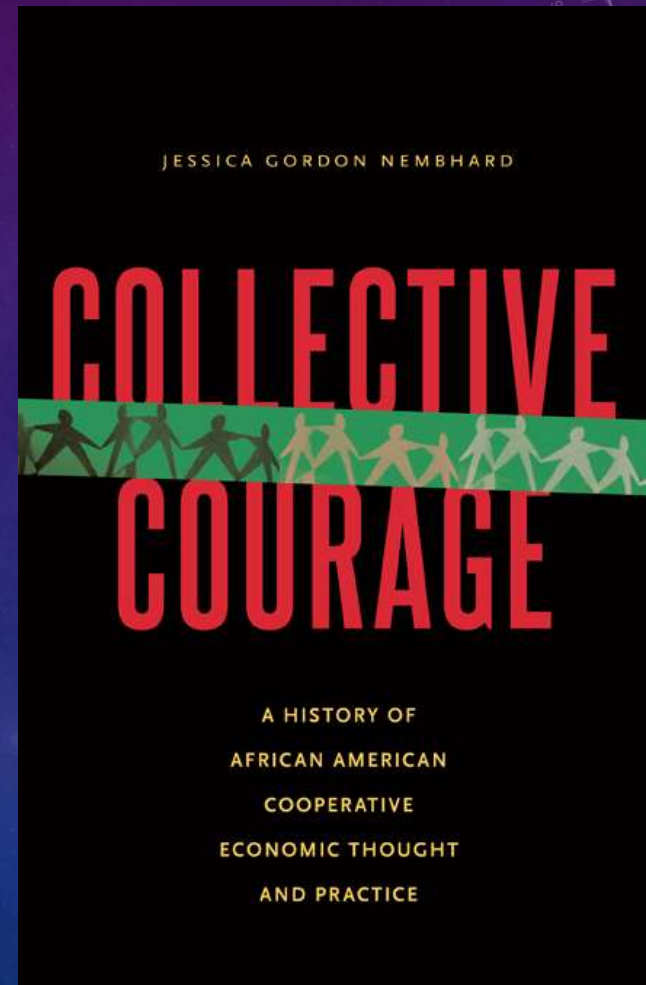
AFRICAN AMERICAN COOPERATIVE PRACTICE

- African Americans have a long and strong history of cooperative ownership, especially in reaction to market failures and economic racial discrimination.
- It has often been a hidden history and one complicated by economic marginalization, and thwarted by racial discrimination and white supremacist violence.
- Less well known aspect integral to the Long Civil Rights movement.

RESEARCH ON AFRICAN AMERICAN COOPERATIVES

- Survival
- Resistance
- Prosperity

- psupress.org



CO-OPS ADDRESS ISSUES FOR INCARCERATED OR FORMERLY INCARCERATED?

- Exploited populations –within and without PIC
- used as slave labor in prison
- Employers outside won't hire – must legally identify themselves
- Need new or different skills
- Newcomers to market in some way
- Bad previous experience(s).

COOPERATIVA DE SERVICIOS ARIGOS

- Began with art therapy in Guyama Penitentiary, Puerto Rico
- Need business model to sell their art
- Learned about co-op model and demanded co-op education
- Meeting with Governor; State Assembly changed PR co-op law; incorporated co-op
- Rephrased the 7 principles; internal rules
- MOU with Corrections Department – 15% (office space, electricity, etc); have to pay for extra security
- **Surplus - 10% retained; 75% to owners**

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IMPORTANT SUPPORTS

- Puerto Rican League of Co-operatives and the Co-op Movement in Puerto Rico provides important support:
- Volunteer Co-op Educator in the prisons
- State-level worker co-op model and legislation support – years of experience
- Marketing and clients – invite to sell products at Annual General Meetings, newsletter coverage, etc.

GROWING THE MODEL IN PUERTO RICO

- 4 More Co-ops developing in prisons
- Men's: technology, solar
- Women's: Tanos Co-op: bakery now sewing; Much slower development
- **Challenges of what to do with returning citizens – not as far along.**

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BENEFITS

- More control over one's life and work
- Decent humanized work with living wages and ownership equity
- Develop trust and solidarity relationships
- Increase skills and capacities, new kinds of leadership
- Change behavior in prison/prison experience
- Rehabilitation, resocialization, reintegration
- Reduce recidivism - Only 2 recidivists of 50 + who got out over 10 years.

FAMILY SUPPORT

- Cooperativa Arigos internal rule: members must pay child support and contribute to family expenses outside.
- Former member stated that this model is the only option they had for jobs to support their families.
- Weaver (2015) similar: importance of control over work, sense of family, ability to support family.

TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE - ROBERTO RODRIGUEZ



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“I never imagined that working in a cooperative I would find the ideal model to rehabilitate myself.”

“I will say anywhere that the program with the co-op model changes lives” - We are not the same after engaging in the co-op.

REFORM?

- Make prison life acceptable instead of leading toward transformation/abolition?
- Programs and co-ops may be co-opted as model programs to show how to make prisons “better” rather than lead to meaningful change and transformation of people and places.
- “Creams” and divides prison populations, used as rewards for favored prisoners.

BARRIERS TO DEVELOPING & SUPPORTING INCARCERATED WORKERS' CO-OPS

- State/Federal laws; Prison bureaucracies
- Corrections administrations/prison directors keep changing and not always interested
- Lack of information about cooperatives
- Social inequalities and potential for elitism
- Society's view of prisoners as non-deserving of human rights
- Commodification of prisoners and prison slave labor – will corporations free labor?

RETURNING CITIZEN WORKER CO-OPS

- **SHIFTING GEARS CO-OP**, community bicycle shop in Wisconsin – bicycle repairs and bicycle advocacy; returning citizen members +; plan to offer a day release program
- **COLLECTIVE REMAKE** social enterprise in Los Angeles County, designed to support the creation of worker-owned businesses & other cooperatives with returning citizens +.
- **BLACK PRISONER'S CAUCUS**, Washington state

GENERAL CHALLENGES:

- Co-op model not well known or understood.
- Few uniform co-op laws in US – state-level laws differ from federal; state and federal prison rules differ – and by state.
- How to create effective co-op eco-system for incarcerated and returning citizens?



• Thank you!

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