



# THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX



WHY WE OCCUPY #8



EXPOSING AND OPPOSING THE CORPORATE STATE

**T**wo and a half million people are currently incarcerated in the United States, more than in any other country in the world. While the U.S. has only 5% of the world's population, it has 23% of the world's prisoners. There are more Black men under correctional supervision—in prison, on probation, or on parole—than there were slaves in 1850. And the total number of people under correctional supervision in the U.S.—over seven million—is greater than were in Stalin's Gulag at its height.

These statistics and the increasing rate of incarceration do not reflect a growth in violent crime, which has actually declined during the last three decades, according to government data. Rather, they are the result of policy changes that promote greater rates of prosecution and longer prison terms. These policies, like “determinate sentencing,” “mandatory minimums” and “three strikes” laws, deny judges discretion and remove the human element from sentencing. They have filled U.S. prisons with millions of nonviolent offenders—particularly drug offenders from poor and Black communities where the policing and enforcement of drug laws is disproportionately high. The passage of more and stricter federal and state sentencing guidelines combined with heightened drug war enforcement has led to the quadrupling of the number of Americans incarcerated since 1980, with 70% of prisoners today consisting of minorities and people of color.

### WHO BENEFITS?

The exponential rise in the prison population parallels the growth in the private prison industry, which began in 1984 when Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) was awarded its first contract to administer a prison in Hamilton County, TN. Since then private

prison corporations have expanded to control over 415 state and federal facilities housing over 130,000 prisoners. Like the military and biotech industries, the prison industry has used lobbying and political campaign contributions to promote its own growth and profit. The top two prison corporations, CCA and GEO Group, contributed over \$2.2 million to state political campaigns in 2010. These corporations have also been successful at placing their own lawyers and lobbyists in state offices where “tough on crime” legislation is being considered. For example, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer's deputy Chief of Staff, Paul Senseman is a former lobbyist for CCA who helped draft the State's notorious anti-immigration law that will—if it survives in court—greatly increase Arizona's incarceration rates (and CCA's profit margins).

The criminal justice system in the U.S. has become a false solution to the social and economic problems resulting from increasing poverty and inequality. Rather than funding education, affordable housing, and social services that reduce poverty and promote healthy communities, politicians have been bought off by a prison industry that feeds its own greed by increasing human misery. Given the current level of corruption and corporate collusion within both major political parties, a broad, grassroots movement of **education, protest and civil disobedience** will be needed to shift our national priorities from corporate profits to the common good.

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