Survival Tips and Ideas for the Ex-Prisoner
A guide for a successful transition

INTRODUCTION

The idea for the compilation of this booklet was arisen out of a need to present some basic steps, tips, and ideas to the prisoners who are on their way back to society. So much emphasis is placed on what we should do once we are out that some very crucial survival tips are not being pointed out. So for myself and other comrads i have decided to construct this guide as a reminder that we all must prepare everyday before we get out for a successful transition. Preparing do not mean just saying we are going to do the right thing, because it takes more action than just the affirmation that all will be good. Because this is simply not true.

Anyone who has read some of the extensive materials on George Jackson will understand that the exposure to this prison culture has an adverse affect on our human existence. After coming to prison and being exposed to this reality, we don't return back to society the same. He states that it affects us in many different ways. i'm sure there have been other guides presented on behalf on the prisoner and a lot of what i will say may have been said before. But i must outline what is affecting us on the inside because we are confronted with these realities. We are confronted with these realities as individuals and as a collective. After the majority of us on the inside have been incarcerated a lot of changes happen to us and our loved ones. A lot of these changes are outside of our control.

Some of us continue to enhance our relationships with society and our families. But other prisoners who have, as a result of their miseducation, hostilities, and criminal activity, lost the support of family, friends, and support from society. When this happens, it affects and alters our transition to being successful in present society. What this guide will offer is some avenues to take to rebuild relationships with family, society, friends, and religion.

For us, once we have been liberated, nothing will be easy. We will need all of our support systems in place. i am prayng this will be a constant reminder of what we must do before and after we have been released.

In order to survive,

Khalfani X. Khaldun

REAPING THE BENEFITS OF HARD WORK

Survival, for the most part, entails a lot of focus, discipline, courage, and will. Some years ago prisoners, as soon as they enter prison, were afforded the opportunity to change through educational opportunities. A lot of these opportunities, for the most part, are not accessible, or are slowly deteriorating into nothingness. So, largely, education in all its forms must be approached by the prisoner his or herself. Prison rehabilitation is a myth. It is the prisoner or prisoners, who consciously see the necessity to change, who really rehabilitate themselves. This change, or attempt to change, by the prisoner entails effort on their part and work.

This work begins with us trying at every chance to transform our criminal attitude and mentality, which ultimately changes our ideas, what we do, how we think, our overall thought process, and how we socialize and interact with men and — especially — women. This work also takes on the character of us sharing our re-educated mindset with the willing prison elements who also want to move forward with their education. Once we have enhanced our sense of awareness and consciousness we are obligated to share it. If we fail in this, we fail society because some of the men who have not been transformed and still exhibit criminal behaviors would only return to prey on the innocents of present society. But even in the process, society as a whole must play its role by helping and not rejecting our released souljahs. Parole policies are very reactionary and are repressive to the prisoner who is released under its restrictions. We must learn of these repressive parole traps in order to stop falling into them. Some basic tips for this section on what work should be done once you're in prison:

- Find out immediately what the prison you're confined to has available where it concerns education.

- If you didn't finish school, sign up for the education department. Sign up for the G.E.D. program. Basic reading, writing, and math should be your first steps.

- If you're having problems emotionally, don't be so quick to seek prison mental help; there are some prisoners who are more qualified to help in these areas. But if you feel more comfortable talking to prison counselors then do so. Don't let it be your first choice, though, because they talk but don't help us.

- Get involved with anyone who is moving in a positive direction. College and drug rehabilitation courses are all good achievements. Gain knowledge and access to all the needed trades and skills available, which can only be beneficial once you're released.

- Exercise and keep your health maintained and up to par. Mentally/physically exercising is fundamentally beneficial for change and medical stability.

AVOIDING THE RECIDIVIST PAROLE TRAPS

In response to the hype of society's heightened fears of violence, the call for more punitive measures to allegedly combat such fear by soliciting political and legislative support to build more prisons. The parole repression varies from state to state, but for certain, this process does not act as an effective tool for staying out. In fact, it is bringing prisoners back to prison. So parole is not a treasure, it is a trap. We must begin to research parole statistics in the areas we are paroling to. This will somewhat give us a chance to internalize the success rate. How we counter these traps is right at our fingertips: it is education while we are still in prison.

Notes from the Center on Crime, Communities, and Culture states: Nationally rates of recidivism for adult offenders in the United States are extraordinarily high, ranging from 41% to 60%. The difficulty in pinpointing specific rates of recidivism is often due to a confusion of terms. The national re-arrest rate averages around 63% and the re-imprisonment rate is 41%. Research shows that most prisoners who have obtained G.E.D. or college degrees have been more inclined not to return, as opposed to individuals that have failed to gain their education.

Research studies conducted in Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, and other states have all reported significantly low recidivism rates for inmates in correctional higher-education programs, ranging from 1% to 15.5%. Educated prison elements can be a stabilizing influence in an often chaotic prison environment, enhancing the potential for transforming the entire prison population.

• Research parole statistics for your own confidence in being able to avoid the trap.

• Have patience in getting involved in a lot of activities before you have stabilized yourself.

• Stay away from negative elements — parties, drinking, drugs — because your parole is depending on your behavior.

• Try to establish a working relationship with your parole persons, male or female. Clear communication is the key.

• Just know that these people who we have to report to really don't care if we return to prison. We must stop overlooking this and stay on the path.

GRASSROOTS NETWORKING AND REBUILDING STABILITY IN FAMILY

Men and women on the inside must realize the importance of networking and constantly working to rebuild relations with our children, mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles. We must also begin to network with institutions and organizations who reflect a common interest of the prisoners who are on their way back to society. We must write letters to family and supporters to reconnect and affirm our commitments to be a positive example in society once we are released. We must articulate our agendas and express to family members how their help is needed to stabilize our successful transition.

A successful release and staying released can be attributed to many factors. Not just saying "its all good" or "i have a plan". Because economically we come from poverty and more or less will be returning to poverty. It takes money to eat, clothe yourself, place a roof over your head, take care of lights, gas, plumbing, etc. So we must hone in on our creative skills. If the family or support bases can help, that's cool as well. This help will only be temporary; we must be ready to work and structure our lives around things that are going to help us recover and adjust. If we fail to adjust, we will find ourselves in very desperate situations. Networking is truly beneficial and re-connecting is essential for our overall survival. i have outlined for everyone some basic steps.

• Write letters to all progressive support groups who have proved to be reliable in meeting the needs of prisoners. Introduce yourself and tell them your intention upon release.

• Write stories, editorials, or essays about your prison experiences and send them out to family, friends, and supporters to give them a sense of your prison reality.

• Explain to family and friends the role they can play in your life upon their release. Make amends with any past misunderstandings you may be responsible for with anyone you plan to work with upon your release.

• Connect your supporters, family, and friends together to allow them a chance to become acquainted. This is important.

• Whatever city or state you are being released to, you should get involved in any progressive programs that may be in your immediate area. If possible, this should be done before your release. Stepping out into a structured program is paramount.

• Family or supporters can be advised to try to have you a job available and waiting on you upon release. So that a lot of the ills dealing with the stress of not having a job will not be a problem for you.

• While still on the inside, we should always try to socialize and keep principled relations with the revolutionary elements who are challenging contradictions on the inside. Keep in contact once the transition is made with the elements on the inside who helped or assisted you in preparing for your release

• Upon release we have an obligation to re-build our relations with our families; our children in particular, who have suffered the most from our incarceration. Which will mean doing more than simply talking. Quality time, patience, and affection is a most stressed emphasis on our rebuilding process.

• Don't make no commitments to anyone until you're sure what your reality will be like after at least 6 months after you're out and have assessed your situation. This way we cut down on disappointments, unkept promises, or face the possibility of breaking our ties to comrads who seek out our support.

• Some of us who may have, for some reason or another, developed life-threatening medical health problems and couldn't get proper treatment in prison should write or have outside groups who help ex-prisoners with health problems. Solicit support and help in these areas and maybe you could be forwarded to a branch group in the area you're returning to. AIDS, mental health, cancer, bad vision, or internal problems should be healable through these support systems.

WHOLISTIC COUNSELING AND EMPLOYMENT

Being in prison is being exposed to a lot of abnormality, confusion, stagnation, stress, depression and loneliness. All of the above are ultimately weighing on our mental stability. One must be very well balanced to not succumb to insanity after being released from this prison colony to the larger prison colony (society). Not only are we confronted with these same abnormal conditions, but it is much broader and more overwhelming. Because prison is only a microcosm of society, what exists in prison on a small scale is much larger in our society. But the dynamics are still the same. In our attempt to re-stabilize our lives, we must start by confronting the realities of our prison experiences. And how we have mentally been affected by them. If we fail to confront these realities, they can and will emerge to affect our everyday lives as we try to move forward. We can't work or maintain a worker's focus all stressed out, having suicidal thoughts, or being overwhelmed with depression. So the outlined suggestions are some ideas of what to do if confronted with these realities.

• We must seek revolutionary and psychological counseling and therapy from skilled and trained individuals who represent the people's best interest. Discussions should take place allowing the ex-prisoner a chance to release his or her pent-up emotions. If there is no release, there will only be a build-up of rage, uncertainty, depression, alienation, and insecurities

• Ex-prisoners should call on support from every progressive entity or institution in our communities: churches, mosques, centers, boys and girl's clubs

• Sociologists, psychologists, community counselors, and organized mentor centers should be called upon for weighing out the conditions we face collectively and individually.

• If we begin to develop mental distractions while working and trying to stabilize our economic base, we should call on the closest support base available to us. If they don't help, then expose them.

• New Afrikan leadership and other leadership from anti-authoritarian groups must be called to task on their ineffective support of the prisoner before and after release.

• Ex-prisoners should get involved in as much exercise as possible. If need be, get yourself a membership to a workout club. Our exercise also acts as a release of stress and frustration. Exercise is very important.

• Ex-prisoners should try very hard to collectively build relationships between their families and other ex-prisoners' family members in an attempt to build groups to aid prisoners inside and those guys coming home.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The sheer complexity of the criminal injustice system, with its myriad of varying jurisdictions and regulations, limits community response. This complexity makes the implementation of fundamental changes in the system quite difficult. Patterns of racism and unfair treatment of prisoners and convicted persons tend to get lost in a multitude of seemingly unconnected individual appeals for redress from specific local, state, or federal institutions.

The battle lines are predictable: prisoners, their friends and families, and prisoner's rights advocates on one side, and criminal justice bureaucracies, elected officials, victims of crime, and a majority of the general public on the other. Society has been conditioned by all the bad press about prisoners and prison that their approach is one of reluctance and indifference in dealing with us. When communities begin to deal with issues of crime and justice, the focus is generally on "holding criminals accountable" and "making them pay." Unfortunately, there is relatively little attention given to holding society accountable for failing to address the poverty, lack of education, lack of jobs and employment opportunities, which has paved the way to prison for prisoners universally, to return to prison. If we don't begin to challenge these realities, the system, by

sending prisoners back to prison, prevents us from giving society at large an inside view of prison conditions. Thus they will be winning the war of the continued brainwashing of our communities, as other people who haven't visited or been in prison themselves will have no first hand account or knowledge of the conditions that exist.

- If a community refuses to hire prisoners for jobs, or allow them to receive support from organized community-based formations, then their chances for survival are extremely limited.

- Prisoners who are deserted by family or friends because of past action, even after making every attempt to become a transformed new person productive in their thinking, attitude, actions, and behavior and interaction, can be forced by desperation and necessity to fall off course.

- Incarceration is not the alternative to being mentally unstable, uneducated, or unemployed; which ultimately are motivators of acts of violence or criminal activity. What is supposed to be in place to challenge this is social institutions prepared to work with, and on behalf of, the prisoner.

POLITICALLY CONSCIOUS PRISONERS AND POLITICAL PRISONERS

Due process often does not exist within prison walls. Disciplinary and grievance procedures in these prisons are unfair and unbalanced because a lot of these prisons operate on a platform of institutional racism. Politically conscious prisoners have assumed the role and responsibility for challenging these racist tendencies, procedural violations, injustices, brutality, and all other contradictions being waged against the prison community. A lot of our activities and challenges against such conditions create a sense of awareness in prisoners. Our work, beliefs, and study materials have become the alternative, as opposed to the alleged alternatives prisons claim to offer the prisoner for education and rehabilitation. Political and revolutionary materials are creating a development and character that is becoming prevalent widely throughout the prison system inside men's and women's prisons alike. Our way of life and belief systems are expressive of a concrete reality that most prisoners are accepting of. Our efforts to improve prison conditions are off base as far as prison staff are concerned and are often met with hostility.

When we speak out for changes to be made, we find ourselves facing strong repressive sanctions. They see prisoner activism as a threat to the orderly running of the prison. The politically conscious prisoner and political prisoner are viewed as, and labeled, troublemakers; revolutionaries, terrorists, etc. What is clear at this point is that the prison system wants to be able to take credit for the positive transformation of those prisoners who are able to make a successful change. So they slander us, discredit our work, and attempt to break the link of influence we have on the prison populations. By putting us in control unit settings, cutting off all our contact with the general prison population statewide. However, they have not been able to stop the growth and development of the prison movement. This won't stop until we allow it to be stopped. Outlined are some examples of repression waged against prisoners who resist.

- Segregation of all natural leaders.

- Physical removal of prisoners to areas sufficiently isolated to effectively break or seriously weaken close emotional ties.

- Use of cooperative prison leaders against other progressive elements on the inside.

- Spying on the prisoners and reporting back on private materials, texts on the internet, etc.

- Tricking prisoners into signing statements against others recognized as leadership

- Exploitation of prisoner opportunists and informants.

- Systematically withholding mail or destroying it.

- Using techniques of character invalidation, e.g. rumors or bad-jacketing.

- Placing prisoners whose willpower has been seriously weakened or eroded into living situations with several others who are more advanced in their thought patterns and whose job it is to further undermine the prisoner's emotional support, already strained through isolation from family and friends.

The struggle for survival has continued and prisoners must start to slowly gravitate to the side of political consciousness. We have legal books, and all the other necessary materials. We can help each other. A luta continua!

INDIANA GUN VIOLENCE STATISTICS: 1995-1996

i'm sure this has changed now, but i want to illustrate it for prisoners here in Indiana.

- Indianapolis had an increase in gun-related deaths from 81 persons in 1995 to 90 persons in 1996. In 1996, there were 13 more Afrikans killed as a result of gun violence.

- The cities of South Bend, Muncie, and Evansville experienced an increase in gun-related deaths in 1996

- In 1995-1996 in Gary, Muncie, and Evansville, all New Afrikans killed as a result of gun violence were killed by New Afrikans.

- In 1995-96, of the cities reporting, all women killed were killed with guns.

- In 1996, of the cities reporting, 67% of New Afrikan males killed were between the ages of 19-30 years old (110 New Afrikan males), as compared to 32% of white males (7 white males).

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CONCLUSION

i'm sure there are some issued releases i have failed to cover. Don't fault me because i am outlining general, yet personal, issues that prisoners here have who are about to make their transition. Seeing so many of today's prisoners leaving and returning is the encouragement. i have been here and seen it happening first hand. We must be careful in our approach to a successful transition, and we must really try to be honest about all the internal and external contradictions we are confronted with. Having spent nearly 13 years in prison since i was 17 years old, i haven't been afforded the chance that i have always wanted to share my views, tips, and ideas about making our freedom work for us. So i do it in the signs of this release.

All power to the people who dare to struggle and dare to win. Free the world, the land, and our oppressed nation's people. Free all political prisoners and prisoners of war.

REFERENCES/NOTES

- Indiana Commission on the Status of Black Males, 1995-96 issue.
- A Call to Action, National Commission on Crime and Justice.
- Prison research documents of behavior modification.
- 1998 Prisoner's Resource Guide, produced by an anti-imperialist, anti-authoritarian organization called Raze the Walls!. It consists of various groups from everywhere that may or may not have in place programs to assist prisoners and people who have just been released. Comrad Mike Mann suggests that 4 stamps be sent to him at the address below from prisoners for a copy of this valuable resource guide. People of the so-called free world should send a $2.00 donation for a copy. i recommend it to every prisoner who is trying to re-connect with the outside. Every issue raised in this release can be addressed through obtaining a copy of this Resource Guide. i thank you Raze the Walls for this important contribution.

Write for guide:

Raze the Walls!
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The voice of an Indiana political prisoner

from the trenches i rise!

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