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Hidden in Plain Sight

The Timeline of USP Lompoc during the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Stories of Formerly Incarcerated Inmates

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Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, inmates at USP Lompoc were subjected to increased exposure of the virus due to inaction from staff, guards, and the Bureau of Prisons (BOP). This paper focuses on the history behind prisons and incarceration as a punishment, the timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to events happening in Lompoc, and includes interviews from two former inmates at USP Lompoc, Bernd Appleby and Ron Shehee. Looking at the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it affected inmates at Lompoc, the conscious refusal by staff and guards to follow instructions given by the Attorney General, the absence of personal protective equipment, and the lack of structure and testing led to the death and health issues of inmates. Appleby and Shehee highlight the apathy, power imbalance, and inhumane conditions they faced during their time at USP Lompoc. They share specific details into accounts from other prisoners and the health and administrative problems that inmates faced. Incarceration not only affects inmates but their communities as well and more visibility around the injustices at USP Lompoc is needed to show that the ineffectiveness of prisons to handle a pandemic comes at the cost of inmates and their lives.

INTRODUCTION

In this research paper, I will be observing literature, including critiques, documentaries, and websites, that discusses the history of prisons and the prison industrial complex, the system under which the government and companies profit from the building and maintenance of prisons. In addition, I will also be interviewing two former inmates from Lompoc Prison and asking them about their experience during the COVID-19 pandemic and how that affected them.

This research paper will be addressing the experiences of the formerly incarcerated and how we can support them by advocating for them in our daily lives. Through the lens of environmental injustice and human rights, this research paper will address the following issues. First, the paper will take a look at the different ways incarceration has historically affected inmates, their families, and the local communities. Second, the paper will take a look into the experiences of the formerly incarcerated in USP Lompoc. Finally, we can take a closer look at how to support the formerly incarcerated by listening to their stories and experiences.

LITERATURE

Many books and academic texts have been published over the last few decades diving into the history of the prison system as well as analyzing how today's prison-industrial complex in the United States emerged. The literature is not all-encompassing and does not cover the nuances and complexities of the prison system, in addition to its connection to policing and corporate interests, but provides a general overview of how the prison system formed into the present day. Two authors, Foucault and Blackmon, describe historical roots of abuse and racism within the prison system, which are pervasive within our contemporary system and are reflected in the Covid crisis at Lompoc prison, which led to its status as the prison with the highest infections within the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) system.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault mentions the disappearance of public punishment and the shift in Europe from public executions to timetables,¹ a shift toward control over the body of prisoners. The book delves into how punishment shifted from being a public spectacle to being a way for those who are punished to think about their error of their ways and reform themselves (Foucault, 2012). During this time, the public-spectacle punishment style made punishment visible to everyone, and both the state government and the prisoners were present at the scene. As punishment shifts from being displayed in the public to an individualistic personal punishment behind bars, less attention has been brought to the issue of incarceration – inmates are out of sight and out of mind. The state government has been able to portray themselves as humane and just, removing the stigma that the punishments given are violent and condemnable.

In *Slavery by Another Name*, Blackmon delves into the origins of policing and prisons and how the prison system replaces slavery as a way to imprison the Black population. In the 1870s, many Black men were forced to work for big corporations after being jailed by the sheriffs. Many of them worked in jobs that

¹ Timetables refer to the daily schedules created by the prison that prisoners have to follow.

were environmentally hazardous and dangerous, such as mining coal or building railroads. Blackmon states, “The same men who built railroads with thousands of slaves and proselytized for the use of slaves in southern factories and mines in the 1850s were also the first to employ forced African American labor in the 1870s” (Blackmon, 2012). In the post-civil war era, prisons are disproportionately populated by people of color, particularly Black individuals. As of 2019, the Black population in the United States is 14% (Tamir, Budiman, Noe-Bustamante, & Mora, 2022) and yet according to the BOP website, 38.3% of BOP inmates are Black (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2022). Similar patterns of prison labor can be seen today as prisoners in California are often called upon to fight wildfires for a portion of minimum wage and risk their lives in the process. Although Gavin Newsom passed the new legislation, A.B. 2147, to allow for inmate firefighters to become hired as firefighters, eligibility guidelines and discrimination restrict many from being able to do so (Lowe, 2021). It is not only limited to firefighting; prison inmates work for a multitude of corporations that grossly underpay and undermine their labor² and do not provide them with career support after.

Many prisons are built on environmentally hazardous sites called Superfund sites, an injustice that remains obscure to the general public.³ In a research study conducted at the University of California, Santa Barbara, Superfund sites proved to affect communities of color disproportionately. The research team found that “the area within three miles of Superfund sites includes only 16% of the U.S. population, [but] includes 19% of Black Americans and 23% of Hispanic/Latinx persons” (Ashby, Vazin, & Pellow, 2020). In addition, water quality and air quality can be very detrimental to the health of the inmates; volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and contaminants found in the water and air can result in body irritation and can lead to long term organ damage (Ashby et. al, 2020). It is important to understand the history of prisons, as well as a variety of factors, such as environmental racism, corporate interests, and policing, in order to establish the background and provide the foundation that explains how Lompoc Prison failed to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

TIMELINE OF LOMPOC PRISON

Economic development and interpretation of community are essential in understanding the development of Lompoc Prison and the COVID-19 crisis that emerged and infected many of the prisoners. During the early months of the pandemic, many businesses were waiting for restrictions to end and reopen their businesses. One significant hurdle stood in the way of economic reopening for Santa Barbara County: Lompoc Prison. Due to the failure of Lompoc Prison’s staff to follow mask

² The documentary, 13th, showcases the reach of prison labor, extending from anything to food, clothing, and furniture to big companies like Microsoft and Boeing. Many prisons are influenced by large corporations and legislation that profits off prisons. Some of the corporations involved or previously involved with ALEC include ExxonMobil, a gas company, Altria, a cigarette company, and Koch Industries, a petroleum and chemical company, many of these companies contributing to environmental hazards and waste.

³ According to EPA, “thousands of contaminated sites exist nationally due to hazardous waste being dumped, left out in the open, or otherwise improperly managed”.

mandates⁴ and COVID-19 regulations, many (if not all) prisoners were susceptible to the virus and unable to socially distance themselves and sanitize.

Santa Barbara County had its first confirmed case of COVID-19 on March 15, 2020; other California counties had several COVID-19 cases. The first confirmed case should have resulted in action by the prison staff to ensure the safety of the prisoners who are living in close quarters and, as a result, more susceptible to the virus. By March 22, 2020, an inmate began to show several symptoms of COVID-19, including “nausea, vomiting, ... general malaise, and a dry cough over the prior two days”. The Lompoc staff did not test the inmate, stating that his pre-existing medical conditions and their suspicion about his infected gallbladder were a reason not to. They tested the inmate on March 27 and the results came back positive on March 30. Lompoc prison guards dismissing the first COVID-19 case at Lompoc Prison is strikingly similar to how guards at Irwin County Detention Center,⁵ a private prison for detainees serving short sentences, attempted to lie to detainees stating that there were no COVID-19 cases at the detention center.⁶

According to the Bureau of Prison’s memorandum from the Attorney Journal on March 26, 2020, given the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic and the risks it could pose to public health, the attorney general directs and orders the Director of BOP to grant home confinement to inmates who are eligible (Barr, 2020). This memorandum was an action step for prisons across the nation to help inmates, specifically those who are immunocompromised, from catching the virus in the confined spaces within prisons. Despite this order from the Attorney General, Lompoc Prison refused to transfer inmates to home confinement, which was revealed in the later months of the pandemic.

On March 27, Lompoc officials stated that they would start testing inmates for COVID-19 only if they exhibited COVID-19 symptoms. It was not until April 24 that the Bureau of Prisons expanded testing to asymptomatic inmates. Lompoc officials reported testing all 1,162 inmates⁷ on May 4 and found a week later that at least 891 FCI inmates had tested positive for COVID-19. Refusing to set up any kind of testing system, such as contact tracing, until a month later led to the outbreak at the Lompoc prison. Media coverage began to cover what is happening at Lompoc prison and the LA Times, on May 9, 2020, reported that 70% of inmates at Lompoc prison tested positive for COVID-19 (Winton, 2020).

According to a newsletter announcement from KCSB on May 9, 2020, the new state requirements prevented businesses from opening until there were “no COVID-19 related deaths in the County for 14 days.” At the time, county officials were concerned because Lompoc Prison was preventing Santa Barbara County from reaching those requirements; at the time, there were two COVID-19 related

⁴ Many of the inmates and their journals state how Lompoc staff do not wear masks and are hypocritical in the policing of masking as stated by Appleby. “Lompoc staff freely circulated among the 3 sections of the prison (Medium, Low and Camp) twice daily and without masks, a practice that continued at least until September 2020”.

⁵ In May 2021, Irwin County Detention Center was closed due to women prisoners and a whistleblower nurse coming forward and revealing that nonconsensual surgeries were being conducted by a gynecologist; many continue to suffer from the effects (O’Toole, 2021).

⁶ In the documentary, “The Facility”, the guards at Irwin attempted to lie despite the news stating that three detainees were tested with one test coming back positive. Despite the evidence that COVID-19 has found its way into the prison facility, there is denial by the staff members and leadership which comes at the expense of inmates and detainees.

⁷ “Those were only the inmates at the Low facility and did not include the Camp or the medium facility” (Appleby, 2022).

deaths, and more than 300 inmates tested positive. KCSB also noted how prison leadership at Lompoc Prison “reportedly has been slow to contain the virus, and has been resisting offers of assistance from county health officials. It’s also hard to get a clear picture of how many of the hospitalized cases (39 hospitalized as of Friday, 12 of these patients in ICU) are inmates versus community members because prison officials are barring public health doctors from disclosing this information.” The failure of the Lompoc Prison leadership and staff to receive outside help from the county health officials and public health doctors shows the incompetence of Lompoc Prison and the wider prison system in being able to take care of their prisoners and provide them with the resources they need (personal protective equipment, social distancing space, quarantine facilities, testing supplies). During a health and environmental crisis when there was a high-risk virus in the community, Lompoc Prison refused to seek help and assistance to support its prisoners.

The *Santa Barbara Noozhawk* also reported how Lompoc Prison cut all phone and email communications between inmates and families during the COVID-19 outbreak, stating that “inmates, instead, are left to write letters, although they have limited access to stamps. Letters also have been returned to family members without explanation” (Scully, 2020). Families of prisoners and inmates were left distressed with no communication with their loved ones and were unable to contact them to ask about their health and their well-being. It also points to the bigger problem with prisons and how, as an institution, they are not at all there to support the rehabilitation of prisoners but rather are a way for prison investors to profit at the expense and health of the incarcerated.

The recognition and the addressing of this problem continue to be exacerbated as the local government and members of the community got impatient. On May 11, 2020, *Santa Barbara Independent* reported, “The Board of Supervisors will vote Tuesday to send a letter asking the governor to allow the county to separate community cases from inmate cases, and Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson and Assemblymembers Monique Limón and Jordan Cunningham are lobbying for the same. Hart also said that the community could make an impact by sending letters to the governor himself, sending letters of support to the aforementioned state legislators, and voicing their sentiments at the Board of Supervisors meetings” (Smith, 2020). The proposal for this change shows the intentions of the county officials to revive the local economy rather than trying to address the problem at Lompoc Prison. Moreover, by asking to separate Lompoc Prison from community cases, it categorizes the inmates at Lompoc Prison as people who are not part of the community and of lesser importance. The news illustrates the prioritization of economic gain over the health and well-being of the incarcerated who are unable to deal with prison leadership and regulations.

During this time as well, on May 16, 2020, ACLU filed a case against Louis Milusnic, a Warden of Lompoc, and Michael Carvajal, a Director of the Bureau of Prisons, stating that the lack of coordination and response by the Lompoc prison staff and the Bureau of Prisons in response to the COVID-19 pandemic is linked to cruel and unusual punishment as stated in the Eighth Amendment. Examples of mistreatment stated in the case included inmate Yonnedil Carror Torres, who has asthma, “[who] reported symptoms consistent with coronavirus [and] was ignored for days and denied medical treatment until he went into respiratory shock and had to be put on a ventilator.” Felix Samuel Garcia was scheduled to be released in the fall and was eligible to be released early through home confinement by the CARES Act, but instead

Lompoc Prison “arbitrarily forced him to spend two more months of his sentence at Lompoc in a hastily-converted warehouse, where he is locked in a cell and not even allowed to shower”.

At the same time the ACLU lawsuit was filed, Santa Barbara County took Lompoc Prison off their hands. On May 18, 2020, Newsom agreed to loosen his criteria for reopening and separate the Lompoc Prison inmate cases from the county cases (Smith, 2020). The removal of the prison from community cases essentially serves as a way to dismiss the problems occurring at Lompoc Prison. Rather than finding a way to reduce case counts at Lompoc by pushing for home confinement or enacting social distancing guidelines, the County instead focuses its efforts on the community – the businesses and economic development of Santa Barbara County rather than the incarcerated population at Lompoc Prison.

A few days later, on May 29, 2020, the *Santa Barbara Independent* reported an additional two incidents where the inaction of prison staff prevented the inmates from getting the treatment they needed and resulted in serious illness. The letter from a fellow inmate from one of the critically ill inmates shows the neglect from the prison staff to address the symptoms of the inmate, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. According to the *Santa Barbara Independent*, there has been a push for the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) “to carry out an April order from Attorney General William Barr to release certain inmates to home confinement so that BOP facilities with coronavirus outbreaks can better enact social distancing and quarantine measures” (Hayden, 2020). In reality, only a small minority of prisoners were able to be sent back home due to the restrictive eligibility requirements for inmates to qualify for home confinement; only 34 transferred out of the prison out of the 509 eligible inmates (Hayden, 2020).

A pandemic report from the Department of Justice was not released until July 2020. Although the report did describe the failures of USP Lompoc, it detailed only a fraction of the events that happened at the prison. Action by the Bureau of Prisons did not happen until five months after the first confirmed case at Lompoc Prison when there was a scheduled inspection on August 12, 2020, by Dr. Homer Venters.

Interview with Ron and Bernd

Bernd, a former inmate at Lompoc Camp from June 3, 2019, to Oct 23, 2020, and Ron, who was at Lompoc Camp⁸ from April 2020 to January 2021 and utilized a wheelchair, both talked about their experience at Lompoc during the pandemic. Bernd’s and Ron’s interviews highlighted some of the changes that happened during the COVID-19 pandemic and how the misuse of power and neglect of inmates exacerbated the mistreatment that prisoners faced. It is important to note the difference between camp life and prison life and that the experiences of Ron and Bernd may only be the tip of the iceberg, a small glimpse at the many inequalities faced by inmates at Lompoc camp.

To enter USP Lompoc, prisoners would need to first be isolated in the Solitary Housing Unit, otherwise known as the SHU, for COVID-19 isolation. Bernd explained how he was sent to the SHU three times. The first time, Bernd was in isolation for three days and he received a roommate from Camp. The second time, he stayed there for three weeks with no human interaction and medication and was not released

⁸ “Camp life and prison life from my understanding of life from people who came to camp from prison is totally different. At a camp, you have way more freedom. The guards are not allowed to have guns, they can’t lock the doors, and you get more time to move around every day instead of being on a set movement like over in prison” (Shehee, 2022).

until the INS checked his passport and “quickly confirmed [his] citizenship.” The third time, Bernd came down with shingles and was sent to the SHU, again without any of his regular medication. It was only when Bernd saw his doctor a few days later and stated that he had no medication, including his prescribed shingles medication, was he able to receive them. The lack of organization and proper procedures to get people efficiently through the facility showcases the problems of prisons. The slow process of verifying citizenship and other legalities can result in physical and mental health problems without proper medication and care.

Contradictions and the power dynamic within the prison played a huge role in how prisoners were treated and the difficulties they were faced with. The refusal by prison guards to acknowledge the needs and requests of prisoners shows the inhumane treatment that inmates were subject to face. For Ron, spending time in the SHU for solitary confinement was a physically and mentally harsh experience. Ron physically injured himself because he slipped out of his wheelchair while getting out of the shower and bruised his ribs (Shehee, 2022). Mentally, being in confinement with no one to talk to made him start hearing things and start getting paranoid. Bernd noted how when he was isolated in the SHU during his intake at Lompoc Camp, it was emotionally taxing, stating “I had to dig down deep and tap into my inner reserves to avoid being depressed and angry. The guards do what they want - they ignore your requests for access to the outside (you're allowed an hour a day, I never got any access during my 23 days in the SHU). It is prison at its worst.”

In terms of standard of living, Ron explained in his interview how the crimes that they have committed served as “justification” for prison staff to treat them inhumanely and ignore the physical and mental health of the inmates. When COVID-19 came, inmates started getting bagged lunches, which were made by inmates without proper COVID-19 protection. During COVID-19, the staff started putting a limit on how much water an inmate could buy. The nearby army base, Vandenberg Air Force Base, which is known as a spacecraft launching site, fired missiles that would enhance the bad air quality within minutes of them beginning. When asked what he wished people knew about incarceration during a pandemic, Ron emphasized how life at USP Lompoc involved increased exposure and less protection, noting “you cannot control what the next person does as far as keeping their distance from you [and] wearing their mask.” The inability to control environmental factors and improve living standards can be frustrating for inmates who are struggling to protect themselves from the virus.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, that power dynamic played a direct role in the outbreak at USP Lompoc. In Bernd’s journal entry dated April 13, 2020, Bernd noted how guards and staff were never tested for COVID-19 and only screened for some symptoms, which did not account for asymptomatic cases between guards and staff. Moreover, Bernd also stated that guards were hypocrites when it came to wearing masks; guards would often not wear masks but if an inmate was caught not wearing a mask, the inmate would be called out. Preventative signs were hung and social distancing procedures were only practiced a few days or on the day of inspection.

When it came to COVID-19 personal-protective-equipment or PPE, Bernd stated that masks were not given until April 6. The masks were also of low-quality cloth and daylight could be seen through the mask. In addition, COVID-19 testing was unavailable for prisoners and was given only if someone

suffered from extreme symptoms of COVID-19, which often was too late for these inmates to receive help. One inmate who died from COVID-19 in April 2020 was Efrem Stutson, who “despite Stutson’s condition, which included a bad cough, Rangel claimed, USP Lompoc sent him packing on a Greyhound bus bound for San Bernardino. Their sister, Laura Harris-Gidd, met him there. ‘He was so out of it,’ Harris-Gidd said. ‘He could hardly hold his head up.’” (Hayden, 2020). Bernd stated how inside the prison, nothing was done to mitigate the spread of the virus to other prisoners, stating, “He was weak and showing significant symptoms, obviously infected. The guard didn't wear a mask and when the driver (a camper who was tasked with driving Efram to the bus station) asked for a mask he was refused.”

The unsanitary conditions and creative preventative measures by prisoners⁹ were often ignored and squelched by prison staff and guards. Bernd’s journal entry details how the chow hall consisted of black mold and inmates have often turned away from medical treatment or told to purchase over-the-counter medications from Commissary.¹⁰ More shockingly, because soap usage increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, staff decided that soap dispensers would not be refilled for up to three to four days. The denial of soap to prisoners, even more so during a pandemic, is in violation of WHO guidelines for prison health (Enggist, 2014). Despite the staff’s denial of soap to inmates, some inmates came together to use their own money from the Commissary to buy soap for communal use, highlighting the support and community that inmates are able to foster in their time of need. Even when inmates decided to put up blankets on their bunk as a screen to act as a “social distance” barrier, the staff decided to confiscate their blankets.

In the instance of inmates with disabilities, USP Lompoc refuses to take care of and give them proper accommodations, even going so far as to omit parts of their health records. Ron explained that his multiple health conditions, such as being paralyzed from the waist down, having acid reflux, restrictive lung disease, potential kidney failure, and PTSD. He communicated with staff on five occasions, from 04/18/2020, 04/20/2020, 06/09/2020, 06/19/2020, and 07/24/2020, with short replies or no replies. Even on August 4, 2020, “staff do not wear masks while conducting headcounts... [they] come from other infected facilities to conduct headcounts.” Incomplete medical records prevented Ron and an estimated 40 other inmates from being considered class participants in the ACLU lawsuit against Lompoc, illustrating the obstacles and voices that are unheard even when pursuing justice and accountability.

When asked about what they wished more people knew about in terms of incarceration during the pandemic, Bernd responded by stating that there were many contradictions between what was reported and what actually happened at the camp. He noted how the Bureau of Prisons misstated the number of infections and what was being done to mitigate the virus was very little. Lompoc prison would only put up signs detailing COVID-19 regulations when inspectors were coming. Bernd noted how when the

⁹ In the short film, “The Facility”, ICE detainees also have to adapt to the situation using their limited resource. This included using a sock as a mask and a plastic cup attached to a piece of headphone cord

¹⁰ A store within a correctional facility

pandemic began, the environment of the prison changed a lot, noting how inmates were locked in their dorms “where we had about 150 inmates living

together [in] tight quarters instead of allowing outside access to the large Camp (about 10 acres).” Prisoners were forced to stay housed in their own dormitories and were not let outside, even though there were ten acres of land at the prison to walk around, exercise, and socially distance themselves. Looking back Bernd summarized his thoughts about the prison guards and staff, saying “My feeling is that the guards and staff had a lack of apathy and concern for inmates and acted with impunity. They were untouchable – not even the Attorney General could make them tow the line.”

H-UNIT

Perhaps more terrifying is the H-Unit, the COVID-19 sick ward at USP Lompoc. H-Unit is a wing of USP Lompoc used for disciplinary housing. It was decommissioned in 1999 but in 2020 was used to house COVID-19 patients despite having a lack of ventilation and sanitation.

Omid Souresrafil is one of the inmates who stayed at H-Unit. Omid has a Ph.D. in biomedical engineering and has done work designing implantable medical devices. Bernd states that in his conversation with Omid, Omid’s medication was withheld because of its cost; outside, it was prescribed and paid for by Omid’s insurance. Omid suspected that the staff retaliated against him and sent him to the H Unit as punishment for constantly asking for his medication, even though he tested negative for Covid before going. In an interview conducted by Bernd on May 27, 2020,¹¹ Omid emphasized how H-Unit was unsanitary, unsafe, and devoid of medical care. He noted that when he entered his 8` by 8` cell, there was mold on the walls, the smell of excrement about the unit, and insects on the cell floor. He was given one small bar of soap during his 22 days at H-Unit and an insufficient amount of toothpaste and was unable to shower for the first 9 days of his stay.¹² During his time at H-Unit, Omid was tested three times for COVID-19 and the results came back negative each and every time. When he asked to return to South Camp, Dr. Watson, his supervising doctor, said that he could not because now Omid was exposed to the virus that was circulating in H-Unit.

An anonymous inmate details his experience at H-Unit after he tested positive for COVID-19 on May 21, 2020. The inmate asked for more specificity to determine his condition, such as a blood test, X-ray, EKG, or other diagnostic test but was refused by Dr. Watson for all of these diagnostic tests. His lungs were never checked and Dr. Watson did not even have a stethoscope. The front of the cells in H-Unit have old-style bars and was full with about 120 inmates. The inmate recalled how he was required to take azithromycin (5 days) as a condition of release, despite the fact that “azithromycin is an antibiotic and if taken when not needed, acts as an immunosuppressant.” According to a research study on efficacy and safety of azithromycin in Covid-19 patients, “the results show that using AZM as routine therapy in

¹¹ His letter is also published on the *Santa Barbara Independent* (Hayden, 2020).

¹² According to the interview, Omid noted how several inmates claimed that they never had the chance to shower for 17 days.

Covid-19 patients is not justified due to lack of efficacy and potential risk of bacterial resistance that is not met by an increased clinical benefit.”

CONCLUSION

From a socio-environmental standpoint, it is important to see how socioeconomic status and environmental issues can play a role in the development of families and communities. To claim that incarceration is a punishment that only affects the prisoner is incorrect. Having a parent that has been taken away for many years, combined with racist environmental policy, harms the community at large.¹³ In this way, the family environment and the community environment are interconnected with one another. Ron stated the effects incarceration had on himself and his community, stating how “not being able to spend time with your family is a very depressing way to go to sleep and wake up knowing you won’t see them for many years”. For the community, I feel like before I left I was very well known and liked. After I got out I felt like they looked at me like I was a criminal and didn’t want me in their presence” (Shehee, 2022).

When asked about Ron's experience at Lompoc, the BOP declined to comment on "anecdotal allegations" (Anderson & Huo, 2022). The refusal of BOP to cooperate and deny the experiences of Lompoc prisoners shows how prisoners’ experiences are rarely acknowledged and their voices are dismissed by those in positions of authority. The traumatic experiences that they have experienced during the pandemic and the mistreatment they have faced from prison staff need to be highlighted so the perpetrators are held accountable.

The details of this paper showcase the complexity of incarceration. For readers who may ask “How does this affect me?,” the problem starts with the “out of sight, out of mind” mentality. There is a false sense of belief that everyone who is incarcerated deserves the punishment that they receive. However, punishment should not equate to a violation of human rights and abuse of power by prison staff. The people who were at Lompoc Camp have committed low-scale crimes and the experiences they went through are traumatic and unacceptable. No one deserves treatment where their humanity is deprived and there is complete conscious removal of hygienic products, medications, sanitation procedures, and resources.

Seeing the incapacities of Lompoc prison to take care of prisoners, the function of incarceration and prisons must be questioned. As noted in “The Facility”, Nilson Marriaga notes how the ICE officers told him to leave the country because he is a threat to the community, to which Nilson responded, “Who are they talking about? My wife? Were they talking about my son? They were protecting my son by taking me away from him? Were they protecting my sisters, my mom? Who were they protecting?”

¹³ According to research at Boston University and the Pew Research Group, “An estimated 2.7 million American children have an incarcerated parent. The problem has become so common that Sesame Street recently introduced a character with an incarcerated parent, to teach children how to cope with this difficult situation and the shame that can accompany it”.

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