

Life Without Parole prison sentences heretofore to be called Death By Incarceration (DBI) are inherently unfair. It is literally a term of confinement that condemns men, women and children to die in prison. In doing this, the state is making the argument that it has the moral right to strip a human being of all hope and dignity until they die. This rationale is a byproduct of a historic cycle of violence that the United States was founded upon—slavery, racism, classism, misogyny, the genocide of Native Americans and the theft of their ancestral lands. The total lack of compassion and the dehumanization of DBI sentences has its roots in this historical legacy. Since its inception DBI has been disproportionately imposed upon poor people of color. Inherently disproportionality categorizes human beings into different groups as if some are fully human while others are not. This idea informs beliefs that only "others" deserve punishments that condemn forever because their incapable of atoning and they lack the capacity to participate in healing.

Isn't part of the human experience learning from mistakes and becoming better? What distinguishes people from other animals is our capacity to transform and atone. We transgress, we're held accountable, we transform, and then we make amends. DBI strips people of this experience. To be human is to have the ability to live fully within that human experience to be better, it is to exercise that latent capacity that we all have to redeem ourselves.

In the context of the criminal legal system the United States of America is a country that supposedly abhors torture, the 8th amendment barring cruel and unusual punishment is a testament to this anathema. If torture means to cause intense suffering, wouldn't locking someone up for decades and stripping them of all hope and human dignity constitute as intense suffering? If that is the case how does that definition reconcile with this abhorrence?

This application of punishment is a perpetuation of violence on the poor that is part of an ongoing cycle of harm that offers only more pain and misery which in turn contributes more devastation and dysfunction to the communities these draconian sentences are purported to serve.

Humanity's history of capitalism and the inherent underclass of that economic system are inextricably tied to the consequence of DBI—the lifetime enslavement of men, women and children. A reality that violates the most basic rights of being, the right to be human and not enslaved.

If we revisit Thomas Jefferson's words, "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by the creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness..." Then we must ask ourselves these questions: is there ever a time when a human being stops being human? And if so, who amongst us, government official or citizen is infallible enough to deem anyone a non person or other. And if that person does not exist how can we then in good conscious continue to support sentences that mandatorally strip away our humanity.

This essay was written in conjunction by members of the Right To Redemption Committee: Robert Labar, Vernon Robinson, Charles Bassett and Terrell Carter. Right To Redemption is a

committee within the Lifer's Inc., an organization composed of men who currently reside in SCI Phoenix, the largest state prison in Pennsylvania. It is an organization formed to influence the passage of legislation for parole of life sentences in Pennsylvania. The Right To Redemption Committee is a means to that end.