

Excerpt from “The Prison-Industrial Complex: An Investment in Failure” by Michael J. Love (May 1998)

The Prison-Industrial Complex is a national phenomenon with a vested interest in economic and political power. This multi-billion-dollar industry targets African Americans and Latinos, primarily within socially, economically and politically destitute communities. The criminal justice system is the complex machine that devours African-American and Latino men, women and children as the raw material to sustain the Prison-Industrial Complex under the moral banner of “the war on crime.” This is more accurately a war on “street crime,” revealed as a war on people of color, the marginalized. Historically, this country has always misused its power against its marginalized. The method has not changed. Mass media works with elitist policy makers to shape and create public misperceptions which so desensitize citizens to the real issues that the targeted group is held with contempt or indifference. The Prison-Industrial Complex is unequivocally “an institutionally racist mechanism, which is neutralizing generations of Black and Latino males in New York and across the nation and is devastating communities of color that comprise America’s inner cities,” according to John Fleteau.

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With about 70,000 prisoners in New York State and about 63,000 ex-offenders on parole at any given time, it is not hard to conclude that current criminal justice policies are more geared toward investment in recidivism, and keeping non-violent offenders for bizarre and lengthy sentences only as financial pawns. If we expect prisoners to return to their communities, why are post-secondary education and effective therapeutic programs scarce, and obsolete in their application? If we desire men and women to return to society with civil interpersonal skills, why relegate them to repositories of violent rage? If we expect men and women to return to their communities as assets, and with respect for the law, why do we ignore brutal and corrupt prison guards/police officers who abuse those in their custody with impunity?

SOURCE: Michael J. Love, “The Prison-Industrial Complex: An Investment in Failure,” May 1998. In *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal; An African American Anthology*, edited by Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, 622-623. New York: Bowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000.