

MARCH 2016

# THE SPRING TIMES

WHAT IS POPPING UP AROUND YOU

A few weeks ago we got news that there had been a fairly massive prison riot at Holman State Prison, in Alabama. Pretty quickly we started seeing news reports that a fight broke out between prisoners on the evening of March 11th. Corrections officers responded, and during the attempt to detain one of the prisoners, a corrections officer was stabbed. Of course, this prompted more officers to swarm the dorm, along with the warden, and the fight got larger. This warden in particular has a long history of excessive force and brutality. He has been accused of punching a handcuffed inmate, running a prison where the guards smuggle in drugs and contraband and being in charge of a facility that consistently abuses the inmates. During the fight, the warden was stabbed as well. One inmate said, "The warden got to talking crazy so they ended up stabbing the warden". While the media tried to portray the stabbing of the warden as a random casualty from attempting to break up the fight, others might see it as an act of revenge against the warden's brutal reign over the inmates.

Once the warden and corrections officer had been stabbed, the prison staff fled the dorm, and hundreds of inmates took over general population. In videos that a prisoner filmed on a cell phone, one could see inmates putting on masks, opening all the doors and setting a small fire in the guard tower. One inmate can be heard saying, "We're tired of this shit; there's only one way to deal with it: tear the prison down." Another inmate says, "It's going down in this bitch, they need to let us up out this bitch". Corrections officers eventually regain control of the dorm after firing tear gas, and by the morning of

the 12th, the prison was back under the administrations control.

There has been a lot of tension in the Alabama prison system over the past several years with riots and disturbances becoming more and more frequent. Alabama's prison system is currently almost 14,000 inmates over capacity. In some of the correspondence that inmates sent out, they echoed this sentiment for why the prison erupted into a riot. Other inmates, though, sent out a different message, saying, "It has nothing to do with overcrowding, but with the practice of locking folks up for profit, control and subjugation."

Then, on March 14th, we got news that there was another disruption going on at Holman. This time around seventy prisoners had taken over a dormitory and barricaded themselves in, after a fight that morning had left one inmate stabbed. News reporters were able to talk by cellphone to one of the prisoners, who said that the inmates were in a standoff with armed guards after they broke out windows and gained access to other parts of the prison. We heard from inmates that after both riots were put down, the administration transferred out a lot of inmates and that the riot team was going to be on site at Holman for three days to ensure control. We also heard that the Alabama governor came to visit the prison a few days after the second riot, which some inmates took as a sign that maybe some of the complaints about overcrowding and negligence would be addressed. One inmate sent out an account of the governor's visit. When he walked into the prison, a sentry of officers

*If they are roses, they will bloom.*





# Spring is here. New things are possible.

went into the dorms armed with shotguns and screamed, “Everyone face down on your rack, and if you lift your head we’ll blow it off.” The Governor then came onto the main hall of the prison and took a photo as he appeared to be in deep discussion with his entourage. Once the photo-op was complete, he was on his way. Not one word to nor with an inmate. Many can’t say if he really came or not, but he blamed rioting on too many prisoners and too few staff, tweeting, “The situation at #Holman is under control, but it is only a matter of time before another situation occurs.”

Though some prisoners released demands, what erupted in Alabama several weeks ago was demandless at its core. Clearly, some prisoners asked nothing and took power, holding space and creating major disruptions. While obviously having better conditions is important and desirable, it seems evident that a large number of prisoners feel and know the system is fundamentally fucked and cannot be reformed. The recent attacks on order can be more powerful than negotiation. The actions of this uprising rejected the existing mediation offered by the framework of the institution and its power. Instead getting out of control seemed to be the point. Prisoners made their own agency the force, affirming their power in coming together.

The demands of some prisoners include:

- “Immediate federal assistance”
- The release of “all inmates who have spent excessive time in Holman Prison”
- The abolishment of habitual felony offender laws, which mandate long prison sentences for repeat offenders
- Parole for all inmates who “fit the criteria to be back in society with their families”
- The implementation of “proper classes that will prepare inmates to be released back into society” in all Alabama prisons
- Monetary damages for “mental pain and physical abuse that inmates have already suffered”

Here are some other background details inspiring these recent actions that mainstream media may not report. Inmate to staff ratio at Holman is forty-nine to one. Medical neglect is rampant. There is no heat or air conditioning and have been amputations from diabetes. CO’s are told not to drink the tap water. The warden got shanked. Previously, guards weren’t entering the housing units. When inmates heard warden Davenport, known for brutality/inmate deaths, was coming to Holman, they were ready to fight. Things weren’t going back to how they were before. They thought he’d bring the stomp-down, but he didn’t. The theory was that he was making ADOC look bad so they put him there to kill time until retirement. Eventually, to the glee of some inmates, he showed his face. A guard made heavy use of a billy club to break up a fight and got stabbed. Inmates demanded the warden. He arrived, verbally disrespected them, and got shanked in retaliation for being a fool. Some were ecstatic, others terrified. This sentiment was described later, during a second riot, in an inmate phone interview. There was a standoff with armed officers after breaking windows and gaining access to another area. He told them that this riot was as spirited and violent as the last one and said to “expect casualties.”





## THE FREE ALABAMA MOVEMENT

In prison, resentment of the jailers is normal. It makes sense that with little oversight and much neglect, a rebellious culture would develop among inmates in Alabama. Out of this climate, the Free Alabama Movement (FAM) was born. FAM advocates prison reform, paid work in prison, and prisoner work strikes. “When the slave master had invested all that he owned into his next crop (prison factories), the slaves would wait until just before the harvest and rebel against the slave system by ‘going on strike’ and causing the crops to rot in the field. This tactic would completely ruin the slave master’s investment.” - *Let The Crops Rot In the Field* by FAM.

A work strike in Alabama could devastate its prison system, halting production of things necessary to the prisons functioning, cutting profit, and forcing it to pay outside workers. FAM frames itself as taking part in a freedom struggle. “While these crops were rotting in the field, the slave master would come down from the big house, make nice and beg the slaves to go back to work. But when that didn’t work, the slave master, just like the modern prison commissioners and wardens, would then result to threats and violence. But those determined for their freedom would resist and fight to the end.”

The conflict between appealing for concessions and struggling for freedom most likely comes from FAM being very open about who they collaborate with. A variety of people, inside and out, struggle alongside FAM regardless of disagreements. FAM’s work may actually contribute to a broad struggle for the freedom of prisoners. That being said, many people who work alongside FAM advocate outright rebellion and militant struggle against the state, moving beyond asking for longer chains.

# You are not alone.



## A TIMELINE OF REBELLION IN ALABAMA PRISONS

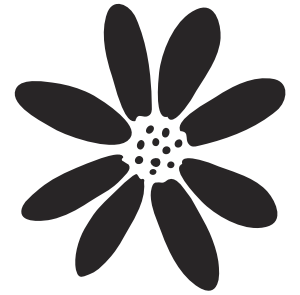
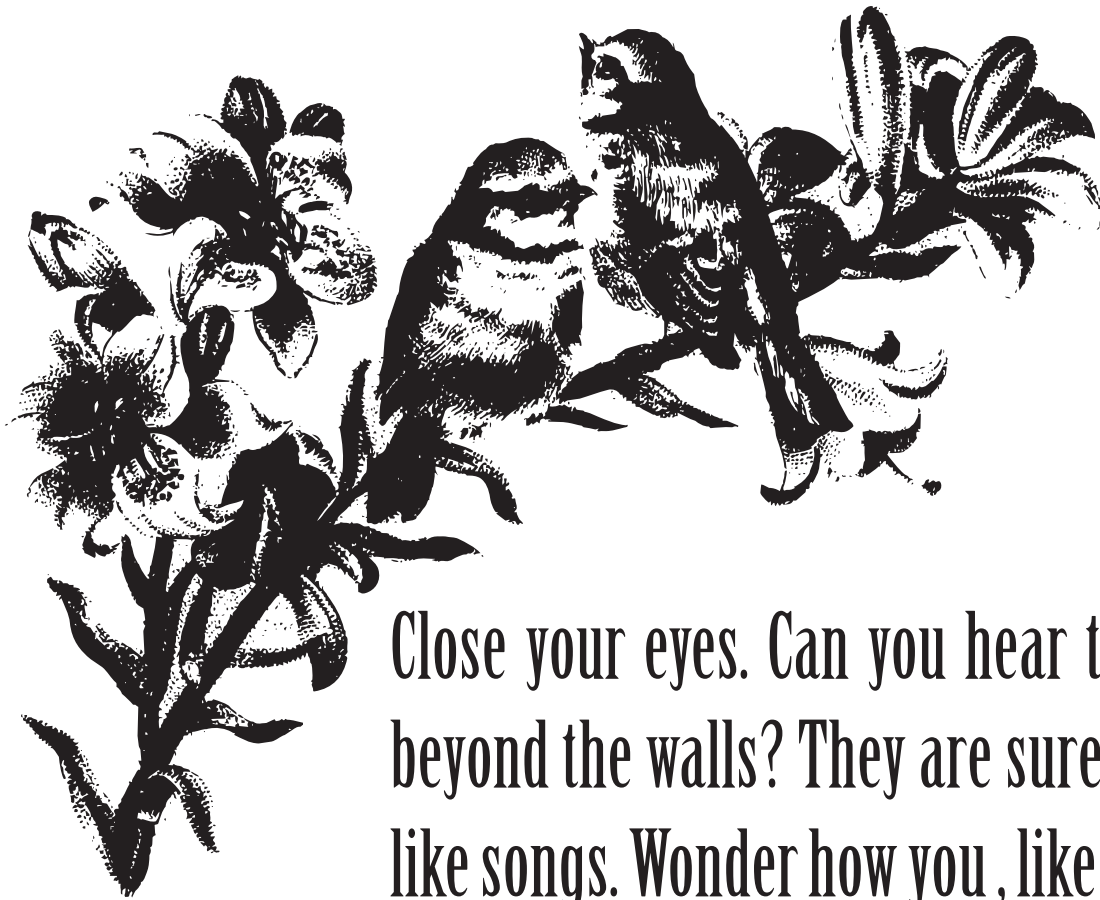
[*St. Clair*] Jan. 2014, inmate work strike – April 2014, inmate workstrike – Oct. 2015, guns/ammo discovered – Nov. 2015, guard stabbed by three inmates – June 2015, guard attacked – April 15, 2015, riot, one guard, fifteen inmates injured – Mar. 7, 2016, inmate stabbed guard [*Bibb*] Sept. 10 2012, 8 inmates refuse orders/attack guard in mess hall – Jul. 23, 2015, 56-year-old lifer escapes – Jul. 30, 2015, inmates takeover/trash B-dorm [*Donaldson*] Jul. 2009, inmate escapes - Sept. 2015, inmates take over dining hall [*Draper*] Jul. 2015, inmate escapes [*G.K. Fountain*] Aug. 2009, inmate escapes – Oct. 2010, inmate escapes – June 2015, guard stabbed – Nov. 2015, inmates riot [*Limestone*] July 2010, inmate escapes [*Staton*] Nov. 2014, inmate escapes – Nov. 2014, guard attacked [*Tutwiler*] Jan. 2015, ADOC commissioner resigns after federal investigation into sexual abuse [*Holman*] April 5 2011, inmates takeover A-wing, clash with CERT – Jan. 2014, inmate work strike – Sept. 5 2014, guard stabbed – Nov. 2014, 4 inmates attempt escape Mar. 11-12 2016, guard/warden stabbed, riot, inmate unit takeover – Mar. 14 2016, riot, inmate unit takeover

## ACTS OF SOLIDARITY

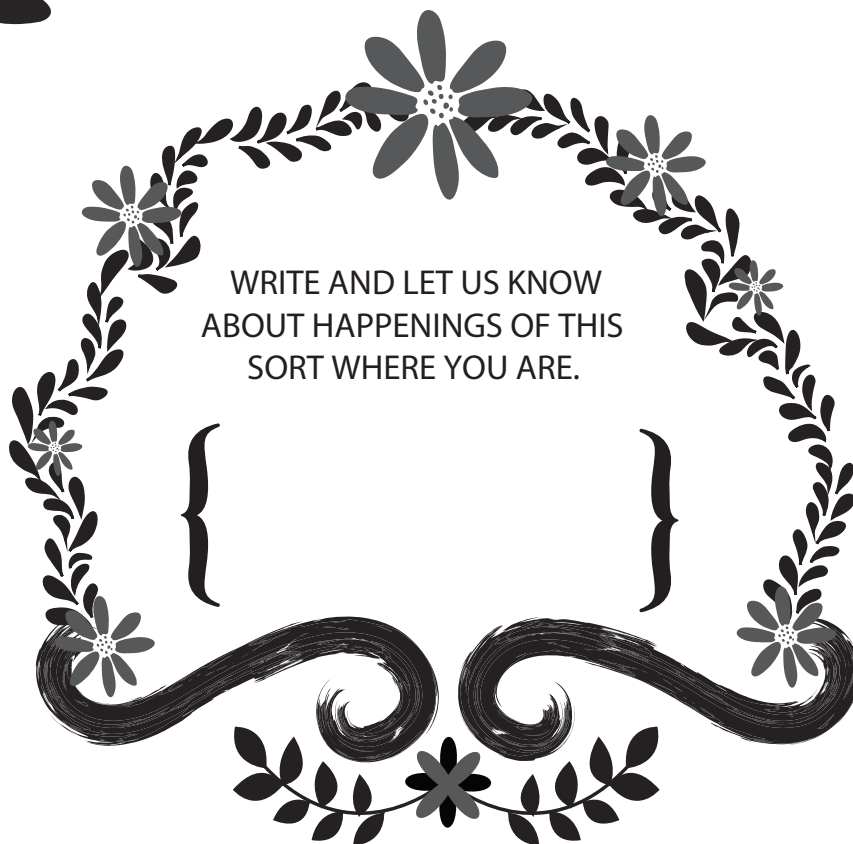
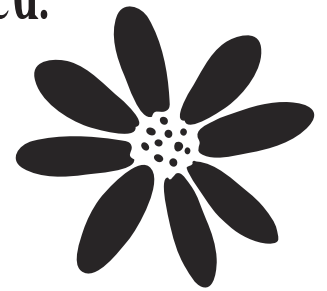
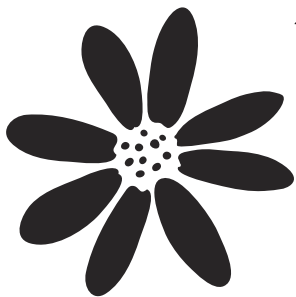
The Tucson ABC designed a solidarity poster. Atlanta, Philadelphia and St. Louis put up posters around the city. There was also a protest outside of Holman. A banner declaring ‘fire to the prisons’ was hung in Minneapolis, MN and flyers were left in the area about the uprising. On April 9th there is a protest planned by a wide variety of groups to also take place outside Holman.

- *New York Times, NY*





Close your eyes. Can you hear the birds chirping beyond the walls? They are surely singing spring-like songs. Wonder how you, like the birds, can collaborate with each other to make some noise that opens up possibility for the unexpected.



WRITE AND LET US KNOW  
ABOUT HAPPENINGS OF THIS  
SORT WHERE YOU ARE.