

MESSAGE FROM THE SMALL CAGE

KEITH SOANES[∞]

Keith Soanes recounts his experience of being indefinitely held in solitary confinement as punishment for his political organizing. He reflects on the purpose of the criminal punishment system within a capitalist, imperialist, patriarchal, white supremacist society, and on strategies for survival within that system and society. He concludes by describing the struggles of attempting to challenge his conviction pro se, emphasizing that, for incarcerated people with no money, genuine justice and/or freedom is out of reach.

Power and respect to all the people in the small cage and the big cage. I am in the small cage within the small cage within the small cage. It is called Close Management down here in Florida.¹

I've been in solitary confinement since June 23, 2020, after Martin Correctional Institution recommended that I be placed here based on claiming me as a threat—not only to Martin C.I., as I was told by the facility's assistant warden, but to the entire Florida Department of Corrections. It was alleged that I incited or organized a riot or disorder (pure calumny, no such riot or disorder occurred); that I managed a Facebook page connected to known radical groups; and that I made posts calling for prisoners to organize against “violence”—i.e., officer violence against handcuffed prisoners—and that “allude[d] that the only way true reform will come is in reaction to violence.”

On December 6, 2020, in solidarity with prisoners, a peaceful protest was held in the parking lot of Florida State Prison, where I am housed.² As a result of the protest, my visitation has been indefinitely suspended, and I was repeatedly continued on CM-1 status. First Amendment? Explain the First Amendment to the peaceful protesters who were arrested. Can we say authoritarian?

The Florida Department of Cruelty is literally planning to hold me on CM, incommunicado, either until my life sentence is overturned, causing my release from prison, or until I die in one of these cells—whichever comes first. All for simply

[∞] “I am a former Miami, Florida, street reactionary turned autodidactic revolutionary, prisoners’ rights organizer, and activist. I am currently serving a life sentence for robbery with a firearm, most of which time is spent focusing on attaining genuine self-rehabilitation and implementing essential self-criticism, made possibly only through essential knowledge of self-identity, purpose, and method. My passion lies in reading to learn as much history, law, and egalitarian politics as possible. I am also an aspiring cultural worker, political visual artist, hip-hop lyricist, poet and essayist, and a servant of the people.”

¹ Where relevant, *The Harbinger* has included citations to relevant media coverage or legal documents. Mr. Soanes’s own descriptions of his experiences do not include citations.

² See *In Honor of Karen Smith, in Solidarity with Keith Soanes and All Those Incarcerated*, FL. PRISONER SOLIDARITY (Dec. 18, 2020), <https://www.flprisonersolidarity.org/2020/12/18/in-honor-of-karen-smith-in-solidarity-with-keith-soanes-and-all-those-incarcerated/> [https://perma.cc/8U2G-6MLK].

picking up the pen instead of the shank, or not indulging in other reactionary habits or behaviors. For becoming politicized, I am in trouble, a doomed man. If you check out some of my reports and work at *Prison Censorship*, *Florida Prisoner Solidarity*, and *San Francisco Bay View*, you will see why.

Please understand, I am in prison; like everyone else, I know I've committed crime(s). But what kind of justice is being pursued if the state is fixed only to go beyond court-ordered separation from society to focus solely on inflicting torture, rather than instilling genuine correction or rehabilitation? What is the purpose of prison if it is not bringing its captives any kind of genuine self-evaluation? It is modern-day Jim Crow, a lie, that's all it is; pure anti-egalitarian oppression.

And our main problem as oppressed people (in the small cage and the big cage) is that we've been conditioned into believing in the system's miseducation. We are humans whose humanity is being deprived. The Capitalist Imperialist Patriarchal White Supremacist ("CIPWS") miseducation system has a subtle way of keeping society from discovering and uniting with its own humanist qualities. Instead, we are being subliminally made into competitors against each other, aspiring only to CIPWS ideals, interests, and agendas.

In *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Dr. Carter G. Woodson asserted a critical truth: "every man has two educations: 'that which is given to him, and the other that which he gives himself.'"³ The CIPWS miseducation we are given is designed to turn us against our cooperative and collective interests. By the time we graduate, we are mostly misanthropes, unconsciously stuck in constant competitive survival mode. We are made anti-egalitarian, because an egalitarian society is a humanist one, based on stripping us of our CIPWS aspirations, interests, and tendencies.

We keep waiting to be humanized by the very same system that has dehumanized and continues to dehumanize us. We fail to realize that the state cannot humanize us because it has not, cannot, and will not humanize itself. Thus, through continuous observation, I've come to the realization that I must rehabilitate myself. It is up to us to discover and unite with our indwelling intelligence and humanity, and to learn and practice essential self-criticism. An educated public is a threat to the state.

Essential self-criticism is considered dangerous to the state because it inspires prisoners into looking not just at the crime(s) we have committed, but to look deeper. It makes us holistically question why, or what, makes us commit the immoralities that come to be deemed criminal. Essential self-criticism pushes us into realizing the truth: that we are prisoners, but we are not the real criminals; many of us are in prison only or mostly because we are too poor and/or miseducated to defend ourselves against the state. The actions that land most of us in prison are only or mostly economically desperate and/or miseducated responses and reactions to conditions brought on by poverty: a poverty that is created and perpetuated by the plutocrat politicians and capitalists—the real criminals—and their policies.

Essential-self-criticism helps us realize that we must no longer blame the crabs in the bucket; we must blame the plutocrat policymakers, who create the bucket and put in the crabs, with the miseducated feeling that there is no way to the light at the

³ CARTER G. WOODSON, THE MIS-EDUCATION OF THE NEGRO 126 (2006).

top unless we climb up each other's backs and heads. We live in a CIPWS society and world, in which it would be a bad investment for the plutocrats to spend \$10 million or more building each plantation (institution or prison), then turn around and genuinely rehabilitate prisoners into not recidivating. Genuine rehabilitation and a real war on poverty would tremendously decrease crime, but crime is a job-creating industry: it creates and maintains jobs for a state-favored lower-class—not just correctional officers, but the entire so-called criminal justice system—who become the state loyalists following the carrot on the stick, keeping the machine alive and functioning.

Once citizens and/or prisoners realize this reality and begin applying it, they automatically become viewed as enemies of the system, un-Amerikklan. And this is where I'm at: this realization and application is what landed me on CM, for life, with visitation indefinitely suspended. I'm here because I figured it out, and for helping others do the same, for putting the people up on game.

On the flip side, I am also still challenging my criminal situation. I was resentenced to life (for a 2006 robbery with a firearm) pursuant to the Prison Releasee Reoffender ("PRR") law.⁴ Allow me to demonstrate one manner in which the CIPWS works, resulting in another aspect of the war against the poor. In 2019, I received a letter from an attorney stating that he had been looking into my case and found that the PRR had been ruled unconstitutional,⁵ that I do not qualify for the PRR, and that he was willing to take my case for a fee—money I don't have. So, no money, no freedom.

At the same time, I have been doing my own legal research and found that the charging document/information in the burglary charge—used as the predicate offense in resentencing me to life pursuant to the PRR—is fundamentally defective, meaning I was never supposed to be charged with burglary, much less convicted. Even though the burglary sentence is now completed, this issue could be attacked, being that, as a prior conviction, it was used to enhance the sentence I am currently serving.⁶

With that said, a friend and I prepared a 3.850/habeas corpus motion.⁷ With the motion complete, I contacted that very same lawyer, sending him a copy of the motion, and asking him if he would adopt it, and at what price? He responded, stating flatly that he would not adopt my 3.850 motion. However, he enclosed a retainer contract, seeking \$15,000—\$10,000 upfront—to put together a 3.800(a) motion⁸ attacking the PRR, which he claims is unconstitutional, and mentioned that I'd have

⁴ FLA. STAT. § 775.082(9)(a)(1).

⁵ But see, e.g., *State v. Cotton*, 769 So. 2d 345, 354 (Fla. 2000) (holding sentencing scheme contemplated in PRR does not violate separation of powers principles).

⁶ See *McArthur v. State*, 597 So. 2d 406, 407 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1992) (citing FL. R. CRIM. P. 3.850 and noting that "a prisoner seeking post-conviction relief need not be in custody under the sentence attacked, 'provided he contends "the sentence he is serving was enhanced by the conviction he seeks to have set aside'"'" (quoting *Wall v. State*, 525 So. 2d 486, 487 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1988)).

⁷ See FL. R. CRIM. P. 3.850 (describing requirements for a motion to vacate, set aside, or correct a sentence).

⁸ See FL. R. CRIM. P. 3.800 (describing motions for correcting a sentence).

to pay him more money to represent me in court if the appeal were granted. So now you see: no money, no relief, no freedom.

In the meantime, I'm stuck with the 3.850 motion for post-conviction relief. The problem is the fact that pro se prisoners are not respected in appellate court. Any motion I submit pro se will only get rubber-stamped "DENIED" without any objective consideration or opinion, no matter how meritorious. It's the court's way of saying, "You've been buried alive."