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## **A Dialogue on Isolation, Race, and Justice**

Jason Goudlock and William Nichols

**Jason Goudlock, 41, an African American inmate held in Ohio's Ross Correctional Institution, is the author of the prison novel *Brother of the Struggle* (2014). William Nichols, 78, is a retired professor and writer.**

**Nichols:** When you first wrote to me in June of 2008, you were an inmate at the Ohio State Penitentiary, the state's "supermax," where you lived in isolation. You had read an essay of mine, "Contemplating Torture." There is irony in how we came to know each other because my essay attacked the use of isolation, and sometimes you have reluctantly embraced it. When the Bush administration chose to "define cruelty down," in order to justify torture after September 11, 2001, I wrote, we had already begun "to accept torture as just" by building prisons like the one holding you. I said the French writers Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont, who studied our prison system long ago, told us in 1833 all we needed to know about the power of isolation as a form of torture: "absolute solitude, if nothing interrupt it, is beyond the strength of man; it destroys the criminal without intermission and without pity; it does not reform, it kills."

You began to experience enforced isolation when you were twelve years old, and you've known it, off and on, for many years since then. When you finally earned your way out of isolation in the "supermax" and into the general population, you were moved around from prison to prison in Ohio, and you sometimes have concluded the only way you can hold onto your sanity and integrity while you work for your freedom is to remain in "the hole." This conclusion led us to disagree, and here's what you said in November of 2015.

**Goudlock:** I realize that to a person on the outside it must make no sense at all for a prisoner to choose isolation, as opposed to doing their time in the general population. But I'm an old-law prisoner who has served nearly 22 years, which means I was sentenced under Ohio's pre-July 1, 1996, indefinite set of guidelines, and I have to go before the Ohio Parole Board periodically to have my time in prison determined. If a new-law prisoner picks a fight with me, his sentence will be unchanged, but my time of incarceration will be increased. If I

call attention to corruption in the criminal justice system, as I have, my time will be increased, as it was *for five years* in 2014. I have come to believe the only way I can survive my time in prison is if I'm isolated from the general population.

If I were still the mis-educated 18-year-old I was when I came to prison, I might fit in with the general prison population. My imprisoned peers probably don't want to hear this, but many of them spend most of their time gang fighting or scheming on ways to steal someone's commissary items or gossiping or talking about which female officers look the best. I've become a writer, and I'm trying to absorb as much knowledge as I can from my reading, which really began the first time I was put in isolation. Trying to study and write in a general population cell makes as much sense as a student trying to study for an exam at a heavy-metal concert instead of in a library. Solitary confinement is no library, but it is the lesser of two evils. It is a stressful, often depressing, environment, but I'd rather be stressed and depressed and able to function than unable to function at all.

**Nichols:** I worry about choosing isolation. Besides the psychological stress, you have to break a rule to get there even if it's only refusing to return to your cell. And no doubt the Parole Board uses your unwillingness to live in the general population as evidence that you're not ready to live outside. But I'm a writer who has sometimes chosen to work in the quiet of our basement next to our furnace, and sometimes outside in our car. So I find your case for solitude convincing even though I disagree with it as a strategy for gaining your freedom.

Another risk you take is calling out the criminal justice system for racial prejudice. One of your most powerful essays at [FreeJasonGoudlock.org](http://FreeJasonGoudlock.org), your website, is titled "Black Lives Matter: ODRC and Attorney General Michael DeWine Swindle An Inmate." You say our system "issues disproportionate punishment to poor people of color." It's hard to think of anything you could say that would raise more hackles. The most powerful man in our country, President Barack Obama, has found it difficult to talk about that issue without getting criticized for "playing the race card." We don't like to talk openly about race in our country, as reactions to the Black Lives Matter movement are also revealing. When you raise this issue, you probably provoke more punishment.

**Goudlock:** I agree that the Parole Board uses my unwillingness to live among the general population as so-called "evidence" that I'm not suitable to live in society. But the Parole Board knows full well that it's nearly impossible for me, as an old-law prisoner, to live among the bedlam of the general population. They are well aware of the dangerous environment. But the Parole Board doesn't care about the

minefield-like obstacle course they want me to navigate in the interest of trying to receive parole. And, furthermore, I've tried numerous times to live among the general population, only to have my efforts derailed. So I refuse to keep foolishly putting my life in danger for the sake of trying to reach a destination the Parole Board won't allow me to reach. The traditional thinking makes no sense--that a prisoner will be unable to live in society if they can't live as a model prisoner in the midst of a hostile prison environment. In society a person is not forced to live every day in the company of convicted criminals. In society a person can choose to avoid trouble by distancing himself from it. But a prisoner doesn't have this luxury—that is, unless he chooses to self-isolate himself, as I have done.

As for speaking out against Ohio's racist criminal justice system, I don't fear being retaliated against by the system after being given a preposterous 60-month sentence continuance at my last Parole Board hearing, in 2014. I realize my essay "Black Lives Matter: ODRC and Ohio Attorney General Michael DeWine Swindle an Inmate" most likely upset some people. But when the people in power ignore blatant acts of prisoner abuse committed by white correction officers against black prisoners, as the Attorney General and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections did after I was assaulted and framed by six white correction officers, then their failure to uphold justice should be exposed. How can a broken criminal justice system ever be fixed if people are unwilling to voice the truth? And besides, when it comes to fighting for justice as an incarcerated black man or woman, we must be fearless and fierce because the long history of racism in the United States reveals that the deck is stacked against us. Our country still has a very, very long way to go before it actually becomes the country of "liberty and justice for all."

**Nichols:** After we began working on this dialogue, Ta-Nehisi Coates published "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration" in *The Atlantic* (October 2015), a powerful essay that encourages me to ask you something I've wondered about for quite a while. But first I want to quote a statement from Richard Braceful, a middle-aged African American in Detroit who served several years in Michigan prisons. He tells Coates about having to choose between "locking up"—that is, choosing isolation--or fighting when he was in prison. He adds this: "And if you lock up, everybody know you lock up. When you come back out, you gonna have a bigger problem." Braceful describes an authentic dilemma for someone in your position, a prisoner who gets his sentence extended when he fights.

What I've wanted to ask you about is your understanding of how your incarceration has influenced your family. The context for my question is suggested by Coates' essay. How far Patrick Moynihan was from blaming the black family for poverty and crime in black

communities is evident in Coates' summary of Moynihan's report on black families: "Running against the tide of optimism around civil rights, 'The Negro Family' argued that the federal government was underestimating the damage done to black families by 'three centuries of sometimes unimaginable treatment' as well as a 'racist virus in the American blood stream,' which would continue to plague blacks in the future." Coates goes on to make the case that mass incarceration has done great damage to black families and black communities, and he claims even those families that have stayed strong are seldom strong enough to keep all their members out of prison. I'm asking if your experience suggests the black family is doomed as long as we have mass incarceration.

**Goudlock:** From the beginning of slavery until the present, the black family has been under attack by greed-driven racist people of power. First, slave traders destroyed black families. During Reconstruction the enactment of racist laws known as Black Codes destroyed black families. And today the racist criminal justice system of the United States continues to destroy black families. This destruction is a key to keeping the lucrative business of mass incarceration thriving.

The various people who profit from mass incarceration will never admit this publicly, but they don't want the families of their golden goose black convicts to prosper and be undivided. Strong black families produce fewer black convicts to provide the next generation of financial windfalls for the prison-industrial complex. This is why racist laws like those making disparate sentences for using or dealing crack and powder cocaine were enacted.

I grew up in and out of group homes and foster care so my relationship with my family was shallow. I've never seen a picture of my father. My mother, who grew up in foster care and was once incarcerated as an adult, died from a drug overdose toward the beginning of my incarceration. Her death was the beginning of the end of our family ties. I was not allowed to attend her funeral, and afterwards nobody came to visit me for ten years. I've made attempts to reconcile with them, asking them, for example, to call the Ohio State Highway Patrol to file a complaint when a correction officer assaulted me. One day I hope to be able to bridge the divides in our family and bury the past. So to answer your question, my experience tells me the black family is dangerously close to being broken beyond repair, but it's not yet doomed.

**Nichols:** Since we began our dialogue, you and I have both read Shaka Senghor's memoir *Writing My Wrongs: Life, Death, and Redemption in an American Prison*. Senghor's account of his life includes parallels with your life, as well as important differences. He got caught up in dealing drugs and in violent street life, and he went into prison in Michigan

when he was about the same age as you were when you entered prison in Ohio. Like you he seems to have experienced what prison professionals call “rehabilitation” while he was in isolation, where many people are damaged or destroyed.

An important difference between your story and Senghor’s seems to be your contrasting takes on rehabilitation. You’ve said you have no faith in the criminal justice system’s claims to foster rehabilitation. “I’m intelligent enough,” you write, “to recognize the underlying agendas of the rehabilitation pretenders who earn a handsome income off their car salesman-like tactics of persuading people to drink the rehabilitation Kool-Aid.” You add: “I do, however, believe my incarceration accelerated the process of my becoming the person I am today,” and you say you are now able to empathize with “the impoverished people of the world.”

Senghor’s “powerful transformation” came during his longest period of isolation, when he says he “broke down in front of the mirror, forgiving everyone I had held anger for, all of those years.” After that he started to keep a journal and write letters, and he participated in classes and in the Assaultive Offender Program (AOP) offered by the Michigan Department of Corrections. Senghor doesn’t make claims for the effectiveness of the prison system’s rehabilitation programs, but he does say his participation in the AOP program was necessary to convince the parole board he could be safely freed.

You seem to have emphasized independence more than Senghor as a way of understanding your own rehabilitation. The closest you’ve come to acknowledging a mentor is in writing about the influence of Siddique Abdullah Hasan, the African-American imam who has been sentenced to death for his participation in the 1993 prison uprising at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility. Why have you so emphatically rejected the Ohio prison system’s rehabilitation programs?

**Goudlock:** My current position of abstaining from participating in any so-called rehabilitation programs is based on my experiences of going before the Ohio Parole Board. In 2007, after having served nearly 14 years of my six to 25-year sentence, I went before the Board for the first time. At the conclusion of my hearing, the Board noted on my Parole Board Decision sheet that my institution programming had been "good" and I had "programmed well." Nevertheless, due to my institution record of misconduct, I was given a 36-month sentence continuance. Three years later, in 2010, when I went before the Board for the second time, they noted I had "completed relevant programming." The Board also noted that my "conduct [had] much improved since my first hearing" and that I had demonstrated "insight into [my] offenses of conviction." As a result, I was given a shorter continuance of 14 months, and Board member Kathleen Kovach told me if I stayed out of trouble until my next hearing, she would

recommend that I be released when I returned.

At my third hearing, in 2011, I returned without having committed any rule infractions. True to her word, Board member Kathleen Kovach, along with one of her colleagues, recommended that I be granted a parole. At this time, the record of my institution program participation was not an issue. But in spite of the Kovach hearing panel's release recommendation, the Board's oversight committee issued me an increased sentence continuation of 15 months.

The following year when I went to my fourth release consideration hearing, I had lowered my Security Level classification from a Security Level 4 to a Security Level 3. In spite of that evidence of improvement, I was again issued an increased sentence continuance, this time, for 24 months. That I was given this unwarranted continuance didn't surprise me because the hearing panel that issued this "flop" was officiated by a former warden, Marc Houk, whose administration in 2006 had been caught red-handed trying to frame me for vandalizing a prison service elevator. The Ohio State Highway Patrol later discovered I was not responsible for damaging the elevator, which had been used to transport a customized motorcycle allegedly owned by Warden Houk. (In August of 2006, Ohio State Highway Patrol Trooper David H. Simpson conducted the criminal investigation. See Case No. 06-000028-0400.)

During my fourth hearing, Houk and his colleague falsely claimed my program participation record was limited. They used that as a pretext to issue me another increased sentence continuance. Prior to attending my fourth release consideration hearing, I had concluded that the completion of prison rehabilitation programs meant absolutely nothing to the Parole Board. After attending my fourth hearing I was certain they don't matter although the Board would never admit to this. It would be akin to a corrupt elected official admitting to being corrupt.

As you know, two years later, in 2014, at my fifth release consideration hearing, when I was still classified as Security Level 3 prisoner, I was given an unjust sentence continuation of 60 months! If the Board truly cared about justice, I would be a free man now, on my way to becoming, like Shaka Senghor, a success story of redemption. But instead of the Board doing what they surely know is the right thing, they choose to continue psychologically torturing me and putting my physical survival in jeopardy. Since the recommendation that I be released in 2010, I've been physically assaulted by two wannabe gang members, and, in a single incident, assaulted and framed by six prison guards. The Ohio Parole Board, the Director of the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, and various state elected officials all know about this egregious injustice, but they don't care. If I was being mistreated and was,

perhaps, a German Shepherd, then there might be a public call for justice. But because I'm an African-American male inside of the Ohio criminal justice system, its officials refuse to bite the hand that feeds them. And as long as people continue to ignore injustice, there will never be true justice for prisoners.

The only way a criminal justice system is going to ever work is if the people who control the system want it to work. In Michigan, the criminal justice system--to an extent--worked for Shaka Senghor because the authorities allowed it to work. When the parole board released Senghor, they acknowledged his undeniably positive strides, talent, and redeeming qualities. They didn't ignore the fact that he had been rehabilitated and had completed rehabilitation programs, which is what Ohio's parole board has done to me and many other old-law prisoners.

**Nichols:** Even though you've acknowledged the importance of Hasan in your own development, you haven't claimed to be a Muslim. My impression is that you don't think of yourself as a religious person, certainly not a Christian. During Senghor's years in prison, he became a leader in the Melanic Islamic Palace of the Rising Sun, one of the four dominant Islamic groups he found in Michigan prisons. He was drawn to the Melanics, he writes, because they "profess a militant Afrocentric ideology."

One of the words in Senghor's subtitle, *Life, Death, and Redemption in an American Prison* might bother you. I'm thinking of "redemption." Its religious meaning is deliverance from sin or atonement for guilt, and it can suggest a sudden transformation, a bit like instantaneous salvation, although it doesn't always mean a change that happens so quickly. It seems to me Senghor's participation in the Melanics was like Malcolm X's early relationship with the Nation of Islam. That is, he became part of a community and developed leadership skills that have been important in the years since Senghor left prison in 2010. Building inclusive and just communities seems a crucial role of organized religions at their best. If a religious community doesn't work for you, do you feel you've been able to feel part of any community since you've been in prison?

**Goudlock:** I'm an agnostic person and I don't have any ties to any religion or spiritual beliefs. At one point in time, at the very beginning of my incarceration, I did give some thought to the possibility of joining the Nation Of Islam. Just as Shaka Senghor had been intrigued by the militant Afrocentric ideology of the Melanics, I was intrigued by the militant and pristine image that the members of the Nation Of Islam conveyed. I soon realized, however, that the NOI teachings were not for me. During my incarceration I haven't been part of any community. With the exception of the few religious communities that exist within

Ohio's prison system, the rest of them are all rooted in gang culture, which is a culture that I've never been a part of at any time in my life.

Although I'm not part of any community now, I do intend, once I'm released, to become affiliated with an organization or community that practices the core self-empowering philosophies of the late statesman Marcus Garvey. I don't believe in all of Garvey's beliefs, but his calling for impoverished people of color to collectively become economically self-sufficient through the practice of entrepreneurship is something that greatly resonates with me, so much so that one of my long term goals is to finance a motion picture about his remarkable life, which is a story that I believe would inspire people all over the world.

**Nichols:** One crucial similarity between your story and Senghor's is your growing interest in Black history. Senghor tells of a time in 1999 when he was beginning to gain confidence: "I could feel myself becoming a leader, a deep thinker, and a man of self-control—the kind of man that my reading of African history has inspired me to become." He describes a speech he gave at the Muskegon Correctional Facility for a Melanic Brotherhood Day of Remembrance in 1999, when he talked about the bravery of Nat Turner in leading the famous slave rebellion. Senghor reminded his listeners "that his greatest sacrifice was risking his life to learn how to read."

You've said the first time you were put in isolation, not long after you first went to prison, older men in isolation tried to get you to quiet down and stop causing trouble by giving you material to read, including *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881). The ex-slave's autobiography influenced you when you began writing your own life story a few years later, and your manuscript was lost or stolen when you were again put in isolation. In *Brother of the Struggle* (2014), your novel, where your protagonist is named Malcolm and on [FreeJasonGoudlock.org](http://FreeJasonGoudlock.org), your website, the influence of your reading about the African American past is evident in your references to Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey. And you mention above your dream of financing a film about Garvey.

How would you describe the importance of Black history in your own development?

**Goudlock:** Throughout the course of my incarceration, learning about Black history has helped me become the productive and courageous person that I am today. Prior to learning about the history of Black men and women, such as Assata Shakur, Elaine Brown, Frederick Douglass, Malcolm X, Huey P. Newton, and Marcus Garvey, I never knew there were Black leaders who were as courageous and uncompromising as they were in their fight for justice. Through them, I was able to realize that many of the rebellious-against-injustice views and principles I harbored were not an anomaly. When I learned the story of Frederick

Douglass physically resisting a whipping by a brutal overseer and the story of statesman Marcus Garvey's bold and remarkable global organizational efforts to unite all Blacks in the interest of eradicating a longstanding global system of socio-economic oppression--their stories gave me an affirming sense of assurance that allowed me to know with certainty that my frowned-upon-by-the-criminal-justice-system stance against injustice wasn't wrong.

Right now, there are countless people within Ohio's criminal justice system--that is, prison employees, parole board members, and even some inmates--who are repulsed by the fact that I have the audacity to

follow in the footsteps of iconic Black leaders and demand the justice I'm entitled to. Hopefully, though, one day my refusal to capitulate to being steamrolled by Ohio's broken Twilight Zone-like criminal justice system will lead to my freedom and some kind of moral awakening for the string-pullers in the system who publicly profess to be torch-bearers for justice while knowingly engaging in acts of corruption and deceit.

**Nichols:** The title of Senghor's memoir and his emphasis on the importance of Nat Turner's risking his life by learning how to read suggest how important the written word became in his life. And even though his title is *Writing My Wrongs*, it seems clear he has devoted his life and his writing to righting wrongs that are not his alone. He is committed, for one thing, to #cut50, a bipartisan effort to cut the U.S. prison population in half by 2025, and he speaks out often about our criminal justice system's overuse of isolation as a form of punishment.

You too have written at length about wrongs in Ohio's criminal justice system, but you haven't called attention in quite the same way to the importance of writing in your own development, except: you've kept on writing for more than ten years. When I think of you and your writing—and that's really been the focus of our work together for more than eight years—I think of something E.M. Forster is often said to have written: "How do I know what I think until I see what I've said?" That notion of writing as a form of discovery might seem silly at first glance. How can you write about something if you don't already know it? But the main kind of writing you do at FreeJasonGoudlock.org, the essay, can mean a tentative attempt. And I know for a fact that the best essays I've written lead me to questions and conclusions I didn't have in mind when I began writing.

When you wrote to me in 2008, you were working on a novel, but you were seeking advice concerning the possibility of making a documentary film about the challenges you might face when you get out of prison. I know you're drawn to film and the social media as ways to communicate with people who might not take the time to read an

essay or a book. But I wonder what you think about how your own writing has influenced you in becoming the person you are today.

**Goudlock:** Writing has solidified my evolution from being an impatient and irrational teen, into becoming a goal-oriented, thoughtful, and productive man. Twenty years ago, I would never have thought I might one day become a published writer of any sort, except maybe rap music. Rap songs have always been relatively easy for me to write, but I didn't have the discipline or focus to do anything productive back then. What eventually led me to venture down a path of productivity was my desire to improve my horrendous financial situation. In 1999, after my mother died--and my surrogate grandparents had died in 1995 and 1998--I had no moral or financial support from anyone. After some serious brainstorming, I decided to try writing an autobiography to improve my financial situation.

My thinking was if Frederick Douglass could write a book during a time when Blacks could get killed for reading and writing, then surely I could write one during a time that was less hostile. When I began writing my would-be autobiography, I probably balled-up the first few pages at least ten times, and I nearly gave up on the project. But the burning desire to improve my financial situation kept me going, and every time I finished writing on each yellow notebook page, which contained two scaled-down hand-written lines in between every single-spaced line of the page--I felt a sense of triumph over the bleakness of my incarceration. In my mind, each page I completed was moving me an inch closer to getting out of prison, because my thinking was that I was going to be able to use the proceeds from my autobiography to hire a top-notch attorney who could get me out of prison on some kind of legal loophole.

Soon afterwards, however, my writing came to an abrupt ending after I was released from the hole, where I'd been put for fighting, and I discovered that my stored property, which included the manuscript, had been lost. After losing my manuscript, I was so upset that I gave up on trying to write a book. But several years later, after being moved into the supermaximum-security wing of Ohio State Penitentiary, and after meeting death row prisoner Siddique A. Hasan, I became inspired by his daily pearls of wisdom and his ability to persevere in his situation of grave injustice, and I began a second attempt at writing a book. This was my novel, later titled *Brother of the Struggle*.

As you are aware, while I was working on my novel, I went through numerous trials-and-tribulations, dealing with disrespectful prisoners and corrupt prison employees. But the self-confidence that I acquired early on from my first attempt to write a book in 1999, gave me the later self-confidence to know I could complete the writing of my novel, or any other writing project.

After I finished writing *Brother of the Struggle*, in the

complementary essay that I wrote, titled "Penning a Novel Behind Bars as a Novice," I stated: "I feel like rejoicing and yelling at the top of my lungs

like [NBA superstar] Kevin Garnett every time I think of how I was able to finish writing *Brother of the Struggle*." After winning his first NBA championship, in one of the most memorable moments in sports history, Garnett yelled, "ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE!" His emotional yell exemplifies and mirrors the resilient refuse-to-quit mentality I was able to refine throughout my tumultuous evolution in becoming a writer.

**Nichols:** In January of 2016, well after we began work on this dialogue, you decided to leave the "hole" and return to the general population as the prison authorities had long been urging you to do. Here's how you explained your decision on your blog at [FreeJasonGoudlock.org](http://FreeJasonGoudlock.org): "After doing a lot of thinking, I came to the conclusion that I could more efficiently network with people if I was in general population, mainly because I could use my mini-tablet to communicate."

Your decision probably had a lot to do with your transfer to Ross Correctional Institution in Chillicothe, Ohio, on December 23, 2015. And that transfer was probably a result of your protest at Toledo Correctional Institution when you were moved out of isolation against your will. I'd like to know more of the backstory in your decision to return to the general population.

**Goudlock:** After vowing not to return to the general prison population when I was at Toledo Correctional Institution, I was suddenly transferred to the Ross Correctional Institution. Upon my arrival, my intention was to continue refusing to accept being housed in general population. After being given an unwarranted and ridiculous 60-month sentence continuation at my 2014 parole board hearing, I grew extremely bitter about the psychological games the Ohio Parole Board was playing with me. Mentally, I was exhausted, and I made up my mind I would not allow the Parole Board, or the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, to toy with my life by making me—for 60 more months--live among a hostile general prison population that's composed of a large majority-class of new-law prisoners, who, nearly all, don't have to go before the Parole Board to have the length of their imprisonment determined. What changed my position was the fact that filmmaker Sam Crow expressed interest in making a documentary about my situation of injustice, and I became fearful that I might be about to pass over an opportunity to be interviewed for the film that might lead to my being freed. So, taking everything into consideration, I came to the conclusion that, at that particular time, it would be unwise for me to continue to refuse to be housed in the general prison population, which would have prevented me from being able to be interviewed through the Skype-like JPay video system.

**Nichols:** Your transfer to Ross Correctional Institution, where you agreed to leave the “hole” in order to begin work on a documentary film, followed an act of civil disobedience at the Toledo Correctional Institution. My understanding of civil disobedience is that a person disobeys a law when obedience would lead the person to participate in an injustice. I wonder if you see your action in Toledo in those terms? One possible difference is that someone who refused to pay a tax for war or to serve in the military or to move to the back of the bus was risking imprisonment. Because you were already imprisoned, you risked something else, and you can probably explain that difference better than I. How would you describe the thinking that led to your action in Toledo? And how would you describe the action itself? Did this chapter in the story of your incarceration influence your decision to return to the general population?

**Goudlock:** I definitely felt that returning to Toledo's general population would be wrong for me, and that, yes, if I did, I would be participating in a detrimental act of injustice. And although my act of civil disobedience didn't place me in jeopardy of being imprisoned, it has put me at risk of having the Ohio Parole Board cite the incident as a reason to continue my incarceration at my next release consideration hearing in 2019.<sup>1</sup> But, if this happens, continuation will be unjustifiable because I should have been released at my previous two release consideration hearings, in 2014 and 2012.

As for the frame of mind that I was in prior to engaging in civil disobedience, my mindset was that I had to, some kind of way, make it known to the heads of Ohio's criminal justice system that I was no longer going to accept being discriminated against, or being over-incarcerated. At the time in which I staged my protest, I had served a total of approximately 22 years. It wasn't a difficult decision to decide to put my foot down and stand up for myself. And although I was fully aware that my protest would give the Parole Board more ammunition to use against me, I felt that I really didn't have anything to lose by staging my protest. The majority of the members of Ohio's Parole Board are corrupt. So it's not as if I'm going to be given a fair and meaningful

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<sup>1</sup>In 2014, upon being given a controversial five-year sentence continuance at his fifth Ohio Parole Board release consideration hearing, I vowed to refuse to attend my scheduled hearing in 2019.

hearing anyway because the Parole Board doesn't care anything about furthering the interest of justice on the behalf of Jason Goudlock. If they did, they wouldn't be ignoring the well-documented incidents of injustice that I've been subjected to as an old-law prisoner over the course of my incarceration.<sup>2</sup> Any person with common sense has to agree that if a parole board ignores undeniable evidence an inmate was assaulted and framed, as I have been by various prison employees, the parole board in question is one that operates without any integrity whatsoever. Overall, I feel my act of civil disobedience was a righteous and sensible thing to do.

Although I failed to produce the results I was seeking, I don't regret standing up for myself.

The protest in Toledo didn't really influence my decision to return to the general population at Ross Correctional Institution. Shortly after I was transferred from Toledo to Ross, after a taking a couple of weeks to reevaluate my situation, I made the decision to return to general population so I could participate in the making of a documentary film by award-winning filmmaker Samuel Crow, to publicize my predicament, as well as the longstanding old-law sentencing disparity that was created on July 1, 1996, which is when Ohio enacted its non-retroactive new-law sentencing guidelines. But, if it weren't for the golden opportunity to participate in the production of the documentary film, I almost most certainly wouldn't have returned to general

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<sup>2</sup>In 2006, at the Ohio State Penitentiary, several prison employees, including Warden Marc Houk, attempted to frame me for allegedly vandalizing a service elevator. An investigation conducted by Ohio State Highway Patrolman David H. Simpson, however, vindicated me. (See OSHP Incident Number 06-000028-0400.) The investigation led to the discovery that a motorcycle, allegedly owned by Warden Houk, was stuck inside of the inoperable elevator. Mark Houk left the Ohio State Penitentiary and is currently a member of the Ohio Parole Board. In 2012, he sat on the parole board hearing panel that issued a 24-month sentence continuance, miscalculating the time I had been incarcerated.

In 2013, while being housed at Mansfield Correctional Institution, I was assaulted and subsequently framed by several correction officers, who alleged that they had to use physical force against me, accusing me of allegedly "kicking his cell door open." A vindicating comment made by the Chair of the Mansfield Correctional Institution's Rules Infraction Board--"The [surveillance] video clearly shows that Goudlock did not kick his door open"--proved that the officers falsified their reports. The actual comment, which was made during my 2013 Rules Infraction Board hearing, can be heard by going to [FreeJasonGoudlock.org](http://FreeJasonGoudlock.org).

population.

**Nichols:** How would you describe your act of civil disobedience in Toledo?

GOUDLOCK: My act of civil disobedience in Toledo was daring and slightly dangerous. Prior to committing the act, I had to make a harness from the outer plastic cover on my mattress and a bed sheet, and I made a pair of makeshift goggles from a Ziploc bag. To make sure the harness wouldn't look too bulky on me when I was let out of my cell the following day, I wrapped it around my waist underneath my clothes.

The following day I was let out of my cell to eat in the dayroom area of my cellblock, and when I saw the door to my cellblock was open, I sprinted out of the cellblock and climbed up to the top of a nearby crashgate. Before I could get my goggles on, as I was attempting to secure my harness to the top of the crashgate, approximately thirty to forty feet up in the air, an officer sprayed me with a chemical agent and caught me off guard. Partially blinded by the chemical agent, I abandoned my original plan of tying myself to the top of the crashgate. Instead, I climbed over onto the top of a nearby ventilation duct and lay on my back.

Several minutes after I climbed up the crashgate, dozens of officers and prison employees stood gathered around below me. Among the crowd was an institution crisis negotiator, and he asked me why I had climbed up the crashgate. As I was now being filmed by two video cameras, I explained to the negotiator that I was protesting against my unjust situation of being forced to live as an old-law offender among a dangerous new-law prison population. And I was being forced to serve an unjust and disproportionately longer prison sentence than those being served by new-law offenders. The negotiator responded by telling me that nobody at the prison could do anything about eliminating the existing disparities between the old-law and new-law class of prisoners, and I needed to come down off of the ventilation duct. I explained that my objective of climbing up the crashgate was to get some meaningful attention about my situation, and that I wasn't coming down until I spoke to someone from either the media, the Governor's office, or the Department of Rehabilitation's central office.

After about an hour went by of failed negotiating to get me to come down off the ventilation duct, someone involved with responding to the crisis had a hydraulic lift brought onto the scene, along with a bunch of small mattresses. As the negotiator continued to try and negotiate an end to my protest, various prison employees began spreading the mattresses out underneath me on the ground. Shortly

after they finished, the investigator of the prison appeared and aimed a rifle-style gun at my head and ordered me to come down. It was loaded with some kind of non-lethal ammunition. Not wanting to risk being shot off of the duct, I decided to end my demonstration. I climbed down the crashgate to the ground. I was then placed in a cell inside of a Special Management Housing Unit without being given a decontamination shower to wash off the chemical agent.