A Comparative Essay on Slavery and Penal Labor

Introduction

Slavery is commonly referred to as the worst era in American history. The long-lasting effects of slavery are still very much present in the modern era. Americans have sworn up and down that this horrendous era would never again be seen in our country and vowed to keep slavery out at all costs. However, many people do not realize that various aspects of slavery are currently present in the penal labor systems that are implemented in prisons across the country. Inmates live in deplorable conditions, have severe limitations on their freedoms, and work long hours on a daily basis and receive dollars a day as compensation. The similarities between the worst era in history and what is currently in place in the American prison system are remarkable and demand immediate rectification.

In this essay, I will compare and contrast the similarities and differences between chattel slavery and penal labor performed by prison inmates. First, I will analyze the labor performed in each of these settings. Next, I will discuss the living conditions for slaves and that of inmates. Then, I will compare the compensation and allowances that each group receives. Finally, I will present arguments made for both the preservation and abolition of both systems.

Although slavery stands alone because of the level of brutality that it imposed on its victims, penal labor is comparable to it. Penal labor is a modernized version of slavery, which is made evident by the similarities in the labor performed by inmates, the conditions they are forced to live in, and the earnings they receive. Penal labor is an extension of slavery, as the freedoms of inmates are critically limited and their labor is severely exploited.
Labor Performed

When comparing these two institutions of oppression, it is important to first discuss the work that the actors involved in the past were forced to do and how that compares with the work being done by actors today. Slaves commonly worked in plantation settings, as well as other jobs that their masters could assign them too. A majority of the jobs demanded physical labor. Inmates working in prisons are not necessarily subject to physically demanding jobs, but the labor is coerced and underpaid.

If a slave was owned by a plantation owner, then their job would more than likely be that of a field hand. On those same plantations, a smaller number of slaves would be selected by the master to work as house servants instead. Field work was much more brutal than that of house servants. Both classes of slaves worked long hours and were subject to frequent physical punishments. House servants were tasked with taking care of the main house of the plantation owner and also caring for his family. This meant labor such as cleaning, cooking, taking care of children, and other household tasks. Young female house slaves were most likely to be raped by their owners because of their frequent contact with their owner.¹ Many households in the South were moderately wealthy, but not wealthy enough to own large plantations and own a large number of slaves. Therefore, many Southerners owned few slaves and those slaves only worked in their homes.

Field work was much more demanding labor. As such, it would be expected that women would not be required to do as much of it. One example that contradicts this logic is that of George Washington’s slaves and the labor that was performed by them. His estate of Mount

Vernon had 316 enslaved people in 1799 and about 75% of them labored in the fields. Over 61% of field slaves were women. Their tasks were hoeing, ploughing, harvesting, sowing, and building fences around the estate, among other physically demanding tasks. Other jobs that were required of slaves in Mount Vernon were more skilled, such as blacksmiths, gardeners, millers, distillers, seamstresses, shoemakers, spinners, knitters, and more. Once again, these were a minority. Most of Washington’s slaves worked as field hands and spent their lives ensuring that their owner’s agricultural affairs were in order.  

Taken from the autobiographical narratives of Frederick Douglass, we can further explore the daily tasks mandated to slaves in the South. Douglass was born into slavery in Maryland worked in numerous locations. Most of the work he performed at each of those places was that of a field hand. As a teenager, he learned a trade and was able to work at a shipyard. He would essentially work on his own, but when he arrived home to his owner, his wages would be dealt to his owner and Douglass was rarely given a portion of his own earnings. Even after having learned a trade, being able to work outside the home of his master, having gained the ability to work the hours he pleased, and no longer be subject to brutal punishments imposed on him, Douglass remained a slave because his earnings were never truly his.  

Jobs assigned to prison inmates are largely varying from region to region. In areas with greater concentration of agricultural work, inmates will often find themselves working in fields. In other places, inmates will work with public service workers and aid in the building of roads. Others work in the prisons they are confined to, as laundry and cleaning staff, general maintenance jobs, and other miscellaneous positions.

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Many jobs that are available to inmates are not very physically demanding jobs. However, these jobs require a vast screening process. Inmates that are allowed to work in many prisons are required to have not committed a violent crime and have less than five years left on their sentence. Inmates apply for the jobs they want, many stating that working 12 hour shifts is a relief from being incarcerated in a confined cell. A majority of inmates work jobs within their prison in jobs available to them there. Generally speaking, the tasks that they are asked to perform within the prison are less physically demanding than those of inmates who have to work outside of the prisons, as they usually involve cleaning and some other forms of maintenance.4

For the inmates eligible to work outside of prisons, the work they perform can be much more physically demanding. For example, Colorado Correctional Industries uses prison labor as an agricultural advantage. Inmates who work in this area have tasks ranging from caring for cattle and farm animals, to picking crops. Emphasized by companies who benefit from this prison labor is the fact that inmates choose to work in such conditions. The director of sales and marketing of Haystack Mountain Goat Dairy, a Colorado local dairy producer, very clearly stated how their company was not taking advantage of prison labor: "Just to be clear, this is an entirely voluntary program, so there's no issue at all about 'taking advantage' of the workers. All inmates have to work, whether that's in the library, or the cafeteria, or somewhere else—you have to do something to keep yourself busy. And over 1,000 guys are on a waiting list for one of the agricultural programs".5 This shows that inmates prefer working than being locked in a cell all day. However, it is important to note that this statement was made by someone who was greatly benefiting from exploited labor, so his words must be taken with a grain of salt.

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Other roles offered to inmates involve working in public service tasks, such as building roads, cleaning trash on the side of roads and sidewalks, patching potholes, among other tasks. In a statement released by the North Carolina Department of Corrections, they outlined the tasks that the inmates in their system are expected to do. These include road crews, prison construction crews, farm work, various construction projects, and work within prisons. At the end of this release, it states: “Inmates sent to N.C. prisons should expect to work. General Statute 148-26 declares that: all able-bodied prison inmates shall be required to perform diligently all work assignments provided for them. The failure of any inmate to perform such a work assignment may result in disciplinary action”.

In another state, South Dakota, prison labor has been used to construct affordable housing buildings. In yet another state, California, a recent news story revealed the use of prison labor to fight the raging forest fires that decimated parts of the state, and these inmates were forced to work shifts ranging from 12-24 hours.

The labor performed by inmates is comparable to the labor that slaves performed, from the long hours they were forced to work, to the physically demanding jobs. The most important common denominator to note here is that all of the jobs that slaves were forced to do and all the jobs that inmates are currently being tasked with is work that nobody else wants to perform. They are forced to work in terrible jobs because nobody else is willing to do them and because slaves were the lowest on the social hierarchy, as are prison inmates in the present day, they are tasked with all of the labor that everybody else passes on doing.

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7 McDonald, Terrence T. “Using Inmate Labor to Build Affordable Housing.” Shelterforce, 1 Apr. 2020, shelterforce.org/2020/04/01/using-inmate-labor-to-build-affordable-housing/.
Living Conditions

The living conditions endured by slaves and those endured by prisoners are also comparable. Both groups are confined to small living spaces, receive limited portions of food, and wear cheap clothing provided to them by the system that holds them captive. For slaves, these “amenities” were also perceived as pay for the work they performed, which will be discussed in a latter section. Inmates are subject to even harsher living conditions than those normally offered if they are placed in isolation as an extra punishment.

Frederick Douglass’s narrative provides candid insight into what exactly the living conditions were for the average slave living on a plantation. He describes the low quality food they received, as well as the clothing which was given to them. He writes, “The men and the women slaves on Col. Lloyd’s farm received as their monthly allowance of food, eight pounds of pickled pork, or its equivalent in fish. The pork was often tainted, and the fish were of the poorest quality... The yearly allowance... consisted of two tow-linen shirts, one pair of trowsers of the same coarse material, for summer, and a woolen pair of trowsers and a woolen jacket for winter; with one pair of yarn stockings and a pair of shoes of the coarsest description. Children under ten years old had neither shoes, stockings, jackets, nor trowsers and when these were worn out, they went naked till the next allowance day...”

It is very important to note here that Douglass referred to both the food and clothing as an “allowance,” as if it was optional to give the slaves these basic necessities. Not only were meeting these necessities viewed as a valid form of recompense, these were also just barely met. Douglass writes that for the difficult, arduous manual labor that they were performing daily, the food they were given was simply not enough,

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since those who perform manual labor require more food intake. He also describes the scarce amounts of clothing which they were given, which were supposed to last an entire year and would not be replaced if they wore out.

Next, Douglass also described the living spaces which they were confined to. Space was extremely limited and entire families were expected to live in the tiny spaces they were given. Additionally, they were provided with no bedding, only cheap blankets to keep them warm at night. Douglass writes, “As to beds, they had none. One coarse blanket was given them, and this only to the men and women. The children stuck themselves in holes and corners about the quarters, often in the corners of huge chimneys, with their feet in the ashes to keep them warm...” Their need to keep warm at night was simply not met. A single blanket was offered to adults only, and children had to make due with the little warmth that emitted from the fireplace.

Douglass also described how their ability to sleep was limited by their masters. They only had a few hours to complete their own household tasks, like cooking for their families, which could only be done in the time the masters allowed them to go home and sleep. Their household tasks cut into the limited time they were allotted to sleep, which was further hindered by the fact that masters would strictly wake up their slaves at a certain time, and punish those who didn’t wake up on time. As Douglass describes it, “At the first gray streak of the morning they were summoned to the field by the overseer’s horn. They were whipped for over-sleeping more than for any other fault. Neither age nor sex found any favor. The overseer stood at the quarter door, armed with stick and whip, ready to deal heavy blows upon any who might be a little behind

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time. “Slaves were forced to live in tiny spaces with large numbers of people, the amount of food they received was controlled and insufficient to nourish them for the labor they were performing, the clothing they were provided was minimal, and the amount of sleep they needed was not given to them. All in all, the living conditions in which slaves were forced to be were horrible, even unsurvivable.

The living conditions that inmates currently have in the US can vary in different areas of the country, as well as in what type of prison they are in. Generally speaking, prisons that are higher security will have stricter rules which affect their living conditions, whereas smaller lower security prisons tend to be more lenient with inmates. In a comprehensive report conducted by Human Rights Watch, the intricate details of prison conditions are revealed and explained thoroughly in interviews conducted with inmates. The report divides into sections, each reviewing a different type of prison, such as state, federal, or smaller jails, but for the purpose of this essay, I will only be focusing on state prisons, as 90% of all American inmates are held in state prisons.

The first issue that the report highlights is that of overcrowding, explaining that in highly populated states like New York and California, prisons can be close to 100% capacity, and some can even be closer to 200% capacity. Overcrowded facilities means that inmates may be subject to reduced living spaces, which are already limited to begin with. Additionally, areas that were originally designated for recreation activities could be remodeled to become more cells, reducing the amount of recreational activities that inmates can engage in.12

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Sanitation issues can also arise as a result of overcrowding. Overcrowding in a California women’s prison led to over usage of the bathrooms that were available to them, so much so that their showers broke and the prison flooded with sewage water. It is common for inmates to have to wait in long lines in order to use sanitary facilities. Further, many inmates described filthy living conditions, infested with rodents, bugs, and mold, simply unclean facilities. In addition to being unsanitary, prisons can also be extremely unsafe. Guards do little to protect inmates from other, more dangerous inmates. Transgender and gay inmates are often attacked and raped by other inmates, and nothing is done to protect them. Many younger inmates taken to adult prisons report being raped in the first few days of their time spent there, leaving them in trauma and truly unsafe circumstances for the remainder of their sentence.13

The cells provided to inmates are usually equipped with a toilet, a small sink, a bunk, and maybe a table. For the inmates who work regular hours, about half or more of their day is spent in this living space. For death row inmates, the cells are smaller than in regular state prisons, and the time they spend in the cell is much longer. Death row inmates are allowed to leave their cells five times a week, for no more than two hours at a time. This is the only time they are allowed to engage in any recreational activities, as well as take showers and contact family members. The clothing which is provided by inmates is a strict uniform and inmates are provided with a limited amount. One inmate interviewed relayed that after five years of incarceration, he was only provided with one change of clothes. Inmates are expected to wash their uniform in the sink provided in their cell, which does not guarantee that the uniform would be sufficiently clean. The inmate also said that because his uniform was not ever properly washed, he was developing rashes on his skin. As far as food goes, inmates interviewed revealed that the quantity of food is

sufficient but the quality is severely lacking. Inmates also reported that the time they are given to eat is not enough and they often have to eat very rapidly or they are unable to finish their meal. Inmates who refuse to get up before finishing their meal are subject to punishment, such as physical punishment or being placed in isolation, as are any inmates whose behavior is deemed as uncooperative. Inmates are also offered the option of buying food and snacks at the commissary and in vending machines, but as will be examined in the next section, this is not a reasonable option for inmates either, as the prices are too high for the little pay they receive for their labor.\(^\text{14}\)

In sum, the conditions that are imposed on inmates are inhumane and awfully similar to those imposed on slaves. The cheap, limited clothing, the low-quality food, and the cramped living spaces are all frightening examples of how similar these two institutions are. Additionally, the time they are allotted to conduct personal activities is closely monitored and limited, and if anyone steps out of line, they are subject to corporal punishment. Their freedoms are finite and their needs are just barely met.

**Earnings**

Comparing the wages and earnings given to inmates and slaves, it is important to note that for one group, slaves, their living conditions were often considered to be their earnings, while inmates are entitled to receive actual monetary earnings. For slaves, the clothing and food that they received, as was presented in the previous section, was viewed as a form of recompense for the work they performed. Their most basic necessities were met, and meeting these necessities was seen as enough to repay for the intense labor that was forced upon them.

However, there are a few instances where earnings differed from this, such as with Frederick Douglass.

Douglass worked for many different masters during his time as a slave, and the work he was coerced to differ in each location. When he was working for Master Hugh, he describes that his working conditions were very distinct from his previous places. Here, Douglass narrates that he would work in a shipyard on a daily basis, learning the trade well and soon becoming a foreman. The wages he received there were about 7 dollars a week, which is about $200 today. At the end of each week, he would receive his weekly earnings, come home to Master Hugh with his money, and then have no choice but to give him the money he had earned. Even though he was working on his own and earning his own wages, he was still compelled to give his earnings to his master; he was still a slave.

As Douglass writes, “I was now getting, as I have said, a dollar and fifty cents per day. I contracted for it, worked for it, collected it; it was paid to me, and it was rightfully my own; and yet upon every returning Saturday night, this money—my own hard earnings, every cent of it—was demanded of me and taken from me by Master Hugh... I had received from him only my food and raiment; and for these my services were supposed to pay from the first. The right to take my earnings was the right of the robber”.15 He went on to describe a rare occurrence, “Draining me of the last cent of my hard earnings, he would, however, occasionally, when I brought home an extra large sum, dole out to me a sixpence or a shilling, with a view, perhaps, of kindling up my gratitude.”16 Douglass’s wages situation is evidence that there were some

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slaves who did earn monetary wages. These wages were rarely their own, though. Their slave state continued to force them to surrender their hard earned money to their master, having no other recourse. And as Douglass narrates, they would rarely be given a small portion of their earnings. In sum, slaves rarely earned monetary wages for their labor, as the food and clothing provided to them was perceived as sufficient allowance.

Inmates, however, receive pay for their labor in a majority of places in the US, with some notable exceptions. In a comprehensive study conducted by Wendy Sawyer of Prison Policy Initiative, a nonprofit organization that uses research on the US carceral system as a form of advocacy, thorough information of the wages provided to inmates in each state was uncovered. This study was conducted in 2017, and the results are as follows. The average daily wage across the United States is reported to be 86 cents for inmates. This is less than it was in 2001, during which the average daily wage was 93 cents. The average maximum daily wage for inmates was $4.73 in 2001, which has since declined to $3.45 as of 2017. This study also found that many jobs which had been paid about $4 a day in 2001, are no longer being paid in some states. About 6% of inmates are selected to work in state-owned businesses while incarcerated, which are the jobs that are eligible to earn “higher wages”, ranging from 33 cents to $1.41 per hour on average. The study found that not only are incarcerated people paid significantly less than the general population, but their wages have been decreasing in the past two decades, for no apparent reason.17

Another important finding in the study is that regular prison jobs are unpaid in most cases in the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Texas, and South Carolina.18

Unpaid forced labor is the very definition of slavery. There is no better word to describe the situation in which inmates incarcerated in those states are subjected to.

Further, not only are the wages that inmates receive a miniscule amount, but the money is also not theirs to keep in many circumstances. The court system has the right to seize any and all funds that an inmate has worked hard to earn in order to pay any court related fines and fees in any state. This means that some inmates never get to see the products of any of their hard worked labor because all of the money that they earn is taken away from them.\textsuperscript{19}

Additionally, the wages that inmates are paid are insignificant to the prices of items that are available for them to purchase within the prison. Documented examples of these unreasonable prices demonstrate the amount of work that an inmate must perform in order to buy everyday items. An incarcerated woman in Colorado has to work two weeks in order to be able to buy a box of tampons, which could be even more if the prison were to have a shortage of tampons. Similarly, an incarcerated person in Pennsylvania would have to work close to two weeks in order to afford a $10 phone card to be able to communicate with their family.\textsuperscript{20} In research conducted by Erin Hatton, PhD, a professor of sociology at the NY State University at Buffalo, interviews with inmates were conducted to uncover their personal experiences with prison labor. Here is what two inmates in New York prisons had to say.

A 47 year-old Black man by the initials K. H. stated: \textit{“$0.23 an hour is not a pay. You can’t even figure that as pay. And then with the prices in the commissary constantly going up, you can’t even buy a peanut butter and jelly with the salary that I made as a porter. You can buy the peanut butter or the jelly, but you couldn’t buy both. And then, if you bought either one, that


was all you bought.” A 56 year-old Black woman, J. Robinson, mirrored this sentiment by stating: “Because, at this point, 35 hours a week for $155 a month is – What is that? $2, $1.75 [an hour] maybe? I think the minimum wage would at least leave us with our dignity. Come on, man. Don’t do that. To me it’s slave labor, I’m sorry.”

The statements made by these inmates perfectly demonstrate why these are blatant injustices. The wages are so insignificant that inmates are forced to choose what things to buy in order to suffice their needs. Inmates that are forced to work and receive no pay for it are in outright slavery. The same is true for these inmates who are paid too little to afford to purchase items that are the bare necessities or inmates whose money is stripped away to cover court fees. Their wage is disproportionate to the labor they perform. They are enslaved.

Public Opinions

As the issue of slavery became one of political significance, many politicians and activists made their opinions public and presented arguments on why slavery was a lawful and adequate institution, while abolitionists argued that slavery should be immediately eliminated from the US. Similar arguments are made in the present-day to discuss whether or not penal labor and the US carceral systems should be kept, reformed, or abolished completely. This final section will present the arguments made 150 years ago, both for and against slavery, as well as the arguments made now, both for the preservation and the abolition of the carceral system.

In a speech made by Alexander Stephens, vice president of the Confederacy, there are many arguments made as to why slavery is an appropriate practice that should be preserved, which gives us insight into the public opinions of people who believed that slavery was not wrong. Stephens argues that by science, or what he calls the law of nature, and by divine laws

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created by God, Black people are meant to live in slavery. He states “With us, all of the white race, however high or low, rich or poor, are equal in the eye of the law. Not so with the negro. Subordination is his place. He, by nature, or by the curse against Canaan, is fitted for that condition which he occupies in our system.” Stephens also made arguments declaring that it was the will of God for Black people to remain in a subjugated state, “They were attempting to make things equal which the Creator had made unequal... It is, indeed, in conformity with the ordinance of the Creator... For his own purposes, he has made one race to differ from another, as he has made “one star to differ from another star in glory.” This speech is a prime example of the sentiment that many Americans genuinely believed. Viewing Black people as beneath them and because of this, they were deserving of being forced to their position of slavery.

On the other hand, there were many abolitionists who argued the opposing side of the matter and called for the immediate abolition of slavery. A number of newspapers were circulating that were created with the purpose of spreading the message for abolition. Among these were The North Star, The Liberator, The Freedom’s Journal, and more. These newspapers highlighted abolitionist sentiment through the eyes of many different figures. Some would focus on political messages, while others would publish the narrations of slaves to evoke an emotional, empathetic response from the audience. One example of this is seen in the paper The Provincial Freedmen, which often published testimonials written by enslaved women, including that of Sojourner Truth. In The Liberator, calls for abolition were commonly made, like one made by George Bourne which called for the immediate abolition of slavery: “The system is so entirely

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corrupt that it admits of no cure but a TOTAL AND IMMEDIATE abolition. For a gradual emancipation is a virtual recognition of the right, and establishes the rectitude of the practice.”

The arguments made for the abolition of slavery were most commonly on the grounds of it being an immoral practice the subjected Black people to the worst conditions imaginable to man. As we will examine later, the argument of immorality is one that is also commonly made when discussing the abolition of the carceral system.

In the present day, arguments are made for the preservation of the current carceral system and the maintenance of prisons and the labor that they provide. Many arguments made are centralized around the idea of economic dependency on prisons, but many of them are concerns around crime increasing if criminals are not incarcerated. Politicians, like Mitt Romney, have long supported the use of the death penalty and called for longer prison sentences on violent crimes, such as sex crimes, as well as for the ability to appeal the sentences that are deemed to be “too lenient”. But the arguments made by politicians in the present-day that support the claim of the necessity for prisons is that they are needed to keep criminals away from the general population. Keeping criminals locked up will make the rest of society a safer place to live, they claim. But what happens when reformed criminals finish their sentence? Do they re-enter society as changed people, or did the system that kept them encaged and enslaved not accomplish its goal of rehabilitation?

Modern day abolitionists argue that prison reform is not enough to eliminate the problem within the carceral system; the abolition of the institution as a whole is the only way to truly create a system that functions well and offers rehabilitation rather than punishment. One of the primary goals that abolitionists keep in mind is changing the rhetoric around criminals needing to

be punished as harshly as possible when a crime has been committed to a mindset that allows for the opportunity to repent from the mistake that was made and make inner change to not commit the mistake again. Abolitionist Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes the issues with prisons and why a change is needed: “If prison, in its philosophical origin, was meant as a humane alternative to beatings or torture or death, it has transformed into a fixed feature of modern life, one that is not known, even by its supporters and administrators, for its humanity. In the United States, we now have more than two million incarcerated people, a majority of them black or brown, virtually all of them from poor communities. Prisons not only have violated human rights and failed at rehabilitation; it’s not even clear that prisons deter crime or increase public safety.”

Gilmore explains that the carceral system leads to violations of human rights, does not achieve its goal of rehabilitation, and disproportionately affects people of color.

Abolitionist Mariame Kaba, in her book We Do This ‘Til We Free Us, outlines ideas of alternatives to mass incarceration that would actually result in rehabilitation and would result in a better societal relations overall. Kaba also highlights that many people have an idea that abolitionists believe that people who commit wrongdoings will never be held accountable for their actions. This is an incorrect mindset, according to Kaba, as she states, “While abolitionists hold a range of values, principles, and ideas about transformation, we’ve never known an abolitionist who thought that nothing was the preferred alternative to imprisonment. We believe in consequences for harm... any consequences should be determined in direct relationship to the harm done and should involve input by people impacted by the harm.”

Kaba expresses that seeking for an alternative for incarceration does not mean that people will no longer be held

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28 Kaba, Mariame. We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice. Haymarket Books, 2021.
accountable for their actions, but rather that they will find a better way to do so. And the form which the method of accountability will take must be directly related to the wrongdoing committed in order that the wrongdoer will actually be able to reconcile and rectify their mistake and whoever was wronged will be able to input as well, so they can also feel that a form of justice has been served. Abolitionists hold arguments for why the carceral system should be abolished, but offer more than that. They argue that money used to fund this system of oppression should be redistributed to help poor communities, be invested in other sectors like education and health care, and just simply be used to do good and help Americans, rather than be used to punish them.

Abolitionists also do not pretend that this will be an easy transition and fix. They know fully well that most people will not see abolition as a viable or realistic solution. Changing a system that has existed for centuries is difficult for people to imagine and eliminating it completely can be completely unfathomable. But just as the abolition of slavery was once viewed as a radical, imaginative idea, is prison labor currently viewed as such. The change may be crazy to think about, but ultimately, it will result in a better functioning society that better funds necessary programs and focuses on aiding people who need help rather than giving them the harshest possible punishment for mistakes they make.

**Conclusion**

Slavery and penal labor are two remarkably similar systems of oppression, both used to oppress poorer, usually Black and brown communities, place severe limitations on their freedoms as Americans, and exploit the labor they perform. Discussed first was the labor
performed by slaves and that which is currently performed by inmates. Both were deemed to consist mainly of physical labor that requires long hours of arduous work. Then the living conditions of both groups were compared. Slaves were offered low amounts of food, cheap clothing, and tiny living spaces that were over-filled. Similarly, prisons are extremely overcrowded which leads to sanitation and hygiene problems, and inmates are provided with little clothing and low quality food. Also, prisons can be an unsafe environment for many people, and sexual assault is a pervasive issue. Next, the earnings between the two groups was discussed, finding that slaves were rarely paid any monetary wages, as their allowance of food and clothing was viewed as recompense. Inmates are offered very little wage for the tough labor that they perform, and in some cases, pay is not even given. Finally, the arguments for both the abolition and the preservation of each institution were presented, showing that the argument of morality was made in favor of the abolition of both slavery and the carceral system. The similarities between both of these systems is awfully close. Prisons were created to offer rehabilitation, but all they do is remove the freedom of inmates and capitalize on their labor for their own commercial gain. Inmates are not allowed to choose how they spend their time, where they can be at any given moment, where to work, what to eat, what to wear, and the list goes on and on. They perform labor that nobody else wants to do for almost nothing. American prisons are severely flawed and a change must be made to end this exploitation of labor immediately. As inmate J. Robinson put it: “To me it's slave labor, I'm sorry.”

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