

tive intrusion does not have to mean resigning oneself to the state's neglect. Ex-felons have their citizenship rights seized. They don't forfeit their human rights at the same time.

Similarly, if women and children subjected to intimate abuse encounter only additional abuse if they call the police, they learn not to ask for the state's assistance.<sup>105</sup> Restorative justice offers avenues to confronting interpersonal violence without involving the criminal justice system. Still, victims' services are now so entwined with the courts that it is difficult to get public services, especially in an emergency, without knocking on the prosecutor's door. Movements that seek to untangle personal conflict resolution from the penal system need at the same time to hold the state accountable for bettering citizens' lives in other ways.

This is one of neoliberalism's most brilliant sleights of hand: whittle government down to its most noxious functions, generate such hostility to the state that people cannot conceive of a benign, much less helpful or just, state; sit back and wait until people cease to demand assistance and then grow suspicious of and even hostile toward it — namely, popular opposition to Obamacare. Communities of color experience every day the replacement of public services with hyper-policing. Members of RSOLs come to need public services because the state is hyper-policing them and taking away their ability to find housing, make a living, or look after their children. Understanding these shared predicaments and strategizing to overcome them may be a point of convergence between progressive movements and the grassroots movement of sex offenders.

## HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL

The sex offender's voice is important because the regime that oppresses him does not oppress only him. The state uses his treatment to habituate the public to the dehumanization of all offenders. His position as scum of the earth stands for all who were left behind when the factories closed and the prisons went up: hazardous waste to be inventoried, warehoused, and destroyed.

This is the function of the supermax prison as well, which selects the human detritus supposedly so toxic that it must be quarantined in lead boxes for years. A campaign to shut down Illinois's torturous Tamms supermax prison offers an example that progressives could follow to end the sex offender regime.

Tamms Year Ten, a coalition of artists, community activists, civil libertarians, and former inmates and their families organized by “legislative artist” Lauri Jo Reynolds and others, was launched in 2009. The campaign employed techniques ranging from conventional lobbying and petitions to the collective creation of enormous outdoor art pieces, slowly winning over skeptical lawyers, hostile union members, timid legislators, and quiescent human rights advocates. After four years, Illinois governor Pat Quinn signed the order to close Tamms.

What the organizers understood was that in order to generate the public sympathy to mobilize sufficient political will to get the government to close Tamms, they had first to humanize the men inside. That effort began by sending the prisoners poems and photographs. Letters came back expressing astonishment: “Hi Committee, is this for real? I can’t believe someone cares enough to send a pick-me-up to the worst-of-the-worst.” After a while, the inmates were speaking up for themselves. The crowning moment may have come when Quinn put pen to paper. But the campaign’s supreme achievement — one that other progressives can look to as model and inspiration — was persuading both people on the outside and those inside the box that the “worst of the worst” are people.

One of the most beautiful actions of Tamms Year Ten was a march of mothers and former inmates, who carried placards modeled on those of the striking Memphis sanitation workers, an all-black force whom Martin Luther King Jr. addressed the night of his assassination in 1968. “I Am a Mom,” the women’s signs declared. The men’s: “I Am a Man.” The sex offender is a man, possessor of inalienable human rights and worth.

## NOTES

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1. Michelle Mondo, “Woman Recants Accusation of Sex Assault,” *San Antonio Express-News*, September 15, 2012; Linda Rodriguez McRobbie, “How Junk Science and Anti-Lesbian Prejudice Got Four Women Sent to Prison for More Than a Decade,” *Slate.com*, December 4, 2013.

2. Deborah Esquenazi, dir., *Southwest of Salem: The Story of the San Antonio Four* (Motto Pictures and Naked Edge Films, 2016).

3. Two recent cases: Millionaire Gigi Jordan murdered her autistic son to protect him from further abuse by his father, one of more than twenty people he allegedly