

The return of the chain gangs

Mumia Abu-Jamal

1995

The vision: scores of men wearing white prison issue, legs shackled man to man rankles.

The return of this practice, one which has similar symbology as slavery, is a testament to the ulterior motive of U.S. corrections: humiliation.

Now, Alabama has stepped back into the morbid, repressive past, to recoup the sagging political futures of some pitiful public representatives.

For 12 gruelling hours a day men in chains, chafing, biting leg irons, slash and chop at weeds, making Alabama beautiful for tourists. While the highways of 'Bama are beautified, their treatment of sentient humans are uglified. As an act of State power, corrections are a synonym for 'humiliation', a legislative echo of degradation.

Who is 'corrected' by this process? Who is made better? Who becomes more human?

Who is not made more more bitter?

This national wave of repression that is at the root of the practice is as senseless as as every other element involved in this dark movement.

Two-foot blades attached to wooden handles are the implements of this work. Workers, in bright white coats, their backs emblazoned with the words "CHAIN GANG" — a temporal echo from a past thick with blood, hatred and death.

One man, quoted in an Associated Press distributed article, decried the idea of being used as a "political chess piece".

That's exactly right.

Will Alabama be a safer place after the retrograde, reactionary re-introduction of this backwards process?

Years ago, black revolutionary theorist George L Jackson, tellingly likened the prison experience to the direct historical precedent of the slavery experience.

The spectre of black men in chains is one deep in the 'collective unconscious' of this stolen land called America.

This nation, borne in white skin privilege, genocide, degradation of Indian and African, settled on the inviolable principle of stolen human labour — slavery.

Why, in this alleged Land of the Free, are there more chains, more shackles, more repression, more death?

Alabama leads America Backward.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Mumia Abu-Jamal
The return of the chain gangs
1995

Retrieved on 28th November 2021 from struggle.ws
Published in *Workers Solidarity* No. 46 – Autumn 1995.

theanarchistlibrary.org