



About the Southern Poverty Law Center

The 94,000 Children of the Carceral

Nine-year-old Eri'Shine Lewis cannot recall how old she was when her father went away. "That was a long time ago," she said. "I was probably in my [mama's] stomach."

Eri'Shine's father, Erick Garrison, has been away for eight and a half years. He has been serving a prison sentence at a federal facility in California, over 2,000 miles away from Eri'Shine's home in Louisiana.

Eri'Shine remembers visiting him once with her grandmother and other family members. "He was, like, behind a window—and I was on the other side."

Nearly 2.3 million people in the United States live in confinement.¹⁴ Accounted for in this number are state and federal prison populations, youth in detention, local jail populations, immigrants held in detention facilities, patients in psychiatric facilities, and other conditions of confinement.¹⁵ The U.S. incarcerates so many people that CNN reported in 2019 that more Americans live in criminal confinement than the populations of some of the United States' most populated places.¹⁶ The prison population in 2016 was so large that if it were a city, it would be the fifth most populous city in the country—behind New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston.¹⁷

Though the United States' mass incarceration

32% of the state's total population but account for over two-thirds of the prison population.²⁶ Black people are more than twice as likely to be jailed following an arrest than their white peers, and receive longer sentences.²⁷ Similarly, Black people in Louisiana are twice

sometimes without accommodations nearby. Sadly, the children able to visit their caregivers behind bars are the lucky ones. Other children are funneled into foster care with no way to see their loved ones behind bars; these children's relationship with their parents is more permanently broken upon the termination of parental rights.⁵⁸ This practice more often affects mothers. Further, incarcerated parents are more likely to have their parental rights terminated due to their incarceration alone than parents who physically or sexually abuse their children.

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First and foremost, Louisiana must work to end its mass incarceration problem. At the same time, it must

Per a Narrat e

The American concept of justice promotes punishment of the guilty and vindication of the innocent but fails to recognize its roots in racism and socioeconomic inequality, and the effects of incarceration on families. In its blindness, American justice has devastating effects on arguably the most innocent among us—our children. These are the stories of children and caregivers who suffered the consequences.

DOMINQUE JONES

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NARRATIVES OF GIRLS GROWING UP WITH AN INCARCERATED FATHER

' 37 A r and my father has been incarcerated for 37 years for a crime that he did not commit. My mom was pregnant with me in 1982 when he was sentenced to life in prison. There was no DNA evidence at that time, there was no eyewitness; and to be clear the person who did the crime is behind bars as well. So, it's basically like the state of Louisiana ripped my father away from me for no reason at all. Maybe the state thought, "Oh well," because my father was a drug addict.

This organization is extremely important to me because I didn't have a "me" when I was growing up. I didn't have anyone to help me dealing with the trauma that I realize I was dealing with now, as a child. So, the way that I dealt with it was I physically fought: everywhere I went I was always known as being the most belligerent person on the team or in my area or wherever, I was always known to be violent. And I'm not that person anymore and I understand why I was that person because after seeing my father shackled and chained and being escorted by two corrections officers at his father's funeral, I thought I had to become what everyone told me my father was. And that's not who I am.

People don't understand how traumatic it is for a child to have an incarcerated parent. You have kids who wait all year to see their parent, only to arrive on a visitation day and find out that their father has been placed in solitary confinement and can't have visitors anymore, or that their father was in a fight and is now in the infirmary. You have kids who are ashamed of their last name, because their parent is locked up. I know these experiences firsthand, for myself.

One time I visited my dad, and he had to tell me to tell a friend of mindfinlis faath9m.

A? B B A I was once that girl growing up fatherless. My dad went away to prison while my mother was expecting me. He was given two life sentences in Angola State Penitentiary and he served 23-and-a-half years before being exonerated for a crime that he didn't commit. The importance of DBI is for girls to know that their fathers can raise them behind bars because my dad did; and it also helps with the communication because bridging the communication gap between a father and daughter is essential. When my father was incarcerated my mother made sure that I communicated with him and I visited with him when she was able to afford it. My dad was 19 and my mom was 17 when I was born, so it was really hard for my mom to go and visit him in prison. She brought me when she could and other times I went with my dad's mother (my grandmother). I went with my grandmother and we would catch the Angola Bus that would take you to see your father in prison.

For any girl that is growing up fatherless, whether your father is incarcerated, deceased, or not in your life, DBI is a great program because we have girls in our program who used to be afraid to tell their stories, but now they are helping to advocate for other girls to show them how to use their voice and that is important to get their story out. You shouldn't feel neglected or ashamed or embarrassed about your story. I grew up in the projects and it was hard. My mom was 17 when she had me, and I started working at 14 because one income in the household was hard for my mother. She did all that she could do, and when she had two other kids, I had to step up and help her.

NARRATIVE OF A MOTHER WITH CHILDREN WHOSE FATHER IS INCARCERATED

without their father has been a struggle to support them. In his absence, his friend and father's friend, Jimese Van Buren, has stepped in to help.

JIMESE VAN BUREN

Jimese Van Buren is a 49-year-old male who has been incarcerated for several years. He is currently serving a sentence for a crime. He is a friend of the mother and has been helping her with her children. He is a good person and is doing a good job of taking care of the children. He is a good father and is doing a good job of being a father. He is a good person and is doing a good job of being a person.

Acknowledgment

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