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Louisiana Incarcerated



Prisoners line up at Jackson Parish Correctional Center in Jonesboro. Most of Louisiana's inmates are housed in local prisons, where they subsist in bare-bones conditions with few programs to give them a better shot at becoming productive citizens. Despite locking up people for longer periods than any other state, Louisiana has one of the highest rates of violent and property crimes.

HOW WE BUILT THE WORLD'S PRISON CAPITAL

Sheriffs and politicians have financial incentives to keep people locked up

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Louisiana is the world's prison capital. The state imprisons more of its people, per head, than any of its U.S. counterparts. First among Americans means first in the world. Louisiana's incarceration rate is nearly five times Iran's, 13 times China's and 20 times Germany's.

The hidden engine behind the state's well-oiled prison machine is cold, hard cash. A majority of Louisiana inmates are housed in for-profit facilities, which must be supplied with a constant influx of human beings or a \$182 million industry will go bankrupt.

Several homegrown private prison companies command a slice of the market. But in a uniquely Louisiana twist, most prison entrepreneurs are rural sheriffs, who hold tremendous sway in remote parishes like Madison, Avoyelles, East Carroll and Concordia. A good portion of Louisiana law enforcement is financed with dollars legally skimmed off the top of prison operations.

If the inmate count dips, sheriffs bleed money. Their constituents lose jobs. The prison lobby ensures this does not happen by thwarting nearly every reform that could result in fewer people behind bars.

See PRISON, A-6

LOUISIANA IMPRISONS MORE PEOPLE THAN ANY NATION IN THE WORLD...

LOUISIANA
1,619
people per
100,000 residents

UNITED STATES
730

RUSSIA
525

RWANDA
450

IRAN
333

CHINA
122

AFGHANISTAN
62

LOUISIANA ALSO LOCKS UP MORE RESIDENTS THAN ANY OTHER U.S. STATE

SEE LIST, A-8



More than a decade after a prison-building boom, Louisiana's corrections system is a sprawling for-profit enterprise, with local prisons, like the Richland Parish Detention Center, a major revenue source for sheriffs.

Some rural parishes' economies hinge on keeping their prisons full

RAYVILLE — When Warden Alan Cupp arrives at the Richland Parish Detention Center a little before 8 a.m. on a Wednesday in late September, the inmates are already through with breakfast.

Those with jobs on the outside are being carted off in vans. Others are at work within the prison's cinder-block walls. The rest are beginning another day of idleness — watching soap operas, hanging out, reading, sleeping.

See SHERIFF, A-9

THE 8-DAY SERIES
Also online at nola.com/prisons

TODAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
BEHIND BARS: After two decades of policy shifts, Louisiana locks up unprecedented numbers.	AN ECONOMIC MACHINE: Private firms reap profit while sheriffs reap jobs and cash from prisons.	THROWING AWAY THE KEY: Lifers, paradoxically, get the best shot at rehabilitation in state prisons.	LOCKED IN: Powerful interests conspire to obstruct reform of draconian sentencing laws.	NO WAY OUT: Hundreds of pardon recommendations gather dust on the governor's desk.	HITTING HOME: The state's policies have a disproportionate impact on some neighborhoods.	ROUGH RE-ENTRY: Inmates facing release have few programs to guide them to the right path.	ARRESTING DEVELOPMENT: Bipartisan reform makes possible a first for Texas: closing a prison.

On north shore, storm clouds gather over home's solar panels

Subdivision wants 'unsightly' add-on gone

By Christine Harvey
St. Tammany bureau

Brett Piazza was stopped in traffic in Mandeville, on his way to buy doughnuts, when his life took a drastic

turn four years ago.

The pharmaceutical salesman was waiting to turn right onto Louisiana 22 when his vehicle was rear-ended by an 18-wheeler. Piazza was left disabled to the point that he can no longer work.

Just 40 years old, he relies on disability payments to support his two young sons, while his wife, Amy, often works overnight shifts as an intensive-care nurse to help pay the bills.

So Piazza tried something he hoped would help cut down on the family's

expenses, noting an especially high electric bill that at one point reached \$460 a month. He installed solar panels on the roof of his house in the Estates of Northpark near Covington in March and cut his family's time on the grid — and his electricity costs — by about 80 percent.

But the time for celebration never came.

Before he received his first post-

See SOLAR, A-18



Worker Marc Jones examines sunlight-collecting panels on Brett and Amy Piazza's roof in the Estates of Northpark subdivision near Covington on Tuesday. The homeowners association is suing the Piazzas over the panels. TED JACKSON / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

WEATHER
See C-10

CONTINUED STORMS
HIGH **83°**
LOW **67°**

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