

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.

The men's side, along with a women's facility next door, is full to capacity, about 800 beds all told. Cupp's "honey holes," as he calls them, are flowing nicely. There is no need today to ring up wardens in other parishes, asking, sometimes begging, if they have a few extra to send over.

Cupp, a stocky 38-year-old with dark hair, a goatee and mischievous brown eyes, is reluctant to publicize his prime sources for inmates. There are scores of other Louisiana

See SHERIFF, A-9

THE  
8-DAY  
SERIES

Also online at  
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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 Piazas over the panels.

TED JACKSON / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE



# Louisiana Incarcerated

## How we built the world's prison capital

Prisoners wait at the intake center of Orleans Parish Prison. Those convicted of nonviolent charges are more likely to end up in local prisons. State facilities, which have more rehabilitation programs, are for the worst offenders.



An inmate reads on his bunk at Caldwell Correctional Center, about 40 miles south of Monroe. With little in the way of training or rehabilitation, local inmates mark time until their release.

A prisoner requests a special meal at Richland Parish Detention Center southeast of Monroe. Each prisoner brings in \$24.39 a day in state money to the local sheriff.



A sign warns visitors who enter Orleans Parish Prison. New Orleans has an excess of sentenced criminals — one in 14 black male New Orleanians is behind bars — while prisons in remote parishes must import inmates to survive.

# One in every 86 adults is doing time in Louisiana

### PRISON, from A-1

Meanwhile, inmates subsist in bare-bones conditions with few programs to give them a better shot at becoming productive citizens. Each inmate is worth \$24.39 a day in state

money, and sheriffs trade them like horses, unloading a few extras on a colleague who has openings. A prison system that leased its convicts as plantation labor in the 1800s has come full circle and is again a nexus for profit.

In the past two decades,

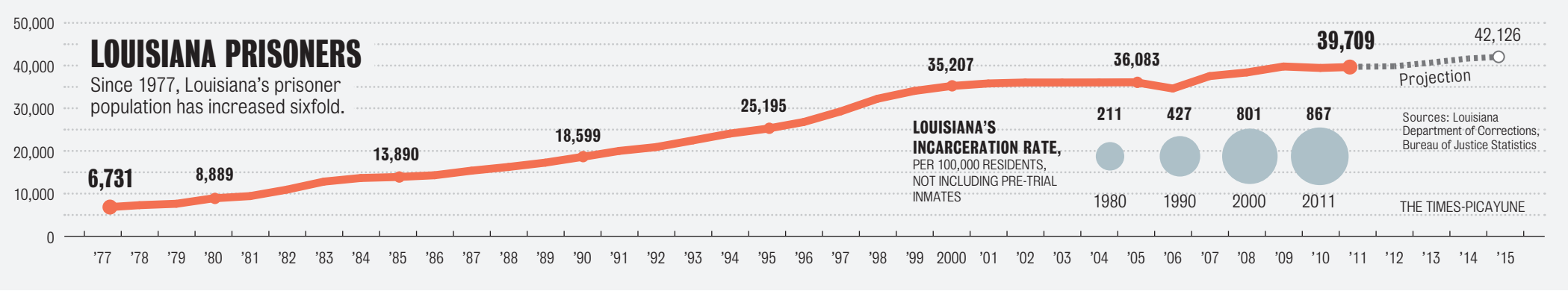
Louisiana's prison population has doubled, costing taxpayers billions while New Orleans continues to lead the nation in homicides. One in 86 adult Louisianians is doing time, nearly double the national average. Among black men from New

Orleans, one in 14 is behind bars; one in seven is either in prison, on parole or on probation. Crime rates in Louisiana are relatively high, but that does not begin to explain the state's No. 1 ranking, year after year, in the percentage of residents it locks up.

In Louisiana, a two-time car burglar can get 24 years without parole. A trio of drug convictions can be enough to land you at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola for the rest of your life. Almost every state lets judges decide when to mete

out the severest punishment and when a sympathetic defendant should have a chance at freedom down the road. In Louisiana, murderers automatically receive life without parole on the guilty votes of as

See **PRISON**, A-7





# Louisiana Incarcerated

## How we built the world's prison capital




Inmates wait to enter a dormitory at Richland Parish Detention Center in September. Prison overcrowding has become a thing of the past, even as the inmate population multiplies rapidly.




Many of the inmates in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola live there until they die, serving life without parole. A young lifer will rack up more than \$1 million in taxpayer-funded expenses.

**ANGOLA WARDEN BURL CAIN**

 “Something has to be done — *it just has to be done* — about the long sentences. Some people you can let out of here that won’t hurt you and can be productive citizens, and we know the ones who can’t.”

**FORMER STATE CORRECTIONS OFFICIAL RICHARD CRANE**

 “If the sheriffs hadn’t built those extra spaces, we’d either have to go to the Legislature and say, ‘Give us more money,’ or we’d have to reduce the sentences, make it easier to get parole and commutation — and get rid of people who shouldn’t be here.”

**ANGOLA LIFER PRESTON RUSSELL**

“I feel like dudes get all this education ... under their belt and been here 20, 30 years. You don’t think that’s enough time to let a man back out and give him another chance at life?”

# Incarceration rate doubles during past 2 decades

**PRISON**, from A-6

few as 10 of 12 jurors. The lobbying muscle of the sheriffs, buttressed by a tough-on-crime electorate, keeps these harsh sentencing schemes firmly in place. “Something has to be done — it just has to be done — about the long sentences,” said Angola Warden Burl Cain. “Some people you can let out of here that won’t hurt you and can be productive citizens, and we know the ones who can’t.” Every dollar spent on prisons is a dollar not spent on schools, hospitals and highways. Other states are strategically reducing their prison populations — using

tactics known in policy circles as “smart on crime.” Compared with the national average, Louisiana has a much lower percentage of people incarcerated for violent offenses and a much higher percentage behind bars for drug offenses — perhaps a signal that some nonviolent criminals could be dealt with differently. Do all of Louisiana’s 40,000 inmates need to be incarcerated for the interests of punishment and public safety to be served? Gov. Bobby Jindal, a conservative Republican with presidential ambitions, says the answer is no. Despite locking up more people for longer periods than any other state, Louisiana has one of the highest rates of both violent and property crimes.



**Louisiana Incarcerated**  
How we built the world's prison capital

**For a video overview of Louisiana as the capital of punishment, see [nola.com/prisons](http://nola.com/prisons)**



**Interview with Lt. Dee Hutson, a corrections officer at Richland Detention Center**  
See video on [nola.com/prisons](http://nola.com/prisons)

Yet the state shows few signs of weaning itself off its prison dependence. “You have people who are so invested in maintaining the present system — not just the

sheriffs, but judges, prosecutors, other people who have links to it,” said Burk Foster, a former professor at the University of Louisiana-Lafayette and an expert on Louisiana

prisons. “They don’t want to see the prison system get smaller or the number of people in custody reduced, even though the crime rate is down, because the good old boys are all linked together in the punishment network, which is good for them financially and politically.” **Keeping the beds full** In the early 1990s, when the incarceration rate was half what it is now, Louisiana was at a crossroads. Under a federal court order to reduce overcrowding, the state had two choices: Lock up fewer people or build more prisons. It achieved the latter, not with new state prisons — there was no money for that — but by encouraging sheriffs

to foot the construction bills in return for future profits. The financial incentives were so sweet, and the corrections jobs so sought after, that new prisons sprouted up all over rural Louisiana. The national prison population was expanding at a rapid clip. Louisiana’s grew even faster. There was no need to rein in the growth by keeping sentencing laws in line with those of other states or by putting minor offenders in alternative programs. The new sheriffs’ beds were ready and waiting. Overcrowding became a thing of the past, even as the inmate population multiplied rapidly. “If the sheriffs hadn’t built

See **PRISON**, A-8



Louisiana Incarcerated

How we built the world's prison capital

LOUISIANA IS NO. 1 BOTH WAYS

PRISONERS ARE COUNTED

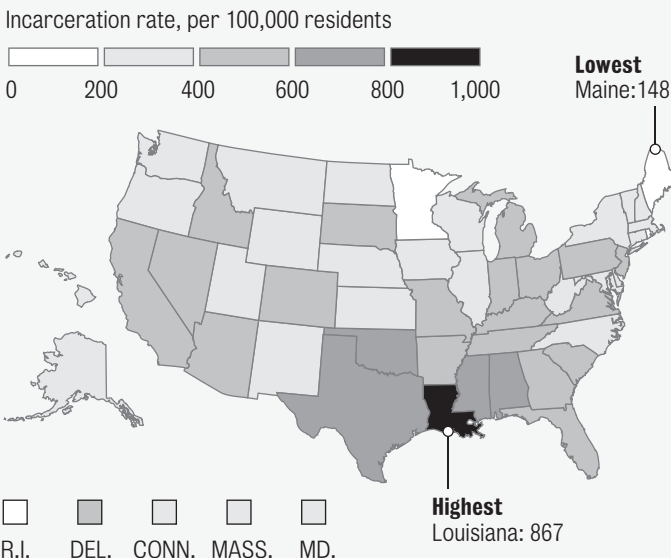
WORLD INCARCERATION RATES

include inmates awaiting trial

Rank		Incarceration Rate	
	Louisiana		1,619
1	United States		730
4	Georgia		531
5	Russian Federation		519
16	El Salvador		391
27	Iran		333
34	South Africa		310
49	Brazil		261
64	Mexico		201
88	Saudi Arabia		160
92	United Kingdom		155
114	Australia		129
123	China		121
130	Canada		117
174	Sweden		70
191	Japan		55

STATE INCARCERATION RATES

count only people who are serving time



U.S. INCARCERATION RATE RANKING, HIGHEST TO LOWEST

Rank	State	Incarceration Rate
1	Louisiana	867
2	Mississippi	686
3	Oklahoma	654
4	Alabama	648
5	Texas	648
6	Arizona	572
7	Florida	556
8	Arkansas	552
9	Missouri	508
10	South Carolina	495
11	Georgia	479
12	Idaho	474
13	Nevada	472
14	Virginia	468
15	Kentucky	458
16	Ohio	448
17	Michigan	445
18	Colorado	445
19	Delaware	443
20	California	439
21	Indiana	434
22	Tennessee	432
23	South Dakota	416
24	Pennsylvania	403
25	Maryland	387
26	Wyoming	385
27	Montana	378
28	Connecticut	376
29	Illinois	373
30	North Carolina	373
31	Wisconsin	366
32	West Virginia	363
33	Oregon	361
34	Alaska	340
35	New Mexico	323
36	Kansas	317
37	Iowa	309
38	Hawaii	302
39	New York	288
40	New Jersey	286
41	Washington	269
42	Vermont	265
43	Nebraska	247
44	Utah	238
45	North Dakota	226
46	New Hampshire	209
47	Massachusetts	200
48	Rhode Island	197
49	Minnesota	185
50	Maine	148



Corrections officer Dee Hutson yanks down towels put up in front of beds to obstruct the guards' view, as he and the warden walk through an empty dormitory at Richland Parish Detention Center searching for any items that look suspicious.

Sheriffs wheel and deal prisoners

PRISON, from A-7

those extra spaces, we'd either have to go to the Legislature and say, 'Give us more money,' or we'd have to reduce the sentences, make it easier to get parole and commutation — and get rid of people who shouldn't be here," said Richard Crane, former general counsel for the Louisiana Department of Corrections.

Today, wardens make daily rounds of calls to other sheriffs' prisons in search of convicts to fill their beds. Urban areas such as New Orleans and Baton Rouge have an excess of sentenced criminals, while prisons in remote parishes must import inmates to survive.

The more empty beds, the more an operation sinks into the red. With maximum occupancy and a thrifty touch with expenses, a sheriff can divert the profits to his law enforcement arm, outfitting his deputies with new squad cars, guns and laptops. Inmates spend months or years in 80-man dormitories with nothing to do and few educational opportunities before being released into society with \$10 and a bus ticket.

Fred Schoonover, deputy warden of the 522-bed Tensas Parish Detention Center in northeast Louisiana, says he does not view inmates as a "commodity." But he acknowledges that the prison's business model is built on head counts. Like other wardens in this part of the state, he wheels and deals to maintain his tally of human beings. His boss, Tensas Parish Sheriff Rickey Jones, relies on him to keep the numbers up.

"We struggle. I stay on the phone a lot, calling all over the state, trying to hustle a few," Schoonover said.

Some sheriffs, and even a few small towns, lease their prison rights to private companies. LaSalle Corrections, based in Ruston, plays a role in housing one of seven Louisiana prisoners. LCS Corrections Services, another homegrown company, runs three Louisiana prisons and is a major donor to political campaigns, including those of urban sheriffs who supply rural prisons with inmates.

Incarceration on the cheap

Ask anyone who has done time in Louisiana whether he or she would rather be in a state-run prison or a local sheriff-run prison. The answer is invariably state prison.

Inmates in local prisons are typically serving sentences of 10 years or less on nonviolent charges such as drug possession, burglary or writing bad checks. State prisons are reserved for the worst of the worst.

Yet it is the murderers, rapists and other long-termers who learn trades like welding, auto mechanics, air-conditioning repair and plumbing.

Angola's Bible college offers the only chance for Louisiana inmates to earn an undergraduate degree.

Such opportunities are not available to the 52 percent serving their time in local prisons. In a cruel irony, those who could benefit most are unable to better themselves, while men who will die in prison proudly show off fistfuls of educational certificates.

Louisiana specializes in incarceration on the cheap, allocating by far the least money per inmate of any state. The \$24.39 per diem is several times lower than what Angola and other state-run prisons spend — even before the sheriff takes his share. All local wardens can offer is GED classes and perhaps an inmate-led support group such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Their facilities are cramped and airless compared with the spacious grounds of state prisons, where inmates walk along outdoor breezeways and stay busy with jobs or classes.

With a criminal record, finding work is tough. In five years, about half of the state's ex-convicts end up behind bars again.

Gregory Barber has seen the contrast between state and local prisons firsthand. He began a four-year sentence for burglary at the state-run Phelps Correctional Center — a stroke of luck for someone with a relatively short sentence on a nonviolent charge who might easily have ended up in a sheriff's custody.

With only six months to go, the New Orleans native was transferred to Richwood Correctional Center, a LaSalle-run prison near Monroe. He had hoped to end his time in a work-release program to up his chances of getting a good job. But the 11th-hour transfer rendered him ineligible. At Phelps, he took a welding class. Now, he whiles away the hours lying in his bunk for lack of anything better to do. The only relief from the monotony is an occasional substance-abuse rehab meeting.

"In DOC camps, you'd go to the yard every day, go to work," said Barber, 50, of state-run prisons. "Here, you just lay down, or go to meetings. It makes time pass a little slower."

Downward spiral

While Louisiana tops the prison rankings, it consistently vies with Mississippi — the state with the second-highest incarceration rate — for the worst schools, the most poverty, the highest infant mortality. One in three Louisiana prisoners reads below a fifth-grade level. The vast majority did not complete high school. The easy fix of selling drugs or stealing is all too tempting when the alternative is a low-wage, dead-end job.

More money spent on locking up an ever-growing number of prisoners means less money for the very institutions that could help young people

stay out of trouble, giving rise to a vicious cycle. Louisiana spends about \$663 million a year to feed, house, secure and provide medical care to 40,000 inmates. Nearly a third of that money — \$182 million — goes to for-profit prisons, whether run by sheriffs or private companies.

"Clearly, the more that Louisiana invests in large-scale incarceration, the less money is available for everything from preschools to community policing that could help to reduce the prison population," said Marc Mauer, executive director of The Sentencing Project, a national criminal justice reform group. "You almost institutionalize the high rate of incarceration, and it's even harder to get out of that situation."

Louisiana's prison epidemic disproportionately affects neighborhoods already devastated by crime and poverty. In some parts of New Orleans, a stint behind bars is a rite of passage for young men.

About 5,000 black men from New Orleans are doing state prison time, compared with 400 white men from the city. Because police concentrate resources on high-crime areas, minor lawbreakers there are more likely to be stopped and frisked or caught up in a drug sweep than, say, an Uptown college student with a sideline marijuana business.

With so many people lost to either prison or violence, fraying neighborhoods enter a downward spiral. As the incarceration rate climbs, more children grow up with fathers, brothers, grandfathers and uncles in prison, putting them at increased risk of repeating the cycle themselves.

'Don't feel no pity'

Angola is home to scores of old men who cannot get out of bed, let alone commit a crime. Someone who made a terrible mistake in his youth and has transformed himself after decades in prison has little to no chance at freedom.

Louisiana has a higher percentage of inmates serving life without parole than any other state. Its justice system is unstintingly tough on petty offenders as well as violent criminals. In more than four years in office, Jindal has only pardoned one inmate.

"Louisiana don't feel no pity. I feel like everybody deserves a second chance," said Preston Russell, a Lower 9th Ward native who received life without parole for a string of burglaries and a crack charge. "I feel like dudes get all this education ... under their belt and been here 20, 30 years. You don't think that's enough time to let a man back out and give him another chance at life?"

An inmate at Angola costs the state an average of \$23,000 a year. A young lifer will rack up more than \$1 million in taxpayer-funded expenses if he reaches the Louisiana male life expectancy of 72.

Russell, 49, is in good health. But as he gets older, treating his age-related ailments will be expensive. The state spends about \$24 million a year caring for between 300 and 400 infirm inmates.

Now in his 13th year at Angola, Russell breaks into tears recounting how he rebelled against the grandmother who raised him, leaving home as soon as he could. First he smoked weed, weed became crack, then he was selling drugs and burglarizing stores in between jobs in construction or shipping.

The last time he stole, Orleans Parish prosecutors tagged him as a multiple offender and sought the maximum — the same sentence given to murderers. In the final crime that put him away for life, he broke into Fat Harry's and stole \$4,000 from the Uptown bar's video poker machines.

Political will

Tough fiscal times have spurred many states to reduce their prison populations. In lock-em-up Texas, new legislation is steering low-level criminals into drug treatment and other alternatives to prison.

In Louisiana, even baby steps have typically been met with resistance. Jindal, who rose to the governor's office with the backing of the sheriff's lobby, says too many people are behind bars but has not always thrown his political weight behind that message. This year, he supported two relatively modest measures that had failed the previous year, providing a small ray of hope for reformers when he signed one of them into law on Friday.

Measures like those in Texas, which target a subset of nonviolent offenders, are frequently lauded but may not be enough. To make a significant dent in the prisoner numbers, sentences for violent crimes must be reduced and more money must be invested in inner-city communities, according to David Cole, a professor at Georgetown Law School. Such large-scale change — which has not been attempted in any state, let alone Louisiana — can only happen through political will.

In Louisiana, that will has been practically nonexistent. Locking up as many people as possible for as long as possible has enriched a few while making everyone else poorer. Public safety comes second to profits.

"You cannot build your way out of it. Very simply, you cannot build your way out of crime," said Secretary of Corrections Jimmy LeBlanc, who supports reducing the incarceration rate and putting more resources into inmate rehabilitation. "It just doesn't work that way. You can't afford it. Nobody can afford that."

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# Louisiana Incarcerated

## How we built the world's prison capital

SHERIFF OF RICHLAND PARISH CHARLES McDONALD



"I hate to make money off the back of some unfortunate person. The fact is, somebody's going to keep them, and it might as well be Richland Parish."

NATIONAL PRISON EXPERT JAMES AUSTIN



"It makes it hard to do reforms that lower the prison population, because you're affecting the local economic engines that they provide."

MANGHAM MAYOR ROBERT NEAL HARWELL



"Every one here works at the prison. Everyone I know works at the prison."



A corrections officer keeps watch over inmates at Richland Parish Detention Center southeast of Monroe. Most of the inmates aren't local residents awaiting trial. They were sentenced to state time in other parishes and shipped to the prison, bringing with them the \$24.39 a day the state pays the sheriff to house them.

Inmates play basketball in the exercise yard at Richland. About one in three of the inmates has a job either inside or outside the prison. For the others, a turn in the exercise yard breaks the monotony of days spent lounging around, reading, watching television and sleeping.

## Rural prisons populated with urban inmates

SHERIFF, from A-1

wardens who could move in on his pipelines, which he has carefully tended through chummy relationships with colleagues in urban areas that have prisoners to spare.

But a roster tells the story: In the men's prison, 36 are from Jefferson Parish, 84 from Livingston Parish, 59 from the Shreveport area, a handful from New Orleans.

Some are local residents awaiting trial, but most have already been sentenced to state time, bringing with them the \$24.39 a day the state pays the Richland Parish sheriff to house them. Anything left over is profit for the sheriff. Other than a 1/2-cent sales tax, the prison is the sheriff's biggest revenue generator, underwriting the purchase

of new squad cars, shotguns and bulletproof vests.

"I hate to make money off the back of some unfortunate person," Sheriff Charles McDonald said. "The fact is, somebody's going to keep them, and it might as well be Richland Parish."

More than a decade since a prison-building boom swept the state, Louisiana's corrections system is a sprawling, for-profit enterprise. Private companies got in on the spoils, but the primary beneficiaries have been local sheriffs, who use the per-diem payments from the state to finance their departments and to pump jobs into moribund rural economies.

With little oversight from the Department of Corrections, sheriffs wheel and deal among themselves for inmates. Cupp and other rural north Louisiana



The GED class, held in the prison cafeteria, is akin to a one-room schoolhouse; teacher Phyllis White gears her lessons to a wide range of levels. The average education level among the Richland inmates is seventh grade, with some as low as second grade.

wardens drum up business with daily rounds of phone calls to their suppliers — urban areas such as New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Shreveport that produce

more criminals than their own jails can hold. The mad scramble to build prisons has become a mad scramble for inmates.

Like hotels, prisons

operating on per-diem payments must stay near 100 percent occupancy to survive. The political pressure to keep beds full is a contributing factor to the state's world-leading incarceration rate. No other state comes close to Louisiana's 52 percent rate of state inmates in local prisons, and few lobbies in Louisiana are as powerful as the sheriffs' association.

What is good for the sheriff can be bad, even tragic, for the inmate. Local prisons, which generally keep those with sentences of fewer than 10 years, are bare-bones operations without the array of educational and vocational programs that are standard at state prisons. Inmates caught up in the wardens' daily bartering can be transferred arbitrarily, sometimes losing chances at a GED certificate or a work-release

job when they land at another facility. Plumbers and auto mechanics are valuable commodities, given up by one warden as a favor to another.

"It makes it hard to do reforms that lower the prison population, because you're affecting the local economic engines that they provide," said James Austin, a national prison expert who has studied Orleans Parish Prison extensively. "It would be different if everyone were in state facilities. It's a lot easier for the state to close a state facility than for a state to close several small local facilities that really provide economic fuel at the local level."

### 'An economic driver'

Richland Parish, where green vistas of corn and soybean fields stretch for

See SHERIFF, A-12



# Louisiana Incarcerated

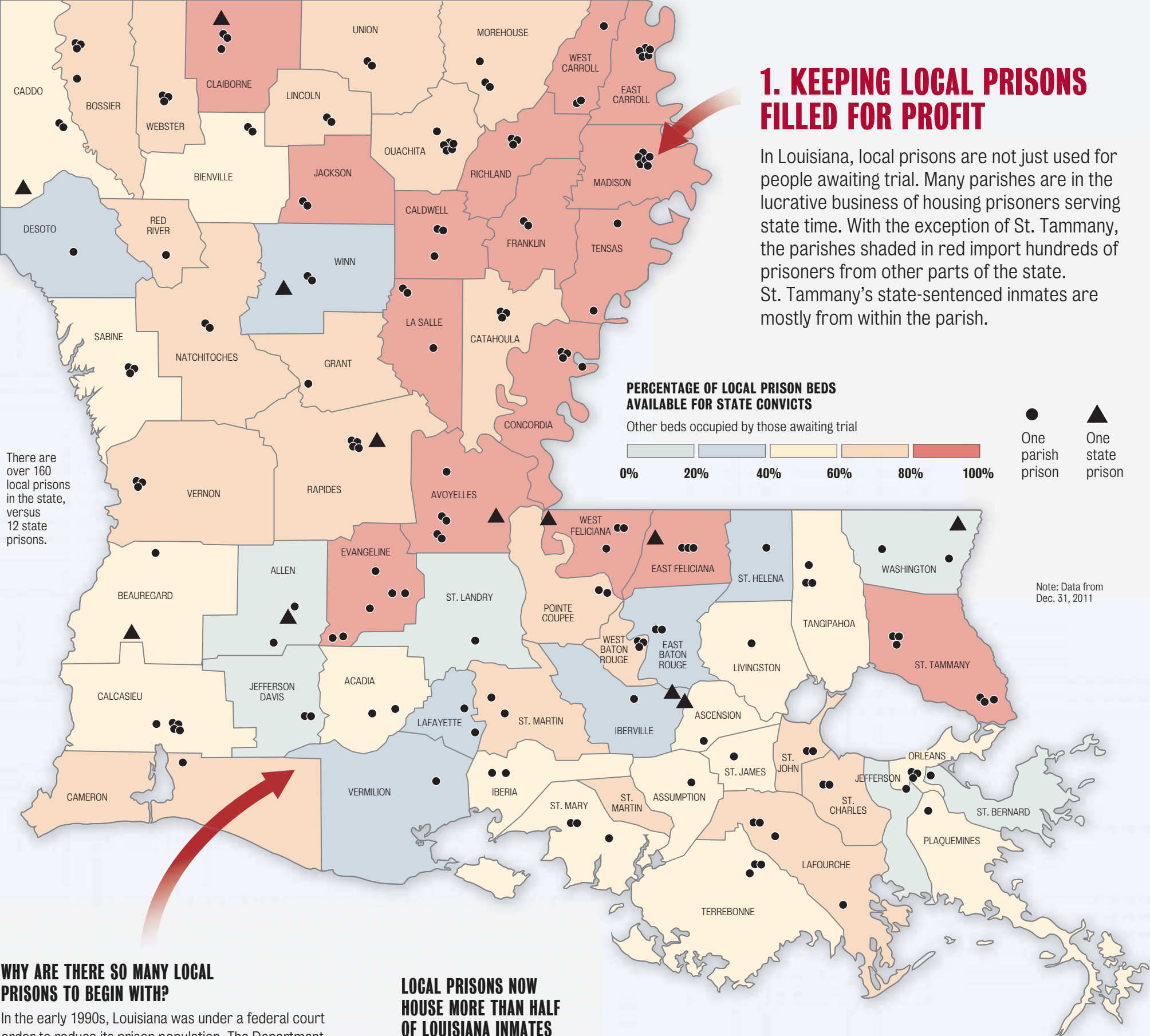
## How we built the world's prison capital

# HOW WE BECAME NO. 1

**FOUR REASONS** highlight why Louisiana locks up more people than anywhere in the world.

## 1. KEEPING LOCAL PRISONS FILLED FOR PROFIT

In Louisiana, local prisons are not just used for people awaiting trial. Many parishes are in the lucrative business of housing prisoners serving state time. With the exception of St. Tammany, the parishes shaded in red import hundreds of prisoners from other parts of the state. St. Tammany's state-sentenced inmates are mostly from within the parish.



## WHY ARE THERE SO MANY LOCAL PRISONS TO BEGIN WITH?

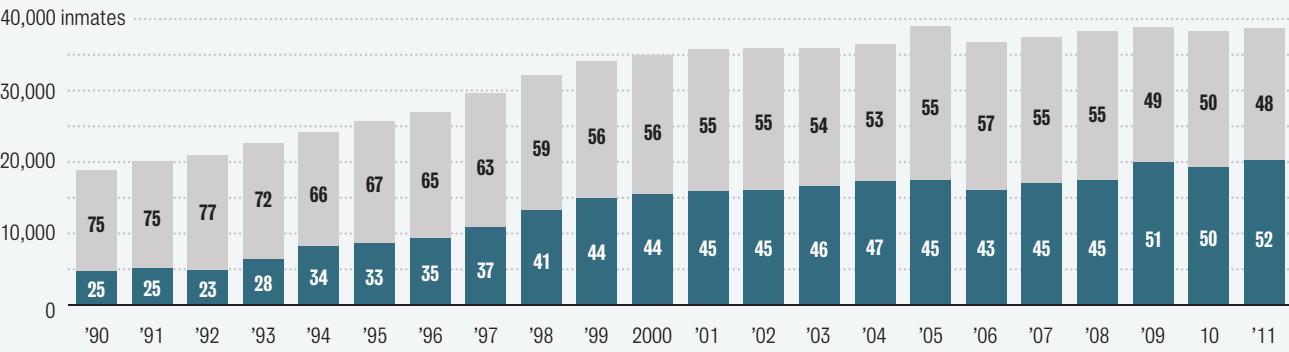
In the early 1990s, Louisiana was under a federal court order to reduce its prison population. The Department of Corrections encouraged local sheriffs and private companies to build new prisons by allowing them to skim a portion of the profits.

## WHAT DO SHERIFFS DO WITH THE MONEY?

Louisiana specializes in incarceration on the cheap. The state pays the sheriffs \$24.39 per day, per inmate, which means not a lot is left over after food, housing and personnel costs. The sheriff uses some of the profit to buy patrol cars, shotguns, bulletproof vests, etc. That leaves almost nothing for programs that benefit inmates and reduce their chances of another prison stay.

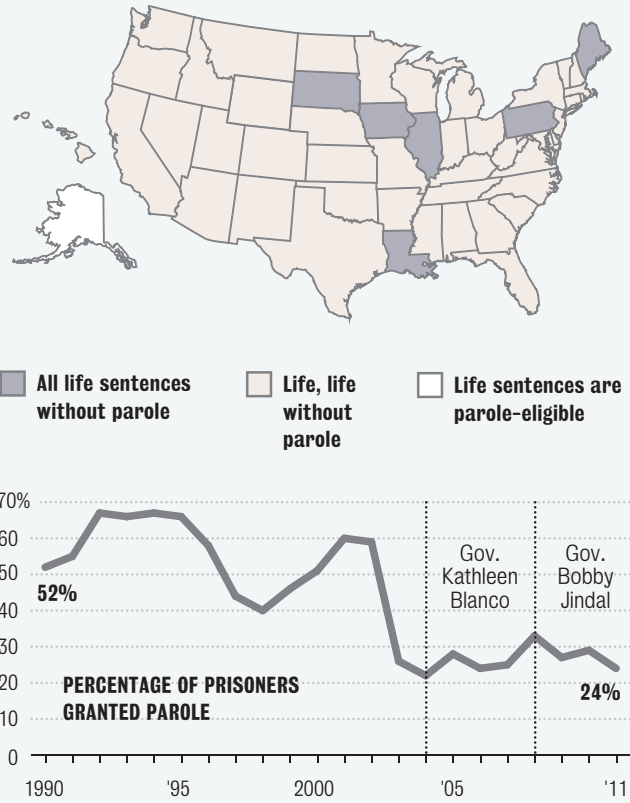
## LOCAL PRISONS NOW HOUSE MORE THAN HALF OF LOUISIANA INMATES

There is now a higher percentage of inmates in local prisons than in state prisons.



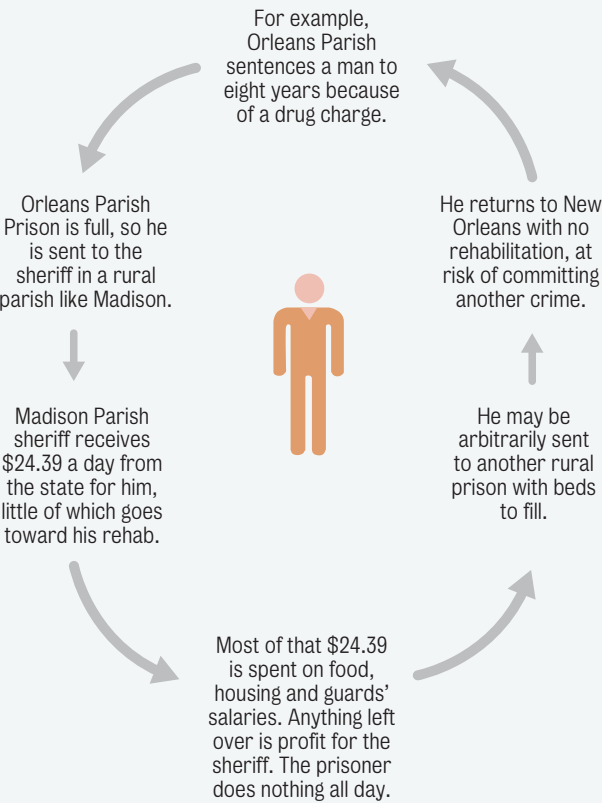
## 2. PAROLE IS HARD TO COME BY

Louisiana is one of six states where all life sentences are granted without parole, and those up for parole have had a harder time getting it under Govs. Blanco and Jindal.



## 3. LOCAL PRISON ECOSYSTEMS

Sheriffs trade inmates like horses, shipping a few to a pal up north who has empty beds.



## 4. HARSH SENTENCING LAWS

Louisiana is tougher on criminals than most other states, including Texas, which also has a high incarceration rate.

State/ incarceration ranking	First-degree murder	Car burglary	Worthless checks
<b>Louisiana</b> No. 1	Death, life without parole	Not more than 12 years and/or fine	6 months to 10 years, or fine
<b>Texas</b> No. 4	Death, life with or without parole, 5 to 99 years	No more than a year in jail and/or fine	Fine of no more than \$500
<b>California</b> No. 20	Death, life without parole, 25 years to life	Jail term of no more than a year	Jail term of no more than a year

### HOW EACH STATE SENTENCES HABITUAL OFFENDERS

<b>Louisiana</b>  For the 2nd and 3rd offenses, up to twice the maximum sentence. 3rd offense, life without parole if all are violent crimes, drug crimes, sex crimes with underage victim, or crimes with sentences of 12 years or more.	<b>California</b>  For the 2nd offense, sentence is doubled if first felony was violent or serious. 3rd offense, 25 years to life if previous two were violent or serious.	<b>Texas</b>  The next offense is bumped to a higher felony class.
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Sources: Department of Corrections, staff research  
RYAN SMITH / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE



# Louisiana Incarcerated

## How we built the world's prison capital

Cotton is no longer king in rural Richland Parish. In its place: the bartering and boarding of criminals.



PART OWNER, RICHLAND DETENTION CENTER DOUG WHITE

“The sheriff couldn’t pass a tax, but everyone wanted to lock them up and throw away the key. We did a service for the community and provided a lot of jobs for farmers who went broke.”



Without the Richland Parish Detention Center on an isolated stretch of Louisiana 15, many of the parish's residents would be working offshore in the oil industry, far away from their families. The prison provides 100 of the 160 Sheriff's Office jobs in the parish, and even the lowest-paying positions are in demand because they include a full package of benefits.

# Prison boom may have created too many beds

**SHERIFF**, from A-9

miles without interruption, is a case study in the economic advantages and moral incongruities of a rural sheriff operating a for-profit incarceration enterprise.

Without the detention center, many locals would be working offshore in the oil industry, away from their families. Deputies would be patrolling the country roads without a full array of modern equipment.

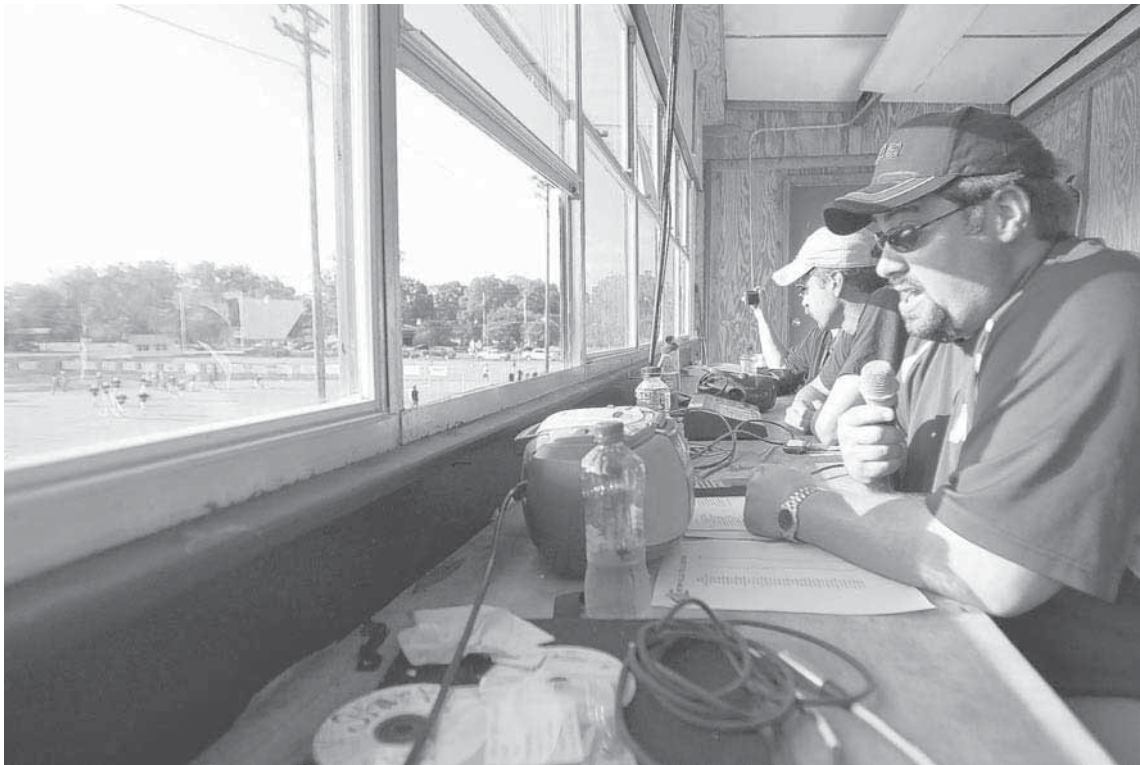
The wholesome air of small towns like Mangham has undoubtedly been enriched by more fathers staying close to home. But a business where prisoners hide contraband in Bibles and fashion knives from toothbrushes, and where wardens trade human beings like horses, is hardly ideal conversation for a family dinner table.

It is a Faustian bargain, but one that residents generally agree has been good for a region where farmers went bankrupt en masse after a drop in cotton prices. The sheriff's 160 jobs — 100 of them at the prison — are among the few that include a full package of benefits.

Lately, inmates have been hard to come by. The state-wide prison-building frenzy may have resulted in too many beds. Last year, the Richland Parish Detention Center lost more than \$500,000. But no employees were laid off, and the count has been healthy after a recent infusion of pre-trial inmates from Livingston Parish.

In good years, the prison has generated as much as \$700,000 in profits.

“There's no downside. They keep them contained out



there,” said Mike Shoemaker, whose printing business in Rayville, the parish seat, has many prison employees as customers. Shoemaker's wife draws several hundred dollars in retirement each month from her years as a guard at the prison.

State Rep. Charles “Bubba” Chaney, R-Rayville, said he supports reforms that give low-risk offenders a chance to succeed outside of prison, even if that means fewer inmates for the detention center. In the meantime, feeding and housing prisoners from other parts of the state is too good a business opportunity to pass up.

“You don't want to earn a living off the misfortunes of people who are incarcerated, but somebody has to fill the void,” Chaney said. “Having them in local rural parishes

is an economic driver in our community.”

### ‘Like running a town’

At a Mangham Junior High football game, Warden Cupp is in the announcer's booth, calling the game. His son Bryan is an offensive tackle on the seventh-grade team. Chris Flemming, the pint-sized quarterback, is the son of Perry Flemming, the warden on the women's side.

Mangham gets out to an early lead. “Nobody's gonna catch him. First play from scrimmage, touchdown, Dragons!” Cupp crows into the microphone.

During a break in the action, Cupp goes down the Mangham roster and counts. Eight of the 40-some players have parents who work at the prison.

“This is our lives right here,

at work or at a ballpark,” says Cupp, who was appointed warden of the men's prison a decade ago, when he was just 27.

In Mangham, everyone is either kin or neighbor or classmate or co-worker — sometimes all of the above. Monroë, with its mega-mall and chain restaurants, is a half-hour drive away, but Mangham remains its own world. For the past decade and a half, that world has been inextricably bound with the prison, known as “15” because of its location on an isolated stretch of Louisiana Highway 15.

More than any other town in Richland Parish, Mangham is the locus of the local prison industry. The key players — the sheriff, the wardens, the former sheriff who commissioned the prison — are from Mangham, as are many prison

employees. Alan Cupp, right, warden of the Richland Parish prison, is the volunteer announcer at a Mangham Junior High football game. His son Bryan is an offensive tackle on the seventh-grade team. Eight of the 40-some players have parents who work at the prison. ‘This is our lives right here, at work or at a ballpark,’ said Cupp, who was appointed warden of the men's prison a decade ago.

are on call 24/7 in case of a water-main break or other emergency.

“Everyone here works at the prison. Everyone I know works at the prison,” said Harwell, citing a daughter-in-law and a cousin, among others.

### ‘A lot of jobs for farmers’

In addition to being a part-time pharmacist at Mangham Drugs, Doug White is part-owner of the Richland Parish Detention Center.

The prison would never have been built without White and other investors. In return, they take 25 percent of the revenue each year.

“The sheriff couldn't pass a tax, but everyone wanted to lock them up and throw away the key,” White said. “We did a service for the community and provided a lot of jobs for farmers who went broke, and for their wives. It was good for the parish and good for the state.”

In the early 1990s, the state prison system was under a federal court order to reduce overcrowding. Richard Stalder, who headed the Department of Corrections at the time, saw the sheriffs as the solution. By increasing the per diem and guaranteeing that enough state inmates would come through their doors to keep profits up, he transformed them from adversaries into willing partners. A prison gold rush began.

In Richland, a poor parish even before it began reeling from a drop in cotton prices, there was no hope of a publicly funded prison. Deliverance came in the form of two separate teams of investors, including a local pastor; a local businessman named Billy McConnell, who now runs the state's

See **SHERIFF**, A-13



# Louisiana Incarcerated

## How we built the world's prison capital



SCOTT THRELKELD / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

Charlie Smart of the maintenance department, left, stops by to talk to Warden Alan Cupp at Richland Parish Detention Center southeast of Monroe.

# Private investors helped the parish get its prison

SHERIFF, from A-12

biggest private prison company; and White, the pharmacist. White and McConnell leased a former bar in the middle of nowhere, completing the women's prison in 1997 at a cost of about \$3.5 million. The investors and their successors act as landlords, paying for major maintenance and collecting a cut of the revenue as rent.

McDonald, then the chief deputy under Sheriff Lorell Graham, had doubts about embarking on such a large and unfamiliar venture. But everyone else saw dollar signs. The prison started paying off almost immediately, with nearly \$400,000 in annual profits by 1999.

Now, more sheriff's employees work in corrections than patrol the rural highways. When McDonald started his career in the 1970s, the department owned three patrol cars and three shotguns. Income from the prison has allowed the Richland Parish Sheriff's Office to squirrel away a \$1.5 million surplus and purchase "more equipment than we know what to do with," in McDonald's words. Deputies no longer drive used cars with 200,000 miles on them.

"It was always a dream of Daddy's, to bring something to Richland Parish, to help the economy," said Mangham Police Chief Lennie Graham, the former sheriff's son.

Corrections officers start at \$8 an hour, but the jobs are in demand because of the benefits, which include a fully funded pension. There is always a stack of applications on the couch in McDonald's office. With the sheriff's blessing, many take on second jobs. Even Cupp, who makes about \$50,000 a year as warden, ducks out each afternoon to drive a school bus.

"There's no telling what I'd be doing," said Capt. Frank Dear, 45, who runs the work-release program for the men's prison and used to work off-shore. "I would not be at home. The jobs are not here. I couldn't work for \$7.25 an hour and support my family."

Charlie Smart, the prison's maintenance manager, farmed 900 acres of cotton until the late 1990s, when prices plummeted. Soon after filing for bankruptcy, he began working as a corrections officer. His daughter used to work at the prison, too. Smart, 55, said he misses farming, but he also has nightmares about it. He is grateful for the steady paycheck and the pension.

"The only thing I have dreams about is that I got the crops just planted, when everybody else had already plowed," he said.

### 'Not for the weak at heart'

The prisoners from G dorm file into the hallway in orange jumpsuits and sneakers, hands clasped behind their backs like



It costs **\$1.43 a day** to feed a female prisoner, **\$1.78 a day** for a male, with a diet heavy on cheap staples like beans, rice and cornbread.

well-behaved schoolchildren. It is 11 a.m., and they are on their way to lunch, or "second chow."

Lt. Dee Hutson, a small man with a jockey's wizened face, calls out orders: "Close your jumper." "Take the long sleeves off." "Fix your collar."

The men, mostly young and African-American, silently comply. "Sarge, when can I make a phone call?" one asks.

The Salisbury steak and baked potato is palatable enough, though the portion looks meager against the large tray. It costs \$1.43 a day to feed a female prisoner, \$1.78 a day for a male, with a diet heavy on cheap staples like beans, rice and cornbread.

While the inmates are eating, Hutson and Cupp walk through the empty dormitory — opening lockers, examining items that look suspicious and yanking down towels put up in front of beds to obstruct the guards' view.

Eighty men share four toilets, three urinals and two sinks, sleeping double-bunked on thin plastic mattresses and watched over by guards in a glass booth.

A prison runs like clockwork, until it doesn't. On the women's side, Lt. Jessie Graham has a can of pepper spray clipped to her belt. She uses it once or twice a month. Everyone remembers the time an inmate showed up at the nurse's station holding his own ear in his hand after a fight with another inmate.

The other day, a work-release inmate was caught trying to smuggle contraband tobacco in a beverage cooler. Guards recently confiscated a makeshift tattoo machine made of a ballpoint pen, rubber bands and a motor from a cassette player. Richland inmates are drug dealers and thieves, not murderers, but they are still criminals.

"They've got nothing to do but sit around and watch you — everything you do, everything you say, every move you make

— to see what your strengths and weaknesses are and use them against you," Cupp said of the inmates in his charge. "They'll play sympathy, get on your good side and try to get you to do things you're not supposed to do. This is not for the weak at heart."

The Department of Corrections would not allow inmates to be interviewed. However, a few former Richland inmates, in Mangham on a lunch break from their landscaping jobs, spoke negatively of their experiences.

"They bird-feed you," said Jeremiah Kelly, 36, of Rayville, complaining of the small rations. Kelly spent three-and-half years at the detention center on a drug charge. As a trustee, he left the grounds every day to cut grass and perform other odd jobs, but many other inmates stayed in the prison all day, he said. He described "tear gas, Mace, fighting and rioting" while "the sheriff acted like he knew nothing about it."

Prison meals are approved by a dietitian, McDonald said. He added that while fights do happen, nothing on the scale of a riot has ever occurred at the Richland Parish Detention Center.

"Any prison that has that many inmates is going to have problems at some point. I don't think we're out of line with anywhere else."

### 'Miss, I can't read'

Idleness is a fact of life at most local prisons. At Richland, about one in three has a job either inside or outside the prison. A few others are enrolled in a GED class, with 21 passing the exam last year. The rest lounge around, day after day, year after year, the monotony broken only by a daily turn in the exercise yard.

"The rest of the time, I'm not going to sugarcoat it, we ain't got as much stuff for them to do as at Angola," Cupp said.

See SHERIFF, A-14

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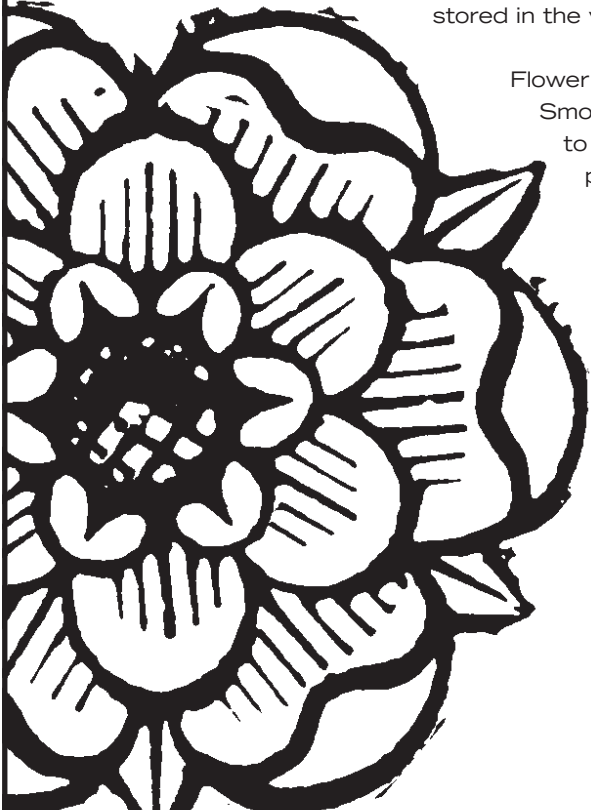
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# Educational offerings are rare in the local prisons

SHERIFF, from A-13

The Department of Corrections saves a huge amount of money by housing inmates under these conditions. An inmate at the Angola state penitentiary costs \$63.15 a day, compared with the \$24.39 sheriff's per diem. State facilities house the sickest and oldest, but DOC Secretary Jimmy LeBlanc admits part of the differential is the lack of educational offerings.

Angola inmates, most of whom will die behind bars, can acquire certifications in welding, air-conditioning repair and other trades. But inmates at local facilities, serving sentences of just a few years, have virtually no chance to learn a skill that could improve their job prospects. Of 15,000 prisoners released in Louisiana each year, 11,000 come out of local prisons like Richland.

The education level among

the Richland inmates is typical of the state prison system as a whole — an average of seventh grade, with some as low as second grade. The GED class, held in the prison cafeteria each day, is akin to a one-room schoolhouse, as teacher Phyllis White gears her lessons to a wide range of levels.

"Nothing breaks your heart more than a 55-year-old who says, 'Miss, I can't read,'" said White, whose students at Mangham High during the four decades she taught there included both Cupp and McDonald.

In October, Richland began offering a 100-hour re-entry curriculum that is already standard at state prisons. Inmates who were once released with nothing more than a bus ticket and \$10 will get tips on money management, job interviews and other situations they will face back in society. White is designing and teaching the new program on top of her GED responsibilities,

so it will not carry a large price tag.

With money tight, LeBlanc can do little more than encourage sheriffs to offer the re-entry program, which he hopes will eventually reach every local inmate. For McDonald, it's a no-brainer: Implementing the classes puts him in DOC's good graces, helping to ensure a continued flow of inmates.

Soon, there will be a changing of the guard at the Richland Parish Detention Center. McDonald is retiring later this year after three terms. Cupp will not be staying on when the new sheriff, Lee Harrell, takes office.

"I know it sounds crazy and impersonal, moving humans around, but we're stuck with this jail," McDonald said. "We can't walk away. We've got investors, employees."

.....

Cindy Chang can be reached at cchang@timespicayune.com or 504.826.3386.

## NATION

# Gas drillers wrangle over limitations, bans in N.Y.

*Half of rich holdings may be off limits*

By Mary Esch  
The Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — With all the restrictions in proposed state regulations and local bans, gas companies say about half of their lease holdings in the lucrative Marcellus Shale region in New York state will be off-limits or inaccessible to drilling if the state gives the green light to developers this year.

A coalition of environmental groups is pushing for a complete ban on shale gas drilling, but the industry and landowners hoping to lease to drillers are working to lift some of the restrictions and halt the movement toward local bans.

"Industry estimates that when you look at the cumulative effect of prohibitions and setbacks, 40 to 60 percent of their leasehold is effectively undevelopable," said Tom West, an Albany lawyer representing gas companies.

The Marcellus is a gas-rich shale deposit thousands of feet underground in parts of Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio and West Virginia. It's estimated to contain 84 trillion cubic feet of recoverable natural gas, enough to supply the nation's gas-burning electrical plants for 11 years.

The formation produced just over 1 trillion cubic feet of gas in Pennsylvania last year, providing \$3.5 billion in gross revenues for drillers and more than \$400 million in landowner royalties, according to an analysis by The Associated Press.

Industry insiders and environmental groups say it's impossible to quantify how much gas would be off-limits to production under the various bans and restrictions in New York because the amount of gas that can economically be extracted won't be known until wells are drilled.

Drilling hasn't been allowed since 2008, when the state began

an environmental review of high-volume hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, which frees gas from shale by injecting a well with millions of gallons of water mixed with chemicals and sand. After drillers poured into Pennsylvania in 2008, environmental problems including methane-contaminated private water wells, salt in rivers from wastewater dumping and spill-polluted streams prompted regulatory reforms in that state and touched off a vocal opposition movement in New York.

The Marcellus Shale comprises 20,569 square miles beneath 23 counties across the southern half of New York, with the most gas likely to come from areas where the shale is thickest and deepest underground. That's in the counties along the Pennsylvania border, with the prime area considered to be in Broome and Tioga counties and parts of Chenango and Chemung counties.

About 25 municipalities have enacted bans on gas drilling, and about 75 others have enacted moratoriums. Dozens of other communities are considering them. That amounts to 1,015 square miles of the Marcellus region under local bans, 2,171 square miles under moratorium and more than 2,400 square miles under consideration for a ban or moratorium, said Karen Edelstein, a consultant in Ithaca who closely follows the oil and gas industry.

The majority of those communities are outside the region most likely to see development. Only one, the city of Binghamton, is in one of the prime counties, Broome.

The Joint Landowners Coalition of New York, which represents about 70,000 landowners seeking to lease land for gas drilling, is working to counter the push for municipal bans. The group has drafted a resolution supporting gas drilling, and several town boards have adopted it. Members of the coalition also have lobbied in towns considering bans and have had some success blocking them.

"We maintain that these local

bans are illegal under New York law and that they will be overturned in court," said Karen Moreau, executive director of the New York State Petroleum Council.

Two of the bans were upheld by local judges but are under appeal.

Another concern is restrictions proposed in state permitting guidelines and environmental regulations that are undergoing final review.


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