The Loyola College of Law Human Rights Advocacy Project, supervised by Professor Jeanne Woods, is currently investigating ongoing human rights violations at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. It is the goal of this project to explore the potential use of international human rights treaties as a framework for analysis and advocacy regarding the use of involuntary servitude at Angola. These treaties include the Charter of the Organization of American States, the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, and the Inter-American Convention of Human Rights.

Angola officials jokingly refer to the prison as a “Gated Community,” “The Farm,” or, in the words of Warden Burl Cain, an “old-school plantation.” In fact, Angola is a former slave plantation. Today it remains a plantation in which men – overwhelmingly African-American – are taken away from their communities and forced to labor to produce capital and goods for the prison and those who operate it.

The Penitentiary holds nearly 6,000 men. The average sentence is 93 years. The philosophy of the prison is that one never leaves it alive. Nearly every man in Angola is forced to work for a wage of 4 to 20 cents an hour. The types of labor include farm work, carpentry, construction, tending livestock, and organizing the prison’s biannual Rodeo in which prisoners risk their lives to net over a million dollars for the prison. Where the money goes is not publicly known. The prisoners have built an entire town for the employees of the prison and their families, re-creating the dynamic of the master-slave relationship in which 1400 employees and their families live off the labor of the incarcerated men.

Though nominally public, we believe that Angola is essentially a profit-based institution focused on the exploitation of free labor rather than the rehabilitation of offenders. There is a clear financial motive to keep the prison full, even if it means keeping men incarcerated beyond their original sentences.

The Inter-American Commission of Human Rights

The Commission is a regional body with the mandate to uphold, foster, and protect human rights, peace, and justice. As a member of the OAS, the US can be brought before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights even though we are not a party to the Convention on Human Rights.
Article 6 of the Convention states:

**Freedom from Slavery**

1. No one shall be subject to slavery or to involuntary servitude, which are prohibited in all their forms...
2. No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labor. This provision shall not be interpreted to mean that in those countries in which the penalty established for certain crimes is deprivation of liberty at forced labor, the carrying out of such a sentence imposed by a competent court is prohibited. Forced labor shall not adversely affect the dignity or the physical or intellectual capacity of the prisoner.
3. For the purposes of this article, the following do not constitute force or compulsory labor:
   a. Work or service normally required of a person imprisoned in execution of a sentence or formal decision passed by the competent judicial authority. Such work or service shall be carried out under the supervision and control of public authorities and any persons performing such work or service shall not be placed at the disposal of any private party, company, or juridical person...

We are currently investigating whether forced labor is formally part of the judicial sentences, and what private contractors, interest groups, or individuals benefit from the vast income generated by the involuntary servitude at Angola.

The American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man provides:

**Article XIV.** Every person has the right to work, under proper conditions, and to follow his vocation freely, insofar as existing conditions of employment permit.

Every person who works has the right to receive such remuneration as will, in proportion to his capacity and skill, assure him a standard of living suitable for himself and for his family.

We are currently researching the extent to which prisoners at Angola are being inadequately compensated for the work they perform and the profits they generate.

**Moving Forward:**

In the coming months we hope to form a broad based coalition of community members, educators, activists, students, exonerated citizens, ex-offenders and others to gather data, evidence, and information on the institution of modern day slavery at Angola State Penitentiary, and to strategize on ways to eliminate these dehumanizing practices.

For more information on the Loyola Human Rights Advocacy Project, please contact:

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