

To celebrate the publication of *A Clean Hell: Anarchy and Abolition in America's Most Notorious Dungeon* from PM Press, author Eric King and Josh Fernandez discuss the book, life inside the ADX supermax in Colorado, healing from the trauma of a decade behind bars, and struggling for a world beyond the carceral state and the sanitized violence it tries to hide.

A Clean Hell opens the doors of America's most secretive prison and lets the reader step into the cell to experience all the horrors the Federal Bureau of Prisons tries to keep hidden underground. After defying the odds and beating the government in a crooked criminal trial, antifascist prisoner Eric King found himself inside the ADX for eighteen months at the end of a ten-year bid. In telling his story of his trial and life inside this underground supermax, Eric vividly captures what life inside ADX is like for both the most infamous prisoners, as well as those prison rebels you have never heard of.



A CLEAN HELL

ANARCHY AND ABOLITION:
A CONVERSATION WITH ERIC KING

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ERIC
KING

JOSH
FERNANDEZ

Support Political Prisoners

Originally hosted as a live conversation by Firestorm Books, recording available on Firestorm's youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDddTTAfME0>
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Published by PM Press, *A Clean Hell: Anarchy and Abolition in America's Most Notorious Dungeon* by Eric King is a searing firsthand account from inside the most repressive prison in the United States, a place built not for rehabilitation but for disappearance.

all labor volunteered

with whatever weapons at hand



As you've heard & read, it is vital that we support the political prisoners of our liberation movements. Providing support builds bridges across and through prison bars, giving those locked inside a connection to the outside world. Your support matters.

Get involved. Write to a political prisoner—a simple letter provides a needed escape. Visit them in prison. Ask what a political prisoner needs and do what you can to help them. Offer them support.

Visit the NYC Anarchist Black Cross website (nycabc.wordpress.com) and learn more about those currently imprisoned for political reasons.

Visit *In Contempt* for monthly roundups of political prisoner, repression, and prisoner rebellion news (incontempt.noblogs.org)

Buy a *Certain Days: Freedom for Political Prisoners* calendar (certaindays.org).

Visit your local Books Through Bars group and send books to those incarcerated (booksthroughbarsnyc.org/resources).

Join your nearest Anarchist Black Cross group (abcf.net).

Ray Luc Levasseur — Ray Luc was a member of the United Freedom Front and the Sam Melville–Jonathan Jackson Unit who spent over twenty years in prison. The group known as the Ohio 7—Ray, Patricia Gros Levasseur, Barbara Curzi-Laaman, Carol Saucier Manning, Tom Manning, Jaan Laaman and Richard Williams—were working-class revolutionaries charged with actions against US military facilities, recruitment centers, and corporate headquarters. These actions were done in solidarity with the people of South Africa and Central America, who were bearing the brunt of US imperialism. Ray spent twenty-one months imprisoned in Tennessee State Penitentiary in Nashville and at Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary in Petros, Tennessee, between 1969 and 1971, before spending twenty years imprisoned from 1984 to 2004 for his actions with the UFF. Ray has published three zines—*Family Values*; *Letters from Exile*; and *The Trial Statements of Ray Luc Levasseur*—all of which are to be republished by Kersplebedeb and Burning Books in 2024.

Susan Rosenberg — Susan spent sixteen years in high security federal prisons for her involvement in the anti-imperialist armed actions that culminated in the Resistance Conspiracy Case of the mid-1980s. Her sentence was commuted by outgoing president Bill Clinton in 2001. Susan was imprisoned at the Lexington high security unit at FCI Lexington, the first maximum security prison for women in Marianna, Florida, and FCI Danbury, and she also spent time in the DC jail. She was involved in the May 19th Communist Organization, the Puerto Rican independence movement, the movement to Ban the Box, and the successful fight for the release of longtime political prisoner Dr. Mutulu Shakur. Susan published the book *An American Radical: Political Prisoner in My Own Country* (Citadel Press, 2011).

Eric King is a father, poet, author, and activist. In December 2023 he was released from the supermax ADX prison after spending nearly ten years as a political prisoner for an act of protest over the police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. He was held in solitary confinement for years and was met with violence by guards throughout his incarceration. Eric has published three zines: *Battle Tested* (2015), *Antifa in Prison* (2019), and *Pacing in My Cell* (2019). His sentencing statement is included in the book *Defiance: Anarchist Statements Before Judge and Jury* (2019). Eric now works as a paralegal for the Bread and Roses Legal Center.

Josh Fernandez is an antiracist organizer, a father, a runner, a fighter, an English professor, and a writer whose stories have appeared in *Spin*, *The Sacramento Bee*, *The Hard Times*, and several alternative news weeklies. Josh is the author of *The Hands That Crafted the Bomb: The Making of a Lifelong Antifascist* and lives in Sacramento, CA.

Libertie Valance: Welcome everybody. My name is Libertie and I'm a member of the Firestorm Collective. Today we're really excited to be hosting a book launch event with author, activist, and former political prisoner Eric King, who's going to be in conversation with author and educator Josh Hernandez. If you don't already have the book *A Clean Hell: Anarchy and Abolition in America's Most Notorious Dungeon*, Eric has done an incredible job here of writing a book that seamlessly combines personal memoir, journalistic expose, and political insight. And Eric's a fantastic writer who really puts everything on the page. So, if you haven't picked this up yet, I hope that the conversation tonight inspires you to do that.

Just a little background on Firestorm. We're a 17-year-old radical bookstore owned and operated by a queer feminist collective in southern Appalachia on the land of the Cherokee people. ... So, thanks so much to Eric and Josh for being with us today and being willing to do this book launch virtually.

Eric King: Yeah, thank you so much. Shout out PM Press for helping me with this amazing book. Just a wonderful publication. So, the reason I wrote this book is because in my mind there was no representation of these stories in popular culture. There's not very many people that have ever been released from ADX, let alone been able to have the platform to talk about it. So that's a privilege that I had. And there's almost nobody who has won at federal trial. That list of numbers is minuscule, so having both those unique experiences together, it felt selfish and almost pretentious to hoard that information. It's important especially in times like now, where the fascists are ramping up repression and more and more of us could see the inside of a cage, or the potentiality of being inside of the cage. And I wanted people to know what can happen if it gets taken to the max.

There is a lot of misinformation about trial, a lot of romanticization of it to where it's looked at as like this revolutionary act of rebellion as opposed to a defiant fight for your life. There's a lot of misinformation about prison resistance. That's another thing, where people talk about it as if they're George Jackson and the reality is that what you are going to face is brutality, and people need to know that going in. It's consequence awareness. And because I had a unique experience of having it horribly bad. It could have happened to anyone. It happened to me because of how

securing an investigation. A grand jury was convened three days later that exonerated the prison guard after permitting no black prisoners to testify. Thirty minutes after the grand jury decision, another prison guard was thrown off a cell-block tier to his death, and George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Clutchette—who came to be known as the Soledad Brothers—were indicted. Many revolutionaries would join the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee, such as Angela Davis who would become the leader of the committee and friend to George, who sent her the book *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. On August 7, 1970, George Jackson's 17-year-old brother Jonathan Jackson burst into a Marin County courtroom with an automatic weapon, freed prisoners three prisoners, including Ruchell Magee, and took a judge, district attorney, and three jurors hostage to demand the release of the Soledad Brothers. Police killed Jonathan, the judge, and wounded three others in the ensuing chase. On August 21, 1971, George pulled a 9 mm pistol from beneath a wig and said: "Gentlemen, the dragon has come," quoting Vietnamese revolutionary Ho Chi Minh, and ordered prisoners' cells opened, escaped to the yard, and was murdered by a guard from a guard tower. George finished writing the book *Blood in My Eye*, which was published in 1972, just days before his escape and death. *Blood in My Eye* is a masterpiece of urban guerrilla theory, political economy, and theories of armed Black liberation.

Oso Blanco — While his Cherokee name is Yona Unega (White Bear), from growing up in New Mexico he is used to being called Oso Blanco (White Bear in Spanish). He is now serving 55 years in prison for bank robbery, aggravated assault on the FBI, escape and firearms charges. Oso Blanco defended himself from federal agents in a gun battle on August 13th 1999 at his home in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Although he escaped, he was arrested later that day. After being held just over a year in New Mexico State Penitentiary, he escaped from a prison transport van and almost immediately resumed robbing banks before he was recaptured. Oso Blanco never used a gun in any bank robbery, but he has a long history of living by the gun and will not hesitate to use it on the agents of repression or the occupiers of Aztlan whom force false laws on the true people of this land. He is not asking for monetary support— he's only asking that people become aware of indigenous people's issues. In an interview he expressed: "I am still able to hold my head up high and feel the gratification for my work in a world where money, power and destructive industries are regarded far above humanity, indigenous and impoverished peoples and cultures. I cannot help that I got deeply into my work..." He spent some time in Mexico after the escape, and then continued to expropriate funds from U.S. banks to send to the Zapatistas in Chiapas. Authorities believe he expropriated funds from about eight banks after his self-liberation. He was placed on the "15 most wanted" fugitive list. On February 7, 2001, Oso Blanco was recaptured, unarmed, after being wounded by gunshots from the Albuquerque police to his back and face. To write to Oso and contribute to his Childrens Art Project that continues his project to raise money for the Zapatistas, visit freeosoblanco.org

Bill Dunne — Bill is an anti-authoritarian sentenced to 90 years for the attempted liberation of comrades from Seattle’s King County Jail in 1979 and for attempting to break himself out of Leavenworth Penitentiary in 1983. Bill was charged with possession of an automatic weapon, auto theft, and aiding & abetting the escape. Charges further alleged the operation was financed by bank expropriations and facilitated by illegal acquisition of weapons and explosives. Bill and his codefendant, Larry Giddings, were accused by police of being members of a small, heavily armed group of revolutionaries,” associated with the anarcho-communist Wellspring Communion. Dunne has made the rounds of the federal prison system—including a stint at the infamous Control Unit in Marion, Illinois, where he assisted prisoners with political & academic education. Bill also organizes solidarity runs in conjunction with the Anarchist Black Cross Federation’s Running Down the Walls and has edited & written for 4 Struggle magazine. Bill also helped run the newsletter “Prison News Service” from Marion, which was incorporated into the Toronto anarchist prisoner support magazine *Bulldozer*. To write to Bill, visit nycabc.wordpress.com

David Gilbert — David is a lifelong anti-imperialist who was captured and imprisoned as a result of an attempted expropriation of a Brinks truck in Nyack, New York, in 1981. He was sentenced to seventy-five years to life but his sentence was commuted by outgoing Governor Cuomo, and he was released from prison after nearly forty years in November 2021. Though he spent short stints at MCC-NY and other federal prisons and jails, David spent the majority of his forty-year incarceration at the six maximum security men’s prisons in New York (Attica, Auburn, Clinton, Comstock, Wende, and Shawangunk prisons). While in prison, David was a cofounder of the Certain Days Collective, and he also helped pioneer AIDS awareness programs that saved thousands of lives in prisons across the country. David wrote numerous zines, including *Our Commitment Is to Our Communities: Mass Incarceration, Political Prisoners and Building a Movement for Community-Based Justice* (2014). He also wrote three books — *No Surrender: Writings from an Anti-Imperialist Political Prisoner* (Abraha 2004); *Love and Struggle: My Life in SDS, the Weather Underground, and Beyond* (PM Press, 2012); and *Looking at the U.S. White Working Class Historically* (Kersplebedeb, 2017).

George Jackson — George was a revolutionary prisoner and Minister of Defense for the Black Panther Party. During his first years at San Quentin State Prison, where he was imprisoned at age 20 for stealing \$70 from a gas station on a sentence of one year to life, George became involved in revolutionary activity, after becoming acquainted with the works of Marx, Lenin, Mao, and Fanon. On January 17, 1970, a prison officer shot and killed three Black prisoners during a set-up fight with members of the Aryan Brotherhood. Following their assassinations, thirteen black prisoners began a hunger strike in the hopes of

I resisted and how they viewed antifascists in prison at that time. Because I wanted to share it. But more importantly, I wanted to share the stories that will never get told.

There are 370 people inside ADX, and I am one. Most of those people no one in this chat or no one that ever listens to this will ever hear about. You might hear about the Unabomber. You might hear about the big time jihadis. But you’re not going to hear about Colin McDonald. You’re not going to hear about Shahid. And those are people whose stories I took to heart because they had experienced their own form of brutality. And my repression is not more valuable than theirs. What I went through does not mean that I am special and they are unspecial because I have a chance to talk about it. So it was important to me to let people know that I’m not the only one who deserves to be heard. I wanted to use my platform to uplift those people who will most likely never have that chance.

So that’s the purpose of this book, to give young radicals or just any radicals an inside look into what can happen when it gets to that worst point, and to hopefully encourage people to write those inside. I encourage people to love and honor and cherish those who are going through hell right now and to recognize that there’s levels of hell. Not all prison sentences are the same. Not all repression is the same. And therefore, not all support can be the same. That’s really, really important to me that we always show love to those that are still captive. So, that was the point of the book. I’m going to turn it over to Josh now.

Josh Fernandez: First of all, thank you Libertie, thank you Firestorm, thank you PM Press for allowing us to do this. I think I can speak for both of us when I say everyone’s treated us really well. I want to back up a little bit because it was kind of funny. We were talking before this and Libertie was talking about your book and said it was almost surprising to read the book and get so much out of it, and because it’s such a good book. It’s such a good book, and when I got the manuscript I was a little scared. I’m like, “Oh, what if this book sucks?” Right? Because I don’t know you as a writer. I don’t know. And I come from a world of literature and studying, writing, the craft of writing. People go to school for years and years to learn how to put words on a page. And here you come out and you just write this beautifully heartbreaking book that tore me up. I read the manuscript and it made me cry. And then I’m like, “Okay, I’m going to read this book again just to prepare for this interview.” And it made me cry again. That’s a real

skill to be able to coax emotion out of people. So my first question really is how the fuck did you write this book? Like how did you write it?

Eric King: I obviously had a great editorial team. Josh Davidson was really, really instrumental in helping me navigate because I put a lot of anger into the first edition before it got chopped down. There was a lot of hurt inside of it and we had to figure out what actually told this story as opposed to what was just me ranting with rage. We also had elders take a look at it also, like David Gilbert and Ray Luc [Levasseur] both looked at it and gave me advice, [and asked] do you really want to write about this, like this section, that section. But also it was my therapy. I still sit with a lot of hurt, a lot of trauma, and a lot of things that I don't know how to get rid of. And because I had to go so many years without talking, literally I went 5 and a half years without talking to my family, and that same time period was also not talking to friends. So a lot of these experiences got shoved down, and that hurts that way. They just fester and they ferment in there. And when I got out and I had a chance to go to therapy, I realized how good it feels to talk about things that are hard. If you share them, it takes the load off your shoulders. So stuff like sexual assault, who would I ever have a chance to tell that to if not in a book form? Things like the physical torture, who would believe it? Who would care if it wasn't written down in a way that is captivating, or it didn't have pictures and stuff like that. So shout out Courtney at PM Press for making so many great pictures and doing the photos for it, all the art inside.

But people expect me to be dumb. I mask. I mask a lot. I put on 'silly face'. I put on 'fun face' sometimes. I put on 'aggressive political prisoner face'. But what's underneath that is really, really emotional Eric. Really, really vulnerable Eric that just really, really wants to share love with the world and is also still healing and probably will keep healing. So I took all the smartness that I had left, just the minuscule skill that I had left, and put it into a book that thankfully isn't trash. It could have been trash really, really quick. Not every prison book is guaranteed to be entertaining, even if they all deserve to be heard. So, yeah, I nailed it. This is probably the best thing I've ever done besides marrying my wife. This is number two on my list.

Josh Fernandez: And meeting me, of course. [Laughter] There's a part in this book that reminds me of what you just said, where you said, "I haven't shaken their claws out of my psyche yet." How do you do that? Have you

Josh Fernandez: Thanks y'all. It's been a great evening. I look forward to seeing you all again soon.

Libertie Valance: Thanks to everybody who came out. Love you all both. Bye, friends.

Eric King: This is where I think radical honesty comes in. If you talk honestly to someone — like, “Hey, you hurt me. Here’s why.” Or, “Hey, that made me uncomfortable because of this.” Or, “Here’s stuff about myself. Here’s what I’m feeling. Tell me what you’re feeling.” — that develops trust because we can respect that. We can respect when someone is honest with us. I can understand you’re not bullshitting me. You’re not going and telling the cops that was rude to you. You’re telling me, “Hey, that wasn’t really fair. Can we work on that?” That’s a legit relationship now. And from my experiences that can really, really help people. Josh?

Josh Fernandez: Yeah, I think that’s totally right. I think it’s radical honesty. When I go into the prison to teach, that’s what it is. It’s authenticity. I don’t fuck around. I just am myself. I don’t try to change my persona when I teach. It’s this all the time. And I’ve gotten letters from white supremacists after the semester’s over and they send me letters like, “Hey, this class changed my view on the world. I didn’t know that there were people like you who were doing these kinds of things in prisons.” And even if they don’t change their views so much, it did give them a little insight into the way people can be kind and honest. So I think it did move the needle a little bit.

The part about guards and prison staff, I don’t really know. I mean, people are always vulnerable to guards and prison staff. When I went in there, I was vulnerable, too. The way they’d look at me, the way they’d form little groups around me and try to intimidate me. They were fucking dicks. So, everyone’s vulnerable. But I always made it very clear that I was teaching my students and we were together and I wasn’t on their side, which is probably why they don’t let me in the prison anymore.

Eric King: Yes, that is why. Yes. So, there we go. I’m going to wrap it up. I want to thank everyone. We had a really big crowd, a shockingly big crowd, and that made me feel really seen and really loved, even though I should feel that way even if no one showed up. I thank everyone for giving me that space to be vulnerable, to heal. Please write to someone inside. Please, for the love of God, take the time, take the five fucking minutes it takes to just write a letter and ask them, “Are you okay? Can I help you with anything?” And then do it. Do it. Put in the work. You want your parents or your partner to have that love. So, please do that. Thank you so much. Thanks, Josh. Thanks, Libertie.

done that? Are you still working on that? Is that something that’s going to be a continuous thing for the rest of your life, do you think? And what are their claws?

Eric King: Yeah. So, those claws are deep emotional trauma. Those claws are the fears that I still have being around people, the anxiety that I have that I’m going to do the wrong thing. The trepidation that my voice isn’t valuable because for so long it wasn’t heard. The fear that people aren’t going to show up, that I’m going to push people away, those are claws that are in there. And then also I’ve been hurt physically. I have been physically damaged. I still can’t feel so much in my left arm, and so much in my left leg. These things are gone. So the way I shake those claws is by talking about it, and, of course, by doing events. I know you’re not supposed to get vindication or validation from people showing up for you, but when I see we’ve got a lot of attendees right now that makes me feel safe. Like these people are not going to hurt me if I’m vulnerable. They’re going to actually show support and love. And that’s something that is not guaranteed for anybody.

I’m also on a lot of medication. I’m on three or four different mood stabilizers that I need to function, because I wasn’t functional. You should not want to pull a knife on someone at a grocery store for bumping into you. That’s not ... you cannot exist in society that way. And I also had really good EMDR therapy for a long time. And that’s a privilege also. Not everyone will have access to that sort of therapy. Because I did, it felt like I’d be a real piece of shit if I didn’t take advantage of it.

Josh Fernandez: What is EMDR?

Eric King: EMDR. It’s where you hold these buzzers and they go off intermittently and it shakes, and it helps you just shake out trauma to remember things you’ve repressed. It’s a form of therapy and I cannot recommend it enough.

But as far as like am I going to have it forever? I fucking hope not, dude. It gets old. It gets old having to mask all the time. Having to be insecure all the time. I don’t want to have to look at how many people are here to feel good about myself to know that people care. That’s not healthy. So, hopefully it’s gone by tomorrow. But if not, maybe a couple more weeks, a couple more months, maybe a couple years. We’ll see.

Josh Fernandez: Is that why you're so good at Scrabble?

Eric King: I'm so good at Scrabble! I'm a beast, dude. [Laughter]

Josh Fernandez: I assume a lot of this comes from the horrors that you faced in prison. Reading this, there are certain parts that made me cry. And one of the parts that made me cry was where you're there with the guards and they're torturing you and you're trying not to cry. For some reason that just struck me, and that was the most emotional part of the book for me. It just seemed like it took a toll. It really took a toll. So, I kept reflecting on myself in this book, like, could I have done this? And the answer is no. I don't think I could have done it. I don't think my mind is that strong. So, I'm wondering what it takes to have a strong mind in that setting?

Eric King: In the torture setting?

Josh Fernandez: Yeah, and in the prison setting, because you went through stuff outside of that in the prison that was bad, too.

Eric King: It seemed like day after day there was something. The thing about this book is I didn't want it just to be a bunch of war stories. I left out years of shit that I still don't think people would believe unless they read it in a manuscript, like my lawsuits and everything. But for me it was strong ethics. Like what is important to me? How do I want to live? And I want to live as an anarchist. I want to live free. I want to live without people dominating me and without dominating others. When you have something to rely on when they come at you, it gives you strength, like you're not alone. Like their repression of me is a vindication of my beliefs and of my actions. You are showing me that I have struck a nerve with you. So, it sparks up this false sense of dignity. Maybe not even false, but like you're not gonna break me. You're not going to take something from me that I'm not voluntarily giving to you.

But sometimes you fail at that. The torture stuff, like being four-pointed, it's hard to describe what it's like just laying down pissing on yourself for seven hours while staring at a fluorescent light bulb. It's hard to describe the guards forcing you to do things to yourself that you never want to do. And when those things happen, you have to fall back on what matters to you. And mine was, I need to get home to my family. How do I make it

and how to maintain them on the outside. Because I've very successfully put in the hard work to have a very strong and loving and powerful relationship with my wife. A lot of it had bumps in the road. A lot of it had to do with me doing self work. It had to do with me not putting myself first all the time. So, the next book is going to be hopefully a helpful book to help people know that your relationship can survive if it's worth it. If you think it's worth it, you'll put in the work to do it and it comes inside-outside.

Josh Fernandez: One question to mix it up. How did you get into flashy Adidas designer sneakers? I'll just say one thing. It's so funny because I'm on this Adidas subreddit and I just lurk it all the time and there's this one dude on there who always has these fresh Adidas and I'm like, "Damn, this dude is so cool," blah blah blah. I followed him for like a year and then just the other day he posted a picture of himself in his Adidas and it was Eric King! [Laughter] I'm like, "Oh, I can't escape this motherfucker." You son of a bitch, you got me again.

Eric King: How did I get into them? I love Adidas. I love soccer. So, they're always there. Rochelle had to force me to treat myself well. Rochelle's my wife. She had to treat me, or force me, to understand that I deserve things that I want. Because prison teaches you you don't deserve shit. You're not getting shit. Everything can be taken away. I forget what that's called, but impermanence. Everything can be taken. So don't have nothing. And they taught me that it's okay to love yourself. It's okay to have something you enjoy. It's okay to look at something and be like, "I want that" and get that. You work hard. You have two jobs. You're a great dad. You're a great father. Love yourself the way that you love us, and you would want us to have whatever we want on this earth. So why not do that for yourself? Why not care enough about yourself? So I thank my wife every day for that. Rochelle taught me that it's okay. And if you want good Adidas, don't go buy them at the store. Get them on eBay. Get them on Japanese eBay. You want to get them from overseas. You don't want to buy American shoes because we have the lamest styles over here. Trust me. Don't be one of those kids. Wow. I sounded like such a douche. For real.

Josh Fernandez: For both Eric and Josh, how do we set boundaries and also build trusting relationships with people inside without making them more vulnerable to the guards and prison staff?

never given that option, given that chance? How else are they ever going to change or see the damage that they cause if no one ever helps them figure out the damage that's been done to them? So, yeah, they deserve it. I won't do it. I fucked up sex offenders in prison. I did. I watched them get stabbed. I watched them get their heads kicked in. I watched them get extorted. And that's because I wasn't willing to put my life on the line for someone else. I wasn't willing to do it. If you stick up for a sex offender in prison, you will get butchered. And I was not willing to get butchered for people that had done those crimes. And that is a reality. It's a reality. I'm not always proud of it, but I still exist in that world. You exist in that world. And you have to sometimes play by that world's rules. It can't just be, "Oh, I'm going to stand up for every single person and fight every single fight." That's how you get your teeth kicked out. So fight to win.

Josh Fernandez: If you could speak to the version of yourself incarcerated in ADX, what would you say to him?

Eric King: I would tell that kid that he's doing good. Like, you are doing good, you are loved, you are not forgotten. People are not moving on from you. Your voice will be heard. So, do not give up. You have a family. You have a future. And you have a now. Your existence right now in this cell is still beautiful. It's still you. You are still capable of giving that existence all the love, all the joy, all the dopamine it deserves. You don't have to live in the past. You don't have to live in your hurt. You can work. You can work forward and love yourself and love others. I would give that kid a hug so fast because that Eric is hurt. That Eric is crying every day. That Eric is sleeping on the most uncomfortable mattress you can imagine in your life. That Eric is eating food that he wanted to spit out every single day. So that's what I would tell that Eric, don't throw away your now and don't think that there's not a then. I love that Eric. He's a good kid. I'm crying. That Eric is trying so hard not to fuck up. That Eric is trying so hard not to fall apart. He's trying so hard to manage, to still be there for his family and still be there for his friends. He's trying so hard to make sure that people don't forget him, that people understand what's happening and care. You're doing good. I know that Eric's a good dude, too. That Eric deserves joy. Thanks for the hard question. God damn.

Josh Fernandez: Do you think you will write another book?

Eric King: Yeah. The next book's going to be about relationships inside,

home safely to Rochelle? I don't want to die. I don't want to get more time. So how do I make it home to her? How do I make it home to these little kids so that their mom isn't just destroyed emotionally and mentally every day? And that's what I kept in my mind, even though I failed sometimes.

You get stuck in the war zone sometimes. There were stretches where I was battling every day because they were winning. That's what I consider it. If you're letting them dictate what you're doing, then that's them winning. So a lot of my ability to survive was denying them access to that victory. You don't get to determine that I will cry. I will not give you that. You will not get these tears from me. You will not elicit this anger from me. When I was four-pointed, you will not hear me scream. And I've heard people screaming. I've heard people screaming to god to kill them because it gets so painful. But I will not give you these victories. No easy victories is a motto that I live by. You're not going to take it from me. You don't get to take everything. You can take my body, but you're not getting this also, you pieces of shit. So that's how I survived — constant resistance and constant embracing of what's worth it and what I have on the outside.

Josh Fernandez: I imagine there's a very fine balance between constant resistance and shutting the fuck up so you can go home.

Eric King: Yeah, there is. Yes. And it's hard. That is a tough pill to swallow. If a guard comes and disrespects you, in the SHU especially, there's a part of you, or at least me, that says you're now an enemy and I'm going to get you. Yeah, that's it. You said the wrong thing. You dropped Rochelle's letter too hard. You didn't give me my sugar pack. You looked at me wrong. That means you want to now have these issues. But that means that I now don't get to determine how my day goes because now you get to. And so it is a fine line, and sometimes it's worth it, sometimes it's not. But you have to decide what's more important for you — your ego, your pride, or whatever you have to grasp onto on the outside. And if I had a longer sentence, I probably would have got life in prison because I would not have had shit to grasp onto.

Josh Fernandez: Yeah. There's a part in your book where you say, "Never underestimate how much cowardice exists within the hearts of those with physical power." That stood out to me because it reminded me of your back tattoo. What does your back tattoo say?

Eric King: It says Every Cop is My Enemy.

Josh Fernandez: Yeah. I think if there are people listening to this who are not as radical or maybe more liberal or don't understand the resistance against law enforcement, maybe we can talk about that a little bit, because it's a hard pill to swallow for some people, that kind of ideology.

Eric King: Yeah. And so in the free world I captured it by just growing up poor. That class horror never leaves you when you've seen the cops decimate your communities, your neighbors, your friends. People that have never had that happen cannot fathom that it's real. And then you see what they're doing. For example in Minnesota, in Chicago, in LA, all these places where you see ICE militarized, and they're all Proud Boys. They're all militants. Our enemies now have a position of power, like legal power. In prison, these people, it is so easy to find them as your enemy because they don't give you a choice, even if you didn't want to. The options are either be a bootlicker and let them just step all over you or see them for what they are, which are just rampant cowards.

People with real power don't need to treat you that way. People with real respect don't have to demand it from you. You just will have it. You will understand it and you will want to give it to them. Or you will see them on an equal plane. So it takes a real level of cowardice to see someone locked behind bars and to spit at them, to mock them, knowing that they can't do anything about it. It takes a real level of cowardice to walk by someone's cell and rip up their mail, knowing that they can only reach so far and they cannot get you. That's what sometimes forces people into drastic actions, including myself. I've thrown shit at cops. I've thrown piss at cops because I can't reach them. That level of cowardice, it's offensive almost. Like you think I'm so small. Fuck you. Come get it. Like let's do this. We are not friends.

Their cowardice can provoke your ignorance. That goes back to the previous question. But for people that have never experienced that, I would ask them: Imagine you are in the worst situation you've ever been in your life. You are in the worst physical pain, emotional pain, and spiritual pain. Nothing is going right. And then someone disrespects you, someone spits at you, someone calls you a horrible name when you're at your lowest point. How would that feel to you? Most likely it would feel enraging. Then imagine you have to do that every day for years and years.

going to hurt them. Because the core root of anti-self worth is not trusting that other people care about you, so then you don't care about yourself. You've never been loved. You've never felt what it's like to give a shit about yourself or have others give a shit about you. That's building blocks. That takes a lot of time and a lot of building blocks. And I've seen it work. I've seen it work, but it's not easy. And you can't allow yourself to get exploited in the meantime. You can't let you building up someone else become you getting torn down, because you're not a shelf to be climbed up. You are a rope where you can help pull them up too, and hopefully uplift yourself as well on the way.

Josh Fernandez: I just love you, dude. Next question. Well, I mean, I don't even know if this is a question. This is someone that just went through some fucked up shit. This person just got beat. They just got beat and went through it. I wonder if you could speak to what would happen in real time on the other side of prison abolition to help vulnerable populations safe from those who seemingly are unable to resist the urge to get hurt. I think this is very similar to the next question as well, which is what do we do in these cases where there's sexual violence?

Eric King: The next question from Nicole is talking about how do you feel about people and how would you handle people that commit sexual violence, because in prison those are the people that, no matter what prison you're at, they will get hurt. They will have the worst time possible. What's the action? How do we help them? Do we believe in restorative justice for them? Of course. It's not the state's job to determine someone's worth. We as a community can do it. If we as a community and as a collective decide that we are not okay with what you've done, and you need to put in the work to heal not only the person that you hurt but also their family and also yourself, and then determine what it's worth if they decide not to do that. That's our choice as a community. But do I believe that we can do that? Do I believe that a rapist is always going to be a rapist? No, I don't. Do I believe that a child molester is always going to be a child molester? That it's their destiny and they can't shake it? No. Do I believe that those people still deserve support? Yeah. It doesn't have to be all your support. It doesn't have to be the same way you support Bill Dunne or Oso Blanco. But if we are going to participate in the abolitionist movement then we have to participate bottom to top, and that includes helping the people that are considered the least helpable, the least deserving of help. How else are they ever going to shake this if they're

they've got cancer or a tumor. No one will know. But I know. So I hope people care about ADX the same way we cared about Thompson. Shut that shit down.

I'm going to skip the one about ICE or any suggestions on what we can do to help abolishment. I kind of answered that in the last one. Force their hands. Let's take private prisons where they're holding ICE captives. Who benefits from that prison? Find out what company that is. Shut down that company. We saw it with the Israeli boycott, divest, [and sanction] movement. Start hitting them in their wallet to where it's no longer profitable to have these prisons. And connect with prisoners inside to see what they need, what they think will work. Figure out where these people live and figure out how to hurt their wallets. If you hurt the wallet in a capitalist society, you change everything. I don't want to make this connection, but look at goddamn Jimmy Kimmel. He was shut down by Trump and 7 million people boycotted Paramount or whatever and they brought back Jimmy Kimmel. If we can get punk ass Jimmy Kimmel brought back due to 7 million people, there's enough activists to hurt Geo Group and CoreCivic, to hurt their wallets to where their shareholders no longer want to participate in this action. Boycott, divest, force them to lose money to where they have to care now. Sons of bitches.

Josh Fernandez: I like how you skipped that question but ended up talking for 10 minutes.

Eric King: I know. I'm so pedantic, dude. Listen to me. I'm important.

Josh Fernandez: This one says something very, very nice. When you're writing and supporting people inside who have fallen for the idea that they are worthless, how can you convince them that they are worthy of the support that you're willing to give?

Eric King: What a deep question. My god. How do you convince someone in the free world that they're worthy of a hug? How do you convince someone in the free world that what their parents did to them isn't their fault? How do you convince them that even though they did something horrible, they don't have to exist as the bad choice that they made, or the guilt that they still hold? It takes a lot of hard work and it takes a lot of vulnerability, and that's another back and forth thing. But you've got to dig deep into them and you've got to get them to trust that you're not

It's an easy way to develop true true hatred of these people. I fester on it still. I still have it deep in my heart.

Josh Fernandez: Have you ever spent any time thinking about why these prison guards are so fucking cruel?

Eric King: Yeah. Pathetic people.

Josh Fernandez: How did they become this way? Like what the fuck?

Eric King: I think a lot of them do not start off cruel. I think a lot of them start off with the Johnny Do Good superhero mentality that they can really change the world. They can affect us for good, for positive. But the gang mentality of cops takes over. You cannot exist in an environment of repression and not become the repressor. You will always have that in you. And if you don't, then you're going to get fucked up by your co-workers. They won't tolerate you being soft either.

Man, they're a bunch of bitches. These dudes that would not break an egg in the free world get to exercise their insecurities behind bars. They get to feel like the big men. They get to finally have that power. They're the bully. They're the all-star quarterback. They've got the girl. When most likely they do have the girl, they're beating the shit out of them at home. 33%. So, I think it takes those two levels, the Johnny Do Goods and then the always pathetics. You put them together and it creates this vicious storm of pieces of shit. There's also the ex-military people that just could not not bring the war home. Like, they weren't able to leave it over there so they bring it to us inside.

Josh Fernandez: We've talked about this before, but it's always fascinating to me how many bootlickers there are in prisons who are prisoners taking on the role of the state. But you're not the state. What is that mentality where people become bootlickers in prison who are locked up?

Eric King: It is so weird. It is a weird phenomenon to see someone suck up to the people locking your doors. An elder told me his enemy is always the person locking the cage, not the person in the next cage. But some people are so afraid that they want to have any advantage they can. And oftentimes they can feel safer if they are the master's pet. They are not going to, in their mind, have to face problems. They're not going to have to

get bullied by the cops. They're not going to have their mail ripped up. I don't believe in Stockholm syndrome, but they start relating to the people hurting them as if they're not also victims of it.

I've never experienced even half a second of that, but I've seen it so rampantly. A lot of people don't realize how many bootlickers there are in prison. I'd say probably close to 10% of every prisoner I've ever met is hardcore bootlicking. And then you could have another 15% that will laugh at the guard's jokes and talk to them about their wives, their old ladies. And it makes me sick. Why do you want to talk to these people? What do you possibly have to share with them? I'll never understand the smallness of that mentality, and I hope I never do understand it. I don't want to understand the type of person that thinks it's okay to befriend those that will pepper spray you and will rape you and will beat you. That's a toxic relationship. And maybe that's what it is. Maybe it becomes a toxic reliance; you rely on them so much that you stop seeing them as your abuser and start seeing them as your provider. You don't want that relationship because then they can take it away from you. I hate those people. That's a long answer short. I hate those people and there's way too many of them.

Josh Fernandez: Part of your book talks about actually being an antifascist in prison, which is a pretty unique situation. I think at the time you had an antifa tattoo on your face.

Eric King: Yeah.

Josh Fernandez: I imagine that probably causes some situations that were less than comfortable. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Eric King: Before Trump became president, people didn't know what an antifascist was. No one cared. So the only people that were mad about it were guards, because they understood. But other prisoners were like, "Whatever that means, I don't care." But after Trump did his little speech declaring antifascists as terrorists the first time in 2017, I think that's when the prisoners got really, really hot about it. And that's when the people started coming to me wanting to fight, wanting to cut it off my face, wanting to tattoo over it, wanting to stab me. And the guards upped their level of abuse as well, intentionally putting people in my cells to cause me to get fucked up. They want to see the race traitor get fucked up.

purpose and history of supermax prisons and there's more coming. So, how does public pressure work to shut them down?

Eric King: So, the second supermax prison ever was USP Marion. It was the first control unit. And after I think eight years, it got shut down because there was massive support to shut it down. People were on the streets, there was direct action, there was legislation action, there was action at the prison, and there were people inside that felt supported. And then they could push that on the outside. It was inside-outside [organizing]. So they were able to shut that down because they forced people to look at what was happening.

And that's the same thing that happened with the Lexington control unit for women. That's where Susan Rosenberg was. That was a torture facility to see how bad people could survive. What's the worst we could do and they still would exist. Once public pressure and public knowledge gets out, that can encourage people to fight, fight, fight. Like, let's go. Let's put in the work. Let's not let them destroy our people.

But for some reason, as soon as ADX was built, maybe it's because there's not very many leftists there anymore — I was the last one to be there and before me there were years in between. It just doesn't seem like people care right now — but the more eyes we can get [the better]. Thompson was a SMU, a special management unit, and that's just a brutal place where they put people that are violent and then the guards would set them up to kill each other. Once enough pressure and word got out about that, it forced legislators to shut down the prison, legislators in Illinois. So, we have that power and our power is to influence who's benefiting from this prison. If we can hurt them in their pocket, in their voting, in their campaign, then we can start making changes to where we can do the rest. I hate saying that we have to use politicians to do this, but as long as they control the government's pocketbooks, like we're not tearing down prison walls. No one's doing it. So, if we're not going to start getting rocket launchers, we've got to start forcing people that make money off of prisons to change. It breaks my heart that no one really gives a shit about ADX. I hope they do after reading the book. ADX is brutal, and I want it down, too. I want people to understand that 370 people are not hugging their families tonight and won't tomorrow and they won't the next day. And no one will know if they're crying, no one will know if they're screaming. No one will know if they have toothaches. No one will know if

very distinct voice in real life, and that transferred over to the book, which I thought was really hard. It's hard to do. I'm someone who teaches writing to students and it's probably the hardest thing to do is retain your voice. So yeah, I really suggest that you buy this book. I would love to see if there are any questions.

Eric King: There are six and I'd like to dip my toe in them. I'd like to try to answer these while we have a little bit of time left.

So the first question is they would love to hear an example of how we successfully spoke to and got through to someone who initially didn't see our perspective. And the best example I have of that is Smiles, Randy Platt. The way I was able to do that was we were next to each other in the SHU and we were both facing similar charges. He had sliced the cop. I beat the shit out of a lieutenant. So we were both pre-trial and we did it at the same prison. That gave us time to talk and become friends. And if you can humanize your enemy in this aspect, where it's just you guys, you have to exist in this world, if you can start humanizing him, then you can start relating to him on different levels. Then you can start relating his experiences to the broader scope of leftism. You feel left out by society? You hate that Black people get welfare? Why? Why? Because your mom was poor, because you grew up without food? These people aren't your enemy. You should have also gotten food. This is a struggle. Also, you're being racist because more Black people are not on welfare. Look at the statistics. I would have people mail me almanacs so that I could break down his bigotry. Once you see it in writing and once you have that empathetic friendship, you can really start drilling it in. And Smiles right now is making art to sell for trans causes. He is in ADX. He'll be there for the next 11 years.

But it takes hard work and we had lots of fights. It wasn't a linear model. And sometimes we'd backpedal and he'd just be like, "Fuck you, Eric. I'm sick of you. I hate you." And you just have to find a way to still maintain that love. We're never going to convert people with anger and violence. We're never going to do that. No one's ever had that done. But what we can do is by relating on some level and then putting in the hard work to really open their eyes to things. That's how I would put it. Put in the work to open their eyes.

Josh Fernandez: The next question: There's a politically repressive

They want to see these things. And you have to navigate that very delicately and sometimes very violently.

There were multiple times where guards intentionally put a white gang member in my cells and told them in front of me like, "Get this boy. Teach this boy what's right. They're not going to bring antifa to Kentucky." That sort of shit. It's like, "Well, we are in Kentucky. Sorry." But you don't get a chance to say that. You get a chance to fight for your fucking life. And the people in prison are not Proud Boys — they are killers. They're not going to fight you in the streets one-on-one. They're not going to have discussions with you. They're not going to stand there with a megaphone. They're going to come at you with knives when you least expect it. They're going to cut you bad. They're going to take things from you that you do not want to give and you'll never get back. So, you've got to be safe and you've got to learn how to fight.

Josh Fernandez: But there are also people who came to you with genuine curiosity, right?

Eric King: Yeah. There are people that are anti-government, even if they don't know it. There are people that don't agree with fascism, but they don't know that they don't agree with it. And so, I met a couple of them. I made friends with a handful of people. And then I made antifascists out of a couple people. But you have to do that delicately, too. Because if you come out and say, "I love trans people, I love queer people, I hate government repression, I love every race, borderline hate my own race," if you say that, you'll push people away. So finding that line and walking that line to where you can touch someone's heart as opposed to deflecting their ego, that's a fine line. Sometimes I walked it perfectly and sometimes it backfired in my face.

Josh Fernandez: So back to the writing of this book. I was stunned by the poetry that you produced while writing this book, and maybe that's something that you developed in prison. I don't know what happened. Maybe you were in a trance while you were writing. Were you trancing out, zoning out while writing this?

I just want to read this little part which is one of my favorites. I know I've said that like four times already. "I am generally someone who enjoys a little peace and quiet. I was driven mad at different SHUs when people

would be screaming non-stop all hours of the evening, banging on shower walls, rapping, shouting conversations all day and night. At those times, I would pray to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to please offer a bit of silence, to please let those loudmouths catch a bug in their throats just to shut them up. This was completely different. I didn't know that a building housing hundreds of other humans could be this quiet. It was a living morgue." That's poetry, man.

Eric King: Yeah, I'm very deep. And thank you.

Josh Fernandez: But it really showed me the difference between these institutions. I've only had experience with the county jail, which is crazy and wild and loud and people banging and and going crazy. Then this gave me a completely different picture, which was almost more eerie and scary.

Eric King: It was, too. Those SHUs and county jails, they're loud. They are essentially just eight different concerts going on at once. I was in the SHU for 5 years straight. It started to drive me insane. Like I wanted to hurt people. I would hear just casual talking and it would feel like someone was shouting in my ear. It was affecting my psyche to a drastic point, to where I started hating other prisoners. Like you're now my repressor also.

Then you get to ADX and it's a ghost town. I went two weeks without hearing another voice. At times you can go days without ever hearing a human talk. And when you go from the loudest to the most quiet, it makes you feel like something is wrong. Like what is going on here? Are people dead? Am I alone? Am I ever going to be heard from again? Do I have a voice? Have I lost my mind? It's terrifying, that level of quiet. You don't have it elsewhere in your life because there's always something. There's your phone buzzing, there's a neighbor, there's the air condition, there's a car. There's always something. And then you remove all of that and you're just by yourself. It takes a lot to deal with that, too. The same way it takes a lot to deal with pain, it takes a lot to deal with sitting in a room with nothing but your thoughts and your pains. It's hard and it's scary. Also, fuck SHUs, man. Fuck those loud ass SHUs.

Josh Fernandez: Yeah, it sounds absolutely brutal. And that's the part where I'm like, I don't think I could have done that. There's this part where the power goes out and that was almost like a welcome thing because it was connecting you to nature — you could see the stars and the

ability right now to shape someone's life and make it so much better. If Levi had someone that he knew loved him, maybe he still hangs up. I don't know. But there's a good chance he doesn't because there's someone that cares. We have the ability to save people's lives in a real serious way, not in a fucking game way.

Josh Fernandez: Some good questions. Last thing that I totally forgot, but I wanted to ask you because I just watched an interview with you on Business Insider, which was a very weird place to see you. I'm always interested in the comments that follow those things. And in your interviews that you've done, different things that I've seen on YouTube, I always look at the comments and there are a lot of people who are like, "Oh, this guy deserved it. Fuck this guy."

Eric King: They hated me. Yeah.

Josh Fernandez: Yeah. So, I'm wondering, do you think those are funny or do you get bummed out on those? Or like we are dipping our toes in enemy waters, you know what I mean? Like that is not our space.

Eric King: In my mind, I got a chance to force radical views on these people unintentionally. I got to force them to see prisoners as human, even if they hated that human. So just being able to take that space, like, "Yeah, hate me. Hate me, you fucking racist pricks." You don't want your enemies to like you. They're not your friends. So if some Trump supporter is like, "You know what? I really love this guy. He's got some good ideas," maybe that's cool from an abolition perspective, but most of the time it's just some jackass bigot. And we're not friends. Hate me. Write your little hateful note because that means I got you here, bud. That means I'm taking some space in your brain. So, I encourage everyone to watch my Business Insider interview. It's gotten over [a million] views.

Josh Fernandez: That's amazing. I really encourage whoever's listening to this to get Eric's book, *A Clean Hell*. It's really good. And I'm not just saying that because Eric's my friend. I'm saying it because I read it with the intention of reading a not very good book and it blew my fucking mind. It really did, in all of the best ways. It's such good writing. Just from a literary perspective, it's a great book, but also from an information perspective, a journalist perspective, it's just really well put together. I think Libertie was saying before this that it really retained your voice, a

Then figure out what they need. Do they need commissary? Figure out a way to get it to them. Do they need books? Get them goddamn books. Do they need visits? Find someone that can visit them. It takes work. Supporting prisoners should not be a passive hobby, it should be a revolutionary act. If we're abolitionists, if we're anarchists, if we're leftists of any kind, we should treat all state repression as if it's the worst state repression. And how do we beat that? By lifting up our people. So find names and write to them as humans. Write them as a human that needs help, not a symbol, not an object, not an idea. And then figure out everything they need to feel human. That takes hard conversations sometimes. It takes having to write back and forth, back and forth. It takes time. But they're worth the time the same way your grandparent or your partner would be worth the time. So start with writing. It's the bare minimum. Was that pedantic?

Josh Fernandez: That was good. If I went to prison, would you write me a letter?

Eric King: I would write you something. I don't know if it'd be a letter. Probably like an FU note. You get what you deserve. [Laughter]

Josh Fernandez: Is there anything we didn't cover that you wanted to talk about?

Eric King: I would really implore people to remember that there are more people inside than just our political prisoners. And there are stories of brutality that you'll never hear. We need to continue to reach out to people because we don't know what they're going through. We don't know how bad their day has been.

I like telling the story of this kid named Levi. I mean, I don't like telling the story, but ... Levi was a young kid. He had a three-year bid and he only had a year left and his mom died and they wouldn't give him mental health stuff. They took away all of our radios. They took away all of our books, all of our magazines. So all he had left was crossword puzzles, and he couldn't take it. The day before Christmas he hung himself. He was 19 or 20 years old. I'll start crying about it right now. Dude, he was 19 or 20 and that's the first time I heard a body cut down and I heard the thud. That's a human body being disregarded. And that's what I want people to remember is that it's life or death, and that you have life in your hands. You have the

sky. But that just showed me how big it was in there, that a power outage could bring you so much connection. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Eric King: Yeah. When I say realistically it was one of the best days of my life, I'm not being hyperbolic. The power, you don't expect it to go out. Obviously this is the highest profile prison in the country. So it did and all of a sudden everything went dark — the hallway lights, your room lights, the flood lights went out. And that's when you know shit was serious, because the flood lights never turn off ever. So the guards started walking down the hallway with their flashlights, making sure everyone's door stayed closed.

But then I peek out my little window, because we have the skinny windows and the top of that window, right at the top you can see the sky. Everything else is building, like concrete, concrete, concrete, sky. And if I stand on my bed and look up, all of a sudden I can see stars again. All of a sudden I can see this beautiful book opening and sharing all its words with me. Just this poetic journey with nature and the celestial beings, and I wept. I wept because I went so long without seeing the sky. Me and my dad before he passed away, that was his thing. He would go out there with a telescope and take pictures of Saturn and we just looked at the world and knew that we were a part of it. We're existing as a part of it. That got taken away for a long time. And when it came back I cried so hard, just thank you goddesses. Thank you so much for letting me just have this one moment where I know that the world still exists. For this one brief moment I'm not a number. I am now a participant in the universe again. And that shook me. It shook me hard and it gave me a lot of strength.

Josh Fernandez: That's at once beautiful but also really scary for people who don't have experience with prison because it's like a warning. It's a warning especially for us on the outside who are doing organizing stuff, and at this point in time it's like any of us could go down at any time. So is your book a warning, is it a call to fight, or what? What do you think?

Eric King: I wanted it to be informed consent, that if you are going to do these things — which I support on every level, from the street underground up to the top — every bit of safety that we have, I want us to take and force. But if you're going to do these things, there are consequences that no one ever talks about. We never talk about the reality of what happens inside prison. We do the whole "it's repressive, they're

taking this, they're doing this," but you don't think about what it's taking from you. Not the tangible shit, that's fine. You're going to lose that. But what it takes from you existentially. So it's a warning that this is not an easy road and it's not a romantic road. This is not a path to where you're going to ... I keep saying this, you're not going to be George Jackson in there unless you want to do life in prison. He died inside prison fighting that fight. That's real. So you need to know what can happen to you. You need to know the exhaustion, the mental destruction. So it is a warning.

Then on the flip side, like you said, these fucking prisons exist. Are we going to tear them down or not? Are we just going to keep talking about abolition like it's a theory as opposed to something that we can take hold of and literally create today? There's 350 million people in this country. We could, even with a fraction of that, destroy every prison we have. But we make a conscious choice not to. And so the flip side to this book is to ask why not. Why is that prison standing not as important as your friend getting served a subpoena to go talk to a court? Do we put the prison as an acceptable consequence, but having a cop pull you over is worth our rage? It behooves me. It behooves me that we lose the empathy even though we talk like we haven't. It's pleading with people, "Please, please care. Please care enough to write. But also please care enough to get that bazooka. Let's start doing something." If that makes sense.

Josh Fernandez: What do you say to someone like my mom who would be like, Well, Eric, we need prisons and we need cops to enforce the rules."

Eric King: I would ask your mom or my mom, "Has crime gone away? Has the increase in police made less crime?" No, it hasn't. Has rape stopped? No. Has murder stopped? No. Because police don't stop crimes, because crimes are usually impulse control. They're usually set about by capitalism, by not having resources and seeing others with resources. So I would argue if you taught someone from a young age, if you provided them with resources, psychological resources, would they be able to cope better with jealousy and anger to where maybe they don't want to beat someone? If you taught someone these skills at a young age, would they maybe not commodify a woman and think that she's my property, so if she goes somewhere else, I have to attack her? That means that our society is failing these people. It's not cops protecting them. It's not cops keeping you safe from rape. So that's what I would plead with them, that we have the largest prison population on earth and none of these

because you don't understand that what's coming next is going to ruin your life. So, I did that. I always thought I had it as bad as I could get until the torture. Until that happened, I was like, "I'm ready for anything. They can't do nothing to me. I've seen how bad it is. I've seen people get stabbed." And then you get taught that it can always get worse, no matter what. And that's naivety or that someone being naive and not understanding the reality of their situation. That this is not a game. That this is not a playground. This is not a place for you to impress people with your intellect. That can come later. It can come through respect, through mutual respect. But if you start trying to preach to people, you start trying to make comrades out of people that don't fuck with you, you'll face consequences for that. And that's what I did. I got into a lot of fights. I got beat up a couple times because I thought I was going to create a bunch of crazies and instead I was annoying the fuck out of people.

Josh Fernandez: I can't imagine you annoying anyone. It's weird. I know it behooves you. I just realized there's probably at least one FBI agent listening to this right now. Is there anything you want to tell that little guy?

Eric King: Would you want yourself watching your mother, dude? Would you want one of your coworkers watching your mother talk? Probably not. Go fucking kill yourself. Go away. There are more important things to do than steal people's freedom. Go plant a garden, you fuck.

Josh Fernandez: That's what I'm saying. So, as we wind down, I just wanted to take questions. How do we support prisoners? What's the best way? What do we do? What can I do?

Eric King: So, what you do is — and I say this at every single talk and I want people to really focus on it — pretend as if someone inside is your grandparent or the person you love most on earth. The person you love most, your wife, your best friend, a celebrity, it doesn't matter. Then what would you want someone to do for them? Everything. Not just what would you want to happen in prison. What would you want everyone to feel about them, to see about them, to tangibly do for them? And then do that. You would want people to know their story. You would want them to feel heard. Tell their stories. Write to these people. That's step one. Always write them and then promote them. Treat them like something special. Treat them like you give a shit.

relationship, just like any relationship, and you don't have to get used by someone. You don't have to let someone inside say and manipulate you into things you don't want because they're facing repression. You don't have to do that. You can say no or you can cut off that relationship.

Another thing that can happen is dry snitching, where these idiots, someone will write to you and be like, "Oh hey, remember when you cheated the system this way? That was awesome." "Remember how we sent you money for the drugs?" That is dry snitching. You can get someone fucked up for that. These cops read these letters. I have seen people get stabbed because their partner wrote, "Is your cellmate still doing Suboxone?" Like, what is up with that? What? People find this shit out and a lot of times the guards will be the ones to let them find out, like, "Oh, we heard in a letter that you were slanging drugs." So those sort of things you have to be mindful of. These are real relationships and you wouldn't want someone to get hurt in the streets. You would not want someone to feel manipulated in the streets. You would not want to be abused yourself in the streets. So we cannot allow it to happen in a relationship with a prisoner.

Josh Fernandez: There's a few parts in the book where you describe your old self as sort of naive and cocky. I'm wondering what you've learned since then, and maybe that can serve as some advice to people who might be new to the movement, or young or just starting out.

Eric King: When I went inside I had the same mentality. I talk about where I keep telling people, "You're not George Jackson." I had that mentality. We're like, "I am going to change the way we view prison. I'm going to revolutionize these cats. I'm going to organize. We're going to be a union of warriors against this system." And I got taught very quickly through fists and through harsh words and threats that you need to mind your own fucking business and let people do their own time.

People don't want to hear what you have to say if it's going to get them hurt and they don't know you. I think a lot of prisoners go inside, one, not understanding how bad it can get, thinking that what they have right now, "They're not giving me this. They're not giving me a pen. They're not giving me a hot tray every single day." They start thinking that that's as bad as they can get and they antagonize and they push and they complain, which is whatever. You have to complain if you feel bad, but it's naive

problems have gone away because society hasn't gone away, and we only get worse and worse — more inequality, more lack of equity, more taking away mental health, more taking away resources from people that need it. And if we're going to value gold and dollars more than we value a young child's brain then we're always going to fail and there is going to be police because someone's got to protect that capital.

Josh Fernandez: I agree. That's for my mom. I hope she's listening somewhere. One thing that was going through my mind as you were talking was when I was writing my book — and I always have to bring this back to my book. [Laughter]

Eric King: A cheap plug, huh?

Josh Fernandez: It brought out a lot of trauma and I found that writing it was really hard. There were points where I was shaking while I was writing. Did that happen to you too? Was this super traumatic to write about some of these experiences?

Eric King: Yeah, but more traumatic was living them and not having people know or care. The part that hurt me the most is knowing that I went through this and people are equating it to someone getting a cold dinner. [While I'm] having guards forcibly have to sexually assault myself to avoid getting killed. Not being able to tell people that made me feel as if it wasn't real and I started gaslighting myself. And I don't want that. I know it's real. I still cry about it today. You've seen me cry probably seven times. So holding that within hurt a lot more. Letting it out. I cried, of course. I'm like, "God damn it. God damn these pieces of shit."

But every sentence I did, it was like it was freeing that part of my brain to finally say, "Okay, we can let go now." I keep rubbing my neck and my head because my body's getting tense even talking about it. But it didn't hurt me as much as it freed me. It felt like I was taking weights off my shoulder, because it sucks when you think no one cares. It sucks when you think people are minimizing what you've been through. And for a long time that did happen. So yeah, it was just to offshackle left and right.

Josh Fernandez: Is there anything about prison that you want people to know?

Eric King: It's not very fun, really. I would really like people to understand that there are these things that we misunderstand. Every day is not this revolutionary war zone. There is deep, deep boredom and if you don't have people supporting you, if you don't have love from the outside world, it's going to be even more boring, and your brain is going to rot. I feel like that's how a lot of people fall into bad, bad circles in prison because they don't have anybody. They don't have any dopamine coming in. So they're going to find it with the people that are giving it to them, the people that are giving them love and respect. It's scary. It's hard to describe how scary it is when you're about to go into a unit and you know there are people in there that literally want to kill you and your only chance of survival is yourself. You now have to rely on yourself. That's a hard thing to do.

I can't stress enough that there are people in prison that haven't gotten a letter their entire bid, and they've been in there 30 or 40 years. So when I say that prison support is more valuable than you can imagine, it's because I've seen people kill themselves because they had nobody. I have heard their bodies hit the floor when the guards cut down their ropes. I think people minimize how important love and support is, and not just words but tangible support. The difference between being able to buy a bag of coffee and watching everyone else with coffee is huge. The difference between not having to bum a spoon of coffee from someone and looking like trash is huge. The ability to not have to do demeaning work — to have to clean someone else's cell, to get two stamps, to write to your family. And we have the power to get rid of that stuff. When I say prison support, that's what I'm talking about. Because there are small things that people don't realize. If you don't have money, you're going to have to find money. And sometimes that can mean robbery. It can mean drugs. It can mean doing demeaning jobs. There are people that their entire job inside is washing other people's underwear. And that's a legit hustle. I honor those people for doing it. But do you think that feels good, washing your neighbor's underwear? No, but they got to eat, too. So, what I would like people to understand about prison is that it is soul suckingly shitty.

Josh Fernandez: There's not a good aspect to it.

Eric King: Never. Every time I've ever heard someone say, "Prison allowed me to do this," I always get so sad because they've lost the ability to see

that they were able to do it, but prison stole their sense of self worth. It stole their sense of accomplishment and gave it to itself. It had to uplift itself as the oppressor again. So yeah, the long pedantic answer is prison sucks. Keep that in mind. And it doesn't suck like not being able to watch your favorite show sucks, it sucks like you never get to talk to the person you love again sucks.

Josh Fernandez: Whenever I go in to teach in the prison, writing to the prisoners, there's always a strong contingent of people who are like, "I love prison. It's made me like so and so." And they probably align with the bootlicker crowd. There's probably some crossover there. But it's always surprising to me to hear people say how much prison has helped them and how they're so much better because of prison. Imagine how low your self-esteem has to be to feel that the thing that's crushing you is the best thing that's ever happened to you.

Eric King: Right. Yeah, like your life has been so shitty and deprived of joy that the best attention you've ever received is negative attention. That sucks. That's a failing of society that we need to understand and reckon with.

Josh Fernandez: Right. Yeah. It is a failure of society, which creates the need for law enforcement, which creates the need for prisons. I was talking to this guy, I was telling him I was going to a letter writing night and he started scolding me about going to a letter writing night. He spent time in prison and he's like, "Yo, don't do that shit, That's liberal shit. You're going to get people in trouble. You're going to get people killed." Blah blah blah. I didn't really know what to say to that guy. Is there anything that you can say to that? Is there anything that can go wrong with letter writing and writing to prisoners? Can you talk about that a little bit?

Eric King: Yeah, we have to also reckon with the fact that prisoners a lot of times can be damaged people. And damaged people can hurt people. So things that can go wrong: There are prisoners that will manipulate the shit out of you. There are prisoners that will say and write sexually explicit things that you did not ask for and do not want. There are people inside prison that will write you things that are brutal and make you feel so gross and so used that it can push you off from other prisoners. I always try to implore people to understand that this is a consent-based