

**TEXAS CORRECTIONAL
INDUSTRIES
AND COMMISSARY
GOUGING**
by Curtis Stephens

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I'm not exactly sure how this goes or where to start or even what to say, so I suppose I'll begin with a brief introduction. My name is Curtis Stephens. I am 41 years old, from a tiny spot in East Texas, not far from Houston. At the age of 17 I was arrested, charged and eventually convicted of Capital Murder. Upon conviction I was given a mandatory minimum life sentence. (I must do 40-flat calendar years before becoming eligible for parole) This sentence was handed down without the benefit of a punishment phase. I've been locked up since 1997 so I've seen my fair share of things down here, so much that I honestly don't even know where to begin! However, I do feel like enough is enough.

It is my desire to reach out! To dialogue with people on the outside about the various issues we deal with on a daily basis. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice would have the voters and taxpayers believe that their practices are all righteous and just, that their draconian rules and policies exist for the purposes of "the rehabilitation of the offender". Or is the prison industrial complex in the State of Texas designed to enrich the fat cats in Huntsville and Austin as it has done for well over a century? I just want to put some things out there and let you decide. Believe me, these people are not going to tell you what's really going on "beyond the walls"! But, before continuing, I do want to say that I write thee words with great trepidation.

These people don't play fair! By putting this in the mail I am opening myself up to reprisal from the administration in a variety of ways. Let me tell you, they have been known to get very creative with their retaliatory practices. They'll make it look like I'm the one in violation, not them! After all, they're the ones with all the power, often making up new "rules" on the fly to try to shut down any and all forms of what they define as dissent. There is no independent oversight and the disciplinary process and grievance procedures are a fucking joke. So, if they say I did it – that's it, that's all, end of story.

As I stated before, there is so much I could speak on. The amount of bullshit going on would be overwhelming if it were all laid out at one time, but that would take a long time. As this is my first foray into this sort of thing, I'll limit this to one particular area of concern – the commissary department. According to the 2020 World Almanac, the State of Texas (as of 2019) has 162,523 men and women locked up. That astounding figure eclipses that of entire nations, such

as Columbia (119,491), Pakistan (83,718), United Kingdom (83,226), France (68,974) and Saudi Arabia (68,056), among others.

Those of us who find ourselves in Administrative Segregation or simply decline to use the offender telephone system must rely on the unit commissary to purchase correspondence material in order to communicate with the outside world. That's a lot of people buying pens, stamps, envelopes and writing paper. There was a time that they allowed us to purchase envelopes and paper from outside vendors and have those items sent in. Alas – they brought that to a screeching halt some time ago. Why? I cannot speculate. It really wasn't too bad. At the time I was still able to buy notebook paper from the commissary. If memory serves me correctly, I could get a pack of paper (100 sheets) for \$1.15. That is, until the Texas Correctional Industry decided to get in the game. (TCI is the widespread, diverse conglomerate that produces goods through slave labor to be sold in unit commissaries) Now if I want to buy notebook paper with lines on it, the only option I have is a TCI product. I get 50 sheets of paper for \$2.50! And I have no choice! You do the math. Is this not price gouging? They lock people up for that shit in the world, but to do it to inmates is alright. But that's just one thing.

Anyone who has ever been locked up will tell you that wearing protection on your feet in the shower is absolutely essential. That is, unless you want your feet to rot off! Well, thankfully TCI provides this item. You can get a pair of TCI shower shoes from your local unit commissary for the handsome price of \$7.00. Go down to Dollar General and get basically the same damn shoe for, you guessed it, One American Dollar. So why am I forced to pay seven times that amount for something every inmate has to have?!

There is plenty more I could get into. I just want to communicate with people on the outside who are interested in helping us blow the lid off of all the bullshit going on down in Texas. Please feel free to contact me. I'll be here. I'd like to know there are people who are concerned about our daily struggle. I'm looking forward to hearing from you all! Until then – STAND FAST.