

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/news/no-one-believes-felon>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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I recently conducted a training for a group of incarcerated women which outlined [what to do if youre stopped by the police](#). As we discussed how to file a complaint if treated unfairly by an officer, one woman declared, No one believes a felon.

The other women in the room nodded their heads in affirmation. Her declaration, while sad, was correct.

In Americas culture of mass criminalization and incarceration, those labeled with the lifelong scar of a felony conviction have been relegated to a near sub-human classification of people who can neither be trusted nor deserve rights and dignity.

Laws, policies and rhetoric reinforce this.

Making Second-Class Citizens

American people with criminal convictions are denied various rights of citizenship. Though people with criminal convictions are [able to vote in Ohio](#), in [some states](#) they are barred from voting. In others states including Ohio they are barred from serving on a [jury](#) or as [poll workers](#).

In addition to civic prohibitions, employment and housing discrimination are commonly accepted practices that send a message that people with criminal convictions cannot be trusted, ever!

Peoples sympathy often ends when they discover someone has a criminal record. If someone who has experienced a tragedy has a criminal conviction, the belief is that they brought the tragedy upon themselves. This same punitive perspective is true for those who have had their rights violated.

A Past Criminal Record Often Justifies Future Wrongs

Sometimes a criminal conviction is used as justification for aggressive police behavior. After Alan Pean was shot and tased by police in a Houston hospital where he was a patient, his father said [officers asked over and over if Alan had a criminal record](#).

Other times a criminal conviction serves as a reason to treat people with indifference. While reviewing police records, a filmmaker came across a [slang term used by police](#) that refers to people who are not worthy of personhood. The term NHI is short for No Human Involved.

Often dismissed as liars, people with criminal convictions are vulnerable to police misconduct but are hesitant to file complaints. Oklahoma City Department Police Officer Daniel Holtzclaw was recently sentenced to prison for sexually assaulting women. It is believed that he specifically [targeted women who had criminal records](#) and lived in high-crime neighborhoods.

The United States is the leading incarcerator in the world, primarily due to decades of responding to people in an increasingly and unnecessarily punitive manner. One of the outcomes of this countrys addiction to criminalization is the systemic dehumanization of a large segment of our population. As many cities seek transformative change in policing practices, we must also change the culture that leaves millions vulnerable to abuse and suffering in silence because of the label that has been assigned to them.

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