

Women's History

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Prisons/Politics/Women

Weeks after the Abu Ghraib prison abuse disclosures, a news article quotes how, "The culture of sadistic and malicious violence that continues to pervade the prison system violates contemporary standards of decency." Stated by Judge William Wayne Justice of the Texas prison system in 1999 when George W. Bush was governor there.

In 1830 under President Andrew Jackson, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act. It sanctioned removing the Cherokee nation from Tennessee and Georgia, where gold had been discovered, to Oklahoma. The thousand-mile forced march, Trail of Tears, opened 25 M acres to whites. Militia would typically enter a house and force the family to leave. Mounted soldiers acted as if they were driving cattle. They rode circles around the people, hooting and shouting insults. Cherokee women and children were repeatedly raped. Food intended for the tribe was sold to the locals and living areas along the trail were filled with excrement. Soldiers ordered their captives to perform acts of depravation so disgusting they cannot be told here. One member of the Guard would later write, "During the Civil War I watched as hundreds of men died... but none of that compares to what we did to the Cherokee Indians."

In 1917, after President Woodrow Wilson refused audiences with suffrage lobbyists, women peacefully protested for passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in front of the White House. In a five-month period, 168 were imprisoned. Forced to disrobe in front of a company of men, some were tossed head first into prison cells, and rendered unconscious. Guards terrorized them. They were fed oatmeal and soups filled with worms, insect-ridden starches, vile salt peter, and rotting horse meat. Conditions in the jail leaked out to the press. Placed in solitary confinement, their mail was cut off, and they were forced to perform hard labor. One prisoner was handcuffed to a spot above her cell door all night...some imprisoned for months. "In all my years of criminal practice, I have never seen prisoners so badly treated," said an Illinois senator. Alice Paul launched a hunger strike and was immediately placed in the psychiatric ward. She was force-fed three times a day through a tube in her throat and wakened hourly throughout the night with a flashlight. Thirty women followed her lead and hunger struck.

In 1942, ten weeks after the outbreak of war, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Exec. Order 9066 authorizing the exclusion of all persons of Japanese descent. Forced to be registered, numbered, tagged, and kept under armed guard, they were herded into buses or trains and taken to internment camps. Deportees, surrounded by American soldiers

carrying rifles with fixed bayonets, were forced to board militarized freighters and made to strip naked. Many as Yoshiko Uchida, her sister and mother, had to live in horse stalls that reeked of urine and horse manure. In the mess hall, a cook reached in a dishpan full of canned sausages and dropped two onto my plate with his fingers...we tried to eat but the food would not go down...we were constantly hungry.

In 1962 during the civil rights movement Fannie Lou Hamer was arrested and severely beaten along with Annelle Ponder after they attended a voter registration training session in Mississippi. From her cell Mrs. Hamer could hear Annelle screaming as they beat her. Hamer was made to lie down on a bench. She was beaten by two black men, charged to beat her by two white guards who held guns on them to make sure they gave her a good whipping. When they lashed her about her legs, her dress started to move up her thighs. As she reached to pull down her dress, one of the guards pulled it over her head. They beat her with leather straps until her thighs were hard. When told to get up, she did not think she could move.

At the 1964 Democratic convention, Hamer described meeting with Hubert Humphrey, who explained that in his heart he really supported their struggle (Blacks), but his chance to be on the ticket with Lyndon Johnson would be jeopardized if the issue reached the floor.

Sources:

Daily Herald 5/21/04 Sec 1:13, "Echoes of Abu Ghraib in our own prisons?"

HBO "Iron Jawed Angels"

PBS "Not for Ourselves Alone"

Only what we could carry

Women in the Civil Rights Movement

www.ngeorgia.com/history/cherokeeforts.html