

Bonds (cont.)

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Activists began to voice their concerns about corruption in the industry in the 1920s. In 1966, the Federal Bail Reform Act “emphasized a presumption of release on personal recognizance for people charged with non-capital offenses, placed restrictions on the use of money bail and promoted the use of pre-trial services within the Federal court system,” according to a September 2012 report by the Justice Policy Institute. In 1984, however, Congress passed the Bail Reform Act, which allowed for the purported dangerousness of the criminal to be taken into account when setting his or her bail amount. This act resulted in an increase in bail amounts across the country. Even after these acts and other reforms of the bail bond industry, the same concerns from the 1920s are commonplace to this day.

The for-profit bail bonding industry so common in the United States is different from that of almost every other country in the world. The Philippines is the only other country with a similar commercially based pretrial release system. In fact, in both England and Canada, agreeing to help post bail for another person in exchange for money is a

serious crime. In the introduction to his 1991 book *Commercial Bail Bonding*, F. E. Devine wrote that “American commercial bail bonding [is] a world-wide object lesson in what to avoid” in a pretrial release system. Four states — Illinois, Kentucky, Oregon and Wisconsin — have banned the use of for-profit bail bonding companies as a form of pretrial release. In these states, those arrested or their friends or family may pay a deposit of 10 percent of their bail amount directly to the court, and receive most of it back if they appear for their trial. Other countries have various other forms of pretrial release, ranging from keeping arrestees in jail until trial to allowing them to go free with strict conditions and serious consequences if they do not show up for trial.

In 1998, release based on financial conditions surpassed other release methods as the most common across the United States, and its use has continued to increase ever since. If other countries and some states have successfully done away from the use of commercial bail bonding companies, why does their use in the United States continue to increase? The main answer is the political power that bail bond companies and their large overhead insurance companies wield.

And the bottom line? Well, that’s just it. The fact of the matter is that the bail bonding industry in



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the United States is extremely profitable, no matter how unjust it may be. Until the commercial bail bonding business is banned, bail bondsmen will continue to profit from the criminal justice system in the United States.

Vendor Askari tells story of incarceration and redemption

BY ZACHARY JONES

Staff Writer

Askari Shabazz, 52, is a living testimony of redemption.

He was born Harvey Robinson and raised in Detroit, Michigan. He cites his Muslim household growing up as a major factor in his decision to change his name to Askari, which means soldier in Swahili.

Shabazz graduated high school at age 15 and as the valedictorian of his senior class. At graduation, his commencement address, titled “Education in the 80s: Spiritually from a Black Perspective,” would earn him a standing ovation. Shabazz expresses that his mother, Irene Costella Pacely, had a significant influence on his ability to write poems and speeches. When he was young, he says, his mother would read him Maya Angelou and Langston Hughes.

Even though Shabazz was raised in a positive home, his life as a young man was fraught with adversity. At age 22, Shabazz began a 25-year prison sentence for assaulting a police officer. According to Shabazz, the altercation occurred because law enforcement officials were mistreating his brother. At that time, the crime and sentencing seemed unreal to Shabazz, who was then a junior at San Diego State University.

Despite being incarcerated in some of the most dangerous prisons in the country, including San Quentin State Prison, Shabazz feels his experience was essential to his transformation in life. While serving time, he says, he allowed time to serve him. During his incarceration, Shabazz spent the



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majority of his time reading about revolutionaries, writing poetry, and writing book reports. He read Martin Luther King, Jr., George Jackson, Mao-Tse Tung, and Malcolm X, among others.

“I look upon my experience being incarcerated not as a curse, but a blessing in disguise,” says Shabazz. “Those who are worthy for the glorious heights of heaven must first descend into the bottomless pits of hell. The quickest way up is down.”

Shabazz was released from Old-Folsom State Prison in Sacramento, California on January 26, 2013. After serving nearly 25 years in several maximum

security penitentiaries, Shabazz promised himself that he would never go back again. And he hasn’t.

Since discharge in 2013, Shabazz has instead busied himself throughout the communities of San Diego and later, Memphis.

An advocate for the homeless in his San Diego days as well, Shabazz became a certified vendor for The Bridge in October 2013. He is also in the process of writing a nonfiction book called “Consequences of My Actions.” According to Shabazz, the book will detail hardships, downfalls, transformations, and growth — the stuff that makes up his life. And what a life it is.