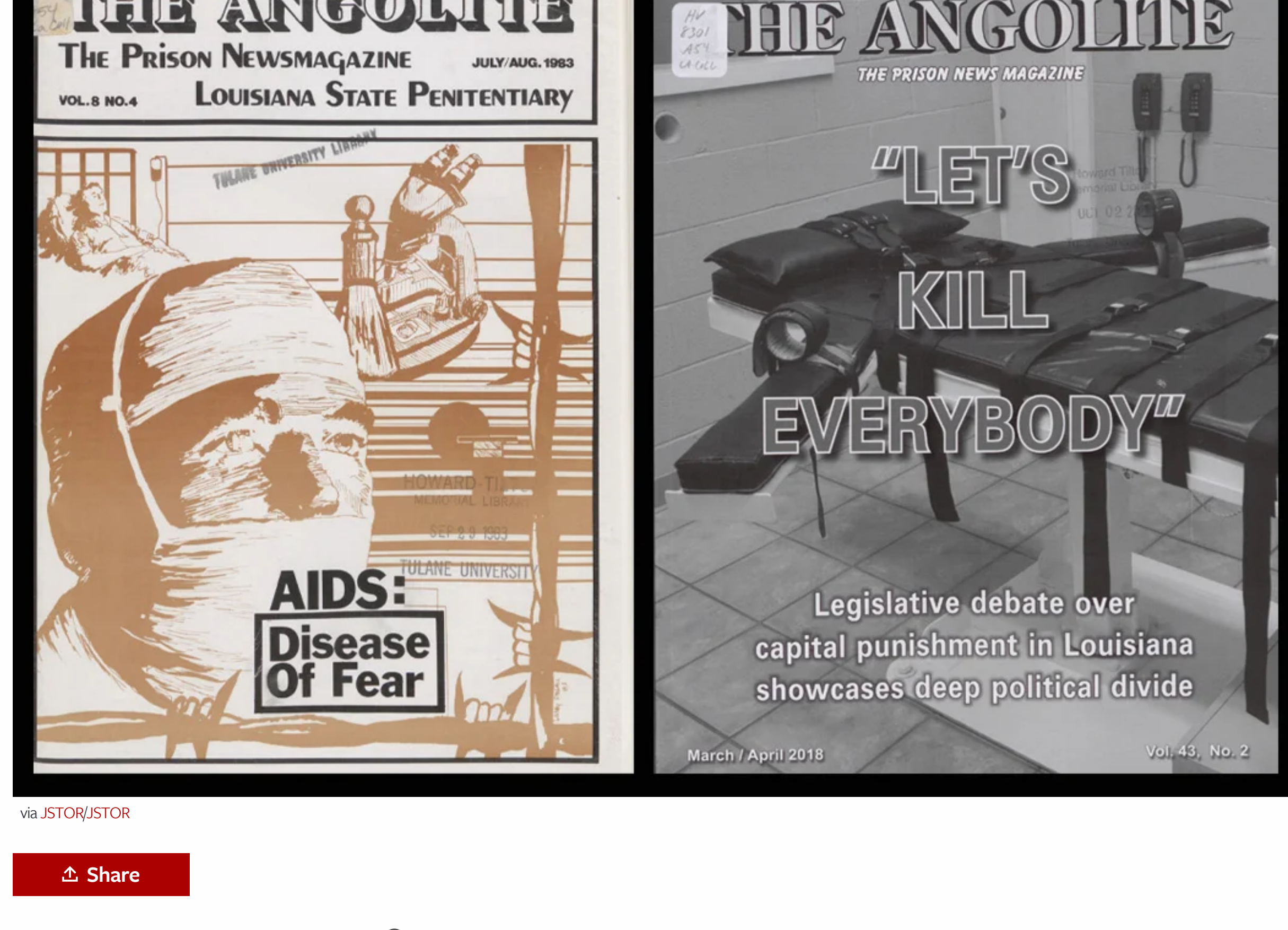


AMERICAN PRISON NEWSPAPERS 1880-2020

# The Angolite Comes to the Reveal Digital American Prison Newspapers Collection

The award-winning prison newspaper has long covered topics like prison policy, the death penalty, the societal cost of mass incarceration, that are still relevant today.



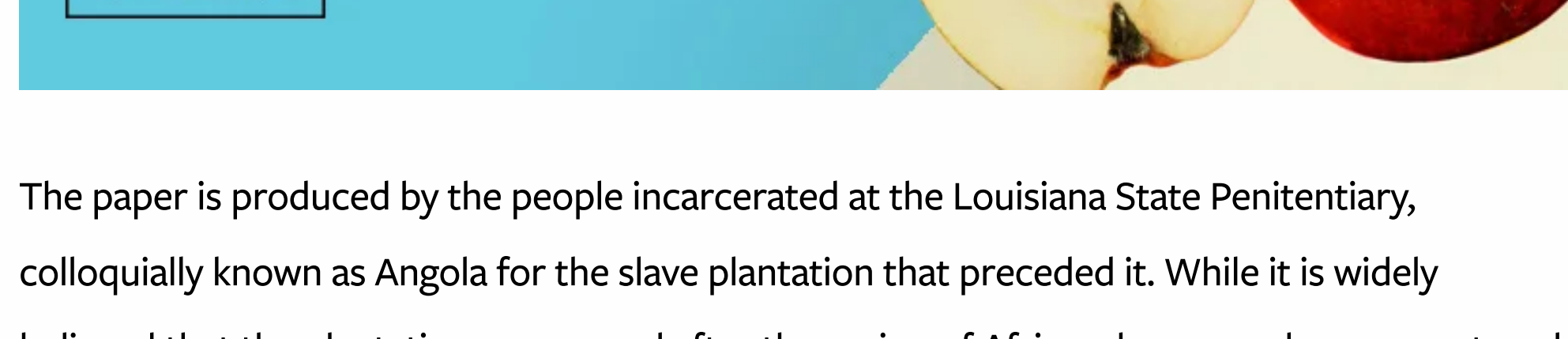
via JSTOR

Share

By: Morgan Godwin | May 13, 2022 | 5 minutes

The icon indicates free access to the linked research on JSTOR.

The *Angolite* is one of the most famous prison newspapers in history, having won multiple awards and changed the popular conception of what prison journalism could be.



The paper is produced by the people incarcerated at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, colloquially known as Angola for the slave plantation that preceded it. While it is widely believed that the plantation was named after the region of Africa where people were captured and enslaved, that notion appears to be **apocryphal**. At present, the sprawling prison farm is 28 square miles, 18,000 acres. It is the largest maximum-security prison in the United States, and the state of Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate in the nation.

In its earlier years, the staff of *The Angolite* was all-white, because the southern prison still operated under a strict regime of segregation. Prior to desegregation, Wilbert Rideau had attempted to join the paper but had been turned down because, “only whites were on the magazine and they didn’t believe that a black person was qualified...” In response, Rideau started his own magazine called *The Lifer*. When that became successful, he was then offered a place on *The Angolite*. When desegregation was finally forced upon the prison, administrators hired Rideau as the first-ever Black editor for the paper, alongside co-editor and future bribery scheme whistleblower **Billy Sinclair**.

Rideau served the first 12 years of his sentence in solitary confinement, on death row. Upon his return to the general population after his sentence was reduced, he **said** that he found Angola to be “an abomination,” with killings, gang violence, drug trafficking, and sexual assault all rampant. “And I felt it was incumbent upon me to tell society, the public what’s going on, to let them know.”

With the support of the warden at the time, C. Paul Phelps, *The Angolite* became a free press, not bound to the same level of censorship as many other prison newspapers. Rideau says that the warden “thought that a free press could perhaps make a difference.” His stories were biting and often critical—and by most accounts made a difference. Co-editor Billy Sinclair’s piece, “**The Other Side of Murder II**” won a George Polk Award. The landmark exposé of Angola’s prolific sexual violence, “**Prison: The Sexual Jungle II**,” written by Rideau also won the same George Polk Award and was nominated for a National Magazine Award. It is among the most famous and influential of all prison newspaper stories in American history.

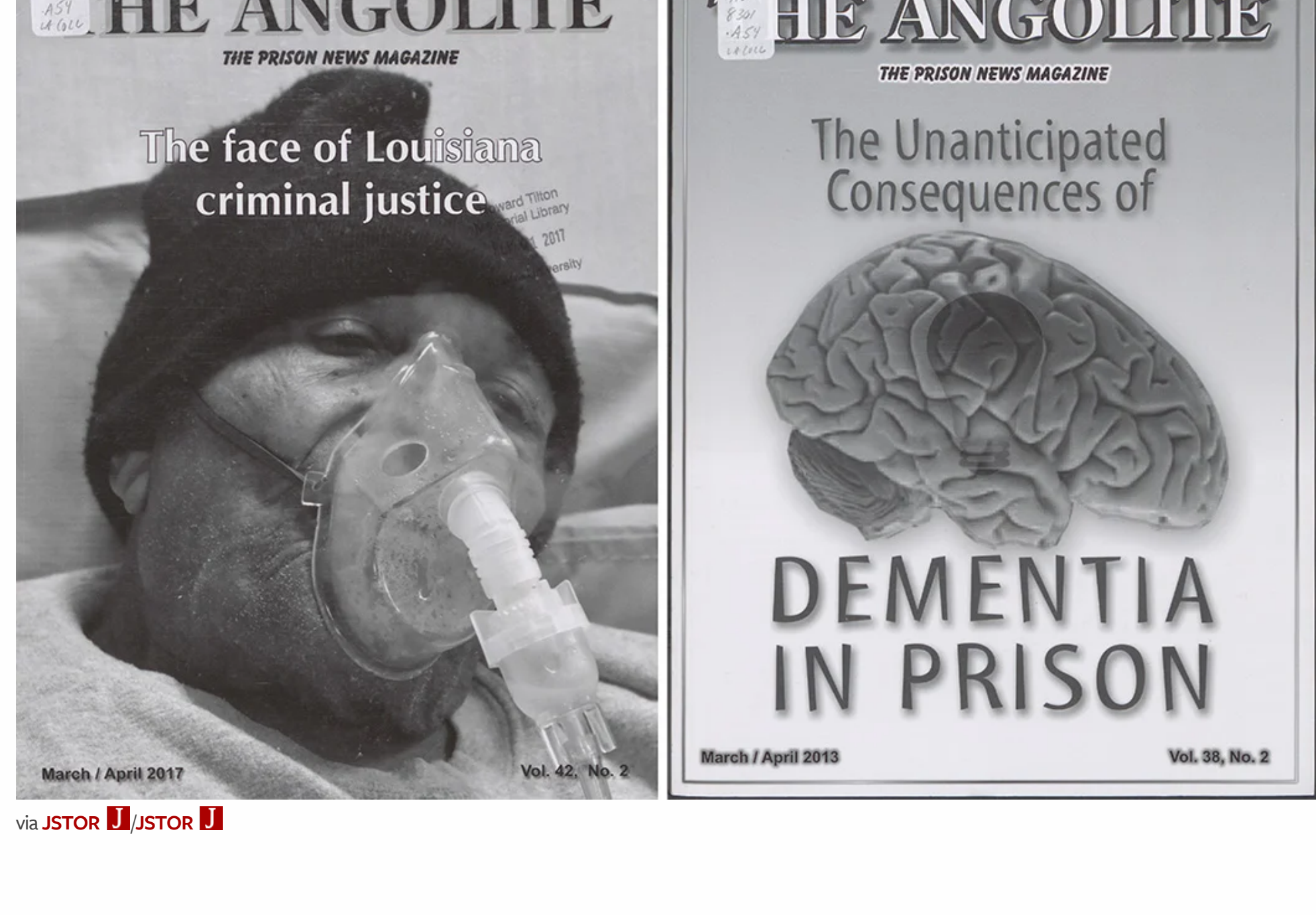
## The Angolite was given uncharacteristic journalistic freedom (by prison standards) to do its reporting.

From the curious to the exceedingly brutal, *The Angolite* was given uncharacteristic journalistic freedom (by prison standards) to do its reporting, leaving its pages rich in history not often repeated elsewhere. In 1983, a piece ran striking a concerned tone that the plasma donation program that had been an economic lifeline for the people incarcerated at Angola for many years was being suspended due to rising fear around **AIDS II**. The death penalty is another frequent topic, with features such as “**The Other Side of Murder II**,” replete with graphic photos and illustrations, including of the botched execution. After serving 44 years in prison for a crime committed as a juvenile, Wilber Rideau was freed, but his 25-year legacy at the *The Angolite* was carried on by others.



via JSTOR

The **aging US prison population** means that more elderly people are confined than ever before. With a stark look at the human cost of incarceration frail and dying people, *The Angolite* deftly shows the reader less-seen aspects of incarceration. **Obituaries II** are a constant fixture of the paper, offering three-dimensional humanity to some of society’s most forgotten souls.



via JSTOR

The prison is truly a farm and harvests several crops annually. Another point of fame or infamy, depending on perspective, is the Angola rodeo that is held twice a year. Numerous articles and photos can be found throughout the collection, the special edition magazines of which can be found elsewhere in the collection in the *Angola Prison Rodeo* magazine, though *The Angolite* itself is full of rodeo content. **Boxing II** is yet another activity unexpectedly found at Angola that makes its way onto the paper’s pages, as do football and other sports, true to the culture of Louisiana. The media legacy of the prison even transferred into broadcast television, as described in part three of “The History of Angola Media” series titled “**The Producers II**” written by John Corley.

Following in the tradition of the plantation it used to be, all those who can work are forced to, often in the fields for a period of time before being allowed to transfer to other jobs. While the brutality of the forced labor may have diminished over time, the practice continues today and is documented in the most recent issues.



via JSTOR

**Kerry Myers** was the editor of the paper for 16 years. “I am thrilled that *The Angolite* is now part of the American Prison Newspapers collection,” Myers told JSTOR Daily. “It is not only an important piece of journalism, but American journalism, having had significant impact on justice policy and law as it covered issues such as the death penalty, life without parole and extreme sentencing, the societal cost of mass incarceration, law, courts, and more.”

### Weekly Newsletter

Get your fix of JSTOR Daily's best stories in your inbox each Thursday.

[Subscribe](#)

Privacy Policy Contact Us  
You may unsubscribe at any time by clicking on the provided link on any marketing message.

Reveal Digital’s collection currently holds nearly 300 issues of the magazine. “The magazine is an institution, having provided insight into prison life, continuously, since 1953.” The earliest edition in the American Prison Newspapers collection currently is from 1966, but the issues from the infamously violent 1970s are nearly all available. “*The Angolite* is historically relevant, and having been on staff there for 20 years in one capacity or another, knowing that the body of work will be available for research and reference affirms the work of the writers who helped shaped *The Angolite’s* journalistic mission,” said Myers.

*Editor’s Note: This article was amended to correct two typographical errors.*

**Support JSTOR Daily! Join our new membership program on Patreon today.**

Have a correction or comment about this article? Please contact us.

American Prison Newspaper collection prisons



### Resources

JSTOR is a digital library for scholars, researchers, and students. JSTOR Daily readers can access the original research behind our articles for free on JSTOR.

#### The Angolite

The Angolite, 11-01-1979  
Louisiana State Penitentiary

#### The Angolite

The Angolite, Volume 8, Issue 4, 07-01-1983  
Louisiana State Penitentiary

#### The Angolite

The Angolite, 03-01-1979  
Louisiana State Penitentiary

#### The Angolite

The Angolite, Volume 43, Issue 1, 01-01-2018  
Louisiana State Penitentiary

#### The Angolite

The Angolite, Volume 40, Issue 5/6, 09-01-2015  
Louisiana State Penitentiary

#### The Angolite

The Angolite, Volume 44, Issue 4 07-01-2019  
Louisiana State Penitentiary

### Get Our Newsletter

Get your fix of JSTOR Daily's best stories in your inbox each Thursday.

[Subscribe](#)

Privacy Policy Contact Us  
You may unsubscribe at any time by clicking on the provided link on any marketing message.

### More Stories

1 Voted stickers

**POLITICS & GOVERNMENT**  
**Voting in American Politics: A Syllabus**  
From battles to expand the franchise to the mysteries of turnout, voting is one of the most important things to understand about US politics.

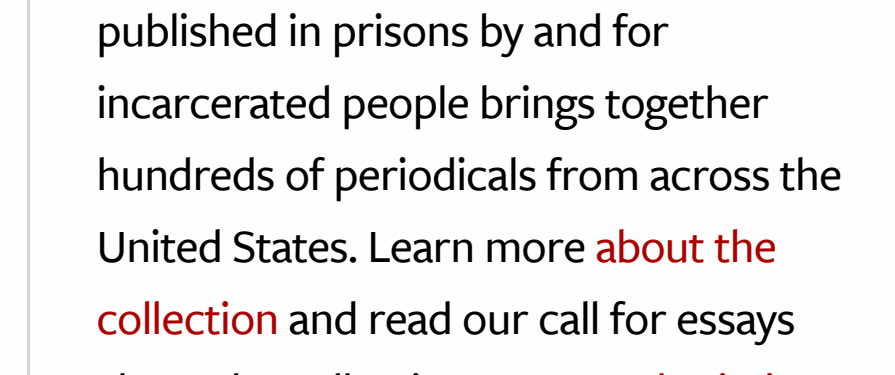
**U.S. HISTORY**  
**Genesis of the Modern American Right**  
During the Great Depression, financial elites translated European fascism into an American form that joined high capital with lower middle-class populism.

**SOCIAL HISTORY**  
**Preserving History at the Digital Transgender Archive with Portico**  
Portico helps preserve underrepresented community content and collections, including the wide-ranging materials of the Digital Transgender Archive.

**U.S. HISTORY**  
**How a Rice Economy Toppled the Shogun**  
The co-existence of economies—one based on rice, the other on money—pushed the Tokugawa government toward financial misery and failure.

### American Prison Newspapers 1880-2020

Reveal Digital’s collection of newspapers published in prisons by and for incarcerated people brings together hundreds of periodicals from across the United States. Learn more about the collection and read our call for essays about the collection on our [submissions page](#).



**Read this next**



### 50 Years Later: The Evolution of Prison Policy

Buried within *Adelante* is evidence of a fleeting attempt at prison reform and oversight in Connecticut. Is history repeating itself?



### Trending Posts

- The Naked Quakers
- Racist Humor: Exploratory Readings
- When Albus Huaiy Dropped Acid
- Why Does the Bible Forbid Tattoos?
- How a Rice Economy Toppled the Shogun

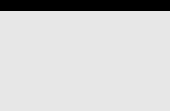
## Support JSTOR Daily

Help us keep publishing stories that provide scholarly context to the news.

[Become a member](#)

### About Us

JSTOR Daily provides context for current events using scholarship found in JSTOR, a digital library of academic journals, books, and other material. We publish articles grounded in peer-reviewed research and provide free access to that research for all of our readers.



JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization helping the academic community use digital technologies to preserve the scholarly record and to advance research and teaching in sustainable ways.

©2024 ITHAKA. All Rights Reserved. JSTOR®, the JSTOR logo, and ITHAKA® are registered trademarks of ITHAKA.

- About JSTOR Daily
- Masterhead
- Submission Guidelines
- The JSTOR Daily Sleuth
- Teaching and Learning Resources
- American Prison Newspapers
- Contact The Editors
- Newsletters
- Unsubscribe
- Support JSTOR Daily on Patreon
- Inquire about Advertising and Donations
- RSS

JSTOR.org Terms and Conditions of Use Privacy Policy Cookie Policy Cookie Settings