

Northwestern Pritzker School of Law

## Northwestern Pritzker School of Law Scholarly Commons

---

JCLC Online

---

Fall 2020

### COVID in Menard

Deandre Banks

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc\\_online](https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc_online)



Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Deandra Banks, COVID in Menard, 110 J. Crim. L. & Criminology Online 109 (2020)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern Pritzker School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in JCLC Online by an authorized administrator of Northwestern Pritzker School of Law Scholarly Commons.

## COVID IN MENARD

DEANDRE BANKS\*

I woke up today with the best habit of monotony: thanking God for waking me up and putting me in my right state of mind. Quarantined within a quarantine, the level of anxiety is extremely high in Menard's Correctional Center because of COVID-19, so the best thing I can do is keep the safety and well-being of the institution's staff and inmates alike in prayer. Gathering my thoughts in the quiet so I can wish my sister happy birthday over the phone—before 9 am, lunch, and my early morning cup of coffee—the news that smacked our eardrums was that fourteen more on top of sixteen inmates tested positive, one inmate hung himself, and another's coughing and throwing up his guts over the toilet. "It just got real," brother man down yonder exclaimed. "Wait, what!?" I thought, unfazed because it has been real all along and shame on the man who thought COVID-19 was a hoax until he himself got it.

Being incarcerated for close to two decades, one could be unfortunately privy to a few things that scare men more than getting prostate exams, cancer, diabetes, and exhausting all their remedies in court. Who knew a deadly pandemic would cause such fear and hysteria? Many men can't even functionally cope with a common cold. Many could not fathom even a single whiff of the average flu. So, coming in close proximity to COVID-19 is literally like the end of the world to some people. In my humble opinion, I do not believe men are afraid for the sake of being afraid. Men want to be able to have a fighting chance of surviving, as opposed to dying in prison from a virus that may or may not discriminate. God be with us all.

Although the circumstances vary in different prisons, every inmate, more than likely, wants the same thing: the phone, commissary, showers and cleaning supplies. Some do not have the luxury of using the phone right now, while others are fortunate enough to talk to their families on the daily. Commissary has become an even hotter commodity than normal because food and hygiene products are mandatory necessities. As the adage "cleanliness is next to godliness" reigns true so does the need to have a hot

---

\* Deandre Banks is a client of the Bluhm Legal Clinic Center on Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern Pritzker School of Law. He is currently incarcerated at Menard Correctional Center in Illinois.

shower because no matter how many bird baths one takes in the cell, you still have to clean up the mess you made; hence cleaning supplies.

As much time as one has on their hands with the monotony of the “same thing different day” reality, inmates have to be encouraged to do the time and not allow the time to do them. Television can be entertainment for some, others find relaxation in listening to music. While it is important to work out physical muscles to get some movement and the heart rate up, it’s just as vital to get some mind stimulation to feed the brain with something constructive. For some, reading and writing are excellent, that’ll never get old, and sudoku puzzles and chess games are common pastimes that never hurt nobody’s mentality. All in all, though one may feel as though they’re physically trapped inside tombs, it’s a must to keep your mind alive.

Considering the circumstances of this day and age, one can actually see how somebody could describe it as being in dire times because there is a time for everything under the sun. Every time you look up there’s coverage on media outlets about police shootings, protests, looting, wildfires, killer hornets, hurricane flooding, COVID, and the presidential election. To be aware is to be alive, true enough, however, being informed by CNN and World News can literally control people’s thinking if that’s all they see and hear. I know people who lost loved ones due to COVID-19 just as well as I know the many guys in Stateville and the County jail going through it big time; we are in different facilities, but we are in this together. The stay at home order is entirely different than quarantining in prison because here there are warehoused bodies on top of bodies. But thanks to the support of all the first responders imaginable, we are able to be encouraged, strong, safe, clean, fed, prayerful, and hopeful to find a bright spot of our own in a bleak place.

To the world’s masses: diligently follow all recommendations put forth by the Center for Disease Control and please continue to wear masks, wash your hands thoroughly with antibacterial soap, and practice social distancing.

BEST.