



FILED 12:00 p.m.
11.04.2023

CLOSING ARGUMENT

The Prison Soul Band That Opened for Stevie Wonder

The band The Power of Attorney flourished when more Americans saw incarcerated people as more than their crimes.

The Power of Attorney wasn't alone. In the 1970s, at the dawn of mass incarceration, the Escorts worked with a Motown producer in a New Jersey prison, and Texas bands sold their own vinyl at prison rodeos. In these stories, you can see how Americans used to be more willing to consider the talents of people behind bars, seeing them for more than their crimes.

“When guys come out these days, they have nothing to feel good about,” Aikens told me in an interview this week. He had left prison ready to face the world: “It was about rehabilitation, and there were opportunities to show people that even though we were in prison, we had some worth, and somebody believed in us.”

Although prisons today are less hospitable to the arts, many people behind bars still persevere to produce visual art, writing, podcasts and even movies. Later this month, Die Jim Crow Records will release an album by Lifers Groove, whose members “represent 150 years of time spent in the American prison system.” Vocalist Maxwell Melvins formed the Grammy-nominated hip-hop act Lifers Group from behind bars, 30 years ago.