



Prison Reform

After spending over four years of my life in prison, I came away with perspectives unattainable by ANY academic, politician, or bureaucrat. Simply, to live it is to know it and to fix what is very, very wrong. Absent the view from inside, it cannot be done effectively.

To be clear, my perspective is extremely unique in that not only have I lived it, but I was the rarest of rare beasts who have existed behind the razor wire. That is, I was not what I have come to label as an STD. No, not what you think: It is the acronym for Sociopath, Transient, or Derelict. Those three categories make up the vast majority of the prison population. To sit on a prison yard and watch them day in and day out, 365 days per year, 24/7, was like watching an alien world from my educated, upper middle class upbringing and life experience. It was like watching the same circus with no escape nor break possible, forced to sit mesmerized by what I came to label as one friendly, funny, and religious inmate so cleverly commented to me one day, “The Sodomites on Parade.”

There I sat or stood with no other choice but to observe the fallout of what happens when the human soul is wrecked by lives that I wouldn't wish on a dog. I watched the detritus of broken homes, men filling their bodies daily with easily available heroin, meth, and spice smoking filterless cigarettes with stained fingers and brown teeth—that is, those

that had teeth. Many, often as young as 19 or 20, were missing most or all of their teeth, gumming their food like macabre infants, their chins touching their noses with each mastication. Almost none took the offer of free dentures from the prison dentists, and not because the dentures were bad. They were actually pretty good by all accounts. Rather, the inmates assumed that they would go back to their lives of tweaking on the street and dentures were just too much work and responsibility.

Arms, torsos, necks, and yes, even faces, heads, and in some particularly grossly painful looking cases, eyeballs were inked with images that ranged from their *hood's* zip code to racist symbols or gang affiliations, all worn in a sort of witch's brew display of self-loathing mixed with perverse pride. Violence constantly simmered just under the surface, ready to erupt if they perceived that they were disrespected as if their existences entitled them to respect with not a thought given to actually doing anything to earn it. Respect for authority? Don't make me laugh. I'd watch them as they sat in front of our tiny prison TVs while on the nightly news some cop was reported killed by some random criminal and they'd all cheer out loud. To loudly resist any request by a correction's officer, no matter how small or reasonable or inconsequential, was the norm. It is easy to see why there is a growing number of police shootings as these men are immersed and raised in a culture that celebrates the killing of and resistance to police. I have heard many times these rotten sperm donors brag that they teach this same corrosive ethos to their sons and daughters. I have actually debated them on the

subject and they'd just look at me like I'd lost my mind. The wonder is that there aren't more shootings.

Yet there is another side to this story. Most of these boys and men are simply lost. Their sociopathy isn't evil; it's the natural defense mechanism born of a life unloved and uncared for by anyone. Most participate in the poisonous criminal culture because, as is the case with most human beings, they are natural followers, not leaders. What leaders there are among them are evil in the vileness they preach, themselves born of the same damaged pasts and so never taking a moment's consideration for the best interests of those that follow them.

Then there are the men and women our society has hired to oversee these lost men in prison (I assume women's prison is exactly the same but obviously I have not been there). A few start out dedicated but soon the mixture of the resentment and hatred of the inmates mixed with the rigidly stupid rules of the system devised by politicians and bureaucrats far away from the prison yard leaves them hollowed out and cynical shells of human beings. Those are the good ones. Most are just there for the paycheck and come to view the inmates as human garbage and themselves the refuse workers. Usually they chain smoke just like the inmates and quickly pick up the prison patois of peppering every sentence with at least one "f**k," "motherf***er," or "bitch." Most of them ink up too, even the prison nurses and cooks. In the end, all of it reduces to a gray and putrid soup of hopelessness and despair. The only

thing that separates the inmates from their captors is a 12-Pack and bad luck. They are usually the same kinds of beasts.

As for rehabilitation in prison, it's just a word and a joke. Classes are mandatory in such pretty sounding subjects as "Cultural Diversity," "Thinking for a Change," "Reentry to Society," blah, blah, blah. All are disregarded as what they are, shows put on for the outside public to prove that their elected leaders and government officials are working hard to reduce recidivism. It's all baloney. The inmates pretend to pay attention. The instructors pretend to teach. The wardens report the massaged and misleading numbers and pretend it works. The politicians pretend that they've done something good. And the beat goes on. **We lock up 25% of the world's prison population**, and then we complain that crime is getting worse. Why is it? Answer: In no small part because *prisons are criminal universities*. They are the graduate programs where skills first learned on the street are honed to perfection.

So what do we do about it? CAN anything be done? The good news is, you bet. Of course, as with all of my solutions, the plan that I am about to lay out is radical and rational. Rationality and the current political reality are antithetical. Put aside all of that as a given. And as I always say, *the radical becomes reasonable when the poop hits the fan*. It's hit. Here is my plan to reform the prison system:

1. Upon intake into the system, inmates are screened and classified based upon their crime, violence, and risk to staff and other inmates once inside. That much I would not change. It's best to

separate out the lifers without possibility of parole (vicious killers and sex criminals) as maximum risks because they, from the point of arrival onward, have literally nothing to lose. After all, how many life sentences can a man serve? However, there are other murderers that are in fact at low risk of reoffending, such as passion/jealousy killers. I am not forgiving these people but acknowledging that they are not usually psychopaths. For example, imagine that you walk into your house at an unexpected moment and find your spouse doing it with someone else. Mix jealousy, anger, and hurt and sometimes a person drastically overreacts in the moment. I've known some and in context, again not forgiving their crimes, you too would feel for them and not experience any sense of danger in their presence. They should NOT be thrown in with the Dahmers and Bundys. Properly screened and administered, Andy and Red would have never been mixed in with the predators at Shawshank.

As for the rapists, pedophiles and their ilk, these are sub-human scum now segregated for their own protection from the general population. As you can easily imagine, I am sure, many of the men and women in prison were themselves, like me, the victims of molestation and abuse. Most would immediately murder these monsters in revenge if given the chance. It could be seen as a public service. We as a society could, if we chose, let nature take its course and not separate them... okay, I am dreaming. They have to

be protected... I guess. That said, their sentences should *always* be life as their recidivism rate is 100%. Now, this assertion is a controversial one on my part as the actual statistics are much lower. I think the numbers lie. These monsters are smart, know how to avoid the law, and simply get away with it. More than I am sure the profession would like to admit, mental health professionals can be fooled. Prefacing that I am only referring to the real psychopaths i.e. serial rapists and pedophiles and believe some so-called sex offenders are simply mislabeled, like those arrested for public exposure because they pissed while drunk in full view of passers-by or statutory rape when an 18 year old is arrested for having sex with a 15 year old when the age of consent is arbitrary, I don't believe that the real thing is curable. Again, as Remo said in "Casino", why take a chance? We need to protect society.

This is where drug legalization can make a huge difference. At least 80% of the prison population today is inside due to drug-related offenses in some way. As I spoke to in my drug legalization white paper, robbery in all of its forms and names, murder, and assault are usually drug-related offenses. I think that is a conservative estimate. Legalization would soon empty the prisons. Using my own state of Arizona as an example, the government here spent \$1.13 billion on state prisons last year. The cost is not likely to go down. An 80% prison population reduction

would reduce that number to \$226 million, a roughly \$800 million savings. That's a ton of money, especially at the state level, and more than enough to fund all of the reforms that I am about to lay out with, I estimate, nearly \$600 million still left over for education, drug rehab, infrastructure, and tax cuts. I don't include the savings on policing in this number as it's hidden in the budgets of the various departments and they don't break it out. That said, figure it's A LOT and certainly discoverable by good auditing and accounting. In any case, multiply Arizona's savings by 50 states and we are looking at least \$45 billion which is on the low side as Arizona is not a particularly populous state, below average to be sure. We can absolutely afford to do the right things, beginning with life sentences for sex predators. Once drug crimes are gone, we will have lots of room to store them like putrid mushrooms.

2. Once classified, a second segregation should take place. Namely, all those incoming with gang or racist ink should be given a simple choice: immediate laser removal at state expense OR be placed into maximum security with the lifers. What you need to comprehend is the importance of prison ink. Most of it is harmless, BUT for a destructive and powerful minority who also make up for what is accepted as leadership inside, ink is their identifier. Given the choice, the wannabes who have this kind of ink not because they are dangerous gangsters or actual racists, can have their brands-of-stupidity that they only got to fit in erased while the real filth will absolutely refuse, thereby self-selecting into their own

hell where they can do the least harm to anyone but themselves. Let's face it; these kinds of people are lost anyway. Meanwhile the rest of the medium to low risk inmates will be shut off and protected from the poisonous influence of the incorrigible in order to have the best shot possible at redemption. The weak will always follow the Alphas and these gangsters are the Alphas. We cannot fix the unfixable, so we must be tough and lock them away to wallow in their own bile. Their ink makes finding and cutting them from the herd easy.

3. Proper classification and segregation now completed, all remaining inmates will then be assigned to PBT (Prison Basic Training). This will be a three month military/Marine-style boot camp where heads are shaved and extremely strict discipline is enforced, including severe punishment for disobedience such as solitary confinement 23 hours per day (1 hour out for fresh air and shower) with no TV or entertainment of any kind. Those unable to do the PBT course due to age or chronic medical conditions will be put into their own all-day program of tamed down drills and instruction that will take into consideration their conditions but strict discipline will still be enforced. I can tell you as a veteran without any fear of contradiction by anyone who has experienced it, Basic Training though very tough regardless of branch of service, changes everyone who goes through it for the better in ways that will last a lifetime. I still can't wake up without immediately making my bed with hospital corners and folding my

clothes the same way that they were in my foot locker. An ordered personal life makes success much easier to attain. Therefore, why not instill what we know works into a population of men by and large bereft of positive life skills like teamwork, selflessness, taking orders from superiors in respect to position and rank, and just plain hard work?

Now, after doing my time, I know who I am dealing with and some of those knuckleheads will have to do PBT several times over to get it. So be it; we will have plenty of funding. Starting over on Day 1 should be the automatic punishment for the serially clueless. PBT, like military basic training, will NOT be fun at that moment. Yet, once successfully completed, including a graduation ceremony where outside family and friends are invited to witness actual achievement of something difficult, the first time in their lives for the VAST majority of these men and women, the pride of accomplishment and an esprit de corps will be the result. Thus a foundation will be laid for even more success to come.

4. While in PBT, extensive intellectual testing shall be done to determine literacy level and IQ as well as identify any learning disabilities. It is a sad truth that inside prison there is a large population of either the completely illiterate or functionally so inmates, some even with high school diplomas which in today's world cannot be trusted to signal any education whatsoever. Our culture got so caught up in preserving self-esteem and promoting

diversity that we forgot all too often to demand actual results. Those with the IQs and ability to learn should be placed in remedial reading and math classes designed to bring them to a minimum 9th grade reading level beginning after PBT is completed.

Those with learning disabilities should be treated and instructed as their condition and potential allows. Again, we will have plenty of funding absent the money wasted on the Drug Rout. Once 9th grade levels are achieved, and for those inmates who are literate but never graduated, all of them will be placed into “Redemption High,” an inside program to achieve a true diploma with a curriculum that includes electives just like a regular high school. Learning for these men must not be drudgery or they will never engage.

For those whose sentences are too short to allow time for completion or who have skills and do not need classes, GED testing and/or guaranteed placement in regular high schools outside of prison after release to earn their diploma shall be available free of charge . A requirement to graduate should be a true “C” average. Failure to achieve in any semester shall result in a redo of PBT. That will focus the class, which is largely made up, let’s face it, of problem children when they were in the public schools. For those inmates with diplomas or degrees already, graduate college and/or

vocational programs shall be available in conjunction with local junior colleges and universities.

5. Jobs shall be available and mandatory for all inmates, and not the make-work kinds of today paying slave wages, typically 10 to 50 cents per hour as is the case, but real jobs that match the abilities of the individual inmate as well as their interests both inside and outside prison (for those cream-of-the-crop inmates who earn Trustee status based upon compliance with the rules and performance) and that match up with similar jobs in the real world. These jobs should be provided by private companies with an avenue open to transitioning to a career with the employer after release. All should pay a base wage that matches the state's legal minimum, out of which should be deducted realistic percentages for the inmates' room and board, not to mention restitution to victims of their crimes and, of course, child support. This will provide the inmates two benefits. First, it will introduce them to budgeting. For example, say the hourly pay is \$10.00 (for the sake of simplicity in this example). On the outside a third would typically go to rent and another 20% to food and another 10% to utilities. The state making those same deductions would therefore net the inmate about \$3.50 per hour. At the same time, he/she is offsetting from privately earned incomes the costs of their own incarceration. Out of this, the inmate can receive 50 cents to spend in the prison store (about \$40 every two weeks) on coffee, cigarettes, and treats, with the balance being deposited to his or

her inaccessible-while-inside bank account to build a nest egg for release. Example, an inmate with a 5 year sentence like mine can expect to leave with approximately \$36,400.00 plus whatever interest rate the account pays which will be administered by an FDIC bank. That beats the daylight out of the \$0 to at most \$250 they leave with now. Not a penny of it unearned, costing the taxpayers not a dime, and all along the victims and families have been getting a lot more than would be the case otherwise.

Casting these people onto the streets nearly penniless, as we do now, is insane and almost guarantees recidivism. As for child support and restitution, 10% of the gross can go for each, thus reducing the net to spend inside in order to build savings.

Decisions have consequences and that's a positive lesson too and will hopefully teach responsibility. The savings is the second benefit of the work program. They will leave with thousands of dollars in most cases, and they will need it. Everybody wins in this scenario. The inmate feels productive and not like a slave, as they do now. The 50 cents per hour spending money for the inmate inside is something they need to feel some immediate gratification. The offspring get some child support when now they get none, and the victims get paid back something. It may not be everything, but as I have said, the enemy of good is perfect. This will work, and don't forget, this is all funded by private business.

6. Based upon compliance with the prison rules and job/education performance, inmates can earn improved housing conditions. All should begin in two-man cells, with a step first to a single bed unit with some privacy and ultimately to private rooms a la college dormitories or Scandinavian prisons. Norway, for example, has had tremendous success in fighting recidivism with similar accommodations. Prefacing that they are a tiny, racially and culturally homogeneous country and therefore cannot be a direct parallel to ours, we can adapt their lessons to our circumstances.
7. Exceptional inmates should be able to earn visitation and work privileges, including—in some of the best cases—work-release and weekend furloughs (living weekends with family on the outside) and conjugal visits.
8. The misbehavior of any individual inmate and the consequences for such shall be borne solely by that inmate and not result, under any circumstances, in the entire prison population being punished as is routine prison practice today. That practice is just plain stupid as it kills all individual incentive to perform if the only possible result is punishment for something you had nothing to do with. I'd like to meet the idiots who came up with this idea first. They must have either been lobotomized, communists, or fascists, but I digress.

The idea behind all of this is to take men and women who have in the vast majority of cases lived lives of no rules or structure and been raised

without any positive role modeling, and mainstream them into society. Remember, subsequent to drug legalization we will be dealing with a MUCH smaller prison population, 20% or so of what it is today, and we will further reduce those in the program by weeding out the animals (which is an insult to animals to equate them with the vicious creatures we will segregate, so PETA and ASPCA folks please forgive me). This will make the management of this new way of doing things much more humane and efficient. I spent over four years watching the current system that provides only the pretense of rehabilitation with no true effort or chance of success. I lived through regularly being punished and locked down, strip searched and humiliated because of the actions of some brain-dead pod person whom I had zero to do with, and I was far from alone. It is a system that breeds hopelessness and dehumanizes while providing no incentive to perform. As an example, I experienced being “led” by vile racists and anti-Semitic skinheads recognized as the *white leadership* by none other than the prison authorities, though we inmates never had an election nor any opportunity to object. I saw countless inmates released and nearly all come back, and worse, leave with the certain expectation that they would be re-arrested. In summary, the current prison system does nothing more than institutionalize men and women for life in the VAST majority of cases while transforming addicts into professional criminals. The inmates call the system as it is today, “Life on the Installment Plan.” I am not joking.

Allow me to here address those of you reading this of the *who gives a fig about bloody lowlife criminals* set and who also believe that they *ought to be*

at hard labor busting rocks with a ball and chain on the legs of every inmate concerns. You know, the same people who believe that we can punish the addiction out of addicts. Try and read this with an open mind: The isolation of prison is the punishment, and every sentence served is life. Think about it; a criminal record of an adult is never expunged and follows him/her for life. It is a perpetual lodestone that is never removed. Believe me as one who has experienced it firsthand, the ex-convict is *always* stained for life and most people in this situation have neither the brains nor insight to overcome it. We are punished, forever. Believe that. And it hasn't reduced crime a bit. If anything, it traps the ex-felon into a life of crime as most will not see any other option.

Free of incarcerated addicts made into criminals by idiotic drug laws, enormous resources will be available to weed out the truly incorrigible and rehabilitate many of what today are lost souls. The end result for ALL of society will be *much* safer streets, homes, and public places. *Save an ex-convict and save a lot of their children as a result.* Before long, America will go from being a nation that incarcerates more of its population than any other developed country (while we represent 4.25% of the world's population, we represent 25% of the total of those incarcerated world wide!) to become an example of civility and smart second chances for those that deserve and earn them. We will be able to say with pride that it is un-American to do otherwise.

Besides, we could hardly do worse than we are now, no?