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10/27/13

RE: SOLITARY CONFINEMENT ESSAY: (POST)...

THERE WAS A DISCUSSION ON PBS STATION 10/13/13 ON A PROGRAM CALLED RELIGION & ETHICS.

THE DISCUSSION WAS CENTERED AROUND SOLITARY CONFINEMENT AND THE MISSISSIPPI STATE PRISON SYSTEM.

THE DIRECTOR OF MISSISSIPPI'S DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS MR EPPS HAS DECIDED TO CLOSE DOWN MAJORITY OF HIS PRISON'S SECURITY HOUSING UNITS (SHU'S).

THE REASON MR EPPS DECIDED TO CLOSE THEM DOWN WAS BECAUSE THEY WERE BEING USED INDISCRIMINATELY. AND PRISONERS WERE BEING SENT TO THE SHU FOR ANY MINOR INFRACTIONS.

THIS IS SOMETHING THAT IS BEING DONE IN EVERY STATE, THEY HAVE A LOT OF UNFILLED CELLS, AND NEED TO FILL THEM. THE MORE PRISONERS IN SHU, THE MORE MONEY IS PAID TO KEEP THEM SUPERVISED.

IT COSTS A LOT TO KEEP PRISONERS LOCKED UP IN THE SHU, THE MONEY GOES TO PAY GUARDS SALARIES, NOT ON THE PRISONERS, PROGRAMS, EDUCATION, MEDICAL, OR ANYTHING ELSE BENEFICIAL TO THE PRISONERS.

DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE, PRISONERS ARE IN THEIR CELLS ALL DAY AND NIGHT, THEY RARELY LEAVE THEIR CELLS.

SO WHAT ARE THEY PAYING GUARDS EXTRA FOR, WHAT EXACTLY ARE THEY DOING TO EARN MORE THEN THE AVERAGE GUARD.

THE CALIFORNIA PRISON SYSTEM OPENED A PRISON "CORCORAN SHU". IN THE SMALL CITY OF CORCORAN CALIFORNIA.

I HAD JUST BEEN TRANSFERRED TO TEHACHAPI SHU ALONG WITH THOUSANDS OF OTHER PRISONERS IN JANUARY OR FEBRUARY 1987.

I WAS IN SAN QUENTIN STATE PRISON, THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS HAD TURNED SAN QUENTIN INTO THE BIGGEST SHU IN CALIFORNIA. AND I BELIEVE THEY REGRETTED THAT THEY DID. BECAUSE IT WAS THE WORSE IDEA THEY EVER HAD. SAN QUENTIN STATE PRISON WAS A COMPLETE MAD HOUSE.

II.

WHAT HAPPENED WAS PRISON OFFICIALS IN THE EARLY 1980'S CAME UP WITH THEIR FIRST BIG IDEA (THAT HAS LED THEM AND US PRISONERS DOWN THIS LONG ROAD OF BLOOD AND VIOLENCE.

SEE, IT HAS ALWAYS AMAZED ME THAT PRISON OFFICIALS IMPLEMENTED WHAT THEY CALLED ADMINISTRATIVE SEGREGATION. AT FIRST IT WAS DESIGNED FOR JUST A HANDFUL OF PRISONERS, WHO WERE HELD IN SEGREGATION BECAUSE THEY WERE CONSIDERED PRISON GANG LEADERS, OR TOO VICIOUS TO LET OUT OF SEGREGATION, THIS WAS ORIGINALLY CALLED "DIRECTOR'S CASES". ALL OTHER PRISONERS WERE ALLOWED TO GO BACK TO THE GENERAL POPULATION AFTER THEY SERVED THEIR DISCIPLINARY TIME IN SEGREGATION.

THE LONGEST THAT ANY ONE WOULD STAY IN SEGREGATION WAS ONE YEAR. AND THAT WAS FOR A MURDER. FOR ASSAULT ON ANOTHER PRISONER WAS SIX MONTHS AS WELL AS POSSESSION FOR A WEAPON, EVERY OTHER VIOLATION WAS LESS THEN SIX MONTHS.

THIS CHANGED BY 1975 WHEN A PRISONER CHARGED WITH A PRISON MURDER WOULD SERVE THREE YEARS IN SEGREGATION. SIX MONTHS TO A YEAR FOR WEAPON POSSESSION. EIGHTEEN MONTHS FOR ASSAULT ON ANOTHER PRISONER.

THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS A "SHU" BACK THEN.

BUT THEN IN 1980'S THE PRISON SYSTEM IMPLEMENTED ADMINISTRATIVE SEGREGATION IN D.V.I. AFTER HOLDING A GROUP OF PRISONERS LONG TERM IN A UNIT CALLED WEST HALL. AND IN 1982 A NEW CLASSIFICATION SCORE SYSTEM WAS IMPLEMENTED.

THIS SCORE SYSTEM WAS DESIGNED TO PLACE PRISONERS IN CATEGORIES THAT WOULD DETERMINE WHICH PRISON EACH PRISONER WOULD BE SENT TO.

THEY SENT ALL GANG MEMBERS TO SAN QUENTIN PRISON SECURITY HOUSING UNIT. THIS WAS THE FIRST "SHU". 1982-1983...

PRISON STAFF THOUGHT IT WAS A GOOD IDEA TO PLACE ALL GANGS IN ONE PLACE AND MONITOR THEM. THIS QUICKLY BLEW UP IN THEIR FACE. BECAUSE GANG VIOLENCE ERUPTED IN ALL AREAS OF SANQUENTIN STATE PRISON. PRISONERS WERE BEING ASSAULTED DAILY. ON THE WAY TO YARD, ON THE YARD, ON THE TIERS GOING TO SHOWERS, ANY TIME THAT SOMEONE CAME OUT OF THEIR CELL.

DURING THIS TIME PRISON GUN TOWERS USED A 12 GAUGE SHOTGUN TO SHOOT PRISONERS TO BREAK UP FIGHTS ON THE TIERS OR ON THE YARD.

IT WAS RARE FOR PRISONERS TO BE KILLED BY PRISON GUARDS AFTER BEING SHOT WITH THE BIRD SHOT. MANY OF US HAVE BEEN WOUNDED BY SHOT GUN BLASTS.

III.

ONE OF MY FRIENDS WAS SHOT IN THE FACE BY A GUARD, HE IS NOW BLIND AND WAS SENT TO A MEDICAL FACILITY. I FEEL SORRY FOR MY FRIEND. HIS NAME IS "SLEEPY" AND HE IS FROM HOLLISTER, CALIFORNIA. HE IS SERVING A LIFE TERM AND THATS WHAT IS SO SAD ABOUT IT. HE MUST SERVE A LIFE TERM IN DARKNESS, AND IN A PLACE AWAY FROM HIS FRIENDS. I HATE TO IMAGINE HOW LIFE HAS BEEN FOR HIM ALL THESE YEARS. HOW PEOPLE HAVE TREATED HIM. I HATE TO EVEN THINK ABOUT IT.

A LOT OF GUARDS WERE ALSO ASSAULTED, AND WHEN A SGT. WAS KILLED BY A SPEAR PRISON OFFICIALS BEGAN THINKING OF HOW TO TIGHTEN SECURITY, BECAUSE THEIR SANQUENTIN STATE PRISON EXPERIENCE HAD FAILED TO MEET THEIR EXPECTATIONS, AND THEY HAD BUILT A NEW LEVEL IV PRISON IN TEHACHAPI, CALIFORNIA. IT HAD A MAINLINE AND EACH PRISON HAD A "SECURITY HOUSING UNIT" THESE ARE THE FIRST "SHU-UNITS" THEY ALSO BUILT ONE IN FOLSOM PRISON "NEW FOLSOM" LEVEL IV SHU.

PRISONERS IN SANQUENTIN HAD NO IDEA THEY WERE BUILDING THESE NEW PRISONS. NOT UNTIL JANUARY OF 1987. WHEN WE WERE TOLD WE WOULD ALL BE GOING TO "I.C.C." THE INSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE. FOR TRANSFER TO A NEW PRISON. AND IT WAS LIKE AN ASSEMBLY LINE THEY CUFFED US UP IN BUNCHES AND HAD US LINED UP WAITING TO GO IN. WHEN IT WAS MY TURN I WALKED IN AND DIDN'T EVEN GET TO SIT DOWN. I WAS TOLD I WAS BEING PUT UP FOR TRANSFER TO THE NEW SHU. ON THE FIRST WEEK OF FEBRUARY 1987 WE WERE LOADED UP ON BUSES AND WERE SENT TO TEHACHAPI.

IT WAS A LONG, LONG RIDE. FINALLY WHEN WE GOT THERE WE WERE ALL TAKEN OFF THE BUS. STRIP SEARCHED AGAIN AND TAKEN TO BE X-RAYED. THEN TAKEN TO OUR UNIT. I WAS IN 5-BLOCK.

THE PROGRAM WAS A LOT MORE STRICTER. BUT WE HAD A SMALL YARD AND IT HAD A BASKETBALL RIM ON ONE WALL, AND WE HAD A HANDBALL COURT. IN THE SUMMER IT'S REALLY HOT, IN WINTER IT WAS FREEZING, IT SNOWED A LOT UP THERE.

AT FIRST THE GUARDS WERE RESPECTFUL AND TREATED US ALRIGHT. THEY FED US GOOD WE COULD HAVE TWO APPLIANCES, A T.V. AND A RADIO. WE COULD HAVE SWEATSHIRTS AND SWEAT PANTS. THEY HAD A GOOD CANTEEN AND THE ANNUAL PACKAGES WERE GOOD.

THEY HAD WINDOWS IN THE BACK OF THE CELLS SO YOU COULD SEE OUTSIDE. AND SEE THE DAYLIGHT AND NIGHT TIME, WHEN IT SNOWED I WATCHED THE SNOW FALL, I ALSO WATCHED BIRDS OUTSIDE MY WINDOW. I USED TO SEE THE GUARDS MARCHING AND RUNNING IN FORMATION. THEY DID THAT FOR A WHILE THEN QUIT. IT'S NOT EASY RUNNING IN BOOTS.

IV. THEN PRISON OFFICIALS BEGAN TO CHANGE. FIRST THE FOOD GOT WORSE. THEN THEY TOLD US WE CAN NO LONGER WEAR OUR THERMALS OR SWEAT CLOTHES TO YARD. IT WAS SNOWING AND WE HAD TO GO OUT THERE WITH JUST A T-SHIRT, BOXERS, PANTS, SHOES, AND A THIN JACKET. THEN THEY STARTED TO BEAT DOWN PRISONERS.

ONE DAY I WAS GOING TO THE DENTIST AND SAW SOME GANG OFFICIALS PUNCHING A PRISONER IN THE FACE. WHEN THEY SAW ME THEY STOPPED. BUT CONTINUED WHEN I PASSED BY. ANOTHER TIME I SAW PRISON OFFICIALS DRAGGING A PRISONER WHO WAS ON HIS KNEES BY HIS HAIR, WHICH IS WHY MOST OF US SHAVE OUR HEADS. I SAW GUARDS OPEN PRISONERS DOORS AND RUN IN HIS CELL. FIVE-SIX GUARDS ON ONE PRISONER, THEY'D BEAT THE PRISONER SENSELESS. THIS BECAME A REGULAR THING. THEY SHOT AND KILLED A BLACK PRISONER NAMED OMAR. THERE WAS NO REASON TO SHOOT HIM HE WAS IN A HOLDING CELL. THEY SHOT ANOTHER BLACK PRISONER WHILE WE WERE DOING OUR EXERCISES OUT ON THE YARD. THERE WAS NO REASON TO SHOOT HIM WE WERE ALL IN THE PUSH UP POSITION.

THE VIOLENCE AMONG PRISONERS HAD ALMOST STOPPED COMPLETELY. BECAUSE ALL GROUPS WERE KEPT APART, ON SEPARATE YARDS, AND THE CELLS HAVE STEEL DOORS.

THE GUARDS DIDN'T LIKE IT. THEY WANTED TO SEE PROBLEMS. THEY USED TO INSTIGATE PROBLEMS AND ANIMOSITY AMONGST US, WHEN I USED TO GO TO YARD THE GUARDS WOULD TELL ME THEY WOULD BET ON ME SO PUT ON A GOOD SHOW.

A FEW YEARS AFTER WE WERE SENT TO "TEHACHAPI SHU" IN THE SUMMER OF 1989 THE PRISON OFFICIALS TOLD US THAT A NEW SHU OPENED IN CORCORAN, CALIFORNIA, AND ITS GOING TO BE USED TO BREAK GANG MEMBERS. THEY WERE ALL EXCITED AND LAUGHING. AGAIN THEY HAD US ALL GOING TO I.C.C. AGAIN FOR TRANSFER. THEY GAVE OUT A LOT OF BUS TICKETS, SOME OF MY FRIENDS WERE THE FIRST TO GO FROM OUR BUILDING. I REMEMBER TALKING TO THEM ON THE YARD TELLING THEM THAT I'VE HEARD THEY ARE MIXING UP THE YARDS WITH RIVAL GANG MEMBERS SO THEY COULD FIGHT THEN GUARDS COULD SHOOT THEM. MY FRIEND WHO WE CALLED BABY BULL BECAUSE HE WAS SHORT AND STOCKY. HE WAS ONLY DOING 90-DAYS FOR PAROLE VIOLATION. SO I WAS TELLING HIM TO BE CAREFUL, AS SOON AS THE GUARDS YELL GET DOWN HE MUST SQUAT DOWN QUICK. MY FRIEND WAS SHOT IN THE NECK WHILE FIGHTING WITH A RIVAL GANG MEMBER, I LATER HEARD THAT AFTER HE WAS SHOT THEY LEFT HIM ON THE YARD TO BLEED OUT. IT WAS REALLY PAINFUL TO HEAR HE DIED, WHAT BOTHERED ME MOST WAS THAT HE WAS AN ONLY CHILD. HIS PARENTS LOST THEIR ONLY KID.

ANOTHER FRIEND OF MINE "TOMAS" WAS ALSO SHOT IN THE BACK. BUT WHEN HE WAS TOLD TO STOP HE WAS WALKING AWAY FROM THE OTHER INMATE A RIVAL GANG MEMBER WHEN HE WAS SHOT IN THE BACK. AFTER WE WERE MOVED FROM SAN QUENTIN GUARDS STARTED USING A RIFLE MINI-14. IT'S A NINE MILLIMETER. THEY USE THAT A LOT NOW. AND IT KILLS OR CRIPPLES. NONE OF MY FRIENDS HAD A WEAPON, THEY WERE KILLED FOR A FIST FIGHT. A LOT OF PEOPLE WERE KILLED AND PARALYZED AT CORCORAN STATE PRISON.

YOU KNOW WHAT I HAVE ALWAYS THOUGHT OF. PRISON OFFICIALS SAY THEY WERE SEGREGATING US TO STOP GANG VIOLENCE. THEY ACCOMPLISHED THAT AT TEHACHAPI. BUT THEY CAME UP WITH THE IDEA OF "MIXING UP THE YARDS AT CORCORAN PRISON" KNOWING THEY WOULD INSTIGATE FIGHTS. THEY KNEW IT AND USED IT. THEY DEPENDED ON IT. SO THEY COULD HAVE AN EXCUSE TO KILL US. AND THEY KILLED A LOT OF US.

A. THEY USED THIS OPPORTUNITY TO GET BACK AT PRISONERS. THEY DESIGNED "CORCORAN SHU" FOR ONE PURPOSE TO KILL PRISONERS AND TO BREAK THOSE WHO WOULDN'T FIGHT.

CORCORAN SHU WAS YEAR ROUND HUNTING SEASON. AND WAS INTENTIONALLY SETUP BY CDCR'S ADMINISTRATION.

THEIR ACTIONS DOESN'T SURPRIZE US, MOST OF US HAVE SEEN THEIR TACTIC'S AND HAVE EXPERIENCED THEIR TACTIC'S.

THE GOVERNMENT AND STATE OFFICIALS HAVE COMITTED MANY CRIMES AGAINST THEIR CITIZENS. BUT BECAUSE WE ARE INCARCERATED THEY DON'T CONSIDER US AS CITIZENS, BUT THINK ABOUT ALL THE CRIMES THEY'VE COMMITTED, AND NEVER BEEN HELD TO ANSWER FOR.

I READ ALOT OF CASES THAT HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO THE COURTS BECAUSE PRISONERS HAVE FILED CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLAINTS SEEKING RELIEF. AND I'VE READ SOME OUTRAGEOUS CASES. THESE ARE PRISON GUARDS COMMITTING CRIMES AGAINST PRISONERS, IS IT ANY WONDER WHY PRISONERS ASSAULT STAFF.

PRISONERS KNOW THAT ANY TIME THEY STEP OUT OF THEIR CELLS THEY ARE UNDER THE GUN, AND ARE PRETTY MUCH SITTING DUCKS. SO WHY DO THEY SHOOT TO KILL US WHEN WE DON'T HAVE GUNS. WE JAMN SURE CANT SHOOT BACK.

WHEN THEY OPENED CORCORAN SHU AND MADE IT INTEGRATED YARD. MEANING MIXED YARDS. KNOWING RIVAL GANG MEMBERS WOULD ATTACK EACH OTHER.

IF THEY WANTED THAT TO HAPPEN. THEN WHY EVEN PLACE US IN SEGREGATION THEN, THEY CLAIM THEY DON'T WANT US OUT ON THE GENERAL POPULATION BECAUSE OF THE VIOLENCE, RIOTS, ASSAULTS, AND MURDERS.

YET THEY PUT ALL THOSE SAME INDIVIDUALS ON THE SAME YARDS TOGETHER SO THEY CAN CONTROL THE FIGHTS.

SIMILAR TO DOG FIGHTS, THEY LET ONE CELL OCCUPANT OUT TO THE YARD THEN LOOK FOR A RIVAL GANG MEMBER TO LET OUT WITH HIM. AND THEY'D WATCH US FIGHT AND THE WINNER WAS USED OVER AND OVER UNTIL HE LOSES, OR THEY TIRE OF HIM AND SHOOT HIM. JUST LIKE THE COCK FIGHTS.

IN 1989 THE CALIFORNIA PRISON SYSTEM OPENED "PELICAN BAY SHU". IN DECEMBER 26, 1989 THEY STARTED SENDING BUS LOADS OF US TO PELICAN BAY. WE WERE TOLD THIS WAS IT, THE END OF THE ROAD, THAT WE'D BE HERE FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES.

THE GAME PLAN FOR ALL THIS CAME FROM THE GOVERNMENT AND PRISON ADMINISTRATION, REGULAR PRISON GUARDS JUST FOLLOW ORDERS, MOST OF THEM AREN'T BRIGHT ENOUGH NOR HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO IMPLEMENT THE DIFFERENT POLICIES THAT WE'VE SEEN OVER THE YEARS.

RACISM HAS PLAYED A BIG ROLE IN HOW THE PRISON'S SEGREGATION UNITS HAVE GRADUALLY ADVANCED IN TORTURE AND EXECUTION UNITS.

II  
I DON'T WANT TO SOUND LIKE I'M TOTALLY UNDESERVING OF MY TIME IN MANY SHU UNITS, BECAUSE I'M NOT.

I HAVE DONE MANY THINGS TO BE DISCIPLINED FOR, I'M NOT AN INNOCENT BY-STANDER, LIKE A LOT OF OTHER PRISONERS.

I COULD NEVER SAY THAT I DIDN'T BELONG IN THE SHU. BECAUSE I HAVE A LENGTHY DISCIPLINARY RECORD. AT ONE TIME I HAD TO BE CHAINED EVERY TIME I LEFT MY CELL. I HAD TO BE CHAINED WHILE I GOT MY EXERCISE PERIOD TO PREVENT ME FROM ATTACKING ANYONE. AND I WAS PLACED IN A SMALL SALLY PORT TO WALK IN BY MYSELF. THE LEG IRONS HURT WITH EVERY STEP I TOOK. THE WAIST CHAINS WERE TIGHT SO I COULDN'T SLIP THEM OFF, AND THE HANDCUFFS CUT INTO MY WRISTS. MY CELL WAS SEARCHED TWO TIMES A DAY WHEN THEY CHANGED SHIFTS.

BUT THAT WAS A VERY LONG TIME AGO. I'M MUCH OLDER NOW. AND I'VE BEEN IN THE SHU OVER 30 YEARS IN TOTAL.

IS IT RIGHT TO JUDGE ME FOR WHAT I DID LONG TIME AGO, BECAUSE THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT PELICAN BAY OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN DOING. I CAN'T DENY THE PAST, BUT PEOPLE CHANGE AS THEY GET OLDER, AND KEEPING SOMEONE IN SEGREGATION FOR THIRTY YEARS IS IT REHABILITATION OR A SLOW TORTURE.

FOR THE TWENTY PLUS YEARS THAT I HAVE BEEN IN PELICAN BAY I HAVE NOT BEEN ALLOWED TO PLAY BASKETBALL, OR HANDBALL, ANYTHING. THERE IS NOTHING TO DO FOR THE HOUR AND A HALF WE ARE ON THE YARD. MOST PRISONERS DON'T EVEN GO OUT FOR THEIR FULL TIME. SOME DON'T GO OUT AT ALL.

OTHER STATES HAVE BEGUN TO CLOSE DOWN THEIR SHU UNITS. THEY ALL HAVE DIFFERENT REASONS, BUT NONE HAS TO DO WITH THE DAMAGE THE ISOLATION CAUSES PRISONERS, INFACT THE ONLY REASON THEY EVEN CONSIDERED CLOSING DOWN SHU'S IS BECAUSE THEIR STATE'S WERE SPENDING WAY TOO MUCH MONEY ON PRISONS.

THEY WERE SPENDING BILLIONS TO KEEP RUNNING ALL THEIR PRISONS, AND WHEN THEY STARTED LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS. THEY FINALLY REALIZED THEY HAVE MANY PRISONERS WITH NON VIOLENT CRIMES, THREESTRIKES, AND AGING PRISONERS THAT REALLY DON'T BELONG IN PRISON.

THEY ARE NOT CLOSING THE SHU'S BECAUSE THEY FEEL SORRY FOR TORTURING US ALL THESE YEARS. NOR BECAUSE THEY WANT TO EDUCATE AND TRAIN US, AND ESPECIALLY BECAUSE THEY WANT TO.

CALIFORNIA IS STILL FIGHTING AGAINST IT, THEY SPENT TOO MUCH MONEY TO CHANGE NOW AND ARE LOOKING FOR SOME OTHER SOLUTION, A WAY OUT OF THIS MESS. WITHOUT HAVING TO RELEASE PRISONERS FROM THE SHU. SO IT'S NOT OVER. AND UNLIKE MISSISSIPPI AND OTHER STATES. CALIFORNIA IS NOT ABOUT TO LET 700 PRISONERS OUT OF IT'S SHU UNITS.