

TRANSFORMING PRISONERS INTO PEACE AMBASSADORS

If you want to UNDERSTAND the CAUSES that existed in the past, look at the RESULTS as they are manifested in the PRESENT. And if you want to UNDERSTAND what RESULTS will be manifested in the FUTURE, look at the CAUSES that exist in the PRESENT.

(Buddhist philosopher, Nichiren Daishonin, C.E. 1272)

U.S.A. RANKING AMONG INDUSTRIALIZED NATIONS:¹

- 13th in suicide rates
- 31st in the gap between the rich & the poor
- 6th in per-capita education expenditures
- 1st in military weapons exports
- 1st in number incarcerated: 2.4 million²

In the above perspective of Nichiren, one can see that the 1st & last ranking are, in actuality, the results of the middle 3 causes. All 5, cumulatively, have a direct bearing on the 'Culture of Violence' prevalent today throughout our inner-cities. However, to ebb the flow of violence in these areas, particularly, Chicago & California,³ the prison population will have to play an instrumental role.

By 2011, the U.S. was incarcerating "5 times more people than Britain, 9 times more than Germany, & 12 times more than Japan." Toward the end of that same year, it was projected that nearly 750,000 men & women were expected to be released from prison (44% on the inmate population) at a "greater disadvantage (& more PRIMED for TROUBLE than his [or her] predecessors did)." (Petersilia, 2011, p.26, 28)

Prisoners have an affect on Youth Culture... Worldwide⁴

Locking people up has an especially malign effect on poor

urban neighborhoods, where up to 20% of the male population may be behind bars at any given time. Not only do the men come home with diminished prospects that **HURT THE WHOLE COMMUNITY**, but as criminologist Todd Clear show in Imprisoning Communities (2007), their absence **WEAKENS THE FAMILY & SOCIAL NETWORKS** they need when they come home & **hurts those left behind**. It is **NO ACCIDENT** that the sons & brothers of men who go to prison are **MORE LIKELY** to follow that **SAME PATH**. These trends help **CAUSE CRIME** rather than prevent it. (Petersilia, p.29)

Being a L.A. exile, I know that 'these trends' affect a great deal more than just a prisoner's immediate family. Whether one is a geek, joker or malcontent, one will normally bond with a '**Band of Brothers (or Sisters)**.' Therefore, members of this extended family are, also, just as susceptible to go down this detrimental path. This is due to the fact that some of these prisoners are the de facto leaders of their respective cliques, i.e., **THE TRENDSETTERS**. Plus, their influence have been amplified by the streets & prisons' offspring: The global phenomenon, **HIP HOP**. And, it is for this worldwide kinship that conscious-raising⁵ in prisons is imperative to the building of an universal '**Culture of Peace**.'⁶

From its conception, Hip Hop has been deeply infused with this culture from whence it came. (E.g., the lingo, baggy pants, bandanas, et al.) On account of its emotive authenticity, youth around the globe have gravitated to this culture, then, infused it with their own. To paraphrase DJ Quix, the world has become, "just like Compton."

Nevertheless, these are **PAST CAUSES**, with their **PRESENT RESULTS**. However, with the **CORRECT CAUSES** in the **PRESENT**, we can alter this destined 'pipeline to prison,' & as a **RESULT**, curtail the violence. The **CAUSE** is a **HUMAN(ITARIAN) REVOLUTION**. As Chuck D aptly remarked, rap music is 'the Black CNN,' because this is where '**The People**' report, & receive the news directly from the **HOODS**. Today, we can witness 'Black CNN' reaching back to its conscious roots, & commenting on these **HUMANITARIAN** issues, as

illustrated by 2 of Hip Hop's biggest stars:

We ain't thugs for the sake/ of just being thugs/
Nobody do that where/ we grew up..../ Duh/ the
POVERTY LINE WE NOT ABOVE⁷/ out comes the mask
& gloves/ CAUSE we ain't feeling the love/ we
ain't doin' crime for/ the sake of doin' crime/
we movin' dimes [drugs]/ 'CAUSE we ain't doin'
fine/ one out of 3 of us is/ LOCKED UP DOIN'
TIME/ you know what that type/ of [****] can
do to a [*****] MIND?/.... & if Al Sharpton is
speaking for me/ somebody get him the word/
& tell him I DON'T APPROVE/ tell him I remove
the curses/ if he can tell me OUR SCHOOLS GON'/
BE PERFECT/ when Jena 6 DON'T EXIST⁸....
(Jay-Z, "Say Hello")⁹

1 in every 100 Americans are locked up/ 1 in
every 9 Black Americans are locked up¹⁰....
The money we spent on sending [a person] to jail
... A young [person] to jail/ would be LESS to
send him, or her... TO COLLEGE¹¹.... I guess we're
just MISUNDERSTOOD, huh?... Good HUMANITY to me
is HELPING ONE ANOTHER/ no matter your color/ or
RACE/ but this guy/ & people like him/ they
rather SPECULATE/ before they INFORMATE/ if
that's a word/ meaning 'spect [respect] before
you CHECK/ Mr. Sharpton/ & anyone like you/ YOU
DON'T KNOW ME.
(Lil' Wayne, "DONTGETIT")

The fact that both rappers referenced Al Sharpton, in such a manner, is indicative of our non-willingness to take GUIDANCE from others whom we feel do not know our plight (or, are close to our oppressors [police]). This is another reason why the incarcerated (from these environments) are better suited to effectively lead these neighborhoods out of darkness. As Baruch

Spinoza (1632-77) emphasized, **YOU MUST SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE.** (Durant, 1961, p.214) Therefore, training aspiring **HUMANISTS** in skills that will give them the "cognitive behavioral & 'social learning' techniques -ranging from **anger management....** [will wean] offenders away from their **NEGATIVE & ANTISOCIAL ATTITUDES.**" (Petersilia 2011, p.30)

During my youth, the seed of Humanistic Transformation was first planted by reading The Autobiography of Malcolm X. His conversion in prison, from a street hustler to an activist, is one example of the transformational power of conscious-raising. Later, Nelson Mandela took it another level by turning his prison into 'Mandela U,' which, eventually, led to a new, &, a more humanistic government that consisted of his own presidency. Of his prison awakening, he stated:

It was during those long & lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the **FREEDOM OF ALL PEOPLE, White & Black.** (Ikeda, Nelson....., " 2005)

Naturally, with my high-regard for Pres. Mandela, learning of his comradeship with Pres. Ikeda, made me more receptive of taking the latter as my own mentor. And, through this mentorship, that initial seed planted by Malcolm X, & Mandela blossomed:

Ghandi once remarked that though a **PRISON CELL** maybe a prison cell to a thief or burglar, to him it was **A PALACE.... FREEDOM**, the Indian spiritual leader declared, **COULD ONLY BE SOUGHT BEHIND PRISON WALLS** or sometimes **ON THE EXECUTION BLOCK.** He maintained that it is **NOT** something one seeks in conference rooms, **IN THE COURTS**, or in the classroom. Ghandi's words are words of a person who has **BUILT A PALACE WITHIN HIS OWN HEART** (Ikeda "Ghandi... , " p 34)

FREEDOM is INDEPENDENCE, & independence of mind leads to the greatest of all powers: **GNOTHI SEAUTON (Knowing Thyself)**. It was during 'those long &

lonely years' that Mandela became aware of the fact that the **ONLY** thing he truly controlled was **HIMSELF**, therefore, it was **THYSELF** that he **PERFECTED**. (Stengel 2010) This is the essence of that **FREEDOM** Ghandi spoke of - the **FREEDOM** to **KNOW THYSELF...** then, **RECTIFY THEE SELF...** which, **EVOLVES** into the **LOVE** of **ONESELF...** that **FLOWS** into the **LOVE** of **OTHERS**. This **LOVE** of **FREEDOM**, **PERFECTED** in prison, turned Mandela into an exemplar of humanitarianism, & a **POTENTIALITY** of **ALL PRISONERS!!!**

In Conclusion

A **RAND** study found that offenders who participated in regenerative programs, including those that are 'community oriented,' had recidivism rates **10-20% below non-participants**. (Petersilia 2011, 30) Boston reentry Initiative (BRI), implemented such a program that focused on the 'highest-risk offenders.' This program includes religious institutions, **MENTORSHIPS**, & community collaboration - in other words, **PEOPLE** who are **PERSONALLY INVESTED IN**, & **KNOW** the **COMMUNITIES**; As **OPPOSED** to those that **PROFIT** off **RECIDIVISM**, like the **WALL ST.** connected **PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX**, & the **POLITICIANS** they lobby.¹² Therefore, it's of no surprise that the **BRI** results surpasses those of the **RAND** study:

The [BRI] results have been impressive. Harvard researchers found that participants had a rearrest **30% lower** than that of a matched comparison group. (Petersilia 2011, 31)

With the proper determination, we can take this further by turning a portion of this astronomically large inmate pool into community oriented **PEACE AMBASSADORS**. From here, they can enlighten their respective communities, divert their peers away from the 'pipeline to prison,' & onto a road constructed of **HUMANISM & WISDOM**, leading to a **NEW ATLANTIS**.

A person's [esp., a prisoner's] **inner-directed change** can transform the larger **WEB OF LIFE**, which **CONNECTS US ALL**. This dynamic process of inner-transformation is **FUNDAMENTAL TO RE-JUVENATING SOCIETY FROM THE GROUND UP**.

(Daisaku Ikeda, "A Declaration of Human Rights at Lincoln Park [Chicago]," World Tribune - Special Commemorative Issue, 10/2/10, p.6)

Lastly, it is imperative that we have women, from all walks of life, in the vanguard of this movement, for:

Women are far more dedicated **pacifists** than men. Endowed with an instinct for nurturing life, they **abhor war & killing**. In this respect, **NATURE** has given women a **UNIQUE MISSION**. (Austrian thinker, Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi [1894-1972], World Tribune, 5/10/13, p.5)

Besides their proclivities to 'abhor' violence, & 'nurture life,' women have the adroitness of using compassion, along with patience, to soften even the most belligerent of souls. Missouri state-senator, Maria Chappelle-Nadal discovered this, during the recent Ferguson uprising, when she encountered a tormented man:

I had to hold this man, a grown man, crying because he felt his 1st Amendment rights has been taken away from him. First time I learned [how the] **TOUCH** of a **WOMAN** can **IMPACT** a **MAN**. (Democracy Now, 8/20/14)

THIS HAS BEEN A "CULTURE OF PEACE" ESSAY⁶

AFTERWORD

If you know of anyone in prison, on parole/probation, or, just on the periphery, please help **ADVANCE** this **CAUSE** by sharing this Manifesto (or, its essence) with them.

NOTES

1. State of America's Children-Handbook 2012 (www.sanquentinnews.com)
2. OccupyWallSt. has the total incarcerated population at **7.3 million**. This figure includes prisons, juvenile facilities, immigration camps, et al. ("Original Call-Out from Occupy Oakland," 2/19/12 [OccupyWallSt.org])
3. By Aug. 2009, a small section of L.A. had 74 murders; Oct., same year, Chicago was at 307, with 152 being under the age of 25: Same month, tiny Salinas, CA, had 22, with 10 being 19, or younger. (USA Today, 10/8/09, 3A). In 2012, Chicago ended with 506 murders. (BBC-WORLD, 1/16/13)
4. For another aspect on this topic, see high-school teacher, Kara Wright's article: "Parents in Prison Can Still Help Their Children's Lives," Sept., 2012 (www.sanquentinnews.com)
5. Conscious-raising: "3. an act or instance of increasing the awareness of one's own or another's needs, behavior, attitudes, or problems." (Random House Webster's unabridged dictionary, 2nd ed.)
6. The 8 action areas for building a **CULTURE OF PEACE** as defined by the 1999 United Nations Declaration & program of Action on a Culture of Peace: 1. Fostering a culture of peace through education; 2. Promoting sustainable economic & social development; 3. Promoting respect for **human rights**; 4. Ensuring equality between women & men; 5. Fostering democratic participation; 6. Advancing understanding, **tolerance & solidarity**; 7. Supporting participatory communication & the **FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION & KNOWLEDGE**; 8. Promoting international peace & security.
Also, from **Article 8**: "A key role in the promotion of a culture of peace belongs to parents, teachers, politicians, journalists, religious bodies & groups, intellectuals, those engaged in scientific, philosophical & creative & **artistic activities** [yes, we **NEED** you, too, **RAPPERS**], health & **HUMANITARIAN** workers, social workers, managers at various levels, as well as to non-governmental organizations." (un.org/Docs/asp/ws.asp?m=A/RES/53/243)
7. Prior to incarceration, 2/3 of **ALL** prisoners came from conditions of economic hardship; While white-collar perpetrators largely remain free. ("Original Call-Out from Occupy Oakland") See, also, 'the rich & the poor' ranking, above.
8. Jena 6: A group of Black H.S. students unfairly prosecuted for defending themselves against continuous racial taunts; The instigators remained free.
9. Jay-Z is an example of knowledge's transformative power. He went from drug dealer to holding fund-raisers for Pres. Obama. Lil' Wayne (quoted next), who grew up in a rough New Orleans project, was shot. Yet, grew to hold such humanistic views. Both have comrades in prison that they still connect with, despite being extremely successful (i.e., **Band of Brothers**).
10. "roughly one in every 100 adults...." (Petersilia 2011, 26)
11. "States spend an estimated **\$50 billion** on corrections annually, sacrificing: transportation, **higher education & public assistance**. Also, CA, in 2010, spent about **\$50,000 per inmate** - national avg: **\$23,000**." (Petersilia 2011) During a 2012, Long Beach TED Talk, attorney Bryan Stevenson stated that CA was slated to spend **\$1 billion**

on the death penalty over the next 5 years.

12. E.g., "Our GROWTH is generally DEPENDENT upon our ability to obtain new contracts to DEVELOP & manage NEW CORRECTIONAL & DETENTION FACILITIES. This possible GROWTH DEPENDS ON... CRIME RATES & SENTENCING patterns.... [&] could be ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY the RELAXATION of ENFORCEMENT efforts, LENIENCY.... with respect to DRUGS... or ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION." - Correction Corp. of America's SEC fiscal year filing, Dec. 31, 2005. (Alexander 2010, 218-19)

This document is CONFIRMATION that THESE people view THE PEOPLE as COMMODITIES.

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