

The Legalization of Hate and Violence

by Jeremy Plason

Recently I was contacted by an attorney representing an inmate accused of throwing a cup of feces & urine on a federal correctional officer. While discussing what life was like in the unit where I and his client had been housed I voiced my confusion at why his client had been charged when so many serious inmate on inmate assaults and homicides were passed upon.

In reality after 8 years in prison I already knew that the life of an inmate had far less value to authorities than a prison guard, really I just wanted to see if a respectable member of our legal system would corroborate my suspicions. He did not disappoint me. With a tone bordering on sheepishness, he said that Judges and U.S. Attorney prosecution teams would view an inmate victim as less worrisome and worthy of action than a federal prison guard.

Prisons have been dangerous for as long as they've been a part of our society and a means for civilized people to punish wrongdoers. But in my 8 years I've seen horrible atrocities committed by one man against another. Murder, rape, extortion, robbery. All inside prison walls.

Rather than houses of "corrections" or

rehabilitation, prisons are environments thick with fear, angst, misery and hate. Embezzlers and check forgers are prone to become hardened thugs or killers in the survival of the fittest mentality of prisons.

The most aggressive learn that the consequence of violence in prison is not much greater than the sanction for insolence or untidiness. Because the Wardens, prosecutors, courts, etc. do not care what happens to an inmate.

After years of this, even I am desensitized. Whereas a man having his throat cut, or his abdomen ripped open by steel shanks, or eyes gouged out by the same, once would have shocked and appalled me. Now it is a sight I could not only endure, but even consume a meal through.

Although I am no longer shocked, I remain very much appalled. And the indifference to the proliferation of hate and extremism in the prison setting, to the de facto legalization of hate and violence by the officials charged with housing and rehabilitating millions of Americans who one day will live in communities once again absolutely disgusts me. Recidivism is an issue secondary to the fact that one day women and children, innocent workers and neighbors, will one day live amongst men who have been conditioned to resolve disputes through bloodshed.

We as a society have an obligation to entice or compel positive change in those who break laws. Throwing men into situations where they emerge far worse than they were upon commitment is a mistake and an error in judgment that society will bear the burden and pay the cost for.

I look into the eyes of men of varying types of character. In some I see a future, in some I see tragedy to come. Some men I have watched so long I have seen in their eyes the transformation from irresponsible mischief to soulless hatred and dangerousness.

When I read or listen to people in society carelessly advocating for harsh prisons, to cut educational and recreational programming, to indulge our inner demons who urge us to treat our fellow man with disdain and cruelty, I am saddened. It is true that there are some so cruel and inherently evil that they must be imprisoned forever, but most in prison do not fit such criteria but become that in the process of survival.

It is sad and it is disturbing to any person who values human life and dignity. Who believes it is our compassion, and empathy, and ability to forgive that sets us apart from the beasts of the jungle. If we lose that in search of vengeance, all of society suffers in the long term not just the condemned.