

## Is The Criminal Justice System Color blind?

As you know we in the U.S. celebrate our country's triumph over racism with the election of Barack Obama as our first African American President. While on the other hand young black and Latino men are being warehoused in prisons at an astounding rate, and also are trapped in a permanent 2nd class status much like their great-grandparents before them.

Some say we have not ended racial caste in America, we have simply redesigned it. I think by targeting black and Latino men through the War on Drugs and decimating communities of color the U.S. Criminal Justice system functions as a contemporary system of racial control. In this day and time it is no longer allowed to use race explicitly as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. Yet it's perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways that it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans.

You remember the old forms of discrimination - discrimination in employment, housing, education, and public benefits; Denial of the right to vote; exclusion from jury service are suddenly legal once you're labeled a felon. Once a person is labeled a felon he/she is ushered into a parallel universe. Most people branded felons in fact are not sentenced to prison. As of 2008 there were approximately 2.3 million people in prison and jails, and a staggering 5.1 million people on probation or parole. Merely reducing prison terms does not have a major impact on the majority of people in the system. It's the badge of inferiority - the felony record - that relegates people for their entire lives to 2nd class status.

The language of caste may well seem foreign or unfamiliar to some. Public discussions about racial caste in America are relatively rare. We avoid talking about caste in our society because we are ashamed of our racial history. We also avoid talking about class. Conversations about class are resisted in part because there is a tendency to imagine that one's class reflects upon one's character. According to America's understanding of class it's the persistent belief despite all evidence to the contrary that anyone, with the proper discipline and drive can move from a lower class to a higher class. We recognize that mobility may be difficult, but the key to our collective self-image is the assumption that mobility is always possible, so failure to move up reflects on one's character. By extension the failure of a race or ethnic group to move up reflects very poorly on the group as a whole.

What is completely missed in the rare public debates today about the plight of colored people is that a huge percentage of them are not free to move up at all. It is not just that they lack opportunity, attend poor schools, or are plagued by poverty. They are barred by law from doing so. And the major institutions with which they come into contact are designed to prevent their mobility. To put the matter starkly: The current system of control permanently locks a huge percentage of the African American community out of the mainstream society and economy. The system operates through our criminal justice institutions, but it functions more like a caste system than a system of crime control.

What do you think? Do you feel im way off base? Or, Do you agree with what im saying? Comment as you see fit.

You can also reach me at S.C.F. P.O. Box 116

Fallsburg, New York 12733

Julio Sanchez #06A6623