

## THE PRISON SUBCULTURE AND CRIME IN AMERICA

by Luis D. Perez #W-33937, MCI - Shirley Medium

The prison subculture involves every sector of American society: Irish, Italian, Afro-American, Asian, Hispanic, etc., and is very difficult to understand, because its roots have not been properly studied by professional analysts. For the most part, criminologists and sociologists present popular theories, based on their own perceptions, blaming different sectors of the community in the cause of promoting a book or rationalizing a complicated subject. The prison subculture involves every level of society and a cross section beyond culture boundaries.

To shed some light, I want to present another perspective. It may be considered a "taboo subject" and it may offend some people, but the public has the legitimate right to know the facts, and we should uncover the real complex of problems that is affecting the entire Criminal Justice System, the prison/subculture and the juvenile gangs in urban areas.

The prison subculture is the mix of cultures in a closed prison environment that creates a diversity of conduct meriting the immediate attention of the public, and State and Federal agencies. For one thing, correctional facilities across the country have strong roots in playing a role to promote the crime industry upon the release of their prisoners into the community. On the other hand, another related dynamic is taking place with regard to our youth, who are indeed creating gangs, looking up to the wrong role models, and having adverse motivation leading them toward crime, against the moral principles and values that are healthy to our country.

### THE CONCEPT AND ELEMENTS OF PRISON SUBCULTURE

The confinement of ethnic groups and the mix of cultures from every sector of society in one place leads to separation of individuals, either by racial attitude or conviction by religious belief in prison. This in fact sets the foundation and structure that creates many avenues of conflict, the center stage that produces the diversity of prison/subculture.

The prison subculture is being transferred to the youth in urban areas affecting them in major proportions. The older persons are either connected with organized crime, or individual efforts to make fast money by the sale of drugs, or committing violent crimes. Only 35% of the individuals who have been released from prison re-adjust themselves and become a productive member of society.

It is important to mention that most of the gangs that are affecting our youth in America have their roots in prison. The following is an accurate representation of the Federal Prison System and State Correctional Facilities in the mid-west: some Mexican-Americans in California and Texas are dividing themselves by the FAMILIA & FARMERS, these activities have their roots in the prison system. The ARYAN BROTHERHOOD was also created in the California Prison System and its members are a mix of white Americans, including members of motorcycle gangs. The Islamic Church with prisoners from Washington D.C. has created another influential power among the Afro-American youth, and that is not the only issue of concern. You also have ethnic group movements which are divided between Italian, Irish, and Asian underground communities competing for power, that eventually leaks back into the communities in an organized manner when the members are returned to the cities and towns from which they came.

If we move to the east coast, we have to add additional ingredients that play within the prison/subculture; the Hispanic Pasa, with religious roots from Jamaica and Haiti and the direct influence of Latinos from Puerto Rico, Cuba, Colombia and the Dominican Republic, etc.

I do not expect that the public will totally understand the context of this information, because crime itself has been perceived as a business industry and not as a problem that is affecting this

country. In fact, it represents an annual multi-billion dollar budget. The amount of money being spent is questionable, it is like dumping money into a whirl pool that never ends. There is no question that the present prison system across the nation is a breeding ground for rapists, homosexuality, drug addicts, gangs, murders, etc., factories of crime that eventually represent more money that secure jobs for the court system, district attorneys, judges, police, and police staff.

The upper-class does not inherit or feel the impact of prison subculture. Corporate and upper-middle class America is attentive to other types of crime such as bank fraud, money laundering, embezzlement, kick backs, government corruption and many other charges in connection with this form of white collar crime. For the most part, those individuals never reach the hard core of prison subculture, and if they do in exceptional cases, then those are the individuals who in most cases become sophisticated in dealing with organized crime or in positions to influence corruption among individuals working in different branches of state and federal government.

New England prison system does not escape from this social phenomenon of prison subculture. Instead, here in Massachusetts in the past 10 years, juvenile gangs have been organized and becoming increasingly more powerful and more violent as time goes by. This dynamic plays with local authorities, politicians and the media. While the violent crime rates increase, juvenile gangs are taking up strong positions in urban areas surrounding the City of Boston and spreading throughout the entire Commonwealth by identifying themselves with color and turf and moving into the school system.

In conclusion it is important that the public be aware of the negative reactions that will be felt by the political structure of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, that they are so out of touch that they don't understand the problem. Politicians from both political parties are constantly playing on the public fear re-empting the legal system without a clear definition of role to pursue, re-introducing legislation as the media makes the events. This is without counting the influence of multiple victim's groups that are going around in a vicious hate circle that complicates the internal operations of correctional facilities. The entire Commonwealth of Massachusetts is caught between the public pressures, the Governor's personal philosophy, the media, and what happens with juvenile gangs in the area surrounding Boston.

Prison/subculture and its many negative aspects are like an open wound bleeding into our mainstream. This seeping wound must be cured, not with a bandaid approach, but rather by taking a serious look into the National Correctional System and its objectives, making evaluations based on facts and what is important as a matter of priority, and recommending solutions aimed at this complex problem without excluding any aspects of the American society. If you don't study the prisons, you will never know the problems that we have in our country. Public safety is best served by guiding the system of government toward a correctional policy balanced between punishment and treatment. It is counterproductive to look at crime in America as a business.

My best advice for the leaders of our communities is that we should not turn our backs on our youth. You cannot ignore our youngsters in the urban areas, because as a matter of survival, they have to enroll in the juvenile gangs. He/she really has no choice, as soon as he/she comes out of their houses, they must make a decision, either turn left or right. In either direction, they face gangs, he/she can't cross the street because then he/she has two potential enemies and could become the next victim.

Massachusetts has become very cynical, on the one hand saying "tough on crime", "three strikes you're out", "bring back the death penalty" -- while on the other hand the State Supreme Court is saying that the court system is guilty of racism. The dirt can't be swept under the rug anymore, and sooner or later, someone must recognize the mistake.