

I was asked via postcard from Between the bars to write a blog in regards to International Human Rights Day, so I chose a topic that a lot of people tend to avoid and deny in the United States criminal justice system, and as a country as well... Racism.

It was once said, "We must not allow the manifestations of racism, which have not changed, to be swept under the carpet. We must be vigilant to the changing faces of racism and deal with it whether or not it is popular to do so. We must demystify all the laws, declarations and charters etc; from fancy words... We must confront the government for programmes that will rid our country of racism, otherwise, it will go underground."

Many of us use the term racism not knowing its roots, for example schools do not teach that racism "is rooted in the European history of expansion and colonialism and, consequently, in the history of colonized continents. It is a combination of prejudice and power. At its heart is the concept of 'race'. prejudices about 'race', whether expressed in biological or cultural terms, have long been part of racism. In our prison system and country racism is more than individual beliefs; rather, these are part of coherent sets of ideas legitimizing social practices that reinforce the unequal distribution of power between groups designated in racial and/or ethnic terms. Therefore, racism is also a structure of power.

Racism represents contextually determined modes of exclusion, subordination, inferiorization, exploitation and repression." In my life, and in prison, I have come across racism, and I have been the victim of racism. My belief is that in order to deal with racism in the prison, we have to first deal with it as individuals, and as a society; we must first stop being afraid of bringing the issue to the forefront, we must be willing to present facts that debunk the stereotypes that have been fed to us by the media, schools, parents, grandparents, politicians, and other influential persons. We must also realize that we as individuals and as a society - especially in prisons, sometimes perpetuate racism without realizing that we do so. Many of the terms we use in our daily speech comes from a racist background, some African-Americans feel disrespected when the officer call them boy, because of the negative history of the word, yet the run around, pushing, rough housing, throwing things at each other like little boys. We also use the word nigga (slang version of nigger) as an endearment for each other, and view it as cool, but if a different race uses the term or an officer uses it, it can turn into an altercation. In the outside world our assumptions and perceptions can also be based on racism; If you do not believe me, do this exercise. Think about the last time you saw an African-American individual with their hat turned a certain way, or hanging in a large group or for that matter wearing the oversized earrings, Now with that image in your mind write down the first things that come to mind. Now think about the last time you saw a Caucasian individual with their hat turned a certain way, or hanging in a large group or wearing the oversized earrings, Now write down the first things that come to mind and review both list.

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I can almost guarantee that the first assumption was that the black individual was a rapper or gang member, from the ghetto, and probably out to make trouble, and that the Caucasian individual was more than likely making a fashion statement, hanging out with friends or some other positive action, this is how racism works subconsciously.

What we have to do in order to put racism to sleep for good, if that is even a realistic possibility is clear up the myths and misconceptions that we put on different races; there are so many falsehoods about race that it will be easy to find a starting point. There are religions that believe that a scientist created Caucasians; there are religions that believe African-Americans were produced by ape semen and are a cursed race because of this. The country, state, and prison system are in a state of denial when it comes to racism. They (Society) wants to believe that electing a "black" president means that racism is no longer a problem in the United States, but if you watch the news or walk through a prison, African-Americans are still the predominate race being "justifiably" killed and placed in segregation, and denied medical attention, and African-Americans are also receiving harsher sentences in the judicial system. Missing Caucasians and other stories are still the cases with the most televised exposure, and crimes against whites are the most investigated and publicized crimes, but until we stop seeing color and become united, racism will be the poison that kills off a beautiful community and judicial system. As I said, my solution is to bring the issue of racism to the forefront and deal with it as humans instead of individuals of African-American, Caucasian, and Mexican, race.