

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

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A \$3,700 Concert Ticket:
A 12-12-12 Travesty

NPR news interviewed a guy who spent \$3,700 to attend the 12-12-12 concert to raise money for victims of Hurricane Sandy. I think altruistic efforts to help others in their time of need is what "loving your neighbor as yourself" is all about. People with plenty of money stepping up to help those in need should be applauded and honored.

But seriously, how many people could afford to pay \$3,700 to attend a benefit concert - no matter how worthy the cause? Are you kidding me? Does Rep. Boehner really think that wealthy people can't afford to pay more in taxes? The \$3,700 was not a down payment on a car so he could get to work every day, nor was it to pay for dental work for his kids. It was an evening's diversion, a justified expenditure because it was a benefit concert.

Do you have any idea how many people don't have \$37 to spend on food let alone \$3,700 for a concert ticket? My cell mate makes \$40 per month in prison wages. His daughter was born after he came to prison (he didn't know he was going to be a father until after he was locked up). His woman left him and had a second child with another man. When that happened, the state child support agency began confiscating 65% of his prison wages to pay child support (the judge ordered him to pay \$72 per month at a time when he had zero income).

He now has \$6 every two weeks to live on. He must buy shampoo, deodorant, razors, etc. out of that \$6. Not only is that not enough money to meet his hygienic needs, he can't buy his daughter a birthday card or pay the \$2.40 cost of a 20 minute phone call.

I look at him suffering under these oppressive conditions, wishing I could help, knowing the few measly dollars they are taking from him will go more toward the surcharges and fees the state imposes rather than benefit his daughter.

Do you think taking his \$28 each month will benefit anyone? There are many prisoners in the same situation - some losing up to 90% of their prison wages to child support arrearages. Then I hear about a \$3,700 concert ticket on the news.

We are turning into a 2-class society - the rich and the poor. We have more prisons and harsher sentences than any other country in the world. You don't see many wealthy people going to prison. Our criminal justice system is designed to do one thing: control the poor people, keeping them subjugated and obedient. They are expected to work for wages so low that they can barely survive. It's not unusual for the working poor to live in homeless shelters because they don't have enough money to eat and pay rent.

For those who rebel against this institutionalized oppression, there is prison where conditions are even more onerous. Cut off from family members who can't afford to feed themselves let alone buy gas to visit their loved one, the emotional damage everyone suffers is horrendous.

And while this monstrous system continues to perpetuate itself, billions of dollars are going to be spent to rebuild houses on the sea shore - right in the path of the next hurricane.

Which is the greater crime: the desperate acts of the men in prison or to squander our nation's wealth on rebuilding houses that will only last until the next storm?