

Diamonds In the Rough

There is a paradox at the core of penology, and from it derives the thousand ills and afflictions of the prison system. It is that not only the worst of the young are sent to prison, but the best - that is the proudest, the bravest, the most daring, the most enterprising, and the most undefeated of the poor. There starts the horror. Norman Mailer, introduction to *In the Belly of the Beast*.

Which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the lord of glory. 1 Corinthians 2:8

It is amazing that when the accused is poor, we never give it a second thought of who he/she really is or could be. We lump all those accused of crimes into a mass soup of criminals. Their faces are blurred into one face, usually black or brown. Their characters, ambitions, and hopes are covered by the cloak of accusations by the State. The accused become non-human, animal like, as we listen to the allegations. Some of us even wonder why give the accused a trial as nostalgia for the lynch mob is barely reined from becoming reality. "Lock'em up and throw away the key!", is the most common phrase of the unimaginative and frustrated among us. Convictions are almost certain. Why? Because we have a natural incentive to believe the allegations. We have been programmed by the media of who the criminals are, and just like a jury, regardless of the flaws of the State, we rarely reconsider as we cast our vote, guilty!

In a court of law, we presume that there has to be some type of evidence against the accused, but most convictions are not based on actual evidence. In fact, no tangible evidence is necessary. If a defendant survives the attempts of a forced confession (The Central Park Five), others will not, and they will be coerced to say they either witnessed or heard the defendant incriminate his/herself. Case closed! 237 DNA exonerations should be proof enough that many witnesses are either mistaken or untruthful.

But why? What is the purpose of false convictions? It is simply an abuse of power. An age old practice of those in authority to use prisons as instruments of subjugation and tyranny. The castles of the so-called royals and nobles were reared on the arches of dungeons/Super Max. Just as today, the occupants were deemed suspicious, dangerous, and expendable. Remember that it was those in authority that imprisoned and murdered John the Baptist, Jesus, and Socrates. They imprisoned Galileo, Hampden, and L'Ouverture. They took the lives of Mark Clark, Fred Hampton, and Steven Biko. All for speaking out against inhumane treatment and conditions. History is showing us that the people are the only check to government abuse. History is showing us that freedom is not free; we have to fight for it! There is a price for speaking out. A price the people must pay a thousand times over, because the first steps to freedom is the willingness to speak the truth.

A great number of our youth, the best of our future and people are being ripped from our communities. The new Socrates, Galileos, and Hamptons of our life time are being denied their potential to contribute and elevate humanity. The most daring, the most enterprising, and the most innovative are being locked away and it is not only to their detriment, but to ours!

The people must assert its right and demand the freedom of all those unjustly imprisoned. The steel and concrete pride of the State must be destroyed as a threat to our youth.

Freedom! Be about it, or be without it!

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