

You Must Change The Guard Culture

By Timothy J. Muise

One thing that 200 plus years of American corrections has taught us is that the “jailer” will never play an effective role in the rehabilitation of the “jailed”. It is just the nature of the beast. In order to keep a man, a human being, in a cage you must demonize – dehumanize – them. You must attempt to lift yourself above them and the easiest way to do that is to put them down. I am not Sigmund Freud or Carl Jung but I do know this piece of simple psychology; first hand.

Former Massachusetts Governor William Weld has been repeatedly quoted for some extremely damaging remarks he made. Mr. Weld stated, “I will return the prisoners of Massachusetts to the joy of breaking rocks. I will send them on tours through the circles of hell.” Now many remember these remarks, especially the old guard DOC employees who still hold onto that flawed philosophy, but few know who he made the remarks to. He made them before an assembly of the Attorneys General of the United States who had gathered in Washington, DC. Not one of these “top cops” questioned then Governor Weld about the law in his state, Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 124, ss. 1(e), which states that the Commissioner of Correction (the “top jailer”) must provide programs of rehabilitation and education. In other words it is the law of the land in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that prisoners be rehabilitated. Governor Weld ignored that law, a treasonous act, and the sycophant “tough on crime” top cops dared not challenge the Fuhrer.

The Weld Era supposed “tough on crime” breaking rocks madness brought us from an approximate 24% recidivism rate to an almost doubled 47% rate. This draconian view of corrections made it so that 1 in 2 prisoners returned to prison within 5 years of release. Even more tragic was that this was done with the highest staffing ratio in the nation (2.2 prisoners for every 1 staffer) and the third highest paid guards in the country. Failure at an exorbitant cost, but no

cost has been more severe than that which has been burdened upon society. The Massachusetts taxpayer pays top dollar for unsafe streets and untolled future social ills the likes of which we can only envision in our nightmares.

The opioid crisis is part of this failure, as is the rash of teenage pregnancy and youth violence. Our children are born into a world of peril which is made manifest by the prison industrial complex's negative injection of hopelessness into our punitive capitalistic society. The abusive guard culture was allowed to flourish under this failed system and it destroys rehabilitation. The time is now to make a change. Hope must be allowed to replace the hopelessness.

Help us to force the Massachusetts Legislature to write into law a Citizen's Advisory Committee which has real power to force the Department of Correction to rehabilitate; in line with the law. It must have "non-jailer" members from the citizenry, not law enforcement, as they are the real stakeholders. They must be able to send the dinosaur employees of the "breaking rocks" era packing if they are not willing to change. It is the only way we can turn the modern day gulag into a healing and rehabilitative endeavor.

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