

media fear factor
and a
dangerous overreaction

by Timothy J. Muise

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So the Boston Globe wanted to come in to a Massachusetts prison and speak to the "prisoners"? Sounds like a good idea, but let me tell you about how I see it.

The week of June 26, 2011, the Boston Globe sent a reporter into MCI Shirley for a story we are still not too certain about. This reporter spoke to some prisoners, but was steered away from some men who have a reputation for reciting the brutal facts about correctional failure. My feeling is that the Globe got the watered-down version, and in fact was subjected to communistic style crushing of the freedom of the press. This "crushing" came in the form of an escort by DOC public relations and an IPS (inner perimeter security) team member. In other words they were escorted by the Minister of Propaganda and the Gestapo. With this type of escort they were certainly steered away with design.

Now I am not so egotistical that I believe they should have spoken to me, but I would have liked to speak with them. In fact I approached them three times, and all three times the DOC PR man (propaganda) assured me that they would be coming down to my housing unit to speak to me. Trust and believe they did not make that trip! Now I am a bit disappointed as I would have loved to tell them how I think the superintendent here is a co-conspirator in murder. It would have been my pleasure to detail for them my opinion of how the commissioner of correction orchestrated the rise in suicide rates bringing this fine state to number one in the nation as far as prison suicides are concerned. My heart would have soared if I was afforded the chance to detail for them the men who are dying in the hospital units - men who pose no threat to society - but who are forced to endure abuse and degradation at the hands of their captors. Too bad I was not afforded that chance. You think maybe the Minister of Propaganda avoided me like the proverbial plague because he knows all too well that I would bring unfiltered truth? Hard saying, not knowing.

This media fear factor is something this state should be ashamed of. When the public is insulated from the truth they are placed squarely in the line of fire of murderers. Do you think that sounds too strong? Well trust me that it is far from too strong. The young men here at MCI Shirley are offered only farsical programming and educational opportunities and most choose not to attend them. What they do choose to do is engage in criminal thinking and gateway criminal behaviors which will turn a percentage of them into murderers when they hit the streets of our Commonwealth. This facility is operated in a haphazard and unprofessional way and that operating procedure instills a sense of irresponsibility in the easily shaped young men who roam the grounds. An attitude of "if they don't care why should I", permeates this place, but the deeper damage is laying in the subconscious of these men. They feel they "can't" succeed, so they won't. When are we going to begin to be responsible for them feeling they can? The time is now.

In the early 1980's there was a serious overreaction to the crack cocaine epidemic that faced the streets of our urban areas. Tough on crime drug laws removed many of the males from the community for double-

digit prison sentences. This forced their children to seek that type of paternal love from each other in the form of gangs. These gangs are responsible for many of the murders on our streets.

Another serious overreaction occurred when Lee Atwater used the case of Willie Horton to propel George Bush senior over Mike Dukakis in the presidential election. The nation saw a picture of a disheveled looking black man who had been released upon society to rape and murder. This caused the political hacks here in the Bay State to call for blood. Part of this blood lust was to end the nations most successful furlough program, author and pass "truth in sentencing" laws, and totally forget the state mandates, legal mandates, to rehabilitate prisoners. What did this get us? It took us from a 22% recidivism rate to a 44% rate and increased the corrections budget from 10 billion to more than 50 billion annually. More money is spent on corrections than education and crime rates stay the same. We have blown it as far as public safety is concerned.

We are now facing another "overreaction" dilemma. When Dominic Cinelli shot a Woburn Police Officer the wheels of insanity started to turn wildly. The Governor forced the resignation of the entire parole board, he installed new day "tough on crime zealots" in their place, and the republican hacks in the Golden Domed building on Beacon Street shouted from the rooftops for blood! They never let the truth get in the way of a good story! They want to again ignore the facts which clearly show that these type of overreactions to isolated incidents diminish the public safety, increase recidivism rates, and promote a whole new generation of crime. Dominic Cinelli is an anomaly. He is the exception not the rule. Because of his personal failure should we allow rhetoric and sky-is-falling professions spark a throw the baby out with the bathwater knee jerk reaction? Absolutely not! If we allow this insanity to take place we will go from a 44% recidivism rate to an 88% rate. "If you do what you did, you get what you got!", is a saying they use in the halls of recovery. It will ring true as far as Massachusetts public safety is concerned if we allow another overreaction to thwart commonsense and proven methods. Let's take the politics and emotion out of the process and push in a unified manner for real and effective reform.

Shame on the Boston Globe for allowing the DOC ostrich-head-in-the-sand strategy to get in the way of interviewing prisoners who are in the public safety reform trenches each and everyday. Does the Globe buy into the false premise that there exist no men in prison seeking to make real reparations? If they do they are dead wrong! I wonder if the Globe will hold a man's past up to the light to view his future, like their competitor does, or if they will see men for who they are today, judged by their current actions. If they choose the former then society is doomed, but if they believe in the latter then let's not see lip service but action. Cut through the fear factor and tell the real human stories of reform. Let's work together to make the streets safer. Help us to quell the dangerous overreaction.

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