

WEEDING OUT THE GENES

<blockquote><i>The world is what it is: Men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it,
A Bend in the River</i>
--V.S. Naipaal</blockquote>

I recently had a conversation with another prisoner while waiting to see the doctor. With a look of dejection, he asked me if I'd heard anything about the house bill for first-time offenders serving life without the possibility of probation or parole. I said no, but added that I believe a prisoner has better odds at being granted executive clemency--or struck by lightning--than the Missouri State Senate passing the first-time offenders bill.

Having served twenty years on a life without parole sentence, the guy expressed his frustration with the judicial system, enduring three jury trials--one hung jury and two retrials--and completely exhausting all legal remedies in state and federal court. Now the only remedy left available to him is executive clemency.

Something occurred to me as I listened: although he and I have had similar experiences with the criminal justice system, we were molded by the juggernaut differently. Time in the system left him broken, bitter, and without hope or direction, whereas it left me strong as an oak tree after a torrential downpour, and resolute as a young lion eyeing a gazelle.

As human beings, we have become not just survivors but conquerors over the adversities of life, through the formation of societies. Society labels winners "winners," losers "losers," the weak "weak," and the strong "strong." But how does it label the incarcerated? We are labeled the losers, the weak, the ones with the genes that did not evolve to become productive members of our communities. In his book <i>Mastery</i>, Robert Greene writes<blockquote><i>All of us are born unique. This uniqueness is marked genetically in

our DNA. We are a one-time phenomenon in the universe--our exact genetic makeup has never occurred before nor will it ever be repeated. For all of us, this uniqueness first expresses itself in childhood through certain primal inclinations.</i></blockquote>The misconception is that we, the incarcerated, are of low intelligence and of little value to humanity because, instead of evolving, we acted out primitive instincts of survival, and, by doing so, violated socially acceptable norms, and destroyed the trust of the people who make up society.

That which doesn't conform must be eradicated. Over time men die, and their genes die with them. Only replication--sex--allows the genes any hope to escape death. The men who are less capable of surviving or having sex will be weeded out of the gene pool. A cost-efficient way to accomplish this goal is by mass incarceration.

Wittingly or unwittingly, public officials subtly went to work, constructing a genocide through tough-on-crime laws and the imposition of extreme prison sentences, sentences so long that the primitive genes of those who did not evolve will eventually become extinct.

For our genes to survive, we must evolve, attentively cultivating our primitive instincts into a creative force for the betterment of ourselves and mankind, developing communication skills for conflict resolution and effective communication, raising our self-worth through setting and accomplishing goals, revolutionizing the criminal justice system from within, and regaining the trust of the people. But without society's encouragement and support, a prisoner's effort to change is futile.