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A TRANSFORMATION: PRISONERS to PEACE AMBASSADORS

"If you want to understand the cause that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present. And if you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the PRESENT."

- Nichiren Daishonin, C.E.1272

U.S.A. RANKINGS AMONG INDUSTRIALIZED NATIONS: [1]

- 13th in suicide rates
- 31st in the gap between the rich & the poor
- 6th in per-capita education expenditures
- 1st in military weapons exports
- 1st in number incarcerated: 2.4 [7.3] million [2]

When these rankings are viewed from the perspective of Nichiren, one can see that the first & last are, in reality, results of the middle 3 causes. Then these 5, cumulatively, help breed the 'Culture of Violence' prevalent today in our inner-cities. However, when it comes to ebbing the flow of violence in these areas, particularly, Chicago & California[3], no other group can be more effective in this cause than the prison population.

Prisoners have an affect on Youth Culture - Worldwide[4]

Locking people up has an especially malign effect on poor urban neighborhoods, where up to 20% of the male population may be behind bars at any given time. Not only do the men come home with diminished prospects that **hurt the whole community**, but as criminologist Todd Clear shows in *Imprisoning Communities* (2007), their absence **weakens the family & social networks** they need when they come home & **hurts those left behind**. It is no accident that the sons & brothers of men who go to prison are more likely to follow the SAME PATH. These trends help CAUSE crime rather THAN PREVENT IT. [5]

As an insider, I can say, this influence runs much deeper than a prisoner's immediate family. Whether one is a geek, joker or malcontent, one will normally bond with a '**Band of Brothers (or Sisters)**.' Therefore, members of this extended family are just as susceptible to follow down this detrimental path. This 'plague', also, affects youth worldwide via the streets & prisons' offspring: HIP HOP. Due to this global communion, consciousness-raising[6] in prisons is imperative to building a '**Culture of Peace**.' [7]

From its conception Hip Hop has been infused with the culture from whence it came: the streets & prison. On account of its emotive authenticity, youth around the world has gravitated to this culture, & blended it with their own. One can witness this impact in the popularity of the sagging pants, abundance of tattoos, & it reached new heights during Pres. Obama's

1st campaign with his usage of the fist-bump (pound), as opposed to the regular handshake. [8]

Nevertheless, these are **past causes, with their present results**. Nichiren, tells us that with the **proper cause**, in the here & now, we can amend this destined path of prisoners & their successors (plus, curtail the violence). This cause is a humanitarian revolution. The time is ripe. Chuck D aptly called rap music the Black CNN, because this is where 'The People' report, & receive the news directly. At this time, the 'community' is conscious of the **causes**, & seek **HUMANITARIAN** answers for relief, as evidenced by the following verses of 2 of rap's biggest stars:

We ain't thugs for the sake/ of just being thugs/
Nobody do that where/ we grew up..../Duh/ The
poverty line we not above[9]/ out comes the mask
& gloves/ cause we ain't feeling the love/ we
ain't doin' crime for/ the sake of doin' crime/
we movin' dimes [drugs]/ 'cause we ain't doin'
fine/ one out of 3 of us is/ locked up doin'
time/ you know what that type/ of [stuff] can
do to a [brother] mind?/....& if Al Sharpton is
speaking' for me/ somebody get him the word/
& tell him I don't approve/ tell him I remove
the curses/ if he can tell me **our schools gon'**/
be perfect/ when Jena 6 don't exist[10]...
- Say Hello, Jay-Z [11]

1 in every 100 Americans are locked up/ 1 in

every 9 Black Americans are locked up[12]....

The money we spent on sending [a person] to Jail/
...A young [person] to jail/ **would be less to**
send him, or her...to college[13]....I guess we're just
MISUNDERSTOOD, huh?....GOOD HUMANITY to me is HELPING ONE
ANOTHER/ NO MATTER YOUR COLOR/ OR RACE/ but this guy/ &
people like him/ they rather SPECULATE/ BEFORE THEY INFOR-
MATE/ if that's a word/ meaning 'spect [respect] BEFORE
YOU CHECK/ Mr. Sharpton/ & anyone like you/ YOU DON'T KNOW ME
- 'DONTGETIT,' Lil Wayne

Notice that both rappers reference Al Sharpton. This is indicative of the fact that people in these environments (esp., the youth) are not prone to taking guidance from those whom they feel do not know their plight. This is the reason why those incarcerated are better suited to effectively lead their neighborhoods out of this darkness. As Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) once wrote, **you must speak the language of the people.**[14] Therefore, training aspiring HUMANISTS with skills that will give them the "cognitive behavioral & 'social learning' techniques - ranging from anger management...[that will wean] offenders away from their negative & antisocial attitudes",[15] will, as a result, enlighten their fellow "Band of Brothers &/or Sisters."

This seed of Humanistic Transformation was first planted in me while reading "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" in my youth. His transformation in prison is actual proof of the metamorphic power of conscious-raising. Later, we witnessed Nelson Mandela take it to another level by turning his

prison into 'Mandela U,' for himself, & others. Eventually, this led to the formation of a new government, & his presidency. He stated this of his time in prison:

It was during those **long & lonely years** that my **hunger** for the freedom of my own people became a **hunger** for the **freedom of all people**, white & black.[16]

Naturally, with my high-regard for Pres. Mandela, learning of his comradeship with Daisaku Ikeda, made me more receptive of having the latter as my own mentor. It was through this mentorship that I discovered this fruitage of that initial seed planted by Malcolm X:

Ghandi once remarked that though a **prison cell** maybe a **prison cell** to a thief or burglar, to him it was a **palace**....Freedom, the Indian spiritual leader declared **could only be sought behind prison walls** or sometimes **on the execution block**. He maintained that it is **NOT** something one seeks in conference rooms, **in the courts**, or in the classroom. Ghandi's words are words of a person who has **BUILT A PALACE WITHIN HIS OWN HEART**.[17]

This type of **SUNSHINE** transforms one's whole constitution when sitting in a **DARK** prison. Mandela called this the moment when one realizes the only thing he/she truly control is **ONESELF**. (**Gnothi Seauton: Know Thyself**) Therefore, he took his confinement as a message, & **an opportunity**, to **perfect that which he controls**.[18]

With our highly disproportionate incarceration rates[19], coupled with this 'epidemic of violence,' we cannot simply continue down this path of destruction. Toward the end of 2011, it was projected that nearly 750,000 men & women were expected to be released from prison (44% of the inmate population) at a 'greater disadvantage (& more primed for trouble than his [or her] predecessors did)'[20] This is one of the main causes to that continuous cycle stated above. Without these 'Peace Ambassadors,' whom the youth will respect, guiding them towards a more peaceful existence, we are further assuring our own self-destruction. Make no mistake about it, with the Prison Industrial Complex now apart of Wall St., factored in with the aforementioned rankings, help, most likely, will only come from the 'inside.'

A RAND study found that offenders who participated in regenerative programs, including those that are 'community oriented,' had recidivism rates **10-20% below non-participants**. [21] Boston Reentry Initiative (BRI), implemented such a program that focus on the 'highest-risk offenders.' It must be pointed out that this program includes, **religious institutions, mentorships, & community collaboration** - in other words, people invested 'in,' & know, the communities. With this said, the following should not come as a surprise:

The [BRI] **results** have been impressive. Harvard researchers found that participants had a rearrest **30% lower** than that of a matched comparison group. [22]

IN CONCLUSION

With the proper determination, we can create a conglomerate of PEACE AMBASSADORS that will ENLIGHTEN their respective 'Bands of Brothers & Sisters,' & CONSTRUCT A NEW ATLANTIS FOUNDED UPON HUMANISM & WISDOM, AS OPPOSED TO EGOCENTRISM.

a person's [esp., a prisoner's] inner-directed change can transform the larger web of life, which, CONNECTS US ALL. This dynamic process of inner-transformation is FUNDAMENTAL TO RE-JUVENATING SOCIETY FROM THE GROUND UP.

-Daisaku Ikeda, "A Declaration of Human Rights at Lincoln Park," World Tribune-Special Commemorative Issue, 10/2/10,p.6.

Lastly, it is imperative that women, from all walks of life, are in the vanguard of this movement:

Women are far more dedicated **pacifists** than men. Endowed with an **instinct for nurturing life, they ABHOR WAR & KILLING.** In this respect, **nature** has given women a **unique mission....**

-Austrian thinker Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi (1894-1972), World Tribune, 5/10/13.p.5

With their proclivities to 'abhor' violence, & 'nurture life,' women can be exemplars of pacifism, while doling out compassion to our future Peace

Ambassadors. NO DOUBT, THEY WILL IN TURN, PAY IT FORWARD!!!

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p.s., Special RESPECT to Snoop on his transformation from a Dogg to a Lion,
& his quest to add more consciousness to HIP HOP, AND CEASE THE VIOLENCE.

NOTAS

1. State of America's Children-Handbook 2012 (www.sanquentinnews.com)
2. National Institute of Justice (NIJ) (A publication administered by the U.S. Dept. of Justice, specializing in research.) Article: "Beyond the Prison Bubble," by Joan Petersilia, Adelbert H. Sweet Prof. of Law @ Stanford University, & co-director of the Stanford Criminal Justice Center. Issue #268/Oct.2011,p.26. All subsequent NIJ references are f/this article.
7.3 million: This figure accounts for the whole incarcerated population '[in] American Prison, Juvenile Hall & detainment [immigration] camp[s].'-Source: "Original Call-out from Occupy Oakland," (OccupyWallSt.,2/19/12.)
3. In 2003, Illinois 'had about 1000 murders.' (ex-Gov. Ryan, "In the Company of Giants," by Paul J. Ciolino; In 2009, by Aug., A small section of L.A., had 74 murders; by Oct., Chicago:307, with 152 under the age of 25; same month, tiny Salinas, CA had 22, 10 were 19 yrs. old

or younger. (USA Today, 10/8/09,p.3A) 2012, Chicago ended with 506 murders. (BBC-World, 1/16/13).

4. See, High School teacher, Kara Wright's article: "**Parents in Prison Can Still Help Their Children's Lives.**"-Sept. 2012 (www.sanquentinnews.com) far another aspect.
5. NIJ, op. cit., p.29.
6. Consciousness-raising:3. an act or instance of increasing the awareness of one's own or another's needs, behavior, attitudes, or problems.-
Random House Webster's unabridged dict., 2nd ed.
7. The following are the 8 action areas for building a **CULTURE OF PEACE** as defined by the 1999 United Nations Declaration & Program of Action on a Culture of Peace: **1.**Fostering a culture of peace through education; **2.**Promoting sustainable economic & social development; **3.**Promoting respect for human rights; **4.**Ensuring equality between women & men; **5.**Fostering democratic participation; **6.**Advancing understanding, tolerance & solidarity; **7.**Supporting participatory communication & the free flow of information & knowledge; **8.**Promoting international peace & security.

A pertinent point from our 'Declaration': "Article 8: A key role in the promotion of a culture of peace belongs to parents, teachers, politicians, journalists, religious bodies & groups, intellectuals, those engaged in scientific, philosophical & creative & artistic activities, health & humanitarian workers, social workers, managers at various levels as well as to non-gov't orgs."

8. Sagging pants: Come f/when inmates couldn't wear belts; Tattoos: represent inmates/malcontents literally wearing their heart on their sleeve; 'The Pound': 2 practical explanations: in prison, one never

knows how clean the other's hands are; & for defensive purposes, must keep a ready fist.

9. 'poverty line we not above,' see 'rich-poor' ranking, p.1.; Prior to incarceration, 2/3 of ALL prisoners lived in conditions of economic hardship - while perpetrators of white-collar crime largely go free.- Occupy Oakland, op. cit.,n.2.
10. "Jena 6": A group of Black H.S. kids unfairly prosecuted for defending themselves against continuous racial taunts - the instigators remained free.
11. Jay-Z is a prime example of Knowledge's transformative power. He went f/drug-dealer to holding fundraisers for Pres. Obama. Lil-Wayne (quoted next) grew up in a rough New Orleans project, was shot, yet, grew to have these humanistic views. Both have comrades in prison that they still connect with, despite their extreme success (the Band of Brothers)
12. 'roughly one in every 100 adults....As a proportion of its population, the U.S. incarcerates 5x more people than Britain, 9x more than Germany & 12x more than Japan.'-NIJ, op. cit.,p.26.
13. 'states spend an estimated \$50 billion on corrections annually,' sacrificing: transportation, higher education & public assistance. Also, CA, in 2010, spent about \$50,000 per inmate - national avg: \$23,000.
14. "The Story of Philosophy," by Will Durant, p.214.
15. NIJ, op. cit., p.30.
16. Essay: "Nelson Mandela-Lion of Freedom," by Daisaku Ikeda.
17. "Gandhi: A Discussion on the Struggle for Human Rights," by Daisaku Ikeda, p.34.

18. "Mandela's Way: 15 Lessons on Life, Love, & Courage," by Richard Stensel.
19. See note 12.
20. NIJ, op. cit., p.28.
21. Ibid., p.30.
22. Ibid., p.31.