

WHERE IS REASON ?

August 1998

by Milton L. Rice

I read and watch with great sadness, in news papers and other media, about the senseless deaths of two U.S. Capital police officers as well as reports of other victims and tragedies across this country. My prayers are for the victims, their families and loved ones. I am compelled to write at this time however, in response to letters I've seen published in various editorial pages ...as well as the constant barrage of negative media stories & network programming that sensationalize violence.

We all need to adopt a perspective of more compassion and civility as we strive to find a real solution to a national problem. While violence is indeed a problem, there is no epidemic taking place, as would seem the case if one's only source of information was the news media or politicians. "**The real problem**" faced by this nation and it's very survival is, the vicious cycle of mis-information permeated by the new media that breeds fear and hostility coupled with irresponsible politicians having the moral integrity of hyena (taking advantage of "the hype") riding "the wave of public ignorance" (or indifference) to pass legislation that threatens democracy as we have known it, to it's very core.

It is most unfortunate that the actions of a psychotic or mentally ill individual's mindless act can fuel any public outcry to justify, or use "the death penalty." Contrary to many popular and uninformed opinions, "a death penalty" would not deter many deaths, that the criminal justice system likes to call "murder." Most "wrongful deaths" (classified as murders) occur "in the heat of passion," at a point of mindless rage, involve substance abuse and/or just plain and simple stupidity. Unfortunately for many poor and/or uninformed (ignorant) defendants, whether justified or not, state prosecutors are routinely successful (convincing juries to ignore human frailties) at winning convictions that negatively effect the offender to the highest extent of the law. Thus allowing the merciless state it's "pound of flesh," forgotten by the public, but always "dredged up" by the media in concert with someone's political agenda (as a public service). "Getting tough on crime" is the battle cry of the conservative Republican (or politicians wanting to get elected at any cost) who introduce and/or pass "knee-jerk" legislation resulting in: longer heartless sentences, oppressive mandatory minimums, harsh conditions of confinement, reducing or eliminating programs, counseling and education ...and least we forget "the ultimate punishment, the death sentence"and we are all given a "bad tasting" recipe for failure, humiliation, disenfranchisement, social melt-down and eventual anarchy. Legislating what amounts to state sponsored terrorism against it's own population is not a realistic or humanitarian response to tragedy that should be embraced by a civilized society. Violence only begets violence ...and prisons are very violent places. Building more prisons to incarcerate and warehouse men, women and juvenile offenders is not a reasonable, intelligent or acceptable application of this great nation's capacity and potential to find solutions to it's social problems.

The social conscience of America needs to move forward toward reconciliation and away from retribution. We all need fairness and a "level playing field" when entangled with the courts ...with more compassion and understanding taking precedence over the "business as usual" of punishment and disenfranchisement. Unfortunately, those in positions of power and privilege rarely see needs, or solutions from the perspective of "the shoe being on the other foot." They most often only see "the photo opp." for "free" media attention while using that opportunity to "stick pins" into the most defenseless and deamonized (by the media) portions of our society.

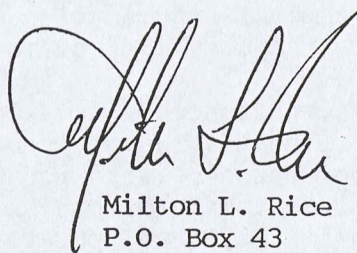
State and Federal Constitutions as well as the Bill of Rights are being shredded by politically appointed conservative judges and their legislative counterparts. We as a society need to remove politicians (especially the mean spirited

right wing conservatives) from office for their violations of the public trust, not the least of which is, by legislating negative criminal justice policy that is now being reflected in court decisions eroding democracy itself. If you, the reader think this is good, you should take a serious personal inventory of why you want to belong to "the new third-reich." Then you can gloat and love every minute of it, until "it's your turn" to be arrested.

If all the above isn't enough, the plot (conspiracy) thickens with America's newest growth industry ...The Corrections Industrial Complex, which replaces the Military Industrial Complex of "the cold war." These same politicians referred to above, have lobbyists paying them thousands of dollars to sponsor legislation to make corrections (prisons) "big-business." How? Longer sentences, no parole, mandatory sentences, fewer appeals, tougher laws,widen the net, lock more up, and privatization, etc. Why? It's profitable for those investors who are getting into "the business" of prisons. This includes communities where facilities are built (employment), contractors, consultants, special equipment, service providers (vendors for food, property, health care), and least we forget ...the private prison owner (the corporation), their stock holders (Wall Street) and of courseyour friend and mine, the politician. And it's all at TAX PAYER EXPENSE, that's right, you are picking up the tab, literally and figuratively. The victims are the poor, homeless, defiant, uneducated, minority and/or ethnic populations within this country but ...you may be next. The corrections industrial complex is only interested in one thing, filling the beds (which translates into getting paid). The more candidates the better. Lock'm all up ...forever, and the tax payers (whos ever left after the dust settles) will be paying the bills, forever. And for those who do "get-out" of prison, well. Recitivism? It's almost guaranteed since little if any programs, counseling, education, or training most often means "they" are most likely coming back to do more time. A great business plan, especially if you eventually want half the country locked-up and the other half paying for it and/or guarding the gates. We currently have 1.8 million persons incarcerated within these United States. Only Russia has more, but we'll soon be number one (because its good business). Our philosophy of corrections is the most backward, repressive and repulsive of any industrialized country on earth and add to that over 3,000 men and women on death rows across this country. And the President of the U.S., given all the above, has the unmitigated gall to lecture anyone on human rights violations?

The unethical conspiracy between the Media, Politicians (Right wing or ignorant) and Business interests, to imprison as many of the population as possible, is the greatest perversion of the public trust, authority and mis-appropriation of public funds taking place in this country today ...and possibly within this century. It is obscene madness and a precursor to another holocaust and needs to stop. God Bless America and those with the courage, strength and resources to reverse this egregious plot and the despicable mis-deeds being perpetrated against it's citizens in the name of all things, "Justice."

Dedicated in loving memory
to Mary Ellen



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