

TREASURE AND TRASH

When I was a little boy I used to love to help my Dad load the trunk of our 51 Chevy for a trip to the trash dump, or to be politically correct "the landfill". No matter what its called it's a place where people dump stuff they don't want. My father was a master at spotting perfectly good treasures other people threw out as trash, some of it was of questionable value like vacuum tube stabilizer racks, headless mannequins and blast doodles with copper fringes, but a lot of it was stuff in perfectly good condition, people just wanted to dispose of it. I would sneak away from Dad on my own treasure hunt trying to beat the bulldozer as it mindlessly crushed really neat stuff into totally useless garbage. I found a Red Rider BB gun in perfect condition, Dad found TV sets, radios and tools. Like proud hunters we carefully stored our trophies in the trunk we just emptied of our trash.

Once we got home our loot never made it past the domicile Customs Agent, Mom. She would start with Dad "Dale how many times have I told you not to bring that dirty stuff from the dumps!" Pleading our case, we would both say "But, its perfectly good stuff." And, every time Mom would come back "Its TRASH from the garbage dump! people threw it away for a reason! Its dirty, I don't want it in my house, now take it back!" I know Dad snuck some of his loot pass customs, but to keep the peace all of my trash trophies and most of Dad's found its way back to the dump, as once again trash.

Now, as an old man, I find myself in one of society's ultimate multi-billion dollar social dump yard: California State Prison System. I can't help but think back when I was a kid wondering why people would throw away perfectly good stuff. Now, ironically, I see people doing it with perfectly good human beings, young and old men dumped and treated as persona non grata, unwanted social trash. Men being crushed into useless garbage under the bulldozer blades of brutally long sentences. Those who survive the crushing brutality of time come out like the BB gun I found, they are perfectly good, but carry the "dump" stigma of "Ex Con", "Convicted Felon" "Offender" "Parolee". My mother didn't want that BB gun in the house because it was from the "dump". Mother's don't want scarlet lettered men in their homes; men that are human versions of that BB gun. The ugly statistic of 70% unemployment of parolees speaks to people's attitude about stuff from the "dump". So, with little social acceptance and no means of support the perfectly good parolee, like the BB gun, finds his way back to the dump. California's so called system of "Rehabilitation" has a recidivism rate of 70%

Professing "Rehabilitation", but showing a failure rate of 70%, one would think California would be ashamed supporting a multi-billion dollar mega-prison complex housing over 100,000+ (one hundred thousand plus) prisoners. Not so! Wall Street sees treasure in California's social trash. Private prisons like Corrections Corporation of American are cashing-in popping up all over the United States like mini-storage units for human beings. California is a favorite customer spending hundreds of millions of dollars to store 9,000 prisoners out-of-state and just recently committing \$24 Million to lease a 2,400 bed prison in the desert to dump more prisoners. California prison guards are the highest paid guards in the world, vendors are realizing lucrative contracts, lawyers are piling caviar on their plates and politicians get politically fatter convincing voters they're safe because the social dumps are filling up. California is so committed to keeping their dumps status quo they have spent tens of millions of dollars fighting the federal court, who has found California's system cruel and unusual punishment. Why find a cure for crime when the disease is so profitable?

In general, people have only two questions: 1) How safe am I? 2) How much will it cost me? With this in mind the hasty generalizations: "Prisoners" "Convicted Felons" "Convicts" and "Dump BB Guns" are dangerous; is money in

the bank. Convince people if one of those evils gets into mainstream society the streets will run red with blood. Perpetuate the fear, if one convicted person is evil, they all must be evil; if that BB gun was in the trash; its got to be bad. Corrections Corporation of American, prison guards unions, prison hardware suppliers & vendors, along with functionaries looking to get fat at the public trough have the perfect multi-billion dollar answer to your fears. Nationally prisons are a \$65 Billion Dollar a year business. California's prison and jail system costs in excess of \$16 Billion Dollars a year, and growing exponentially.

Functionaries and profiteers defend the current system beating their chests and pounding their drums proclaiming, we keep the public safe by providing world class "rehabilitation" programs and vocation training. Yet, these same heralds of penal progress neglect to explain why these world class "rehabilitation" programs are producing a 70% failure rate, nor do they offer solid statistics as to how many prison parolees are successfully placed in the vocations they supposedly gained in prison. This argument brings to mind the story of Barmicide a wealthy Persian in the tale of The Arabian Nights. In his great benevolence Barmicide offered a beggar a magnificent feast, which turned out to be imaginary, where the beggar received nothing. However, Barmicide enjoyed the illusion of offering abundance and the public's admiration. When it comes to world class "rehabilitation" the public is enjoying a Barmicide Feast.

People surmise their guardians of the public trust will spend their tax dollars wisely and keep them safe. However, if one would bother to look behind the curtain they would find thousands of broken down old men and women unable to move about the prison yard without walkers, canes and wheelchairs. Edward Harden, 60yrs old almost totally blind from glaucoma, psychologists have said he is no threat to society and should be paroled, has served 41yrs on a 7-to-life sentence, is denied parole. Dennis Hanson, 69yrs old, riddled with arthritis, liver cancer and orthopedic damage requiring a cane to limp about the prison, psychologists have deemed him no threat to society after 45yrs in prison, yet is denied parole. Jon Schnabel, 79yrs old, one kidney, repeated heart attacks, multiple prostate surgeries, unyielding arthritis and a degenerated hip requiring a cane to hobble about the prison yard for the past nine years, no threat to anyone, yet he must be "Dangerous". Rodney Lopez, completely immobilized from advanced cancer, doctors said he should be Compassionate Paroled, was forced to die in prison at a horrendous financial burden to taxpayers and a shameless stain on society's soul. "Dangerous" old people are expensive to punish -each costing \$138,000. per year, these four examples of old men are less of a threat to society than my dump BB gun, yet they are being housed as "dangerous" at an annual cost to taxpayers of \$552,000. (over half a million dollars a year). Statistics show 14,000+ prisoners over the age of 55yrs are housed in California's social garbage dumps. Billions of dollars are squandered protecting society from "dangerous" old men and women that need help crossing the street.

Equally appalling to punishing old crippled men and women to death is opportunistic profiteers exploiting society's fears, thirst for punishment and revenge, by allowing young prisoners to decay morally and physically in multi-billion dollar social dump yards. When dealing with cattle it is advantageous to confine them to feed lots for fattening. However, confining young men with no purpose other than punishment, with a Barmicide Feast of rehabilitation, does nothing for the greater good. It doesn't take genius to predict the results of many prisoners paroling out of these dump yards: Prison parolee Lavelle Mixon left a murderous wake of 4 dead Oakland, CA police officers, prison parolee Richard Davis kidnapped and murdered Polly Klass, prison parolee Philip Garriddo kidnapped and sexually assaulted Jaycee Duggard for 18 years. Every horrendous crime that a law was named after (Marcy's Law, Jessica's Law, Chelsea's Law, etc) was committed by a "prison parolee". Political knee-jerk reaction has been longer sentences and build more prisons.

Unfortunately, this tough-on-crime solution is doing more damage than repair. Perfectly good men who could be beneficial to society are thrown under the bulldozer blades crushing them into costly dump yard liabilities. Long periods of social isolation may be an immediate fix, however without some positive intellectual sublimation, the effects are extremely corrosive (monster making).

Being a denizen of the social dump, I see first hand the good and bad social trash. Young men hungry for knowledge and guidance who are treasures, yet deemed trash by a system that is less than perfect itself. Under the incredible burden of oppressively long sentences, I admire how they persevere dodging the bulldozer blades wanting to crush them into useless social garbage. These men could be productive contributors to society. However, sorting the trash and utilizing the good to society's benefit and humanely releasing old prisoners, would not be in the best interest of the grand financial scheme of the multi-billion dollar mega-prison complex business.

The clear emergence of corporations seeing prisoners as commodities for financial gain, lucrative salaries, handsome pensions, bulging contracts, seasoned with political gain, there is bankable treasure in assuring the trash pile grows.

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