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I am writing of my experiences in prison, after being incarcerated in close to half of the state Prisons in the State of Pennsylvania for almost 2 decades. I have been incarcerated since 1998. I was 15 years old at the time of my arrest. I was charged with 1st degree murder and certified as an adult. The person I was charged with killing I sold drugs for, he was 24. made numerous attempts on my own life, including chasing me and shooting at me with 3 other people. I have had a rough life in prison, to say the least. I first was housed at the old Youth study center in Philadelphia. I was there for a little over a month and then sent to the adult county jail "The House of Corrections" which we called "The creek". It is an old prison built in the 1840's. Real long cell blocks that are scary the first time you walk them. I spent a year housed there until I was 16 and convicted and sentenced to life without any chance of parole. I was sent to Graterford Penitentiary, from there I went to Camphill, then was classified to SCI. Houzdale. A few years later they built the first Juvenile State Prison in PA. SCI. Pine Grove. At least it was suppose to be, however it end up being both adults and Juveniles. I was sent there where I did not last very long. It was a bad experiment with Juveniles, and I had a lot of problems adjusting in this facility. The guards were very disrespectful and assaultive. I got in numerous physical altercations with guards their, and was locked down in the hole for close to 2 years. Part of that time being in the State's SMU (Special Management Unit) at camphill. I moved around alot after that, floating from prison to prison every 2 years or so. For me, life on the street was not as bad as some of the people I have met in here. I had a mother who raised me on her own after my father died while I was about 9 years old. I was an average kid in all respects until my father died. I lost two of my cousins I was very close with right before that in a house fire. And suffered from depression and was in counseling for many years. I also lived in a part of Philadelphia that was drug infested.

Everybody in my neighborhood sold drugs, and my block was the block that everyone hung out on and hustled their drugs. There was also a lot of violence, shootings all the time. So I grew up fast. And was affected by my environment in ways that many can't understand unless they lived it. I started selling drugs when I was 11 years old. By 14 I was a full fledged drug dealer. I dropped out of school at 15. To me the streets was a normal way of life. I thought selling drugs was my way out. I seen many who were what I deemed to be successful in the streets, driving nice cars, had the nice clothes, beautiful women, and I wanted the same things. That thinking is what led to my current incarceration. I had a dispute over money owed to me by the person I was selling drugs for, which led to him trying to kill me and 3 others. I have never denied my crime, however have always maintained that I acted in fear of my own life and thought he was armed at the time of the shooting.

Prison is a place that is unlike anything I have ever experienced in my short life. I first came to prison I was 5-6, 143 pounds. I had a rough time in my beginning years. I had to fight for my commissary, sneakers, even my respect. The guards, they didn't respect rats, as prisoners didn't, so if someone tried to take something from you, you had to fight. Even if you lost, you had to keep fighting. I fought a lot. My mother would come see me twice a week. I would always have a new scare to show my struggles in here. A black eye, swollen lip, cut on my face. But it made me tough. I thought the streets had made me tough, but prison, in order to survive in here it required a different level of toughness. I came up state, and things were even worse. Because now being up in these mountains as we refer to these prisons, since they always build them out in the middle of nowhere, up here you had to deal with many things that I didn't have to deal with down the county jail. For one, I was around a lot of seasoned prisoners. Some who been in prison longer than I been alive. You had a lot of predators who wanted a lot more than just your commissary and sneakers. I noticed that when I would shower, the showers were a lot more unsafe. 200 people at a time in the basement together. I watched people get raped and always minded my business. I watched people get stabbed and no one come to help. I watched people who would pay for the protection of other prisoners. People family would send them money to make sure nothing happens to their son, or brother. I've seen people

fight over a man that they come to look at as a women, and even kill over them. I've seen many kill themselves. Prison just becomes too much for them to bare. One lifer I was at the Supermaximum security Prison SCI. Greene with, had over 40 years in. He left a note and said that it has just become too much to bare. I use to think it gets easier as the years go by. But I was wrong. I remember when I was about 24 years old, I had almost 10 years in and was at SCI. Smithfield. There was this old head there who took a liking to me. He had 20 years in at the time and use to box before they took boxing out of the prisons. He had the heavy weight belt. They called him "Champ". I use to stay in my cell and read at night and he would come to my door and talk to me for hours threw the gate. One day I asked him, "Doesn't it get easier after a while?" I had asked him because he had 20 years in and I thought after a while man prison will grow on me, I'll get use to it. Be able to adapt a little better. And I never forgot the look on his face when I asked him that question, he looks off in a daze for a minute like he was lost in deep thought, looked at me and said "Young buck, it only gets harder". Champ had life. I didn't understand then how it only gets harder. I thought I went threw the hardest years. And thought maybe that's just him. I won't be like that. But it has turned out just as he said, it has only gotten harder man. Prison is a place like no other. I have never adapted to the constant chaos and violence. If I had to pick the worst parts of prison, no doubt missing my family, watching my mother have to watch my grow up in here, was among the most difficult things. However the worst thing over all? The way that the prison system is used to try to destroy you! Destroy your mind, destroy your soul. Destroy your humanity. Destroy everything about you. These are not places of rehabilitation. For the one who desires it and seeks it, not only will you not be helped in rehabilitat~~ing~~ yourself, but there will be every effort made to prevent you from that. there is a lot of racism in here. In fact since prison is so isolated from those who do not work inside here, it is like it's own world. And it feels like I am living back on a plantation everyday. The way they treat us, white guards referring to us as "Niggers". They beat and kill dudes in here all the time man and nothing happens. This prison here I am at, SCI. fayette, is among the worst. They keep putting all these articles in the local paper up here trying to say how

dangerous it is for the guards and how they are getting assaulted at an alarming rate. The whole time the guards every day here go around harassing and trying to provoke people to put their hands on them every day! At times they will assault a prisoner and then say he assaulted them first to try to justify his injuries. And nothing is done about it. This place is full of tension and it feel like it's about to explode at any moment. The guards are unprofessional, and only come here it seem to oppress people. Some come in here drunk. I been here almost 3 years, and was here before from 2010-2011, so I have almost 4 years total in this prison, and it is only getting worst. Recently the US. Supreme court ruled that to sentence Juveniles to a mandatory life without parole sentence is unconstitutional under the 8th Amendment of The US Constitution. Myself and over 500 others in PA. are now pending re-sentencing because of this ruling. Some have already gotten out. Pennsylvania has the most Juvenile lifers in the country, and in the whole world for that matter. The DOC. has instructed the facilities to start preparing those of us for society that are juvenile lifers. So the staff member here who they put in charge of it, called me a nigger in a mock job interview. Saying how he don't like Niggers, and don't really want no niggers working at his business. He tell me later he only did this to "test" me to see how I would react. These people don't know how to deal with people. So dealing with the constant disrespect and racism, is no doubt the most difficult thing to deal with. The only rehabilitation I have found is threw Islam, and strong family support. Still having that connection to the outside world. I am among the leaders of the Muslim community here, and I give classes on Islam. Dealing with the correct belief, correct methodology. As I myself have found that there is nothing in life that will change a persons life like Islam, and the correct understanding, belief and application upon that. As I myself use to be from among those who, prison was making me worst. I became more violent. Fights, stabbings. I would go to sleep hoping I didn't wake up in the morning. That was the only comfort I got in here, the fact that some day I would die and that would be my way out from this madness. I use to think I would die here, and still don't know if I may. Because i am not sure how the courts will look at my violent history in here when I go to get re-sentenced. I don't know if they can understand the

mind of a 15 year old kid trying to navigate this jungle. For those who know me, they commend me for not letting these places destroy me. To still be holding onto my sanity, still trying to better myself whether I get out or not, not allow these places to turn me into an animal like they do so many others. But the courts? I am not so sure how they will look to these matters. I have about 8 or 9 years of time spent in solitary confinement. Fighting guards, stabbings. However I have never preyed on anyone all my years in here. Never look for trouble, and I stay to myself. However in here, the more violent you are, the more respected you are and the more you are left alone. It's like you have to make people fear you to respect you in here. However it has not been all bad. I got my GED in here. After having failed it about 6 times over the course of 7 years, I persevered and always went to school when ever I was not in the hole. It took almost 10 years to fight to get any education beyond that. About 4 years ago I got into a trade, HVAC. That was only due to the new ruling allowing new sentencing hearings for juvenile lifers that I was able to get That. I am now also in carpentry. I took a money smarts course, Violence prevention high intensity, A drug group, AOD. Victims awareness, among about 15 other groups. And have not had a violent misconduct in almost 8 years. My most serious misconduct was 2 years ago, for being too affection on a visit with an old girlfriend that I had not seen since we were 15 years old. I had also not even so much as hugged a women in 8 years. Which is also another part of Prison that is among the most difficult to adapt to. Not having that affection with a woman. It is not normal, and no man gets use to that. Even one who has been incarcerated since he was a kid. To see women and not be able to touch them, hug them, embrace them, and be intimate with them, it is among the most difficult parts of Prison, if not thee most difficult part in many ways. You never get use to that, and it is not a normal part of life to deprive a man of that. As I said, Prison is not a place that is meant to change a person and make him better, it is designed to make them worst. To destroy everything within them. Which no doubt is the reason why many come back. Because what society does not understand is that most of those confined in these prisons, are coming back to their communities. And it should be more attention paid to why people are coming out of prison worst than they have

come in here. I seen something on C-span the other day where a current senator stated that society has agreed in going away from rehabilitating prisoners, to an approach of preferring punishment of prisoners for their crimes. What sense does this make when many are coming back to society? You give a person a longer sentence all this does is make a person worst over a longer period of time. He has spent years confined in a place that only cared about punishing him and cared nothing about making him better. Which is why the US has the highest prison population in the world. With a little over 500,000 confined in prison in the 1980's, to now over 2 million! Pennsylvania alone in the late 1980's only had 7 state correctional facilities. Now, PA. has almost 30! Prison has become a business in a way that far exceeds what slavery was in the past. These prisons are built in white rural areas, where it becomes the main boost, at times the only boost, to that local economy. Especially with coal workers being put out of work. It employs guards, kitchen stewards, medical staff, activities workers, Teachers, librarians, psychologist. The new millennium took it to a whole nother level with technology. Million dollar, and even billion dollar companies have been built off this prison expansion. Telephone companies like Securus, GTL, among others, making hundreds of Millions a year in profits off of providing telephone calls to prisoners. They pay around 1/3 of a penny per minute, and charge some prisons \$2.50 just to connect for the first minute!!! Then almost 50¢ each additional minute per call! Extorting prisoners. Whose families are the real victims. We use to have to pay these prices in PA., until a couple years ago we finally fought and got it down to .6¢ per min., even though they stil are making .6¢ Off of every 1/3 of a penny they are paying. Some states are still fighting these prices. Other companies like GTL, selling Tablets For \$160.00, which on the street are about \$20 for ones better than these, then charging crazy prices for Music and Email services. Also companies like KEEFE, that provide commissary to facilities. While the DOC gets a kick back. Cable companies, ect. The health care? Almost non existent. Your best bet is to stay healthy and not need any medical care. This facility is built on a coal waste and refinery site. And the water is bad, so all the staff drink bottle water. They give them bottled water at times and tell all staff not to drink the water, while we drink and shower in this

water. We have no choice. We cannot even buy our own bottled water. They force us to drink water that they themselves do not. I read an article in The Philadelphia Prison society Newsletter "Graterfriends" about close to 10 years ago about how they were prescribing This generic drug to treat High Cholesterol that had as a side effect that it causes hepatitis C! These people care nothing about us in here.

If I had to sum it up. Prison is a business. It is a place that destroys more than it builds. It is a place to profit off the misery of others. There is no rehabilitation, no effort to rehabilitate. As one who has been incarcerated almost all of my life, society needs to examine more closely what is going on within the prison system. Because there is no community that goes unaffected by what goes on inside these prison walls. Society needs to take a closer look as to how, and why people are being incarcerated,

Sincerely,  
Shariff Ingram  
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