

What Have We Learned?

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Everything we do is supposed to help us develop more as a person- yet not JUST a person, a GOOD person. Yet, how do you define "good"? What does that really mean. In prison, it could mean a lot of things, but I might define it from the heart. Actions don't always imply a good person, because a wicked person will do good things if it gets him what he wants. So are often the acts we do in prison... for many.

But I don't feel right doing that. I didn't lose my integrity when I came to USP Tucson, and there are values I won't compromise. But what do you do when there is opposition to your values?

This month, the prison will have an "Inclusion Diversity Day", where the theory is that inmates of different races, religions and beliefs can co-exist in peace, and that there can be a harmonious lifestyle here at USP Tucson. The Inclusion Diversity Committee is made up of inmates of various backgrounds, like Native American, African American, Caucasian and Hispanic. UPS Tucson is quite diverse, one of the things I like about it. And for the most part, I agree with the cause.

The problem I have is that I don't believe at all that

the Recreation Department TRULY believes this. I've been on the Black History Month Committee the last 2 years, and Recreation has adamantly denounced Black History Month outright, refusing to support it in any form. Their ultimatum to us each year was to call it "Multi-Cultural" and they would support it. This from the state of Arizona, who once refused to acknowledge Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day... so that figures.

To make matters more complicated, on Memorial Day of this year (2016), one of the Recreational Officers, Ms. D. Huffstuttler, was quite discriminatory to black inmates, to which I wrote to the Recreational Department and the Warden. But to this date, 71 days later, even with numerous complaints, the prison has done nothing.

So, in private protest, I banned myself from going to Recreation. I cannot support a department that refuses to acknowledge Black History Month, and further, does nothing to resolve a discrimination issue. It just seems to me that the Recreation Department doesn't really honor all races as they ought. And while many inmates just "deal with it", I can't. It just doesn't seem right.

So, in my self-ban, I stopped participating in the functions in Recreation, while writing updates on any changes since my allegation of Huffstuttler's discriminatory acts. The first was the night of the incident, on Memorial Day Weekend. The second, 3 days later. The third, 27 days later. Throughout

this, very little, if anything, was done by staff, which sadly, I expected. In that time, I had turned down a request by the Inclusion Diversity Day Committee to do the Jeopardy Tournament, which I did the last 2 years with Black History Month. I turned it down because it was to be held in Recreation... I would not support that.

They (the inmates) of the committee asked if I would co-host the Inclusion Day Ceremony, since they heard that I had hosted the Black History Main Event. They told me it would be in the Chapel, so it should be no problem. So I agreed. It would be good to have a black and white host for the event... until Recreation Department heard I was the co-host, and shot me down.

Not because I'm black, that would be too obvious, but because of what I stood for. I do not agree with the line of action the department has taken. There seems to be no acknowledgment of the concern for equality in prisons by the Recreation Department, so I cannot in good faith support it. They knew what I stood for, and for that reason, they chose to reject me as being the co-host.

So, what have we learned? To learn is to acquire new information about a subject. Have I truly learned anything about Recreation that I didn't already know? Sadly, no. Their actions were predictable, and although the clear retaliation was also predictable, I truly had hoped they would not do it.

So, the "Inclusion Diversity Day" event will hold a hypocritical tone; in the midst of inmates trying to respect our diversity, the Recreation Department will put on the show that they support diversity, yet in reality, does not acknowledge fair treatment or respect of black inmates.

THIS is what we've learned.

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