

The American Prison Writing Archive  
198 College Hill Road  
Clinton, N.Y. 13323

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Re: essay submission

I am eight years into a long sentence at the Maine State Prison. Previously, I did a four year bid in the Texas prison system (TDCJ). Despite my own unfortunate experience of being incarcerated on several occasions for a significant portion of my young adult life, I have ~~plenty~~ plenty of family & friends whom have never been arrested. Those who haven't, like most of our society, lack the understanding or awareness that those whom have done time or are incarcerated ~~have~~ possess. Not even lawmakers (legislators), officers of the court, nor attorneys fully understand what actually transpires although they share limited knowledge. Most importantly, most of the world has no idea or are disinterested of the world of correctional institutional systems.

I can honestly say that I now understand how huge of a problem the U.S. has with "Mass Incarceration." We have over a quarter of the world's incarcerated held in our prisons (more than Russia and China combined and their populations are greater). What this fact reflects is that the American Criminal Justice system is broken. Also, the judicial system is corrupt and biased when you look at the statistical data concerning racial disparities pertaining "convictions" and "sentencing". Lastly, capitalism has permeated American society to the point that it not only influences politics but Justice as well.

(1)

When I was a younger inmate with a short sentence back in the notorious Texas Prison system, I didn't really care as much as I should've, or do now, about policies and law that affect prison conditions and/or prisoner rights. I once heard that, "a man that does not know his rights has none". Additionally, as ~~my~~ one of my inspirational leaders once said, "Anyone unwilling to fight for their rights will lose them". - It is such a complex reality: the prisoners whom have short sentences (under 5 years) care less about the conditions, violations of policy and/or law, or corruption ~~or~~ racism in the administration; while the "long timers" (i.e. 10 years - "lifers") have a vested interest. It is similar on the prison personnel side of this subject. New correctional officers ~~and~~, administrators, or staff usually enter the environment with a decent attitude and genuinely themselves, or, they lead with a facade of who they believe they need to be to get respected or are peer influenced by senior officers to act authoritatively. whatever the consensus of mentality of the consensus of Department of Corrections staff is typically solidifies the prison's climate. In the most notorious prisons in the U.S., the "lifers" set the standard for inmates code-of-conduct and the rules of engaging correctional staff. There must be structure and order in any prison facility.

Here in Maine State Prison, there are many obvious reasons most people consider this to be, one of, ~~the~~ if not the safest and most pleasant prison in the country. We are able to buy flat screen televisions w/remotes; cd players and unlimited cds; Playstation 2 game system and games; state uniforms consist of blue jeans, blue button down shirts / grey sweatsuits; free mail once a week and "unlimited" legal mail postage for indigent inmates; the facility is new (ca 10 yrs. old); the state food is decent; the weight room is adequate and there is a barbershop and music room, as well as a soccer and baseball field with two tracks; we have an educational department and chapel for classes and religious services. In short, the quality of life for an inmate here is optimal in comparison with many other states and their facilities (which are typically "old"). Nevertheless, even aware of this actuality, the benefit of what could arguably be considered a luxury is overshadowed by the sheer incompetency of the management of D.O.C officials. Furthermore, the blatant violations of prisoner rights on a continuous basis is ridiculous. The administrative relief available is inefficient, as the ~~designated~~ designated overseer are often insufficiently trained (i.e. the Prisoner Grievance Process, Disciplinary Process/Hearing, etc.)

This facility has implemented imposing monetary sanctions (fines) as punishment upon a finding of guilt during the disciplinary hearing. Fines range from \$50 - \$100 depending on the class of the infraction Class C (\$50), Class B (\$75), Class A (\$100). First, historically, in any prison system nationwide, the only purpose for monetary sanctions is for fines and/or restitution. Usually, they are imposed to either defray the cost of the hearing (e.g. reimburse for paper, ink, photocopies, etc.), reimburse the destruction of state property, or reimburse the cost of urinalysis testing. The state statutes my facility's Departmental policy is predicated on do not specify any of the above amounts (which are ridiculously inappropriate because there are numerous available sanctions to impose for the purpose of deterring rule violations). Most importantly, this constitutes the 'excessive fines' and 'cruel and unusual punishment' described in the Eighth Amendment of the Bill of Rights. I have invested more than I can actually afford to in filing civil complaints for redress of numerous actionable claims.

In closing, I wish there were more citizens, not just the family and/or friends of incarcerated folk, whom we were willing to advocate or support doing something to protect the rights of prisoners.. "whom

were ~~to~~ sentenced ~~as~~ to prison as punishment, NOT  
to be punished"! I appreciate your attention to  
this writing. All are invited to respond, correspond,  
and write for more details. Peace, health, and blessings!

In Solidarity,  
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