

" America's Succubus "
(The Nightmare of the Criminal Justice System in the United States)

An Essay By: L.Francis

If what I have been led to believe is true, that great works of Art, Music, and Poetry are birthed through the endurance of loss, despair, and great suffering, then the creative gifts that I have to offer the world should at this point be phenomenal... Since the Summer of 2002 I have endured the complete and total loss of my freedom, parts of my humanity, and bits and peices of my very soul. Despair? This I have intimately known. It is birthed through the endurance of abandonment, heartbreak, and betrayal at their highest levels. Then, there is the suffering. A palpable thing. The essence of which line the walls and fill the negative spaces that I have been forced to occupy.

All of these things and more have awakened within me, then subsequently honed my once hidden and dormant gifts and talents. Yet they have also created in me the sensation of having the lining of my heart whittled slowly away. Carved; Like using a dull knife, to shape by force, a peice of driftwood, that had floated aimlessly through a moon-less night, on a violent, unforgiving sea. Then, abandoned by that tumultuous body onto a desolate beach, left there only to be fashioned by the elements into an ugly, unrecognizable thing. Unclaimed. Unwanted.

My current condition is not unique. At least in the sense that there are countless talented individuals whom possess extraordinary gifts whose lives have been lost within, and have fallen victim to a fractured, and broken Judicial system. More often than not, this is the end result and by-product of misguided, overzealous investigating officials, blantant instances and examples of prosecutorial misconduct, and discretional abuses by judicial authorities. Each of whom represent a system that serves justice on a silver platter, but only to those that can afford to eat from it with a silver spoon. A system whose name is a gross misnomer.

"Justice" truthfully means "Just-Us", the plutocrats that the system was designed to provide benefit for, and "Just Us", the underpriviledged, minority individuals to whom it provides none once they find themselves caught in the cogs of the merciless Criminal Justice Machine. A machine described in theory to mete out justice impartially, advertised as fair and equal, but in reality is anything but. To exacerbate matters is the fact that few people outside of these government sponsored " Interment Camps ", where men and women are unconscionably warehoused, truly realize, or have a reference point for, the daily, often times life and death challenges that individuals encounter once they are consumed by this "Just-Less"

system and are committed into America's penal institutions.

The life of a prisoner is not life at all. It is nothing short of a bleak, pitiful existence within an inhumane, artificial environment that is scientifically proven to degrade an individual's sense of humanity to base levels. Barbarism, brutality, depravity, assault, murder, and other extreme acts of violence, along with an over-all dehumanization of the mind and spirit are mere par for the course associated with incarceration and prison environments. This atmosphere creates such an oppressive emotional, mental, and psychological burden on the human psyche that the affect is intolerable. The inhumanity of which, perpetrated not only by the physical aspect of confinement, but also, maybe even more so, by the accepted, collective culture and attitudes of malignancy, and negligent indifference displayed toward inmates by prison staff and administration who seem to be thoroughly entertained by it all.

Schadenfreude. The German language has provided us with a single word that accurately and ever so succinctly describes the general attitude and views of prison employees as they relate to inmates. It means : "...pleasure felt at the misfortune of others ". Yet the mal-sentiment that the majority of prison guards and officials harbor toward prisoners is uglier still.

Contrary to the popular belief in the stereo-typical archetype assigned to the incarcerated individual, not everyone found within a prison environment are animals. Yet honestly, some are. The majority of whom wear government issued uniforms. For these individuals it is not enough that the inherent features of an institutional setting are oppression, repression, and depression. Most view prisoners as deserving the harshest treatment imaginable and they maintain no reservations toward going out of their way to ensure that this sentiment is actualized. Either by the sentient deprivation of basic human rights and dignity, or by the outright refusal of essential health care services, no unethical treatment is off limits.

It is not uncommon for prison guards to abuse their authoritative position at every available opportunity and it is done so by varied forms. Most utilize it as a platform to subject incarcerated men and women to their personal, racist dispositions, ideologies, and skewed world views. Racism, as a form of abuse and psychological torture is ever present within the prison system. This behavior is only indicative of the American racial divide and the systematic, institutionalized racism unique to the United States that encourages it. This fact becomes evident when one considers that there is no serendipitous explanation that could account for the Afro-American statistical majority representation in the U.S. Prison System, when in society they account for roughly 12 percent of the total population.

When prisoners suffer abuse at the hands of prison guards the only protection or available recourse to combat these authoritative transgressions is the use of a farcical, convoluted grievance process. It is the equivalent of supplicating to the oppressor to be less tyrannical.

Quite often this makes a prisoner's situation far dire.

Prisoners who choose to utilize the "Administrative Remedy Program" as a means of redress are nearly 100 percent of the time the recipient of and subjected to some method or form of retaliation. This is accomplished through subversive means such as the loss of grievances, "random" cell searches where personal property is confiscated then destroyed under the auspices of "nuisance contraband", or the unscheduled prisoner transfer to another institution hundreds of miles out of a prisoner's home region. The overt acts of retribution can include, but are not limited to, verbal micro-aggression by staff or an outright physical assault. A clandestine form of extortion is also used when a prisoner is issued frivolous institutional infractions that carry a monetary penalty.

The worst of it all, upon a whimsical and manufactured allegation a prisoner may be subjected to the cruel and unusual punishment of the psychological torture from a near 24 hour per day lock-down situation in solitary confinement known as the "S.H.U.". Pronounced "shoe", the Special Housing Unit is where inmates considered to be in violation of prison policy are sent. Inmates deemed difficult, or to be classified in need of "special handling" while in S.H.U. may find themselves chained naked to a cold, hard, steel bunk, sprayed with pepper spray, and left alone in the dark lying prone in a puddle of their own urine and a pile of feces from which the insects and rodents may feed upon.

The historical prejudices of the collective American psyche and the legacy of Slavery in America have no doubt created the circumstances and mitigating factors that cause many minorities, specifically Afro-Americans, to enter the prison system in the first place. The cycle of ignorance, poverty, violence, incarceration, and death that plague the Black community en masse is encouraged and perpetuated by the ideologies and discriminatory social constructs deeply entrenched in the fabric of American society that finds its historical roots in this country's founding.

The socio-economic toll of the American style of justice and unique brand of policing the Black community is near incalculable. The lasting effects of which have resulted in an upheaval and literal razing of the foundations of the Afro-American familial unit. The outcome; Generational Poverty. An effect that appears to have been the product of design. Also, by apparent design, it is by no means happenstance that although Afro-Americans account for the majority of prison populations Nationwide, they are an obvious minority in terms of prison guards, executive authorities, and legislative officials.

A direct correlation can be derived from a minimal minority participation at top organizational levels to the manner in which prisoners are treated, guarded, and policy written about. Laws concerning prisoners, and penal institutions are influenced by individuals from "Majority" communities and these laws are composed according to those system of values from a

stand point of decidedly different world views,experiences,cultural and personal beliefs.The prism through which criminal justice matters are viewed and decided are based upon,then distorted by their community's societal and social advantages that bar no concession for the historical Afro-American experience in the continental United States.

One version of Webster's Dictionary defines a prisoner as : "...one captured in war...", and in the decade and a half of incarceration in the Federal system I have observed evidence first hand that has led me to conclude that in fact a veritable war seems to have been waged against the Black,male populace of America. As a most formidable weapon the plutocracy of our Grand Nation has employed the stragetig use of the penal system to propagate through proliferation of the second class status assigned to,and the deplorable conditions experienced by,the Afro-American proletariat.

Consider this : Most prison guards are of Caucasin descent,the spawn of the principal perpatrators of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Their captives are the progeny of the human cargo stolen from African shores to become a bastardized Nation,alienated with no connection to their true identity and heritage. The current dynamic of prison is very similar and reminiscent of the archaic system of slavery as it patterns the Overseer/Slave configuration of an Old World Southern Plantation.

The vast majority of Federal prisons have been constructed in rural areas around the country. These geographical positionings have dual effects.Each are of great benefit to the captor.To the captive,no so much.Also reminiscent of the economics of Slavery.

The presence of penal institutions in these rural,predominantly White communities provides it's citizenry with a stable,recession proof source of employment.It is extremely beneficial to their community at large as it provides an economic infusion to the local economy,the prison guards,as well as their familial dependants.A quantifiable avantage is created there by in the form of a government sponsored foundation upon which the families of prison employees may build.This can be tabulated in terms of the strength and economic stability provided.

Conversely,the individuals that fill the cells of prisons to capacity are considered no more than the "little black batteries" that provide the energy to keep the Prison Industrial Complex Machine operating on all four cyclinders. Interdependantly,each component of the machine is connected.The occupational force of the local police enter the "Concrete Jungles" of America as did the slave traders of old entered the defenseless,unsuspecting villages of Africa.The objective the same; Hunt and Capture the Black male. Remove the Father,Son,Grandfather,and Uncle; The strength and providers of the community to be taken only to leave behind strife,poverty, need and want.

When the paternal figure is removed from the house hold dynamic,shipped hundreds of miles away from home, and planted in a governmmnet institution the detrimental effects are near inst-

antaneous. Almost immediately the strain of distance, absence, and the fight for everyday survival weaken then destroy the bonds of family. Fissures become fractures and finally the foundation of a family falls. The effects manifest themselves in the lives of the family members left behind.

In a Federal institution an exorbitant price tag is attached to any item remotely considered a creature comfort. Even the most basic necessities are offered at a premium in the prison commissary at a 175% mark-up. Food items of sub-par quality that are beyond suggested dates of expiration are provided in an almost compulsory manner. A simple phone call can cost at a minimum of \$3.45 for a mere (15) minutes. To cover these expenses, a prisoner is typically at the mercy of family member generosity and ability to provide, or the lack thereof.

When family members are motivated out of love and concern for the incarcerated to send monetary support, these funds are taken from a community already stricken by poverty and economic depression. In this way the prison system further depletes the already minimal resources of these families and at the same time perpetuates the cycle of poverty and the social-ills associated with their present lower class status. The result produces an evident disadvantage and further widens the chasm separating the minority community from its White counterpart.

The institution of family is the nucleus, or the foundation upon which communities and societies are built. Strong, well adjusted families translates to strong, well adjusted societies as a whole. This simply stated, yet complex equation may never be actualized within the Afro-American community on a grand scale so long as the status quo mentality towards mass incarceration as it relates to the Black community remains as it is currently viewed.

In America, the Criminal Justice System, for all practical purposes, has become a transducer of sorts. It has also become a vehicle used to terrorize, torture, abuse, and mistreat, not only Afro-Americans, but also all other minority groups, as well as poor, underprivileged Caucasians. This terror campaign continues a daily basis throughout the Nation despite its interdiction delineated in this country's sacrosanct founding document.

No distinction is made as to whether the form of mistreatment is of a physical or psychological nature. In theory, the 8th Amendment prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment illicitly discourages any sort of abuse or neglect. Unfortunately, the practical implementation of the Constitution is another matter entirely, as torture in a myriad of forms persist in the prisons of the United States.

The monotony of institutionalization found in a prison environment qualifies as a mild form of torture. Recently the courts have examined the harmful psychological effects of solitary confinement on the human psyche and its correlation with the rates of inmate suicide and how the numbers are augmented by the sensory deprivation associated with the nature of solitary. Still, there remains other forms of torture that have yet to be addressed.

From a scientific stand point, the denial of conjugal visitation not only ruptures and helps to crumble the foundation of a family, it is a form of population control and it prevents progenitive familial growth when a prisoner is denied his right by natural law to exercise his ability and power to procreate. This denial is also a verifiable method of psychological torture.

Sexual relations with a member of the opposite sex is an integral part of what it means to be human. That is because the innate desire, biological need, or evolutionary compulsion to procreate the species is hard-wired into the D.N.A. of Mankind. For this reason, and on an individual level, sex ranks in the 'Hierarchy of Needs' (a scale of basic human needs that transcend mere want), along with air, food, water, and sleep. These are the basic needs that must be met before a normal human being can concern themselves with other needs such as freedom from fear, love, dignity, competence, and other growth needs.

Plainly stated, to be asked, or otherwise forced to subdue that innate longing for intimate relations is like being forced to forego the need for sleep, air, food, and water. Sex and intimacy both exist on the same plain as these other insurpressible human necessities. It is patently absurd that all Federal prisoners and most State prisoners are subjected to conditions that deprive them of an outlet to express this important human need. The deprivation of such is a clear example of psychological torture because an individual is forced to unnaturally subdue a compulsion that must be expressed. This forced suppression causes untold psychological harm and manifests itself in abnormal, or deviant behavior; (ie: suicidal thoughts, anxiety, depression, lack of self worth, ect.). The subjection of an individual to these sorts of conditions rise to the level of cruel and unusual punishment and should be considered a violation of the 8th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The myriad of struggles faced by prisoners on a daily basis are legion. A large majority of which are beyond a simple, singular, or solidified definition or description. Despite first-hand experience from the more than (15) years I have spent in the Federal system, and of all the horrors my eyes have witnessed, it still remains difficult to comprehend, much less define all that I have endured. There are no words to relate, comparisons to make, or reference points to create that could have fully prepared me for what truly awaits an individual once they cross onto the otherside to break the threshold into an alternate reality.

Prison is a world within a world. It is a place where the original laws of nature no longer apply. A world where time is relative, distorted, and warped. It is as if at the moment of my arrest when the steel shackles were placed upon my ankles, and the manacles upon my hands, that they had some talismanic quality to transport me to a realm where the dead walked, forgotten by the living. A place where the souls of the lost become trapped in single moment, compelled to re-live a perpetual nightmare ad infinitum. Until an end-less string of days meld into what seems to be a singular one.

Insanity. Psychologists posit that most prisoners, on one level or another, have mental health issues. This proposition contains a kernel of truth. The fact of the matter is that if a person was considered mentally and emotionally stable upon entry into the prison system, the conditions one must endure are sure to remedy that by the time he exits. If one ever does.

How do you cope? The mind does create a method. Yet, not necessarily a healthy one.

The first time you witness a fellow prisoner beat with hands, feet, or by the wielding of a blunt object, literally senseless to the point where if they ever wake from the coma the trauma caused, their faculties of mind are never again the same, at that point you become ultra-aware of your surroundings. It is a sort of functional hyper-vigilance and practiced paranoia. The realization that you won't be protected by staff becomes apparent. That duty is your's alone. The gravity and responsibility of that charge is re-inforced the moment you watch a person stabbed, mercilessly, then left to bleed to death in a puddle of their own life serum due to late staff response or outright sentient delay and negligent indifference. That is when your survival instincts begin to hone themselves to fine tuned efficiency.

Suddenly you are able to assess a situation like never before. An almost supernatural, comic book quality "Spider Sense" develops. You become able to enter a fluid situation and immediately recognize danger, it's source, and the active participants long before any actions are initiated. The subtle changes in behavior, body language, voice intonation, and facial expressions that people exude become as easily decipherable as a children's book. The arts of self defense, and the craft of weapons manufacture from seemingly innocuous items become second nature and in time you are able to produce them with skill and artisan quality.

In prison recognizing environmental cues is also important to your safety. When noise levels are at their highest decibel it is a sign that threat levels are low but never non-existent. The tense quiet before the storm is the indication that something is amiss. It is then that danger is imminent. No loud or otherwise discernable declarations of war are made before the battle ensues. The most dangerous of which are racially motivated riots because in those situations there are no idle participants. Whether one wants to be or not they will be drawn into the melee.

Prison provides it's very own and unique brand of law, unwritten rules, and politics. Politics of a Machiavellian caliber that one must learn to navigate better than Niccolo himself if it is their desire to survive the prison experience relatively unscathed. The fluency with which you do so often determines at what rank and position you fill in the social hierarchy of the prison and in what light you are viewed by fellow prisoners. Determinant upon whether you are liked, feared, respected, protected, despised or frowned upon can decide your fate in the literal sense. The quality of your life is directly affected by it and it could very well mean the difference between life and death.

"Honor Amongst Thieves" is a concept that to a degree has its place in the over-all social order underlying inmate interactions. For example, government informants have an open bounty upon their head. It is paid in the form of prisoner gratitude and the currency given is respect and status to whom ever exacts the collective revenge against a "Judas" who received his "30 pieces of silver" in the form of time cuts for "substantial assistance" to the government. Extortion, assault, and murder are the common lot for these individuals. Either that or perpetual residence in "P-C", the protective custody of solitary confinement. A situation that could cause one to ponder an end like that of the original "Judas Iscariot". Only the child molester is further down the totem pole of prisoner society and higher on the proverbial "Hit-List". They receive similar treatment, except the child molester faces not only assassination but are often targeted for sodomization if and when they cross paths with an individual mentally depraved enough to find some joy in the deed. And the child molester can be certain that 1.) those individuals exist and; 2.) it is only a matter of time before they meet.

Every subsequent aspect of incarceration is governed by the science of control, management, and repression. As these are the institutional primary objectives, rehabilitation of prisoners garners no sway. The concept of "Divide and Conquer" is utilized as a tactic. Separation by race, creed, organizational affiliation, religious designation, gangs, and geographical cliques are encouraged by prison administration. It is an effective and useful strategy. Each prisoner has their individual assignment. The executive authorities employ every means available to maintain these assignments and detailed dossiers are compiled on every prisoner and are frequently updated.

As the day in the life of a prisoner becomes months, then compound into years, the inner workings and daily events, no matter how strange, become common place. One starts to undergo a desensitization process that makes you acceptant of the violence. At a certain point it is viewed by a prisoner as a simple inconvenience and nuisance in the way of your planned recreational activities for the day. In an effort to cope with the unceasing madness of it all, a prisoner subconsciously accepts the institutionalization process of the mind and behavior as it is the brain's attempt to find normalcy and order in the midst of chaos.

The total sum of psychological strain on a prisoner is immense. The mental burden near intolerable. There is truly no way to cope, nor mechanism to reverse, repair, or repress the continuous bombardment of brain altering damage caused by full immersion into a prison environment. A situation only compounded by the emotional toll of the familial and personal struggles created from, then magnified by, the situation as a whole. Only through the understanding of the totality of these factors in combination can one garner a brief glimpse into the world that prisoners truly reside.

From a prisoner's perspective, the passage of time is not marked by the ticks of the cheap quartz watch that is sold in the institution commissary. Neither by calendar notations. When

.the sands of time fall then pool within the eternal abyss beyond human reach and ability to retrieve it is noted by the conscious mind of a prisoner in the eyes of the near unrecognizable face that greets him in the mirror by the light of dawn. It is the countenance of a stranger with an emerging coronal pattern of grey that frames this face. One marred by age lines prematurely caused by the over-whelming stress and anguish that have become his constant companions. It is the face of a man that is but a mere shadow of the unrealized potential of youth lost to the "Criminal Justice Succubus" that has gained it's strength by feasting upon the life force of men, leaving in it's wake the husk or shell of what once was.

On a more intimate and personal level, I have marked my time by the major transformative events that have befallen me since the start of my incarceration. Also by the impact that those events have had on my relationships and familial connections. In my quest to retain any semblance of the individual that comprises my core essence and identity I have attempted to maintain a firm grip on my most redeeming qualities, despite the negative impact of prison. It takes quite a bit of effort to protect their integrity because living in a prison is like attempting to swim through a cesspool of human atrocity and hoping to emerge untainted.

To combat the mental stagnation associated with prison, and the institutionally promoted mental regression back to childhood promoted through the ubiquitous presence of board games, playing cards, and non-thought provoking reading materials, in lieu of viable education alternatives of real world applicability, I have made strides toward self-programing. On my own volition I have acquired (2) languages, written poetry, novels and short stories spanning the spectrum of genres, achieved a championship level mastery of chess strategy, studied the complicated, nuanced landscape of legal theory beyond a novice introduction, and have at every opportunity fed my appetite for learning by devouring a mountain of literary titles with rapaciousness and voracity. Unfortunately, none of my efforts toward self rehabilitation can truly salvage the psychological damage of my condition.

The stability of my psyche remains under a relentless assault. It calls into question daily, the purpose of my existence. Although I harbor no inclination to succumb to the suggestion, the incessant whisper of self-termination is forever present in the deepest recesses of my mind. It is caused by the "Herculean Task" of simply surviving to the next hour, with the hope to make it through to the next day in the same relative condition of mental and physical stability with which you began. A task that becomes increasingly difficult with the passage of time.

There is little doubt that the issues facing prisoners that are caused by the physical aspects of confinement are difficult. What makes them worse are the extraneous factors that one must also contend with. This aspect is the magnification of misery. The emotional variable of the whole equation.

It is heart wrenching to see the disappointment in my Mother's eyes for the hopes and dreams she'd had for her only son's success, happiness and life that have all been differed by incarceration. There is a certain difficulty in the acceptance of the death of my Father when it came at a time when we had just began to tackle the topic of the causes of his minimal presence in my life and had begun to learn each other for who we were as men. It was the abrupt end to an undersanding and budding relationship cut short by the realities of mortality. A reminder that incarceration will prevent me from being a superior father to the one that I myself had.

As the only brother of (2) sisters I am unable to lend my strength of physical presence when it is need most. Only by photos of my neices, newpews, and the children left behind have I been able to participate in their acheivements and developemental milestones as they have grown into adults of their own right and prepare to embark on the journey of life. All of these things I have experienced alone without the vital, synergistic companionship of a woman's physical presence, love and support, under the threat of the fact that I may never again know what it means to experience that level of intimacy due to being incarcerated.

There exists no anxiolytic to supress, cure, or has the power to ease the physical pain, and anxiety caused by the all consuming desire for the female counter-part. Suicide is an attractive option to the prospect of spending the rest of one's life never being able to love again. What a prisoner is left with is only the memories of the once passionate exchanges once shared, and the feminine essence of a woman. Memories that are often revisited and savored like that of a sweet, intoxicating wine bouquet. Memories that can be just as sour as they are sweet. Ones that become like vinegar on the tounge and are viewed with a certain ambivalence. Like hearing the echos a promise made by the woman you've loved, during orgasmic throes to be the bearer of your seed alone, only to later find that gift given to someone else in your absence. The term heartbreak does not nearly encompass the emotion felt.

How does one cope with it all? Actually, you don't. It is impossible to cope with the true nature and essence of what prison is. One simply endures and hopes that he awakens from the nightmare before the succubus completely devours his soul...

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