

## WE CAN'T JUST THROW OUR CHILDREN AWAY

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"All too rarely do I hear people asking just what it is that we've done to make so many children's hearts so hard, or what collectively we might do to right their moral compass- what values we must live by. Instead I see us doing what we've always done- pretending that these children are somehow not our own."

Barack Obama (excerpt from "Dreams From My Father")

Has society reached the point of callousness to where we discard our children without giving them a chance to make it in life? Have we really dug below the surface to unearth the source of anger that causes our once innocent youth to behave so violently? In our search for retribution to punish these young men and women for their crimes, we should not lose sight of the ultimate goal of rehabilitation. Today we do not understand our youth and in turn, they do not understand us. May I ask whose fault is this? A well-meaning parent should not bear the blame for the devious deeds of a rebellious child of whose own choosing, rejected the morals and values that the parent desperately tried to instill in the child. Every parent also has experienced adolescence and engaged in their own form of rebellion while they were teenagers. Still it is very difficult for them to begin to fathom the extent of rebellion displayed by today's youth. What is the cause of their unprecedented depth of anger? We are quick to judge our youth but even slower to understand them. In fact, this is the root of the generation gap: we do not understand our youth and vice versa.

When mankind first walked upon the earth, he did not understand his relation to nature, but he never abandoned his quest to come into harmony with this element that was one with him. In his primal stages, man looked upon nature as his worse enemy. In this same vein, our misguided youth view any authority as an encroachment upon their freedom. In the time before man learned to master nature to his benefit, nature inflicted some cruel treatment upon mankind. Today's youth have done the same thing to society and society has returned the favor to youth. During pre-historic times, nature was man's greatest threat. Society views its youth today as its greatest threat. All year long nature threatened to extinguish human life. Unmerciful winters along with lack of shelter exposed humans to the bare elements and threatened their very existence. Sweltering summers cloaked with heat waves and droughts made this usually tolerable season also terrible for mankind. As man became more ingenious to his own power, he had to ask himself was nature his enemy or his ally? Upon close scrutiny, man was able to realize that nature was here to serve him and not to destroy him. Therefore, he had to use his inner genius to discover ways to make nature serve him. In time, man mastered the forces of nature to make life easier and comfortable for him on this earth.

The generation gap remains a frontier yet to be conquered by the collective whole of mankind. In the order of the human strata, the youth are supposed to serve, respect, and honor mankind. Somewhere along the way such order was lost or disregarded. Now man, for all his genius, has become his own enemy just as he thought that nature was his enemy during pre-historic times. Without the nurturing aid of nature, mankind cannot sustain life on earth. Similarly, human race cannot move forward without the participation of its wayward youth. So how can we give up on our youth? Some critics say that youth who turn to crime and prey upon society become like a cancer that has to be cut off. The epidemic of juvenile crime has indeed become a painful thorn wedged into society's side. First, we must ask ourselves (and the yo



what has happened to your youth. Why have they given up on the social order that society imposes upon them? Why have we become afraid of our youth? At first, we strived to keep our youth off the street and now we have abandoned them to the streets.

What is it about the streets and crime that attracts our children more than the shelter and love that home offers them? Why are our kids in the streets committing these violent crimes? Where did they learn these animalistic tendencies? We did not raise them this way, nor did we teach them to behave in such inhumane ways. Should we abandon them as some animals abandon their young? Of course not; we are humans and must conduct ourselves as such, even ~~when~~ when punishing our youth who sometimes display animalistic criminal behavior. The purpose of punishment in this country is to rehabilitate. Have we as a society lost hope in rehabilitating our youth who commit crime? Many will be surprised that our laws and statutes say that yes we have given up on rehabilitating our youth. In this country, juveniles are sentenced to such disproportionate sentences as life without parole and consecutive sentences that amount to life without parole. The United States is the only country in the world where juveniles serve sentences of life without parole. In essence, sentence by the states says that we do not believe that our youth can be rehabilitated. We have given up on our children.

What is the rationale logic behind sentencing a juvenile to die in prison? Are we so callous in our calculation that we can see decades into future and declare that these youth will not change and mature into productive men and women? These youth are not so corrupted to the point where they are unworthy of a second chance. Are we so unforgiving as a society that we are unwilling to give our youth a second chance at life outside of a prison cell? Will we continue to lock them up and throw away the key? In pre-historic times, this is how cruel and unforgiving nature seemed to mankind. Time and the intelligent faculties of human beings has reversed this. As a maturing society we must also reverse this unforgiving trend of sentencing our children to die in prison. Despite their tendency towards violence, these are still our children and we must help instead of abandoning them. We have to begin to cure them and rescue them from their abyss of isolation and rebellion. Some of us have walked in their shoes when we were misguided adolescents. Although today's youth are more wayward, we have to look into the cause of this and work with them to solve this dilemma. We must work with our troubled youth to come up with solutions to the ailments that plagues and poisons them to the point where they engage in violent crime. The solution can never be found in abandoning them which, happens when we sentence them to die in prison. Such actions do not reflect the values of a maturing society. As a decent society, we must help our youth pull themselves out of the hole that they have dug themselves into. We must not abandon them. We cannot just throw our children away!

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