

## BOOK REVIEW: ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK

I recently read "Orange Is The New Black" by Piper Kerman. I didn't get why it was a #1 New York Times best-seller. Maybe it was Piper's honesty that moved people on the outside who have never experienced the hell of being trapped in a situation with no power or control over what happens to them from day to day. I did find Piper's author photo intriguing, like the Mona Lisa. I can't read her expression, but it's familiar to me, an expression I've seen on the face of someone who has gone through something that was mentally and emotionally challenging. If I were able to ask her one question it would be about her expression in the photo. Perhaps it is a reflection of what D.H. Lawrence said, "The essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer. It has never yet melted."

Of course, her expression could mean something else entirely. We often tell ourselves that if we could just have what we had before we'd be so happy. Yet, when we get it we realize it's not enough to make us happy like we initially thought, leaving us with a knowing expression that we've duped ourselves into believing a lie. We fall out of love just as fast as we fall in love; we experience buyer's remorse after falling prey to a fast-talking salesman; and we dream up things that are never as satisfying in real life. We suffer from the curse of unrealistic expectations, expectations that never come to fruition. In my life experiences, there has always been a down-side to everything, and the upside is never as satisfying as I expected in the beginning. Perhaps that is the prisoner's experience too when he or she is released from prison, but then has to worry about providing for him-or herself, requiring effort, something prisoners don't have to exert in prison.

I remember being elated when I published my first book. It was selling well and was ranked 1# of all the habeas corpus books being marketed to prisoners. But it was not a best-seller



as in a New York Times #1 best-seller. It didn't change my life financially. And four books later, I'm still no better off than I was after the publication of my first book. There is only so much I can do to promote my work from the confines of a prison cell. But it was an awesome experience, one I've enjoyed repeating. My books are like my children. I've felt a wow factor every time I've held one in my hands for the first time.

It's hard not to compare the success of others, especially in the world of writers. We can do what others cannot, but they still seem to succeed on a higher level as if it were their birth right. And this applies equally to those who could afford competent legal representation.

All of that aside, I must continue to press forward and only look backward to educate myself on the past so I won't make a costly life choice in the present that will effect my future.

--Zachary A. Smith, #521163/4D-270

Crossroads Corr. Center

1115 E. Pence Road

Cameron, Missouri 64429

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