

WHO BENEFITS FROM PRISON?

Why would anyone want to work in a men's prison? Who rises each morning anxious to enter a desolate world void of any responsibility greater than turning a key? Or enjoy monitoring the physical movements of grown men who themselves are offered little incentive to develop and enrich their own lives in such a stale environment? Prisoners are, of course, without a choice. Prison workers though choose such a profession. But why?

Is it for money? Many less-than-desirable occupations pay well. Why else would someone work in a far away land or in a job where the margin of error is minuscule? But a low security men's prison? Where one has a better chance of dying of boredom than from a physical altercation with an inmate?

Could the allure of prison work have then more to do with the workers' own deficiencies; physical, educational and psychological? Maybe prisons are the sole work environment that offer the educationally and socially challenged an interlude of comeuppance in an otherwise unremarkable life. Where for a few hours per day they become the chosen, the elite, where they become the ridiculers instead of bearing the contempt of others. Where they not only control the environment but dictate punishment to those who defy authority; their authority. Where a uniform transforms their persona into one that generates respect and reverence on the part of others. Where no one questions their qualifications (out loud anyway) and they decide what is prudent, whether it in fact is or not. Where one's ability to manage, articulate and even spell become immaterial due to the similar deficiencies of their superiors who, thanks to the Peter Principle, perpetuate an environ that never changes and certainly never improves.

What though of the female workers at a men's prison? Are they sadists? Do they enjoy berating grown men inside an environment where such behavior is not only permitted but encouraged? Or are they masochists with low self-esteem who lust for attention from strange men who, because of their confinement, can only look, fantasize, but never touch? Up until becoming a prison worker, these women experienced the highlight of their lives during high school long ago where they were maybe a cheerleader or deemed a beauty in some small, secluded, rural community. After high school and exposure to their competitive disadvantage against the smarter, the more refined, and the prettier, does prison offer them a different kind of high school? Does this world composed of gaping, women-starved men allow them to recall and, in their minds, rekindle everything that once made them treasured, if for only a few hours each day?

What then of the blacks and other minority workers? Can they not help but cherish the moments when they can achieve vengeance against the white race by holding white inmates to a more rigid standard of conduct that they enforce vehemently to the delight of others blacks, both inmate and workers alike?

Men are incarcerated and deemed in need of isolation and, when possible, rehabilitation. Inmates bide their years searching for any possible value in being shelved away from society in a vacuous world where the only progress visible is through a ticking clock and the flipping of a calendar page. After a period of time - different for each inmate - a lengthy prison sentence becomes simply redundant where each passing day becomes of less value and one's skills and faculties incrementally perish.

So who then benefits more from prison? Regardless of the effects on society and the the inmates enclosed therein, one thing is abundantly clear: Prison provides a sequestered microcosm where prison workers can pander to their insecurities and shortcomings in a world where, for a few hours each day, they become everything they ever wanted to be. And when they leave work each day, they return home to look at themselves in the mirror. There they face of the same failed egos that admonishes and reminds them that, unlike the detained, prison is only a temporary reprieve from their unfulfilled dreams and discouraging lives they can never totally escape. Thus, realizing then and everyday thereafter that they need prison even more than the men sentenced to live in such a confined artificial world.