

What The Texas Department of Criminal Justice
WON'T Tell You, the Taxpayers Who Own It.

The philosopher Vladimir Nabokov once said that in order to gain the truest picture of where we stand as a society, one need only to stand outside a prison at shift change. That was true in Nabokov's day, and it is true today.

We live in the greatest country in the world, and with the advent of technology and education, our science and engineering put us second to none in global advancement. Why, then, do we still encounter state prison agencies that are quick to tout "highly-trained professionals," whom, in truth, slovenly lumber about, day to day, without the moral compass, without the benefit of human compassion? Nowhere in modern America do we see the blatant personal desire to mistreat other human beings --than in a Texas state prison. This is where the tobacco-stained, unkempt, sweat-soaked men and women come to assuage any of a number of self-loathing insecurities, personal and financial failings, all under the guise of Texas Correctional Officer professionalism. Giddy up, ya'll.

To be fair, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice made a good showing of evacuating thousands of Texas inmates to higher ground on June 3rd, 2016, during unprecedented flooding of the Brazos and other local rivers. Perhaps it was a last-minute decision to save lives. Perhaps it was a last-minute decision to protect their assets. After all, we are their furniture factories, metal

fabrication plants, slaughterhouses, graineries, and a host of outside, for-profit, contracts aligned by the very same upper-echelon Board of Directors who rake in the cash from the sweat off our backs. We work for free, in Texas. In theory, we are "paid" in early-parole credits. But that's a myth, too.

This is Texas. The south. Where slavery is alive and well.

Nevertheless, I was reminded of those things while I sat on a thin mattress situated on the floor of a huge gymnasium at TDCJ's Wynne Unit in Huntsville, Texas. That was one of the evacuation points Ramsey Unit inmates were bussed off to. There were no bleachers, no stands, no cheering crowds; just a huge cement floor littered with sweaty human beings clad in dingy white, a heated frustration simmering behind our eyes. We were given food. We were given ice water. Those with funds were allowed to use their Commissary, though they were strictly limited to little more than 3 stamps and 3 envelopes. Still, there were problems where there shouldn't have been.

The most glaring issue was that of the Wynne Unit's failure or refusal to provide adequate bathroom access. The gymnasium had two toilets, two small urinals, and two sinks--for some four hundred and fifty men.

Interestingly, there were seven Porta-Potties readily available twenty-four hours a day. The shower area downstairs had a row of toilets along one wall. But no. Those obvious and available reliefs for such unreasonable and unnecessary hardships were not availed until we were pushed to the point of near rebellion. This became the paradigm.

And it cannot go without mention, that the groups of officers

designated ot oversee us--were predominantly female. Certainly, that should not, in and of itself, be as issue. Even the senior warden was female. But those of us with backgrounds in psychology or sociology can discern the possible effects of gender influence on administrations. We more readily recognize the term "hostile working environment" when studying male-dominated corporations, etc. It is diametrically opposed to mysogyny--the rabbit's got the gun. But the rabbits just want to use the bathroom.

In short, those officers took an inordinate amount of pleasure in denying grown men, some wtih handicaps, the opportunity to relieve themselves. They simply disregarded the Senior Warden's verbal guidelines, cut designated restroom waiting lines in half, and told the men to go sit down and wait. Wait for what? Because the line ~~XXXXXX~~ never goes down. Simply put, we had become those womens' entertainment. And because there were always five to seven gaurds in there to watch over us, it could not be said that one or two could not be spared to escort us to the porta-potties as directed by higher authorities there.

Two officers could have been placed on the stairwell between our gym and the bathrooms downstairs, 24/7, so that bathrooms would never have been in sort supply to begin with, and thus, relieve the constant state of tension while we were there.

From an administrative standpoint, it is absolutely senseless to repeatedly inive rioting, the result of which is dangerous for both inmates and staff, but expensive to the taxpayers who own Texas prisons.

And there were confrontations. Many of the men who argued with staff for reasonable toilet access, were those who suffered from colon, urinary tract, or bladder issues consistent with advanced age, or a variety of medications likewise consistent. But because little old men pressed their need for restroom access, they were handcuffed and taken away to a separate disciplinary housing area. Now, some politically-trained TDCJ Spokesperson may say that those individuals were at least then placed in cells with their own toilets and sinks, thus relieving their medical concerns. But the fact remains that each of those men were, in fact, written major-level disciplinary infraction reports for their efforts. They were punished--heavily--for needing to pee. For some, they were placed in disciplinary housing and left, largely, to fend for themselves without timely medical attention, a common occurrence in Texas prisons.

Indeed, one man was dragged off in handcuffs after being caught, in a corner of the gym, relieving himself into a plastic bottle, punished for not being willing to urinate in his pants; the unavoidable result of following the order to "go sit down and wait."

Had it been me, I would not have given the Wynne Unit staff the consideration of using a bottle.

After days of pressing our to the Wynne Unit administrators, their unit major issued a fatwa: Every one of us had to report to the Unit Chapel to watch a 3-hour video. In the middle of the night. We were forced to go to breakfast at 0130, then return in time to have our filthy clothes washed, something that

was done just three times in over two weeks.

The topic of the video? How To Take Notes and Do Classroom Research. Three-hours long, at three in the morning. The end result? Almost five-hundred men sitting in a heat index of 108 degrees or more, who were not being allowed to relieve themselves --and hadn't had any sleep for 24 hours.

But at least we knew how to do classroom research.

Outside recreation was permitted once. While it was raining.

We were given clean sheets just twice, the second time being on day fifteen--of sixteen days there. The gym had begun to stink so bad, that the female gaurds brought in bottles of pine oil to spray around the area where they congregated, but that's it.

The problem at Wynne Unit, was that an otherwise commendable effort was knowingly and willfully pushed into a collision course of anger and frustration by an underlying culture of penitentiary disregard for human life and dignity when there exists little chance that outsiders will ever be told the truth. These "professionals" took an inordinate amount of pleasure in pushing grown men to their limits of patience, in extreme heat, by a group of females who gathered around a desk to enjoy cold drinks from a cooler, fans, their own restrooms, and an airconditioned dining hall that they could retreat to at any time. It is easy, and apparently fun, to deny the elderly and infirm, the opportunity to relieve themselves.

Meanwhile, back on Ramsey Unit, Correctional Officers had been directed to pack up all inmate property located on this author's Wing #1, in anticipation of long-term displacement.

And while that did not become necessary, it did result in some Ramsey Unit officers' unauthorized removal, theft, or destruction of inmate property. Gone, were typewriters, tennis shoes, expensive gifts provided by loving family, items taxpayers would have to replace needlessly--and at least one lawsuit--that taxpayers also may end up having to pay--even though the suing inmate is asking the Court to order costs upon the officers involved in the suit.

What was it that the Russian-born, U.S. citizen Vladimir Nabokov saw in mankind as he stood outside that prison observing the flow of human souls leaking out? What was it that failed to distinguish itself from those going in, some underlying sense of self-loathing that could only be assuaged by projecting their insecurities onto other human beings?

I, the author of this article, cannot answer that question. But I would invite you, the taxpaying citizen, to come study what Nabokov did. See the failure he saw.

Ask to come inside. But be prepared to field a gauntlet of excuses why prison administrators don't want you inside these walls. No cameras allowed. They will say that it's dangerous in here. In truth, you would be well guarded by an entourage of lesser ranking officers whose aim is to keep you from speaking to us. And the only danger present, is their fear of your discovery of the truth about what happens inside the razor wire that surrounds the area; shiny, sharp Concertina wire set in place, not to keep us in; but to keep you out.