

OFFENDER

by Edward R. Clark

Using the noun offender may be considered politically correct, and in statutes as it represents an individual's present illegal act, whether or not the act results in his or her incarceration.

Offender is emphasized by corrections officials in notices, memorandums, policies, all means of communication, including by some staff over the public address system: "'Offender John Doe, report to the staff station.'" The use of this terminology is a constant put down. It is dehumanizing, a constant reminder that prisoners are viewed individually and collectively as less than human beings by some of their overseers.

Emphasizing that the incarcerated are offenders is an offense upon itself in a "correctional" system. It projects the system has failed due to an arrogant and adversarial attitude, implying that antisocial behavior is not correctable nor reversible. It is also hypocritical, as correctional officer trainees are instructed to address the offender as "Sir," to interact with prisoners and make it a safer environment for all concerned.

Rehabilitation of the incarcerated requires mental stimulation: encouragement, momentum, progression through the system, and the setting of examples; not a continuous reminder of past behavior as an offender.

An analogy to labeled an "offender" is to stigmatize an alcoholic as a drunk. Labeling everything to identify that person as a drunk including the person's correspondence, mailbox, drivers license, vehicle license plate, and in the phone directory, regardless that he or she is now reformed through abstinence.

(over)

Therefore, in spite of what is projected to the public:

Prison is designed to breal one's spirit and destroy one's resolve.
To do this, the authorities attempt to exploit every weakness,
demolish every initiative, negate all signs of individuality - all
with the idea of stamping out the spark that makes us human and each
of us who we are.

(Nelson Mandela)

The attitude of corrections officials, or anyone for that matter, should be,
"But by the grace of God - go I."