

Clothes and The Prisoner Identity

Clothes do make the man or woman. As the officer or the prisoner. Studies have shown that people are more likely to follow instructions given by authorities who wear white physician coats or ties. I remember the deepest feeling of degradation when first told to put on the black and white stripe jumpsuit in jail - long before judgment. This "convict" outfit presumes guilt and can be seen in multiple movies of "chain-gang" going back to the 1930s.

Not long ago prisoners in NC Prison #3 wore brown jumpsuits, baggy and loose with elastic waistbands. One piece jumpsuits. These coverings erased sexual identity and promoted the indignity of masked individuality. Sameness was the rule: we were not good enough to deserve the usual attire of pants and a shirt common to males everywhere in our society.

Eventually brown jumpsuits were replaced with brown pants and an undershirt, as well as a cover-shirt and winter coat. And a ball cap. Immediately, one felt more like a man in these clothes.

An officer once said that the only difference between him and his charges was the fact that he had keys and wore a different

Prisoners go to great lengths to individualize their costumes. They might color their Tennis shoes, for example. But most "alterations" of prison garb are considered to be inappropriate by staff, and possible disciplinary targets. Gang insignia, or religious insignia, are usually forbidden, but not always. Each prison has a "personality" based on how strict the staff culture is.

Lately, because of assaults by prisoners on staff at some NC prisons, officers might wear "armored" stab-proof vests, a baton, and in some cases a Taser. However, everyone with experience knows that these protective devices cannot prevent an attack by a determined prisoner who "flips out."

Sometimes a prisoner will claim that he was "provoked" by attitude, language or physical action. Sometimes the causes run deeper and are difficult to predict.

So, when in a crowd of identical brown bodies, and out of the corner of your eye you see a blue or black flash moving among this flock of penguins, you immediately go all alert. Clothes make ~~us~~ us. Clothes hide us, mask us from our humanity shared.

3

Clothing Reform is not a big issue here. It is a "little" issue among hundreds of little issues.

At This "camp" prisoners could benefit by The Center sale of gloves and Toboggans during harsh winters. Boots, Too. Presently "workers" may receive gloves and boots. This camp is one of The rare NC prison sites (before The Pandemic) where prisoners can/could spend hours "on the yard" during daylight hours, sometimes during storms, sleet, snow, cold, heat etc.

I have heard - but haven't verified - That some prisons in other states dress prisoners according to "charge." To me That smacks of Nazi insignia in death camps; Purposely framed for harassment and harm. That's just my opinion.

There is, I think, a place for well-thought out prison clothing That could reflect "good ~~conduct~~ status." Napoleon once said That men are "led by baubles." Presently status in general population is wrought in tattoos, gestures, articulation of ideology, and subtle clothing signs. However, in 19 years no one has asked my opinion on reforming prisons - until now. Thank you.

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