

## "Who's Free?"

How do we approach and eradicate mass incarceration? It is a problem that requires all hands on deck to engage in a battle which has become an all out war on the American people.

But only certain American people. Honestly, having learned what I have here recently, I must admit, my disappointment in this country is great. The things I was made aware of made me ashamed to admit that I am an American, sadly.

They call it the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave. But who is really free? Who is free when we make up 5 percent of the world's entire population, yet 25 percent sit behind these concrete walls?

I read a book recently

which outlined mass incarceration beginning at its roots and up until its present day struggle.

There were times when I had to put the book down as disgust rose in my heart and bile in my throat. It is a sickening feeling to learn what has really been done to you when all you did was to be born Black or Latino/a and make a wrong choice. It hurts. And all for the sake of fear and a dollar. That is simply what it comes to.

Fear and greed and America has no doubt found a way to capitalize on such. How dare they? How dare you treat me inhumanely because you are really afraid of me! Afraid that I may be a threat to your American dream. Afraid that I may know a little bit more than you. Or afraid that because I know more, I can

do more and then make more money than you? America, wake up, as money is the root of all evil. Look what you have done to us in pursuit of this unnecessary evil.

You have dehumanized people who are just as human as you are. You have destroyed lives. Torn families apart. Oppressed us. Enough! There has to be a better way.

A better way to return to the goal of reformation and away from punishment. Away from the allowance of slavery for the convicted by the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. There must be a way to rehabilitate people which does not demand incarceration as the only option. Especially since being incarcerated these days where no help is offered to people who need reform. While it is true that change must come

from within, some people need tools to assist them in their endeavors. But unfortunately, none are being provided.

All that is being provided is injustice. Punishment, cruel and unusual. A system that is breeding a class of people set up for failure. A class of people who do not stand a chance on the opposite side of the gates because they have not been given the instruments with which to work.

If we had a half of a chance on the inside, then maybe, just maybe, we could come out whole. A class of people that are ready to reenter society and become productive members and contribute to the communities they have wronged.

Instead, prisons are  
overrun with drugs and no  
opportunity at rehabilitation.  
From the "honor" wings to the  
"college" wings, drugs are  
running rampant. It was  
problematic prior to the  
pandemic but has increased  
greatly during because we  
have nothing to do. No  
doubt, the pandemic has  
negatively affected us all in  
some way. And some choose  
to self-medicate to escape.  
It may have begun as a  
coping mechanism, but  
eventually became a bad  
habit for far too many.  
Everywhere they turn, there  
are drugs; so what used to  
provide the escape became  
what they could not escape.  
Poor things. What chance  
do they have? Any at all?  
So with the drug

infestation and limited educational opportunities, how does one survive in such an environment? There's enough to walk out of these gates better than they were upon arrival? So we too can have our shot at living the American Dream? Do we get to live it? Or is America too great for us?

Written by:  
Chanelle Buennette  
Chanell Buenette