

The PLEAS of the Legions

One nation under God and undivided,
allegiance to our pledge is given still.
With liberty and justice all invited,
we have so many prison bunks to fill.

We've handled freedom blindly and misguided,
yet think we're making proud our flag unfurled.
America's republic stands united,
incarceration leader of the world.

If self-imprisonment's our pathway forward,
then we must learn to heal with intelligent sovereignty.
Our God-blessed country's become a prison slumlord:
filth-ridden; slave labor; and 'enforced' poverty.

Worse yet, these prisons often teach wrong lessons—
proved easily, check recidivism rates—
for hypocrisy in correction only deadens,
through "As I say, not as I do" dumbed-down debates.

An inmate who falls short is punished harshly,
while guards will skirt their own rules everyday.
Disciplinary hearings cry "Guilty! Guilty!",
while families weep and hungers whip and positives far away.

This singular focus on fault-finding is meant, maybe, to reform,
but there's more to 'justice' than recording wrong.
Where's the fairness at? And where's recognizing right?
And where do an inmate's 'own' injustices belong?

A blind eye turns away, "Not my problem";
and if you're immune from crime, your bubble's tight.
For the rest of us, prison issues are complex,
but only fuller, 'two-sided' understanding finds hope's light.

by John Barton