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English 3

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9 October 2017

Unending Horrors: Society and The United States Prison System

How do people learn the difference between right and wrong? By making mistakes, being corrected, and then growing and becoming more equipped to do better in the future. This is the general rule of thumb for maturing, except when looking at the prison system in the United States. The system does not seek to teach people how to do what is right in the future. Instead, the system traps people in a loop where they are constantly being punished for their “mistake” without any guidance. The prison system in the United States is ineffective because it focuses on punishment instead of teaching humans how to be an active, functioning part of society after committing an offense.

Although prisons are referred to places of “correction” they are more about punishment. People go through hell in jail at the hands of other inmates and the guards. GoodTherapy.org, a blog, states, “... 70,000 prisoners are sexually abused every year, and assaults, fights, and other acts of violence are common in a prison setting. But violence isn’t limited to inmates; prison guards (aka correctional officers) work in a high-stress environment that can increase their likelihood of becoming violent. With little hope for reporting abuse by guards, some inmates may endure verbal abuse, threats of physical violence, and even severe attacks”. This information is further supported by a report conducted by Bureau of Justice (BJS) where they concluded that, “ In 2011-12, an estimated 4.0% of state and federal prison inmates and 3.2% of

jail inmates reported experiencing one or more incidents of sexual victimization by another inmate or facility staff in the past 12 months or since admission to the facility, if less than 12 months". This demonstrates that jail has become more about torture through mental and physical abuse, rather than a place for convicts to learn from their mistakes. Violence between inmates is bad enough, but it's worsened by the fact that guards either do nothing or join in on the abuse. In a video, released by the Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora, N.Y, several corrections officers, (CO) were confronting an inmate who was previously diagnosed with schizophrenia named Leonard Stricklen. Though he looks confused and eventually collapsed, they used excessive force to handcuff him and later dragged him out by his arms. Stricklen later died after being struck on the head, (NPR). These acts would make an inmate feel trapped even among people who should be protecting them. No one, even an offender, should be under constant attack or in fear of it.

Prison is not where the torture ends. Instead, it follows released inmates into their everyday lives as they try to rejoin society. The Center for Economic and Policy Research states, "This effect is not simply that individuals who commit crimes were less likely to work in the first place. Rather, the best available evidence suggests that felony convictions or time in prison has an independent impact that further lowers the employment prospects of ex-offenders". This shows that people, even after they do their time and come out, are further punished by the denial of jobs, work that could put them on the track that they need to be on. This is because of the stigma that is present in society. Instead of reintroducing them and teaching them to be a more active, positive part of society, the U.S prison system limits their chances at a better life.

The lack of work for ex-convicts results in many ex-convicts reoffending. A study done by America Works and the Manhattan Institute found that denial of jobs increases the likelihood of recidivism by 20%, (FKD). This means that unemployment does more than crush spirits, it is a factor that leads to reoffending. This is because, after being away from society for a given amount of time, ex-offenders need to re-learn responsibility and find constructive things to do so that they resist reverting to their old ways. When the prospect of work is taken away, they will find another way to make money. One that is, more likely than not, illegal. This also shows that it is likely for ex-convicts and convicts, alike, to be stuck in an unending cycle where they are in and out of prison.

At first glance, the prison system in the United States seems to be used to rehabilitate criminals, but upon further investigation, it clear that it plays a part in the destruction of lives. Society does not exist without the interaction of humans. The US prison system encourages the exclusion of ex-offenders from society, causing negative mental effects, and permanent, disheartening stigma. This may seem important only to convicted criminals, but it relates to every human being, especially in the United States, because anyone can be imprisoned at any time and consequently anyone can be socially isolated like the ex-convicts mentioned. This system is destructive and needs to be stopped because anyone can fall victim to it.

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