

Mass Incarceration

If you work or volunteer in a prison or other carceral facility, or if you ever have; if you are a prisoner, or ever have been one; or if you have come to know about the goings on inside of these institutions by some means, and you are not actively campaigning to drastically reform or abolish them, then you are as much to blame for their ongoing abuses as are their creators and administrators. Your inaction, whether founded in fear or complicity, apathy or complacency, or something else, has put you in league with evildoers. Your compassion has cowered, failed, and deserted you at an importunate moment. On seeing the injured, desperate, and dying man on the Jerico Road you have become the priest and the Levite and crossed to the other side to continue your journey. You have become no less wicked than those conducting the evil that is, and that is within, the prison institution.

The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people, but the silence over that by the good people.

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

I am aware that many will call my words severe, and will be offended by them. For this I am well pleased, for conviction by one's deeds is recognition of one's misdeeds, and such presents an opportunity to repent and to right the wrong which had been committed. Borrowing the words of William Lloyd Garrison, I affirm:

I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD.

I will be the first to concede that I have no definitive single end-all solution for the problem of criminality. I doubt, in fact, that such a single solution even exists. I can, however, say with certainty that long-term separation from family, friends, and society's social systems; long-term separation from the workforce and the loss of self-reliance; and exposure to long-term physical and/or mental abuse and neglect is no solution at all. Caging and poking an angry dog with a stick repeatedly will not make it less angry, but more. The real criminals embrace prison as a solution to criminality, thereby enabling the abuse that takes place within, knowing that it is not a viable solution;

they do so because it furthers their own agenda. This I can also say with confidence: The longer a solution is in the coming the more difficult it will be to find. By the time the would-be criminal reaches adulthood, possibly even adolescence, there may be few solutions available, if any at all. Thirdly, and here at least we turn toward solutions, it must be considered that criminality rises and falls in direct inverse proportions to the availability of education, vocational and professional training, and opportunities for success. That is to say, as the latter falls the former rises; as the latter rises the former falls. With some few exceptions, this operation is both consistent and verifiable.

Criminality will never completely cease to exist; such a proposition would be fanciful indeed. There are some few who seem naturally propensed toward criminal behavior. But through appropriate legislation criminality's subsidence can be earnestly influenced. For example, which is less expensive, to educate and train a person and prepare them for success in life, or, having not done so, to send that person to prison and ensure their failure? Most would agree that the former is indeed the less expensive option of the two. Which is more cost effective, to create a person who knows only criminality, or to create one who becomes a value-contributing member of society? Which is better for society? Which is more humane? There exists three avenues only that lead away from criminality, they are: education, training, and opportunities that promote success. These are the same roads that lead away from poverty. The President Lyndon B. Johnson, on signing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, told us:

Education is the only valid passport from poverty.

Not all will choose these paths, but they must be available to those who would.

The United States exists as an economic apartheid hosting a wealthy class and a poverty class, with a scant middle class which resides closer to the latter than to the former. Setting financial resources aside, what is it that separates the classes? Education, training, and opportunities for success. And where do the vast majority of society's criminals come from? If you answered, 'from the poverty class' you answered correctly. Statistics suggest that as much as 90% of the prison population was at or below poverty level at the time of their arrest. Similarly, statistics suggest that between 40 and 70 percent of this population is functionally illiterate.

Like their wealthy counterparts poor children have role models that they watch and try to emulate, and though these role models are vastly different between the rich and the poor, so are they eerily alike as well. The rich kid's model is his well educated uncle who sells stocks on Wall Street; the poor kid's is his uneducated uncle who sells drugs on Seventh Avenue. They both drive the same model BMW, and both are looked upon with equal admiration by the children who are watching them; and the children ARE watching them.

The demagogues have used the prejudices and fears of the people as political props to promote their own agenda, to increase their wealth and build their reputations, to fuel their rise to power and add to their influence. They have hijacked and sensationalized your fears and your prejudices to edify themselves. They have used the same to create criminality where none had previously existed, and to build and sustain an economy that is in every way dependent on that criminality for its survival. They have used it as an economic development tool and have created mass incarceration in the process. As evidence of this see the prison population table below.

Prison Population by Year

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Change</u>
1970	196,429	- 8%
1980	329,821	+ 68%
1990	773,919	+ 134%
2000	1,394,231	+ 80%
2010	1,613,803	+ 16%

This they did while you were looking the other way.

We have seen the correlative repulsing movement between criminality and education, training and opportunity. Let us now turn our attention to the correlative attracting movement between criminality and the growth of the police state. This correlation discourages the state and federal legislators from veraciously addressing the cause of criminality: the abhorrent inadequacies of the public education system, inadequacies that disproportionately affect the poor because they lack the financial resources to overcome them; the near

complete lack of vocational training programs available to the poor; and the absence of other opportunities that would serve to steer this population group away from criminality and toward success. Legislators are disinclined to address these problems because doing so would negatively impact the power held by the ruling class. It is axiomatic that the power for the nation's rulers rises and falls in direct proportions to the level at which the poor of that nation are oppressed.

It is as true today as it has been since the very beginning of organized civilization: The success of all civilizations has been bought and paid for by that civilization's lowest caste.

This is how the system works: More criminality translates into more police, more prosecutors, more judges, more government and more power for that government; then, less education, training, and other opportunities translates into more criminality. This is a process that edifies the aristocracy while empowering the government and building up the police state.

There is no way to rule innocent men. The only power any government has is the power to crack down on criminals. Well, when there aren't enough criminals one makes them...you create a nation of lawbreakers--and then you cash in on the guilt. Now that's the system..that's the game.
— Ayn Rand, Atlas Shrugged, Penguin Books USA, 35th Anniversary Edition, 1992, p.411

To veraciously address the deficiencies in the education, training, and other opportunities available to the poor; to faithfully endeavor to reduce poverty; to attack the root causes of criminality would be to willfully weaken the police state; it would be to voluntarily downsize the criminal justice employees (e.g. police, lawyers, prosecutors, investigators, judges, and more); it would reduce the need for large jails and fancy courthouses; it would mean losing hundreds of millions of dollars annually in fines and fees levied against criminals, in seized (i.e., stolen) property taken through the process of civil asset forfeiture; it would mean losing hundreds of millions of dollars more in federal grant money which is doled out to the states to subsidize their criminal justice systems; and the list continues on and on and on. The ancient world existed in much the same way as we do today, but what we call prisoners, inmates, or offenders they unashamedly called slaves.