The Forsaken One

by Knowledge

When I was paroled and released from prison I had to live with my mother in one of the worst neighborhoods in East Baltimore. They call it a “Red Zone”; which is a particularly crime ridden environment. Stipulations in my parole require that I stay out of these “Red Zones”. Baltimore City endured 40 murders last May alone and my P.O. has the nerve to threaten to violate me if I get shot. Of course, punish the victim.

I made a suggestion to my Parole and Probation officers to allow me to move and transfer to North Carolina where I’ll relocate with my uncle. They respectfully declined so I’m stuck in this “Red Zone”, unable to change people, places, and things. However, they still expect me to change myself. Sounds like a set up right?

Nevertheless, I end up enrolling in Baltimore City Community College and found consistent work through this temporary agency. I was on a roll for over ten months or so. I made all of my fees to stay on parole and payed for everything I needed. Also, I've never missed an appointment.

One day on my way home from work I walked smack into a shoot out and got shot in my pelvic area. Needless to say, I was violated immediately and sent back to prison until I went for my relocation hearing. How does that help the community or us? How is that even a plausible thought within the justice system?

Being a felon or ex-felon is a life sentence. You will have to pay for your mistake for the rest of your life, especially if you’re poor and black. I guess re-entry is another scam because it seems as though I have re-entered into a second form of incarceration.

From the Outside Looking In:

Re-entry: Freedom Deferred

A Secret That’s a Secret

by Twist

What's a Secret that's a secret...because it's only a secret if you keep it...A picture is a secret that's a secret...the more it tells you the less you believe it...Racism, Bigotry, and Prejudice is a secret because it’s everywhere and ever present but no one wants to speak it. Knowledge of self is a secret because no one wants to teach it. Being Black is a secret because everyone is trying to bleach it. Being religious is a secret because no one truly desires to be it, but can recite it good enough to preach it. Freedom, Justice, and Equality is a secret because our brains are too small to conceive it. History is the biggest secret, that’s why we are all destined to repeat it. And mass incarceration must be kept secret and all the Presidents are Pharaohs and the United States is the new Aged Egypt.
Does the scarlet letter ever truly disappear?

by Tiffany

There is controversy surrounding the topic of re-entry. The issue is double-sided. Most citizens of society, myself included, like to believe we are open-minded and liberal individuals who are able to see/look beyond the surface and see another individual for who he/she really is. However, many of these same individuals do not want the incarcerated population living in their neighborhoods upon release from prison. Additionally, many employers do not want to hire individuals who have previously served time in prison. So the question remains, how can the stigma of incarceration be erased to allow former inmates a “fair” chance?

I believe many individuals in mainstream society with limited to zero exposure to incarceration view prison as a place one goes to pay his/her “debt to society” for breaking the law and to become “rehabilitated” for your crime in the process. Once an inmate serves his/her term in prison, he/she should now be viewed as an active member in his/her community and of his/her society – right? Unfortunately not. The concept that perception is reality leaves the fate of another human being in the hands of an idea that is extremely subjective. Instead, we must begin by looking at characteristics that we have in common versus what makes us different. A sense of humanity is what links us. Fortunately, conversations are happening, and programs are being created to assist with this challenge. The field of conflict management teaches us transformation can happen when individuals engage in dialogue and get involved. That is the only way to truly elicit change. I challenge all members of society to continue to call one another to our highest selves.

Home of the Incarcerated

by Diana

Incarceration in the United States remains to be one of the most prominent issues within the Criminal Justice System. Within the quest to be the greatest country on Earth the justice system seemed to have lost sight in what truly matters, the citizens. According to the United States Bureau of Statistics 2,220,300 adults were incarcerated alongside a total of 4,751,400 adults on parole or probation. We continue to lead the world in one thing, this being the total amount of our citizens that are currently or have previously been incarcerated. Although the treatment within the prison system must by law be humane and fair, the conditions inmates have to endure within the United States is not by any means humane due to prison overcrowding. Approximately 14 million individuals are currently incarcerated due to a non-violent offense. As incarceration rates began to increase within the United States, violent crime began to decrease. The primary cause for this drastic incarceration increase is due to policy changes, mandatory minimum sentencing, and three strike laws in certain states. According to the Bureau of Justice a study done in 2005 showed that out of 250,000 inmates that were released about 67.5% of these individuals were re-arrested for a different crime within the time span of three years. This is clear indication that something is not being addressed properly within our justice system. That something is crime, which we cannot afford to address improperly any longer.
Black Sheep

by Knowledge

A Black Sheep is what they called me amongst my family and society. Reputably here I stand despite the challenges in front and behind me. A few tragedies and triumphs. Very alike to Geronimo Pratt. The Justice System gave me 45 years. In the Penal System to break my back. Now when I speak of broken backs I'm talking mine to be exact. Brothers of my caliber we don’t do that. A rare breed right and exact. As a black sheep I have a reputation. I must uphold despite the fact, I’m an outcast.

FAST FACTS

46%

Around 46% of those who are incarcerated under state jurisdiction within the United States are incarcerated for non-violent offenses.

40%

Approximately 40% of 126,000 Juveniles that were arrested in 2002 are currently incarcerated in privatized and for-profit facilities.

From the Eyes of an Inmate

by Richard

Right now the government is debating several different criminal justice reform options. Most of it is based on sentence reform and rehabilitation in prison, but no one seems to be talking about re-entry and the importance of the transition back into society. Ohio has the lowest recidivism rate, and they credit that to their many re-entry programs. For the past six years Ohio’s recidivism rate has dropped and incarceration has also because ex-cons are able to go home and have a positive impact on their communities. 85% of Ohio has re-entry programs to help ex-cons with housing, jobs, school, health benefits, etc.

My interview is with a 28 year old two time convicted felon and also a two time parole violator. He is an active gang member who is trying to turn his life around but seems to be going in circles.

Q: What up cuz!
A: Chillin’ man, all is well.

Q: Introduce yourself to the people.
A: My name is Castro Loc! Duele gang!

Q: How did you end up in prison?
A: I’m a parole violator.

Q: How did you violate?
A: I pissed dirty and missed a few meetings.

Q: So you didn’t catch a new charge?
A: Lol, nah, not this time. On my last bid I went home on parole and caught a new charge, but this time it was some bullshit.

Q: Why do you think you keep violating parole?
A: It’s damn near impossible not to violate. I don’t be trying to come back to prison, but sometimes I just gotta do what I gotta do to survive to take care of my family and myself.

Q: Explain that a little more.
A: Both times I was released I went home to nothing. No stable household, little education, and no resources to help me get my life on track in a positive way. They throw you back into the streets and tell you to get a job, pay parole fees, go to school, check-in 3 to 4 times a week, take urine tests. How the fuck am I supposed to do all that shit with a few felonies on my record. This time I was actually doing aight. I had a bullshit job and I was doing tatts on the side. I fail one urine test ’cause I started back getting high and I missed a few meetings (2), and I’m back in prison.

Q: Do you think with a little help from the state you would still be free?
A: Hell yeah!! Not even help, just a little understanding. They could at least work with a [*****] when you trying to do better. I definitely think with some re-entry help I would have been better off. It’s like everything in the system is set-up for you to get stuck. Parole is a set up by itself. They make it so hard for you to complete and they don’t help you with nothing they expect you to do and they have no compassion or understanding for you or your family.

Q: It’s crazy you back in here with dudes who got life for a dirty urine.
A: That’s what the fuck I’m saying. I was doing good -- one slip up and it’s fuck him, throw him back in prison. Each time I come back I always think I might be a criminal for the rest of my life because I can’t catch a break. I’m trying, but it’s like they don’t even want me to do good. They want me to stay down forever. They say they want you to go home and be productive, but is that what they really want? They set traps to keep you down for as long as they can. If you don’t have a little money and some resources available to you, it’s hard as fuck to make it back into society. I don’t got a family with money or a lot of options legally, and I can’t afford a proper education so it will always be a battle for me.

Q: What do you think about the programs in prison, such as AVP, Youth Challenge, Friend of a Friend, etc.?

A: All them programs is cool, but when you get out shit gets real in a hurry. You gotta pay bills, provide for your family and yourself. How can AVP teach me or help me do that? Those programs is good for your brain in terms of giving you tools to avoid certain shit, but that shit can’t help me survive the real world. Even right now, I should be at a work-release spot/half-way house but instead I’m in prison. There is no help with job-training, parenting skills, social skills and shit like that. Some of us are being released with drug-addiction, mental problems, social communication problems, just to name a few.

Q: I appreciate your time and honesty bro, any last word?

A: Even when you change, they look at you like an animal and a dollar sign. They don’t even try to work with you when they see you trying to do good, instead they try to pull you back down. All they want to do is keep you down and try to bring your family down also. Everything in the system is designed to make sure you fail instead of getting better.

Editor’s note – I wanted this interview to be raw and uncut and really see the type of people this topic effects. I want people to see the mind-set of a person in that situation. By keeping someone in this cycle it actually makes that person worse in the long run. People develop a hate for the “system” and a me against them type of attitude.

The Power to Change

by Twist

The power to change begins from within. Within the hearts and minds of men and women who don’t need to pretend. The need to give in or succumb to something or someone driven by envy, jealousy, lust, greed, and hate. No time to waste, not time to wait and watch these parasitic Pharisees full of Propaganda and fallacies on some televised debate. See we the people need not make the same mistakes of the dead, dumb, and blind who equate ignorance to faith. Greater is he who is in me than he that is in the world; so that means our powers are inherent and innate. So I declare a state! A state of emergency, urgently we need to attack these false prophets and fakes who take stake to our legacies and belittle and berate our children and systematically plagiarize and negate all the contributions we’ve made and continue to make to civilization, our ancestry is great. See the power of change begins from within. Within the hearts and minds of men and women who are audacious enough to vanguard and defend. Who understand that in order for us to gain true freedom we must first conquer our fear of death. It’s the pedagogy of the oppressed. We as a collective need to face all of our fears until there’s no fear left. There’s no peace for all the Emit Tills, Sean Bells, and Travon Martins of the world, only unrest. I’ve cried all my tears until there’s no tears left. See for out of the prison he cometh to reign so that explains why I’m so fearless. So, if you ain’t heard nothing else just hear this; The power of change begins from within. Within the hearts and minds of men and women. Power is the ability to evoke one’s will without resistance. Power only respects and concedes to an equal or greater power. It’s the 12th hour. Power to the people, the time is ours!