

Solitary Confinement

The world is being overwhelmed by the media and other advocacy resources with an outcry of criticism of prison management styles often referred to as “Solitary Confinement” and leaving the readers or viewers somewhat puzzled about what this concept is really about. One could research the model on the web and learn about its impacts and characteristics but in all reality, they couldn’t begin to understand the conceptual thinking behind the various models used around the country and international jails and prisons.

I can suggest reading the ACLU PowerPoint dated March 1, 2013, about solitary confinement but it barely touches on the realistic and political edges of the phenomenon men, women and even children have to endure while under such political siege on their human spirit and soul managed through mass incarceration agendas nationwide. It does little for the actual destruction of human life behind bars and inside these lockdown units spread throughout the United States.

The outline does not discuss or cover such topics as bigotry, personal biases and environmental injustices based on a value system that is partially based on racism and whether the human being adds value to the system or not. In other words, those that are mentally ill are devaluated and left for dead and others with strong body and strong minds are pushed up the food chain so they can be used to benefit the internal political systems as well as the economic blocks within the prisons. Individuals without an education or craftmen skills are overlooked for those with an education and vocational skills. There appears to be inconsistent practices of a “caste” system that can be easily verified by reviewing the employment rosters by race, age and learning levels

Furthermore, it doesn’t reflect the true deliberate indifferences targeted based on four main areas create the environmental justice factors e.g. demographic influence; geographical equity; procedural equity; social equity. These dynamics are fluid and much focus must be on these elements to carry out its purpose of how the decision making instruments play into these events and events of the past. Slippery slopes to say the least, the agency has been successful because of its divide and conquer policy to keep these races apart.

It would be hard or difficult to understand what solitary confinement does to a human being unless that human being is willing to be used as a guinea pig and voluntarily put themselves inside a concrete and steel 8 x 10 box with no window and no control to the utilities e.g. electricity, light or darkness, time or sound receptions except for flushing the toilet or turning the water on or off in their stainless steel toilet sink combo that sits at the edge of their cells designed to be farthest away from their head when laying down on their steel or concrete bunk.

This personal sacrifice to experience living while buried underground would take a toll on even the strongest of men as the environment is cruel, harsh and toxic to endure even over a short period of time. Given just enough room to move in and allowed only a portion of the personal property allowed by other inmates not in this kind of housing assignment, inmates must adjust to various factors that impact their wellbeing as well as their sanity if they lack the coping skills to meet and challenge these extreme solitary conditions imposed by design and for the purposes of isolation and control.

The psychological and physiological impacts are extreme to say the least and often the core reasons while those mentally unstable are unable to cope and function in such an environment. Unfortunately, that does not prevent their placement inside such housing units and exponentially adds to the chaos designed for human destruction. Working inside there and supervising staff as well as serving as an administrator has given me an opportunity to see this design destroy the human mind and body work 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

I have seen strong men falter and weak men broken to the point they had to be carried out on a gurney due to weakness and ailing diseases that were inflicted by both the nature of the environment and their own wrathful design of demise. Eventually they lose their connection with reality and begin to self-harm and cut, bang, twist and overdose / harm themselves in most unbelievable manners best described as appalling and punishing in manner.

Strong men and women falter less or within longer periods of time but they all fall and they all suffer dire consequences of these conditions hidden so well behind the cloak of secrecy and undocumented failures of the penal system that was designed for rehabilitation and the return of civility and responsible conduct but often fall short and attain just the opposite side of this goal. These bizarre occurrences and damaging kind of attacks come from many different directions. Some are caused as:

- Indiscriminate housing placements inside maximum security units and placed there for reasons that may be justified on paper but often exaggerated to warrant such a long term solitary placement.
- Wrongful targeting of individuals identified as high risk or high problematic in nature and therefor cast into these cells for the expediency of not dealing with them on the daily basis.
- Direct result of the physical plant where there is no direct sunlight or fresh air;
- Some are created by staff that work there and torment them harshly without justification or provocation;
- Some are because of the policies and procedures imported and often altered through tacit approval of modified directives harmful to human spirits and dignity that often results short term placements into long term placements based on relaxed placement reviews & timeframes delaying reasonable institutional classification changes or recommendations.

Much of the structure within these isolation and control units have fallen to mission creep and in dire need of re-organizing and re-structuring primary and secondary auxiliary support services that include medical, mental health, educational and rehabilitative in-cell programs to re-activate the human mind and re-state their function in social skills, problem solving and individual responsibility areas such as anger management and interpersonal communication skills.

The list is endless and can't be articulated on paper as this assault of caustic and harshly toxic elements can best be described as the "perfect storm" to attack and destroy the human mind, the soul and the capability to return back to society as a reformed or improved human being that will once again be living in your neighborhood, community or family circle.

It is time for society to examine these harmful conditions inside a courtroom or legislative meeting room under a forum that nurtures the restoration of basic human rights and the return of human dignity and respect that have been degraded and devalued over the past decades to favor the mission of privatization of prisons and mass incarceration agenda that have now shown to have failed and costing taxpayers more money than ever once imagined beyond anyone's belief or expectations.

It is speculated that the current hunger strike inside the Pelican Bay Special Housing Units and throughout the California prisons system will establish a just cause to have this concept closely examined by judges and human behavioral experts to finally determine how this concept impacts the human body and fragile minds of those incarcerated for prolonged periods of time under the most harsh conditions imaginable by a persons.

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July 20, 2013