

Feech *Untitled*

The penal institution, oubliette, reformatory, the big house, gaol, the joint. All these designations are used to describe one place: prison. Commonly defined as a place of confinement where people are kept while waiting for trial or while serving time for breaking the law. Some might call it a place where you “find yourself,” maybe discover religion or possibly find your purpose—that meaning in life. Countless have agreed that having gone to prison struck a time in their lives where all that was assimilated was lost.

When hearing the phrase “you have been sentenced to ‘x’ amount of time in prison,” what does that do to a man or woman emotionally? A feeling of trepidation, abatement, anguish or for some, instant remorse for their victim or crime. Sadly, for those who are locked up in the U.S. and abroad who break laws governed to protect the people, they aren’t always placed in facilities that cater to their crime. For example: a first-time offender or person of low risk could be and most likely is placed into an amalgam with different levels of felons—arsonists, rapists, and murderers. In retrospect, that person should be placed in a facility with those of the same level of crime or combination. For instance, why are there more and more new cases of those with diagnosed mental disabilities entering the prison system? Shouldn’t we be trying to succor them the way they need to be? Wouldn’t that make us stronger as a society, a country, and as human beings?

Correctional institutions are portrayed as the type of place a person goes to help “correct” their behaviors or wrongdoings, yet most are becoming training grounds for learning to become better criminals. Of course this statement is mainly geared toward those not wanting help or to acquire new positive knowledge from the experience of being locked up. I do believe one’s location and the people he or she is surrounded by have a deep impact on the way they perceive life situations, view themselves, function inside prison and later on the outside and knowing there are ways to properly deal with future problems.

While many use the time to reflect, meditate, and self-rehabilitate through reading and taking advantage of educational opportunities offered to do what they need to acclimate themselves back into society, by “law” a public file of the individual’s mistake(s)—(a.k.a. crimes)—is sometimes broadcasted and made easy for the public (i.e., potential employers, family, colleges, etc.) to access. What do most do when they come across someone’s criminal record, look past it and think nothing of it? Unfortunately, the majority has a preconceived notion of that person and their character maybe even before meeting. Ask yourself this

question: why have an out date or see a parole board to “judge” if you’re fit to go back into society, if “society” has already written you off? “He or she is a criminal, we can’t hire them” or “they aren’t to be trusted because they were locked up at a point.” A lot of jobs parolees or ex-cons are applying for have little or nothing to do with their initial crime(s). Do you think these individuals are hired or given a fair opportunity? What does that say about the hiring process, discrimination and the way people look down on those with a record? This message is in no way to put anyone in the mindset of “don’t try, give up or go out and re-offend because there is no future.” There is a future and a bright one for those willing to change their lifestyle and way of thinking. This message is to educate those who know: 1. how hard it is to find employment without a record, and 2. to show that all who are LABELED (and yes, that’s all it is, is a LABEL) as criminals aren’t inferior, dangerous and unproductive members of society. Certain choices led to negative outcomes in a lot of our lives and for the most part many are seeking forgiveness and a chance for redemption.

Take for example guys who have been “down” for 10 years, 20 years or more. They will tell you, “this isn’t the place to be” or “there’s time to still change yourself.” They themselves have been in and out of the system and experienced loss, years that can’t be replaced. Some guys know what it’s like to wake up in a Level IV or V each morning and have to grab a weapon to defend themselves for the day; what it’s like to not see, to hear from or to have loved ones pass while being incarcerated—or to get paid \$.84 for a full day’s work. And, for the select few, live day in and day out knowing that ERD (Earliest Release Date) or RD (Release Date) is non-existent. Is this the life I want or plan to continue leading?... No!

Now, I can’t speak for everyone and as mad as it sounds, some enjoy being locked up. For a lot of those who have little on the outside, no family/support system—jail/prison provides a home and all the necessities one needs to survive. Free housing, no bills, free medical, dental for a small fee, and three meals a day. From what I understand from a lot of the old school guys who have been “down” since the early 70s, the food and pay was spot-on in their time. Minimum wage jobs were being offered throughout the compound. The food was “real” and in larger portions. A lot of the meals we receive now are processed; “nutritionist recommended,” right. Most guys refer to the meat as “cat head” purely because the size is close in comparison.

All this to say: are laws meant and written to continuously punish and bind those who have already paid their debt to society? To hang over one’s head like a dark cloud for the rest of one’s life and not mitigate us to become stronger people? When someone is judged on a crime years in the past with no current convictions—how does that help that individual

to mentally overcome and rebuild themselves? It almost lowers a man or woman's self-worth in a sense.

Through my short stint of being incarcerated, I'll be using current and life lessons to make it through, overcoming the obstacles society and the laws put on myself and others as convicts and ex-convicts. The only way to do that is in all but one word: faith.