

Golden State Paradise

Throughout the whole Golden State, people are subjugated and indoctrinated away from the public eye only to be domesticated for California's private prison stock. Every week like clockwork, a new bus pulls into a location surrounded by razor coiled fences, with a new load of walking talking state property. This is a person's nightmare: a colossal laboratory full of subjects conditioned to believe that this is their new home away from home. Welcome to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation: where no one is rehabilitated, but deteriorated. If one were to believe they live in a dystopian world, they have never known the likes of a place like this. A dystopian world, though an imaginary concept, is a world full of oppression, exploitation and suffering. While the world we live in strives towards life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, the dystopian world of prison forcibly divides and conquers its inhabitants, requires long hours of work for little to no wages, and tortures through punishments that are not justified by their crimes.

One characteristic of a dystopia encountered in prison is control. When you first walk through the prison doors, you have multiple eyes staring you down waiting to invade your space. Right away you must choose a side. Are you Black, Wood (white), Sureño (southern Mexican), Norteño (northern Mexican), Paisa (border brother), or Other? Your answer will seal your fate, there is no turning back so choose wisely. This is not prison policy but an unspoken code of ethics, implemented by the hierarchy that exists within prison walls recognized by prison officials. Each racial group/gang has a representative that enforces hidden laws and regulations passed down by their sovereign leaders from Pelican Bay. When new inmates make their presence known, these representatives impose responsibilities on them which contributes to this sturdy prison political structure (Wood). One of the main guidelines to follow: do not

intermingle with other races. Following this rule automatically puts an you into an unwanted racist position, where fraternizing with the other races can get you physically reprimanded by your peers or even killed. Knowing someone from a different race outside of prison who coincidentally is in the same facility as you is no grounds to attempt to bend or break this rule. There are literally invisible lines that you cannot cross throughout the prison depending on which race you pertain to. The crossing of these lines, like stepping on the workout area of a rival race can be taken as extreme disrespect which can lead to a riot. The only time you will see people of opposite races talk is when they are conducting business transactions or negotiating a resolution for a problem that may have arisen between the two groups. Through this socialization, a person is slowly deprogrammed of their original principles and upbringing, only to be replaced with a hateful ideology which unfortunately can be permanent to the feeble-minded. These rules can be overwhelming to many, but it's up to the individual to make a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven (Milton). You can choose to let this experience make you or break you, but even choosing to let it make you can morally break you.

Another aspect of dystopia characterized by the prison system is slavery. Everyone is assigned to work throughout their whole stay, with the exception of the physically or mentally disabled. You have no choice in the matter, you have to work. If you choose not to work without a valid reason, you will be cited a 115 (major citation) or a 128 (minor citation). This all depends on the correctional officer handling the disciplinary action. Jobs vary from prison to prison, but they all share the same thing in common, little to no wages to compensate for the time and effort spent. The perfect example is welding which pays well out in the real world, but only gets you chump change in the prison industry. There is nothing more dystopian than working for little to nothing for yourself while you're fattening the pockets of prison bureaucrats. During this

experience, people feel the loss of self-integrity and worth, only to be led to believe that their reward are the concrete walls that surround them and the mediocre food that they eat every day. This is a crucial constituent of why there is a high percentage of people who return to prison, the socialization they underwent that established the belief that they don't need anything else other than these walls, friends, and jobs to keep them happy. Dr. Christian Jarrett, an editor for the British Psychological Society's Research Digest blog couldn't have said it any better, "It is almost inevitable then that time spent as a prisoner, in a highly structured yet socially threatening environment, is bound to lead to significant personality changes" (Jarrett). This is to the point where they don't mind working under poor conditions with major health risk factors, ranging from asbestos in the air to people's bodily fluids on undergarments in the washing room.

Perhaps the deadliest feature of dystopia found in prison is the practice of torture, solitary confinement, the prison within prison. Forget how movies have portrayed solitary confinement, the reality is far more twisted and not entertaining at all. For this I would like to share my own experience. I was placed in solitary confinement for no apparent reason, I did absolutely nothing to deserve what was waiting for me in that lonely cold cell. The experience can be described as a curse of silence, with the only thing keeping you company is the anxiety inside your head (TV Can Be Good For You). You have absolutely no one to talk to, nor any book to read. Your mind is idle for as long as your awake, trying to figure out how to process this situation you're not accustomed to. Hours become days, days become months with the only true sense of time being the swift opening and closing of your cell for a tray of chow. There is no amount of exercise that can take away the torture of not being able to have a conversation with someone other than yourself. You use your shirt as a mop, dipping it in the toilet and washing your floor with it. You're then disgusted by the fact that you just covered your whole floor with fecal matter and

dip the shirt back in the toilet again, hoping that the water will be cleaner this time. You snap at yourself, wailing at the ceiling, “why the fuck did I do that again?!” Your heart is racing, vision is hazy, you just want to kill yourself. You then wake up, unaware that you just experienced the first meltdown in your life. If these walls could talk, they would say, “I take the sun away, put misery instead When You’re with me, most folks consider you dead...No remorse for your tears, I seen them too often When you cry, I make you feel alive inside a coffin” (Jones). While you’re in solitary confinement, your fellow peers consider you a loss because they know that the agony of being alone can shut you down. Cry all you want, it will not make the pain go away or your stay in “the hole” any shorter. This experience can permanently scar anyone not mentally strong enough to overcome it, which can lead to the fear of being released back into society. This is a systematic technique meant to keep you mentally confined in the dystopian world of prison.

Some people may say that calling prison a dystopia is an exaggeration. Those who oppose prison as dystopian in nature believe that prison’s main purpose is to punish inmates for the crimes they committed, and to rehabilitate them in order for them to be productive members of society. The idea that prison serves as a viable method for rehabilitation could not be further from the truth. Prison officials allow the separation of inmates into different groups for the safety of the inmates and guards alike. What they are actually doing is enabling inmates to constitute their own political system in order to ensure the survival of their group in prison. This is unnecessary, for the safety of these inmates are the responsibility of the correctional officers watching over them. Instead of policing inmates, they are allowing them to police each other which adds to their sense of purpose in the dystopian world of prison. They say that the reason why inmates are paid low wages for the work they render is because the money they earn is being deducted for the restitution they owe. While there is little truth in this statement, it’s utter

bullshit they like to articulate to serve as a diversion to the modern-day slavery taking place behind these walls. Inmates are capital: dispensable assets catering to the greed of these prison tycoons. Lastly, the warden will tell you that the purpose of solitary confinement is to diffuse a hostile situation and segregate those accountable so that they may be reprimanded. The true intended purpose of solitary confinement is to speed up the domestication process. What better way to domesticate someone than to break their psyche, to have them regress to a primitive state of mind.

The dystopian world of prison rules its population by forcibly dividing and conquering its inhabitants, requiring long hours of work for little to no wages, and torturing its victims through harsh punishments that do not fit their crimes. LASD's Sherriff Jim McDonnel thinks that if the prison system continues to use the same tactics used generations before, there will be no progression (Grossman 16). Prison reform can reduce prison population and put a stop to the domestication and privatization of human lives. Programs that successfully help inmates deal with drug and alcohol abuse such as virtual reality therapy aids and accelerates the healing process (Clayton 33). These programs can help the incarcerated in their true rehabilitation when reintegrating into society. In conclusion, ending the capitalization of human lives like those in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation elucidates the failings of a system that further describes a dystopian image of a utopian place for rehabilitation.

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