



Behind the wall

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Once Daniel Berrigan wrote: "To write about prisoners is a little like writing about the dead. They are jealous of their souls. They guard their thoughts, nurse their rages in secret."

When this Correspondent placed a sheet of paper in his typewriter he tried to think of a story interesting enough about prisoners' lives that would make sense to the reader. All of a sudden his mind drew a blank as his fingers lightly tapped across the keys. Nothing happened, not a word or even a constructive sentence could be formulated in his mind.

But a question did appear. Why? Why should the general public care one way or another what any of the prisoners think or say from behind these walls, with their mounted gun towers?

They no longer have any say within different matters that directly concern their well being. Many of these same individuals have been legally labeled by the courts as 'society outcasts,' 'scum of the earth,' 'psychos without any human existence.'

Furthermore, here it is, that time of the biennial year again, when the most popular and controversial subjects turn toward those who are to be counted in their steel cages each night. The incarcerated convicted felons. Prisoners, who come in all shape, color and size. Prisoners, who this year, will be publicized as an ex-

pense burden to the State. Even in their small spaces of hell (a cell), it is becoming the opinion of the voters that the prisoner has become too comfortable. They are still not safely tucked away adequately enough in their dungeons to prevent being a threat to society. Or better yet, a threat to societies pocketbook.

Since the adoption of the 1977 'metric system' a lot of the pressure has been delinquent from the Oregon State Parole Board, the power to determine when a prisoner is ready for parole — five, six, or seven years — they now must work under some rules, regulations, and procedures that state a prisoner cannot be ready before ten, twenty or thirty years. In many cases this is telling the prisoner to 'forget it.' Some voters are opposed to men and women convicted of crimes spending that much time in prison and using that old cliché 'but we gotta feed 'em'. And then there are others who are under the impression that Ballot Measure 8 just might be the most appropriate measure to elevate the problems concerning penal rehabilitation and expenditures. Kill 'em.

The 'death penalty' (Measure 8) has been the most on-again, off-again, on-again penalty of all the laws in Oregon's history. Since the State relieved the county sheriffs of the responsibility (executions) in 1803 the voters repealed it the following year. It was reinstated in

1920 and repealed again in 1964. In 1972 the U.S. Supreme Court found plenty of evidence that the death penalty discriminated against the minorities and the poor, so much in fact such statutes were found unconstitutional.

In the Corvallis *Gazette-Times*, October 17, 1978, Editorial: "Four years after the court's decision, a study of the nation's death-row found that 62 percent of them were unskilled, service or domestic workers, while only three percent came from professional or technical job ranks; it was also found that sixty percent of the inmates were unemployed at the time of their crimes."

Are these individuals who are promoting the 'death penalty' this year searching for the power and excitement to kill? And what if the death penalty is found as a deterrent over the next couple of years. Will the penalty be used on rapists in the 1981 election? Will armed robbers be in fashion by 1983? Just think by 2001 'driving on a suspended license' could be the order-of-the-day.

With this madness forming deeply within this Correspondent's mind, he suddenly slammed his fist on his typewriter. Hey! It's just a matter of time before the 'death penalty' will sink to his level.

Suddenly, fear and anger slowly become a mixed emotional-terror in the pit of my stomach. Why not go all the way off into left field and

make 'Measure 8' retroactive? Has the image of the Oregon convict grown so gross that he can no longer hide with his guilts in a 6x9 cement guarded cell?

Some prisoners cannot help but feel angered. Anger that must be concealed with a smile before the guards, counselors, a priest and the pre-executors. Because of a mistrust in exposing their true feelings — from being interpreted as rebellious.

Anger and fear. Fear to relate honestly among their peers about their newly adopted public image; the prisoner can say nothing, because it could be misconstrued as a weakness.

A prisoner no longer stands in judgement of his own failures or successes. No longer can one thrive for the incentive to overcome that life-long chant being said, "You're no good," "you're no good," "you're not worth a damn."

Today a new voice sings from the sidings of the stage, "ten, twenty, sixty years, die."

There are no sorrows left in the will of the people. Prisons have become a business leaving no room for reform. The last drop of mercy drains from compassion. We prisoners must learn to hate ourselves and return once again to a nothingness. And those of us who have sinned against mans laws may even end up cussing God's.

Romans 12:19, "Vengeance is mine saith the Lord." You wanna bet? Not as long as people believeth upon "Measure 8" and unequal justice.

So once again, the show must go on. The drama of that long and last walk to the gallows, a chair, or an injection room. The cost of admissions once again becomes the will of the people.

Madness? Who! This Correspondent? He has not tasted the sweetness of it yet. Although it might come one day — when those prison gates may open and at a passing glance a young man shackled and chained may march through on his way to the 'Death House.' What type of pain would be felt by this Correspondent if the young man he just passed happened to be his son?

Will Blacks vote?

by Eddie N. Williams
President, Joint Center For Political Studies

The political future of Black America is literally in the hands of Black youth. It is about time we let this fact sink in and begin to take a critical look at how steady those hands are. This assessment is necessary despite the plight of 18 to 24-year-olds who are plagued by rising unemployment and declining expectations.

Analysis

What we see is not reassuring. Black youth have the worst voter participation rate of any other age group in the Black community and in the nation as a whole. What makes this situation both frightening and challenging today is that Black youth have the most to gain from aggressive participation in the political process.

As 23 percent of the total Black voting-age population, 18 to 24-year-olds should want to use the political process to reduce their unemployment rate and to help develop policies and programs that will shape their lives and livelihood in the future.

And, too, they should want to help keep Black political prospects on the incline in the 1978 elections. These elections are critical for Blacks for several reasons:

1. They offer an opportunity for

us to prove that the impact of the Black vote in 1976 was not an accident;

2. They also provide an opportunity for Blacks to take maximum advantage of their considerable political potential in several states, including Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, where close races are expected in the November elections;

3. Aggressive voter participation will help to assure the election of Black candidates;

4. The 1978 elections will signal the beginning of the process of gearing up for the Presidential election in 1980.

Clearly, there is an urgent need to increase Black voter participation across the board. But there is an even greater need to get our youth on the right political track. What makes the participation of Black youth so conspicuous and troubling is that it represents the waste of vast potential — a waste that is often overlooked. In short, the Black youth vote is musclebound, and we have failed to do anything about it.

There are 3.4 million Black youth between the ages of 18 and 24. In 1976, only 38 percent of them were registered and only 26 percent actually voted. This is significantly lower than the voter participation rate of Blacks nationally: 59 percent were registered and 49 percent voted, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. It is lower still than the rate for white youth: 53 percent were registered and 45 percent voted.

Yet another reason for singling out Black youth is the fact that among eligible Black voters, 25 and above, 54 to 73 percent were registered in 1976 and 44 to 65 percent actually voted. That our youth are not pulling their political weight is the understatement of the year.

An examination of the Black youth vote yields some disturbing regional variations. In the South, where 18 to 24-year-olds are more numerous (1.8 million or 53 percent of all Blacks in this age group) and where voter participation drives have been more intense, only 37 percent were registered in 1976 and only 26 percent voted. What this means is that for every youth who voted, three did not vote. What a waste!

Voter participation by Black youth was highest in the North Central states where there are 672,000 eligible 18 to 24-year-olds. Here, 44 percent were registered and 32 percent voted in 1976.

In the Northeast, 37 percent of Black youth were registered and 28 percent went to the polls; and, in the West, where Black youth represent only 9 percent of the national total, registration was 40 percent and turnout was 22 percent. The 823,000 eligible youth voters in these two regions contributed only 214,000 votes in 1976.

The point, we hope, is well made and well taken.

We insist that our welfare mothers, our sharecroppers, our two-job holders, our poor, and our infirm find the time to register and to vote. Isn't it about time we insist that our youth pay their dues? This is the least we can do to help assure our political future.

Public Schools

(Continued from Page 1 Column 3) sive, thoughtful, and balanced in its treatment and interpretation of available material, and in the judgements made and recommendations presented. The Board's response will obviously be affected not only by the Board's commitment to improvement of its integration programs, but by the quality and thrust of the Coalition's report."

Neuman referred to what members of the Board and staff have referred to as "several fundamental points of disagreement involving the data and the interpretations of data" which appear in the first draft.



"We simply must await receipt of the final report to learn in what way the Coalition has considered, accounted for, weighed, and evaluated factual material. We shall expect, however, that the Coalition will wish the Board in its response, not only to recognize what may be accurate, wise, and constructive, but also to be frank in responding to any inadequacies, omissions, or misinterpretations of data which may exist."

"Persons with dreams of upward mobility cannot serve the common people — and when elected to office make opportunistic politicians, not public servants."

State Representative Wally Priestley
Member, Portland Public School Board

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