

OPINION

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No Treatment for Mental Illness

System fails to reach people

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Untreated, mood extremes such as bipolar disorder can lead to violent and sometimes criminal behavior. Knowing this, it's no surprise that over half of the men and women in America's jails and prisons are mentally ill. Instead of necessary treatment, these men and women – most of them of color – get jail time.



survey of the nation's prisons and jails will show that most inmates don't have a high school diploma.

Statistics show mentally ill, wealthy whites are directed to treatment centers or are incarcerated in facilities that provide comprehensive therapy when they are arrested. But most other Americans are sent to jails where they not only do not receive the mental health counseling they need, their needs are ignored altogether.

This lack of treatment makes for a volatile prison situation: Mentally ill prisoners are more likely to get into fights, making jails unsafe environments for inmates and staff alike.

Given the rising prison population and the societal costs to imprison men and women, it's time the justice system treat, not incarcerate mentally ill offenders. These individuals can, with the proper therapy and medication, be rehabilitated. The government just has to be willing to make the investment.

According to a study released by the U.S. Department of Justice, 56-percent of state inmates, 45-percent of federal prisoners and 64-percent of those in local jails are mentally ill. Incarcerated

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women tend to have higher rates of mental illness than men.

While the diseases and symptoms are varied -- depression, delusions, hallucinations and mania – one thing is constant: These people are not getting the help they need before they are arrested or when they are imprisoned.

Drug and alcohol abuse is rampant among the mentally ill, especially those who have been incarcerated. Research shows that many people with mental disorders use drugs to self-medicate, to feel "normal."

Untreated, diseases like Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) can cause young people to become agitated, unfocused and difficult to manage, both at home and in the classroom. Many children afflicted with ADD or ADHD don't get the help they need suffer in school and often drop out. A

population. This country's systems must work together: schools must monitor students to detect early signs of mental health issues, counseling centers and hospitals must do the same.

When a person is arrested for a nonviolent crime, a full mental health assessment must be made and treatment must be available. Catching and addressing these problems in the early stages can help divert many men and women away from the prison system. The U.S. government has a responsibility to make sure all of its citizens, not just the privileged class, has access to adequate mental health care. Such an investment saves society in the long run.

Judge Greg Mathis is national vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL, WHO'S THE MOST STRIDENT OF THEM 'ALL?



Speed the Recovery on Gulf Coast

Some plans to remake city are immoral

BY MARC H. MORIAL

I would be remiss if I said I was satisfied with the recovery from Hurricane Katrina because I am most definitely not. I am not alone. There are countless other organizations releasing reports lamenting the state of the Gulf Coast one year after Katrina ravaged its shores and floods devastated neighborhoods. Thousands remain displaced. Employment is still far below pre-Katrina levels, and many essential services—including public transportation, schools and hospitals—haven't fully recovered. In the first six months after the



storm hit, New Orleans lost nearly 280,000 residents – 64 percent of its population, according to a recent report by the

National Urban League's Legislative Policy Institute. The African Ameri-

can population in the city fell from 36 percent to 21 percent. Roughly 41 percent of Katrina evacuees are still displaced – not back in their own homes. An estimated 278,000 of them are in the workforce, and 23 percent are unemployed. Apartment rents are 39 percent higher than before the storm, and the number of

households in trailers hit 114,000, 28 percent more than six months ago, the report found.

A full year later, public services and infrastructure are still substandard: Less than half the bus and streetcar routes are op-

erational, while only 41 percent of homes have gas service. Less than one-third of public schools and half of the city's major hospitals are open. There's no doubt that this recovery has been mishandled. But why has it been mishandled? It started when some people saw the hurricane as an opportu-

They saw it as an opportunity for a 21st Century Urban Removal Strategy. They said, "These folks are gone. Let's remake the city. Let's make it smaller. Let's take the coffee out of this cream. Let's change the character of New Orleans."

The problem was: It was morally wrong.

A 16-person commission created in Dallas, Texas, began a process that lasted for four months to create a plan that would have shrunk the city's footprint. And it gave cause and comfort to congressional fiddle-faddling. The truth is: the Three Stooges could have been better organized. That's why the recovery lost track. Eventually, a backlash to the notion of shrinking the footprint prompted the mayor and the business community to change course.

Marc H. Morial is president of the National Urban League.

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Drug Courts Impose Solutions for Addiction

Breaking the cycle

BY JUDGE ROBERT SELANDER

When I was Curry County Deputy District Attorney in the early 1970s, I sought long penitentiary sentences for most drug offenders. I believed prison was the ultimate sanction. I was wrong.



Practice has shown that putting people behind bars doesn't affect their drug use. For many offenders jail is a social club where old friends meet. Released addicts simply go back to their other friends, old neighborhoods and addictions.

What works for many offenders is

drug court. Drug court is not an easy out. At the Clackamas County Drug Court, we require offenders to appear on time every week, go into treatment, submit to random drug testing, bring pay stubs to prove they're working, attend at least three 12-step meetings a week, not associate with users and get a GED or high school diploma. Failure to follow any program rule will result in a sanction ranging from writing an essay to going to jail.

One woman in my court had suc-

For many offenders jail is a social club where old friends meet.

cessfully secured a job, regained custody of her kids and had met every other requirement -- but she believed she wasn't capable of passing the GED tests. When I told her time was running out, she finally took the tests -- and passed. Now, as a confident drug court graduate, she is enrolling in college. Her story is anecdotal evidence of what the state Department of Human Services, following legislative direction to invest more money in proven practices, has just accepted as research-supported fact: Drug courts are effective in helping many non-violent offenders quit using drugs, stop committing crimes, get jobs and pay taxes. Drug courts save money by reducing not only crime, but also the need for social services. The

Clackamas County Adult Drug court has seen six women give birth to drug-free babies, saving taxpayers an estimated \$1.5 million. Sheriff's deputies who provide security in my courtroom initially come with an attitude that drug court is a liberal do-gooder idea. They observe me exchange hugs with successful participants or host an ice cream party if everyone remains clean and sober three weeks in a row. But after witnessing the change in people's lives, these officers change their minds. They see that offenders in drug court may risk more sanctions and spend more time in jail than if they were sentenced or on probation.

The best evidence that drug courts work is in the lives that are changed. One participant with multiple felony convictions, while participating in drug court, was working a fast-food job when her boss handed her the keys one evening and asked her to lock up after closing. "She knew my background," she told me, "and yet she gave me the key and promoted me to manager." This drug court graduate has now started a business, enrolled in college and was recently married.

With adequate treatment capacity and court staff, the Oregon drug courts could accommodate many more offenders and provide even more benefit to society. Drug court is a cost-efficient, crime reducing, life-changing program that works.

Judge Robert Selander is a Clackamas County Circuit Judge and president of the Oregon Association of Drug Court Professionals.

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