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## **The Road from Prison to Felon Ghettos**

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We have started down the road to creating felon ghettos that are apt to rival Auschwitz, for their inhumanity and the Indian reservations for their misery. Key benchmarks along this road are loss of voting rights, due process of law, and finally freedom.

The further down this road we travel, the closer we come to a tyranny in which our prisons are comparable to Stalin's gulags or Hitler's concentration camps and ghettos, and where they are not only accepted but become the mainstay of a false sense of well being.

The underlying dynamic of every ghettoization period involves political and economic incentives for those in power to exploit another group. The rhetoric surrounding the process is propaganda and demagoguery used to whip up popular hysteria. This hysteria is followed by progressive steps that lead the exploited group from segregation to isolation.

Today, the target group is the felons. The precedents established to exploit felons are being set with sex offenders. Much of the oratory depends on the pain and suffering of a select few victims for a veil of legitimacy. Lifting this veil exposes the exploitation associated with the demagoguery.

Sex offenders are a threat. However, they are not the greatest threat to our society in general or to children in particular. Traffic accidents are the leading cause of death to children each year; they kill about 2,000 children of which 25 percent are alcohol related.

Using the same logic attributed to the demagoguery associated with sex offenders, we should lock up all 65,000 Florida Citizens arrested for drunk driving each year. Upon their release, tag them with a Global Positioning System to sound the alarm every time they get behind the wheel or come within 2,500 feet of an establishment that sells alcohol.

The key to combating this demagoguery is to understand the objective. Like the Jews in Germany and the Indians in America, prison inmates represent wealth. In Florida, this wealth translates into over 50,000 jobs directly related to their daily supervision. Additionally, there is the prison-industrial complex built around correction officers, law enforcement judiciary as well as the industries that supports and serves them.

Furthermore, most inmates have two or three dependents that rely on the largess of the state for their well being. There are a host of agencies and social service programs that expanded their services over the years to meet the needs of an ever-increasing pool of impoverished felon dependents. By default, these social service agencies and programs have become a part of the prison-industrial complex.

Florida has over 150,000 men, women and children in its jails and prisons. Over 60 percent of the prisoners are a product of a 35 year old synergy between the "War on Drugs" and the "War on Poverty".

This synergy is also behind the cataclysmic growth of the ex-felon class to over 600,000 men and women in Florida. At some point, they will become a political threat to the status quo. The challenge in maintaining the status quo is to marginalize felons without disturbing the facade of a democracy. In a throw back to the days of slavery and reconstruction, the solution has been to deny ex-felons their voting rights.

However, this may not be enough if the ex-felon class continues to grow. Precedents have been set to incarcerate people without due process of law. The superficial justification rests on classifying these people as 'dangerous persons'.

The Department of Justice is using terrorism as part of the 'dangerous person' classification. They classified Jose Padilla as a terrorist and he is being held in indefinite confinement at a military prison without trial. Veronza Bowers, who is one of the last Black Panthers in federal custody, is also classified as a dangerous person. He has been held in prison past his 'mandatory release date' of April 7, 2004.

The State of Florida has also moved towards its own version of indefinite confinement without charges or the safeguards of the courts. The procedure is called civil confinement and involves converting a prison camp into a psychiatric facility. The facility's operation and the sex offenders are then transferred to the Department of Children & Families. Noteworthy, is the fact that the entire process begins only after the felons have served their sentence.

On another front, the federal government has taken steps in post release control measures by isolating felons from a sizeable portion of the community. This was done by prohibiting felons from living in any federally subsidized housing. The private realtor community is exercising a like discrimination by barring felons from property rentals.

Compounding living problems is the state's success in barring felons from an ever increasing number of licensed occupations. At the other end of the employment spectrum, many of the unskilled job opportunities have been preempted by illegal immigrants.

The next phase is the expansion of restricted areas. For sex offenders, the initial precedent set by the state was 1,000 feet from schools, nurseries etc. However, this is being expanded by various municipalities to 2,500 feet. Essentially, this pushes sex offenders into rural areas for work and living arrangements. Our urban areas may well become islands ringed by sex offenders and felons.

It is not a huge jump from exclusionary restrictions to the creation of felon Ghettos. This becomes more likely as the rural community rebels against the encroachment and concentration of sex offenders to their areas.

The ideal location for felon Ghettos becomes under-utilized or abandoned military installations like Cecil Field, Homestead AFB, McDill AFB, Eglin AFB, and Camp Blanding. The ultimate question is will these locations become the final solution as were the camps at Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Theresienstadt and Ravensbruck?