

On Prisons, Artists and Putting Things in their Place

America is dealing with both a financial and social crisis that has reached a point of boiling over into the very streets of our country. Due to funding shortages communities have to close prisons and either release the inmates onto the streets or ship them elsewhere. The criminals and prisons are no longer going to get the funding they need because the American people can't get the funding they need. It costs about \$45,000 every single year to house one criminal. Turn that into a ten year mortgage and you have a house worth half a million bucks. It is an indignity that all of the money went to rent when it could have gone into equity or better yet never left the pocket of the taxpayer where it belongs in the first place.

Take all the hardened criminals, the ones who are violent repeat offenders, and offer them a choice, "Life behind bars or the Prisoners in Pacific Paradise Program." Easy to see which they would choose. They will live able to watch the sun rise and set into the ocean. Swim at the beach, fish, and sit under the shade of a palm tree. Sounds idyllic right? And perhaps the reader is outraged that they aren't suffering for their crimes. Thing is, this island is in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and the only people on it are the criminals. There are no stores to rob, no innocent bystanders to gun down, no children to influence or harm. The places they live have no locks because there is nothing to steal except your neighbor's fishing pole or cooking pot. The inhabitants are taught to forage, fish and farm for their food and they will be so occupied by that, just like our ancestors were that there will be little time to get into trouble. It could descend into a "Lord of the Flies", and become tribal, clannish and there would be turf wars and killings. But how is that different than what goes on now? One costs over hundreds of billions of dollars and creates environments which could hardly be called humane. Perhaps it is time to try something other than suppression and containment as a business plan. Sending criminals to far flung regions to fend for themselves is nothing new and is how Australia started with their first guests arriving in 1788 at Botany

Bay. (Star Trek Episode #22, 2.16.1967 "Space Seed" & 1982 "Wrath of Kahn", SS Botany Bay) But in real life here on earth the first free settlers came to Australia to join the convicts within five years and they turned out to be right nice mates.

Now there are empty prisons that are something skanky and awful. The remedy is to give them over to artists who are poor and will live any place they can so long as they can make their art. Artists have such a passion for making things beautiful that they have the capacity to change entire districts in cities. Soho is an example of how artists in community can change the value of real estate in a place like NYC. Let a few hundred artists move into the prison and do their thing. Murals, sculptures, performance art and all manner of expression will spill forth and attract people to this new live/work/entertain domain.

Before long it will attract people with money like the doctors and lawyers. They will see how trendy and cool it is to live there with all the bars and will slowly but surely force out all of the artists who worked so hard to create a desirable living space. The rents will start to creep up and overnight it will no longer be affordable for artists. Just like Soho in NYC. Before long it will be only the doctors and lawyers who can pay the price and there will be outrage and cries of foul by community activists. But this time it won't matter because now we have them where we can keep an eye on them. "Who had the key last?"