



# THE HIDDEN INTENTIONS OF PRISONS: POWER, CONTROL, AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

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## ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to investigate the intention behind prisons with the belief that the underlying nature of prisons is to maintain the authority of those in power in a capitalistic society whilst upholding the illusion of restoring justice with impartiality and equality. Written with the purpose of contributing new perspectives by connecting different sources, it is separated into three sections: a) dismantling the illusion of impartiality set up by prison systems, b) mobilisation of the general populace in supporting mass incarceration, and c) corruption in police culture. Incorporating evidence from philosophical arguments, news articles, and other papers, it is demonstrated that the ruling class (with the support of the police industry) exploits the general population to support them in marginalising minority communities to maintain their status and prevent mobilisation.

**KEYWORDS:** Capitalistic Society, Illusion, Mobilisation, Corruption, Marginalisation, Upper Class

## INTRODUCTION

When questioned about the nature of prisons, it would be one's natural response to answer things along the lines of, serving justice, protecting the community or 'helping' people. While these things are true, to an extent, one cannot help but ponder over the effectiveness of prisons in doing such things. For a concept of stripping liberty and detaining people does not appear at first glance that it would have such positive connotations associated with it. It does not seem like a concept that would serve justice whilst remaining righteous about it. With the rise of mass incarceration rates and police corruption in the media, there is even more reason to be sceptical. Truly, what is the nature of the prison system? It is my belief the underlying nature of prisons is to serve to maintain the authority of those in power in a capitalistic society whilst upholding the illusion of restoring justice with impartiality and equality.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Lewis (1987) evaluated the humanitarian theory following the belief that the values it preaches pose only as an illusion of endless injustice and cruelty. Lewis establishes the only two valid motives for punishment: to deter and to cure, which he claims to be the self-righteous illusion of the humanitarian theory. In establishing the notion of the theory, the concept of desert is discarded. Lewis argues to remove the idea of the desert is to remove justice. Without the sole connecting link between punishment and justice, a person's humanity is stripped and regarded as an object instead of a human. A tyranny exerted under the guise of the humanitarian theory as merciful is the most dangerous. He maintains that mercy cannot exist without justice, and the humanitarian theory falling into the wrong hands could mean a future of perpetuated injustice (Lewis, 1987). His argument presents a direct parallel to this paper's thesis: that injustice is hidden under the guise of mercy. Chomsky (Bennett et al., "Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media.") delves into how people of

superior status utilise anticommunism as a control mechanism. He proclaims those of high-class position manipulate the general populace by preaching anticommunism as a vague concept that thus can be applied nearly anywhere with their influence. This allows people's imaginations to run free; to imagine the worst situation possible if anticommunism did not prevail. With pressure from the population and the upper class, liberals are then forced to adopt the anti-communist stance to maintain their political power. Anticommunism becomes the dominant religion, and anything opposed to its values is shunned, ostracised and discriminated against. Lewis, C.S. (1987) contends the humanitarian theory falling into the wrong hands would lead to a future of perpetuated injustice. The humanitarian theory can be replaced in this context by the concept of anticommunism, where the ruling class uses its vagueness to target marginalised communities and minorities that may mobilise against them.

William's (2002) report on police corruption across the world ties back to how the upper class uses their influence to further discriminate against minorities. The four core factors of police corruption reinforce the notion: a) Recruitment, training and promotion; b) resources; c) systems of accountability; d) cultural traditions that impede the growth of police standards. The report delves into several case studies of global corruption, but it all circles back to how police corruption stems from a culture of embracing offenders within their ranks. This inadvertently becomes a breeding ground for internal corruption, and the upper class utilises this to their advantage by planting anticommunism into the minds of officers and allowing corruption to be fostered. While those of superior status do not intervene directly, there is no doubt they play a pivotal part in the industry.

## Dismantling Impartiality

To preface my argument, I shall first dismantle the illusion of

impartiality and equality that prison systems have established. According to The United Nations Human Rights Council, "All prisoners shall be treated with the respect due to their inherent dignity and value as human beings" (UN, 1990). However, by delving into the juvenile justice system, this notion can be proved otherwise. Firstly, it must be understood that juvenile justice systems were created due to the belief that youths had less developed moral and cognitive capacities compared to adults (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, 2024). It was also believed that sanctions imposed upon adults were too harsh for youth offenders. Thus, the idea behind youth justice systems was borne, designed to "hold youths who offend accountable for their actions to rehabilitate them rather than punish them with sanctions in the adult criminal justice system (Abrams et al. qt. in Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention). As Abrams stated, the youth justice system centred around rehabilitation as its main principle for dealing with younger offenders. However, in the words of C.S Lewis, this system is also borne from the idea of how well a system deters or cures a person (Lewis, 148). Rehabilitation, in its very essence, is to centralise the idea of curing a person. Not how much a person deserves to be cured, nor whether the curing method is just, but how effective the cure is. Therefore, when the factor of 'what the criminal deserves' is removed, the criminal is removed from the sphere of justice entirely. As C.S Lewis stated, "Instead of a person, a subject of rights, we now have a mere object, a patient, a 'case'" (Lewis 148), effectively terminating humanity from a person in treatment and perception.

If the prison system were as impartial as they say they are, then the need for a more lenient justice system dedicated to youths would be removed. "There shall be no discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status" (UN, 1990). There should not be a reason why adults and youths are tried in entirely different systems when its principle promises equality, impartiality and fair judgment. It claims to be free from discrimination, yet there are differences in consequences between the two systems due to their age. It pushes for equal treatment yet operates on the principle that youths deserve a second chance more than adults. A person with limited cognitive functions over eighteen would not be tried in a juvenile court despite the fact its creation is borne from the idea of limited cognitive ability. Some may argue that adults who commit crimes are fully aware of the extent of the consequences pertaining to their actions as opposed to youths. However, do courts not exist to determine the propriety of one's punishment? If the promise of impartiality holds, courts would consider the factors to determine an offender's punishment, including cognitive ability, intention etc. such that there would be no need for a system that inherently assumes more lenient sentences for offenders due to their age.

### Exploitation of the General Population

As established earlier, the underlying nature of prisons serves to maintain the authority of the upper class in a capitalistic society. Chomsky states that communism actively threatens the root of class position and superior status. The upper class seek to maintain the status quo, whilst those with communist ideals

seek reformation and a classless society. To retain their position, those above in the hierarchy label communism as a vague but threatening prospect. They exploit the uncertainty that comes with the vagueness of communism, utilising the ideology as a common threat narrative that directs the populace to mobilise against an enemy; an enemy whom anyone or anything can be labelled as by the upper class due to the limited understanding of communism people have. The flexibility of this label enables those in power to selectively demonise certain communities, including marginalised groups, Indigenous radicals and groups that support communist ideals, labelling them as the common enemy while mobilising the population against demonised communities. Therefore Liberals, whose ideologies align with communism, face accusations of being pro-communist and experience a detrimental loss in political power. This causes them to behave like reactionaries, withdrawing support to social democrats whom they view as insufficiently harsh on left-wing, radical, marginalised groups to minimise accusations against their anti-communist stance (Bennett et al., "Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media.") In turn, this expands the ability of the upper class to exploit the general population to support them in incarcerating masses of marginalised communities. "It is well-established that prisons around the world "hold a disproportionately large number of people from disadvantaged and ethnic, racial, and other minority communities" (Clegg et al., 2024) With minimal backlash from the major population, the upper class keeps those opposed to their ideals incarcerated, preventing the mobilisation of these communities and maintaining the status quo.

### Police Corruption

The relation becomes even more apparent when asked, who are the ones enforcing the system? The culture of police corruption plays a vital role in suppressing marginalised communities. Hubert William categorises police corruption into four core factors: recruitment, training and promotion; resources; systems of accountability; and cultural traditions preventing the development of professional police standards. However, he states that the root of corruption stems from a mentality of loyalty between the officers. If there were ever trouble or commotion, it would only be natural to contact the law enforcers for assistance. The police do not have this privilege because they are the enforcers of the law. They are inextricably connected in an environment that demands their safety in exchange for someone else's. It is this that leads policemen to swear an unconscious pledge of allegiance towards their fellow officers, to give their utmost loyalty and trust even when a fellow officer becomes an offender. This inevitably fosters a culture of corruption when crimes within the police industry are not answered for (Williams 85-86).

On July 6, 2024, 36-year-old black woman Sonya Massey was shot in the head by the white deputy of the Sangamon County Sheriff's Office in Springfield, Illinois, United States (Jiménez, 2024). Sean Grayson claims to have fired at her because he felt 'threatened' by her holding a pan of hot water despite a significant physical mismatch. Prosecutors also stated that the distance between the two was sufficient for relative cover, such that it would not be a significant threat. The autopsy confirms

Sonya Massey died from a gunshot wound to the head, as the attorney calls the shooting senseless (NewsBank, 2024). Sean Grayson was charged with first-degree murder. What is more interesting is the fact that Sean Grayson, despite rising to the ranks of deputy sheriff, has a history of past misconduct and offences that everyone seemed to turn a blind eye towards. According to CNN news, he was reportedly dishonourably discharged from the military due to a “misconduct” or “serious offence” (Holly et al., 2024). While the files provided did not mention the reason for discharge, it is peculiar that he would be in a sheriff’s department, serving as deputy nonetheless, despite this apparent serious misconduct. Records also show Grayson was charged with “two DUI misdemeanour offences in Illinois’ Macoupin County – one in 2015 and the other in 2016.” Both times he pleaded guilty. At his previous job as an Auburn police officer, he was even reported to have disobeyed direct orders from a superior and struck a deer in consequence. He was recommended ‘high-stress decision-making classes’ by an agency. Despite the serious misconduct and offences, he was still able to rise to the role of deputy sheriff, directly correlating to William’s core factors of corruption: Recruitment and promotion. The department could have hired him despite the full knowledge of his past, or entirely neglected to run a thorough background check before hiring Sean Grayson. Massey’s family was not even aware it was a fellow police officer who shot Sonya Massey until 24 hours after the murder. (Spearie, 2024). All this goes to show the lack of accountability due to culture, recruitment flaws and overall corruption in the police industry.

## CONCLUSION

The actions of the ruling class raise questions of what our society is truly made of. They cast an illusion of justice and mercy on the general populace to hide the oppression and marginalisation of minor communities. They preach the notion that being in prison is to be subjugated and to have liberty stripped away entirely. They paint the picture of freedom when we are in fact, working for the profit of the upper class in a capitalistic regime. But when we begin to ask ourselves the question of what true liberty means other than what people in power have defined as the status quo, we also begin to discover the truth beneath the mask. How they are stripping humanity and liberty from people, their basic rights due to the integrity of being a human being under the guise of mercy. How in police culture, the law enforcers we expect to uphold and represent the law have corruption rooted deep inside of it. How the upper class makes an enemy of communism and manipulates the population to collectively mobilise against already marginalised communities instead of them. They influence the general populace to think that communism and minorities are the common enemy when it should be them. The ones behind the scenes, pulling unethical strings all for the sake of remaining in power.

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