

## PRISON LIFE

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To the Community

My name is Ramiah Whiteside and when I was asked to write about what prison life is like on any given day, my initial Reaction was “crap-eating-grin” like the cat that has the helpless mouse hidden away for its enjoyment and entertainment later on as no one and everyone looks on.

What is it Like inside America's prisons? That is a loaded query. There are many sides to America's prisons; the social side, the political side, the economical side, the spiritual side, the emotional & mental side and the physical side, among the sides that everyone can see or fathom. There are other sides to America's prisons that people do well to ignore ... on purpose. So, which side do you wish to hear or read about?

My experiences within America's prison system are fairly common. Life in America's penal system is reflective of life in America itself. The same things that go on in "free" American society today are the same kinds of things that go on within the bowels and crevices of America's prison system. A snap-shot of America proper is its prison system. Take away the barbed and razor-wire fences and the guard towers and the permanent mean-mugs and there is not much left for one to be able to differentiate between America proper and America's prisons. The two are interchangeable. They are connected on so many levels that the lines often get blurred or disappear altogether.

If society in America is corrupt, so too are its prisons. If parts of society in America are immoral, debased, clueless or indifferently-ignorant, so too are its prisons.

America's prisons enable America to be "" to the world and that is why so many people have the some crap-eating-grin on their faces when asked about America's prison system. It is like people are incredulously asking, 'Are you serious?' I have been in the Wisconsin prison system for over 20+ years all together, including over 19 years straight. Unlike some of the East Coast, West Coast or Southern prisons, Wisconsin prisons are more emotionally, mentally and spiritually taxing on a daily basis. The physical side is not as prevalent. Sure, fights and other physical altercations do occur, but it is not the norm as much as it is in other prison systems. Why? This is due to the fact that Wisconsin prisons are like "honor plantations" if you will, where the slaves or 'inmates' police themselves and oversee each other.

The American prison system is about money and the Wisconsin prison system' echoes that sentiment. The difference with the Wisconsin prison system is the amount of money spent to pacify the prisoner population to deter it from bucking the system and also why the physical element is less of a factor. The end result is, less fights, less stabbings, less riots, less killings and less prisoner-to-staff altercations. However, there are more suicides. This speaks for itself. .

Since the Wisconsin inmate cannot or will not fight each other or “them”, there is a point where the will to fight at all (live) completely dissipates. Hopelessness breeds death. I do not advocate violence in any form, but I do advocate a strong stance and a protection of what is right or inherently righteous. Life within America's prisons is hell, Wisconsin included and therefore I am utterly and completely against such a pained and strained fashion of life. It is not ethically or morally right to "punish" people as

America punishes its very own citizens. Prisoners are still American citizens, but it is far easier to wrong them under the label of "inmate."

During the years I have been incarcerated I have witnessed the degradation of human beings on an unthinkable scale, but I have also witnessed the resiliency of the human spirit. Just like the Irish did, or the slaves, or the Natives, or the Jews, or the Japanese, we (prisoners) survive, perhaps not all of us, physically or emotionally, but enough of us to tell the story and enough of us to inspire those after us. Maybe I am an "old soul" because I still *believe in the greater* good of people despite the unfairness, the injustice, the racism and the cruelty of this life the American prison system forces upon me. The ideals, beliefs and concepts that helped build this country are the only true defenses to the failures of this country. I love America though she seems to hate me. Is "hate" too strong a term?

What else could it be called when a person is forced to **live** in a storage closet or dog kennel for years and years away from their families, away from love and compassion and away from any humanity?

America cleanses itself by purging its "wrongdoers from its society, If America is hard and tough on crime then it holds in-tact its glorious and illustrious reputation and image. The harder America is on its delinquents, the cleaner its perception to the world is or becomes. However, cats like me know the deal, thus, the crap-eating-grin again. The world community is beginning to awaken more and more as well and it is pointing out the fact that the Emperor has no clothes on.

Why the grin? because I know that all of the political rhetoric, all of the puritanical hypocrisy and all of the half-hearted efforts of "rehabilitation" will change nothing and the public is non-the-wiser. Life within America's prisons reflect life in America: we do what we gotta do to get by. We clique up, mob up and knuckle up to survive. I reiterate, the lines get blurry.

How is life in America's prisons?

How is life in America's inner-cities?

Man, we ain't happy here. We're busted and disgusted, on lockdown and wanna be, but can't be trusted. We want better things in life, but have to settle for whatever we can get or take. When people read about or hear about the plight of the Jews, Gypsies and others during World War II, their conscience and their hearts are stirred with compassion. Take similar conditions within America's prison system and no one blinks because Inmates deserve what they get because of what they did. People often say, "Don't like it, well don't go to prison." This is well good Until they end up in the joint and they wish they had one.

Life inside America's prison system is barbaric. It's supposed to be a civilized society...., there goes that crap-eating-grin again. In this New Age, one would think we could do better, but that is the price one pays for thinking outside the box.

Life inside America's prison system is hell, an unnecessary hell.  
Thank you for your time.

