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English Composition Research Paper

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Choose Rehabilitation Over Punishment

How would you feel if you were face to face with a murderer who had multiple knives hanging behind him? Obviously here in America that sounds insane. Why would we allow a prisoner who is in jail for murder be around knives, let alone hold a knife. But in Norway that's not out of the ordinary. They focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment. They treat their prisoners almost as if they were still living in the outside world. And I get it, you're probably thinking "well they chose that life behind bars, being treated the way they do when they decided to break the law". But maybe that's one of our main problems here in America. Why are we quick to change our minds about how we treat humans just because they did a wrong, no matter the extreme. I'm not saying we need to treat our prisoners like they're on vacation. To me being taken away from your family and society is enough punishment. The American prison system should follow Norway's prison model because it will reduce the recidivism rate, reduce the amount of crime throughout the country, and create a safer environment for the prisoners themselves, the guards and the society they walk into when and if they eventually get out of prison.

In the documentary "Where To Invade Next" Michael Moore's first sentence is very powerful when talking about invading Norway. He says "welcome to the Norwegian prison

system, based on the principle of rehabilitation, not revenge”. This speaks a lot because our society alone is mainly about revenge. There was a man in this documentary, Trond Blattmann, whose son was murdered. Michael Moore asked this man if he wanted to go and kill the man that murdered his son. Blattman said he would not want to kill the man that killed his son, even if he had the chance. “I don’t want to step down on the ladder and say I had the same right as you thought you had to kill” (Blattman). This to me completely relates to my main point. So because these people in our prison systems did a wrong that gives us a right to go against what we as a country stand for and treat them inhumanely? We need to think about the bigger picture.

“Anthony C. Graves endured 18 years in solitary confinement while awaiting execution for murders he was later exonerated of committing” (CQ press). Graves said “I would watch guys come to prison totally sane and in three years they don’t live in the real world anymore”. Just think about that for a minute. How is that in any way safe or okay? People should come to prison and be rehabilitated so that when they leave they don’t end up back in jail. Not be punished so much that they don’t even live in the real world anymore when they leave. So what can we do to make people leave prison better than they were when they came in?

One way could be changing who we put into our prisons and what we actually do to our prisoners. Did you know we’ve been throwing mentally ill people in prisons just because we don’t have anywhere else to put them. “While some committed violent crimes and remain a threat to themselves and others, many are incarcerated for minor offenses simply because there is nowhere else to put them” (CQ press). So instead of us helping these people who desperately need their help we’re throwing them into jail and putting them into solitary confinement for behaviors they can’t even control. And how is that safe for anybody? It’s definitely not safe for

that mentally ill inmate themselves because solitary confinement is only enhancing their illness and making it worse. But it also only creates an unsafe environment for the prisoners around them. And eventually that would create an unsafe society if that inmate ever even makes it back into the real world. We need to get these people the help they need for starters. The ones with minor offenses should definitely not just be thrown into prison because we don't have anywhere else to put them. But we also need to get the mentally ill prisoners with the larger offenses the help they need.

One case involving a mentally ill patient being thrown into solitary confinement is Kevin DeMott, who was diagnosed with bipolar disorder when he was only 11 years old. CQ press says Kevin was shackled in his cell with a helmet on his head to protect him against his head banging against the wall. Kevin's mother said "the prison kept him in solitary confinement for four months to punish him for behaviors stemming from his bipolar disorder and did not treat his illness".

"Over the past forty years, American prisons have increasingly relied on a brutal method of confinement that inflicts severe suffering on prisoners" (The Psychology of Cruelty). They continued on to say "Walking past these inmates, one can observe babbling, shrieking, and the banging of prisoners' bodies against the walls of their cells. There is no dispute that this method of confinement has a terrible effect on prisoners' well-being, and yet because it inflicts mental harm, rather than physical harm, courts have largely turned a blind eye".

So why aren't we paying more attention to our prison systems? Why are our courts and us citizens turning a blind eye to our prison systems when to some extent we all know we could be doing better. We need to find a happy medium. Criminals shouldn't be treated like they're on

vacation but they should all be treated as humans and get the help they truly need. If we open our eyes and choose to follow Norway's prison systems not only will we be making our prisoners safer but we will be improving our society as a whole. I think we should all look at it as if it was our parent, grandparent, child, friend in prison being treated this way. Would we want them to be treated like they were animals or would we want them to be treated like the humans they are?

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