

Justice Can Restore True Community

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Three years ago, I joined the Coalition to Dismantle the New Jim Crow in the state of Delaware.

My thinking was the criminal justice system is vulnerable to being dominated by accusation, the primary tool with which the angelic world has dominated humankind, so that would be the best place to focus on bringing change and healing.

I have since learned a vast amount from interactions with prisoners, law enforcement and corrections, as well as many of Delaware's highest

officials, that has confirmed my original hypothesis.

Unificationists, more than anyone, understand that everyone is a child of God, and God cannot be happy until all are restored to their original position. We cannot simply stand by unmoved while God's children are suffering, unaware of their true identity as divine beings. We have to search out the root causes of this vast suffering that has come through the criminal justice system, and heal the underlying wounds through truth and love.



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Our present criminal justice system

The criminal justice system in America has expanded its reach to the point no one is immune to its presence in his or her life. Having reached a situation where massive incarceration rates have negative consequences on a state's budget, many states have begun to incorporate reforms in response to soaring U.S. statistics.

While this has usually led to a slight, sometimes even large, reduction in incarceration rates, it has left in place supervision over millions of lives by the criminal justice system, as well as millions of people deeply in debt to the state.

These developments have disproportionately affected the African-American community, and America's poor, both white and black.

The African-American community is dealing with issues within the criminal justice system that derive from a complex history of loss of every basic human right: identity, freedom, the right to protect one's own family, even self-determination. Resolving some of the disparities in policing, sentencing, and in ascribing guilt or innocence is only a step towards justice.

The bigger issues cannot be disentangled from the daily lives of African-Americans without being addressed at the deepest levels. And the white community cannot really do more than offer opportunities to allow for healing. The healing must take place from within the abused community, as reclaiming its right to power is a huge step that must occur through the process.

With that realization, we see that healing is already taking place, as African-Americans have demonstrated their undisputed ability to hold positions of power in this country. On top of that, they are demonstrating a heart of overcoming resentment in reaching out to the white community. The mutual respect and even affection in countless relationships are indisputable.

However, the legal system, which in many urban areas in America focuses overwhelmingly on the African-American population, serves by its very nature to separate and hence try to destroy the black community. White privilege is so deeply ingrained it has been invisible to most white people. It is just assumed, for example, that following the expected norms within a company will result in promotion and advancement, and whites do not see that as privilege. But black people have not been part of that automatic advancement. Even today, the black person who advances in his or her career is too often seen as an exception to the norm, one who has overcome a disadvantage.

Advancing in the career world often is accompanied by leaving behind one's origins in community. Joining the world of privilege has consequences far deeper than simply economic benefit, because it generally requires a person to adopt white values, and see themselves as part of the white community. Giving up one's own heritage is accompanied by all sorts of unacknowledged wounds, a slicing away of

much of the depth within the self.

In the same way, living as though the natural world is simply a source of economic wealth has separated those with European ancestry from humanity's own deep identification as part of nature. Had the original settlers embraced the native peoples when occupying this land, this self-identity could have been preserved and even revered.

The land of opportunity, that promises government of, by and for the people, has abandoned a large part of the people. Until African-Americans occupy enough positions of power within the criminal justice system as representatives of the black race, so as to transform the system itself in the direction of community values, reformation that accomplishes real healing will be left to those who see the need. And that entails a clear expression of the deepest values from the ancestral heritage, lost in the forced removal from the homeland. It will take creative analysis and application of these values to transport them from Africa of hundreds of years ago to America of the 21st century, but America cannot fulfill its destiny without this depth of contribution.

Traditional values must be meshed with Western science, creating a synthesis able to absorb today's technology without destroying yesterday's deep inner self. They must be able to offer help to any people trapped in today's shallowness and materialistic value system that leaves us vulnerable to losing the deeper values of this country itself. And reclaiming historical depths of character is probably the only way to bring us out of today's crises, which leaves us to look within to rediscover ourselves.

The way a country conducts its justice system has a great deal to say about its values, and we are failing on that very point: *how to handle accusation without losing love.*

Accusation has taken over this country, and we need to look at each other without contempt again, to respect each other and accept that we cannot know another's thoughts and motivations enough to simply condemn them. We cannot just follow killing with state-sanctioned killing via the death penalty and expect people to learn it is wrong to kill. We cannot impose life sentences without self-examination to determine if we are not already sentencing people to lives of injustice every day.

Our own mindset strongly influences what we see in life. One perspective on justice is that all people need to be shaped by society, pushed towards a civilized life and behavior by those in positions of authority, even by force if necessary. In fact, many parents believe in the adage of "spare the rod and spoil the child." The other perspective comes from those who tend to trust people's hearts and ability to discern truth within themselves, trusting in the original innocence within each person. These people believe that good parenting draws out this original goodness through love and patience without need for physical punishment.

Where does wisdom lie? Without doubt, it lies in the capacity to maintain both perspectives at once, to fully acknowledge the truth of each, and to make decisions for the welfare and growth of society that manifest that wisdom.



However, the first mindset alone underlies our criminal justice system, placing decision-making authority in the hands of those who meet the qualifications of a certificate of study and experience within the system, without thought of the wisdom that would come from the harmonization of worldviews. Too often we find our justice system designed by those with a sharply honed intellect, but little perspective on how policies and laws affect real lives, especially as lived among the poor and disenfranchised. Thus we see a massively bloated prison population regarded with little empathy by those who filled the prisons

and who benefitted financially from the huge, overarching criminal justice endeavor.

There is no justice without heart. With heart, an offender can accept his or her misdeeds as in need of correction. However, the order of the day is punitive retribution, along with the discarding of a person for the good of society. Motivation is of little consequence, in the face of the desire for career advancement of the prosecutor, or even simply prosecutors' lack of recognition that the thoughts, motivations and internal state of the accused have anything to do with them. In a society which narrows down the focus of legal education to procedures and charges within an adversarial system, establishing guilt replaces all other considerations. Actual guilt is not even considered to be the concern of the prosecutor, whose job is to establish and present a case.

The system shows up today as a shadow of its intended self, overrun with decisions, objections and

minutely defined laws controlling behavior. This travesty of a justice system is creating a population of the forgotten and discarded, full of anger and hopelessness.

There is no way to make deep enough changes from within the system to reestablish justice. Changing minds and hearts is a generational quest. Therefore a new system must be grown from a seed, unnoticed until it can replace what exists, providing a path that leads toward inner liberation and self-discovery, and that brings recognition of our unity as a people beyond racism, sexism and anything that divides.

Restorative justice and the path of peacemaking

Peacemaking can occur when people involved in a dispute seek community help and involvement to settle the dispute on a much deeper level than that found within an adversarial, punitive approach.

If a crime has been committed, or some action occurs that leaves two or more people in conflict, then instead of taking this into the court system as a “crime against the dignity and peace of the state,” it can be taken to a peacemaking board, consisting of individuals trained in the principles and practices of restorative justice. Rather than focusing on establishing guilt, the proceedings focus on bringing to light the underlying causes and motivations behind the actual events. If both offender and victim can be helped to hear each other out, sharing their action processes and thoughts within the context of what has brought them to this point in their lives, then often the mutual understanding this brings helps them to see the conflict in a very different light.

Generally, the process should occur in an environment of openness to family and anyone affected by the precipitating actions. Instead of the action being seen primarily as a crime, it is seen as a disruption to the harmony of the community, and the resolution then is the reestablishment of harmony. On the basis of a deeper understanding of themselves and the conflict, the offender and victim can be enabled to find restorative actions that may remedy the situation. In peacemaking, restoration takes place on the basis of mutual understanding, and the original relationship can be restored. Thus the involvement of the wider family and community is seen as good, whereas in court they are seen as irrelevant except insofar as they can testify to the facts of the case.

The role of peacemakers is most essential. The main qualification for a peacemaker is to have wisdom. However, this wisdom must be that of the community. Not everyone can be trained as a peacemaker, only those who already have the basic qualifications in restoring relationships and seeing the good in those who have transgressed.

The peacemaker has work to do before the parties can be constructively brought together. They have to come prepared to seek solutions and listen to each other, and this may require much investment of heart and understanding. What elders bring to the peacemaking process is the knowledge of the spiritual values of the tribe or community. What young people bring to the process is the wisdom bought through suffering in negotiating a course through today’s world.

Circles of peace are one very powerful way by which both African-Americans and Native Americans are starting to influence our criminal justice system. We need to seek forgiveness from the people we formerly enslaved, while the biggest circle of peace is the circle in time which brings us back to seek solutions from Native American traditions, destroyed in our history of violence, as the means of bringing healing today.

Only after we have embraced everything we lost in the past will we start to see the real emergence of the community of God’s children on earth, and such truth and beauty is within sight in this very era of history.

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