

Prison riot in South Carolina kills seven, injures 17; how does what happened in South Carolina affect you?

By Larry Lawton

It is a big misconception that what goes on in prison stays in prison. In fact, it is the opposite. What goes on in prison comes to you and your community.

Ninety-five percent of all inmates will be released back into society and, according to the Prison Policy Initiative, there are almost 2.3 million people in 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 1,852 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, and 80 Indian Country jails, as well as in military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories.

How a person who was incarcerated in any of the above places adjusts back into your community will directly affect you and your neighbors. Yes, ex-cons are in your community.

I ask people all the time, do you want a person who has energy, hope, dreams and feels love, or do you want a person with little energy, no hope, desperate and heartless? Everybody wants the guy with hope and dreams. The other guy is a serious problem.

To get the guy who feels love you have to look at what he went through in a place that simply put, is not humane.

As a man who was incarcerated in multiple maximum-security facilities, I know what goes on in prisons and it is not pretty. I was strapped down naked, beaten and peed on by guards in Edgefield South Carolina for writing about the deaths of fellow inmates.

Seeing inmates stabbed and friends die, being stabbed and stabbing others, seeing

young men raped and turned out as prostitutes for other inmates will never leave me.

What saved me was staying connected with family and friends on the outside, being a paralegal and helping other inmates, becoming a gang mediator, helping new inmates adjust to a negative environment and fighting the broken prison system.

I don't believe prisoners should be coddled and pampered, but rehabilitation should be the norm, not the exception. Not only are we losing young people, we are also putting dangerous people back in our communities.

It is not as simple as, if a person does a crime, lock 'em up. Yes, we need to hold people accountable, but we also need to treat people humanely and help them change. Yes change. People do change.

The riot in South Carolina is deeper than a shortage of guards, inmate territory, drugs, etc. It is the little things that build up to a riot. Not giving inmates toilet paper, shutting off the toilet, not feeding inmates and beating inmates are just a few of the things that will lead to unrest and riots.

Although we are talking about prisons, this also goes for jails. Sheriffs who run the jail need to be compassionate and caring. The abuses going on in jails is a growing problem. The Sheriff in Alabama who used inmate food money to buy a summer home comes to mind immediately.

I know of a jail that doesn't give woman sanitary pads when she is on her time of the month. Think about that, if you have a daughter, like I do, it has to make you think, what is wrong with the people

working there. What kind of person would let a woman bleed on her underwear, or on herself and not help her. How do they go home and sleep at night? I know I couldn't. It boggles the mind and will eventually lead to unrest.

Taking away hope, sanitary products and basic human needs like communications will eventually drive a person crazy, which doesn't help the person, or the community he or she will be released to.

As a man who works with young people on a daily basis, helps connect the police with the community and works with courts, I can say with certainty, that ignoring prison issues will hurt communities for decades to come.

Larry Lawton is co-author of "Gangster Redemption" with Peter Golenbock, a "New York Times" best-selling author. The book is about Lawton's life and what really goes on in prison. After being released, Lawton developed what became the top educational program in the country designed to help young people stay on the right path in life. In August of 2013, Lawton was the first ex-con in the United States to be sworn-in as an Honorary Police Officer, and in November 2013 he was the first ex-con recognized on the Floor of the United States Congress for his work with helping young people and law-enforcement agencies. Lawton is a guest analyst for ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, CNN and MSNBC. He can be reached at (844) 922-4800 or at Larry@Lawton911.com.

