

Terminology and Labeling of Prisoners and Prison

by: Peter / Think Tank # 2

Prisoner: A person held in custody, captivity, or a condition of forcible restraint, esp. while on trial or serving a prison sentence. One deprived of expression or action.

This in my humble opinion accurately describes the status of an incarcerated person. Those of us who are incarcerated or have been are constantly defined by the policy makers who wish to portray us in a extremely negative way. The only ones who don't have a say in the matter of how we are defined is us, which goes back to the above definition (one deprived of expression or action).

Not all prisoners see themselves in the same light. We all define ourselves differently regarding our status of incarceration. I'm going to list some of the ways we define ourselves and the terminology used behind prison walls.

One popular term is convict. According to the American Heritage College Dictionary convict is defined as a person found or declared guilty of an offense or crime. A person serving a sentence of imprisonment. But this is different from how we as prisoners define the term. Convict according to prisoners is defined as a veteran prisoner who knows all the "in's and out's" of prison life and is regarded as some one to be respected and feared due to past actions while incarcerated. As ~~is~~ opposed to inmate (someone who is just locked up). Unfortunately, the sad fact is that most prisoners who refer to themselves as convicts are the ones who proudly display their underdevelopment; socially, emotionally, intellectually, and educationally.

Another term I wish to draw attention to is Correctional facility. According to the American Heritage College Dictionary corrections is defined as the treatment of offenders through a system of penal incarceration, rehabilitation, probation, and parole or the administrative system by which these are effectuated. The truth is that prison rarely lives up to this definition. The policy makers want the public to believe that they are correcting our past negative behaviours, but most prisons only reinforce and promote negative behaviour. So why call prisons correctional facilities? Because they want you to believe that despite their best efforts prisoners can't be restored, redeemed, and rehabilitated, and therefore deserve the inhumane treatment heaped upon us.

Now let's define prison. According to the American Heritage College Dictionary prison is defined as a place for the confinement of persons in lawful detention, esp. persons convicted of a crime. A place or condition of confinement or forcible restraint. This is the most suitable definition for prisons; this place is not a correctional facility. Within the confines of prisons some prisoners refer to cells as their "home" or "house" or "my" cell. Let's define cell. According to the Oxford New Desk dictionary a cell is defined as a small room, esp. in a prison or monastery. A small compartment. No prisoner owns a cell, a cell is not where we live. We are forcibly confined here and are assigned cells, we don't willingly live here (refer to definition of prisoner).

Allow me to share some more unusual terminology used in prison. A common term used here is "chow". We are constantly told to "get ready for chow" by guards. Well, the technical term is offender dining room, and for the record, animals eat chow, people eat food. This is another way to dehumanize us, in my opinion. Another term is Orange Crush, this is the name used for the

tactical team whose job is to intimidate, assault, and forcibly respond to prisoners. The name orange crush is a intimidation tactic. This should sound strange, why would prisons need an "assault team" if we're supposed to be rehabilitated? Think about it! One more term to address. Correctional Officer. In all honesty, so-called correctional officers are just guards. Not one guard in my 18 years of incarceration has attempted to correct any thing. Don't get me wrong, some guards are good people and at times seem sympathetic toward our plight, but corrective?, no! Just another title to fool the public.

I hope that this brief explanation helps you to better understand terms and labels in prison. This is by no way exhaustive but I hope that you would look into the motives and reasons as to why terminology in ~~pr~~ prison is so important, even if THEY don't want you to think so. Peace!

Respectfully Submitted

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