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Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, **except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted**, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

13th Amendment to the United States Constitution

After watching “13th” on Netflix, a documentary that shows how the 13th amendment of the United States has become a loophole to allow for the continuation of slavery, I wrote to the Corrections Corporation of America, a company that has largely taken advantage of this clause for profit. My letter to them was the following:

Dear Corrections Corporations of America,

Since your founding in 1983, the prison population of the United States has risen by more than 500 percent, making America the world’s leading jailer. We now hold 25% of the world’s total prison population, a statistic that has given you 2 billion dollars in revenue and 189 million in net income this past year, a profit of 2 thousand dollars per prisoner in your care. But at what cost?

The government entrusted you to build and manage rehabilitation facilities to help the

citizens in your care and prevent future crimes. Yet, your business model gives you an incentive to increase the number of prisoners, their sentence lengths, and the recidivism rates in this country, and cut operational costs at the expense of human rights abuses, understaffing, violence, riots, escapes, and preventable deaths. Highly vulnerable people are depending on you to treat them justly as their isolation from the general public and media can make their voices obsolete. Instead, you further abuse and monetize the substantial power inequality of inmates by treating them as captive labor and exploiting the prison's monopoly on services you provide for them. On top of that, you have used the law as an instrument to perpetrate injustice by spending millions on influencing legislation to upkeep tough-on-crime and anti-immigrant policies in order to drive your expansion. All of these practices have led America to have a 76.6% recidivism rate within five years of release, which translates to further costs to taxpayers, crime, and a disheartening statistical faith for prisoners that could easily be mitigated. Perhaps these factors make sense to you in the context of the millions of dollars of compensation you extract from the 90,000 human souls entrusted to you, yet no moral individual could condone such an action.

On a fundamental level, your detainment facilities are a social administration framework that provide security to the general public through the isolation of people that have breached their duties as citizens. However, to concede that your prison systems enforce moral justice simply by removing individuals which the law deems criminal from society is far-fetched as this marks only the beginning of your responsibility. Equal weight must be attributed to the process of their rehabilitation and reintegration into society, as releasing them unchanged doesn't address the underlying problems and only benefits your end goal of profitability.

As described in the Path of Law by Oliver Wendell Holmes, people are incentivized to

abide by the law to avoid the consequences of punishment regardless of their moral compass. In other words, the legal standing of any individual has little indication of their moral standing, certainly not enough to label them as evil and justify their cruel treatment during and after incarceration. In fact, in the systematic mistreatment that you show to those in your prisons, you have built a system that only serves to prevent those who seek reintegration from doing so. The violence experienced by inmates within your prison walls leave people even more broken and betrayed than they were before, restricting them from growing beyond the limitations that landed them there. As Martin Luther King notes in his letter to Birmingham, many of the criminal acts' individuals pursue are not simply due to a bad moral compass but stem from a systematic inability to present their issues to society. Their injustices "like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light" must "be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured." When treated like criminals without access to the aforementioned human conscience, individuals exposed to injustices will resort to any measure in order to revolt. By that point, most of them are psychologically broken individuals that have

been failed by our system's promises of giving every individual the equal opportunity to achieve a self-fulfilling life. They are unable to negotiate for just conditions and turn to other methods to confront their issues. In response, you, as the oppressor, have become insensitive to the problems of the masses and are failing to express concern for the conditions that instigated the demonstrations of inmate actions.

Once incarcerated, or even following release, any voice an individual might have had is

completely diminished, adding to their neglect through isolation from society. It is clear then, that incarceration without efforts for reintegration does solve the legal issue but does little to give voice to those who need it most, only serving to further encourage them to confront their issues as they always have, knowing no better. In complicating the issue, from which you in turn benefit monetarily, it is difficult to assign ethical conduct to your operations. Furthermore, Martin Luther King guidelines defined this criterion by expressing that “any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust”. Your prison system is distorting the souls of those you house and imposing on them a sense of inferiority as humans, turning your business model into an unjust one. Additionally, your abuse of power, in the form of bribery, to influence laws against the minorities residing in your prison who don’t have the same power of influence, is just as unfair and despicable. In fact, as outline in the Path of Law, you must allow the law to be an external deposit of morality and update based on the general values of greatest number of people. As a corporation, your responsibility lies in demonstrating leadership in business, not solely in increasing your bottom line. Consequently, your responsibility not only lies with your shareholders, but with the individuals entrusted with you by the legal system as well.

In chasing ever increasing profit margins, you seem to forget that, according to Gandhi, “no man [or corporation] has the moral right to use any material or moral wealth accumulated only through the help or co-operation of other members of society mainly for personal advantage.” As a result, your inmates are exploited through your monopsony of forced labor, and much like the farmers that prompted Gandhi to stand for moral values, work for little to nothing. This makes them have to “hustle” to afford basic hygiene supplies from the commissary, products you sell to

them for even more profit. What's worse is that you facilitate a system where companies can take full advantage of their low waged labor yet allow these same corporations to claim them unemployable and a threat to corporate culture once they are released and entitled to minimum wage. This creates a destructive system in which prices for labor are driven down by competition, creating inadequate compensation structures outside and inside your prison. As proposed by both Gandhi and Ruskin, people should be paid an equal and fixed amount for the work they are providing, as this creates opportunity for merit-based employment and market efficiency.

Finally, it is clear that any attempts you might have at reintegration systems during incarceration fall short of any imaginable goal. Inflicting scare tactics that put criminals to shame in order to "teach them a lesson", falsely promotes the idea that violence and abuse are the solutions to conflict. In succumbing to punishment as the way of achieving order, you handicap yourself in the proper treatment that befits reintegration. As emphasized by John Ruskin, you should not regard your prisoners for where they are, but for who they are as people, what they've endured, and how you want them to be. Once you accept your responsibility in solving the core issues that lead to criminal behavior, you can create a peaceful environment for inmates where you can recognize their innate human ability to be morally good, and as Gandhi notes, realize their potential for spiritual growth. More importantly, such a system would not come at a cost of your legal duty to detain, as Ruskin mentions that no matter the firmness "the officer who has the most direct personal relations with his men, the most care for their interests, and the most value for their lives, will develop their effective strength, through their affection for his own person, and trust in his character, to a degree wholly unattainable by other means." Once you start to genuinely wish for

their well-being, your intentions become noble and Ahimsa, in the form of love and charity, becomes your tool for mass action. More specifically, once you start building relationships based on reciprocal respect, you create a mutually beneficial environment that encourages communication, aligns motivations, and builds trust within the system, factors that will in turn help you assist in maintaining the security and effective operations of your institutions.

Indeed, it is your responsibility under law to restrain criminals from society, yet there is no need for retaliation or revenge. The only lesson resulting from that is a lesson of further encouraged violence, hardly a moral one. In conclusion, the impact of your regime of punishment is three-fold: removing the sought-after recognition of inmates' issues discussed above, demonstrating to them an enforced culture of violence, and blatantly ignoring the benefits of improved systems in search for financial gain. As a result, your actions are stripped of any righteousness you claim in protecting society--left only with their legal necessity and societal harm.

As a for-profit organization, I understand your need to create shareholder value, however, there are many ways to achieve this same goal through ethical means. To tackle the root of the problem, I suggest negotiating with the government to create alternative incentive schemes in the form of bonus plans that reward your recidivism rate cuts. In alignment with this, you'd be charged for events such as riots, escapes, and unnatural deaths. These performance-based contracts allow for your prison systems to innovate and allocate its resources towards the development of best practices regarding prison conditions, rehabilitation, and reintegration. More specifically, this objective will only be achieved when you incorporate ways of humanizing the treatment of inmates. At the end of the day, prisoners are humans and should be treated with

respect and

nurtured to be law abiding citizens. Let them wear their own clothes, take vocational classes according to their interests, have access to technology, and reserve their identity. Give them resources but let them manage their own affairs and daily responsibilities. Provide positive reinforcement through milestones that move prisoners to areas of different degrees of security based on their crime, time in prison, and improved behavior. The lowest security area should simulate a conventional community of residential appearance designed to mimic the outside world and prepare prisoners for their release. Finally, check up on them once they leave your facility to seek feedback on their reintegration. By applying these practices, not only would you differentiate yourself amongst your competitors, but drive appeal for your services across the nation and be recognized for starting a movement for a demographic that needs your support the most.

Yours for the cause of justice,

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