

Prison doors are revolving doors

Written by Angela Stanton, Guest Commentary
Wednesday, 18 February 2009 17:41

When I was released from prison, not only was I a convicted felon, I was also a single mother with four children and nowhere to go. I gathered my children and our sack full of belongings as we headed for the nearest shelter. Upon checking into the shelter I was told that we would have thirty days to find housing. The shelters in Atlanta, GA are so overcrowded that they have a "get them in, get them out" policy.

Every morning I arose, I knew that I had four babies and very few options. I went to the housing authority of Atlanta, only to find that they had a seven year waiting list. They also conveyed to me that I was ineligible because of my felony convictions. The same went for section 8.

Now what?... I couldn't afford housing because I didn't have a job. No matter how qualified I was for the position, when that time came during the interview process to ask if I had ever been convicted of a felony, I could feel the tension and they never called back.

Two weeks had gone by, no job and no where to go! Exotic dancing... my last resort. In the state of Georgia, you must have a permit in order to be an adult entertainer. Well when I applied for my permit, I was once again turned away! The state of Georgia would not allow me to obtain a permit because I was a convicted felon.

It was never a dream of mine to live in the projects, or to become a stripper, but my back was against the wall, I had four mouths to feed, I had no other options, I was put in a position where I was forced to consider prostitution. Every time I had been to the projects or the strip club, they were filled with convicted felons, so why was my past a determining factor when I was trying to better myself? Why was I sent to prison to serve my time if I was still considered and treated like a prisoner upon my release?

On the day I was released from prison, I was given a \$25 check and a bus ticket after being imprisoned for more than two years. Consequently, in many instances, convicts resort to living on the streets increasing the crime rate and lowering property values. This is a common fact!

One important question is, after the prison time is up, will the person be wanted back in the community? Or, will he/she feel safer in the familiar surroundings of prison and go back through the door?

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I see the oppressive social and structural roots of criminal behavior in the poverty of so many women, particularly single mothers.

On June 19, 2005, The Chicago Tribune reported “record numbers of ex-con’s return to the streets. Two-thirds will be rearrested within 3 years.” president Bush’s 2004 state of the union speech was quoted, in it he said “America is the land of a second chance, when the gates of prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life.”

The state obviously realizes that this, in fact, is done purposely. The federal government releases ex-cons and purposely perpetuates this “game” by almost encouraging this increasingly problematic crime and homeless situation. So why does the prison system want their inmates to fall into the revolving door trap and return to prison?

Many people have the mistaken impression that slavery was outlawed or abolished in the United States after the civil war by the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. Unfortunately, that was not the case. The Thirteenth Amendment reads: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

Prisoners become “slaves of the state” which might explain the hidden agenda within the prison system to keep that door revolving!

The phrase “revolving door” is often used to describe the need to improve the current system of justice in hopes for improved public safety, namely by stopping the revolving door.

Angela Stanton is author of Life Behind These Walls. Angela is a single mother of five and a three-time convicted felon. She gave birth to a child, handcuffed to a bed, and endured the pain of losing both her mother and grandmother to death while she was incarcerated. Angela has endured every form of abuse known to man, not to exclude being molested at the age of five. She gives a voice to the unforeseeable events that can devastate our youth. She has

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experienced, survived and overcome many of the obstacles that young people face today. Angela gives insight into where criminal behavior begins and the consequences of thoughtless decisions.