

**This essay was written by an inmate who is on his 30th year of incarceration. He recently saw the parole board, and they gave him an additional 5 years. Sadly, he has given up believing that his rehabilitation would be recognized by the department of corrections and no longer believes in the future.*

—Christopher—

The Jerry Springer Effect

Have you seen that commercial that shows a cop walking up to a car to check for car insurance? Did you notice that as he approaches, he has his hand already on his gun? This is a perfect example of how we've come to expect that every situation is the most extreme case scenario. Grieving relatives of police shootings go on t.v. crying, "We just want to know why!" The reason is that police are trained to treat every encounter as a serious, potentially deadly scenario, as if people are around wearing bomb vests. The reason police are often acquitted on cases where they've killed a suspect is that they cite their training and claim that they handled the situation exactly as they were trained to do.

It's an attitude not embraced only by the police, it is everywhere. I call it the Jerry Springer Effect. The more extreme, the more sleazy, the more outrageous the claim, the more likely people are to believe it. This attitude has infected our language, and the way we use language in turn influences the way we treat people.

**We don't have juvenile delinquents anymore, we have "teen super predators."*

**We don't have break ins, we have "home invasions."*

**A guy who has sex with his teenage girlfriend is a "child molestor," registered as a predator for life.*

**What used to be normal flirting with a woman can now put a man in prison for assault.*

**We don't have immigrants we have, "alien hordes invading our borders."*

**We no longer have Democrats or Republicans. We have the "Radical Left Socialists" and "Radical Right Dinosaurs." You can see this trend in politics, the news media, and any police or court show.*

I realize in making this list, I am guilty of the same fault I complain about--but I overstate my position to make a point. I realize that sometimes a situation is extreme and calls for extreme response by authority or the courts. My objection is that we've come to see everything in this light. We hear some story on the news or elsewhere and instantly believe it, no matter how unlikely it may be, no matter how likely there may be more to the story.

The Jerry Springer Effect is strong. What is the effect of this trend? I believe this contributes to the negative and divisive atmosphere that we see all around us, not only in politics, but in society generally. This is especially evident in prison where we live in a closed loop society. It's easy to start a rumor about anything; the more outrageous it is the more easily it will be believed and spread. It's like false information on the internet.

We all need to keep an open mind, exercise critical thinking, and teach our kids not to believe everything they read. Watch how you use language, use common sense, don't be a sheep, and be kind to each other.

—Written by Underdog—

**There is a dark side to incarceration where guys give up hope or stop believing that their rehabilitation will be recognized by the state's parole board. These offenders then go on to negatively influence their peers, pulling other men from the fledgling path of reform and a vicious cycle perpetuates itself.*

I wrote about this in my March 29, 2019 post Rehabilitation and Punishment. As for the views of Underdog regarding society today, he's not alone here. I recently wrote What Is Happening With the World? and discussed how this view is prevalent amongst men who've been incarcerated for decades. Underdog offers his personal view and experience. It's not much different from the views of many here.

Please share this essay together with my post What's Happening With the World? with your family and friends and those who believe rehabilitation is important.

—Christopher—