

From: A SERMON OF THE PERISHING CLASSES IN BOSTON. PREACHED AT THE MELODEON, ON SUNDAY, AUGUST 30, 1846. —Theodore Parker

"It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of those little ones should perish."—MATTHEW xviii. 14.

THERE are two classes of men who are weak and little:

one is little by nature, consisting of such as are born with feeble powers, ...;

the other is little by position, ...

When Jesus said, "It is not God's will that one of these little ones should perish,"

I take it He included both these classes—men little by nature, and men little by position.

...To be poor is hard enough in the country, where artificial wants are few, and those easily met, where all classes are humbly clad, and none fare sumptuously every day.... to be miserable in the midst of abundance, that is hard beyond all purity of speech.

...men may ... be divided into three classes. The first acts on society mainly by their capital; the second mainly by their skill...; and the third by their muscles....

...Go to any State Prison in the land, and you shall find that seven-eighths of the convicts came from this (third) class... The characters of such men are made for them, far more than by them. ... all the difference, then, between the morals and manners of rich and poor, is the result of education and circumstances.

...The removal of these troubles must be brought about by a great change in the spirit of society. ... A Christian State after the pattern of that divine man, Jesus—how different it would be from this in spirit and in form!

...What we want ... is the application of Christianity to social life. ...I look to you to do something in this matter. ...Nothing less is your duty.

...Did not Jesus say, "In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me?"

Only Love Can

Dr. Douglas Gaines Harrell

“You may punish the man, but it does no good. ... Can you frighten them from crime, when all the circumstances about them impel to crime? ... until these causes are removed, a fresh crop will spring out of the festering soil.” ...

These words are as true today as they were over 150 years ago when spoken by Unitarian minister and social justice activist Theodore Parker. It is high time we heeded them.

For decades now, America has been embarked on a “war against crime.” We hear the term every day. Overall crime is down, but drug crime has never been more abundant, and overdoses are now killing more Americans than cars or guns. This morning I’d like to take a look at some of the other unsuccessful wars that the U.S. has fought to see if we can learn anything from them.

In the late 1960s my parents, my brother and I would watch the CBS Nightly News every night after dinner. There was always an update on the war in Vietnam, a war that the U.S. had been fighting for my entire conscious life.

“Why did we fight that war?” We were fighting against communists. It would have been better had we asked the question, “Why are these people communists?” and tried to address that.

Along those lines, at the height of the Vietnam war in his song, “What’s Goin’ On,” Marvin Gaye sang:

“You see, war is not the answer
For only love can conquer hate”

In 2005, philosopher Eckhart Tolle expanded on Marvin Gaye’s theme in his book, *A New Earth*. Under the heading “War is a Mindset”, he says,

“Whatever you fight, you strengthen, and what you resist, persists. These days you frequently hear the expression the war against this or that, and whenever I hear it, I know that it is condemned to failure.”

President Nixon initiated the “War on Drugs” and when it wasn’t working, President Reagan urged harsher sentences. We call ourselves the “Land of the Free,” but as a result the U.S. has the highest percentage of its citizens locked up of any country in the world.

If only President Nixon had heeded Marvin Gaye, he would have understood the futility of a war on drugs.

War is not the answer.

Today we are making the same mistake in our “war” against criminals that we made in our wars against communists and drug users.

“Whatever you fight, you strengthen, and what you resist, persists.”

War is not the answer.

To cure a disease you first need an accurate diagnosis. If I walk into my doctor’s office with a broken arm and he gives me an antibiotic for my runny nose, he isn’t addressing the most critical problem. What was the social ill that led the Russian people to rise up and overthrow the Czar in 1917? Was it tyranny? No, not really. The Russian aristocracy had abused the people for centuries. The situation that was ultimately too much to bear was the disastrous war the aristocracy was fighting to gain territory and influence in the Balkans while most of the population was quite literally starving to death. Had the Russian aristocracy tackled that problem, there is a good chance that they would still be in power today.

Why was Germany such fertile ground for a virulent nationalist party like the Nazis? It was because Germans had been doubly humiliated: first by losing the First World War, and second by the crushing war reparations imposed on them by the victors that sank their economy and resulted in hyperinflation.

These two historical examples are very telling. In one case we had a communist uprising, and in the other a nationalist uprising. Why the difference? Russians overthrew their government and installed a communist one because they knew there was wealth in their country. The problem was that the elites were not sharing it. The hyper-nationalist Nazis were able to ascend to power because Germans knew there was wealth in their country. The problem was that foreigners were taking it all.

In the U.S., perceptive leaders recognized early-on the appeal that communism had for impoverished workers. Henry Ford raised wages and urged fellow industrialists to do the same. Why? Was he a forward thinking liberal who cared for his workers like a father and wanted

them to live happy, enriched lives? Not on your life! He was a hard-nosed industrialist and ardent anti-communist. He understood that the Ford Motor Company would sell more cars if the average American family could buy one. Before the rise of communism, the majority of the wealth in the U.S. was in just a few hands--names like Carnegie, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, and J.P. Morgan come to mind. Contrast the outlandish gilded-age vacation mansions of Newport with the grinding poverty of most workers prior to the labor movement and you can understand how it was that the rise of world communism created a panic among the rich. Progressive liberals and pragmatic anti-communists arrived at a lot of the same conclusions. American society would be stronger and the country would be stronger if we share the wealth.

However, the hard lessons of the 20th century have been forgotten or ignored by the fabulously wealthy of today. They claim that making them richer will help everyone, but as their share of the nation's wealth has nearly tripled since 1980, the middle-class has been steadily melting away, and the poor have become desperate. After being forced to share the wealth during the rise of communism, since its fall the ultra-rich seem to be trying to take it all back.

Today's Trumpism is a curious mixed example of people who should think more like socialists thinking and acting like nationalists. Struggling Americans know that there is wealth in their country. The problem is that the ultra -rich have fooled them into thinking that foreigners are taking it all.

Fighting crime and criminals will never succeed as long as blighted islands of desperation, devoid of opportunity and hope, exist in our cities and in our countryside. If someone lives where there is no work, and they don't have the money to move, or even to commute, what do we expect them to do? Lay down and die--to, in the words of Ebenezer Scrooge, "decrease the surplus population?"

I'm a chemical engineer by profession. By their nature, chemical plants are often immense, interconnected networks of reactors, distillation columns, and other units. To understand how they work, it is often necessary to look at them one unit at a time. The engineer puts an imaginary boundary around the unit and analyzes what comes in, what happens in the unit and what goes out. This is called a mass balance. Money flowing around in the economy behaves a lot like a liquid flowing around in a chemical plant. To understand it, it helps to do a "money balance" around individual local economies.

Every community needs a flow of money coming in to match the money going out for food and shelter. In most communities wages do this. But how do people survive in a community where there is no work? The money to pay rent and buy groceries has to come from somewhere. Whatever doesn't come from work or some form of assistance has to come from crime. There is no other choice. It's a zero sum game. And let's be clear: I'm not only

talking about minorities living in blighted inner cities. Large swaths of rural white America have been hollowed out as well. When people turn to crime, what's the easiest way to start? Robbing banks? Gambling? Protection rackets? No. It's selling drugs. While there is certainly drug abuse by inner city residents, the bulk of the trade is with suburbanites arriving in SUV's with cash and leaving with drugs. As a result, overdose deaths are now the leading cause of death for people under 50 years of age in the U.S. One hundred and seventy-five (175) a day, with opiate abuse accounting for two thirds (a year ago when I originally wrote this it was 129 a day). Heroin is killing in the cities, while prescription opiates are killing in the countryside, especially in Appalachia, and Vermont, and Indiana, and right up the road in Baltimore!

Why are so many people selling drugs? In many cases, it's simply their least-bad option. Legalizing drugs won't reduce crime because the flow of drug-money into the disadvantaged communities will cease and a new form of crime will spring up to replace it. If we want to turn this around, the best way to reduce crime is to create jobs where there are none. Crime actually fell during the Great Depression because F.D.R. put millions to work in their local communities with a program called the Works Progress Administration, or WPA for short. Today we're paying a lot of money to lock up poor people. Instead, maybe we should take that money and pay them to clean streets, and grow vegetables, and restore houses in their own neighborhoods. Not only would it build self-respect and restore community spirit, but it would also create a flow of money into these communities that would attract businesses to set up there, employing people and initiating a virtuous circle.

If you think this sounds like pie-in-the-sky, I should tell you that the Obama administration conducted an experiment in 2009 in the small, conservative, dying town of Linden, Tennessee. Hard hit by the great recession, unemployment was at 27%, and the businesses that remained were on the verge of shutting down. The Federal Government came in and paid the salaries of 300 workers at private Linden businesses for one year. This kept the companies going, and kept people at work. The government also put people to work repaving sidewalks, installing street lights, and painting murals. Today, seven years later, unemployment is down to 6.7% and the town is thriving. Linden not only kept its existing businesses, but it attracted new ones. Money really is a lot like water. Sometimes to get it flowing, you have to prime the pump.

Here we are in 2017. The mindset of war hasn't worked. Decades of hating criminals and the poor has only led to mass incarceration and the disintegration of whole communities. Maybe we should try loving them instead.

In life, each of us has to make a choice every day either to move away from what we don't want, or to move toward what we do want. And they are not the same thing!

Not wanting crime is not working.

So what do we want?

We want a world where people have dignity, and the opportunity to earn their basic needs for food, shelter, and health care.

We want a world with compassion instead of scorn

We want a world with rehabilitation instead of retribution.

This is what we want, and we need to start moving toward it.

We must abandon the mindset of war, because war sees as enemies the very people who need our help.

We must abandon the mindset of punishment, because punishment only piles more misery on people whose problems stem from misery.

We must move toward compassion and understanding, for only by giving them a hand up can we help the desperate to get back on their feet.

Only by working together with them will they be able to rebuild their devastated communities.

What Theodore Parker said over 150 years ago is just as true today. "The Jail does not alter the circumstances which occasioned the crime, and until these causes are removed, a fresh crop will spring out."

This is how we can make America the great country we know it can be where there everyone has enough to eat, and a safe place to sleep.
We must work together to alter the circumstances which impel the poorest among us to crime.

A mindset of war can't do that.

Only love can do that.

Only love can.

Only love.

Only love.

From Theodore Parker's Sermon "Of Justice and the Conscience" ~1853

Look at the facts of the world.

You see a continual and progressive triumph of the right. (i.e. the just)

I do not pretend to understand the moral universe,

the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways.

I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight;

I can divine it by conscience.

But from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.