

How people are badly treated and dehumanized as depicted in orange is the new bla...

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## **The Dehumanization and Corrupt Treatment of People**

The book *Orange Is the New Black* by Piper Kerman describes her time in a women's prison, and the trials and tribulations faced by her and other convicts. Based on Kerman's descriptions of the prison system a likeness can be drawn between the lives and treatment of convicts to those of "okie" as described in *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck.

In *The Grapes Of Wrath* the dust bowl causes hundreds of families to be evicted from their homes and farms, in a similar way hundreds of people are convicted, both rightfully and wrongfully, for crimes and are taken from their homes and dropped into prisons where they lose their most basic rights just as many "okies" did.

Convicts in the prison system are dehumanized in many ways. No matter what their offense most convicts in the same institution get the same basic treatment. They have just about none of the basic rights given to a human just for being a human and are subject to random searches at any time which include pat downs and strip searches which have been documented as borderline and over the line sexual harassment in some cases. Prisoners are frequently not treated as actual people but rather pests to be dealt with, with the use of fly swatters at any wrong step. On top of this they have no freedom of speech and back talking an officer or other prison employee can come with very severe consequences. Along with this come the opinions of those on the outside of the prison that form of convicts they don't know. Many call convicts the scum of the earth despite the fact people are

convicted for a vast variety of things some of which aren't that severe of a crime. Sometimes it is just a person being in the wrong place at the wrong time but yet people make this split second assumptions on the moral fibers and goodness of a person based on the fact they wore an orange jumpsuit at one point in their life. This is similar to how " okies" were treated in the Grapes of Wrath given " okies" were also treated as the scum of the earth and dehumanized. Many people looked down on them as if they were lesser and cast them aside to starve in the dirt and filth with nothing, not even a wish of luck. They were people too but just because they lost their farms to a weather anomaly people looked upon and treated them differently. These poor family's stricken with misfortune could not even rely on the law enforcement for fair treatment just as in many cases convicts cant.

Not only are they treated poorly in prison by the system and its workers but the expense of living in prison when certain amenities such as soap are not provided for prisoners can be quite costly. A five dollar radio found at Wal-Mart might cost forty-five dollars on the inside of the prison and this is because the prison commissary controls the prices and product flow to prisoners (aside from contraband which is apparently quite common in some cases) this is much like the how company stores worked at some work/camp sites many " okies" would be employed at. The companies controlled their own stores and set their own prices as well as decided what to sell and what not to. A prisoner does not have any other source of products they may need other than that of which the commissary offers in the same way " okies"

could not afford to drive to town on their meager salary and had to rely on the unfair prices set by stores owners.

These unfair prices are also combined with a meagerly supplied salary. Even if you are able to get work, in the case of an “ okie”, or maintain the privilege to work as a convict pay was not great. In most cases pay was not more than a few cents in both situations. Convicts make around 0. 12 to 0. 40 cents an hour while “ okies” made similar wages if they were able to find sustainable work, though it varied from job to job. Jobs were also very limited in both cases. A lot of the work “ okies” were able to find involved picking fruit or cotton, there was not a lot of variety. Similarly prison offers a set number of jobs including electrician and kitchen duty. The combined meager salary and astronomical prices created an issue for people needing to buy anything if they did not have an outside source for financial support making it nearly impossible to support oneself in any decent manner.

Humans have been treating other humans in awful ways since the beginning of humanity, but to what end do we allow it to continue? one person may not have what you do, may not believe what you do, may take actions different than you believe to be right, however this does not mean they are less of a person, that they deserve less. Granted, there are some cases where people obviously need some harsh punishments such in the case of pedophiles, rapists and murderers, however those who tried a drug once, a dumb teen who made a bad decision or an “ okie” who lost everything they own deserve support and help and equal opportunity to make something of their life, to learn from their mistakes or better themselves in some way and truly make

something of themselves and reintegrate into society to help build a brighter future.