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U.S Prisons (Interim Title)

In Michael Moore's film *Where to Invade Next*, he visits different countries around Europe with the purpose of collecting the best ideas from those countries that could be applied in the U.S. throughout Moore's "Invasion" of Norway we learn about the Norwegian prison system and the philosophy behind it. The film shows that prisons are built on the idea of rehab and second chances, where the biggest punishment is taking away inmate's freedom not their rights and comfort. During Moore's trip to Norway, Prisoners are seen doing all types of different activities such as cooking, singing and studying, and in doing so they have access to many dangerous objects like knives, glass and electric tools. Although the prison holds high level criminals including murders they still have access to many dangerous objects like knives, glass, electric tools but the energy is always positive, and no one shown any signs of concern since these objects were never used by an inmate to harm another. Norwegian guards in the film speak about the success of the humane treatment of inmates, and how that prison system has proven to be effective by reducing the rate of recidivism and crime around the country. Moore's documentary caused a lot of Americans to question effectiveness of the American prison system, some believe adapting the Norwegian system is the solution for a more effective way to reduce recidivism, crime rate and prison violence. Now should the U.S apply the

Norwegian system as it is? There are a lot of factors that comes in play that allows that system to succeed in Norway, therefore I don't think it should be applied in the U.S.

Early in the documentary *Where to Invade Next* Michael Moore says, "My mission is to pick up the flowers, not the weeds." However, there are some types of flowers that can only be found in certain regions of the world because the environment of those regions allows it to grow, and if you move those flowers to a different region they'll end up dead. Social welfare and healthcare in the U.S is something that is highly criticized by its citizens, we even see that criticism early in Moore's film *Where to Invade Next*, during his journey in France he shows what they provide for their people using their tax money in comparison to the United States. In Norway, they have a welfare state system, where high tax rates are drawn from the rich and used to provide a lot of different services for people with lower status. In the U.S, the past few years prisons spending have been outpacing spending on education, currently we have 18 states where taxpayer's money is spent more on prisons than colleges according to a Washington Post article that was referring a study about spending on education vs prisons. Back to the Norwegian welfare system, that state welfare system leaves the government with a high budget to try out new ways to enhance the services they provide for their people, one of those services is the prison system. In Norway the government spends up to 93,000\$ per prisoner per year compared to 32,000\$ in the U.S according to a New York Times article, and based on a statistic by prisonstudies.org, Norway's prison population is around 3900, and the population in American prisons is around 2.1 million, so with the welfare and healthcare system the United States already provides for its lower-class citizens I don't see Americans accepting to pay taxes that goes for the luxury of over 2.1 million inmates who committed crimes against

them. It would be unfair for students, homeless people and others of lower financial status to put the priority of inmates ahead of theirs.

Another piece that completes the puzzle known as “The Perfect Prison” is the location of Norway, according to CIA.gov, Norwegians makes up 83% of Norway’s population, and other Europeans makes up around 8% and the rest come from mixed cultures, when it comes to the U.S, it’s one of the most diverse countries in the world, diverse cultures have a lot of positive and bright aspects, however, there is a dark aspect to it as well, more diverse areas seem to have a higher violence rate due to the different ideas and perspectives each culture has, for example, in the Arabic culture, a lot of people are okay with beating women, there is even things such as “Honor Killing” that still exists! However, when Arabs come to the U.S and try to apply that we see it leading them to prison. Another issue with diverse cultures is each culture tries to prove their superiority which also leads into some violent conflicts. According to bop.gov 15% of inmates in American prisons are from countries in south and central American, and about 5% comes from other regions around the world, in Norway according to Statistisk Sentralbyra, 87% of inmates comes from Europe, with a similar culture and a similar mindset that makes it less likely for them to start conflicts between each other. As small as Norway’s prison population is, it did witness a rise from 2007 to 2011/12, which is the same time Norway had a rise in their immigration rate, it’s also a time Norway gained a lot of its Dutch inmates. With the provided statistics, it makes it easier to understand why the U.S can’t adapt the Norwegian system, especially when they have the highest inmate population in the world.

Since the Norwegian prison system is something that’s the U.S never tried before, and immigration being a sensitive topic currently in the U.S, some people might say that diverse

culture and the behavior of different people isn't what determines if a certain system works or not, it's choosing the correct system or applying it in the correct way. Since raising prison violence in a country with a diverse culture is my main issue with the Norwegian system, I'll have to refer to another big topic in the U.S regarding violence to respond to that argument. The topic would be laws regarding guns, we look at countries like Mexico, El Salvador where some of the strictest gun laws takes place yet Mexico is ranked in the top 10 countries when it comes to homicide rate and El Salvador is known as homicide capital of the world due to the gang wars. And then we look at a country like Switzerland where they have one of the simplest gun laws and ranked 3rd when it comes to gun ownership according to CNN, with a murder rate that is almost Zero. Going back to the Prisons in the U.S where a high percentage of inmates are associated with gang organizations and drugs traffickers which is something Norway lacks, it would make adapting the Norwegian prison system nearly impossible, because it will turn prisons in the United States into an open season for gangs and groups of the same nationalities to hunt each other and take over. Looking at things from the perspective of the huge population of the U.S, the different cultures in it and the flaws of each culture makes it a bit easier to see or have a second thought on why the Norwegian prison system wouldn't work over here.

America without a doubt has its flaws and issues that needs to be fixed with the prison system to reduce the rate of recidivism and crime, but those are things that could be fixed by learning from some European countries to use community service more as a punishment, decriminalize drugs, lower their sentencing, not strip prisoners from their rights and accepting them as humans when they get out. Not by applying a system that will create more flaws, Since

applying the Norwegian prison system in the U.S would take a huge amount of Tax money to be spent on providing better lives for inmates, it would be a much better investment to have that money go towards college students, kids education, homeless people and providing better services to Americans so they wouldn't end up in prison at first, but when it comes to taking the Norwegian prison system and applying it as it is, is a bit more complicated than people actually think, because even some of the biggest advocates for applying Norwegian prisons system understands that America have an issue with violent behavior "Americans kill people" _Michael Moore.