

Comic Commentary

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It is an old saying in the U.S.A. that "Americans are never willing to pay more taxes - unless, of course, it is to build more prisons". The numbers bear this fact out. The U.S.A. ranks number one in the total number of people incarcerated, with 743 out of every 100,000 citizens behind bars. The result is that, while the U.S.A. makes up only 5% of the world population, it has fully 25% of the entire world's inmate population.

One of the reasons for the large number of individuals incarcerated in the USA is the "lock them up and throw away the key" mentality of American society. Of the available justifications for incarceration, American culture appears to take the concept of incapacitation very much to heart, perhaps pragmatically thinking that while the virtues of rehabilitation and deterrence can be argued about endlessly, one thing is certain: if the guy is behind bars, the chances of him stealing my car stereo are pretty much zero.

In order to make sure that even their great-grandchildren's car stereos are safe, the judiciary across the U.S.A. has developed a system of "consecutive sentencing"; employing the simple logic that, even with good behavior and timed served, the convict will not see the light of day again until the Boston Red Sox win another World Series – and that could take a very long time indeed!

The current race for the infamous title of "Longest Prison Sentence" is a heated one, with a host of states happily entering convicted criminals into the running.¹ Certainly though one person who should at least make it onto the awards podium is a Mr. Darron Bennalford Anderson of Oklahoma, who was found guilty in 1994 of, among other things, larceny, kidnapping, robbery and rape. Initially sentenced to 2,200 years in prison, Mr. Anderson appealed the ruling in the hopes of having his sentence reduced. Instead, the appellate court added on a few years, just for good measure. By saying "a few years", that is being a bit euphemistic, the appellate court actually gave him an additional 4,000 years each for rape and common law sodomy,

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¹ 25 life sentences were handed down to one individual in California in 1973 and 10,000+ years to another individual in 1981 in Alabama, so there are a number of contenders.

500 years for grand larceny, 1,750 years for kidnapping, and 1,000 years for burglary.

In 1997, he once again appealed his sentence, and this time had some success, "some" once again being the operative word. The Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals ruled that the larceny conviction amounted to double jeopardy, as he had already been sentenced for burglary. As a result, Mr. Anderson can now sleep a little easier at night knowing that he is currently eligible for parole in the year 2744.

The Red Sox hope to win another World Series pennant by then.

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"Don't mind Harry here. He got three consecutive life sentences, but he's already finished two of 'em."