

Free Mitch Rutledge

Attention readers: Dennis Prager is off this week. Please enjoy the following column by Stephen Moore.

Nearly everyone has seen the classic movie "The Shawshank Redemption." Well, it turns out there is a real life "Red" Redding, the character played by Morgan Freeman. He is in prison in Alabama. He has been there for nearly 40 years. He was guilty of his crime: a murder he committed as a teenager in a drug operation. But so many people who have interacted with Rutledge in prison see the similarities in character with Red.

He grew up in a broken home with a father he never knew. His mother was a child of 13 years old and was hardly around for adult supervision. He was illiterate. As a teen, he roamed the streets with drug dealers and prostitutes. With no real family. Without religion. Without schooling. Without love of any kind. It was the kind of trapped and hopeless situation that makes you think, "There but for the grace of God go I."

He admitted his heinous crime, and he was convicted and sentenced to death. His tragic story was widely publicized in 1983 by a Time magazine profile of individuals in prison on death row. It was not a sympathetic portrayal. The author ended her story by dismissing Rutledge as irredeemable. She recommended that he "sit and stew in his 8-ft. by 5-ft. pen in Alabama. Forget him."

But his story drew the attention of my friend and fellow economist Burton Folsom – a bestselling free market author – and a few other kindhearted people who saw a chance of redemption. Burt and his wife went to visit Rutledge on many occasions

They and others converted him to Christ, and his life has been turned around. His death sentence was commuted to life in

prison. He has become in every way a model citizen in prison. He instructs young Black men how to avoid the mistakes he made. What gave Rutledge hope was his inner conviction that “maybe there was a purpose to my life. Maybe there were still things God wanted me for.” This epiphany is what has kept Rutledge from the torture of total despair after 40 years behind bars in a maximum-security prison in Alabama.

Prison normally hardens men’s souls. Rutledge has softened. As Folsom and his wife, Anita, wrote in their biographical book “Death on Hold,” “There may be no inmate in the United States who is more rehabilitated than Mitchell Rutledge.” After 40 years behind bars – two-thirds of his life – with virtually no personal freedom and only knowledge of the outside world from TV in prison, he has paid his debt to society.

Trump and/or Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey must act with justice and mercy. It would be a victory for our penal system that a man can serve his time and be rehabilitated. Rutledge puts it well: “The prison system does not rehabilitate inmates. The prisoners have to rehabilitate themselves.” Everyone, including the warden, has spoken up on his behalf.

The famous line from Tim Robbins in “The Shawshank Redemption” is, “You have to get busy living or get busy dying.” Let Rutledge get on living. Freeing a 60-year-old Black man, who has reformed his life against all odds and poses no threat to the public, would be an appropriate and justified use of presidential power by Trump, highlighting his righteous crusade for civil justice reform. Redemption is a beautiful thing.

Stephen Moore is a senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation and an economic consultant with FreedomWorks. He is the co-author of “Trumponomics: Inside the America First Plan to Revive the American Economy.” To find out more about Stephen Moore and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate website at

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