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M i n i s t r y A L E R T

**“Distrust everyone in whom the impulse to punish is powerful.”
– Friedrich Nietzsche**



While researching crime and punishment, I ran across something I didn't know. Since ancient times, people could be branded (with a hot iron) when convicted of certain crimes. They were branded with a letter on their forehead or cheek indicating the crime they committed. I was shocked! Historians believe this practice was started by the Babylonians around 1800 BC, and it has been used in one form or another in our own country well into the 19th century. Can you imagine the shame and humiliation these people carried around for the rest of their lives?

In the North-American Puritan settlements of the 17th century, men and women sentenced with adultery were branded with an **A**. Then there was a **D** for drunkenness, and a **B** was seared into the cheek or forehead for blasphemy. Hester Prynne (*Scarlet Letter*) wasn't branded by a hot iron, but she was forced to wear a patch on her outer clothing with a scarlet **A** for all to see her sin.

A letter written in 1784 by three Massachusetts supreme court justices to Governor John Hancock was recently auctioned off. The letter was a plea for clemency for one William Milton sentenced to be branded on his forehead as a thief. It is not known if Governor Hancock exercised mercy, but the letter documents this type of punishment was still being practiced in our country in the 1700's. In the 1800's, branding was used on slave runaways and military deserters when it was finally considered to be inhumane and the practice was stopped. In the 1930's and 40's the Nazis branded Jews making them wear a yellow patch with the Star of David on their outer clothing. The only purpose being to shame and humiliate.

Being on the public registry is like being branded for life!

It's not my intention to give a history lesson but, I find it ironic that branding is considered inhumane, and being on the public registry is not. Being on the registry is the same as being publicly branded as far as I'm concerned. We are supposed to be protected from cruel and unusual punishment under the eighth amendment. Certainly being on the public registry is every bit as cruel, shameful, and humiliating as being branded on the forehead. Not to mention there is no way to outlive your past even if you're truly remorseful, and you've repented. Ostracized from the rest of the community, and judged by all, people on the registry are **sentenced to life without parole!**

Isn't this the cruel and unusual punishment from which we are protected under the U.S. Constitution?

John Haralson, Director Reclamation Ministry