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# D.C.R. (Drought of Character Rehabilitation)

Two of the biggest atrocities to society today are our insufficient health care and public education systems that are referred to as the pipelines to prison. Many can argue that a big atrocity is the oversaturation of the US prison and jail population with uneducated citizens and the poor resources detainees and inmates are given to be rehabilitated. What opportunities are going to be available to an undereducated marginally illiterate individual having to survive in a job market that all but mandates at least a GED? We have to understand there will be no turnaround in a "criminal's" life if there are no options to better oneself. Many people turn to crime out of desperation. As a society we need to provide better options where crime is not the only thing on the resumes of disenfranchised citizens. Incorporating an education system into the carceral system for inmates that lack proper education is necessary for inmates to form a better future for themselves after release.

A large majority of the carceral population is uneducated, many of whom did not complete high school. The question we have to ask ourselves is how do we prevent recidivism for an individual whose only experience is in the criminal world. Perhaps providing new experiences in prisons will prevent inmates from returning to the carceral

system. There is research directly linking literacy and lack of education to high recidivism rates. This is because after being released from jail or prison, there is no greater option but to commit crime. Why continue to incarcerate people instead of getting to the root of the problem? "Research has estimated that illiteracy rates in prisons are as high as 75 percent of the prison population. This unaddressed issue in the United States' prison system is inextricably linked to high recidivism rates." (Sainato, 2017)

Education is the key to unlocking the future. In the case of many inmates around the United States they are never allowed access to this key after being incarcerated. If anyone understands the need for the carceral system, I do. I come from a third world country where crime and violence run rampant on most inhabited islands. Although there is a need for incarceration as a form of punishment, there is also a need for a multifaceted system that educates

prisoners and rehabilitates them so there is a lower recidivism rate. My proposal for this multifaceted system is to implement GED, or Associate Degree programs for those inmates that already have a GED or High School diploma. This is only part one. The other portion of this program establishes inmate jobs that fund such programs while also not only putting a dollar a day in their pocket but also providing education. The final aspect to this program would be a partnership between local businesses to provide jobs for these newly educated and rehabilitated inmates after release.

It has been proven that inmates who have gone through some form of academic educational programs have a higher chance of being employed after release. "Prison inmates who receive general education and vocational training are significantly less likely to return to prison after release and are more likely to find employment than peers who do not receive such opportunities"(Davis, 2013). By educating inmates and detainees, prisons will have prepared inmates for the process of reintegrating into life outside prison, thus reducing recidivism rates. This reduction will lessen the need for prisons and jails which will open up funds for use in other areas of the US economy.

After doing some research for my proposal, I found that "Prison education is a cost-effective way to reduce crime and leads to long-term benefits across the entire U.S.

population."(Bender, 2018). The United States spends approximately \$80 billion dollars on corrections annually. If the population of inmates were lowered, then it would free up more money for education and health care. This is desperately needed in states like Oklahoma where the education system is 47th in the entire country but has the most incarcerated females and the number one incarceration rate in the entire world. I believe that if we simply educate inmates, we will largely decrease the prison and jail population. "In 2016, the RAND Corporation produced a report that showed individuals who participate in any type of educational program while in prison are 43 percent less likely to return to prison."(Bender,2018). If the carceral system incorporated nationwide education programs in prisons and jails, it would have effects not just on individual inmates but on generations to come. Children of parents who have experienced such educational programs would reap the benefits as well, because the mother and/or father would now see the importance of education and living a life free of crime. For many families, crime and life in prison are all they know. Each generation simply follows in the footsteps of their mother or father.

When doing research, I questioned if there were any programs already like this in the United States. I discovered that most prison systems provide a GED program to prepare inmates to pass the test. "Inmates who don't have their high school diploma are required to participate in GED courses in their prison's Education Department... Prisoners who refuse to participate in their GED are actually subject to sanctions, including incident reports if they refuse to go to class once enrolled(Zoukis). This program to me seems hostile and does not provide any initiative. My proposal incorporates GED and Associate Degree Programs as well as implementing partnerships with local businesses to





provide jobs after release.

Many countries across the world utilize education and vocational training in their prisons and jails by focussing more on rehabilitation rather than punishment. The articles I found on different programs implemented around the world are very innovative and intriguing. My favorite is a financial literacy program for prisoners in Ethiopia. "Young men and women at Mekelle Prison, in northern Ethiopia, are provided with microfinance and insurance loans to start cooperatives

based on business ideas developed in educational and vocational classes offered while they're behind bars." (McCray, 2015). I love this idea because it takes reliance off of local businesses and gives the inmates financial freedom and something to lose. After they are released they have something that they have worked hard for and would not jeopardize by committing another crime and being

reincarcerated. Another favorite of mine is prisoners studying for free in India. "...the Indira Gandhi National Open University set up 94 study centers in jails across the country that offer a broad range of educational and vocational classes leading to degrees, free of cost" (McCray, 2015). This program is amazing to me because it goes above and beyond what many prisons are doing all around the world, not just the United States. Inmates do not only have the opportunity to earn vocational certificates but even Master's Degrees. If we had a program like this in US jails and prisons it would inspire inmates to better themselves and not have a desire to commit crimes after release because they will have the tools they need to live a better life.

Unemployment is largely one of the main causes of reentry into the Carceral system and "between 60 and 75 percent of the formerly incarcerated remain unemployed up to a year after their release,..." (National Employment...). There has been so much research done that shows education while incarcerated helps reduce recidivism and the possibility of getting a job after release. One has to wonder why the system has not implemented nationwide education programs in prisons and jails. There are great innovative ideas being brought to the table like that of the many Unions, advocates and employers that can help the transition after release. Labor unions as well as

inmates have a lot to gain from implemented work programs because it gives them access to a well that was formerly inaccessible and now it is opened and flowing with hydrating H2O. There is so much that inmates bring to the table, ideas that could have been cultivated in prison or jail that the everyday person may not have thought about. It is a true injustice to the world to keep that closed off by not allowing them to get gainful employment and put some of these ideas to work.

The best case scenario for my proposal is that there are prisons all over the United States that will begin to implement vocational training and proper educational programs to allow access to degrees and certificates. The worst case is that only a few implement it and they lead by example, have so much success that the results are undeniable and the other institutions follow their lead. There is no reason why the government would not want to lower the recidivism rate of course unless they benefit from it, but that would just be inhumane. What government would incarcerate its citizens purely for financial gain? The positive effects on communities all around the United States would be immeasurable if people have less incentive to commit crime because they do not have any other way to make ends meet. By incorporating these ideas we not only lower recidivism rates but lower overall crime rates in US cities because now prisons and jails rehabilitate and produce educated, critically thinking, business minded citizens and not the same criminals that entered on day one.

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