



PROJECT MUSE®

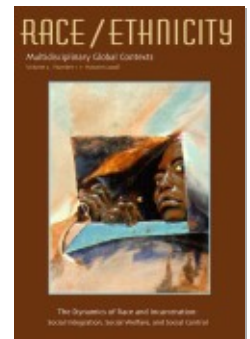
---

## Incarceration and Beyond: A Personal Perspective

Reginald A. Wilkinson

Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts, Volume 2, Number 1, Autumn 2008, pp. 137-150 (Article)

Published by Indiana University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/252440>

# Incarceration and Beyond: A Personal Perspective

Reginald A. Wilkinson

Ohio College Access Network

*This paper is intended to be a reflection of critical events that shaped my leadership and philosophical positions on justice applications. After a thirty-five-year career in correctional administration, it's difficult for me to suggest that significant progress has been made regarding prison management, sentencing policies, and society's attitude about persons who commit crimes in the United States. The advent of the "prison industrial complex" seems rooted in reality given the huge increase of correctional populations. In essence, prisons have become a major economic development tool. Despite the increase of incarcerated persons, technical and social advances are being realized. The emergence of offender reentry models offer some semblance of hope that formerly incarcerated persons can go home—and stay. The adaptation of evidence-based principles and practices further suggests that decisions regarding programming and risk can help determine what works. It is proposed that a social justice philosophy, requiring that all the various sectors of society participate in offender reintegration, be adopted.*

**M**y career in the corrections business began in 1973 when I walked through the gates of the Lebanon Correctional Institution to begin my first job as a volunteer coordinator. A skinny, afro-wearing city boy fresh out college, I was an unlikely candidate for a corrections career—a journey that ended thirty-three years later when I retired as the Director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC).

At the time, I thought I had all the answers. I quickly learned I was wrong. Mostly by trial and error I began to understand the work. Some of the staff were patient and helped me along the way; others had little use for my youthful brashness. Nonetheless, over the course of a few years I learned how to get along. I also learned about John Deere tractors and attended pig roasts. One captain enjoyed quizzing me, not about rules and regulations as you might think, but about country music. He'd say something like, "Hey, Wilkinson, what's this song playing on the radio?" Usually I'd get it

wrong. The day I answered “Merle Haggard,” my respect points shot up high.

Things weren’t as stringent then. For example, I could actually check inmates out and take them to events in the community. During those early days I experienced escapes, disturbances, employee strikes, and more. There were many inequities that were business as usual. In those days, prisons were relatively autonomous. “Central Office” got involved for critical matters and not much else. Generally, state correctional systems were self-governing, operating with little influence from the outside and without much regard for the changes happening across the United States. During the 1970s, that began to change partially as a result of the Attica Prison riot in 1971, but even without Attica there was a wave of change sweeping the country that even the corrections world could not escape.

To provide a historical backdrop, following the Civil Rights Era of the 1950s and 1960s, the 1970s was the era of legal remedies (e.g., Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Employment). Issues of race and sexual discrimination were taken into the court system as women and minorities entered the work force in record numbers and faced barriers in systems that were not created for them. While working in these systems they confronted issues of discrimination, which were addressed and eventually changed—either voluntarily or through the courts. Correctional facilities were no exception. Covert, and sometimes overt, discrimination was not unusual, not only for employees, but also for prisoners.

I vividly recall being involved in working to change these patterns in our prison. When I think back on it, I believe the first time I personally had an impact that resulted in a major administration change was when I decided that the prison’s dining halls should be desegregated. There were three “chow halls.” The first one was whites only. The second was for blacks. The third was referred to as the 50/50 Club; anyone who wanted to eat there could. Most of the gay prisoners gathered there. For a couple of years I observed this behavior. I finally went to the warden and said we must do something about the dining halls. He agreed but knew the topic was sensitive. When we finally proposed a plan to the correctional supervisors (nicknamed “white shirts”), their reaction was predictable: there would be mayhem.

Despite this response, the warden wanted to move forward. We announced to the prisoner population that they would be required to enter the first available dining room that wasn’t full. In preparation for the possible mayhem, the warden activated the Disturbance Control Team; they were in full riot gear. However, the inmates never saw them. The dining halls were desegregated without incident. I felt I had made my first real mark in corrections. I have observed and experienced many in-

*I vividly recall being involved in working to change these patterns in our prison. When I think back on it, I believe the first time I personally had an impact that resulted in a major administration change was when I decided that the prison’s dining halls should be desegregated.*

stances of elation as well as disappointments in my career, and this was definitely a high point. I have come to know that, in ways similar to the stock market, the field of corrections is fraught with a variety of ups and downs. This was my first experience of seeing how risky, yet important, achieving a successful balance of maintaining security and addressing the complex nature of positive change can be, not only to the public but also to the inmates.

When I was first hired to work at the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, there were nearly 8,000 prisoners housed in seven correctional institutions. In 2008, two years after I retired, the agency exceeded 50,000 inmates residing in thirty-two prisons. Since 1970 the United States has increased its prisoner population by more than 700 percent. Thus, notwithstanding all the theory, and all the emphasis on correctional “best practices,” it is hard to determine what, if any, significant progress we’ve made to date.

Nationally, the data is dismal—if not embarrassing. There are nearly 2.3 million persons incarcerated in federal, state, and local lockups. An additional 5 million people are on parole and probation. A recent report by The Pew Center of the States (2008) says that the fifty states spent \$49 billion on imprisonment in 2006. The document calculates that one of every 99.1 adults is in prison or jail.

In 1998, when I was president of the American Correctional Association, I joined a small group of administrators from around the world who met in Jerusalem, Israel, to discuss how we could share international correctional best practices. The result was that we formed the International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA). I served on this group for eight years as the Vice Chair for North America. Since our inaugural conference in Budapest, Hungary, we have conducted summits on five continents. Despite the great research and the admiration for many programs and services in the United States, the undercurrent conversation could never be avoided: that America had the highest per capita rate of incarceration in the world.

Hartney (2006) prepared a fact sheet for the National Council on Crime and Delinquency that outlined the grim statistics. The United States incarcerates 738 persons per 100,000 citizens. The country that comes the next close is Russia—607. The following is a sampling of other nations around the world: South Africa—335, Mexico—196, United Kingdom—145, Canada—107, France—88, Japan—62, India—31. It’s quite obvious from my interaction with international colleagues that other nations have a completely different attitude about citizens who find themselves in prison. Each is still considered a valued member of their society. Much has to be done in the United States to convince the international community that our correctional policies are not Jurassic.

For instance, the situation for black prisoners is bleak. It is difficult to reconcile the disproportional sentencing of African

American prisoners. Laws governing powder cocaine and crack cocaine are among the best examples. Because crack is more of an inner-city drug, many blacks were sentenced to much harsher sentences than their white—often suburban—counterparts. Ohio's prisoner population *is generally* more than 50 percent black, while in the total population blacks hover around 13 percent.

I was initially hired by Bennett Cooper, the first director of ODRC (prior to 1972 prison operations were a division within the Ohio Department of Mental Hygiene and Correction). He was also the first African American director of a state corrections agency in the nation, and is credited with sparking the formation of the National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice (NABCJ). He challenged a group that was gathered (symbolically) at a meeting on the campus of the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa in 1974, which I attended. NABCJ's mission is to promote equal opportunity and career development for blacks working in corrections. More importantly, it monitored the treatment of black inmates around the country.

Not surprisingly, and especially given my involvement with the Black Student Union on the campus of The Ohio State University as a student, I got very involved with NABCJ. There was an early chapter in Dayton, Ohio. Eventually, I served on the board of the national organization. I was also the first president of its state chapter. The original mission of this group continues.

With the exception of Maryland and the District of Columbia (Human Rights Watch 2003), the southern states have the highest percentage of blacks in prison. The following numbers indicate the percentages of blacks among the prison populations in several states: Louisiana—72.1 percent, Mississippi—70.5 percent, South Carolina—67.2 percent. Overall, blacks comprise 43.91 percent, whites 34.72 percent, Hispanics 18.26 percent, and Other 3.11 percent of the state and federal prison populations. While these numbers are always shocking, they do not surprise me.

From my perspective, considering the astonishing growth in the prison population, it can be inferred from these num-

*From my perspective, considering the astonishing growth in the prison population, it can be inferred from these numbers that America is attracted to, if not dependent upon, the "prison industrial complex."*

bers that America is attracted to, if not dependent upon, the "prison industrial complex." According to Eric Schlosser (1998), a writer for the *Atlantic Monthly*, "The prison industrial complex is not a conspiracy, guiding criminal-justice policy behind closed doors. It is a confluence of special interests that has given prison construction in the United States a seemingly unstoppable momentum." He further suggested, "The prison industrial complex is not only a set of interest groups and institutions, it is also a state of mind. The lure of big money is corrupting the nation's criminal-justice system, replacing notions of public service with a drive for higher profits."

construction in the United States a seemingly unstoppable momentum." He further suggested, "The prison industrial complex is not only a set of interest groups and institutions, it is also a state of mind. The lure of big money is corrupting the nation's criminal-justice system, replacing notions of public service with a drive for higher profits."

Throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, the inmate population grew at an unprecedented rate. The rapid growth of a prisoner population is an inherently complicated management responsibility; it is considered customary to manage crowded correctional institutions. An attempt to control a facility that is bursting at the seams can exacerbate a correctional administrator's best efforts. Overcrowding drives crisis, which ups the ante to matters of life and death and often makes it difficult to meet constitutionally minimum standards. Tensions can quickly surface to an unpalatable level—which can force good managers to make decisions where no good decision exists and the only choice is the best among solely poor options. During my tenure as a corrections executive, the most difficult challenge I ever faced was prison riots, some resulting in a loss of life. After I had been the ODRC director for only two years, on Easter Sunday 1993 one of the longest riots in U.S. history began at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville—an extremely crowded maximum security facility. At the time, ODRC prisons were operating at 187 percent of their capacity. Following the disturbance, eleven days later, Correctional Officer Robert Vallandingham and nine prisoners were dead. This was a horrific situation—a nightmare I will never forget.

There is nothing that compares to prison riots, but closing a prison is a major management headache for any director of a corrections system. In 2003, I was given the mandate to close two large facilities. It was then that I truly came to understand the notion of the prison industrial complex. At the time, the prison population had been significantly reduced by several thousand (to 45,284) and the state was confronted with monumental fiscal constraints. The two correctional facilities that ended up being closed, the Orient Correctional Institution and the Lima Correctional Institution, were both aging. Orient had once been a facility for persons with developmental disabilities. Lima had been a mental hospital for the “criminally insane.” These institutions were economically important to the communities in which they were located—employing many local citizens.

The reactions to the closings were even more dramatic than in earlier situations when auto companies had announced closures of assembly plants in Ohio. When the Lima facility closing was announced, the correctional officers union, the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees, sued the state, claiming the governor had no authority to make such a decision. In essence, prisons across the nation had become “entitlements” for local jurisdictions.

Politically, one can make an argument that there is little incentive to reduce prison populations. Prison jobs are generally well paying. The fiscal spin-off effect of prisons is also important to communities. Prisons make purchases of goods and services, staff persons spend their wages, and municipalities collect taxes.



I doubt that there will be any wholesale closing of prisons now or in the foreseeable future. Our current reality reflects quite the opposite condition. As mentioned, the United States incarcerates the largest percentage of its citizenry of any nation in the world. According to Ethan Nadelmann of the Drug Policy Alliance (Vicin 2006), "the United States has 5 percent of the world's population and 25 percent of the world's incarcerated population."

I am not suggesting there is a conspiracy to lock up more people so that communities can employ their citizens in prison jobs. I do suggest that sentencing laws are flawed to the point that a conspiracy theorist could make a debate interesting. It's

*The increase in the length of the sentences and the number of crimes for which a person can serve prison time are the primary reasons why prison populations are on the rise.*

not true that an increase in crime rates is the culprit of a burgeoning prison population. Frieden (2006) cited a report by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, which stated that 2006 was the first year since 1991 (the year I was appointed director) that there was a considerable jump in vio-

lent crime. The increase in the length of the sentences and the number of crimes for which a person can serve prison time are the primary reasons why prison populations are on the rise.

Legislative bodies in the United States seem to be in competition, trying to outdo one another by passing "creative" sentencing laws. Intensive probation supervision, mandatory minimum sentences, boot camps, and "three strikes and you're out" (or "in") are examples of botched sentencing "experiments." During a tour of the maximum security Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, I was shocked to learn that 85 percent of persons committed there will die there. These sentences weren't just a result of capital offences, or even life-without-parole charges, but were due to the length of imposed sentences. No doubt sentences are ramped up beyond any recognizable sense of justice out of anger, not as a corrective measure.

Some public officials have assumed extreme measures to demonstrate their lack of tolerance for crime in their communities. Most notable is Arizona's Maricopa County sheriff, Joseph Arpaio. Sheriff "Joe" is self-proclaimed as "America's Toughest Sheriff." He has introduced a number of unusual practices such as Think Pink, Tent City, and chain gangs. Think Pink includes dying underwear and linens and painting handcuffs pink. In keeping with the pink theme, Sheriff Arpaio erected a pink neon "vacancy" sign outside Tent City. He was determined that inmates would not get out early because of crowded conditions and he added the military-inspired tent configuration to increase the bed space. Further, the sheriff believes that chain gangs are not degrading; on the contrary, he thinks they are rehabilitative.

The idea of rehabilitation is evidently a confusing term to many. The agency I managed for nearly sixteen years is called the Ohio Department of *Rehabilitation* and Correction. Twenty years ago I supported the idea that the term *rehabilitation* was,

at best, misleading. In essence, inmates couldn't be *rehabilitated* when they had never been *habilitated*. It was difficult for some to even utter the word. We often referenced the "R" word. If truth be told, I often thought that the term "Rehabilitation" in our agency's title should have been stricken. In hindsight, the change in name would have been a monumental mistake.

Recently, California renamed its adult corrections agency the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). Only one other state and one U.S. territory have the word "rehabilitation" in their name: North Dakota and Puerto Rico. Rehabilitation in the name of an agency may not indicate that treatment efforts are more highly regarded. However, it does suggest that policy makers are not fearful of the "R" word.

It goes without a lot of explanation that I am a huge supporter of rehabilitative initiatives. Rehabilitation works! Much has been written, discussed, and studied about recidivism rates. My dissertation was a recidivism study: "The Impact of Community Service Work on Adult State Prisoners Using a Restorative Justice Framework." Were it not for the multitude of rehabilitation programs in existing prisons, the recidivism rates would invariably be much higher.

A three-year study of Ohio's recidivism rate (defined as return to prison for either a new crime or a parole violation) found that approximate 38 percent of those released recidivated. While any "failure" is unacceptable, it often goes unnoticed that 62 percent of offenders released from Ohio prisons don't come back. I attribute this success to extensive treatment and programming offerings—rehabilitation.

It is well known that nearly 70 percent of persons released from California prisons recidivate. While confronted with historical legal challenges, and in light of its corrections agency's name change, the Golden State has adopted many new strategies to change its past correctional disappointments. There is now a focus on "evidenced-based" programming, using validated risk instruments, and diverting low-level offenders to nonprison options. The state has also created the Reentry Advisory Committee to help ensure that formerly incarcerated persons will not recidivate—at least at previous rates. I am pleased to have assisted the CDCR with both of these efforts.

Interestingly, there are many debilitating dichotomies in the corrections field. Prison-management approaches have often been contrasted with community corrections work, especially parole supervision. In the prisons themselves, custody staff has historically been at odds with treatment personnel, and vice versa. Practitioners often disagree with academics about research efforts. A dramatic example with far-reaching effects came as result of research conducted by sociologist Robert Martinson.

Miller (1989) quoted Martinson, once from the *New Republic* and again from *Public Interest*, respectively. In 1972 Martinson wrote, "the represent array of correctional treatments has no appreciable effect—positive or negative—on rates of recidivism



of convicted offenders." He also wrote in 1974, "... rehabilitative efforts that have been reported so far have no appreciable effect on recidivism." His words were treated as fact by many.

*"Nothing works" became a well-known outcry heard in the various halls of justice across the country, causing skepticism, the shutting down of programs and funding, and a debunking of the notion that rehabilitation was possible.*

"Nothing works" became a well-known outcry heard in the various halls of justice across the country, causing skepticism, the shutting down of programs and funding, and a debunking of the notion that rehabilitation was possible.

Today, this "nothing works" notion is important because it is the cause of discussions about "what does work." It is generally accepted that what does work is anything that is truly evidenced-based. I happen to think that this term has joined a long list of other quasi-academic terms that have lost their luster among practitioners: collective efficacy, criminogenic needs, and unintended consequences, to name a few. My skepticism aside, we do theoretically understand more about the science of rehabilitating offenders than we did when Martinson rocked the criminology and corrections worlds in 1974.

One of the best examples of an evidenced-based initiative is California's Center for Evidence-Based Corrections. The Center's mission is threefold:

- To identify promising programs and evidence-based practices from the scientific criminological literature;
- To initiate and execute original research that addresses criminal justice policy questions relevant to California;
- To assist The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation agencies to implement and evaluate these practices.

The mission of the Center is truly to integrate theory and practice. Often, research performed is only an empirical exercise. Practitioners are sometimes left scratching their heads with reference to much of the research conducted. Unless the theory and rigor of correctional research can be distilled so that the parole officer in the community or the warden of a prison can adapt it, it has little utility.

Although most of the dichotomies in corrections emerge as contrasting concepts, there is one that, on the surface, seems to be a marriage made in correctional heaven: that is, the combining of institutional rehabilitative treatment with offender reentry programming models. Prisons and community corrections entities have had their troubles working together. However, the reentry movement has the opportunity to undo that which did not work well in the previous century.

It is my view that reentry is not a program; instead, it is the underpinning that all corrections agencies should be working toward. I have often described reentry as the Microsoft operating system for correctional computers. I reference reentry as

more of a philosophy than yet another program. In 2001, the ODRC published its guidebook, the *Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry and Recidivism Reduction*. The text was also characterized as ODRC's reentry *Bible*.

The basic tenets of reentry are detailed in the *Ohio Plan* publication. The overarching idea is that prison reentry programming should commence upon each offender's admission to the reception center. Previously, prerelease, discharge planning, or reintegration programming approaches took place two or three weeks or several months prior to release. There certainly isn't any good data to suggest that these program initiatives were unsuccessful; by comparison, there is also no good data to suggest that they had a major positive impact on an inmate's successful return home. In retrospect, it appears wasteful not to maximize an inmate's entire prison stay, making it part of his or her early planning for reentry.

In addition to the *Ohio Plan*, other initiatives are growing in Ohio. There are reentry plans for persons who require mental health assistance. "Citizen Circles" have been formed throughout the state to work with the recently released; these groups "welcome" home offenders who seek various services at home. Richland County actually has a reentry court, which takes prisoners returning home and helps them to facilitate their transition by giving them the support they need to become law-abiding citizens. The court uses both a carrot and a stick approach. Preliminary data suggest that this program is very successful. Consequently, other Ohio counties are considering implementing similar enterprises.

Nationally, many reentry schemes have been developed. I, along with others committed to supporting the development of reentry initiatives, founded a group entitled the International Association of Reentry (IAR). The IAR has conducted several "international" summits, although most of the conferees were from the United States. In addition to the *Ohio Plan*, much has been written about reentry.

Annually, nearly 650,000 persons "return" home from prison to join a large minority group in the United States: formerly incarcerated persons—individuals who are continually restricted and penalized even though they "paid for their crime." It is no longer the case that a person who committed a crime goes to court, is punished, and returns home. Today, persons released from confinement are subject to a multitude of different penalties. The idea is generally referred to as "collateral sanctions."

In Ohio alone, hundreds of collateral punishments are embedded in the state's criminal code. Some automatically ban the released person from receiving a license to work in a particular discipline. Others are discretionary disqualifications. This means that one can be banned from working in a certain occupation solely on the bases of "moral turpitude," or bad "moral character." One's criminal behavior is not necessarily related in any way to the work.

Certainly, it is inappropriate to allow a child molester to work in a daycare center. Moreover, an embezzler shouldn't be employed as a bank teller or a bookkeeper. These examples represent a nexus between the crime and the work. However, most of the collateral sanctions spelled out in the Ohio Revised Code have no relationship to the criminal past of a convicted felon. To eliminate this situation, the state of Delaware passed a law mandating a relationship between a crime and the license sought. Therefore, unless one made a living stealing auto parts, he or she should be allowed to work in a junk yard.

As the director of ODRC I recommended legislation five years ago to eliminate of such collateral sanctions in Ohio. In April 2008, the Ohio House of Representatives, by a wide margin, passed an omnibus legislative package that would, among other provisions, address the unfairness of these sanctions imposed on formerly incarcerated persons. Of course, the Ohio Senate would need to do the same. Ohio's governor, Ted Strickland, endorses and will sign the bill.

There are examples of jurisdictions assuming enough political will to do the right thing. The U.S. Congress passed The Second Chance Act of 2007 (H.R. 1593). This legislation, which will help ensure that the transition people make from prison or jail to the community is safe and successful, was inspired by President George W. Bush in his 2004 State of the Union address. He

*The U.S. Congress passed The Second Chance Act of 2007 (H.R. 1593). This legislation, which will help ensure that the transition people make from prison or jail to the community is safe and successful, was inspired by President George W. Bush in his 2004 State of the Union address.*

extolled: "America is the land of second chance, and when the gates of the prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life." I was honored to help former Ohio Congressman Rob Portman write the language for this bill. President Bush signed this historic legislation on April 9, 2008. I was invited to attend the bill-signing event, but was unable to do so. It is now hoped that state legislative assemblies will have

the courage to pass and fund similar legislation tailored to their own jurisdictions.

I expect that the nuances of offender reentry will continue to gain momentum as we begin to realize that there are diminishing returns if we continue "business as usual." No one is promoting the oft-cited "hug-a-thug" approach to crime fighting. Without a doubt, quite the opposite is the tactic. The suggestion is to be smart on crime. Being smart on crime is synonymous with cost savings—something that all public officials understand. But for me there is a more profound reason to be intelligent about the administration of justice: the victims and survivors of crime.

Few issues have shaped my worldview as much as working with victims of crime. Early in my administration as ODRC director, I sought legislation creating the Office of Victim Services (OVS). It is now one of the most well-respected victims' service operations in Ohio—if not in the United States. OVS staff serve thousands of persons who want infor-

mation about their assailants: they want to know how to oppose a parole release, what the security status of a prisoner is, how to participate in victim–offender dialogue, and much more. The person who heads up this division is a victim of a violent crime; thus, her credibility is unquestioned. She is often sought to assist other agencies with developing victim services agendas.

In addition to creating the OVS, I empanelled the Ohio Council on Victims Justice. This group provides input and makes suggestions for operational changes that affect victims. The group serves as a liaison between ODRC and the constituents of council members. I have found that including persons who represent victims and crime survivors adds immediate credibility to any justice agency.

We often forget that there are other victims of crime who are swept under the rug: most notably, families of offenders. The pain of a mother or a child of a person who has been charged, convicted, and sentenced, is tremendous. We usually don't think of offender family members as victims. However, we shouldn't dismiss the fact that they are a group that also needs help—especially the children of incarcerated parents. There is one group that exists solely for the purpose of representing families of prisoners: Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE). Although the Ohio representatives of this group didn't always agree with the policies, they were an important organization.

The concept of restorative justice teaches that justice systems should not merely focus on offenders, but also be inclusive of civic organizations, community representatives, and, especially, crime victims. This construct promotes the importance of restitution to both victims and the community. Prisoners involved with restorative activities are taught that they have caused harm and that they should work to repair that harm to the greatest extent possible.

As a way of integrating this idea at ODRC, I appointed a community justice cabinet comprised of senior staff to serve as the alter ego of our restorative justice activities. Also created were five community justice councils assigned to specific topic areas: local corrections, victims' services, community involvement, prison roles, and staff participation. One particular program under the guidelines of restorative and community justice is ODRC's community service work agenda.

This program, entitled Time Well Spent, engages inmates in services that benefit community organizations. Prisoners train guide dogs, build homes for Habitat for Humanity, make educational tools for schools, plant flowers at the state fair grounds, build playgrounds, paint churches, and participate in dozens of other activities. Time Well Spent is not just a volunteer program; it is also a treatment program. Before a prisoner can carry out any community work, he or she must complete a Service Learning curriculum developed by the American Association of Community Colleges. These classes teach the impor-

tance of giving back and emphasize how prisoners can benefit persons and organizations in need.

My doctoral dissertation hypothesized that inmates who participated in any community service work would recidivate less often than those who had none. I also proposed that the more one was involved in this program the less likely one would be to return to custody. In both cases the research proved significant.

It is not surprising that many incarcerated persons also have other family members who have been in trouble with the law. It's a travesty that there isn't greater intervention with persons who are the children of felons. This intervention process is regularly referred to as "breaking the cycle." Under the auspices of reentry planning, some agencies try to identify families, children in particular, who might benefit from this type of plan. The programming can take on many fronts, but the mission is the same: to create a mindset that would divert a child from a life of crime.

You might ask, why should this be the duty of a corrections agency? My response is, "Why not?" It is true that corrections agencies do much more than manage the detention of criminals. I had many differing beliefs about my mission as the CEO of our agency. For instance, I believed that I should be held responsible for Ohio's recidivism rate. This was a self-imposed challenge while I was director. Whenever I'd mention this to my counterparts in other states I could feel and see their angst. I believe that all corrections administrators should be responsible for reducing crime, protecting the public, minimizing victimization, and managing safe and humane correctional facilities. They can't do this alone. Community involvement is critical, but political support is even more important.

Maybe it is foolish to believe that justice leaders can have an impact on the social fabric of society. Nevertheless, I do. The long arm of corrections resources should not be underestimated. I believe there are five prison services that should be carried out regardless of the cost: 1) health care, 2) mental

health care, 3) job training, 4) education, and 5) substance abuse treatment. These offerings are at the absolute top of my list of core programs that will contribute to a successful reintegration back home. Unquestionably, there are many other topics such as life skills, faith-based programs, victim awareness, parenting, and community service work. But after I have spent more than thirty years in the corrections business, these five headline my list.

*I believe there are five prison services that should be carried out regardless of the cost: 1) health care, 2) mental health care, 3) job training, 4) education, and 5) substance abuse treatment. These offerings are at the absolute top of my list of core programs that will contribute to a successful reintegration back home.*

Presently, I head the Ohio College Access Network (OCAN). Immediately following my retirement from ODRC I held a similar position with an organization called the Ohio Business Alliance for Higher Education and the Economy. I have a M.A. degree in higher education administration. My doctoral degree



is in educational leadership. It has always been my desire to return to postsecondary education. I was literally devastated when the Federal Pell and Ohio Instructional Grants were outlawed for prisoners. These acts were an assault on what I considered to be the one big answer to preventing recidivism.

Now it is my responsibility to help prevent the very situations that contribute to the incarceration of hundreds of persons: the lack of education. OCAN is a member-based organization that coordinates services for nonprofit college access groups throughout Ohio's 614 school districts. Agencies affiliated with OCAN have a presence in one-third of these districts. We serve a variety of students, especially first-generation college students and those who have financial need. These services include college advising, mentoring, retention, financial aid, early college, adult learners programs, career development, and much more. Our work helps to reduce dropout rates and enhance the college-going aspirations in these school systems.

Discussions are ongoing regarding how to better work with "hard-to-serve" or "hard-to-reach" populations. Of course, inmates and previously incarcerated men and women are included in this designation. Persons with disabilities, former foster-care children, single-parent mothers, displaced workers, and persons with some college education could be target groups.

It still confuses me as to how our society got in this predicament. Why are so many of our citizens involved with the courts and ending up incarcerated? It is my conviction that justice- and social-service agencies alone can do little more than apply stopgap measures. If we are to see major changes in crime and incarceration rates, we must promote a change in the social fabric of the general public. Even though I believe heads of correctional agencies should be held responsible for recidivism rates, there is really more to this story.

In order to achieve maximum success with those persons who have the propensity to commit crimes, our society should adapt a "social justice" model to minimize felonious behavior. Social justice assumes a holistic approach to repairing the social fabric of our society. Often when a person is released from prison, he or she first reports to the parole officer. Recent returnees are admonished to stay away from drugs, bad people, and find a job. Of course, there are routine guidelines to follow. However, in order to comply with these, and sometimes dozens of others regulations, a network of wraparound services are required.

In addition to social service and justice agencies, the community at large should maintain a high level of responsibility for a formerly incarcerated person's success. In other words, the business and corporate communities as well as trade unions should be intimately involved in this process. Career centers, secondary, postsecondary, and proprietary schools should also be more involved. Agencies responsible for housing should be at the table. Most prisoners have a multitude of medical chal-



lenges: substance abuse, health care, mental illness. Access to quality health care should not be optional; thus, health care organizations should commit resources.

This all may seem obvious. I'm suggesting that the connectivity with these services should be extraordinary. If managed under a rubric of social justice, the rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration levels for former prisoners should be greatly diminished.

*If managed under a rubric of social justice, the rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration levels for former prisoners should be greatly diminished. In order to achieve a social justice approach, much of the work needs to take place while a person is imprisoned.*

In order to achieve a social justice approach, much of the work needs to take place while a person is imprisoned.

For the most part, we live in a disposable culture. Persons who have been convicted of crimes should not be a part of this "throw-away" mentality. In my estimation, only when the various sectors of society can come together with admirable intentions will we be pleased with our progress. And

when we can accomplish this, I believe correctional and justice agency leaders will freely take responsibility for recidivism rates. Therefore, we must leave room for a true sense of hope and rationality.

## Works Cited

- Frieden, T. "Violent Crime Takes First Big Jump since '91." *CNN.com*, June 12, 2006. <http://www.cnn.com/2006/LAW/06/12/crime.rate/>.
- Hartney, C. "U.S. Rates of Incarceration: A Global Perspective." *The National Council on Crime and Delinquency*, November 2006.
- Human Rights Watch. "Incarcerated America." *Human Rights Watch Backgrounder*, April 2003. <http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/usa/incarceration/>.
- Marks, A. "One Inmate's Push to Restore Education Funds for Prisoners." *Christian Science Monitor* 89 (1997): 3.
- Miller, J. G. "The Debate on Rehabilitating Criminals: Is It True that Nothing Works?" *The Washington Post*, March, 1989.
- Pew Center for the States. "One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008." The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008.
- Schlosser, E. "The Prison-Industrial Complex." *The Atlantic Monthly* (December 1998): 51-77.
- Vicin, J. "U.S. Has the Most Prisoners in the World." *Reuters*, 4/4/2008. <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines06/1209-01.htm>.