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Prisons in the United States: A need for reform and educational rehabilitation
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Abstract: The American criminal justice system holds almost 2.3 million people in 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 1,852 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, and 80 Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories. The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world. Ex-convicts express that transitioning back into society, as well as finding employers willing to hire former inmates, is a difficult task. In this capstone, we will look at prison reform from the 1800s-to-today, we will determine which roles retributive and restorative justice play in our criminal justice system, we will recognize the current implications of our current correctional system, we will engage in statistics regarding employment and homelessness rates, we will reminisce on personal experiences as an intern in a correctional facility, and lastly, we will look into programming, educational services, and professional development opportunities for inmates while serving their sentences. To understand social justice ideals, it is necessary to recognize that our nation consists of various structures, policies, and practices that either help or harm the human population. To create a just society, we must find ways in which our nation can find, and enforce, institutional practices that allow all humans to equally flourish in daily life.

Preliminary Thesis: Prisons in the United States must promote education and rehabilitation within the institutions through educational and fundamental programs, student-to-inmate interactions, and professional development.
Introduction:

In the United States, there are institutions that both help and harm individuals in our society. One institution where we can see social controversy is our nation’s jail, or prison system. The American criminal justice system holds almost 2.3 million people in 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 1,852 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, and 80 Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories (Wagner, P., & Sawyer, W., 2018). Oftentimes, the presence of social justice is called into question within these institutions.

The Center for Economic and Social Justice defines social justice as, “... the virtue which guides us in creating those organized human interactions we call institutions. In turn, social institutions, when justly organized, provide us with access to what is good for the person, both individually and in our associations with others…” (Center for Economic and Social Justice, 2008). In light of social justice, prison reform has been a hot topic in our nation dating all the way back to 1777 and continuing in the present day. Prison living conditions have improved but there are still points of concern. It will also be important to consider how other countries serve their prison inmates. And lastly, it will be necessary to take a look at rehabilitation programs, more specifically, education programs and student-to-inmate interaction groups within the institution.

Prison Reform (1800s-Present Day), Restorative Justice, and Retributive Justice:

Prison reform has been a subject of debate dating as far back as 1777 when English Quaker John Howard, a prison reformer, wrote an intellectual piece entitled, *The State of Prisons* within Isaac Kramnick’s edited book, *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*. Howard’s writing revealed the harsh realities of the contemporary prison systems and offered proposals for humane
reform. Furthermore, in 1841 our nation saw emerging prison reformists, such as Dorothea Dix, who also challenged society’s ignorance towards our prisons, especially inmates struggling with mental health. More recently, we have seen Supreme Court cases, such as Brown v. Plata, that question whether or not a court order requiring California to reduce its prison population to remedy unconstitutional conditions in its correctional facilities violated the Prison Litigation Reform Act. Lastly, we can also see current articles that explain the benefits of other countries’ successful prison systems, such as Germany and Sweden’s institutions. These articles question whether America could ever change our system. Prison systems in America surely have some helpful aspects, yet, surely have many harmful aspects, too.

To begin, prison living conditions have not been ideal for decades, even centuries. For example, John Howard criticized the prison conditions back in 1777. In his work, Howard exposed the truths about the lack of water, food, clothing, and terrible air conditions. As for the air he wrote, “Air which has been breathed, is made poisonous to a more intense degree, by the effluvia from the sick, and what else in prisons is offensive” (Kramnick, 1996, p. 537). Therefore, with the lack of nutrition and fresh air, these prisoners with exceptionally vulnerable immune systems were at high risk for disease. In addition to the poor physical aspects of the prison living conditions, the social aspects of prison life were miserable too. One of Howard’s main points was that the prisons should be separated according to, for example, mental health status and age. Howard wrote, “In some gaols you see (and who can see it without sorrow) boys of 12 or 14 eagerly listening to the stories told by practiced and experienced criminals, of their adventures, successes, stratagems, and escapes” (Kramnick, 1996, p. 538). Also, Howard wrote, “Many of the bridewells are crowded and offensive, because the rooms which were designed for prisoners are occupied by the insane. Where these are not kept separate, they disturb and terrify
other prisoners” (Kramnick, 1996, p. 538). Socially, the prisons did little to accommodate the significant age differences and mental health needs among the inmates.

Dorothea Dix demonstrated a great amount of activism work in regard to sane and insane inmates within the prison walls. In 1841, Dix had a life changing moment when she began teaching Sunday school at the East Cambridge Jail, a women’s prison in Massachusetts. Upon visiting, she discovered the appalling treatment of the prisoners, particularly those with mental illnesses, whose living quarters had no heat. As a result, she immediately went to court and secured an order to provide heat for the prisoners, along with other improvements (A&E Television Networks, 2014). To this day, Dorothea Dix serves as an influence in prison reform and fought for justice for all.

As part of the prison reform discussion, some citizens may wonder whether the criminal justice system should follow the path of retributive justice or restorative justice. According to Antony Duff and Zachary Hoskins, restorative justice includes a process in which reparation (the act of making amends, offering expiation, or giving satisfaction for a wrong or injury) or restoration (the act of returning something to a former owner, place, or condition) is served between the offender, victim, and other individuals involved in the trial (Duff and Hoskins, Fall 2018). To seek restorative justice, there must be a mediation (an intervention to try to solve a dispute) or a reconciliation (a restored relationship) between the all parties. In these meetings, there must be a discussion on what was done and how the parties plan to deal with the situation. The offender must express genuine recognition that what they did was wrong, and they must provide a sincere apology to all parties. The restorative justice approach requires active participation from all parties who most likely include the offender(s), the victim(s), and the community. A key point to restorative justice is that it is not achieved by a criminal process and
punishment. Restorative justice, as many people claim, can be an alternative to punishment (Duff and Hoskins, Fall 2018).

Marshall (2003) proposed a definition for retributive justice which is frequently used in literature. He wrote, “restorative justice is a process whereby parties with a stake in a specific offence resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offence and its implications for the future” (p. 28). However, Gilbert and Settles (2007) provided a more comprehensive definition that stated:

Restorative justice views crime as a harm to individuals, their neighborhoods, the surrounding community, and even the offender. Crimes produce injuries that must be repaired by those who caused the injury. In this sense, crimes are more than a violation of law, and justice is more than punishment of the guilty. Restorative justice strives to promote healing through structured communication processes among victims, offenders, community representatives and government officials. It also strives to accomplish these goals in a manner that promotes peace and order for the community, vindication for the victim, and recompense for the offender. Under this restorative perspective, justice is not based on punishment inflicted but the extent to which harms have been repaired and future harms prevented (p. 7).

According to Donald Hermann, writer for the Seattle Journal for Social Justice, Howard Zehr was one of the most prominent practitioners of restorative justice. Practices of restorative justice could be seen in Canada as far back as 1974. At this time, there was an interaction between a probation officer and his coworker, and two offenders. The probation officer and his coworker joined the two offenders and made a trip to the victim’s home to talk over the offenders’ wrongdoings. As Howard Zehr wrote in The Little Book of Restorative Justice, “Restorative justice is a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to carefully and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order that one put things as right as possible” (Howard Zehr as mentioned in Hermann, 2017, p. 72). A strong emphasis on retributive justice is to allow the offender(s) and the victim(s) to meet face-to-face. At this time, the two parties have the chance to come to terms
with the situation at hand and to determine a resolution. Restorative justice can provide justice and healing. The idea is to restore both parties to as much wholeness as possible. It is important to note that the victim has the choice whether to accept or reject the offender’s apology. The victim has the ultimate right to decide the closure.

Victim impact statements have shown to be an effective tool within restorative justice. As written in the Centre for Justice and Reconciliation, Lyn Smith, a woman in her early forties, made her way to a correctional center to share with six prisoners the ripple effect of being held up at knifepoint at work. Smith told the inmates in detail how the incident turned her life upside down. For example, she shared about her flashbacks, how her nervous system shut down for eight months, and her current state as a mother of two who is a “shaking, wheelchair-bound mess of fear and paranoia” (Dalton, 2019). Smith thought out loud, “How many people in there might have held someone up to get a quick fix and not thought anything of it? That little five-minute moment in their life has a lifetime effect on the victim” (Dalton, 2019). As a part of the Sycamore Tree project, victims have the opportunity to share their stories to inmates. Throughout the process, both the victims and the prisoners are given techniques to help heal their lives through role play scenarios, empathy training, prayer, and reflection. Smith concluded her interview saying, “It’s about them understanding. I’ve always wanted prisoners to understand what they’ve done” (Dalton, 2019). Victim impact stories help offenders recognize and reflect on how their actions in society can severely impact other humans’ lives and give victims the platform to reach a point of fulfillment and closure.

Restorative justice has a significant tie to the New Testament. The New Testament supports restorative justice. As written in Hermann (2017), the bishops recall that Jesus condemned revenge and urged to change the laws that harshly punished its offenders. The
bishops stated, “The New Testament builds on this tradition and extends it … rejected
punishment for its own sake, noting that we are all sinners. Jesus also rejected revenge and
retaliation and was very hopeful that offenders would transform their lives and turn to be
embraced by God’s love” (United States Catholic Conference, 2000, as mentioned in Hermann,
2017, p. 77). The bishops recognized Jesus’s consistent concern for the victims of crimes, which
is a strong focal point to restorative justice.

Ideally, restorative justice will benefit both the victim and the offender, as well as the
community as a whole. Critics claim that restorative justice fails to fully acknowledge and
pursue an offender’s status as a wrongdoer and a moral agent. However, according to the United
States Catholic Conference in Hermann (2017), “…the experience offers victims a much greater
sense of peace and accountability. Offenders who are willing to face the harmful consequences
of their actions are more ready to accept responsibility, make reparations, and rebuild their lives”
(p. 78). Prior to determining which form of justice would be best for inmates in the current
correctional system, it will be necessary to take a closer look at retributive justice on its own, as
well as a potential combination of restorative justice and retributive justice.

While restorative justice seeks to repair harm, retributive justice can be seen to inflict
punishment. According to Alec Walen, retributive justice is best understood in the following
three principles: “(1) that those who commit certain kinds of wrongful acts, paradigmatically
serious crimes, morally deserve to suffer a proportionate punishment; (2) that it is intrinsically
morally good – good without reference to any other goods that might arise – if some legitimate
punisher gives them the punishment they deserve; and (3) that it is morally impermissible
intentionally to punish the innocent or to inflict disproportionality large punishments on
wrongdoers” (Walen, 2016). The idea of retributive justice can be seen as problematic for some
critics. For example, the act of suffering is normalized, and inmates may leave the criminal justice institution as vengeful towards society and its people. However, the public cannot necessarily assume that retribution is all about vengeance, rather retribution should be viewed as the justification for criminal punishment towards an offender. According to the well-known philosopher Immanuel Kant’s work, The Philosophy of the Law, “Retribution is simply the state imposing the established consequences of the choice made by the offender when he or she broke the rule” (Immanuel Kant as quoted in Hermann, 2017, p. 85).

The origins of retributive justice could be seen as far back as the era of indigenous or tribal people. In this period, the victims of crimes would seek compensation or reparation from the offenders. If the offender was in the same tribe, then that might result in exile. However, if the crime was committed by a member of a different tribe, then things got more complicated. According to Robert Redfield in Hermann (2017), if a member of a tribe was killed by a member of another tribe, there would be a process of inter-tribe adjudication where the responsibility of the crime would be determined. The offender of the crime could either be forced into slavery for the tribe of the victim, or even killed. However, the overall objective was to maintain a peaceful life without any revenge, blood feuds, or tribal wars (Redfield as mentioned in Hermann, 2017, p. 86).

In regard to retributive justice and reconciliation, the Preamble of UN Security Council Resolution 995 (1994), which led to the creation of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), declares: “The prosecution of persons responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law would ... contribute to the process of national reconciliation and to the restoration and maintenance of peace” (Kamatali, 2003, p. 116 as cited in Clark, 2018). Janine Natalya Clark (2008) argued, “Supporters of international war crimes tribunals maintain
that these tribunals can aid the reconciliation process in three particular ways: by seeing that justice is done; by establishing the truth about crimes committed; and by individualizing guilt. It is the contention of this author, however, that each of these claims is problematic.

Retributive justice has a tie to religion, too. Pope Pius XII shared his thoughts on retribution and the criminal punishment in a series of addresses that were given between 1952 and 1955. The Pope focused on the retributive nature of legitimate criminal punishment and supported underlying views of punishment that were supported by philosophers such as Kant and Hegel. These values viewed the offender as someone who has chosen punishment by the free act of violating a penal prohibition (J.D. Mabbott as cited in Hermann, 2017, p. 89). Pope Pius XII nodded to this view as he addressed a question of execution of a condemned man and said, “In this case it is reserved for the public power to deprive the condemned person of the enjoyment of life, in expiation of his crime, when by his crime, he has already dispossessed himself of the right to live” (Pope Pius XII as cited in Hermann, 2017, p. 89). It is important to note that the Roman Catholic Church has since changed their views on retributive justice and that the death penalty is almost never justified. Overall, it must be understood that a key component to retributive justice is to ensure that an offender is punished because it is what they deserve for choosing to violate a law. The community needs to witness that if one goes against the social norms, mores and taboos, then there will be consequences. These consequences will be appropriate for the violation and should be considered on a case-by-case basis. The state will determine the offender’s guilt and then the judge will impose a just sentence, which can range anywhere from fines, incarceration, or even death.

In today’s society, crime is heavily affiliated with punishment, therefore, it may be an aggressive jump to shift the correctional facility to complete and total restorative justice. As
suggested by Ken Roach in Hermann (2017), in our punishment-heavy society, restorative justice most likely will be used for less serious offenses (p. 96). But, in our society today, could each form of justice be used by itself? In order to ensure a balance between meeting the needs of the victims, the offenders, and the society and state, the current criminal justice system could propose a combination of the two justices. According to Hermann (2017), restorative justice would ensure reparation and restoration that would meet the needs of the victim, as well as ensure forgiveness and reintegration in the community to the offender. Furthermore, retributive justice would meet the needs of the state to make sure that the criminal law remains enforced and punishable in society. Additionally, retributive justice would restore the offender’s moral state as a result of the fair and justified sentence (p. 98). According to Lode Walgrave in Hermann (2017), “Restorative justice and the accountability required by retributive justice are not mutually exclusive as long as punishment is humane and rehabilitative. There is for certain a recognition among many people today of the need for treatment programs to rehabilitate offenders” (Lode Walgrave as cited in Hermann, 2017, p. 101). The two can work hand-in-hand, but it will be necessary for the offender to acknowledge their mistakes prior to restoration. Neither approach alone can satisfy all three parties. The restorative justice can best meet the needs of the victim and the offender, while retributive justice can best meet the needs of the state.

Based on the restorative justice definition by Gilbert and Settles (2007), there are significant differences between restorative justice and retributive justice, especially when in relation to international war crimes tribunals, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Clark (2008) explained, “Retributive justice views crime as a violation of the law and is primarily concerned with punishing those who transgress the law. In
contrast, from a restorative perspective, crime is a violation of people and relationships. Justice, therefore, does not entail punishment; rather, it ‘involves the victim, the offender and the community in a search for solutions which promote repair, reconciliation and reassurance’” (Zehr, 1990, p. 181 as cited in Clark, 2008). Clark (2008) reiterated that the differences between restorative justice and retributive justice do not make them mutually exclusive or incompatible. Clark (2008) also argued that in some post-conflict societies, the people favored restorative justice practices rather than retributive justice practices as a communal healing technique. For example, Mozambique had a civil war that lasted seventeen years and ended in 1992. Thakur (2004) wrote, “As warriors, victims, exiles and the displaced came home, communities reverted to traditional healing rituals designed to take the violence out of the individual person and facilitate reintegration into the community” (Thakur, 2004, p. 285 as cited in Clark, 2008).

In our current United States prison system, our country may want to consider working to create a system in which we combine restorative justice and retributive justice. Our nation’s inmates should have the opportunity to reflect and re-amend for their wrongdoings in which the victim and the community recognize their remorse. To ensure a positive rehabilitation back into society, prison systems around the nation should offer educational and rehabilitative programs within the institution. Once released from jail, or prison, inmates are left with few opportunities to enroll into school or find a job. Prisons in the United States must promote education and rehabilitation within the institutions through educational and fundamental programs, student-to-inmate interactions, and professional development to ensure a successful re-entry into society.

Regardless of what side of the prison reform debate one supports, thousands of people are being affected. By 2010, the United States had more prisoners incarcerated than any other country, and a greater percentage of its population in prison than any other country in the world.
Thus, with the growing prison population, it is harder to keep up with ideal living conditions such as John Howard had proposed in the 1700s. The Supreme Court case of Edmund G. Brown, Jr., Governor of California, et al. versus Marciano Plata, et al. was introduced in 2011. As stated before, this case questioned whether or not a court order requiring California to reduce its prison population to remedy unconstitutional conditions in its correctional facilities violated the Prison Litigation Reform Act. The Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLR) is defined as, “an act which placed several restrictions on the ability of prisoners to file lawsuits based on the conditions of their confinement” (Thomson Reuters, n.d.).

As for the details of the case, the Prison Law Office in Berkeley, California filed a class-action lawsuit in April 2001 on behalf of Marciano Plata and several other prisoners, alleging that California prisons were in violation of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution, which bans "cruel and unusual punishment" (Brown v. Plata, n.d.). A source further explained, “Following a lengthy trial, a special panel of three federal judges determined that serious overcrowding in California's 33 prisons was the "primary cause" for violations of the Eighth Amendment. The court ordered the release of enough prisoners, so the inmate population would come within 137.5 percent of the prisons' total design capacity” (Brown v. Plata, n.d.). As a result, between 38,000 and 46,000 inmates were released. To the appellee’s satisfaction, the court ruled that the court-mandated population limit is necessary to uphold prisoners' constitutional rights and is authorized by the PLRA. As a result, this order required California to release the 46,000 convicted criminals (Brown v. Plata, n.d.).

Another area of concern within current prison institutions is the act of secondary prisonization. Comfort (2003) described secondary prisonization as a weakened, but still compelling, version of the elaborate regulations, concentrated surveillance, and corporeal
confinement. Visitors, especially women, experience restricted rights, diminished resources, social marginalization, and other consequences of penal confinement. These experiences suggest that women experience a form of “secondary prisonization” through their sustained contact with the correctional institution. Some aspects ranged from the display of pertinent information, the commencement of visiting hours, the implementation of the dress code, etc. All regulations are irregular and subject to change without notice (Comfort, 2003, p. 101). Ultimately, secondary prisonization extends the practices of incarceration to include the women who come to visit men incarcerated in prisons, in this case, at San Quentin.

In Comfort’s article, for example, a woman named Sarah has been visiting her husband for two years. She shared that her biggest challenge is that nothing stays the same. She said, “They’re constantly changing the rules.... There’s no consistency, there’s no stability, nothing stays the same, and that sort of living in the unknown is, is really difficult” (Comfort, 2003, p. 102). Another story came from a college graduate named Sophia, a thirty-seven-year-old white woman, who explained, “I’m articulate and educated and I carry myself with class and all that. However… I understand that I’m in a state penitentiary, and I understand that by the law it is a privilege, not a right, that I visit my husband. And with that in mind there are certain guidelines that I have to follow. I have to dress a certain way; I have to conduct myself in a certain manner. And I’m willing to do that” (Comfort, 2003, p. 102).

Comfort (2003) explained that women who visit prisoners readily perceive their treatment at the prison as a collapse of institutional differentiation between visitors and inmates. Stephanie, a twenty-five-year-old security guard and college student, complained that the correctional officers “try to make it as hard for them [visitors] as possible . . . you know, that is treating the family members as if they’re incarcerated too.” This was a common complaint
among women at San Quentin who feel stigmatized and humiliated by their encounters with the penal arm of the criminal justice system (Comfort, 2003, p. 102). According to the author, the space surrounding the waiting room becomes a site of contested personhood where visitors continually define and defend their social and physical integrity against the degradation of self (Garfinkel 1968) required by the prison as a routine condition for visiting (Comfort, 2003, p. 80). Furthermore, the extensive morning and post-count waits imposed on visitors at San Quentin converge to signify the devaluation of prisoners’ families in the eyes of the authorities. To explain, “the distribution of waiting time coincides with the distribution of power” since “waiting limits productive uses of time and in so doing generates distinct social and personal costs” (Comfort, 2003, p. 91).

Not only do adult visitors experience secondary prisonization, but Aiello and McCorkel found that children do, too. The two authors focused their attention to the Northeast Jail. Aiello and McCorkel (2017) defined secondary prisonization as the process through which the micro-physics of carceral power is realized among members of prisoners' social networks, including children (p. 8). Their analysis of the data showed that the most crucial components of secondary prisonization for children involve: (a) discipline of the body and (b) regulation of emotion. One example of how the children experienced secondary prisonization was through the restrictions on the items that they could bring to the jail. According to the authors, the only items that children were permitted to carry with them were baby bags (which were always searched) and, if prescribed, medicine. This regulation was often difficult for the children to understand because they would want to bring in photos or handmade gifts for their mothers, but, those items were always denied entry (Aiello and McCorkel, 2017, p. 8). Another example was that caregivers were prohibited from accompanying children beyond the lobby. This meant from the metal
detector forward, kids had to go in accompanied by staff or volunteers who they may or may not know.

The authors explained that visiting loved ones in jail was very scary, particularly for children who had not yet become accustomed to the jail (Aiello and McCorkel, 2017, p. 8). Furthermore, beyond the second door was a long, gloomy hallway that led to the visiting room. This walk proved to be frightening for the children (Aiello and McCorkel, 2017, p. 9). Overall, the children were preoccupied by three different aspects of this process. First, they experienced the separation, often forcible, of their bodies from familiar objects and people. Second, they experienced the physical sensation of being immersed in a space that overwhelms them with its vast size, intimidating sounds, and foreboding iconography. Third, the children experienced the confinement of their bodies, specifically the imposition and regulation of narrow boundaries within which they can move, touch, socialize, and play (Aiello and McCorkel, 2017, p. 9). Lastly, the authors explained that the children’s emotions, and the emotions they provoked in their mothers, were an ongoing target of surveillance and intervention, and a crucial component of their secondary prisonization (Aiello and McCorkel, 2017, p. 11). The institutional efforts to regulate and manage emotion during visits included (a) rules regarding how children and mothers display their emotions, and (b) concerted efforts to manufacture and facilitate certain feeling states among children (Aiello and McCorkel, 2017, p. 11). Overall, the main findings of Aiello and McCorkel (2017) were that the core aspects of secondary prisonization among children involve discipline of the body and regulation of emotion (p. 16).

A popular critique of the United States prison institutions suggest that the United States should perhaps learn from other countries and mirror other nation’s prison systems. While the United States currently incarcerated 2.2 million people, Germany, whose population is one-
fourth the size of the United States’ population, locks up only about 63,500, which translates to an incarceration rate that is one-tenth of the United States’ incarceration rate (Turner and Travis, 2015). Furthermore, Nicholas Turner and Jeremy Travis wrote in their New York Times article, “More than 80 percent of those convicted of crimes in Germany receive sentences of “day fines” based on the offense and the offender’s ability to pay, and only 5 percent end up in prison. Of those who do, about 70 percent have sentences of less than two years, with few serving more than 15 years” (Turner and Travis, 2015). Cost is another consideration. If it costs $25,000 per prisoner every year, then decreasing incarceration and/or sentence time may lessen the United States’ financial burden on incarceration and allow for more money to be allocated to prison reform, rehabilitation and education.

Furthermore, the living environments within the walls of German prisons are something that the United States could take notes on for their potential prison reform. For example, Turner and Travis commented on one certain prison, not identified as minimum or maximum security, that the men serving time wore their own clothes, not prison uniforms. When entering their cells, they slipped out of their sneakers and into slippers. To John Howard’s satisfaction, Turner and Travis mentioned that the inmates in Germany lived one person per cell. Additionally, they wrote, “Each cell was bright with natural light, decorated with personalized items such as wall hangings, plants, family photos and colorful linens brought from home. Each cell also had its own bathroom separate from the sleeping area and a phone to call home with” (Turner and Travis, 2015). This setup is reminiscent of a college campus dormitory. The fact that inmates have the opportunity to personalize their rooms prevents their loss of self-identity.

Another country that possesses an effective and positive international criminal justice system is Sweden. Aleem (2015) explained that the United States has only 5% of the world’s
population, but one-quarter of the world’s prisoners. He also emphasized that prisons in the United States are overcrowded and house ten times as many mentally ill individuals as state hospitals. Furthermore, our prison system locks up a larger percentage of our country’s black population than South Africa did under apartheid (Aleem, 2015). The United States has a recidivism rate of 2/3, or approximately 60% whereas Sweden’s recidivism rate is 40%. The Swedish prison system has a strong focus on rehabilitation and proves to be an effective system.

Swedish prison system works to rehabilitate their inmates. The country doesn’t necessarily add any additional punishments, as the sentence and loss of freedom are already the prisoner’s punishment. Sweden’s population is 9.5 million and only 4,500 citizens are imprisoned (Aleem, 2015). Sweden looks at prison as a last resort. The country strives to get ex-inmates back into society more mature and responsible than when they entered into the system. Sweden uses a Nordic model to minimize their prison intake and recidivism. It is important to note that the Nordic model is tailored to their geographical location, especially compared to the west. For example, Nordic countries are inclusive and there is shared prosperity and a low level of racial tension. However, the way the Swedish prisons treat their inmates poses as an alternative model that western nations, like the United States, could model after.

Even in high-security prisons, Swedish prisons include common areas with table tennis, pool tables, darts and aquariums. Furthermore, the walls are colored green, brown, and blue, and portray art by the inmates (Aleem, 2015). Another important note is the role of the correctional officer. In Sweden, the correctional officers are both rehabilitative coaches and security guards. Inmates are treated as individuals who have psychosocial needs and they are given special attention. Sweden uses an “open” prison model. The institutional housing closely resembles a college dorm. Inmates are able to accessorize their rooms, commute to nearby jobs, and to visit
families while electronically monitored. The prison staff and the inmates eat meals together in community spaces. And lastly, no inmates are expected to wear uniforms (Aleem, 2015).

Critics of prison reform that incorporate personalized and lighter approaches, such as Germany and Sweden’s systems, may believe that it is necessary to hold prisons as a negative, undesired consequence to ensure that crimes do not repeat. Critics may claim that convicts need to know that if they continue to repeat crimes over and over again they will be sent away from their current lifestyle and close friends and family for a long period of time. Inmates will need to recognize that their wrongdoings have consequences. Unlike Germany where recidivism is blamed on the prison staff, the United States blames the individual and insists on them to think to themselves, “Don’t do the crime, if you can’t pay the time” (Turner and Travis, 2015). Germany and Sweden greatly reflect a restorative justice model, in which the inmates are encouraged to reflect on their actions and to leave the prison as a better person. Aleem (2015) argued that ex-inmates in the United States leave and feel resentment towards the system that brought them in and treated them so poorly. The Nordic “open” prisons create space for reflection and remorse. On the other hand, the United States prison system continues to portray a retributive justice system in which inmates are punished for their wrongdoing. Defenders of the current American prison system may claim that the Nordic system is naïve, and that it is impossible to believe that prisoners can be treated as normal humans who can change and improve without any deterring punishments. The Nordic system responds with this self-fulfilling motto: “If you tell someone they cannot get better, they won’t; if you tell someone they can, they might just have a decent shot” (Aleem, 2015, p. 5).

**Societal Issues and Implications for Transitioning Ex-Convicts:**
In order to make jails and prisons a helpful institution in society, it is important to facilitate strong and stable rehabilitation programs. Life after prison is usually a tough time for the recently freed inmates. According to Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR), upon release, prisoners are often poorly prepared for adjusting to life on the outside and discrimination against ex-prisoners is common, making it even harder for them to get back on their feet (ADPSR, 2016). For example, most prisoners have to find housing and figure out how they are going to support themselves and their families, but discrimination against applicants with criminal records is still legal in some states. Furthermore, prisoners are often released with little to no money and few resources or contacts except those gained while in jail, leading to frequent re-incarceration shortly after release (ADPSR, 2016).

Strong rehabilitation is crucial for a successful employment post-release. Unfortunately, race and class continue to amplify the effects of a criminal record on job prospects. According to Pager (2003), white non-criminals served as the baseline in the comparisons between white criminals and black criminals. The white non-criminal represents the presumptively non-stigmatized group relative to a black criminal and those with criminal records (p. 955). Pager (2003) conducted a study which indicated that 34% of whites without a criminal record received a callback whereas only 17% of whites with a criminal record received a call back. Therefore, a criminal reduces the likelihood of a callback by 50%.

In regard to race, Pager (2003) expressed that regardless of crime the idea of race continues to play a major role in shaping employment opportunities (p. 957). The study showed that 14% of blacks without a criminal record received a callback (compared to 34% of whites). This percentage showed that even whites with a criminal record received more favorable treatment (17%) than blacks without criminal records (14%). Pager (2003) further noted that the ratio of
callbacks for non-offenders relative to ex-offenders for whites is 2:1. This same ratio for blacks is nearly 3:1 (p. 959). Overall, the ideas in the article represented an initial attempt to specify one of the important mechanisms by which incarceration leads to poor employment outcomes (p. 962).

Finding a stable job or career will be necessary for an ex-convict because incarceration increases one’s chances of homelessness. Vice versa, homelessness increases one’s chances of incarceration, too. For example, by the mid-1990s, 70% of US cities had passed laws forbidding sleeping or loitering in public places (Brosch, 1998), increasing the likelihood that homelessness would lead directly to incarceration (Gowan, 2002, p. 501). In San Francisco, where the majority of the men were not from the city, the path from incarceration to homelessness was often immediate. Gowan (2002) further explained that several of the men became homeless for the first time directly following release from jail or prison (p. 503). Incarceration leads to homelessness because ex-inmates become homeless when they leave prison, jail, or a halfway house because they have no place to go. More often than not, these ex-inmates are released from jail in the middle of the night with nothing but clothes on their backs (p. 507). In St. Louis, men were likely to have a family or friends to call. But, as described later in the article, former convicts in St. Louis will be immediately homeless after release from jail or prison in cases where the men had been in and out of the system for many years (p. 514). In San Francisco, a city of migrants, many people come homeless precisely at this point of release.

Homelessness can lead to incarceration through three main ways: (1) crimes of desperation, (2) ‘rabble management,’ and (3) bad company (Gowan, 2002, p. 517). Crimes of desperation are a result of the extreme poverty and mental strain suffered by people who are homeless which compels them to commit actions that are against the law, such as theft or burglary (p. 517).
“‘Rabble management’ is the routine jailing of the disreputable and disaffiliated for minimal offenses in the interests of public order. Some of these offenses include: panhandling, ‘encampment,’ sleeping, drinking or urinating in public, and selling clothes without license” (p. 520). Third, bad company is affiliated with ‘rabble zones.’ A rabble zone consists of high-crime residential ghettos, remaining ‘skid row’ areas of cheap hotels and other organizations which have historically catered to marginal single adults, and the institutional ghettos where the welfare, parole, probation, health, and homeless services are located (Vergara, 1995). Many homeless people gravitate into these ‘rabble zones’ which ultimately results in bad company. Overall, once living on the street, crimes of desperation, rabble management, and the close proximity of many former convicts made incarceration and reincarceration far more likely than it would have been for the same people if they were not homeless (p. 529).

It is important to notice that the lack of rehabilitation not only negatively affects the past-inmate, but his or her family as well. According to ADPSR, most US prisons offer few opportunities for family visits, especially for young children. Jailing parents creates trauma and depression among children, forcing them into foster care, and increases their own likelihood of future jail time. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics in midyear 2007, “52% of state and 63% of federal inmates reported being parents to an estimated 1.7 million children, and 2.3% of US children younger than 18 (Glaze, L.E. & Maruschak L.M., 2010 as cited in Lee, R. D., Fang, X., & Luo, F., 2013). Additionally, a study conducted by Rosalyn D. Lee, PhD, MPH, MA, Xiangming Fang, PhD, and Feijun Luo, PhD (2013) reported that parental incarceration has a positive correlation to increased risks of economic disadvantage, residential mobility, primary caregiver disruptions, exposure to non-biological parent figures, and stigma. The better our society can transition inmates back into reality while providing them with the knowledge and
skills within the prison walls to become a successful contributor to society, the stronger family relationships may become.

On the contrary, many have argued that prisoners should be required to repay their debt to society. Unpaid or low pay work is common in many prisons, often to the benefit of the community. Naysayers to prison reform can also argue that community service is increasingly being used as an alternative to prison for petty crimes, therefore, prisons are only used towards the people in society who have committed a larger crime, who may deserve harsher punishments/living conditions. Therefore, the retributive justice system could serve as a just punishment for wrongdoers who must go through a sentence as a means to deter the offender from committing any future crimes.

**Personal Experiences:**

To prepare ex-convicts for the real world and to prevent them from becoming jobless and homeless, educational rehabilitation programs in prisons could serve as a helpful tool for all participants. In the spring semester of 2018, I had the opportunity to work alongside Dr. Brittnie Aiello as her teacher’s assistant at the Essex County Correctional Facility, also known as the Middleton jail. This minimum-security institution held many pre-trial inmates as well as criminals sentenced to two years or less. Professor Aiello taught her course, “Race, Class and Crime” to the seventeen, which later turned to six, inmates. During this time, Professor Aiello was also teaching this course to Criminology and Criminal Justice majors at Merrimack College. In fact, I happened to be enrolled in that class, too. Throughout the year I was able to witness the course be taught to Merrimack College students during the day on Mondays and Wednesdays and to the Middleton jail inmates on Thursdays. I also helped the inmates on Mondays and Wednesdays at night to help them with their essays, discussion questions, etc., which were all
assignments that I needed to complete, too. Overall, it was a great experience and I was able to learn so much from each inmate. I was also able to observe both learning environments, too. I believe that the six students who completed the course in the jail strongly benefitted from the program. Education within a jail or prison is a topic with many research articles and I plan to explore many different publications in this next section.

**Student-to-Inmate Interactions:**

In Ed Wiltse’s research article, “*Hope Across the Razor Wire: Student-Inmate Reading Groups at Monroe Correctional Facility,*” he presented the “Jail Project” which was an ongoing service-learning project that brought together Nazareth College students in an introductory literature class with Monroe Correctional Facility inmates. The inmates were provided books for the class and prepared for a series of meetings in the jail classroom to discuss literature and its relation to everyone’s lives (Wiltse, 2010). The author had done this work for over six years and had continuously encouraged his students and inmates to regard each other as resources with varying backgrounds, knowledge, talents, and beliefs. Wiltse quoted Vaclav Havel who reflected that hope, “‘especially in situations that are particularly hopeless, such as a prison,’ is above all ‘an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart’” (Havel, 2004, as cited in Wiltse, 2010). Wiltse’s essay exemplified the truth of Havel’s comments and revealed how the experience of reading and writing together could cultivate that ‘orientation’ to hope.

The article presented many similarities between the students at Nazareth College and the inmates at the Monroe Correctional Facility. For example, both groups consisted of students in their late teens and twenties. Both groups are, for better or for worse, institutionalized. In these institutions, both groups are accustomed to their own routines and expectations. In these institutions, both groups have the ability to choose what they do with their free time. Both groups
have the chance to ‘find surprising, creative ways, within and outside their respective systems of control, to meet their individual needs and express their individual self-hoods’ (Wiltse, 2010, p. 209). And lastly, both groups are seen as ‘doing time.’ Both groups are in a current lifestyle that is considered ‘temporary.’ For example, unlike inmates at a maximum-security prison, these student-inmates will most likely be freed in the next few years. Likewise, college students are aware that they will only be in school for an average of two-to-five years.

Wiltse (2010) also shared some of the differences between the two groups. In this case, demographics played a large role. For example, in New York State, two-thirds of jail and prison inmates have not completed high school (The Graduate Center at the City University of New York and Women in Prison at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, as cited in Wiltse, 2010, p. 2010). Secondly, the motivations for writing and conditions under which participants wrote differed. To explain, the college students wrote for a grade where they are surrounded by peers and mentors who support education; on the other hand, the inmates voluntarily wrote in their journals while being surrounded by other inmates who look down on academic pursuits (Wiltse, 2010, p. 211). Unlike the educational program taught by Professor Aiello at the Essex County Correctional Facility, the Monroe Correctional Facility inmates did not receive college credit for their involvement in the ‘Jail Project.’

Both groups, Nazareth College students and the Monroe Correctional Facility inmates, logged journals to disclose their thoughts and experiences. Many journal entries were relatable to my time at the Essex County Correctional Facility. One female student wrote, “When we left for the jail I didn’t really know what to expect. Who was I, a sheltered, small-town girl, to waltz into the Monroe County Jail as if I had something to contribute? Was I mature enough for this?” (Anonymous female student as cited in Wiltse, 2010, p. 209). Similar to this student, I, too, am a
sheltered only-child girl from a small-town with no personal ties to anyone in the criminal justice system. I also questioned whether I would be able to relate to these individuals and to either make an impact or to leave impacted. Furthermore, she wrote, “As we drove listening to music and watching the other cars I tried to imagine myself unable to pop any CD in my player, unable to just hop in the car and go somewhere. I was surprised at how difficult it was” (Anonymous female student as cited in Wiltse, 2010, p. 209). This was all too true for me, too. A few students and I had a conversation about music. I said that I enjoyed listening to Post Malone, especially his new album, and asked if they had heard a few specific songs. One responded with, “We only hear what’s on the radio, that’s it.” This was a wake-up call that my Spotify account was a privilege and that these individuals cannot just listen to what they want and when they want.

To continue, the student also said, “We filed into the classroom and set up the tables. The two minutes we waited for the inmates were the most anxious, apprehensive two minutes of the whole afternoon. Finally they walked in. The door slammed, and six men entered. I was a little intimidated. Anthony came over, introduced himself, and sat down next to me. I could breathe again” (Anonymous female student as cited in Wiltse, 2010, p. 210). I was in a similar situation; however, on my first day there were sixteen male inmates. I recognized some of the male inmates from the graduation of last semester’s course that I attended which made me feel a little more comfortable. The moment that all of the inmates walk in is the time where you can’t help but judge a book by its cover. For example, there was one male inmate who I was admittedly frightened by on the first day. On that first day he came in with an orange beanie with half of his hair in a bun and half in a ponytail, and he sat without saying one word, rather, he sucked on a red lollipop the entire time simply looking and observing everything. In the end, he became one of the most social students who I learned the most from and ended as one of the six who
successfully completed the course. In fact, he will be attending community college next semester.

The inmates kept a voluntary journal for their own benefit. One wrote, “I was kinda nervous, however, feelings of shame overwhelmed me. Now that a piece of the outside world has entered my circle's existence, thoughts of me being locked up, incarcerated, away from society, is not for me. I look at these members of the book club and wonder if I am a guinea pig in their classroom experiment. As we introduced ourselves my feelings changed, I began to get a sense of why I joined this class, and what it is all about. It was about the book, my perception of it, though I still have all these feelings going on. I guess I can say envious feelings because they can walk out those doors at any time to freedom” (Anonymous female inmate as cited in Wiltse, 2010, p. 211).

I found it interesting to read a journal entry from one of the students that countered this female inmate’s concerns about the program. The female student wrote, “I was just amazed by the amount of depth these women had. They were extremely in touch with who they are - and even more - they were secure about it. I walked out of there being envious - wishing I was secure enough to walk out of my home with no makeup and my hair not done. It’s small - I know, but it made me think” (Anonymous female student as cited in Wiltse, 2010, p. 211). Seeing these two journal entries side-by-side is a great comparison for perceptions. If only prisoners could receive this kind of validation on a more regular basis, and to be told it in person, then maybe self-esteem, pride, and hope could increase, too.

During this experience I reflected a lot on my privilege to obtain a higher education. One student wrote, “We went around the room and introduced ourselves. A couple of the inmates told us they had college degrees already. I couldn’t help but wonder why they were in jail. They said they were doing this program because they liked to read and wanted something to pass the time.
It made me think of how it seems like such a chore to do the reason for some of my classes, when to someone else it can be such a huge privilege to even have access to books” (Anonymous female student as cited in Wiltse, 2010, p. 210). In fact, the Essex County Correctional Facility’s 2015 One-Year Recidivism report revealed that nineteen percent of respondents reported having at least some college. Thirty-nine percent reported having received high school diplomas and 19% had GEDs or HiSet certification. Twenty-three percent reported having no high school diploma, GED or HiSet certification (Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017). This information can be seen in Appendix A.

According to the author, the greatest crime of all is the failure of the U.S. jail and prison system to educate its inmates (Wiltse, 2010, p. 214). As a result of the 1995 legislation that eliminated inmate eligibility for federal Pell Grants, post-secondary educational opportunities for inmates virtually disappeared. This could be seen as a part of the 1980s ‘Tough on Crime’ rhetoric and policy which produced a steady erosion in funding for and emphasis on rehabilitation, including education (Wiltse, 2010, p. 214). Wiltse (2010) wrote, “In 1982 there were more than 350 postsecondary correctional education (PSCE) programs in the U.S.; by 1995 there were fewer than 12” (p. 214). In jail or prison, inmates have the Constitutionally-mandated right to pursue a high school equivalency diploma, however, the job market value of a high school diploma has seriously eroded in recent decades (p. 214). Wiltse (2010) also explained that the U.S. incarcerates 2.3 million of its people (p. 215). This number is the highest reported per capita rate of incarceration in the world. The economic costs of that level of incarceration are staggering. In New York State, it costs about $32,000 per year to incarcerate each inmate. Wiltse (2010) stated that this figure does not include either initial prison construction costs or the lost economic productivity of the incarceration person (p. 215).
Wiltse (2010) concluded and said, “Study after study has shown that PSCE is the most effective intervention in reducing recidivism. A 1997 U.S. Department of Education study found that PSCE reduced overall recidivism by 29% and saved two dollars in prison costs for every dollar spent on PSCE” (p. 215). Perhaps, post-secondary education in jails and prisons could be a step in the right direction both socially and financially. This is a change that must occur fast. Unfortunately, according to Wiltse (2010), between one-half and two-thirds of released inmates are re-incarcerated within five years” (p. 215). Many call this phenomenon the ‘revolving door’ of U.S. incarceration. Furthermore, Wiltse wrote, “…of the more-than 600,000 inmates to be released from U.S. jails and prisons this year, two-thirds will have received no educational programs behind bars and three-quarters will have received no vocational training” (215). Ernst Bloch, author of *The Principle of Hope*, spoke of the danger known as ‘self-deceptive hoping,’ or, ‘fraudulent hope.’ He wrote, “Fraudulent hope is one of the greatest malefactors, even enervators, of the human race, concretely genuine hope its most dedicated benefactor” (Bloch, 1986 as cited in Wiltse, 2010). In response, Wiltse commented, “…the recidivism rates tell a dark story - and it would be delusional to think that our too-brief reading and discussion group, culminating in a certificate signed by the jail’s educational coordinator and I, is going to provide a meaningful bulwark against any of these forces. If we were enabling them to earn a degree, or even make significant progress toward one that would be different” (Wiltse, 2010, p. 216). In my experience, I am pleased that Professor Aiello’s program and course at the Essex County Correctional Facility enabled the students to start their college degrees as it credited each student who passed the course 4-credits from Merrimack College. In fact, three students who were enrolled in the Race, Class, and Crime course will be getting released by the end of 2018 and
these individuals have begun applying to community colleges, such as North Shore Community College and Northern Essex Community College.

To conclude, one thought truly stood out in Wiltse’s article. A student wrote, “After I exchanged my visitor pass for my identity from the guard, I thought about how much I had learned in an hour. I’ve decided that you can’t really be educated about the world until you have really lived in the world. We can read about things in books, watch movies, and still never be involved in the world. How can we know anything without experience? I hope that the inmates will get as much out of this project as I think I’m going to. The past hour gave me a little insight into reality, and it reminded me that people are just people anywhere you go, even in jail” (Anonymous female student as cited in Wiltse, 2010, p. 210). Prior to reading this article, I wrote a caption similar to this message for a picture of myself in front of my research conference poster that focused on my experience at the Essex County Sheriff’s Department. I emphasized that hands-on and in-person experiences are a far more effective way to learn than to simply read from a textbook. I explained that I entered the setting with a little bit of fear, but, the overall experience was absolutely worth it. I ended by saying, “and behind every person there is a story for all to hear.” Overall, I believe programs such as the ‘Jail Project’ not only benefit the volunteers, but, the inmates, too.

Legislation, Educational Services, and Professional Development:

In early May 2018, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a bipartisan reform bill, 360-59 votes, that provides more education for federal prisoners and gives them a second chance after their release (Schultz, 2018). This was called the FIRST STEP Act. This act is described by both political parties and the media as prison reform. This act is an acronym and is defined as, “The FIRST STEP Act, described by both political parties and the media as “prison
reform,” is an acronym for “Formerly Incarcerated Reenter Society Transformed Safely Transitioning Every Person Act” (Ascik, 2018). According to Marisa Schultz, Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-Brooklyn) and Rep. Doug Collins (R-Ga.) supported that the First Step Act would authorize $250 million over five years to develop and expand programs that reduce recidivism and give incentives for good behavior. Furthermore, the bill would also give the current inmates a better chance for a GED, vocational and college courses, as well as substance abuse and mental health help (Schultz, 2018). The FIRST STEP Act could provide hope to many inmates across the country. However, not all inmates are eligible. Individuals who are serving time for terrorism, national security offenses, child offenses, illegal immigration, or crimes that resulted in death cannot participate.

Representative Bob Goodlatte, a Republican from Virginia, claimed that we know that over 90 percent of all prisoners within the Bureau of Prisons will be released someday and that we also know that prisoners are more likely to recidivate without programming and intervention. He further stated that programming and intervention ‘trains prisoners to be better citizens, not better criminals’ (Schultz, 2018). This newly passed legislation will allow inmates to earn up to 54 days of “good time” credit per year rather than the standing 47 days. This legislation will also offer incentives to get inmates to participate in new programs. For example, offers could include: increased phone and visitation periods and transfers to institutions closer to the prisoners’ homes (Schultz, 2018). Under this bill federal inmates are also given the opportunity to serve the end of their sentences in halfway houses. And lastly, and maybe even most importantly, this legislation ensures that inmates are held closer to their families and that pregnant women will not be shackled. (Schultz, 2018).
Rehabilitative programs certainly lack in some jails and prisons; however, successful programs are not completely absent. For example, the Green Haven Correctional Facility in Stormville, New York, and the Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining, New York utilize a Rehabilitation Through the Arts (RTA) program. The Sing Sing Correctional Facility has a waitlist of over one-hundred inmates to get into the program. The process to get into RTA can be tedious. Applicants must go through an interview process hosted by a staff member and other program participants, and they must also go through a mandatory pre-program course to learn the expectations for the program.

Green Haven Correctional Facility is a maximum-security prison. The inmates are given the chance to escape their cellblock and to enter into an environment full of reformation and support. One inmate spoke on behalf of the program and said, “It’s about self-development; it's about learning new skills, learning what it means to be in unity and community. It is not about becoming an actor or a singer, although we do provide singing lessons, acting lessons and visual arts” (Li and Chung, 2018). Another inmate added, “Doing time is not easy … You come [to RTA] as a home away from home away from home and you learn skills, you learn how to cope, you learn how to deal with confrontations. You learn how to deal with stress” (Li and Chung, 2018). In this program, the inmates are assigned to create a play. The inmates are encouraged to create characters based on their own upbringing and past experiences. Or, the inmates can create a fictional character, too. The director of the play, Patrick Collins, notably said at the end of a rehearsal, “Let’s keep believing each other … We have something real special here and a lot of people are going to see it and it’s going to change some lives” (Li and Chung, 2018). The RTA program reflects a restorative process. Inmates who are facing many, many years in the institution are able to reflect on their past and to create it into an art. In this process, inmates may
feel remorse, and may want to express their guilt in the form of a character. The program allows inmates to support one another and to help each other tell their stories to a public audience.

Another example of an educational and rehabilitative program is reflected in the documentary, *The Feminist on Cellblock Y*. The setting of this documentary takes place in the Correctional Training Facility (CTF), also known as Soledad State Prison. This facility is a medium-to-minimum security institution. At this facility, inmate Richard Edmond Vargas started a group that taught about the patriarchy in society. As reflected in the documentary, Vargas taught his group about toxic masculinity, as well as the patriarchal values in our current society that strongly influenced the inmates’ lives. Vargas lectured about violence, money, and the objectification of women, and how that all can lead to toxic masculinity. The sessions allowed for the male inmates to open up about their past and how patriarchal views led them to the decisions that ended themselves in prison. For example, the men were taught to fight back, to do whatever they can to get money to provide for themselves and their families, to brag about getting the “hottest girl at the party,” etc. The men were able to intellectually and emotionally reflect on their past actions and were able to vulnerably express their feelings. This type of program combines education and counseling into one session. This program serves as a great tool to help inmates leave their jail sentence with a better understanding of what might have brought them into the system, and how to transition back into society and to ditch the habits that contributed to the unhealthy patriarchal lifestyle.

Lastly, at the Essex County Correctional Facility, a minimum-security jail, some of the students in the Race, Class and Crime course worked in the jail’s library room. This position could be filled upon recommendation. The two students who worked in the library held a great deal of responsibility and had the opportunity to access anything in the library, especially
computers. One of the workers who we had in class mentioned that he does a lot of legal research for his friends in the facility who are close to their trial. He will help them write letters to their attorneys, and he will also help them look into laws or precedents that they could use in their case. Not only does this position give the inmates a platform to help others, but they are also exposed to new information each and every day. Rehabilitation programs, especially educational programs, are a great way for inmates to develop as an educated and prepared individual. Using a restorative method, inmates have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes in a supportive and healthy environment, while still paying retribution, or time, as a result of their past actions. To reduce recidivism rates, and to help ex-inmates re-enter society as a better person than they entered into the system, jails and prisons across the country must offer organized and efficient rehabilitative and educational programs that are equally accessible to all inmates at all level facilities.

**Conclusion:**

In summary, the incarceration system we have right now weighs heavily on retributive justice. In my opinion, I would like the United States to place more emphasis and demand on restorative justice. The high recidivism rate in the United States can speak for itself that punishable retributive justice is not the only solution. I believe that the United States must continue to use retributive justice, but primarily for those who have committed heinous crimes or for those who are repeat offenders. On the contrary, I believe that first-time offenders and non-violent criminals should rely on restorative justice methods. Using restorative justice methods, such as victim impact statements, can help offenders empathize and recognize that their wrongdoings can permanently negatively affect other people’s lives. Rather than harshly punishing all offenders, the United States could try to teach offenders that actions have
consequences, and that the general public genuinely wants to help the inmates re-enter into society once they have recognized that what they did was wrong and cannot happen again.

To conclude, affording and creating more educational and rehabilitative programs and services within jails and prisons proves to be a task that is easier said than done. Of course, the majority of people wish that inmates can leave jail and prison and smoothly re-enter into society; however, this is an extremely hard task. Once an ex-convict leaves the prison, they have two choices they can make. One, the ex-convict can return to their homes and slip back into their old, poor habits with their peers, or two, the ex-convict can return to their homes and build a better life for themselves, both socially and financially. Again, this is easier said than done. If the ex-convict is able to decide to rebuild their life, they will face multiple barriers including noting that they have a criminal record on any job or school applications. In our current system, we are setting our ex-convicts up for a hard transition back into society which may ultimately send them back to their old delinquent tendencies. Inmates should have the opportunity to reflect on their wrongdoings, receive adequate education and rehabilitative services, and re-enter into society with a clean slate in order to provide not only for themselves, but for their friends, families, and future generations.
Appendix:

Appendix A: Source (Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No HS Diploma, GED or HiSet</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GED or HiSet</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017:* “Nineteen percent of respondents reported having at least some college. Thirty-nine percent reported having received high school diplomas and 19% had GEDs or HiSet certification. Twenty-three percent reported having no high school diploma, GED or HiSet certification (see Table 3). A comparison of education levels at time of release and one-year post-release is available in Table 9.”

Appendix B: Source (Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate (%)</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only Those NOT Incarcerated</td>
<td>All Respondents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No HS Diploma, GED or HiSet</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Diploma, GED or HiSet</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College experience</td>
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<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017:* “Former inmates with no high school diplomas, GEDs or HiSet certification had an unemployment rate of 33%. The unemployment rate for those with high school diplomas or equivalent was 13%. Former inmates with college experience saw an unemployment rate of 22%. The overall unemployment rate for former inmates was 16% (see Table 4). These rates are lower than years past. Perhaps reflecting not only the overall improvement in the economy and thereby the decrease in unemployment, but also the increase in demand for laborers. Table 4 also shows the unemployment rate for all respondents, including those who were incarcerated at the time of their interviews.”
Appendix C: Source (Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017)

From Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017: “At the time of their Exit Interviews, 33% of respondents did not have high school diplomas, GEDs, or HiSet certification. Twenty three percent had GEDs or HiSet certification and 31% had high school diplomas. Nine percent had some college and 4% were college graduates (see Figure 29). A comparison of education levels at time of release and one-year post-release is available in Table 9. Of the 207 respondents that stated where they received their GEDs or HiSet certification, 15% had received them from ECSD.”

Appendix D: Source (Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017)

From Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017: “Of former inmates who participated in post-release counseling, treatment or programs, 49% attended Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Thirty percent attended individual or group counseling. Narcotics Anonymous (NA), sober houses and outpatient care each accounted for 6% and detox/inpatient care accounted for 3% (see Figure 18).”
Appendix E: Source (Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017)

From Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017: “ECSD staff is committed to the care and custody of inmates. Inmates’ attitudes toward ECSD program offerings show that they appreciate and respond to the staff’s efforts. Sixty-eight percent of former inmates interviewed believed that drug and alcohol programs available through ECSD contributed to a successful reintegration (see Figure 19).”

Appendix F: Source (Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017)

From Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017: “Sixty-six percent of respondents stated that they had maintained sobriety since their release (see Figure 20). This may reflect some bias, as former inmates may attempt to put themselves in the best possible light. It also reflects, however, the success of the programs taken while incarcerated at ECSD and after release. As noted previously, this figure may also reflect researchers’ limited ability to contact homeless individuals, some of whom may not have maintained sobriety.”
Appendix G: Source (Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017)

From Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017: “Most former inmates felt that family support helped them: 82% responded that they felt family contributed to a successful re-entry (see Figure 23). Loved ones often provide stability, a place to live and financial support.”

Appendix H: Source (Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017)

From Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017: “While the family unit provides support for former inmates, the majority (54%) of former inmates remained single (see Figure 24).”
Appendix I: Source (Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017)

*Figure 25. Number of Children*

From Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017: “Seventy-five percent of former inmates had at least one child (see Figure 25).”

Appendix J: Source (Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017)

*Figure 26. Live with Their Children*

*Figure 27. Have Children and are Married*

From Essex County Sheriff’s Department, 2017: ‘One third of respondents reported living with their children (see Figure 26). Of those former inmates who had children, 35% were married (see Figure 27).’”
References


