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Senior Thesis

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Title: Against All Odds: Successful Prisoner Reentry in an Age of Mass Incarceration

Thesis Statement: In light of increasing incarceration rates and decreased funding for penal rehabilitation, the responsibility of rehabilitation will increasingly fall on the shoulders of individual prisoners. Therefore, it is important to study those individuals who have been able to successfully reenter society and remain out of prison.

I. Abstract

For the three decades this country has been experiencing unprecedented levels of incarceration rates that has left the United States occupying the top spot in terms of incarcerated persons in industrialized countries. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), as of 2003, over 2 million persons were being held in federal, state, and local prisons. An additional 4.7 million persons are on probation or parole. As a consequence of rising incarceration rates, the number of people leaving prisons has also reached unprecedented levels. Currently, about 600,000 persons leave prisons and jails every year; about 1600 per month. The most recent study conducted by the BJS on prisoner reentry and recidivism show that over two-thirds of these releasees will return to prison within three years. This study will focus on the one-third of prisoners who do not return to prison and therefore are able to successfully reenter into society.

(Prisoners in 2003, Petersilia 3)

The growing U.S. prison population has triggered a resurging interest in an oftentimes misunderstood process; that of prisoner reentry. Therefore this paper will provide a brief overview of the reentry process, some recent trends in reentry and other pertinent information.

Moreover, another component of this paper will be to examine successful examples of prisoner reentry that have taken place over the three decades (or since the mid-1970s). This approach has been taken due to the fact that it was during this period of time in which most of the public policy related to rising incarceration rates were adopted. This period will be referred to in this paper as the “age of mass incarceration.”

Another important component of this paper is the use of first-hand written accounts and interviews which utilize the voices of former prisoners themselves. It is important to include this aspect because of the dearth of research conducted from the perspectives of the actual persons who are reentering society. These sources help to provide an insider viewpoint to the issue of prisoner reentry. The project will examine the characteristics and features of former prisoners who have reentered society and have been able to remain out of prison, based on their personal accounts/interviews and to analyze the implications for current attitudes, programs, and policies related to prisoner reentry.

According to reentry expert Joan Petersilia, “inmates have always been released from prison,” but “the current situation is decidedly different” (*Petersilia* 15). Three of the main factors that have distinguished the current period of prisoner reentry from previous periods are: “the sheer number of releasees [today] dwarfs anything in our history,” the needs of parolees now appear to be “more serious” than in the past, and currently “the corrections system retains few rehabilitation programs” (*Petersilia* 15). All these factors have helped to contribute to the public’s “heightened interest in prisoner reentry” (*Petersilia* 15)

The Numbers

Government statistics only 7% of all prisoners are currently either serving life sentences or are on death row, while only about 3,000 inmates die in prisons each year. Therefore, 93% of all

persons who are currently imprisoned will eventually be released. In fact, an estimated 95% of all inmates currently being held in state prisons will be expected to come out of prison at some point and nearly 80% will be released to parole supervision. Meanwhile, the number of prisoners released each year from state prisons continues to grow. In 1990, about 400,000 offenders were released from state prisons. However, just over a decade later, 592,000 offenders were released from state prisons representing an increase of 46%. (*Profile of Nonviolent Offenders, Chesney-Lind and Mauer 168-169*)

Prisons and Overcrowded Conditions

As the prison population has continually grown, “correction costs” or expenses that are associated with running prisons and jails, have eaten up bigger and bigger chunks of already shrinking state budgets. In addition, the speed with which the prison population grown, has “left most U.S. detention facilities well over design capacity” (*Chesney-Lind and Mauer, 244*). Despite increased spending, “the expansion of [correctional] facilities has not kept pace with the doubling of [the] prison and jail populations in the past decade” (*Chesney-Lind and Mauer, 244*).

Capacity can be defined in three different ways. Rated capacity refers to the number of beds or inmates assigned by a rating official to institutions within the jurisdiction. Operational capacity refers to the number of inmates that can be accommodated, based on a facility’s staff, existing programs, and services. Design capacity refers to the number of inmates that planners or architects intended for the facility. In 2001, both the federal prison system and twenty-two States and reported operating at 100% or more of their highest capacity. Yet, at the same time laws favoring the cutting of taxes are aggravating the problem, as local law enforcement authorities have smaller budgets with which to work. (*State Prison Expenditures, 2001*)

Underfunded Prisons/ Increased Expenditures

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in FY 2001, correctional authorities spent \$38.2 billion to maintain the Nation's State correctional systems in fiscal year 2001, including \$29.5 billion specifically for adult correctional facilities. The average annual operating cost per State inmate in 2001 was \$22,650, or \$62.05 per day. Among facilities operated by the Federal Bureau of Prisons, it was \$22,632 per inmate, or \$62.01 per day. Prison operations consumed about 77% of State correctional costs in FY 2001. The remaining 23% was spent on juvenile justice, probation and parole, community-based corrections, and central office administration. State correctional expenditures increased 145% in 2001 constant dollars from \$15.6 billion in FY 1986 to \$38.2 billion in FY 2001; prison expenditures increased 150% from \$11.7 billion to \$29.5 billion. State prison costs per U.S. resident more than doubled between 1986 and 2001. One way in which correctional authorities are dealing with the problems of overcrowded and underfunded prisons is through the early release of prisoners. (*State Prison Expenditures, 2001*)

Early Release

In 2003 alone, 47,000 prisoners were released early from jails in Los Angeles County due to a shortage of funds. Meanwhile, in the state of Virginia, local jails are 7,000 inmates over capacity and in Michigan, 8 out of 10 jails suffer from overcrowded conditions. These examples indicate the existence of a "nationwide clash between [the] tough-on-crime policies of the 1990s and budgetary realities of the new millennium" (*Wood*). Furthermore, there is not only a concern for the public safety in this matter but also the morale of law enforcement and correctional officials. (*Wood*)

Therefore are many reasons to be worried about the continually growing prison population and by default the growing ex-prisoner population. Yet this was not always the case

in the U.S. and it is important to understand the causes of the current correctional picture in this country.

III. The Age of Mass Incarceration (mid-1970s – Present)

Throughout the 1960s and the preceding decades, Americans supported a “positivistic approach to crime and criminals” in which the offender was viewed as being “sick” and therefore “in need of help” (*Petersilia* 61). This approach helped to shape the belief on the part of Americans that “the purpose of incarceration and parole was to change the offender’s behavior rather than simply to punish” (*Petersilia* 61). Nevertheless, after the social movements and various upheavals of the 1960s, Americans would more and more come to view that “incarceration should be punitive” signaling the decline of the “rehabilitative ideal” (*Petersilia* 5)

The Roots

Decline of the Rehabilitative Ideal

Author Francis Allen puts forward in The Decline of the Rehabilitative Ideal, the proposition that “the rehabilitative ideal is likely to arise and persist in societies in which there is a strong and widespread belief in the malleability of human character and behavior” (*Allen* 11). Allen presents American society in the 1970s as an exemplar of a society that had lost faith in such a possibility. Allen indicates that the long-term and immediate causes of the “malaise of the 1970s” were the atomic bombing Hiroshima in 1945, the Vietnam War, and the Watergate scandal during President Nixon’s second term in office (*Allen* 12). Americans were also affected by a “corresponding erosions of morale in all institutions” including the *criminal justice system*, the family, and schools. The cultural and attitudinal changes that resulted “revealed a *radical* loss of confidence [on the part of the American people] in its political and social institutions and a significant diminishment in [their] sense of public purpose” (*Allen* 18). (*Allen* 30)

In terms of the criminal justice system, a general sense of “public pessimism” appeared in the 1970s, towards the “capacities of penal programs to achieve” and perform (*Allen* 30). In fact, the “legitimacy” of these penal programs weakened dramatically during this decade. One reason may have been the “widespread perception of the American crime problem as one principally of race.” Studies illustrated that as the number of minorities in prisons began to rise, the public support for such programs declined (*Allen* 30). Another reason may have been the advent of research that purported to show the ineffectiveness or impossibility of rehabilitation.

The “Myth of Rehabilitation”¹

The “Nothing Works” Decade

In 1974, researcher Robert Martinson and his colleagues published a report “that is often credited with giving rehabilitation the coup de grace” (*Petersilia* 63). Martinson conducted a review of the “effectiveness of correctional treatment” and came to the conclusion that “rehabilitative efforts that have been reported so far have had *no* appreciable effect on recidivism” (Quoted in *Petersilia* 63). Later on, Martinson’s study was reviewed by the National Research Council which came to a similar conclusion. Not only did the study help to foster the public pessimism towards prison programs that characterized the “nothing works” decade of the 1970s but it also helped to scientifically de-legitimize the idea of rehabilitation. Another consequence was the rise of alternative explanations of crime. (*Petersilia* 63)

The Science of Crime

Alongside, the decline in the belief in rehabilitation has appeared the rise of scientific explanations for crime. While these theories are not necessarily widely accepted, it is important to mention them as they have come to shape much of the public’s attitude on crime and thereby prisoner reentry. These theories offer alternative solutions to crime and crime prevention. Some

¹ Jones, Paul A. *The Myth of Rehabilitation*. Potomac, MD: Scripta Humanistica, 2000.

scientists and individuals believe that “specific areas of the brain can be identified that are responsible for specific problems or behaviors” such as hostility and aggressiveness (*Jones* 51). There are also some who believe that there exists a genetic component to aggressiveness, hostility, and violence. Therefore, for these individuals setting up DNA banks which can help in “pinpointing potential behaviors through DNA identification” is a better method to fighting crime than rehabilitation. (*Jones* 51-54)

The Reagan Administration

Due to a rising concern with violent crime during the social unrest of the 1960s, “the seeds of the *get tough* attitude towards crime were planted” as the “earliest advocates of the movement” Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon, in their various presidential campaigns, “explicitly linked the crime issue to the issue of civil rights” (*Chesney-Lind and Mauer* 10). However, it was not until after 1980, when President Ronald Reagan was elected to his first term, that there began “a significant crackdown on crime” as President Reagan made fighting “crime” and “particularly drug-related crime” the “centerpiece” of his presidency (*Chesney-Lind and Mauer* 10; *Walters* 172.)

The “War on Crime”

The main features of the “war on crime” has been rising rates of incarceration for men of all races, a prison construction boom, and the increasing privatization of the prisons. In the early stages of the prison boom only 3% of young white male high school dropouts were in prison and only 14% of young black male high school dropouts were in prison. However, by 1999, these numbers had risen to 10% and 41% respectively. Meanwhile, the prison population for Hispanics, who constituted a small percentage of the prison and jail population in 1980, grew to

be about 15% a couple of decades later. The rising rate of women in prison is a relatively recent phenomenon. (*Chesney-Lind and Mauer* 168-169)

The “War on Drugs”

In the mid-1980s, a crack epidemic hit America’s urban communities. This epidemic coincided with rising joblessness in these communities and resulted in the formation of “youthful gangs” that would sell the drug. The drug trade led to “soaring homicide rates.” In response to the growing problem of drugs and violence, President Reagan declared a “war on drugs.” This war included the federal government’s “weed and seed” program which it hoped would “*weed out* violent crime, gang activity, drug use and drug trafficking in targeted communities” while at the same time contributing to revitalization of these neighborhoods by “*seeding* them with economic activity” (*Walters* 178-179).

During the first decade of the war on drugs, “rates of drug-related arrests” skyrocketed (*Chesney-Lind and Mauer* 244). In fact, since 1990, drug offenders have comprised an increasing percentage of prison releases and about 33% of offenders released from State prisons in 1999 had been imprisoned for drug offenses. In addition, President Bush, who came into office on a “tough on crime” agenda created the post of the “drug czar.” Then during his first term in office, President Clinton raised the “drug czar” post to a cabinet level. Nevertheless “chief hallmark” of the “war on drug” was a “stepped up *federal* role in law enforcement” and “harsh sentencing policies” (*Chesney-Lind and Mauer* 10). (*Chesney-Lind and Mauer* 10; *Walters* 180; *Reentry Trends*)

Legislation

Congress took a leading role in the war on crime. The decade of the 1990s signaled an popular resurgence in the war on crime. Under the Clinton Administration, the Crime Control

Act was passed. It helped to criminalize a number of acts. It greatly expanded the number of crimes which could result in the death penalty. It helped to nationalize the “three-strike and you’re out” rule. The bill also established mandatory minimums for crack cocaine. Furthermore, action was taken on the state level as well as on the federal level. Truth-in-sentencing laws “refer to release policies that require offenders to serve a certain percentage of their sentence before becoming eligible for release from prison” also became popular (*Reentry Trends*). (Walters 183-188)

IV. The Prisoner Reentry Process

Definition

Prisoner reentry can be defined as “all activities and programming conducted to prepare ex-convicts to return safely to the community and to live as law abiding citizens” (*Petersilia 70*). The Bureau of Justice Statistics, defines *reentry* as “a broad term used to refer to issues related to the transition of offenders from prison to community supervision” (*Reentry Trends*)

Features of Returning Prisoners

Approximately two-thirds of new releasees are minorities (either black or Latino), ninety percent are men, and over half are between the ages 18 and 39 upon their release. Most returning prisoners have serious social and medical problems, are largely uneducated, and largely unskilled. About three-fourths have a history of substance abuse while 1 in 6 suffer from some type of mental illness. In 1997, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care conducted an health analysis of the nation’s correctional facilities and found that of those persons who had been released from prison in that year, between 20%-26% were living with HIV and AIDS, 29%-32% had hepatitis C, and 38% had tuberculosis. Meanwhile, one in five adult inmates in state prison is completely illiterate while 2 in 5 are functionally illiterate and in terms

of employment, 31% of state prisoners and 27% of federal prisoners were unemployed at the time of their arrest. (*Petersilia* 24-40, 49)

Prisoner Preparation for Reentry

In general, most prisoners “return home with their treatment and vocational needs unmet” (*Petersilia* 105). Statistics show that only about one-third of releasees have received any form of “vocational or educational training” while they were incarcerated. Furthermore, only about a quarter receive any form of treatment for their substance abuse problems. However, these “treatment programs consist mostly of inmate self-help groups rather than the intensive therapeutic communities found to be most effective” (*Petersilia* 93). Nevertheless, prison programs continue to have “long waiting lists” due to the fact that “U.S. prisons today offer fewer services” (*Petersilia* 93). Overall, 12% of releasees from state prison and 37% of releasees from federal prison participated in “prerelease programs” which primarily consisted of those serving the last year of their sentence in state prisons and those serving the last two years of their sentence in federal prison. (*Petersilia* 95)

Parole

About eighty percent of those persons leaving state prison are released to parole supervision. In most instances, these releasees are provided with a bus ticket and instructed to “report to the parole office in their home community on the next business day” (*Petersilia* 7). This could mean that they need to return to where they last legally resided or the county where they were convicted of their crime. In about two-thirds of the states, newly released prisoner are provided with money (usually between \$25 and \$200). Other features vary from state-to-state. For example, in some states releasees receive “a new set of clothing” and a “list of rental apartments or shelters” (*Petersilia* 7). However, very little assistance is provided in terms of

helping releasees figure out how to reestablish their livelihoods and provide financially for themselves in the initial stages of freedom. In general, “the current process places the offender almost solely in charge and accountable for [their] own transition plan” (*Petersilia* 7-8). (*Petersilia* 7-8; *Reentry Trends in the U.S.*)

Consequences

In this age of mass incarceration, newly released prisoners face several legal and social restrictions when attempting to put their life back together again. The three primary areas where such persons face problems are: employment, housing, and voting rights. (*Petersilia* 112-133)

Employment

Previous empirical research has shown that a “positive link” exists between “job stability and reduced criminal offending” (*Petersilia* 112). When employed, former prisoners are able to “be productive, take care of their families, develop valuable life skills, and strengthen their self-esteem and social-connectedness” (*Petersilia* 112). However, releasees confront significant barriers when seeking employment. Oftentimes, they lack the proper education **level** and they tend to have insufficient prior work experience. Many releasees suffer from substance abuse and they tend to return to neighborhoods where there are high levels of unemployment and low levels of job growth. For example, researches found that in Cuyahoga County in Ohio, where the city of Cleveland is located, just 3% of certain neighborhood blocks in that county “accounted for most of those sent to Ohio’s state prisons” (*Petersilia* 15).

Housing

Parole officers describe finding housing as the “biggest challenge” facing new parolees. In fact, “housing portends success or failure for the entire reintegration process (*Petersilia* 120-

121). Yet, many laws prevent those with criminal records from accessing public housing. (*Petersilia* 120-122)

Voting Rights

The loss of voting rights is another barrier faced by newly released prisoners. In four states, all citizens including those persons who are in prison, are allowed to vote. Fourteen states permanently revoke the voting rights for ex-offenders. Meanwhile, in 32 states parolees cannot vote, and in 29 states persons who are on probation cannot vote. This has led to the disenfranchisement of “an estimated 3.9 million U.S. citizens,” “including over one million who have fully completed their sentences” (*Losing the Vote*). Among this group of disenfranchised ex-felons are 1.4 million African-American men, the group that has been most negatively impacted by this phenomenon. (*Losing the Vote*)

As a consequence of the occurrences of the past three decades it is now more difficult than ever for a newly released prisoner to successfully reenter into society. In turn, this has led to high rates of recidivism. The next section will focus on this issue.

V. Recidivism

Definition and Current Statistics

Recidivism is measured by criminal acts that resulted in the rearrest, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the prisoner's release (*Reentry Trends*). Bureau of Justice statistics show that “within 3 years of their release” from [state] prison, about 7 in 10 nonviolent releasees were rearrested for a new crime, and more than a quarter [of those arrested] were returned to prison” (*Reentry Trends*). Furthermore, about 30% of releasees are arrested for crimes that were committed within the first six months of their release. Meanwhile, after about 3 years, the likelihood that a former prisoner

will be arrested for a new crime drops significantly and after 5 years, the likelihood of arrest is rather small (*Petersilia* 18). Currently researchers have obtained greater knowledge of different factors that help to increase the risk of recidivism and therefore these factors help to predict “whether or not an inmate would be rearrested and how quickly” (*Petersilia* 142).

Predictors of Recidivism

Some of the strongest indicators that a person will most likely be rearrested concern what researchers call “static factors” such as age, race, gender, and prior criminal record which cannot be changed (*Petersilia* 150). Studies indicate that the older that an offender is at the time of their release, the less likely they will be rearrested. In addition, women tend to have lower rates of recidivism and so do whites. Meanwhile, the more prior arrests that an inmate had on their record, the more likely they would be rearrested. In fact, 41% of releasees with only one prior arrest were rearrested within three years. (*Petersilia* 142)

Nevertheless, studies on recidivism have yet to sufficiently focus on the one-third of releasees who manage to successfully reenter into society. Therefore, the rest of this paper will be dedicated to examining such persons.

VI. Successful Prisoner Reentry

Despite many odds, there are those persons who leave prison and manage to remain out of prison. These prisoners may represent a sample of the first *successful* examples of the increasingly individualistic nature of prisoner rehabilitation. The project consists of seven subjects, four men and three women. Four of the subjects are black, two are Hispanic, and one is Native Alaskan. All of the subjects in this study have remained out of prison for three or more years since leaving prison, the same standard that is set by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Approach to Research

This research attempts to avoid taking a monolithic view of successful prisoner reentry. In other words, the goal of the research is not to discover a set, rigid formula nor create a list of rules on how to achieve successful prisoner reentry. Therefore, the role of several factors in the successful rehabilitation of the research subjects will be examined.

Personal Account/ Interviews

Personal written accounts and interviews have been utilized in this project because of the importance of hearing the voices the successful prisoner reentrants themselves. These former prisoners have had a foot in both the inside world of prison and the outside world of “everyday society” and therefore will be able to provide a unique, firsthand look on the issue of prisoner reentry. Furthermore, much of the literature concerning this topic is written by academics and experts who in some instances have no direct prison experience. While much of their work remains quite valuable, it is also important that we hear the often absent and invisible voices of successful prisoner reentrants themselves.

VII. About the Subjects (SEE APPENDIX A)

Carl Upchurch, Convicted in the Womb

Carl Upchurch was born in 1950 in the South Philly. He describes his birth as the beginning of “his experience at niggerization” (*Upchurch xi*). He was born out-of-wedlock to a teenage mother who was verbally abusive and his grandmother, who helped to raise him, was a prostitute. Carl dropped out of school in the 4th grade and so then commenced his life of crime. Carl began to steal as a form of survival and was not charged at first. However, eventually he was sent to the Youth Study Center (YSC) for his crimes. He spent the next five years of his life, in and out of the YSC. In between this time, he spent 2 years at the Bureau for Colored

Children, an isolated boarding farm founded to help “turn around troubled city kids” like Carl (*Upchurch* 29). Carl describes it as his “first warm and positive environment” but after he returned to South Philly and “reverted back to his old feelings and actions” (*Upchurch* 29-30). (*Upchurch* ix-xi, 20, 22-24, 27-30)

He returned to school but dropped out after the seventh grade. He soon joined a gang and was involved in “gang warring” and was eventually shot in the ankle by a rival gang member. After being caught stealing he was sent to the Youth Development Center in North Philly. During this time, his sister Stoney, who was his closest family member, was raped by an uncle and his father was murdered. Therefore, he returned to the streets “tougher, sharper, and meaner” (*Upchurch* 44). Soon after, he was convicted of robbery and sent to Glen Mills, “a place for hardcore youth with long records of theft and violence (*Upchurch* 44). After being released from Glen Mills, he was arrested for committing strong armed robbery and sent to the State Correctional Institute at Camp Hill where he earned his GED at the age of 16. After 2 years, he was released from Camp Hill in 1967, and joined the army. (*Upchurch* 32-34, 39, 56, 61).

In the army, for a while Carl felt as if he was “on top of the world” and that he had “an opportunity to do something constructive” (*Upchurch* 63). However, after receiving orders to go to Vietnam, Carl left the army and returned to Philly where he began robbing banks. In January of 1972, Carl pleaded guilty to several robberies and was given four sentences of 8 years and one sentence of 7 years, to be served concurrently. However, this time Carl was sent to the Federal Correctional Institution in Milan, MI because robbing banks constitute a federal crime. From there he was sent to Petersburg, VA after stabbing a fellow inmate, and then he was transferred to Terre Haute, IN and then to Atlanta. He finally ended up in Lewisburg, PA and was granted

parole in April of 1976. However, after robbing a hospital, his parole was revoked and he served an additional 4 years in the Western State Penitentiary and the remaining 2 years of his original sentence in Memphis, TN. He has not returned to prison since that time. (*Upchurch* 71, 73-74, 78, 80, 106-107)

Elaine Bartlett, “Life on the Outside”

Elaine Bartlett was born in 1957. She was the first daughter of Yvonne Bartlett, a devout Catholic. At the age of 6, Elaine and her older brother spent 2 and ½ years in an orphanage since their mother was involved with selling drugs. Elaine’s mom had seven children overall and oftentimes played “the role of second mother to her siblings” (*Gonnerman* 37). At the age of 17, she left her mother’s household. (*Gonnerman* 36-38, 42)

However, “prison, drugs, poverty, and violence had [always] been part of her family history” (*Gonnerman* 6). At the time of her arrest in 1983, Elaine had been living in a housing project in East Harlem with her four young children. Her primary source of income had been welfare, and she made some extra income by working “off the books” at a beauty parlor and occasionally pouring drinks at a local bar. Meanwhile, since the age of 13, Elaine had been getting high about 3 to 4 times a day. Then as Thanksgiving 1983 approached, Elaine was “seeking to make extra cash for a huge feast;” a “Bartlett family tradition” (*Gonnerman* 16). (*Gonnerman* 4, 16, 19)

Soon after, the friend of a co-worker made Elaine an offer she could not refuse. He offered to pay her \$2,500 for carrying a package of cocaine from New York City to Albany. Elaine agreed and her boyfriend, Nathan (also the father of her two youngest children) also went along. However, after arriving in Albany, Elaine and her boyfriend were brought to a hotel, where they soon realized that they had been setup by a police informant and were both arrested.

After spending 64 days in jail, Elaine opted to go to trial rather than accepting a deal from the prosecutor. (*Gonnerman* 18-19, 24, 55)

At trial, both Elaine and her boyfriend were convicted. At sentencing, the judge gave Elaine a 20-year sentence in accordance with the controversial Rockefeller drug laws that were passed in 1973. These laws had “established a system of mandatory minimums for certain drug offenses (*Gonnerman* 53). Elaine had been caught transporting 4 ounces of cocaine with a street value of several thousand dollars. Therefore both she and her boyfriend had been charged with the “first-degree criminal sale of controlled substances” (*Gonnerman* 31). Elaine spent the next 16 years of her life in the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in Westchester County, NY. Then in 2000, New York Governor George Pataki granted her clemency. She has remained out of prison since that time. (*Gonnerman* 3-5, 49, 53, 61)

Harold Napoleon, Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being

Harold Napoleon, was born in 1950 and is a Native Alaskan who is a member of the Yup'ik Eskimo Tribe. After being educated in his village, he left to attend St. Mary's High School. In May of 1968, he graduated at the top of his class. He went to the University of Montana, and then transferred to the University of Alaska, Fairbanks? where he majored in history. After graduating in 1972, he assumed the position of executive director for the Association of Village Council Presidents. Although initially abstaining from alcohol, his job brought him into situations where alcohol was present and he soon became addicted. Mr. Napoleon does not provide specific details about the crime he committed nor for how long he was sentenced. All the reader knows is that, in June of 1984, he began serving a prison term at the Fairbanks Correctional Center, for an alcohol-related crime that resulted in the death of his young son. (*Napoleon* 1-4)

Nathan McCall, Makes Me Wanna Holler

Nathan McCall was born in 1955 in, and grew up in a working-class home with his mother and stepmother in Portsmouth, VA. After graduating from high school, he attended Norfolk State in Norfolk, VA but then dropped out after one year, (*McCall* 111). Faced with unemployment and having to raise his baby son, Nathan and his girlfriend began to deal drugs. At first, Nathan explains, he began to deal specifically marijuana but then started to deal all types of drugs. He had also personally involved in extensive drug use, especially acid. Then at the age of 19, he shot a guy who had been “messin’ with” his girlfriend. He was charged with felony assault and sentenced to 30 days in jail (although he only actually served 8 days) and one year probation (*McCall* 115-117).

Then, still being unemployed, he was involved in several stick-ups, ran a rip-off scheme with inside help at the department store where his girlfriend worked and joined several stick-up teams operating in his neighborhood. The authorities caught up with him after he was involved in an armed robbery in December of 1974. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison for the crime. After spending 6 months in a Norfolk jail, he was sent to Southampton Correctional Center. He served 4 years of his sentence there until being paroled in February of 1978. (*McCall* 127, 130, 138-139, 149-150, 162, 211)

Jimmy Santiago Baca, Working in the Dark

Jimmy Santiago Baca grew up in a pueblo, or rural town in New Mexico. He was orphaned at young age and was raised by his grandparents for a couple of years. He then left the pueblo, to attend school in the city. This proved to be a highly difficult and damaging experience and Jimmy dropped out of school in the 9th grade. By the age of 13, Jimmy was a runaway. (*Baca* 34, 56, “*Jimmy Santiago Baca*”)

At the age of 17, Jimmy still could not read. He describes himself as having been a “gypsy child in the urban wasteland” (*Baca* 34). He soon began to drink and take drugs and became suicidal as he descended into a period of self-destruction. Soon he was sentenced to a maximum security prison to serve a five-year sentence. When he got out at the age of 21 he began to turn his life around. Today, he is a well-known poet and has won several literary prizes (*Baca* 4-8, 34-36; “*Jimmy Santiago Baca*”)

Patrice Gaines, Laughing in the Dark

Patrice Gaines was born in Quantico, VA in 1949. She was raised in a military family and spent much of her childhood moving around due to her father’s changing base assignments. At the age of 10, her family moved to Beaufort, SC and then three years later, they moved to the Maryland suburbs near D.C. This move allowed the family to be near Patrice’s maternal grandmother which was really important since Patrice describes her dad as having “been AWOL emotionally” from the family (*Gaines* 155). During her teenage years Patrice faced much in the way of physical and verbal abuse including being raped by a man she was dating. During this time, she was involved in extensive drug use which included “heroin, hallucinogens, uppers, downers” and more (*Gaines* 4). Then at the age of 19, Patrice had a little girl. (*Gaines* 1-3, 186).

Patrice moved to Charlotte, NC after the military had transferred her husband to Fort Bragg, in North Carolina. In Charlotte, Patrice led a heavy party life. Then one night while attending a concert with her husband, and a friend, she was set up by an undercover officer and was arrested for “possession of a controlled substance, possession with intent to distribute and possession of a needle and syringe (*Gaines* 106). At this time Patrice was 21 years old. After spending about a month in jail, Patrice went to trial pleaded guilty. She was sentenced to five years probation. After being released Patrice began shoplifting and was eventually arrested.

Although she spent one night in jail, she was not returned to prison and nor was her probation officer notified. Since that time, Patr has remained out of prison. (*Gaines* 1, 98, 101-105, 122-125, 168).

Racque, Making It in the Free World

Racque is the only subject in this project whose personal account was given through a third party. Racque's account will be based on interviews she gave to researcher Patricia O'Brien in 1996 for O'Brien's project on women in transition from prison. Racque, a Hispanic woman, would now be about 44-years old and her daughter would now be 24-years old. At the time of her interview, Racque had been out of prison for close to 3 and ½ years since her last arrest. Also she had spent some time in high school, but she had not obtained a high school diploma. (*O'Brien* 161, 164, 170)

Although she was living in a Northeastern Kansas town at the time of her interview, her criminal past was based in California. Racque's criminal history included ten prior convictions "for a combination of property and street crimes in the California prison system" (*O'Brien* 170). In her last arrest, she served two years for committing second-degree robbery. After moving to Kansas, Racque was able to find employment and make a new start. (*O'Brien* 76, 161, 170)

VIII. Internal Factors and Successful Prisoner Reentry

In this section the role of two internal factors, personal attitude and prison experience in the successful reentry of these former prisoners will be examined.

Personal Attitude

"We may not change instantly, because that's not how change occurs" comments Patrice Gaines in Laughing in the Dark, "but rather we make up our minds to live differently and then we do what we need to do to change" (*Gaines* 125). Attitude was literally everything in the case of all

of the eight successful prisoner reentrants in this study. This does not come as a surprise since a majority of the successful reentrants had faced issues of self-esteem and self-worth that helped to land them in prison.

In Laughing in the Dark, Patrice Gaines recounts that while in jail she once bravely stated “I know, I’m never coming back” because she “could not imagine months or years of life like this” (Gaines 115). Her determination to change came while awaiting to make a court appearance in order to reduce her bail and when her case went to trial. During the former experience her family was present, and at that moment she realized that she missed her family “more at that moment than [she] had at any time since [she] had walked into” her jail cell (Gaines 122). Subsequently, at her trial she felt “more frightened than [she] was [during] her first night in jail” (Gaines 125). Gaines credits these two events with helping her to take the initiative to truly change her life.

Similar, to Patrice, Nathan McCall in Makes Me Wanna Holler, in setting his “sights on doing three years and making parole the first time” he resolved that he would not bother anybody in order to avoid having additional time tacked onto his sentence (McCall 186). For Harold Napoleon, a “spiritual, religious experience” he had in prison in which he “was forgiven by God and his son” for his crime helped him to “begin the process of his own healing journey” (Napoleon 65). According to his prison counselor, prior to this experience Napoleon was growing “thinner” and more “withdrawn” from his fellow inmates (Napoleon 64). For Elaine Bartlett, “finding a way to get herself out of prison” became an “obsession” (Gonnerman 101).

Meanwhile, in Convicted in the Womb, Carl Upchurch admits that it was “hard to take [the] deliberate steps [needed] to break the cycle” of crime in his life (Upchurch 107). He spent over ten years in prison because it took a while for the “balance of power” in his world “to swing

solidly to the positive for the first time” (*Upchurch* 82). Upchurch describes this as being a big step, because for a time he had thought that “being a criminal for the rest of his life” was his destiny (*Upchurch* 74).

Therefore a personal attitude that favors making change is crucial to successful prisoner reentry. At the end of the day, each former prisoner has to determine for themselves what they are going to do with their newly acquired freedom. If one is not able to find a way to adopt an attitude of empowerment, then their lives will be controlled by others which will reduce the likelihood of successful reentry. Meanwhile, in general, for most of the successful reentrants in this study their sense of empowerment came as a result of their experiences in prison.

Prison Experience

The tendency exists to view incarceration in a wholly negative light because it represents a loss of various personal freedoms and rights. However, imprisonment can also have some positive consequences. In an unstable life, prison can represent a point of stability in which one has time to sit and reflect. After all, barely any of the successful reentrants in this study had very stable lives to their first arrests.

Life Before Prison

For Harold Napoleon, alcoholism had “became a part of his life” by the time he went to prison (*Napoleon* 3). By the time he went to prison, Nathan McCall had dropped out of college at the end of his freshmen year and sold drugs in order to support his son. Jimmy Santiago Baca still could not read at time of his arrest at the age of eighteen.

Meanwhile, Racque from Making It In the Free World, was a single-mother and a high school dropout and Elaine Bartlett from Life on the Outside, was living in a housing project in East Harlem and struggling to support her four young children on welfare checks and working

off the books at a beauty parlor and occasionally at a local bar. Of course this is not say that there are not alternative options for those seeking to take a break from their normal routine. Yet, when a person ends up in prison, what they do while serving their time can contribute heavily to their chances of successfully reintegrating into society. (*McCall* 111, *Baca* 4, *O'Brien* 161, *Gonnerman* 4, 16)

Life in Prison

In the American penal system, there are jails and then there are prisons. Oftentimes, jails are run by local authorities and used to incarcerate people who are awaiting trial or who will be serving a term of less than one year. On the other hand, persons serving more than a year are usually sent to prison, although some states such as Hawaii have an integrated jail/prison system. Meanwhile, there are state prisons and federal prisons and a prison can be classified as either minimum-security, medium-security, maximum-security, or super-maximum security. (*Petersilia* 8).

Table I below indicates the length of the most recent prison term for each former prisoner, and whether the facility was a local jail or a state or federal prison. As can be expected, the prisoner experience of the former prisoners varied.

Name	Length of Most Recent Prison/Jail Term	Prison Level
Carl Upchurch	10 years?	Federal
Elaine Bartlett	16 years	State (NY)
Harold Napoleon	x>5	State (AK)
Nathan McCall	3 years	State (VA)
Jimmy Santiago Baca	5 years	Federal
Patrice Gaines	1 month (jail)	Local
Racque	1.9 years	State (CA)

Table I: The Prison Experience

Prison Programs

This section will focus on three types of prison programs: prison education, prison employment/job training or preparation, and prison counseling. It will all focus on informal forms of education and counseling. Table II below indicates what type of prison programs if any in which the former prisoners participated.

PRISON PROGRAMS			
Name	Prison Employment/ Job Training	Prison Education	Prison Counseling (emotional, substance abuse, etc.)
Carl Upchurch	yes	yes	no
Elaine Bartlett*	yes	yes	no
Harold Napoleon	N/A	N/A	yes
Nathan McCall	yes	N/A	yes
Jimmy Santiago Baca	N/A	N/A	N/A
Patrice Gaines*			
Racque	yes	no	no

TABLE II - *Did not serve any prison time; N/A: Information not available

Prison Education Programs

As illustrated in Table II, very few of the successful prisoner reentrants participated in any prison education program. However, coincidentally the two who did, Carl Upchurch and Elaine Bartlett served the most time in prison, ten years and sixteen years respectively.

Carl Upchurch obtained his GED while serving time at the State Correctional Institute at Camp Hill. By the time he was released from that institution, he had gone through an intellectual development and he began hanging out with new friends. However, he did not pursue higher education and “continued stealing and doing stick-ups” (*Upchurch* 61). Even with a GED, he still “did not know how to live a crime-free life” (*Upchurch* 61). However, later on, when Upchurch was serving the last two years of his sentence at Western penitentiary he enrolled in a

college degree program. By this time, Upchurch was motivated to succeed and therefore he better prepared to take advantage of this educational opportunity. (*Upchurch* 56-61, 107-108)

On the other hand, Elaine Bartlett enrolled in a GED class during her early months in prison. She did not actually pass the GED until the ninth year of her prison term on her seventh try. Afterwards, she enrolled in the prison's college program that was run by Mercy College. In her letter to the NY state clemency board discussed how she "completed high school [and] attended five semesters of college" in order to help improve her odds. Bartlett's motivation was most likely driven by the fact that she had to serve the most time in prison. Nevertheless, due to a general lack of availability or participation, the role of prison education programs proved to be insignificant. Instead, the kind of education that seemed to have the greatest impact on the successful reentrants was the process of *self-education* that a number of them underwent during their period of incarceration.

Self-Education

In *Working in the Dark*, Jimmy Santiago Baca discusses the freedom he felt in writing and in reading books by Neruda, Paw, Sabines, Nemerov, and Hemingway while incarcerated. Through these books, Baca discovered that "language was [a] magic that could liberate [him]" from himself and could transform him (*Baca* 4). In the process, Baca "began to teach himself how to read" and caused him to be cured as he "began to learn his own Chicano language" (*Baca* 5). After writing his first words and as a hunger for poetry took hold of him, Baca found himself with "a place to stand" where he could map the life he had lived. When faced with brutality for refusing to eat, he "withdrew even deeper into the world of language" (*Baca* 10). Baca credits writing with bridging the divide between his life as a prisoner and his subsequent life as a free man. (*Baca* 6-11)

Nathan McCall continued his self-education in prison even though he had already obtained a high school diploma and had spent a year in college. Particularly inspiring was a poem entitled “If” by Rudyard Kipling that challenged him to “reexamine self-imposed limitations and encouraged [him] to fight nagging fears that [he] had ruined his life beyond repair” (*McCall* 165). McCall actually spent most of his time in prison, “reading, writing letters, and memorizing new words” (*McCall* 165). Then as the time neared for him to appear before the parole board, McCall wrote a letter to the head of the journalism department at Norfolk State University, requesting that he get a second chance to complete his degree. The department head, Dr. Larry Kawga encouraged him to enter into a journalism competition. McCall won the competition and a one-year tuition scholarship. This was crucial in McCall making parole the first he went to the parole board. (*McCall* 211 – 213)

While spending time in solitary confinement at a federal prison in Lewisburg, PA, Carl Upchurch discovered a book in his cell containing all of Shakespeare’s sonnets and it “transported [him] out of [his] gray world” (*Upchurch* 81). The book of sonnets helped to erase his previous contempt of intellectual activity as he “discovered the magic of learning” (*Upchurch* 82). He began reading incessantly and “started devouring everything in the prison library” (*Upchurch* 87). His self-education included books by Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, and Machiavelli. He also read Betty Friedan’s Feminine Mystique which helped to change how he viewed women and the Bible which helped to give him a spirit of generosity. By the time he left solitary confinement, Upchurch describes himself as an entirely different human being who “realized he could control his own destiny” (*Upchurch* 93). (*Upchurch* 91-93)

Self-education role played an especially important role of Elaine Bartlett because it was through educating herself about the state of New York's Rockefeller drug laws that she was able to eventually win clemency. At first she ordered a transcript of her trial which she read so much that she memorized it. Then she "went to the law library, found out which prisoners were eligible, and learned she met all the basic qualifications" (*Gonnerman* 124-125). Afterwards, she wrote a letter and sent it to the clemency bureau and waited. (*Gonnerman* 101, 125)

Prison Employment

Prison employment programs appear to have played a greater role in the successful reentry of the subjects than prison education programs. Upon arrival at the Southampton Correctional Center, Nathan McCall was assigned to the "gun gang" by which every morning he and other new inmates would be "taken by truck to pick peas and other vegetables in the vast farm fields" (*McCall* 168). After refusing orders from his job supervisor, McCall was taken before a prison panel, but the panel ended up dropping the charges. After this incident, Nathan McCall states that he "started working harder, doing more than [his] share and also doing things without having to be told" (*McCall* 169). He began to understand that "there was dignity in all work" and soon he "was assigned to one of the most prestigious white-collar inmate jobs" in the prison: "working in the prison library" (*McCall* 170). This job also contributed his continued self-education.

For Elaine Bartlett, waiting was her "new full-time occupation" (*Gonnerman* 81). She spent the afternoons working as a porter in the kitchen. Yet because she had to wait to "leave her cell, to go to the mess hall, [and] to call her family," waiting took up most of her time (*Gonnerman* 81). Eventually, Bartlett was assigned to a variety of prison jobs. By her ninth year, she "had worked as a cook helper", a counter attendant, and in the prison's Children

Center, “planning games and projects for other women’s children” (*Gonnerman* 101). She only got paid 77.5 cents per day for doing this job, but the pay was double what she was paid while working in the kitchen. In her letter to the clemency board, Bartlett mentioned how she “worked in jobs [in prison] that [could] bring a pay check home” and therefore proved she could “be a productive member of society” (*Gonnerman* 125). (*Gonnerman* 101)

Nevertheless, for Racque, from Making it in the Free World and Carl Upchurch the benefits of prison employment/job training were less obvious. Racque, actually participated in a pre-release life skills development class twice. During “the last ninety days of one of her prior incarcerations” she attended a class which she found to be useful. In the class, she was “taught job search and interview skills” and the class also “focused on building self-esteem” (*O’Brien* 35). However, when she took the same program after a subsequent incarceration she found the course to be unhelpful. (*O’Brien* 34-35).

There was “a tailor shop, a masonry shop, a woodcarving shop, and an electrical shop” when Carl Upchurch was at State Correction Institute at Camp Hill. However, Upchurch “didn’t want anything to do with the shops” (*Upchurch* 55). In his opinion, “most of the projects that guys worked on” seemed to be trivial. Therefore, Upchurch actually lost respect for the prison employment system since it “didn’t seem to produce anything significant” (*Upchurch* 55).

Prison Counseling

Although many of the subjects entered prison with some type of emotional or substance abuse problem only Harold Napoleon and Nathan McCall participated in prison counseling programs. Napoleon considers Fairbanks Correctional Center to have “been like a laboratory” to him since there was “no shortage” of “Alaska Natives from all parts of the state whose own abuse of alcohol [had] also brought them” to the prison (*Napoleon* 1). In fact, due to the high

percentage of Native Alaskans in the prison, the Fairbanks Native Association and the Tanana Chiefs Conference employed counselors to help Native inmates. Napoleon specifically participated in the “weekly Talking Circles” which utilized “Native group facilitation” and primarily focused on alcohol counseling for “Alaska Native and American Indian inmates” (*Napoleon* 63). After about a year and a half, Napoleon began to enthusiastically participate in the weekly meetings. He “sat right next to the leader, so as to be the first speaker” and brought an energy to the group that he had previously lacked (*Napoleon* 65). The counseling that Napoleon received in prison really aided and encouraged him in his “journey towards wellness” (*Napoleon* 65).

After being sentenced and while awaiting to be moved to a prison, Nathan McCall spent time at Norfolk jail and he was placed in a cell where one of the inmates named “Chicago” directed “daily therapy sessions” which “were designed to encourage self-improvement” (*McCall* 146). At the sessions, “each prisoner took turns on the hot seat where [they] talked about [their] background[s] and answered probing questions from other inmates” (*McCall* 146). The sessions primarily helped McCall to learn about his fellow inmates and actually left him in serious doubt about his chances of successfully reentering society after he was to be released from prison. (*McCall* 146-149)

Informal Counseling

Several of the women in the study engaged in what could be termed “informal counseling.” These were not official programs run by the jails or prisons but ongoing discussions these women had while spending time with their fellow inmates. These informal sessions served as a form of empowerment since due to the absence of men the women “were forced to nurture each other and themselves” (*Gaines* 108).

During the month the Patrice Gaines spent in a North Carolina jail, found an informal support system from her fellow inmates. The ladies in her cell block, braided each other's hair cried when discussing the children that they missed, and played card games. They also helped each other to laugh despite their circumstances. Before going to sleep, Patrice and her cellmates would just talk until they "couldn't stand it anymore" and "fell asleep contented" (*Gaines* 117). In that cell block, "social and class lines disappeared" since they had no choice but to lean on each other (*Gaines* 117). Patrice formed a deeper friendship with Patricia, the woman with whom she shared her cell. They would lie awake talking and soon swore to each other that would never return to that jail. (*Gaines* 107-108, 117-118)

Eight years into serving her sentence, Elaine Bartlett was already thirty-five years old and thereby "older than most of the other inmates" (*Gonnerman* 102). Therefore, she took the initiative to counsel the angry young female inmates in the prison who reminded her of her earlier self. She also "counseled prisoners when they were depressed" (*Gonnerman* 102). Her most important task was to listen to the younger prisoners talk about what was bothering them. She soon earned the name "Ma" and "in turn, referred to [the younger prisoners] as my children" (*Gonnerman* 102).

Racque, from Making it in the Free World, actually spent some time sharing an apartment with an ex-inmate after she was released from prison. Prior to this living arrangement, she was living in various motels. Although, she only lived with the ex-inmate temporarily, her experience illustrates how support networks that are created while in prison, can potentially continue once the members are no longer incarcerated. (*O'Brien* 29-30)

IX. External Factors and Successful Prisoner Reentry

While there is much a former prisoner can and must do for themselves, the support of other individuals, external to themselves, is also necessary for successful reentry. Therefore, this section will examine the level of contribution of family, religion/spirituality, and government agencies in the successful reentry of the former prisoners in this project.

Family

The “family” category includes children, sibling, parents, relatives, and non-related persons who are seen in a familial role. First, the support received from family members will be examined. Then the contribution of children and marriage to the reentry of the former prisoners will be analyzed.

Family Support

Several of the former prisoners were able to return to their parent’s household after their release. Patrice Gaines had family members present at all her hearings and at her trial. Her mom was also present and sometimes they brought along her daughter. Other times her grandma would come and also her aunt. Her parents were the one who paid for her lawyer and upon her release her mom and other family members were present. In fact, her mother actually moved for a while from Maryland to Charlotte, NC to take of Patrice’s daughter. The unconditional love and unwavering support Patrice received from her family members and especially her mother were pivotal to her successful reentry into society. (*Gaines* 113, 122)

After making parole, Nathan McCall was picked up by his mother and allowed to return to his parents’ house. Although he did not remain there for a long time, it was definitely a source of stability. McCall describes the difficulty he had finding employment due to his criminal record. He spent most of the summer after his release unemployed. Job hunting proved to be

quite expensive and he had to depend on his parents for bus fare. Therefore it would have been impossible for McCall who had “no money, no car, and no apartment” to make it without the support of his parents (*McCall* 226). (*McCall* 215, 225-226)

After sixteen years, Elaine Bartlett was thrilled to go home and be with her family. However, “all the ecstasy and optimism of her release day vanished during her first week at home” (*Gonnerman* 171). She had “left one prison to come home to another” (*Gonnerman* 171). Also by the time she left prison, her greatest supporter, her mother had passed away. However, instead of getting discouraged she set out to be the best mother so that she could “break the chain of prison and poverty for [her] children” as she had promised to the clemency board (*Gonnerman* 125). (*Gonnerman* 137, 167-171)

The Role of Children

As illustrated in Table III below, all the former prisoners have children and majority of them had already had at least one child before entering prison. For many of the former prisoners, especially the women, their children served as source of motivation for them to serve their time and then get their life back in order. Furthermore, oftentimes family support was crucial to the continued care of their children.

Elaine Bartlett was able to depend on her mom to take of her four children during her sixteen years of imprisonment. Patrice Gaines was also able to count on her mom to raise her young daughter while she was in jail. Nathan McCall’s young son stayed with his mother while McCall was imprisoned. Racque had not had physical custody of her daughter for several years “due to her frequent incarcerations and lifestyle” (*O’Brien* 104). Meanwhile, Harold Napoleon’s son died as a result of Napoleon’s alcohol addiction and it is not clear whether he had any other children at the time. Generally, children played a significant role for those former prisoners who

were likely to have custody of their children after their release. (*Gonnerman* 85, *Gaines* 120, *McCall* 120, *Napoleon* 3)

Name	Married Before Prison	Married After Prison	Children Before Prison	Children After Prison
Carl Upchurch		+		+
Elaine Bartlett*	+		+	
Harold Napoleon	+		+	N/A
Nathan McCall		+	+	+
Jimmy Santiago Baca		+		+
Patrice Gaines	+	+	+	
Racque		+	+	

TABLE III - * Got married while awaiting trial; N/A: Information not available

The Role of Marriage

As illustrated in Table III above, most of the former prisoners got married after their release from prison. It can be assumed that in prison they matured to the point where they would be ready for marriage. Yet, for the exception of Racque, marriage simply signaled that the lives of the former prisoners were stabilizing rather than contributing significantly to their successful reentry. After all, most of the former prisoners got married after being released for a year or more, when their likelihood for recidivism has already begun decreasing. Then once married, having children signaled even more stability.

Racque was actually able to marry her way into a new life. While living in Oakland, CA she was continually being re-imprisoned for various parole violations. She attributes this to hanging around the wrong crowd and because she “did not have a support system in the area that could assist her in getting a new start” (*O’Brien* 75). Therefore, soon after being released she met a man, whom she married and moved to a small town in Kansas. She felt that she “to leave California in order to change [her] whole life around” (*O’Brien* 76). In the end, she comments

that everything worked out and that she thought she made the right decision. (*O'Brien* 76, 164, 170)

Religion/Spirituality

The Religion/spirituality factor which will examine the role of religious leaders and religious beliefs seems to have played a significant role in the successful reentry of several of the male former prisoners. It appeared that “the life was being crushed from” Harold Napoleon during his first year on half in prison as he was burdened with a sense of “guilt and shame” and “pain and sorrow” (*Napoleon* 64). He credits “the grace of God” with helping him to “make it through each day” (*Napoleon* 64). However, it was not until he underwent a religious experience that his physical and spiritual deterioration came to a halt. In that experience, he was “forgiven by God and [his] son” and therefore could concentrate on forgiving himself (*Napoleon* 65). If it were not for this religious experience, it is not clear that Napoleon would have been able to recover in the way that he did, if at all.

Shortly after his release from prison, Nathan McCall converted to Islam and joined the American Muslim Mission (AMM). The AMM was led by Dr. Na'im Akbar a Muslim psychologist that McCall met at Norfolk State and “whose ideas on human development” McCall had studied while in prison (*McCall* 235). He played a crucial role in McCall's religious conversion.

Islam addressed McCall's need to “deal with [his] spiritual self and to worship in a faith that was not racially offensive to [him]” (*McCall* 237). He had become disillusioned by the black Christian church and liked the fact that “the Muslims were committed to self-help and to establishing black institutions” (*McCall* 238). Religious practices such as praying five times a day helped him to refocus on his purpose and goals. In addition, his family was generally

accepting of his religious conversion and he also led such different lives from his former friends that he rarely saw them. While still in the faith, McCall was also married for the first time. Although later on he was to leave the AMM, it provided much needed stability and guidance in the crucial period right after his release.

After deciding that he had to take deliberate steps to leave behind his “life of crime,” Upchurch enrolled in a prison college degree program through which he met Martha Connamacher. She was his chemistry and physics professor and a Quaker. Up until meeting her, Upchurch had believed that “religion was phony” and there was “no evidence to support the existence of a creator” (*Upchurch* 108). However, Upchurch began to admire Connamacher’s Quaker faith. After serving out the rest of his sentence in a federal prison in Memphis, Upchurch went to live with Connamacher in a farm outside of Pittsburgh. In this environment, he was introduced formally to Quakerism and non-violence. After adopting the faith himself, Upchurch began attending Earlham, a Quaker college in Indiana, in order to pursue a M.A. in Divinity. Although, he dropped out after about a year, Quakerism instilled in him ideals that he could never learn in the streets of South Philly and thereby helped him to break the cycle of crime in his life. (*Upchurch* 108-109, 111-121)

Government Agencies/ Officials

In this section, the role played by various government agencies and officials in terms of the kinds of support they provided to the former prisoners will be examined. Interestingly enough, only Elaine Bartlett and Racque benefited from their interaction with a government official after their release, specifically their parole officer. This is not to say that the other former prisoners had no interaction with the parole process. In fact, Table IV below illustrates that a majority of the former prisoners were released on parole or received probation. However,

either they failed to discuss their experiences with the parole process or like Nathan McCall viewed it cynically. Therefore, it appeared that Elaine Bartlett and Racque lucked out since they were assigned to very helpful parole officers.

Name	Released on Parole or Probation
Carl Upchurch	no
Elaine Bartlett*	yes
Harold Napoleon	N/A
Nathan McCall	yes
Jimmy Santiago Baca	N/A
Patrice Gaines	yes
Racque	yes

TABLE IV; N/A: Information not available

Elaine Bartlett was assigned to parole officer Alfonso Camacho. His method was to try “to coax parolees into obeying parole’s rules by putting them at ease” (*Gonnerman* 172). He warned her not to go visit her son who was in jail before getting her life in order. Instead he advised her to go and apply for public assistance. However, probably most beneficial was that instead of arresting Elaine after a minor parole violation, he “gave her a stern lecture” (*Gonnerman* 176). In this instance, he took into consideration that Elaine “had been home whenever he visited her after [curfew]” and she has passed all of her drug tests (*Gonnerman* 176). Therefore, with Camacho as her parole officer Elaine was able to remain out of trouble despite minor lapses in judgment. (*Gonnerman* 172-176)

For Racque, it was important that she had a very “understanding parole officer” (*O’Brien* 76). Due to the fact that she was released on parole, moving to Kansas placed her in “jeopardy with the California criminal justice system” (*O’Brien* 76). She was listed as absconder and as a result she had to return to California. However, she was able to straighten everything up with her parole officer and able to resume her new life in Kansas. (*O’Brien* 76)

The factors that played the most influential role in the successful prisoner reentry of the former prisoners in this project were: personal attitude, prison experience, family support and to a lesser extent religion/spirituality. Therefore, these results appear to validate the proposition put forward at the beginning of this paper that prisoner reentry will continually evolve into a highly-individualized process. After all, while the government has the ability to influence the prison environment of inmates it has less influence in matters of attitude, family, and religion. Nevertheless, the government still has an important role to play in the prisoner reentry process.

X. Current Policies/Practices

The results from this study have several implications for current policies and practices related to prisoner reentry. Therefore in this section a concise evaluation of some of these policies and practices will be conducted and some recommendations for improved effectiveness.

What Works

Every minute that a person spends incarcerated provides an opportunity for prison officials to either influence the inmate for the better or for the worse. Most of the former prisoners in this study point to their prison experience and family support as major contributions to their successful reentry.

Improving Prison Programs

Today, U.S. prisons offer “fewer services than they did when inmate problems were less severe” (*Petersilia* 93). In addition, even where prison programs exist, “participation rates are distressingly low” (*Petersilia* 94). Therefore, these programs should be retooled in order to attract more participants or eliminated due to ineffectiveness. In general, the results of this study seem to convey that prison employment programs can prove to be valuable, while more *informal* versions of prison education and prison counseling programs could also prove to be beneficial.

According to a BJS survey in 2000, 31% of state prisoners and 27% of federal prisoners were unemployed at the time of their arrest (*Petersilia* 40). This may explain why prison employment programs are so useful. After all, many persons entering prison invite a situation where they are guaranteed employment and compensation no matter how low the amount. In addition, because prisoners could keep the money, it serves as a form of motivation. Therefore, such programs should definitely be preserved and expanded where possible.

On the other hand, prison education and prison counseling programs could use some improvement. Based on this study, it appears that utilizing and thereby empowering prisoners in the operation of these programs may prove to be more effective and efficient. Several of the former prisoners mentioned self-education as a crucial component of their decision to take control and change their lives. Many of them point to books and writing as being vital pieces of this process. Therefore, besides offering formal GED and college degree courses which can have varying levels of success; permitting individual study time as a reward for good behavior might also be useful. However, it would be important for prison officials to ensure that their libraries have adequate resources before this could be instituted.

As for prison counseling programs, where they are available they seem to be effective only if they address and recognize the cultural and social needs of the prisoners. More effective could be allowing *culturally competent* external counselors to help run these programs, such as in the case of Harold Napoleon. Napoleon's weekly therapy meetings were run by a counselor who specialized in working with American Indians battling alcohol addiction. In addition, space could be provided where informal groups of prisoners could help counsel each other, although this may need to be regulated and monitored by prison officials for security purposes.

Family Friendly Policies

Prisons should encourage and improve the process for family visitation. Currently, “due to greater security and contraband concerns of prison officials, the conditions are often cumbersome and uncomfortable for visitors” (*Petersilia* 44). While security should continue to be a priority, prisons officials should be working to encourage that family members stay in touch with their incarcerated loved ones. After all, this can pay off down the line, since the results of this study show that the chances of a successful reentry increase with more family support.

Another hindrance for family members is that “prison phone calls have become very expensive, often \$1 to \$3 a minute” (*Petersilia* 45). Oftentimes, phone revenues represent an important source of funding for correctional costs. Yet, such a policy seems counterproductive, if a lack of contact with family contributes to higher correctional costs.

Recommendations

Alternatives to Prison

Logic states that larger prison populations equal larger ex-prisoner populations. Simply put, reducing the number of offenses that result in jail time by instituting alternatives to prison will help to reduce the prison population and many of the problems associated with such a situation. An unintended consequence of this nation’s war on crime has been that oftentimes prison is seen as the solution to everything although reality states the opposite. The problem with putting people in prison for every offense is that prisons begin to lose the power to deter crime. In fact, studies suggest that “as more people acquire a grounded knowledge of prison life, the power of prisons to deter crime through fear of the unknown is diminished” (*Petersilia* 229). Also as serving time in prison becomes the norm, this will help to “lessen prison’s stigmatizing

capacity” (*Petersilia* 229). Therefore, increased imprisonment actually proves to be “deeply counterproductive” in the “long run” (*Petersilia* 221).

In fact, statistics show that only 48% of state prison inmates have been convicted of a violent crime. Furthermore, as the prison population has continued to increase, “the proportion of offenders being sent to prison each year for violent crimes has actually fallen” (*Petersilia* 222). This is not to say that all those who commit non-violent crimes should not go to prison. Instead, realizing that both the federal and state governments have “limited crime control resources,” there should be a more concerted effort to spend that money where it is truly needed and where there is the greatest return for the society (*Petersilia* 222).

XI. Conclusion

Limits to Research

There were several limitations the current project and the way in which it was designed. The study sample was rather small and included only seven people. Yet, it was large enough to discover common themes, issues, and other similarities between the different subjects.

Another limitation was the racial and gender composition of the seven subjects. It does not exactly reflect the racial and gender composition of the current U.S. prison population. According to government statistics, the “racial and ethnic distributions for the state prison population who were on parole between 1990-1999 remained relatively the same: 47% black, 35% white, and 16% Hispanic” (*Reentry Trends in the U.S.*). In the study sample, about 57% of the subjects were black and 28.6 % were Hispanic. Meanwhile, only about 10% of the prison population is female (*Petersilia* 25). Therefore, in the study women (43%) were overrepresented. However, much of the discrepancies in terms of race and gender were based on the method of analysis.

The use of personal accounts/ interviews that have been published proved to be limiting vehicle of analysis. Most of the autobiographies utilized in this study were published after 1990. Therefore, due to the fact that the popularity of this specific genre has only arisen in the last 15 years, there was only a limited amount of works to from which to choose. Also the time limit that was built into this study (mid '70s to present) also served to limit that amount of prisoner narratives that could be utilized. Furthermore, not all prisoner narratives will be published and not every former prisoner will want to write about their life and prison experience. Thus, although utilizing personal accounts/ interviews were useful for this study, it is too limited to be utilized in any future studies on this topic. Despite, all the limitations of the study, it should serve as a good starting point for those interested in further research.

Possibilities for Future Research

Future research on prisoner reentry may focus on tracking the progress of a controlled group of releasees from a particular prison, state, or region for a period of time. The advantages of such a research would be more accurate results due to the reduced absence of variable factors. Other research may focus specifically on the reentry of particular groups such as: racial groups, women with children, persons with disabilities, juveniles, and long-term prisoners.

Reducing Recidivism

Due to the disproportionate focus on fighting crime, not enough attention has been paid to reducing the number of ex-prisoners who are continually returning to prison. However, as the number of ex-prisoners continues to grow, reducing recidivism should become a more important goal. Yet, it appears that individual prisoners themselves will have to shoulder more and more of the responsibility for their reentry. They will have to take the initiative to make the most of their time in prison and help to prepare themselves to reenter society. Unfortunately this will mean

that only the most able prisoners and some really motivated prisoners, as reflected in the study will be able to succeed. Therefore, those who are least able or not capable of helping themselves for whatever reason will be most unlikely to succeed. This may prove to be the worst consequence of reentering society in the age of mass incarceration.

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APPENDIX A (SUBJECTS CHART)

Name	Age	Race	Gender
Carl Upchurch	60	Black	Male
Elaine Bartlett	47	Black	Female
Harold Napoleon	55	Native Alaskan	Male
Nathan McCall	50	Black	Male
Jimmy Santiago Baca	53	Hispanic	Male
Patrice Gaines	56	Black	Female
Racque	45	Hispanic	Female