



## A Perspective on Prison

By Michael B. Beverley

When I was a boy, my mother often said that one-day people would no longer have names, we would be known only by a number. I know she didn't mean what I would bring upon myself, yet it is not entirely disingenuous to say I am now known as 78552. That is my inmate ID within the New Hampshire state prison system. However, I would rather be remembered as Michael.

Though I am now a felon, it wasn't how my life began. I was the third of eight children. For the first nine years of my life, I lived in welfare housing in Brockton, Massachusetts. And the second half of my childhood, I lived in a quaint rural community. Though our family wouldn't have been considered devout, it maintained a moderately religious home. And many of the teachings I didn't receive by attending church more regularly, were taught in our home as a simple matter of piety and decency.

In my teen years, I was an industrious boy. In addition to the projects my father demanded of me, I had my paper routes and a job at a caterer. At the age of fourteen, I started my career in computers. Following, throughout my adult years, I was either operating computers or programming them. The field seems to be as easy for me as breathing. I can't say I love the work, I would rather it a hobby as opposed to a career, but I am good at it, so it was a natural direction to pursue.

Now, I am a father of four, divorced, and forty-seven years old. I am short statured (5-foot zero), one hundred twenty-eight pounds, brown eyes and balding dark hair with a slow invasion of grays beginning to make their mark: though I generally keep my head shaved

In December 2005, my life took an abrupt turn when I was incarcerated. And in spite of years living in the projects and having been exposed to other forms of abuse and violence throughout my childhood, I was not prepared for this. In the nearly five years I've been down, I've begun to question whether anyone, regardless of their life experiences, can say they were prepared for prison the first time they came in. It's true some adapt much more readily than others do, but none of us have ever had to live like this before.

For the dynamics of prison are not those of the common man, not even for the street thugs and hustlers. Certainly, within society there exists an aggressive environment, such as that seen in the work place, in school and on the field, whether it is the benign workings of rivalry and competition, or the more insidious behaviors like bullying, backstabbing, nepotism and discrimination. However, behind bars the politics and psychology of living take on a far



greater significance. The subtle nuances of the pecking order seen in the business world, in the gym or in competitive sports; becomes obtuse, vocal and often violent. The slightest fault, sign of weakness, misspoken word or unmanaged body language can invoke the necessity for someone to reestablish his pack position or capture an opportunity to rise in the ranks. This is not optional; it is the law in this community. These are the protocols of survival.

This might mislead one to think that a street thug or gang member would fit right in. Objectively speaking, they do tend to learn to use the ropes more readily, but they also experience a learning curve, especially if they were accustomed to being a predator or an alpha-dog on the outside. No matter who you were when you came in, now you are prey. Though not every inmate is a predator, anyone of us can become a target. If someone who has lived preying on others turns his back, loses a sponsor (an inmate that vouches for another,) offends the wrong man or violates a code then he will without exception be taken advantage of, and few if any will care.

The crime committed to land you in prison becomes an integral part of day-to-day life behind the walls. It reminds me of the identification the Jews were made to wear in Germany, the specialized license plates some states are considering for drunk drivers, and the sexual offenders registration; each purported, by its endorsers, to be for a socially advanced agenda to protect the citizens, but becomes labels to justify ostracizing, continued punishment and in some instances violence. Though nothing in prison approaches the abomination that happened to the Jews, there is a very real segment of the prison population that would (if the consequences were removed,) act on their desire to maim or kill those they deem less deserving. Their value of human life is distorted and heavily judgmental. The marginal security in prison frustrates the violent, but does not prevent them from imposing more limited forms of violence; raging from petty name calling to shankings (knifings.) Because of this, each inmate must quickly learn his place and the means of maximizing his safety.

The types of crimes are informally scaled according to the hierarchy of perceived atrocity. As in most militant or gang social structures, the strongest and most violent define the scale. At the top are the 'solid' crimes. These include murder, assault, drug use and the like. Those at the bottom are domestic violence, baby killers, rape (rippers) and child molesters (skimmers.)

Although, having a solid crime does not assure you that accolade. How you handle yourself after your arrest, during prosecution and ultimately after you are behind the walls will affect your status. A man who has turned state evidence becomes a rat, a title that puts him in the ranks of a rapist. Entering and leaving a gang, failing to follow through on a gang order, sporting a controversial or restricted tattoo, not defending yourself in a fight and reneging on a



debt are a few of the many ways to violate the convicts' code. Likewise, there are as many subversive means an inmate may choose to simply establish himself or rise within the pack. There are limits however, such as: a person who is in on a non-solid crime can never become truly solid. If he handles himself smartly, at most, he may reach the place where it is said of him, "He's in on a bad crime, but he's solid." Which translates to: you can't socialize with him, but you can do business with him.

From my observations the 'gangsters' real dilemma is coming to grips with the penal system. They can no longer control their environment, or daily schedule with the sovereignty they expect. They are completely ill prepared to deal with authority in anyway but deceit and rebellion. Conversely the inmates, who before prison were exposed to less street violence, though they tend to handle being controlled by the system better, they are generally naïve when it comes to relating with the criminal minded inmates.

Ultimately, the microcosm we call prison functions differently than any of us knew or could imagine before we arrived here; and so each of us must acclimate to the new culture. Unfortunately, acclimation does not necessitate a change in motives, nor underlying behaviors. And so, if an inmate is inclined to criminal behaviors, his methods may change but he will act out and predate on the system and the other inmates. Because those types of individuals compose a significant majority of the population, it is their behaviors that tend to govern how the system responds.

For all inmates, though the first-time offenders more so, when we enter prison we find ourselves assaulted on three fronts: the Department of Corrections (DOC), the other inmates and ourselves. The degree of impact that each one of these has on us is individualized. There are too many variables related to our tolerance of authority and controls, life experiences and self-image to make an accurate declaration of how any particular individual will respond and survive.

Our first battle is the DOC staff, and like any other census norm, it forms a bell curve in relation to how they manage and relate with inmates. A few see inmates as humans that have made a mistake or functioned from flawed thinking that harmed one or more individuals, or society. These staff members use and guide the system to promote the caring treatment and rehabilitation of inmates with the aspiration they can help the inmate return to society as a healthy contributor.

There is a similar number of DOC staff that sees inmates as the disease of society and so deserving of nothing but scorn and abuse. They twist and corrupt the system to humiliate and punish the inmates at every opportunity. Whether they are sadistic or simply disillusioned, they hold no concept that inmates are redeemable, and so justify their abusive actions.



The majority of the staff falls in the large median range. From reserved optimism to bitter skepticism, rational compromise to punitive correction, individualized guidance to mass punishment; they land in various places in the continuum and so express the complexity of rehabilitating inmates who likewise have varying degrees of remorse and reform ability.

Because the process for an inmate to manage through the system is so dependent on the ideology of the staff they encounter, the success or failure of the inmates' treatment is inexorably linked. This does not intimate that the staff holds the ultimate responsibility for the inmates' rehabilitation, for each inmate must (if he is ever going to be a healthy member of society), take personal responsibility for his own rehabilitation. Yet, because inmates also form a bell curve in openness and preparedness for correction, the majority of inmates exist within the range that will be influenced in one direction or the other based on the experience and opportunities they are exposed to within the prison. How the inmates are treated by the staff and the culture of the environment will, without exception, either contribute to or detract from the efficacy of the rehabilitation process.

It is evident the correction officers (COs) are not educated in rehabilitation. Their training in security and safety is critically important, and is plainly visible. Yet, without training specifically in correction they are unable to avail themselves the opportunity for facilitating behavior changes in the inmate population. They know only one tool, punitive treatment. The often excessive and misuse (such as to retaliate for an inmate filing a grievance against an officer's misconduct), of negative reinforcement and the absence of a reward system, distorts the value of this tool and undermines its effectiveness.

This challenging dynamic between the staff and the population is inescapable. Very often the decisions of the DOC appear to the inmates as though the DOC are unaware of the implications or to be at odds with an objective of rehabilitation. We as inmates must continually adjust to the behaviors and atmosphere imposed by the staff. As each man chooses for himself, a few will express their discontent with violence, most will gripe; and some tend to reflect, then find a healthy outlet for their frustration. I, for example, attempt to capture the moment in words.

A recent example involves a change in our housing situation. In an effort to save money by cramming more inmates in limited space, the facility decided to remove tables from our day-room area and install bunk beds. I have no doubt the administrators see their action as reasonable. For us inmates, its importance is something entirely different. We went from forty seats for sixty-eight inmates to twenty seats for seventy-eight. Common space was reduced by nearly half, noise volume increased, and the potential of being ousted from a two-man cell and put in an exposed bunk on the



dayroom floor became a threat. Additionally this did more than change the physical aspects of our housing area; it created a 'have and have-not' bias. This divide between the DOC's operations and the inmates' concerns was palpable. As I listened to the grumbling and fears, I too became concerned about the impact. So, I composed the suspicions and growing contention in this poem:



## Man on the Bunk

Trust, we cannot give you  
We stand at cell room door  
in proof of breach to status quo. You  
men who live in open bunk are lined,  
in stacks on dayroom floor.  
For this we're compelled to take issue,  
you having no walls of home to find.

Left private never more,  
with no quiet, no T.V., no view,  
no other means to escape your mind.  
Even your needs at the core  
must be awkwardly shared in a queue  
with nine more, vagabonds in kind.

You fish, swim in a well,  
with sixty-plus men an audience  
to your nakedness and vagrancy.  
We, vested with a cell,  
possess our desk and our door. Hence,  
retire to places you cannot be.

Though we concede your plight,  
we're forced to refuse to yield a place  
in our hearts to field your silent plea.  
You stir our deepest fright;  
the growing erosion and disgrace,  
to our fragile, vanquished humanity.  
Are we to be warehoused?  
as tools on a shelf, covered in rust,  
no more to be kept for want or need.

Stone rules require cops keep  
an inventory of beds. There, stead lists  
souls corroding in unpardoned deeds.  
A scratch in blue-black ink,  
(when time claims a man, his body now dust);  
with no sense of lost, no conscience to heed.

Thus you do well to hark-  
en unspoken words, in there,  
a glimmer of poisoned steel.  
Rising from corners dark,  
in your soul, you are aware,  
of the whys, of what you feel.  
Being unwanted, mark,  
you a cornered beast. You dare,  
to be reckoned with. Reveal:

You will fight.

You will thief.

You will do anything,  
to part the foreboding cloud,  
and shed this repressive shroud.

True, though we've never met,  
it would serve no purpose to discuss,  
the subtle nuances of distrust,  
You bring – Man on the bunk.



The very simple act of swapping out five tables for five bunks appears minor on the surface, and it is only one example of the ongoing changes. Generally speaking the conditions of our confinement never improves; on the contrary, it progressively worsens. Our housing is becoming increasingly cramped. Instead of two gyms, we now have one. We've gone from six hours daily of gym time to half that; additionally it is now only three or four days out of seven. Holiday parties are no longer permitted. Religious groups have been so strongly opposed and constrained to make them nearly nonexistent. Education has been trimmed to scarcely more than provision for a GED. Vocation opportunity is available for only one-quarter of the population, and the financial incentive for working has been reduced from fifty dollars per month to three dollars for the first six months and twenty dollars per month following that.

The challenges of working through the DOC system, relating with a staff that is (not always, yet) often confrontational and an environment that seems increasingly dehumanizing poses a hurdle that too many inmates find insurmountable.

The second battle each inmate faces is the other inmates. As mentioned earlier, an inmate's particular crime and his prior life experiences will dominate how he addresses the inmate-on-inmate conflicts. It is critical that each inmate quickly comprehends the reality he is housed with other convicts, many of whom have finely tuned criminal thinking and behavior.

Numerous inmates will banter about the expression, 'doing your own time.' Ideally, this means an inmate would be socially responsible to his peers, address the programs ordered by the court or recommended by the DOC, and serve his time, without getting involved in any other inmates' business. In reality, this doesn't happen. And ironically, those that tend to throw this expression around the most are the same ones who put themselves in other inmates' concerns. In spite of that, it behooves each inmate's interest to adhere to it. Failure to do so will more often than not, turn physical. For example, if an inmate steals from another, you don't ask who, what, when, or any of the other reporter's questions. Nor do you talk about it with names, even if you were witness to the event. If you observe an inmate pass another inmate a kite (note), you don't inquire about it. If you notice an inmate sporting a new tattoo, you don't ask who did the work. Essentially, in prison, we keep our eyes open and our mouths shut.

When an inmate violates the convicts' code, it is considered the responsibility of the offended to retaliate. Failure to do so marks him as a 'punk' and invites further and more escalated abuse. Even if the offended is assured to fare the worst in a fight, it is thought better to fight and lose than not to fight at all. Again, here we expose an irony, those who are most likely to engage in fighting, are also more likely to gang up on an individual. Even though one-on-one is



the expected convict code, gangs (crews, boys, brotherhoods, etc.) will often attack as one to show their bond and instill fear in individuals and smaller gangs. Any inmate who is at risk for being assaulted must be prepared to function this way, or PC (enter protective custody.)

Because inmates don't achieve the ideal 'do your own time,' an inmate's reputation becomes critical and bears upon his rehabilitation process by both direct and indirect means.

By direct I am referring to actions an inmate takes that reflect his personal values or state of mind. For instance, there is the stigma associated with compliance to the system, or getting help through Mental Health services. Either of those may be regarded as sullyng an inmate's reputation. If an inmate attends programs without some degree of contempt, he is perceived as weak minded and conforming to the 'brain washing' by the Man. So, while the majority of inmates are attending programs, even those that are mandated by the courts, they will do so not to be educated or helped, but to receive the required document needed at their parole hearing. Their attitudes during the program sessions are usually disrespectful and confrontational. This allows the inmate to maintain the image of a convict. Fewer inmates yet, will attend programs that are only recommendations. However, there again the majority of these attendees are only doing so to persuade the parole board. Often after returning to the housing, they will deride the value of the programs to keep face among their peers. Collectively between the misbehavior in the sessions and back within the population, their actions reinforce the community's contempt for the programs. Those that have no reputation to protect, or are able to subjugate it to his rehabilitation, are far more likely to attend programs with a self-improvement approach. (Obviously, it cannot be inferred by this that ruining every inmate's reputation would improve the efficacy of the programs.)

Mental Health services and groups are an even greater threat to an inmate's image. The possible perception that he is crazy, weak or not in complete control of his choices, becomes an obstruction to the inmate getting the help that he needs.

The indirect affront to a reputation comes by association and refers back to the prison hierarchy. Those at the top of the hierarchy are generally tolerated by all inmates, whereas those on the bottom, by very few. Those at the top readily form gangs, and those on the bottom become isolated. And though those on the bottom don't ostracize each other, neither do they defend one another, in an attempt to avoid bringing attention to themselves. This tendency leads the shunned into becoming alone and defenseless. Thereby, their needs for Mental Health services are more evident. Given that their social position has already placed them outside of peer acceptance, they readily seek and receive Mental Health treatment. This results in a prevalence of undesired inmates in attendance of treatment groups, therefore those at the top



of the hierarchy (though actually having equally as much need for Mental Health treatment,) are far less likely to pursue them.

Another impact of the failure to achieve 'doing your own time' is the worsening an inmate's mental and moral state through interaction with other inmates. The temptation to adopt criminal thinking is pervasive and compelling. The concept expressed in the thought 'if you want to learn how to be a criminal, go to prison,' is sincere, especially among the inmates at the top of the food chain. A shoplifter might learn to become a home invader, a drug user to become a drug dealer, or a man in on simple assault may become more violent, risking a future charge of manslaughter or murder.

The use of lies and deception runs rampant. Not only to commit criminal behaviors behind bars, but to get what inmates consider reasonableness from the system, such as: A shower before a visit, medical treatment, or the lending of a bag of coffee to an associate. For the first two there are times when the rules interfere and the staff is indifferent to the implications. The third is never allowed, inmates are in no way permitted to lend or borrow from each other. Unquestionably, many inmates are inclined to consider all of their wants as reasonable. Regardless of the validity of the reasonableness, when faced with these dilemma inmates usually resort to circumventing the rules.

Though the potential for physical violence is very real, it has less of a lasting impact than the oppressive nature of the threat of violence, and the culture requiring the maintaining of a convict's reputation. Which brings me to the third battle each inmate engages; the battle of his own mind. In addition to the psychology he must employ when dealing with the DOC and its staff, as well as with other inmates, he must gain a clear understanding of the environment he is imprisoned in, while addressing his habilitation and healing needs. It is difficult for any man to wrap his thoughts around these principles, especially while coming to grips with the loss of his freedom, and what it means for him and about him. The profusion of lawfulness and lawlessness in such close proximity to each other is unmatched in civilian life. An inmate who fails to recognize the power and limits of this frequently learns the hard way.

For example, it is important for inmates, sex offenders particularly, to understand and accept that if they are guilty or not, it does not matter; if they confessed or were convicted, the courts, the cops and the convicts, all see them as guilty and they are not interested in hearing their side of the story.

One time (which is not an uncommon occurrence,) a man came onto our housing block that had not assimilated himself to his environment, and became an example of how a man can make his situation worse. He had been sentenced on the crime of molesting a little girl with some exceptionally heinous acts that resulted in the girl needing corrective surgery.



He started his time here lying about his charge: stating he was in on murder. We live in the information age; which is no misnomer. Between the law library and friends or family with Internet access, people can find out exactly why a man is in prison. Even still, that wasn't necessary in his particular case; his face had been plastered on the TV, and so he should have known better. He was quickly made aware his charges were no secret. So reverted to talking about them and recycling the defense he had presented to the courts. He falsely believed that an argument could be presented that would be persuasive. Instead, he was angering the other convicts, sex offenders and non-sex offenders alike.

When sex offenders come in, they are mercilessly harangued. This is the time when they should find the lines they shouldn't cross, places they should not go, postures they should avoid, and above all, to keep their mouths shut. This inmate not only defended himself when spurned, he exacerbated his situation by bring the subject up.

He didn't see the lines in the sand, and it cost him. It is possible he was destined to be smashed from the start because of some of the details of his case. However, his naiveté and his misdirected grasping to overcome his shame and acquire companionship sealed the deal.

These events are seldom protracted. They seem to suddenly occur and are over within a matter of minutes. This is as it must be. Surprise is used to capture the advantage, and speed to avoid being caught. The apparent spontaneity is misleading.

By evening chow the day following his arrival, his charges and housing were known throughout the facility. As mentioned earlier there are many inmates that function from a belief it is their right or obligation to harm other inmates. A sex offender is assured of being assessed as deserving. So word was passed placing a price on this man's well being. This established motivation. As anyone who reads crime novels or watches TV is aware, this is one of the three pillars in committing a crime: motive, opportunity and means.

Opportunities are many, even more so since they removed the officers from direct supervision<sup>1</sup> positions. The sally ports, bathrooms, cells, stairwells and the yard give ample options with hardly any waiting. Some convicts are motivated without being concerned with being caught. They are aware they can accomplish their goal of hurting someone before the cops can intervene; and so will strike as soon as this target is within reach. And then regard the discipline report and talk of the event like a badge of courage.

Means is the most difficult of the three and more complex than it appears at first. Though the most common weapon, one's own hands, is readily available, and generally there is always someone bigger, these physical measures

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<sup>1</sup> Direct supervision places Correction Officers in positions to monitor inmates without the use of cameras or other visual aids. This is often within the same physical space, as opposed to being in an observation bubble.



aren't enough. There needs to be the political backing as well. A convict does not want to become known as someone who bangs out weaker inmates. With sex offenders this error is usually overlooked, yet it is still better if there is, or appears to be, obvious justification.

This sex offender provided it: He lied about his charges, failed to take responsibility for his conviction and he put himself in harms way by trying to appease the 'solid' convicts. When the event went down, the politics was, "he asked for it." In prison, ignorance and stupidity have a price. It should be noted however, though the politics were clearly met, the inmate that did the smashing provided himself cover, he said, "you called me a bitch!" This kind of disrespect transcends any size differences, and it circumvents the hate crime charges and the fallout for banging out a weaker inmate.

An hour later, this kid put himself in protective custody. It has been nearly a year, and when I see him, it is obvious he hasn't yet been able to disappear into the shadows. If you imagine a dog hanging his head, his tail between his legs and trailing a steak of urine, it is a fair description of his countenance. When I see him at meal times, it doesn't matter where he sits; he is kicked out of his seat repeatedly.

I pity him and imagine him going through an emotional struggle that is drowning him. His face healed many months ago, and the verbal bullying is leaving no marks on his body, but the war that must exist within his head is dangerous. If he is ever going to return to society, he is going to need to come to grips with his guilt and conviction, and to rediscover himself and a reason to be here tomorrow.

His story is not unique. All the inmates that are in on charges of harming women, children or the elderly experience similar threats and oppression to varying degrees. Several walk the halls with the heads held low, hoping to pass unnoticed.

This kind of abuse on inmates is not limited to being committed by inmates. I have witnessed multiple times prison cops humiliating inmates because of their charges, or advertising them to other inmates specifically to encourage this kind of treatment. This also further distorts the attitudes the 'solid' inmates have toward their own crimes. They take on a false perception that there is such a thing as a good crime. I once witnessed an officer tell an inmate that he was the kind of inmate he likes and that the prison needed more like him. From this kind of treatment, what other conclusion could be expected from this inmate except that his crime is acceptable. There are many times when a staff member's behavior, if it isn't actually criminally wrong, is morally wrong. The structure and culture of the system provides no redress for this abuse, and it will continue until there is.



Although the above example centered on a sex offender, the mind battles are not limited to them. Every inmate fights to some degree with culling his thoughts and behaviors. While inmates on the bottom of the hierarchy are struggling with psychological issues from the persistent hate and self-loathing, those on the top are burdened with breaking away from the pressures to remain a criminal. Though some have motives that continue to be sociopathic, the majority truly feels regret and shame for who they've become. Many can't conceive of ever being different; either because they've never known otherwise, or have become so habituated, their minds don't know where to begin. I hear it in the confrontations, in their frustration and in their tears; they want a different life.

In addition with the physical separation from society are the social and emotional separations. The likelihood of this divide adversely affecting the mental and emotional health of the inmate is significant.

Those in on 'solid' crimes are apt to have had a social structure that included other criminally minded people. Many of these will drop away for obvious reasons; those that don't may undermine the inmate's correction. However, some, if not all, of his family and friends will remain in contact; provided they aren't a contributor to the inmate's criminal thinking and behavior, they can augment the rehabilitation process.

Conversely, for the 'non-solid' inmates, their crimes are as much of an assault on the sensibilities and morals of society as they are on the other inmates; very often resulting in most, if not all, of his friends and family disassociating from him. While this may suggest he is not likely to have people minimizing his criminal thinking and behavior, it also means he has little to no support structure.

Finally, when one regards the success and failure of the prison system, or desires to reduce the recidivism of its releasees, one must also address all the needs of the inmates during their incarceration. If one considers that there are moral minimums to the treatment of inmates, then one must become engaged in the ongoing violations to those values. If one regards inmates as people who have made lawful and moral mistakes, but are worth rehabilitating and given a second chance at being a productive member of society, then one must endeavor to change the current system.

If one considers inmates as throw aways, blights to be excised from society, then nothing need be done; simply continue on the present course. The ever increasing prison population, parole violations and recidivism are not a testament to the degradation of society, but of the failure of the prison system to value, educate and transform its inmate population.

I've heard many shallow and mindlessly glib remarks such as, "If you didn't want to be here, you shouldn't have committed the crime." If the solution were that easy, the prisons would be nearly empty. Without dismissing the



very accurate culpability we own, by our choice to commit our crimes, the environments, psychology, sociology and behaviors leading to the committing of crime are far more complex. To assume it can be said to an offender, "Go forth and sin no more," and expect it to be sufficient to rehabilitate him is pedantic and naive.

In the five years I've been down I've talked with, or listened to, a few hundred inmates, and not once have I heard one say when he came into this world, he looked into his father's eyes and said, "One day, I want to be a criminal. I want to be removed from society and made to live in a six-by-ten cinder bathroom. I want to shame you, Mom and all of my family. I want to hate myself for the harm I've caused, and what I've done with my life." What I have heard is that at points in their lives they were victimized, or exposed to experiences, temptations or environments they didn't know how to, or couldn't find the restraint to process healthily. Fortunately, when most of society reaches these points they make the right choice. These men, and I, we chose wrong. But why did we choose wrong?

It would be nice if the simple answer, "Next time, choose right," were enough. In truth, for some, it will be. For most the psychology and habituated behaviors demand more out of the system. Without it, they will continue to fail.

I happen to be an independent, well-educated man with a strong survival instinct. I have managed to make significant progress in my mental health and behavioral rehabilitation, in spite of the three battlefronts. But I am an exception to the norm, not the measure of it. My hope that I will continue to avoid inmate on inmate violence, and find staff that will work with me, is tenuous.

My education is not in criminal psychology, or correction, it's not even in humanities; I wish it were. I would gladly participate in any effort to improve the success rate of the prison system. For the sake of the victims, the mothers, fathers, siblings and children, even society at large; they are losing their men to crime, and far too often, not getting them back.

It's not enough to put us behind bars. We need a path to rehabilitation that is clearly navigable. It needs staff that aids the process, not impede it. We need a means of confronting inmate politics and violence so that those who seek personal change can overcome those very real challenges. We need ample psychological and behavioral therapy to be certain we've addressed the abhorrence in our thinking and behaviors, so that we may one day return to society; healthy, happy members of families and the community.