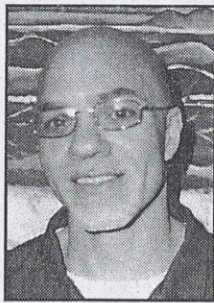


# Inside The Box

## *A Prisoner Tells His Tale* By Matthew Hattley

### *The Relevance of Education: Pre and Post Incarceration*



Matthew Hattley

A person's educational level is a key factor when it comes to prison statistics. The lower your ability to comprehend the fundamentals, the greater your risk of being arrested and convicted of a crime, especially if you are a young black male in America. Education is crucial to achieving success in life going beyond just owning materialistic stuff, especially if that stuff is obtained illegally.

Unfortunately, a large percentage of those from the NYC area start off at a disadvantage — the schools we attend are not adequately funded. Educators are expected to perform at higher than average capacity with minimal moral and financial support. It's not a surprise, then, that the majority of the NY state prison population comes from just five specific neighborhoods in NYC.

This is no secret to our politicians, but they've simply refused to address this destructive situation for decades now. It's time our communities express their dissatisfaction with said politicians' lack of interest and action towards what's really important. They can be replaced at the next election. Collectively we have the power to bring forth change.

Here's the problem — when you have 12, 13, and 14 year old children honestly believing that they possess all the answers and controlling their neighborhoods — yet their math and reading levels have not exceeded the fourth grade — you have a dangerous situation.

Out of this group come those who will get pregnant very young, who will start using drugs and alcohol, who will lose all respect for adults, who will drop out of school and worst of all, who will believe that a life of crime is their best option. Well, they just don't know enough. They don't see that they'll be spending most of their lives in here, behind walls... if, that is, they don't get killed. They don't see the huge waste of life that this represents. Obviously they have been misinformed. They are at a critical stage in life because their minds have not yet fully developed, though their bodies are almost adult. They require positive input and love at this point.

This is why education is imperative. You have to have the skills to assess every situation logically and rationally. If you can't read, or do arithmetic, how can you navigate through modern society? Answer: barely, if at all. Our young people need to learn the difference between ignorance and intelligence. They should understand that the prison system is full of the ignorant, who may well be intelligent, too. Adults must acknowledge the impact that their silence and inaction has when they allow youth to veer from a positive path and do as they please. Everyone has to grasp the fact that every action, good or bad, has both short and long term consequences. Children have to see the difference. Show them what a successful life is like and then what a destructive lifestyle produces. Most children will require more than a verbal lecture, but if you supply them with enough information to make an informed decision? Well, in essence this is crime prevention. We have to teach by example. Children are very easily influenced and they copy what they see in their homes, on the street, in movies and music video.

Education begins at home and parents have to get completely involved in their child's growth and development. This means setting rules and assigning chores and making sure that chores and homework are completed before anyone gets to step outside. They have to be exposed to discipline and responsibility. Strong morals and values must be instilled.

The children are our future leaders. If we do not assist and support them to become successful, what does that say about us or our integrity? It really does take a community to raise a child; everyone must participate... there's no room any longer for excuses. You face the basic question: what are you? Part of the problem or the solution?

As for those of us already incarcerated, if you don't have your GED already, get it immediately unless you really enjoy living in poverty! Education is the only way to obtain decent jobs once you're released. The objective has to be to be able to take care of a family while living comfortably. To get there, we need to expand our thought patterns so we can view life from a totally different perspective, one where we become productive, law-abiding citizens in our communities. We need to become the mentors we were supposed to be from the beginning.

The longer it takes for us as a community to get this — that we have to ensure that our youth get educated — the longer it will be that we fill prison cells or cemeteries. Let's get serious and stop attempting to blame someone else, and take responsibility for creating a better tomorrow for us and our future generations. Doing nothing would be a terrible mistake, and we would have only ourselves to blame for continuing the present situation. Education is the way out; education is the answer!