

Reformationville
By: Jay Miller # S15854

John Doe is an inmate of the Department of Corrections. He has served 10 years of his 20 year sentence. During the past ten years, John received his G.E.D. and his Associate's Degree in Liberal Arts. He has completed Drug and Alcohol classes, Anger Management, maintained his institutional job, and is well praised by D.O.C. employees. Because of John's dedication to change, he is a qualified candidate for Reformationville.

After a very indepth and lengthy screening process, the counselors of Reformationville decide that John shows signs of high reformation and a lowered risk of recidivism. He is selected to participate in a simulated reintergration program, and today; he is on his way.

After driving through miles of rural communities and farmlands, John finally arrives at his destination. He sees the giant water tower standing out on the horizen, reading: " Reformationville, where change begins". As he reads the bold words painted on the tower, his stomach churns in anticipation. The bus suddenly comes to a halt at a large wooden gate. When it opens, John is completely shocked by what he sees. Flowers blooming, trimmed trees, white houses, stores, restaurants, and other men freely walking around about their business. "This isn't a prison! It's a real town!", he thinks to himself. Seems a typical looking suburban cliché.

When he arrives at the community hall, he is greeted with a handshake and a warm smile, by his caseworker. The handcuffs come off. "Welcome to your new home John", he says compassionately. "Although you are no longer handcuffed, and there are no prison towers here, you are still in the custody of the Department of Corrections, and this ankle monitor being placed upon your leg will immediately notify us if you try to leave the town without permission. If you violate this rule or any of the other rules, you will be sent back to prison to serve the remainder of your sentence. How do you feel?"

"Like a new man", John replied with a smile.

Welcome to Reformationville, a new approach to integrating reformed inmates back into society. Due to mass incarceration, most programs available for prisoners tend to focus on releasing inmates sooner, such as; the concept

of inmates earning "Good Time" for their behavior which ultimately results in inmates spending less time in prison. Instead of focusing on releasing prisoners earlier, Reformationville aims to change the quality of their time spent behind bars, instead of reducing the quantity of time spent incarcerated.

Reformationville is an entire self-sustaining town built for convicts. The purpose of the town is to simulate "normal society" as much as possible, so worthy candidates can adjust to living responsible lives. They will also be tested and observed to see if they are ready for their their release back into society.

During their 1-3 year stay at Reformationville, long-term inmates who have served some serious time will be given a test run in society to prove their reformation to the State and to instill real life lessons in addition to life skills as they learn how to manage a life without crime. Reformationville is essentially a gated community built therapeutically to represent the "Idea Utopian Town". In the town, inmates will be assigned individual apartments. They will also be required to pay bills, manage housekeeping, and live presentable lives, as well as find and maintain employment at on of the many businesses in town.

The employment and jobs offered at Reformationville will be real. There will be D.O.C. industries and factories that create products that will help support D.O.C. and to meet its many needs.

There will also be business partners with Reformationville to employ its prison "citezens" at the towns local fast food restaurants, clothing stores, and other firms. Ultimately, reformationville should be fairly self-supporting by allowing its citizens to work at businesses that help cut back costs and generate revenue for such a massive project.

New candidates will be required to Job hunt, get interviews, and work regular shifts. All their money and earnings will be placed on an electronic debit card that can only be used at stores in Reformationville. Residents will be required to fund personal expenses, shop for themselves, stay current on debts and bills, etc.

During their stay in town, they will attend classes and groups with their

"neighbors" as they relearn what it feels like to be productive members of society. Reformationville will be monitored, and there will still be plenty of D.O.C. employees on staff and present to address any security needs. There will also be plenty of professional and paid staff as well as volunteers that will offer various academic, vocational, and clerical services.

The point of this project is to place inmates who want to change around those with similar goals, and to create a positive and uplifting environment that is completely different than the stagnant cesspool of modern prisons. In order to instill social and ethical norms in a person, Reformationville seeks to place him/her in a therapeutic and realistic environment so that he/she can slowly develop a sense of ethical "normality".

In the previous essay I have written for the A.P.W.A. called: "The Concrete Conundrum", I mentioned that "like begets like". The major reason I believe that prison fails to reform criminals is because criminals are constantly around other criminals. Their thought patterns and behaviors are reinforced because everybody in their immediate surroundings share their negative ideologies. Given that the criminal mentality is the accepted norm in prison, prisoners never experience the very ethical system society so desperately wants and needs to instill in them.

Reformationville is not a substitute for prison or for punishment. It is a supplemental program by which truly deserving inmates can prove the punishment has indeed worked, and they are ready to be integrated back into society. Some of the most reformed men I've met in prison are the ones who've served the most time, and still have a long time to serve. These are the men who, by gradual change year after year, are no longer the rebellious boys they once were. Often times it is the people deemed "unreformable" that have changed the most.

Prison will continue to be the revolving door for most criminals simply because they have no desire to change. But some of us do change and continue to change through our own diligence and desire to become better men. Sadly, our efforts are left unnoticed by society and the Courts. Most of us watch less deserving men leave and come back to prison several times before we ourselves are given a shot to prove our lesson learned.

Our punishment is of course deserving, and integration programs should

never be used as replacement for this punishment. However, if the sole purpose for punishment is justice and a crime deterrent, at what point do inmates get chance to prove their behaviors have been "corrected" by the Department of Corrections? why even call the Prison system the Department of Corrections if there isn't a systematic approach to correcting criminal behavior? Why not just call it the Department of Punishment, if the sole purpose of our incarceration is an "Eye for an Eye"?

I believe that a long term simulation of mimicking responsible lives could in fact help turn qualified inmates into productive citizens. Perhaps Reformationville is too large and grandiose of an idea. Admittedly, it is a Utopian Dream Scheme that sounds good on paper until all the politicians and costs get involved, and that is why I'd like to offer this alternative; Reformationville may never physically exist due to cost prohibitions, but it could exist virtually as a computer simulation. It is highly common in aviation school, the military, and NASA to train it's members with simulators. Simulations can prepare and increase a persons skill at tasks before they are actually performed. They are used to decrease risk, increase proficiency, and monitor a person's readiness to perform the task at hand. This is exactly what the prison system needs and what Reformationville would seek to accomplish. When a prisoner is released back into society, it should be the aim of D.O.C. to first monitor an inmate's readiness, and to decrease the risk they pose to society in addition to increasing the individuals proficiency as a citizen.

To increase an inmate's life skills, it is possible to have him/her log hours and hours of simulated life in a virtual platform. Reformationville as a program has the potential for an inmate to step inside a real world setting without putting society at risk. They can be tested, taught, and exposed to aspects of productive and ethical citizenship in a virtual reality setting created to maximize real world change. Many popular video games have explored this idea of virtual life, such as, the "Sims" and "Second Life". What if there was something similar, tailored towards rehabilitating and reforming prisoners?

Reformationville could require inmates to maintain virtual responsibilities, such as, finances, shopping, paying bills, maintaining a career, and ethical training scenarios. The inmates, game hours, and statistics could then be monitored by counselors who could then be trained and ready to tailor specific

programs on an individual basis. There could be specific in-game courses for addiction, theft, anger management, etc. D.O.C. could also set a certain requirement for the number of weekly hours needed to be logged.

Virtual Reformationville could also force inmates to log simulated work hours in which they must perform monotonous in game tasks to reflect various kinds of jobs. These work simulations could be authentic training programs to prepare released prisoners for careers and entry level jobs in Construction, Fast food, maintenance, farming, etc. Work schedules could also vary, forcing participants to log on at specific times in order to maintain responsibilities. Even job interviews could be scheduled in which inmates must type their responses to questions. Their answers would then be saved, reviewed, and critiqued by their RFVille counselor.

RFVille should not be fun. It should be as complex and meticulous as life itself. But it could be rewarding in order to reinforce proper behaviors. These rewards could be "in-game" but given to the inmate in real life, such as more yard time, commissary, extended visits, etc... All of this combined could allow criminals who are foreign to responsibility, ethics, and "real world experience", to become saturated in productivity. This could help them prepare for their release which ultimately would be the real test. Before a pilot ever flies a real plane, he must prove through hundreds of hours of flight simulation, that he is ready and capable. Rehabilitation is every bit as serious, and the risk to society is real.

I believe this simulated approach could be adopted to some extent for inmates while they are incarcerated. Secure tablets for individual inmate use are becoming common in a large percentage of American prison. It is quite possible that inmates could log their RFVille hours while they are in the cell instead of twiddling their thumbs in boredom. They could be planning their budget and solving real life puzzles in preparation for their futures.

Although access to RFVille should be limited to a certain amount of daily hours, dedicated inmates should be able to evolve their virtual self through various phases in life. An inmate's dedication and in-game statistics could help Parole Board officials determine who might be ready for release. RFVille could also potentially reduce recidivism rates by instilling real world

knowledge in inmates as it virtually prepares them for life outside of prison.

The scenarios that an inmate in RFVille could experience are unlimited. In fact, D.O.C. could adopt a set curriculum in which there several overall tasks that inmates need to maintain, and set goals for them to reach as well during their incarceration. RFVille could simulate not only maintaining work and materialistic affairs, but also family issues, domestic strife, fatherhood, natural disasters, and anything else Society would like addressed. It would be a virtual citezen training program that should be used to "correct" criminality, social apathy, irresponsibility, and unproductive behaviors amongst the prison population.

If Reformationville is too big of an idea to physically exist, than surely a virtual form of it could be instituted. Like does beget like, and if you want to break a man of his bad habits, you must also instill new ones, or even better ones. Throwing inmates in a vault with other likeminded criminals will only produce like effects. Inmates who want to change need to experience productive and positive enviroornments for long periods of time in order to slowly adopt a new set of norms. It is my belief that this sort of virtual enviroornment could be effective in helping to produce these changes. Our Prison system is undoubtedly failing and overflowing with more and more people each and every year. America desperately requires a new plan to cure the disease of Mass incarceration.

Perhaps this Essay can be the seed to start something new.

Jay Mills