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"We must not believe the many, who say that only free people ought to be educated, but we should rather believe the philosophers who say that only the educated are free."<sup>1</sup>

Epictetus,

Roman philosopher & former slave

The intersection of the personal troubles of milieu and the public issues of social structure<sup>2</sup> become apparent through utilizing the sociological imagination to conceptualize the social life of a prisoner within this crisis of mass incarceration. Prison is a violent poverty stricken social environment that wields coercive power over the incarcerated that is counterproductive. However, the college student in prison is a member of an aspiring class in pursuit of social capital.

Within the correctional setting are dozens of groups of collective minds that splinter into several dichotomies of

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Discourses

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C. Wright Mills highlights the distinction between personal troubles and public issues in *The Promise*.

us versus them. The college student is often labeled a bourgeois deviant which becomes a social fact that endangers his academic pursuits and his safety. A chance encounter with an officer can lead to a minor sanction that will easily disbar the student from college, and even if the infraction is dismissed the damage will have already been done by the time the quasi-judicial process is complete. Then there's the fragile 'code-of-the-street' mentality that is offended by the social change that higher education has caused within the prison and by this aspiring class's intelligence, articulation, and achievements, especially the master-status of the college graduate — the nouveaux rich within this social dystopia! Physical altercations can easily occur, jeopardizing more than a degree, as these social Neanderthals share condescending sentiments like: college dudes are so smart they're stupid, and dudes get soft when they go to college, they ain't gon' fight back, etc. The expected meek behavior of the student makes him vulnerable, so he must remain strategically hyper-vigilant to succeed, since the manifest function of college behind bars has resulted in the latent consequence of a new class divide.

Inequalities within this social location are revealed through access to resources, or the lack thereof. Although, there is a computer lab — with narrow access — research is limited without the internet. Then there's the issue with the printer, which a civilian must unlock

with a key if and when they decide to show up. Interlibrary loans are available through the general library, however it's a two to three week process which often nullifies students' ability to benefit from this option.

The college student faces many challenges within this social institution. However, as a pioneer of SUNY Ulster's and Mount Saint Mary's college initiatives facilitated through Hudson Link, my social value continues to increase. In addition to being a dedicated student, I've selflessly helped my peers on the cell-block, at work in the kitchen, and within the computer lab—which has enhanced my reputation. Last summer I was asked to tutor precollege math, in addition to the assistance I provide in my spare time. Then I was chosen to be a Board Member of the Student Advisory Committee, and at our welcome back orientation I was offered an opportunity to participate in a new Hudson Link civic engagement initiative launching during the summer of 2020. Fortunately, the master-status of a leader amongst my peers which not only exemplifies the trajectory of my social mobility within this stratification system, but also as a returning citizen with the necessary credentials, experience, and drive to succeed. Thus, I have been empowered through this pursuit of social capital which has granted me a seat at the table.