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Module 5 Thesis Building Exercise

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Overpopulation.

Prisons: Big Business. Why?

What better business to invest in than one where you are guaranteed a lifetime of customers? As long as there are people on this earth, there will be crime and there will subsequently be a need for jails and prisons and everything needed to build, supply, and operate these facilities. Everything an investor looks for when considering a new business venture, the department of corrections can provide. So, if we want to reduce crime and subsequently the prison population in this country, we have to make the prospect of keeping people out of prison more profitable than putting them in. If the government were to turn existing prisons into centers designed to house and train criminals to be productive members of society with skills taught by well paid professionals, we could change the whole perception of prison as a place to obtain a new beginning, not simply a place that wastes trillions of taxpayer dollars to remind convicted felons that their lives are over. As it stands, once a convicted person gets into the prison system, they are for the most part forgotten about by the justice part of the process and now the concern of the department of corrections which is simply not equipped to do much more than feed and clothe the inmate and give them a place to sleep.

Now, can you imagine a college campus, such as Ohio State University for an example, that's set up to feed and house the many thousands of students there and there are no professors to teach them anything? Other than the fact that the thousands of inmates in the prisons have been convicted of felonies, you have basically the same scenario. Except for the ones who have no desire to better themselves if given the chance, there are thousands of inmates who would gladly accept an education

designed to exemplify any attributes or skills they may possess and take those now certified skills and reenter society with the tools to be an asset to the community instead of a burden. At the present time there is absolutely no attempt being made to change the same old system of making the process of getting people into prison and keeping them there the only profitable component of the entire operation.

An ex-inmate from the York Correctional Institution in Connecticut, Chandra Bozelko, who wrote a column while she was in prison and since turned it into a blog after being released, has been on a push to get the states to provide news papers to inmates for literacy teaching tools. Bozelko stated, "The majority of inmates cannot read or read at a very low level, according to a 2003 study by advocacy organization, *Proliteracy America*, and nationwide, only 9% of inmates with low literacy skills receive literacy training while incarcerated." (*Quartz*, Aug. 13, 2015) Ms. Bozelko goes on to explain how college courses have been once again made available in some prisons but, because of these low literacy levels among inmates, the vast majority cannot even pass the entrance tests needed to even qualify for college. Although when the public hears of the offer of college to prisoners, there is substantial feedback, much of it negative, but when you consider only a low single digit percentage are even capable of qualifying, it's simply not what the public's lead to believe.

That's where my plan comes in; although somewhat expensive, it would not cost near as much as the recidivism rate is now costing this country. There are dozens of vocational trades that would be of interest to most inmates if they simply had a chance to learn from a master craftsman in that particular trade. Many of the prisons already have the facilities equipped with much of what would be needed but due to previous prison industries shops being shut down for various reasons, mainly a lack of staffing, these shops sit empty. These master craftsmen would have to be paid a salary comparable to what they could make in the free world and various companies would have to be given incentives to invest in these particular shops which would be, in essence, mini-factories that could use inmate's

learned skills and labor to make parts that would be used on that companies products. The inmates could also be paid a minimum wage salary for their work which a large percent would be held in an account until their release. The inmates would sign an agreement that requires them to stay out of trouble while incarcerated through this entire process or they would lose the difference in banked pay between the regular state pay and the minimum wage. At \$10 an hour, minimum wage, the difference would be \$1600 per month compared to \$16 per month state pay; quite the incentive to keep your nose clean. This program would also cut the now epidemic level of violence in the prisons drastically. Due to peer pressure from inmates not wishing to take advantage of the program, these inmates would of course be housed and recreate together, away from the general population.

An article in the, *National Review*, October, 9, 2015, written by Mona Charen, stated, "how we've become complacent about crime because the crime rate has dropped since we've raised the rate of incarceration." Charen also stated, "The incapacitation argument; criminals who are behind bars cannot be mugging people; seems awfully strong." That's a pretty good example of what the public in general thinks about convicted criminals. Even back in the days of the Greek Philosophers like Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato, human nature required the cities striving for controlled justice to provide a system to deal with criminals, the unjust, by way of imprisoning and even torture but, we've come a long way since those days and one would think simply locking people up and essentially throwing away the key would (could) be a thing of the past by now. The fact that it's not should make us all wonder what we're doing wrong and do our best to fix it.

There are huge corporations out there that have a great interest in keeping our prisons full for no other reason than it's good business. According to Kara Gotsch, and Vinay Basti, *The Sentencing Project*, (<https://www.sentencingproject.org/>), "The American Legislative Exchange Council, (ALEC), is a non-profit organization advocating for large scale privatization of governmental functions, such as

prisons. The introduction of profit incentives into the country's incarceration buildup crosses a troubling line that puts financial gain above the public interest of safety and rehabilitation." They go on to say that, "Core-Civic and GEO Group were involved with ALEC at a time when it worked with members to draft model legislation impacting sentencing policy and prison privatization. These policies promoted mandatory minimum sentences, three strikes laws, and truth-in-sentencing, all of which contribute to higher prison populations. While no longer a member of ALEC, Core Civic and GEO face the bottom line reality that a decline in incarceration is bad for business." That excerpt from The Sentencing Project's article speaks volumes as to where the incarceration business plan is aimed at the present time. The government is going to have to take the lead on making changes because the whole issue is such a political 'hot potato,' nobody in the private sector is going to want to touch it.

In conclusion, by changing the department of corrections' business plan and diverting the trillions of dollars already being spent on simply keeping convicted felons locked up and instead, making it profitable for corporations and qualified craftsmen to invest in actual rehabilitation of these inmates, we could change the entire structure of this outdated system and the results would surely reduce the populations of our prisons in this country.

Works cited:

Bozelko, Chandra, *Quartz*, Aug. 13, 2015 (America Now)

Charen, Mona, *National Review*, October, 9, 2015 (America Now)

Gotsch, Kara, and Vinay Basti, *The Sentencing Project*, Aug. 02, 2018

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