

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Fantasies of Rehabilitation and Imprisonment

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Rehabilitation remains an important stated goal of imprisonment, even in jurisdictions where deterrence, incapacitation and “just deserts” are prominent (e.g. Page, 2011). Through work and schooling opportunities, moral instruction and adherence to institutional disciplinary regimes, it is claimed that prison time can transform prisoners into a law-abiding, productive citizens, while restoring their “dignity and privileges” lost as a result of being in conflict with the law (Mathiesen, 1990, p. 27). Conservative criminologists (see Cullen et al., 1988) have gone as far as to claim that the notion of a punitive public is a myth, the notion of punitive prison administration and guards is a myth and that rehabilitation is a noble idea. As more critical scholars of punishment note, therapeutic and risk-based approaches to rehabilitation continue to individualize, blaming prisoners for their plight (e.g. Polizzi and Maruna, 2010).

Given that the relative ineffectiveness of prison programming compared to community-based initiatives has long been established (e.g., LeClair and Guarino-Ghezzi, 1991), the counterproductive nature of carceral environments that privilege institutional security to the detriment of personal growth opportunities (Haney and Lynch, 1997), prisonization that sees prisoners “taking on in greater or lesser degree the folkways, mores, customs, and general culture” of human warehouses (Clemmer, 1958, p. 479), the debilitating pains of imprisonment (e.g. the deprivation of liberty, goods and services that give one a sense of their identity, desired sexual relationships, autonomy and security) that can trigger anti-social forms of adaptation to survive incarceration (Sykes, 1958), and the stigma associated with being a ‘criminal’ that stifles opportunities to proceed with one’s life after their criminalized transgressions have occurred (e.g. Munn and Bruckert, 2013), Mathiesen (1990) argues that rehabilitation in the prison context operates as an ideology. The rehabilitative ideology, like other ideologies, is a “unified belief system which lends meaning and legitimacy to one’s activities... To the extent that an ideology is not followed in practice, it masks reality” (ibid, p. 29), it becomes a fantasy.

For some, the promise of rehabilitation, of making efforts to abolish ways of thinking and acting that previously resulted in harms to others, along with taking steps to build new insights and skills in the hopes that they will

have an opportunity to put them to use outside prison walls, is just that — a promise kept on their end but reneged on by the penal system (Irwin, 2009). Changes to penal policy and to prison design and practice are deepening this phantasmagoric sense of rehabilitation (Pizzaro et al., 2006). Nowhere is the fantasy of rehabilitation, of having one's freedom restored through transformation, clearer than in the case of prisoners who have committed high-profile harms in their youth that have been trapped in prison until their deaths decades after. A notable example is past *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (JPP) contributor and widely published prisoner ethnographer Victor Hassine (see Gaucher, 2008), who died after being denied parole on several occasions despite working tirelessly against violence, including the violence that incarceration does to all of us.

Late in 2015, the *JPP* lost another one of our Editorial Board members, Dr. Jon Marc Taylor, who died of a heart attack in a Missouri prison nearly two years after suffering a crippling stroke during a stint in solitary confinement for being in possession of butter while in his cell. It is with great frustration and sadness that the concluding months of Jon Marc's life were beyond cruel, particularly when one reflects on his many accomplishments and contributions. As a young prisoner, Jon Marc turned to education to transform his life and compiled a series of higher education degrees via correspondence. Having benefited from the expanded horizons that education offers, he actively promoted its virtues (e.g., Taylor 1989) and shared his knowledge on how to gain access to college and university programs with other prisoners so that they too could benefit from it (e.g., Taylor and Schwartzkopf, 2009). He also spent the past 20-plus years of his 54-year life fighting for the restoration of Pell Grants for prisoners that provided them with subsidies to access college and university courses prior to 1994 (e.g., Taylor, 1997, 2008, 2013; Davidson and Taylor, 2004), as well as documenting other injustices related to increasingly harsh penal policy and practice across the United States (see Taylor, 1995, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2014). His work was widely recognized inside and outside prison walls, including through the receipt of The Nation / I.F. Stone and Robert F. Kennedy journalism awards. To some, Jon Marc was “the very ideal of reformation and rehabilitation” (Zoukis, 2016; see also Tammeus, 2016).

That Jon Marc Taylor was denied release from prisons numerous times illustrates how the pursuit of rehabilitation is time and time again relegated to grim fantasy, cruelly cast aside by state authorities in favour of continued

injustice and brutality. As with past issues of the *JPP*, contributors in this issue invite readers to take stock of the violence of incarceration (for an overview see Chartrand, this volume), which foists upon all of us the responsibility to radically rethink how we respond to social conflicts and harms that are criminalized at present in ways that are life-giving, rather than life-taking.

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