

RESPONSE

What We Have Continued to Exemplify *Jon Marc Taylor*

When Justin Piché requested that I write the response to this issue, a revisitation and update, on the theme of education on prisons, I was paradoxically flattered and melancholic. After nearly three decades of incarceration with the concomitant isolation from the mainstream of society, I feel more and more the forgotten soul, the “crazy aunt kept in the basement” so to speak. It thus is reaffirming personally to be remembered and reassuring professionally to be recognized for the career of arduous and persistent work obtaining an education and striving to educate others. My depression arises out of taking measure of how much has been lost over the intervening years. Sadly, I fear, what I achieved cannot be repeated from where I exist today.

Yet there is hope. The hope that burns eternal in the human soul and as Andy Dufresne in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) proselytizes: “hope is the most crucial thing in prison to keep from going mad being overwhelmed by the endless systemic repression of regimented prison life”.

When Justin’s packet arrived from that exotic foreign land of Ottawa, Canada – hey, after twenty-eight years of maximum security imprisonment, a trip to the regional hospital is a drive through a safari park of verdant farmlands and strip mall hamlets – shipping all the manuscripts for the forthcoming issue, the institutional mailroom had withheld all but the cover letter and the draft of the issue’s introduction. In the myriad of maddening policies, this state penal system limits envelope enclosures to five items / pages beyond actual correspondence. This is simply another example of many (e.g., the prohibition of receiving free books even directly from distributors or publishers, the denial of stamps as enclosures, the refusal of prepaid correspondence courses and so on) restrictions continually creeping into prisoners’ lives to further isolate them from the outside world. Some of us learn to live and even struggle to grow within these needless confines, but many, if not most of the newer “fish” simply do not and learn the hopelessness of the situation that the system wishes to inculcate via the bludgeoning of ever more pedantic restrictions.

After reading Justin’s letter and introduction piece, I so wanted to contribute to this issue. Having long ago grown beyond the trap of being upset by the obtuse enclosure policy, I was not emotionally bereft but

nonetheless disappointed that I would not be able to contribute to the journal that published my first (circa 1989) academic-quality article. Then an epiphany of sorts.

As I read through the introduction manuscript I kept recognizing familiar prior contributors. They were old friends of a sort, having never met but within the synapses of our minds, I know them though for their erudite prose, insightful and critical contributions to the now recognized field of Convict Criminology. I found myself nodding my head as I read through Justin's literate "Why?", I pondered, "shouldn't I contribute my voice even with systemically imposed limitations, using the very repressions as a cogent example of what we all face from one degree to another?"

My response to this issue is thus: BRAVO! As I wrote my response to the 2004 issue (Taylor, 2004), which I was honoured to co-edit with Professor Howard Davidson, we have learned to fight the good fight. Encouragingly all but Richards and possibly Beck are new contributors to me. Bravo my brethren for voicing your insights from the ever more cloistered compounds. As this response so dramatically evinces, the struggle for education is ever more arduous and thus more crucial than ever.

From just reprising the introduction I have grown more appreciative of what our Irish brothers achieved and exemplified via their struggles as conveyed by Laurence McKeown (2001: 148). As Charles Huckelbury (2004: 33) has so clearly outlined, the end result of education presents the system with the dichotomy of a socialized (i.e., rehabilitated) citizen but also a person that can cogently "begin to question our subjugation and treatment". No wonder society is schizophrenic in its philosophy of prisoner reintegration. Teach them enough to successfully facilitate their lives amongst the bourgeoisie and the "uppity" prisoners to ex-cons then challenge the system as a whole. Of course we must forebear the obvious revelation that such behaviour is the very exercise of citizenship in a free society and is infinitely preferred over the backlash of the recidivistic criminal act or wanton affliction of terroristic hopelessness.

All the obstacles to overcome are very real and more numerous today than when I took my first semester of classes twenty-six years ago. All the reasons for education and expression in prison are more necessary today than they have ever been. The numbers of prisoners in the carceral state of America has grown to be the largest in sheer number and per capita in the world, and have by that critical mass become a social class unto themselves. It is in the short-term peace and long-term economic interests

of society to reintegrate, to recapture these souls into the mainstream of the social order, rather than continue to shun them into a neo-Mad Maxian world of peripheral and predatory existence.

The *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* and this particular issue continues to make the case. If only to speak truth to power. If only to mark the line in the proverbial sand. These voices refuse to poetically go into the good night without a fight. This issue and all the issues of the *JPP* are critical to the “common body of knowledge” that if not only today, one day, will be among the lanterns held by the few good men and women that will have helped to guide us out of the darkness of the prison-industrial complex. And if not, then heaven will have known, we did indeed learn to fight the good fight.

Bravo.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jon Marc Taylor, PhD, is co-author of the *Prisoners' Guerrilla Handbook to Correspondence Programs in the United States and Canada (third edition)* to be published and distributed by Prison Legal News in 2009. In 1989, Taylor's first piece in the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, “The Economics of Educational Rehabilitation”, appeared in Volume 2(1).