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Promoting Informed Citizenship through Prison-based Education

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Radical Departures: Ruminations on the Purposes of Higher Education in Prison

Abstract

There are two dominant frames that emerge in the political discourse regarding whether or not public funds should be invested in educating incarcerated adults in the United States. The first discusses prison-based education in terms of its instrumental utility as a crime control technique within cost-effective analyses. In the second, education in prisons is described as being either good or bad for moral reasons. In this essay, I argue for a third frame in which the merit of prison education programs is determined based on whether or not such programs advance democratic values. I hold that this is particularly important, because the current era of mass incarceration has brought about several threats to the civic well-being of American society, and thus to the legitimacy and stability of the democracy. I then use practitioner and student accounts of prison-based educational programs to illustrate that classrooms can function as unique spaces within prisons to promote informed citizenship. I conclude with two modest recommendations to further expand the civic capacities of incarcerated men and women, within the existing structure of US prisons.



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In the United States, there is little empathy shown to those who live under the purview of Departments of Corrections. Incarcerated men and women experience stigma that challenges their status as fellow citizens and their fundamental humanity. In the absence of empathy, these individuals are regarded as a dangerous and nefarious “other” unworthy of full consideration or recognition. However, as noted social theorist Erving Goffman (1963) described, the distancing and detachment that is manufactured against those who are in prison, is not simply rhetorical; rather, it manifests in “varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce [one’s] life chances” (p. 5). Stigma, Goffman argues, becomes ensconced as social fact through theory and language, which in turn shape law, policy, and practice; including, as is the focus here: an imprisoned person’s access to and quality of education.

To make this point, I turn to a not so distant example from New York State. New York is home to the Bard Prison Initiative (BPI), one of the best known and most highly regarded prison-based college programs. In February 2014, hoping to capitalize on the recognized success of BPI, Governor of New York Andrew Cuomo proposed a state-run initiative offering college level classes at ten of New York’s fifty-four state prisons. This plan came two decades after series of federal and state actions dramatically reduced the number of prison-based post-secondary education (PSE) programs through caps on federal funding for correctional education and legislation barring incarcerated individuals from receiving federal Pell Grants or financial support from the New York’s Tuition Assistance Program. Referring to Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, and Miles’s (2013) study of correctional education programming, Cuomo said, “Giving men and women in prison the opportunity to earn a college degree costs our state less and benefits our society more” (Seiler, 2014, p. 25).

Cuomo’s plan to extend access to higher education in prison prompted contentious debate among New York State legislators. In a statement supporting the proposal, Assembly Member Daniel O’Donnell (D-69th District) said, “Reducing the unfortunate cycle of recidivism is a moral imperative, especially because of the discriminatory and disproportionate impact this system has on minority communities” (Seiler, 2014). By contrast, State Senator Greg Ball (R-40th District) drafted a petition against the initiative and described it as “a slap in the face to hard working New Yorkers that work multiple jobs and take out exorbitant student loans to pay for the cost of higher education” (Bakeman, 2014, p. 2). Citing the political controversy, within six weeks Cuomo withdrew the proposal for public funding, stating that any expansion of in-prison higher education would rely on private donations (Kaplan, 2014).

The political discourse regarding whether higher education should or should not be freely available in New York’s prisons reflects the two dominant ways of thinking about prison-education more broadly. In this example, Cuomo’s comments articulate an *instrumentalist* view, in which the merit of prison-based education is determined by its cost-effectiveness as a crime control technique. On the other hand, though O’Donnell and Ball express different opinions on the matter, they both approach prison-based education through their specific *moral* frameworks for determining what is right and good versus what is wrong and bad. In this essay, I argue for a third way of thinking about college courses in prison that foregrounds the *civic* responsibilities a democratic society has to all its members. By considering educational programming in prisons in terms of whether they are in the service of our democracy, we shift to a more coherent framework for understanding how to allocate state resources—particularly for a stigmatized group.

I begin by reviewing the existing frameworks for talking about prison education. Next, I consider why penal policy regarding prison-education should be understood as a civic issue. I then identify various civic consequences of mass incarceration, and suggest that prison-based classrooms provide an important opportunity to repair the civic harms of mass incarceration. I conclude by discussing additional avenues for bridging the civic divide between people who are or have been incarcerated and those who have not.

The Limits of Cost-Effective and Morally Dependent Penal Policy

While the politicians in New York were debating the merits of publically funded post-secondary educational options, the rhetoric used in this specific example follows the two dominant frameworks for evaluating the merit of all types of prison-based educational programs more generally. The first is a cost-effective calculation, which is primarily used by advocates of prison education. The second is a moral analysis, which is used by both those who support educational programming in prisons and those who oppose it. In this section, I present each logic and identify the limitations of these frameworks for assessing and designing policies relevant to prison-based education.

Between 1970 and 2012, the rate of incarceration nearly quintupled (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014). While a host of “tough on crime” policies related to the “War on Drugs” brought a greater share of Americans into prisons, the incarcerated population at any given time was also comprised of many “repeat offenders” who had previously been incarcerated, released, and then reincarcerated. Annually, nearly 600,000 people are released from state prisons across the country (Carson & Golinelli, 2013), and an estimated two-thirds of those released will be rearrested or reincarcerated within three years (Langan & Levin, 2002). These high rates of incarceration and recidivism understandably prompted renewed attention to identifying strategies that would facilitate the transition from prison to free society and reduce the likelihood of reincarceration. Among such strategies, educational programs emerged as a solution associated with lower odds of recidivism (Davis et al., 2013; MacKenzie, 2006; Vacca, 2004), along with higher odds of post-incarceration employment in both experimental and descriptive studies (Davis et al., 2013; MacKenzie, 2006).

As articulated by New York Governor Cuomo, prison education garnered support not simply because of its impact on recidivism, but because programs are thought to reduce the incarcerated population cost-effectively. In their meta-analytic study on the effectiveness of correctional education, Davis and colleagues (2013) estimated that for every 100 people who participate in correctional education, there is between a \$0.87 million to \$0.97 million reduction in reincarceration costs. While these authors note that their ‘back of the envelope calculations’ do not include all variables relevant to an analysis of the costs and benefits of prison-based education, they use an approximation technique that is extremely common in policy research. Indeed, the prominent political scientist Smith (2008) notes in the *Handbook on Public Policy* that cost-analysis is extremely attractive to researchers and policy-makers alike as it, “offers a way systematically (and its most fervent proponents would argue, objectively) to judge the social worth of alternative policy options” (p. 738).

There are, however, two assumptions built into a cost-effective analysis of in-prison education that require additional consideration. First, such an approach relies on point-in-time costs that may change over time. If, for instance, correctional officer salaries plummet—a value

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included in the estimated cost of incarceration—just as prison educator salaries increase—a value included in the estimated costs of prison education programming, under this instrumentalist logic there may no longer be a justifiable rationale for prison education. Second, embedded in the cost-effective evaluation of prison education is the assumption that prison education is, or should be, limited to individuals who will be released from prison. While about two-thirds of incarcerated men and women are released within three years, others serve life sentences or terms longer than 20 years.

Highlighting these two assumptions demonstrates what political theorist Michael Sandel (2013) describes as the troubling tendency of “putting a price on every human activity [which] erodes certain moral and civic goods worth caring about” (p. 121). Sandel (2013) cautions the use of market-based practices, such as cost-effective analyses, in decision making in various social policy fields including criminal justice, especially in instances in which the governing norms and values have yet to be established. Given that the professed aim of correctional departments is to insure the public’s safety, such that all members of society experience the right to security and to live free of fear, it begs the question: What are the values and norms that should guide this pursuit?

Michael Tonry’s (2011) essay, “Making peace, not desert,” provides a helpful starting place to address this question. In this article, Tonry, a prolific criminologist, calls instrumental arguments for prison education or other “humane criminal justice policies” (p. 637) a mistaken and failed approach, because these rationales fail to realize that cost savings or program effectiveness are rarely compelling in the face of deeply held moral beliefs. This sentiment is reflected in the vocal—and ultimately successful—opposition to Governor Cuomo’s proposition to publically funded higher education in New York prisons. Tonry goes on to link moral claims to increasingly punitive criminal justice policy over the past 40 years,

Mandatory minimums, three-strikes, truth-in-sentencing, “dangerous offender,” “sexual psychopath,” and life without-the-possibility-of-parole laws were not adopted because their supporters had done cost-benefit or recidivism-reduction analyses that demonstrated their cost- or preventive effectiveness. They were adopted—usually openly—because their supporters believed they were morally justifiable, that “we” deserve to be protected from the dangerous “them” and that “they” have forfeited any claim to have their interests or human rights taken into account. (p. 637)

Here, Tonry (2011) reiterates the process that Goffman (1986) described, wherein the theory, ideology, laws, and policies that emerge in response to the stigma of incarceration allow for an otherwise unacceptable curtailing of life chances of imprisoned men and women. For Tonry, the solution is to move from a cost-conscious framing, to one that asserts that the absence of penal interventions, like educational programs, is morally unjustifiable. In the example of New York, we see this in Assemblyman O’Donnell’s explicit use of the phrase “moral imperative” when urging other lawmakers to support Cuomo’s educational plan (Seiler, 2014). Tonry (2011), importantly, illuminates the impasse that arises from these two discrepant approaches to criminal justice policy. However, he offers little direction in how to reframe moral justifications of prison-based educational programs, and it is likely that constructing shared moral grounding is too ambitious a task. Indeed, partisan affiliation is a strong predictor of what one will consider morally acceptable (Carroll, 2006).

Having identified weaknesses in both the instrumental and moral justifications for penal policy, I argue that democratic values should guide penal policy. I offer the following distinction between moral values and democratic values. Moral values are the personally or culturally determined principles regarding what is good, or otherwise positive, and what is bad, or otherwise negative. Whereas, democratic values are the ideological principles regarding what is good, or otherwise positive, for a democratic society and what is bad, or otherwise negative, for a democratic society. The preposition, “for,” is used intentionally to signal that democratic values are in service of a democratic collective, above, a religious or ethno-racial moral value system, for example. Reorienting the evaluation of prison-based penal policy generally, and prison educational programs, more specifically, around democratic values, allows us to assess the merit of such programs in terms of whether or not they are good for our democratic society. Doing so also serves as a reminder that as public institutions, Departments of Corrections have responsibilities beyond punishment, deterrence, and retribution, that include maintaining and sustaining well-being of our democratic society. This responsibility is achieved by insuring that individuals, even those who may have conducted bad acts, are equipped with the capacity to productively engage in democratic society. Before assessing whether prison education programs advance democratic values, we must first understand how contemporary patterns of incarceration impact the strength of our democratic society. To this end, in the next section I argue that the current period of mass incarceration has engendered a series of civic harms to American democracy that have worsened the civic disenfranchisement of residents of poor, predominantly black or Latino urban communities.

Civic Consequences of Mass Incarceration

A growing line of sociological and social policy scholarship has argued that the incarceration boom of the past 40 years has substantially reshaped many dimensions of American society, which has impacted sectors beyond the criminal justice system. For example, work by Western (2006) and Pager (2003) has demonstrated that mass incarceration results in artificially low unemployment rates, and that criminal records substantially lower the odds of getting a callback for a job interview. Similarly, when considering the impact of mass incarceration on the dimensions of civic well-being, the evidence indicates a “civic empowerment gap” (Levinson, 2010); whereby contact with the criminal justice system introduces a set of formal and informal obstacles that decrease the likelihood a person has the civic knowledge, dispositions, or behaviors traditionally fundamental to active citizenship.

Formally, in every state except Maine and Vermont individuals are barred from voting while in prison or under correctional supervision. In 10 states, laws permanently exclude individuals with certain criminal convictions from voting. Uggen, Larson, and Shannon (2016) estimate that 6.1 million Americans were unable to vote in 2016 due to felon disenfranchisement laws, 51 percent of whom had fully completed their sentences. Sociologists and criminologists have used the term “secondary sanctions” to refer to the consequences of incarceration beyond those directly associated with imprisonment, such as these legal restrictions on voting. Unsurprisingly to some, this punitive impulse is closely linked to America’s history of racial exclusion. Exploiting state-level variation since the 19th century, Manza and Uggen (2006) identify racial composition as a reliable predictor of states’ voting restrictions: “When African Americans make up a larger proportion of a state’s prison population, that state is significantly more like to adopt or extend felon disenfranchisement” (p. 67). Alongside de jure exclusions,

formerly incarcerated adults' experiences inhibit their capacity for certain forms of civic action. Using data from both the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health and the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, Weaver and Lerman (2010) find that even when formerly incarcerated individuals can vote, they are far less likely to do so than others who have never been imprisoned.

The implications of low voter participation among incarcerated and formerly incarcerated populations for national civic well-being are somewhat self-evident. The unique perspectives and insights of this population are less likely to be addressed by politicians or reflected in policy. A context in which people do not believe that their interests are represented or that government is responsive to their needs breeds social distrust. When one perceives the government as illegitimate, one often perceives the laws and the enforcement of such laws to be illegitimate (Weaver & Lerman, 2010), which poses a threat to the feasibility and stability of a democratic society (Thomassen, 2007).

In addition to the impact of imprisonment on civic actions, incarceration also retards the development of civic dispositions by disrupting social networks and exposing individuals to a likely criminogenic, or crime producing, environment. In general, after returning from prison people report encountering substantial social stigma and hostility from other community members which causes them to shy away from active community engagement (Greenberg, Dunleavy, & Kutner, 2007; Uggen, Manza, & Thompson, 2006). Within criminology, a subset of scholars have long argued that when incarceration is not administered selectively, imprisonment runs the risk of actually *harming* public safety because individuals are exposed to a new crime-involved social network (Ramsay, 2011). In most instances, this pull towards criminality runs counter to civic values.

The exclusion of imprisoned people from traditional forms of civic participation and the experience of social alienation has existed for much of American history, however, their impacts are made more acute by mass incarceration. Longer and harsher penalties for crimes mean that more individuals are experiencing greater exposure to the features of imprisonment that are criminogenic or designed disrupt social relationships. There is a new rapidly increasing formerly incarcerated class of citizens, for whom the impacts of imprisonment during adolescence or early adulthood will persist for the remainder of their lives. Moreover, because incarceration is both demographically and spatially concentrated, communities with high rates of imprisonment experience the effects of concentrated civic disenfranchisement. As Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997) found in their Chicago study, collective efficacy, a measure of neighbors' social connectedness and willingness to act for the collective good, is observably low in high incarceration communities. In short, the retributive turn in correctional policy has not only produced mass incarceration, but in doing so has also exacerbated the civic displacement of those whose lives and communities have been touched by incarceration.

Alongside limited civic participation and expression, incarcerated individuals and their home communities also have specialized civic knowledge. By having cases processed, they have more exposure to the judicial system than most Americans and knowledge of how state level bureaucracies function. Incarcerated people are also quite likely to have petitioned on their own behalf by reaching out to local officials or politicians—a civic skill that traditional measures of civic health often include. Thus, while many of the indicators often considered to be bell-weather of civic well-being are under-developed among those directly impacted by mass incarceration, there are important complementary civic capacities that take root in their absence.

Considering the demonstrated civic harms associated with mass incarceration, an important question emerges: What can be done within the existing structures of prisons to reach out and re-engage a deeply alienated segment of the population?

Restoring Civic Capacities through Prison-based Education

Active citizenship is essential to a stable and legitimate democracy, however there is very little in the infrastructure of contemporary prisons that further develops individuals' civic capacities during periods of incarceration or after release. The difficulty that the formerly incarcerated experience in re-integrating socially and civically into free society is likely a consequence of systematic process of exclusion of those with criminal convictions as well as insufficient preparation for and support during reentrance. Yet, even against the backdrop of worsening prison conditions, reductions in prison-based programming and services, and a growing use of technologies of punishment, educational programs have shown signs of being an enduring and an important catalyst for civic development.

Though broad based educational programs are available at most correctional facilities, few of those who wish to participate in programs can do so. The most recent national census of state and federal correctional facilities, reported by Stephan (2008), reveals that 84 percent of institutions provide some form of educational programming. GED courses were the most commonly offered academic program and were available at 77 percent of institutions. About 67 percent offered some form of adult basic education, and a little over half listed available vocational education programs. However, the options for individuals seeking higher education are even more limited. Only 35 percent of state and federal correctional facilities had college-level coursework available to incarcerated individuals.

There were two federal policies that proved particularly deleterious for prison-based educational options, particularly for programs offering higher education. First, the criteria for federal Pell Grants—a tuition subsidy distributed to students demonstrating financial need—were changed such that individuals in prison were no longer eligible for federal tuition assistance. Second, the federal Perkins Act, which required a *minimum* of 1 percent funding on correctional education, and the Workforce Investment Act, which required a minimum of 10 percent funding on correctional education, were revised in 1998 such that 1 and 10 percent respectively became the *maximum* amount of federal funding for prison education (Travis et al., 2014). Combined, these two policies drastically reduced access to funding for educational programs thus limiting the seats available in correctional programs and reshaping the landscape of correctional education during a period when incarceration rates were rapidly increasing.

As noted previously, findings from recent experimental and descriptive research have found that prison-based educational programming limits recidivism. Few who teach in educational programs in prisons found this result to be surprising, to quote prison educator and sociologist Kaia Stern (2013), “Anyone who has worked in the context of prison education is aware of its tremendous transformative power” (p. 451). So, what is it that is transformative about prison education? And, what is the relationship between that transformative process and addressing the civic disempowerment associated with incarceration? To answer this question, I turn to the accounts of educational programs by journalists and social scientists alike. These narratives serve as illustrative cases that help depict how these in-prison programs bolster civic competencies of incarcerated men and women like working and living in diverse contexts, self-

efficacy to enact change, and care and respect for others. These capacities are not only the building blocks for the active civic participation foundational to a democratic society, they are also skills and dispositions associated with increased public safety.

Prisons are heavily regulated by the formal elements of institutional design, but also by cultural and behavioral codes that emerge out of the correctional context. One such practice is the maintenance of racial segregation that is violently enforced. Describing his time in California state prison, Steven Czifra recalls, “As a white person, I can’t use or touch anything that a black person has used or touched...[or else] They’ll put batteries in a pillowcase and attack me in my bed in the middle of the night” (MacFarquhar, 2016, p. 28). Aware of the incongruity between the code of racial separateness that governs prisons and the importance of being able to respectfully engage with people from diverse backgrounds, educators like Robert G. Thomas (2012) attempt to help their students navigate cross-racial interactions. From Thomas’ perspective he hoped to teach social awareness and tolerance in his GED class at the California Men’s Colony facility, because “many of my previous students were not used to interacting with people who came from different ethnic, social-class, and cultural backgrounds than that of their own” (p. 175). This process was not quick or straight-forward, but through deliberate pedagogy—which scaffolded inter-racial academic collaboration—his classroom became a place where, “it was not uncommon to witness a Mexican American, African American, and Anglo American working as a team to solve a mathematics problem or to identify the correct answer to a reading comprehension question” (p. 175). And this is evident in the course feedback Thomas’ received from his students. One of whom wrote, “Another important way going to school has improved my life is interacting with different students,” while another remarked, “I learned how to communicate with others in a group” (p.175). In this regard, prison classrooms can offer an important neutral space in which interactions across racial boundaries are permissible, and thus build the capacity to engage in a diverse society.

Works by sociologist Kaia Stern and psychiatrist James Gilligan, both of whom taught extensively in Massachusetts state prisons, highlight the possibility of prison educational programs to improve the self-esteem of incarcerated students. In interviews with incarcerated men and women on their experiences in educational programs, Stern (2015) observed multiple references to improved self-esteem. One woman, who Stern refers to with the pseudonym Lynne, described prison education programs this way, “It does so much more than teach. It builds self-esteem where there was none. It creates hope when you thought there was not a hint of hope, and it opens doors in life that were once closed” (p. 165). As Lynne hints, the personal development afforded through her participation in educational programming provides a path for new opportunities such as civic development. However, the improvements to students’ self-esteem are not solely impactful on incarcerated individuals. In his text, *Preventing Violence*, Gilligan (2001) reflects on the educational program he established for incarcerated individuals in a Massachusetts psychiatric facility, writing, “education is one of the most powerful tools for acquiring self-esteem, and since self-esteem is the most powerful psychological force that prevents violence” (p.98). It is in the best interests of all members of a democratic society that more individuals develop skill sets that provide alternatives to violence.

Prison educators provide a host of examples illustrating how the academic learning environment provides a foundation for civic social membership for incarcerated students. First, I turn to Smith’s (2017) essay about teaching a creative writing course to incarcerated men in Massachusetts. Smith, who believes that punitive era of penal policy has dehumanized the

incarcerated population and described education as having “emancipatory power,” hoped that his course would enable his students to “move beyond the social constructs of the world as they currently exist” (p. 85). As noted in the introductory discussion of the stigma associated with incarceration, those who are in prison are keenly aware of how this status shapes their lived experience. Smith’s students wrestle with stigma, social perceptions and self-definition after reading Jonathan Franzen’s (2011) essay “Liking is for Cowards. Go for What Hurts.” One student, who Smith calls Darryl, stated during a reflective group discussion, “Sometimes they can make you forget that in here—sometimes you get so caught up in how the rest of the world sees you that you start to believe it.” Here, the academic grounding of the course provided a forum in which Darryl was able to distance himself from the stigmatized label, and assert a new, implicitly positive, definition of self. This act is, in my view, is essential to Darryl being able to re-establish his social membership because it allows him to see himself beyond the stigma of incarceration.

Another example of how academic learning expands skills foundational to civic social membership comes from Stern’s (2015) interview with a man she calls Anthony Roman. For Anthony, through coursework he gained an expanded vocabulary and a richer conceptual understanding of social processes, which in turn provided the skillset for a more nuanced understanding of himself. He commented, “What education did for me, more than anything else was help me to articulate experiences deep down inside me that I had no words for, so I couldn’t comprehend” (p. 145). Ellen Lagemann’s, a Distinguished Fellow at the Bard Prison Initiative (the organization that served as the blue print for Cuomo’s proposal to expand PSE in New York prisons), 2015 Distinguished Lecture at the American Education Research Association (AERA) annual meeting reveals the importance of a transformative educational experience, as described by Anthony, in civic terms. Lagemann (2015) highlighted that because those who are, or have been, in prison experience reduced access to voting, it is essential that educational programs prepare them for other forms of civic action such as joining in public debate or associating with others in common cause. She noted that, “Unless people have peaceful ways to a hearing for their opinions and constructive avenues to effect change, they will turn to violent ones” (p. 417).

In the previous discussion of the civic consequences of mass incarceration, I identified harms at the individual, familial, and community level. Correspondingly, I now turn to examples of the civic benefits of educational programming for the families and communities of incarcerated people. In her lecture, Lagemann (2015) shared that the gains in self-esteem and civic skills that she witnessed among her incarcerated students, was also visible to their children and promoted a sense hope and pride that “spilled-over” to their children and moderated some of the shame of having a parent in prison. In his essay, Smith describes a scene in which a classroom discussion of a text prompts his student, Chad, to engage in empathetic perspective taking regarding how his actions may have impacted his daughter, “You know, I wonder if that’s how my daughter thinks of me...I been in here her whole life. I feel like she’s growing up to think her daddy’s a bad person” (p. 89). Julio Medina, an incarcerated man, who participated in Stern’s (2015) study echoed Chad’s sentiment, saying, “Prison was my university because I developed a conscience, I cared about people again. To me, it was like sacred ground” (p. 134).

Conclusion: A Vision Forward

I opened this essay recounting New York Governor, Andrew Cuomo’s failed attempt to institute publically funded post-secondary education in his state’s prisons. I highlighted how

Cuomo's remarks and the political discourse surrounding the proposed policy reflected the two dominant frameworks for assessing the merits of prison-based educational programs generally, not only at the post-secondary level. In the first, education is discussed in terms of its instrumental utility within cost-effective analyses. In the second, education in prisons is described as being either good or bad for moral reasons. I proposed a third alternative, in which prison-based education is assessed as being either good or bad for a democratic society. Following that proposition, I demonstrated how mass incarceration enacts civic harms and used various examples from classrooms in prisons to illustrate how educational programs, in certain instances, help expand students' civic capacities, thus enabling them to more actively engage with democratic society. However, there is an important caveat to the central argument put forth in this essay.

While I believe that within the current criminal justice system prison-based educational programs offer the best opportunity to further grow the civic capacities of incarcerated people, it is important to consider the alternative perspectives on the topic. The most direct counter argument comes from prominent social theorists such as Cloward (1960) and Wacquant (2014). These scholars contend that because prisons are instruments of social control and subjugation, no feature of the prison can truly supplant the social structures designed to exclude incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people from full citizenship. As Cloward (1960) writes,

no matter how lofty the goals to which the prisoner aspires and no matter how successfully he acquires the values, knowledge, and skills he needs to make the transition to higher status, *the prison cannot make available legitimate means of access to the goals he has been led to seek* [original emphasis]; for his public identity remains unchanged, even though he may have undergone a 'moral regeneration.' The society in which he is to become reintegrated continues to reject him ...and thus perpetuates his inferior status. (p. 30)

This critique underlines the most significant limit of prison-based education as a vehicle of active citizenship. While I argue that prison education may be the best tool within the existing penal structure to promote active citizenship, I must also acknowledge that such initiatives do little to lessen the well documented ways in which free society rejects those who are, or have been, imprisoned. Returning to Goffman's account of stigma, education while in prison does not neutralize the stigma of being in prison. That stigma, today, is a social fact. However, what the examples used in this essay do illustrate is that classrooms environments are a distinct social space within prisons, in which incarcerated men and women can work in diverse groups, develop self-esteem, practice empathetic perspective taking, and through this access to knowledge better understand themselves and their actions. These skills are the bedrock of active civic membership in a democratic society. While they do not erase the myriad de facto and de jure barriers to full civic engagement that go hand in hand with incarceration, they do help individuals better navigate them.

It is likely the case that the classrooms described in this essay are exceptional. Consequently, I will conclude by offering two actionable interventions to foster the civic capacities of incarcerated individuals on a larger scale. First, I propose robust pre-service training for educators working in prisons that includes specific attention to pedagogies that will help cultivate civic skills, knowledge, and dispositions among incarcerated students. The examples above highlight *intentional* practices by select educators, most of whom remarked that

they had received little training for teaching in prisons and relied on trial and error and previous teaching experiences. While a detailed description of such a training protocol is beyond this scope of this paper, it is widely held in K-20 teacher education scholarship that students experience greater success in a given domain, when their teachers establish corresponding goals and plan instruction in accordance with said goals. Accordingly, providing prison educators with the requisite information to develop goals that prepare students to work in diverse contexts, feel empowered to enact change, and expand empathetic perspective taking alongside academic goals, is a high-impact intervention that begins to address the civic consequences of mass incarceration.

Second, I recommend integrating explicit instruction on civic re-integration into existing transitional or pre-release programming. Transitional programs are distinct from the types of educational programs I have discussed in this paper in three key ways. Transitional programs typically range from a few days to two weeks, and thus are often much shorter than semester-long educational programs. Transitional programs do not provide a shared academic grounding on which to build civic capacities and apply civic skills, but focus instead on providing information regarding community based service providers and employment assistance. However, unlike educational programs, which are typically only available to a fraction of those in prison, nearly all Departments of the Corrections mandate participation in a pre-release transitional program during the final days of incarceration. Mirroring from the culturally sustaining pedagogical frameworks (see for example, Paris & Alim, 2017) that were originally designed to address the unique educational experiences of Black youth, this civic transitional programming should articulate the broader structures that limit full access to civic membership for those under correctional supervision. Such programming would explain the relevant voting legislation and prepare individuals to navigate civic life in their communities.

Taken together these recommendations offer a modest starting point from which to build a larger strategy to repair the civic harms brought about by mass incarceration. This is a task that is of the utmost importance, not simply because it is a cost-effective public safety intervention or because of its alignment or misalignment with one's moral values, but because closing the civic distance between the members of our society who experience incarceration and those who do not plays an essential role in fulfilling the legitimacy of our democracy.

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