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# A critical impasse: literacy practice in American prisons and the future of transformative reading

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A CRITICAL IMPASSE:  
LITERACY PRACTICE IN AMERICAN PRISONS  
AND THE FUTURE OF TRANSFORMATIVE READING

by

Kathrina Sarah Litchfield

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts degree in Library and Information Science  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2014

Thesis Supervisor: Assistant Professor Joan Bessman Taylor

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2014

Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTER'S THESIS

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee  
for the thesis requirement for the Master of Arts  
degree in Library and Information Science at the  
May 2014 graduation.

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To the men at IMCC Oakdale --  
the men who come to book group,  
and the men who don't

In reality, every reader, while he is reading, is the reader of his own self. The writer's work is merely a kind of optical instrument, which he offers to the reader to permit him to discern what, without the book, he would perhaps never have seen in himself. The reader's recognition in his own self of what the book says is the proof of its truth.

--Marcel Proust  
*Time Regained*

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## INTRODUCTION

The security officer walks a few feet ahead of me, now and then turning to check that I am still behind him. I've made this walk over a dozen times, yet still, a moment of daydreaming could easily lead to a wrong turn down these labyrinthine corridors. I make sure I keep to his pace, and soon we enter a classroom packed with almost twenty men, all wearing identical navy blue t-shirts and jeans. As I approach, an empty chair is rustled from a corner and placed before me, guys inch their chairs over to make room, and friendly greetings welcome me from all around the crowded table. Discussion has already begun; I've missed the first ten minutes as I waited in the lobby for an officer to safely escort me to the room. We have a guest facilitator today, Mr. James<sup>1</sup>, a favorite from the prison staff, who occasionally attends the group whenever we choose a mystery thriller. Mr. James loves to read almost as much as he loves coaching the guys' basketball scrimmages during recreation hours, but he reads strictly mysteries, a couple a week. We have not met before, but Mr. James very graciously introduces himself and recaps the discussion as it has progressed so far.

I immediately sense an unusual vibrancy in the room. There are significantly more participants than usual, and as I scan the room I note both regulars and occasional members, and a handful of offenders I have never met before. All are engaged in the topic at hand. We are discussing a work by famed thriller author Michael Connelly (*Blood Work*, 1998), and the plot centers around the gathering of evidence obtained from security

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<sup>1</sup> To protect their identity, I have changed the names of all staff affiliated with the prison.

camera. Members are divided on their opinions of the appropriate use of hidden security cameras -- some feel that cameras provide a valid way to protect one's property and deter crime, while some feel that hidden cameras violate privacy. Time flies by as almost every member takes the opportunity to voice his opinion, and the group, as a whole, finally agrees to disagree.

This particular day's discussion continues to interest me, not only because discussion was so lively and well-attended, but because the topic was clearly one that is meaningful to these participants. One of the unwritten rules of our "inside" book group is that, regardless of the turns our discussions take, we never discuss any of the reasons why anyone is incarcerated. It is impossible to know, as an outside observer, if security camera tape played a role in any of the participants' convictions, or just how personally relevant this discussion is to each participant's experience. There are a number of possible reasons to explain the day's large turnout: our visiting facilitator attracted some new participants, the crime thriller genre is a particular leisure-reading favorite, or perhaps the crime genre touches on material of particular interest to an incarcerated population, beyond leisure-reading and escapism, allowing the consideration of issues that have real implications to their own experiences.

I began volunteering as a facilitator for this book group at the same time that I initiated graduate work in library and information science. I'd been a volunteer for a short time years before, and welcomed the opportunity once again to participate in monthly book discussions, this time to gain the new perspective of a librarian-in-training while observing the library work inside the prison. I was surprised to learn that the book group

is actually unaffiliated with the library at all. Run by the Education Supervisor, contracted from the local community college, Ms. Henning<sup>2</sup> is responsible for federally mandated GED/ABE prep and general literacy courses. She volunteers her time to the group, and book purchases for the group are made entirely through trust fund-managed donations. In fact, many changes had occurred within the prison since my last visits in late 2003. Most relevant to this discussion is that certified librarians are no longer on the Department of Corrections (DOC) payroll, and no longer make periodic visits to the institution. The library is now supervised by Recreational Activities Specialists, who share their time between the library, the gym, and the art room. The library tasks (circulation, cataloging, book repair) are actually performed by Library Clerks, offenders who have earned status to obtain one of the most coveted jobs in the institution, earning around 43 cents an hour.

I remember the eagerness I felt in my first return to the book group. Student colleagues asked me if I felt nervous to be in such close quarters with convicted felons. Surprising even myself, I answered “no”. Of course there is the anxiety of entering a social gathering as “the newcomer,” and perhaps additional butterflies from considering that I am one of only two women in the room, but their criminal histories have little effect on my nerves. I know that this particular group of men is self-selected. They receive no tangible rewards for participation, other than the monthly opportunity to engage in a reading experience and informal discussion with their peers. Such opportunities for discussions (especially on topics outside their own experience-related rehabilitation) are scarce in the routines of institutional life. From my very first visit, it has been clear to me

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<sup>2</sup> Not her true name.

that the book group is valued as a pro-social activity that allows for the exchange of ideas, the exposure to new ideas and alternate perspectives, and the challenge to accept the opposing views of others. The participants follow unwritten rules in order to maintain this pro-social environment, and are unwilling to conduct themselves in ways that might threaten their ability to participate.

Residents of several different dormitory wings of various levels of security (none of them maximum) sit at a circular table alongside Ms. Henning and I, and we are all given equal opportunity to participate and lead discussion. Attendees vary each month from around ten to sixteen members, with a core group that attend each month regardless of the title chosen. Averaging in age in their early forties, the group is clearly experienced in the routines of institutional life. Most are well educated, some with Master's degrees, and several with Doctorates, and have worked professionally before their incarceration. Many of them are now employed as offender-tutors, assisting in the HiSET/ABE prep and literacy courses, and they encourage some of their select students to attend. Generally, we have a core group of educated participants and a fluctuating group of new participants, some of whom struggle with even fundamental literacy. All are given the opportunity to read the same book and contribute their thoughts. It is unusual in any voluntary book group to host such a range of reading skills, but there is always time to address both comprehension discrepancies and analytical responses. Selecting titles is a democratic process, where all participants are invited to nominate titles of interest. The list is vetted by Ms. Henning, but then offered by ballot, and the top ten titles are selected. Some choices are surprising, as genres range from science fiction/fantasy,

biography, and literary fiction, to narrative non-fiction, teen dystopia, and crime mystery. We grapple with tough issues like sexual victimization as illustrated in Emma Donoghue's *Room*, slavery and racism in Dolen Perkins-Valdez's *Wench*, and the trauma of war in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*.

Although my voluntary position as a facilitator allows me the freedom to lead discussion with the group, I have never had the opportunity to speak with members individually. I am curious to know how each member values the book group experience. In the case of the Connelly discussion, I want to know why that particular discussion attracted so many participants, and why that particular discussion seemed to resonate with each member. As much as I would love to know the answers, I have been unable to obtain research approval from the warden to investigate these questions. I initially designed a qualitative study that would allow volunteer participants to engage in short, private interviews regarding their reading habits, favorite genres, and specifically address why they either regularly or sporadically attend this volunteer book group. The warden's rejection is couched in generalities -- "...we do not have the time or resources to accommodate" all of our research requests, "...we are favoring requests that best fit with our research priorities with regard to offender reentry" (Craig, 2013). This is the only communication I received from the warden, despite several repeated attempts to communicate. Therefore, I can only speculate that, because the book group is not a federally mandated, funded, or "evidence-based rehabilitation", exploring offender reading habits is not viewed as related in any way to correctional reentry programming.

Unwilling to drop it, as my ignored appeals implied I should, I reworked my thesis and instead conducted a literature review that establishes the origins of reading in prisons, and the implications of the historical roots of prison reading and education that influence current corrections practice. Given the priorities stated in the warden's email, I first decided to locate academic literature investigating the implications of book groups and other literacy programming on offender recidivism. I quickly understood that it is almost impossible to track quantitative evidence linking literacy practice as the sole contributor to reduced recidivism. A multitude of factors contribute to recidivism, and no study has been successful in isolating group reading as a measurable benefit to offender success. However, fundamental literacy skills are a proven contributor, hence the federally-mandated literacy training for every offender reading at or below a sixth grade level. Perhaps the most convincing evidence of applied literacy programming that measurably lowers recidivism can be found in the Changing Lives Through Literature (CLTL) program (Waxler & Trounstine, 1999). This program was very popular in the early 1990's, and adopted throughout Canada and the UK, as well as in half a dozen American criminal justice systems. Select offenders could enroll in a reading and discussion course, taught by English professors, in exchange for parole, and in some districts, for prison sentencing. Participants who successfully completed the six- to eight-week program showed a marked decrease in criminal behavior. The CLTL program in New Bedford, Massachusetts, reported a 68% decrease in their participants' criminal behavior (New Bedford Evaluation, 1996). Regrettably, CLTL is not as vibrant as it once was. CLTL was concurrent with the largest influx of prisoners in our nation's history, and

criminal justice systems welcomed alternatives to conventional sentencing. And though our prisons are crowded still, more have been built in the last twenty years, and conventional sentencing has again taken precedence (Trounstine, 2005).

Other researchers have examined the reading habits of imprisoned populations, and have provided qualitative data proving the transformational qualities of engaged reading. Most notably, Megan Sweeney conducted several book groups in three American prisons serving adult women, documenting her experience in *Reading Is My Window* (2010). She interviewed hundreds of female offenders, investigating their reading choices and the emotional/intellectual benefits of their self-prescribed reading program. She noted distinct preferences for self-help/religious titles, urban fiction, and victim narratives among these female readers. Her empirical studies provide an excellent template for needed research in exploring male offender reading habits, and I return to this work later in this paper.

As I noted earlier, I began graduate coursework in library science at the same time that I began volunteering with the prison book group. My professors, encouraging my burgeoning interest, allowed me to direct many of my assignments toward prison library-related topics. For one assignment, I investigated literacy programs facilitated by public libraries, schools, and youth outreach programs, aiming to support American “at-risk” teenagers. My primary claim is that such programs could be modified for adult offenders in prison education programs, reaching students who have failed or been failed by such programs in their youth. Having once been “at-risk” themselves, they are now beyond “risk”, evidence that some students are not reached by the safety nets these outreach

programs aspire to be. Yet, just because they are now labeled as “adult” and “incarcerated” does not mean that transformational programming should be abandoned. These students are not beyond rehabilitation, as the existence of DOC support for restorative justice programs makes plain. I will discuss such programs in Chapter 3 of this paper. In pursuing the scholarship of transformational reading engagement, I reviewed literature by scholars attesting to strategies for encouraging the “reluctant reader” (Zaro, 2007; Winters, 2000; Krashen, 1993). Again and again, educators recommend seducing the reluctant reader, be they “at-risk” or adult, with reading material that fosters empathy. A reluctant reader will be more invested in a narrative that reflects one’s own experience, with characters that look and think like them, with settings that look and feel like their environment. Fundamental literacy, it is understood, will improve with such empathic reading, and in time, as the reader increases fluency, he will be prepared to explore narratives slightly more unfamiliar. The reader’s capacity for empathy with unlike characters will grow.

Does narrative empathy lead to real, life-experience empathy? I consider my observations made on the day we discussed Connelly’s work. Several new offenders joined us that day, a few of whom struggled with fundamental literacy skills and found Connelly’s novel a challenge, but despite that challenge were drawn to the discussion. Were they experiencing an empathy with the material that urged them to participate, despite the hard work of reading the material? The end of our discussion left the room split in opinions concerning security cameras, but there were no fights, no lingering anger. Each participant heard both sides and expressed their views seemingly without fear

of reprisal. Something extraordinary was happening in that room. It centered on the reading of a crime novel, but something much more substantial was going on. Every member was engaged in the discussion, using a blend of text and personal experience to analyze ideas and articulate opinions. It was a situation that classroom teachers strive for, and here it had happened, spontaneously, in a voluntary book group, with no grades, no rewards, just the satisfaction of exploring a meaningful idea.

Unfortunately, this experience is only available because of the good will of a staff member willing to volunteer her time, and the good fortune, for these offenders, to be placed in an institution willing to make space for it. There is no state or federal mandate requiring prisons to offer literacy interventions beyond high school completion. The ever-tightening budget continues to whittle away at staff. Ms. Henning has less than half the education staff she had when we first met in 2003. More responsibility is left to a smaller number of employees, and when time is stretched so thin, it is the voluntary work that gets cut first. Space is also vulnerable to a cost/benefit ratio, and today, serving an above-capacity population, the library serves as little more than a safe and secure recreational area, its shelves filled with dog-eared, donated paperbacks. Treatments in behavioral therapy, restorative justice, anger management and other evidence-based programs need space, too, and these programs have a calculable benefit to the aims of the institution. Without a trained librarian to advocate for it, how long before the library space is reclaimed to accommodate these needs? The life and vibrancy of reading in prisons is threatened in very real, concrete ways.

Reading in prisons is far from a passing fad. It has a history as long as the history of prisons themselves. Over time, reading has been considered a sustenance as well as a danger, a cure and a poison, a treatment and a frivolity. Required reading has been used as a therapy, and *denying* reading has been used as a therapy. Most of that conflict stems from a belief that the content of reading has a powerful emotional effect on the choices we make and the people we are, i.e., if we read good books, we will learn how to be good people. If we believe that some books encourage us to be good people, than we must also accept that some books encourage us to be bad. At times in the history of prison reading, prison administrators have simultaneously praised the act of reading while attempting to control the content, allowing only the titles believed to make the reader *good*, or at least not make them *bad*. Authorities have and continue to go to great lengths to deny access to the books that make you *bad*, putting forth considerable energy to stemming an act that, in other contexts such as therapy and emotional management, gets short shrift today as an effective means of rehabilitation. A problem may reside in the ubiquitous notion that reading is dichotomous: reading either helps you or harms you. But by understanding how reading employs our empathy and perspective-taking skills, we may begin to see that reading is far more integrated into our personal experience. It helps us to fill in the blanks about our own sense of self, and appreciate that others fill in their own blanks in different ways (Sweeney, 2010; Keen, 2007) . We are affected by the content of what we read, but we are also practicing cognitive thinking skills -- perspective, construction of *other*, effect anticipation -- skills that are difficult, and sometimes dangerous, to practice in real life (Kidd & Castano, 2013). But in order to practice those skills, a reader must be

engaged with the text. My book group participants were clearly engaged with Connelly's novel. They were engaged with the ideas surrounding the lawfulness and justice of hidden security cameras. They were not concerned with whether their opinions made them better or worse people. But I argue that their enthusiasm to form and articulate their opinions *did* make them better people, just a bit. And they will do it again each month, as long as book group persists.

Investigating the trends of prison reading has led me to the difficult realization that prison authority and prison rehabilitation are at odds that are not easily reconcilable. The natural desire to help people in dire situations, to help those facing incarceration with low education achievements, minimal access to basic needs, and little sense of agency in civic community, runs up against the more visceral aggression of the general public to punish and incapacitate lawbreakers. Prison authorities claim to attempt rehabilitation for the purpose of lowering recidivism, but those attempts cost money and take time, and have no guarantees, while incapacitation is an immediate short-term solution that requires little training and minimal compassion. And so we have institutions that attempt rehabilitation and incapacitation simultaneously, leaving ex-offenders with a confused sense of agency, with expectations for successful civic membership, but without the full set of tools to achieve it. It appears that the purpose of incarceration in America is at an impasse.

Reckoning with this impasse has affected my own ability to remain objective within the research. Ann Cvetkovich, a scholar on affect theory, reflects on the concept of impasse, and her words give me hope that we are in the midst of a social circumstance

that can be solved with fresh perspective. She states, “As a theoretical concept, impasse imports its spatial or literal sense into conceptual and social circumstances; it suggests that things will not move forward due to circumstance - not that they can’t, but that the world is not designed to make it happen or there has been a failure of imagination” (Cvetkovich, 2012). She reminds her readers that an impasse is only a delay, not an end. We live in a world that is not designed to make transformative experience valuable, to the prison authority or to the hundreds of thousands of incarcerated Americans. Amidst all the concern for harsher penalties and skyrocketing long-term sentences, there has been a failure of imagination to envision a more productive outcome. It is my hope that this paper will assist to reignite our imaginative power to find a way through this impasse.

To better understand this impasse we are currently confronting, it is necessary to understand how we got here. In Chapter 1, I provide a chronological review of the literature concerning reading in American prisons. Although formal literacy interventions were not introduced until the twentieth century, reading has played an informal role in detainment facilities since the first jail was built in Pennsylvania. Reading was used as a form of rehabilitation through affective response to its content, and the key (and sometimes only) text was the Bible. Over time, religious libraries served our prisons, and various brave pioneers introduced secular, but always moral, literature, for the purpose of uplifting the soul. Non-fiction titles were encouraged when trends toward vocational training for prisoners was popular. Non-fiction titles were most valued by prisoners when political radicalism was trending across the country as a response to social disparities.

The value of reading has crested and ebbed over the centuries, but always with a concern for affective content. A book that educates a reader on how to farm or weld or fix a car is welcome, as is a book that models the exceptional character of an Abraham Lincoln or the ingenuity of a Benjamin Franklin. A book that questions class hegemony or imagines an altered class structure is dangerous and requires censure. This concern for the effect of literature comes to a head in the 1970's, when prison authorities responded by clamping down on security, limiting access to all material, moral or otherwise. In the decades since, there has been little time or interest to consider the effect of literature on prisoners, as authority is concerned with housing and securing the enormous new populations of offenders.

Chapter 2 considers the ways that literacy interventions of the past, specifically the twentieth century, have contributed to the current atmosphere of education, treatment, and rehabilitation within our prisons, as well as the self-prescribed reading that prisoners practice on their own behalf. Concern for reading practice has moved from prison administration to prison treatment staff, to dedicated public volunteers, and to scholars of prison and prison reform. Chapter 3 looks toward the endangered future of literacy practice in prisons. I first consider the reparative treatment programs that enjoy full support and endorsement by prison authorities as evidence-based programs to lower recidivism. In so doing I have discovered that a current advancement of a program called Restorative Justice encourages many of the same skills and outcomes that a literacy intervention of perspective-directed reading might achieve. I assert that there is opportunity for advancing the parallel benefits of transformational reading practice and

the empathic encounters encouraged in a restorative justice program. In order to support the aims of both projects, a strong prison library system is required. I also envision a reading program that does not rely solely on the affective content of literature, but on the cognitive work of reading itself, as described through Theory of Mind, an approach that has not been documented previously in prison literacy interventions. Bringing these approaches together for the first time enables me to imagine an intervention that treats both the affective response to varieties of the human experience, as well as exercising the cognitive skills used in forming self-identity, perspective, and interpersonal sensitivity. I recommend both of these approaches as opportunities to re-imagine our way out of this critical impasse.

#### A NOTE ON KEY TERMS

This paper considers concepts that overlap across the domains of librarianship, institutional corrections, and literary and cognitive theory. In so doing, key terms have various meanings, depending on their context. I hesitate when using forms of the word *rehabilitative*, as the historical inference in *corrections* (a term itself that has arguably evolved into its own antithesis) is that of a naive and futile attempt to eliminate crime through teaching behavioral change. This is all the more complicated by the prefix “re-”, which assumes in this context that a convicted criminal is being returned to a state of fitness for civic functioning. It is as likely that a criminal prior to incarceration has never been privileged with access to the tools necessary for civic functioning or, conversely, that corrections rehabilitation does not genuinely aim to return an ex-offender to full civic

membership. The long list of civil liberties that are impinged upon even well after a sentence is served (e.g., curtailed voting rights, denial of access to federal assistance for food, housing, and education) evidences a lip service paid to the efforts of current corrections-based rehabilitation efforts. At times I am more comfortable substituting the word *transformative*, intentionally implying a transformation from a narrow worldview to a wider one, or a movement from self-recrimination to agency, from denial to validation. *Transformative Justice* is sometimes used interchangeably with *Restorative Justice*, but has distinct differences. Restorative Justice is mostly concerned with the aftermath of crime and its repercussions for the victim, offender, and the community. Transformative Justice seeks to examine and address the background of the criminal incident and its full context, with the aim to not only repair the current damage, but prevent future harm. Yet the word “transformative” remains problematic, with its implications of spiritual or metaphysical catharsis, which adds a note of melodrama to a process that is often quite grounded and pragmatic.

Additionally, I pay heed to a discretionary use of the multiple terms ascribed to an incarcerated person. Correctional institutions refer to their populations often as *offenders*, as a reminder of the reason they are serving time. Corrections authorities also make frequent use of the term *inmate* as a generic and dehumanizing form of address. I have heard the men in my book group refer to each other as *inmates*, but they do not address each other as *Inmate*. It is less likely to hear the term *convict*, but *ex-convict*, referring to a person who was convicted and incarcerated but is now released, is common. The general public appears to favor the term *prisoner*, and it is indeed the legal term for any

person under legal custody. But this term is not favored by incarcerated populations or those who are sensitive to prison reform efforts, as it gives power to the imprisoning body and removes the identity of the individual. While I prefer to use the term *incarcerated populations* (at least politically, if not phonologically), I have used various terms in harmony with the context under investigation. I prefer this term because it implies an inarguable state without inferring blame. I refer here to populations incarcerated in all detainment facilities, including federal, state, and private institutions, unless otherwise noted. Likewise, I frequently refer to these populations with masculine pronouns, as incarcerated men are my focus of study, but I do not intend to preclude the thousands of American women currently or previously incarcerated.

Finally, I have been volunteering as a co-facilitator for an incarcerated men's book group for several years now, and I bookend this thesis with personal narratives of my experience with this group of readers. My intention had been to remain a passive observer in the field, but almost immediately I became an overt participant, intellectually and empathically a member of the group. This is in part due to the men's proclivity for my participation and expressions of gratitude for it. Due to my loyalty and fellowship with this particular group of men, I tend to refer to them as "my" book group. I do not mean to imply in any way that I am the owner or proprietor of this group, only that my dedication to our work has grown personal to the extent that this group is "mine" just as my family is mine. It is their enthusiasm and open hearts that have generated my continuing interest in this line of inquiry.

## CHAPTER 1: A CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW OF READING IN PRISONS

### 1.1 The Bible and the Birth of the Penitentiary

The reading of literature has played a role in prison culture since the first penitentiaries of the 18th century. Previous to the penitentiary, Puritan colonists established jails as a means to maintain social control as they disassociated from English codes of criminal justice. As devout Calvinists, Puritans acknowledged an obedience to God's spiritual commands and, in creating their local system of justice, mixed and matched pairings of crime and punishment modified from the English corporal system but suited to their religious beliefs. Prison historian Adam J. Hirsch notes, "...the criminal justice system of Puritan Massachusetts by and large duplicated Old World sanctions but applied them in novel ways, treating property offenses with relative lenience and moral offenses with relative severity" (Hirsch, 1992). Theft would be sanctioned with fines or public admonition, but moral offenses such as blasphemy, adultery, or murder were capital crimes punished with lashings, the stocks, and sometimes the gallows, though this last was used sparingly, both as respect for God's compassion and belief in a reformation of moral character, and also an acknowledgment that the colony population was small enough already.

In the colonial jail, inmates were primarily pre-trial. Incarceration was not a sentenced punishment, but rather a holding place for alleged criminals awaiting a

sentence of fines, banishment, or corporal and public punishment. Administration of these jails was arbitrary and often disorganized, locally managed, and often lacking in security and standard protocols.

The blending of Old World traditional justice practices with Puritanical views toward virtuous living often created irrational laws. For instance, a medieval practice, known as the “benefit of clergy”, allowed priests to avoid the harsh penalties of the secular courts and be tried instead by ecclesiastical court under canon law. Over time, anyone who could read a Bible verse or recite one from memory could avoid a death sentence, at least for one’s first offense (Lynch, 2014). This is the first instance of the value of literacy in the penal context in America.

Through the eighteenth century, as the Industrial Revolution and the rise of early capitalism began to transform the American landscape, crime became a more prevalent issue in the minds of Americans. The British legal system, known as “the Bloody Code” for its harsh severity, continued to influence American criminal justice. From 1688 to 1815, the number of capital crimes rose from around fifty to over two hundred (Lynch, 2014). A simple theft could lead to a death sentence.

The spirit of reform, utilitarianism, and advancement that affected all of American society prior to and beyond the American Revolution affected the development of criminal justice, as well. Reformers began to question an indiscriminate system of punishment, and whether such harsh penalties really did deter crime. For instance, if the penalty for theft is a death sentence, as well as the penalty for murder, what is to stop a criminal from killing his burgled witnesses? As Samuel Johnson noted of the English

system, “If only murder were punished with death, very few robbers would stain their hands in blood; but when by the last act of cruelty no new danger is incurred and greater security may be obtained, upon what principle shall we bid them forbear?” (Johnson, 1751).

Many Americans took the same view, and after the Revolution, state after state began to reduce the number of death-penalty offenses. Thomas Jefferson, in helping to revise Virginia’s statutes in 1776, wrote of the legislative debates, “On the subject of the Criminal law, all were agreed that the punishment of death should be abolished except for treason and murder; and that, for other felonies, should be substituted hard labor in the public works” (Jefferson, 1776). Politically, many patriots felt that the death penalty represented a monarchical ideal, and that reformation was more compatible with the new republican views of an independent nation.

At the same time, many reformers thought along more theological lines. The historical Calvinist beliefs of original sin allowed that some people were destined for wickedness, and that retribution was the appropriate punishment, as innate wickedness could not be reformed. But after the Revolution, an optimism set in as Calvinist ideas diluted with other religious perspectives. Reformation would be welcomed by a kind and merciful God. Quakers were especially active in attending to health and rehabilitation concerns in both American and British jails and prisons. Dr. Benjamin Rush was a notable Pennsylvania Quaker and political activist that advocated for isolation and labor as punishment, and cleanliness and hygiene as institutional standards. Elizabeth Fry, another prominent Quaker involved in prison reform, extended this advocacy into the

next generation, although she argued against the practice of solitary confinement (FCNL, 2014).

A group of prominent citizens in Philadelphia, including Dr. Benjamin Rush and Benjamin Franklin, created The Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons in 1787. Their aim was to reform criminals into law abiding citizens, and protect juveniles, women, and offenders of lesser crimes from the deleterious effects of cohabitating with dangerous hardened criminals. Their first documented attempt at intervention was in introducing prayer services at the Walnut Street Jail (our nation's first jail) in 1787. The jail's administrators opposed the intervention, yet a year later the Society submitted its first public recommendation of prison reform to the General Assembly for Pennsylvania. The document encouraged utilizing solitary confinement to allow for personal and spiritual reflection, more hard labor for idle hands, a segregation of criminals based on the severity of their crime, segregation by sex, and the prohibition of liquor. The following year, all of these recommendations were passed into state law (Fields, 2005). This society is also recognized as the first organization to provide reading material, albeit of a religious nature, to the inmates of Walnut Street Jail, thus providing the first book service to prisons in America in 1790 (Rubin, 1973).

The combined efforts of political and theological reformers led to a reevaluation of the role of American prisons. The reduction of death-penalty offenses led to a large population of criminals that required care. Exile, a popular solution of the past, had worked for a time for British convicts, but Australia had met its saturation point, and America, as an independent nation, no longer provided an easy dumping ground.

Incarceration became its own penalty, rather than a holding place for pre-trial detention. In 1785 Massachusetts legislature appointed a fortress in Boston Harbor, Castle Rock, to be a repository for convicted criminals -- and only convicted criminals -- from all over the state (Hirsch, 1992). This was a major first step in the evolution of modern criminal justice and the state's role in appropriating responsibility for its convicted populations.

Meanwhile, the Enlightenment era encouraged the idea that social institutions built moral character, that the proper environment shaped rational people, and that all people could be rehabilitated if provided with the appropriate environment. Conversely, it was the deleterious effects of rapid population growth and social mobility that led to societal decay. Removing "deviants" from the corruption of their families and communities allowed the criminal to learn valuable moral lessons they had ignored previously, without the constant temptation of vice aroused by an encroaching and depraved society (Rothman, 1971). Thus, two experiments in the rehabilitative model of the penitentiary -- a "home for the penitent" -- came into being.

The Eastern State Penitentiary opened in 1829 in Philadelphia, promoted by the aforementioned Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, and purported as the world's first penitentiary that advocated complete isolation. Institutional aims were to provide an environment of complete silence and isolation, encouraging convicts to contemplate their behavior alone with their Creator, and to recognize their errors. The penitentiary was architecturally unique, reflecting a panopticon style where convicts could not view each other, but supervisors had a line of sight to every cell. The building was the most expensive American construction of its time. Convicts were held alone for

23 hours a day, with a private exercise yard adjacent to their cells. No speech was allowed, and black sacks were placed over their heads whenever convicts were moved outside of their cells. Each cell had a skylight, the only natural light, referred to as the “eye of God.” The hallways featured a monastic design, and cell doors were especially low to encourage a penitent kneeling to pass through (Eastern State Penitentiary, 2014).

This enforced solitude was the attempt of the era to encourage rehabilitation. Eighteenth-century social theorist Jonas Hanway claimed, “Solitude is the most humane and effectual means of bringing malefactors...to a right sense of their condition” (Lynch, 2014). Contemporary John Brewster also claimed, “It has been recommended, both by the practice and precept of holy men, in all ages, sometimes to retire from scenes of public concourse, for the purpose of communing with our own hearts, and meditating on heaven” (Lynch, 2014). It was reasoned that isolated men would have neither the resources nor the desire to rebel or escape, yet this reasoning proved a grave error in judgement. The Eastern State Penitentiary made heavy use of corporal punishment from its beginnings, developing an arsenal of hideous torture devices, including the “iron gag,” the “shower bath,” and the “mad chair,” into which prisoners were tied in contortions that prevented their bodies from resting (Christianson, 1998). Although isolation was advertised as Eastern’s method of rehabilitation, torture was the prevailing method of control.

Around 1823 the state of New York also developed its first penitentiary, Auburn Prison. It also privileged solitary confinement by night, with congregate hard labor by day (Hirsch, 1992). Even during congregate labor, inmates were restricted from

communicating with each other; a rule of strict silence and constant surveillance encouraged both inmate separation and congregate therapy. Both the Eastern State Penitentiary and the Auburn Prison created the prevailing models for all future incarceration facilities in the United States, though the Auburn model proved more popular as it became evident that the labor element provided income, and it was more cost-effective for surveilling and housing large populations.

It is important to note that, by far, the largest demographic of inmates in these facilities was white men. African-Americans, at this time, were tied culturally to the slavery system, and the disciplining of slaves was handled privately by their slaveholders and local communities. Literacy rates of prison inmates were relatively proportional to the general free population at this time. While neither Eastern or Auburn contained libraries in their early history, they did allow for the reading and ownership of the Bible. For those who could not read, prison chaplains, visiting clergy, and male members of volunteer religious organizations might read the Bible to prisoners through the bars of their cells. As prison library historians Brenda Vogel and Larry Sullivan note, “During the early years in the Philadelphia system, the prisoner was permitted only the Bible for his solitary comfort. Similarly in the opposing Auburn, New York, system, reading was limited to a Bible and sometimes a prayerbook” (Vogel, 2009).

The inclusion of a Bible in a prisoner’s limited inventory of possessions was not just a nod to the requirements of a moral life, but an active element of rehabilitation through solitary confinement. Benjamin Rush, a vocal member of the Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, and a medical doctor, believed criminality to

be a physical defect that would someday be cured through medical means, but in the meantime could be treated through a prescriptive reading of the Bible. In his *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind*, Rush compared the Bible to “an apothecary’s shop, in which is contained remedies for every disease of the body” (Rush, 1818). By reading and meditating on particular verses, a prisoner could be cured of their criminal impulses. Rush applied the bulk of his biblio-therapeutic ideas towards the treatment of insanity, pushing for what could be termed today “recreational therapists” in every asylum and madhouse (Weimerskirch, 1965). In these cases he argued for a more varied menu of reading, including fiction as well as philosophical and religious texts. Although criminality, in his view, was also a mental disease, the only cure strong enough to reform deviant behavior was the strong word of the Bible.

This approach to literacy practice and rehabilitation makes an interesting reappearance in the philosophy of imprisonment more than a full century later. Librarian scholar Philip Weimerskirch sub-titled his journal article devoted to Rush and John Minson Galt, “Pioneers of Bibliotherapy in America,” making the case that Rush helped establish the concept of prescriptive reading long before the experiment became standard in the mid-twentieth century. This article was written during the height of bibliotherapy popularity (1965), especially within the context of clinical therapy treatments for mental illness. A more recent article published in the *Journal of the Medical Library Association* in 2013 cites Weimerskirch’s article and reasserts Dr. Rush’s influence on bibliotherapy as it is interpreted today as a clinical therapeutic tool. The authors go on to claim that, due to Rush’s advocacy and the work of his younger contemporary, John Minson Galt, in the

early nineteenth century, most hospitals today maintain libraries for patient use (Levin & Gildea, 2013). Although Rush is regularly credited for his prison reform work, his bibliotherapeutic advocacy has remained strongly and singularly associated to the domain of medical library scholarship.

## 1.2 The Moral Library

Access to reading material expanded quickly over the following decades, and by the mid-nineteenth century most prisons had libraries of some sort, typically with a heavy emphasis on religious material. Prison chaplains frequently improvised as librarians. Documentation of prison library collections of the time appears contradictory, since the majority of chaplains who bothered to document their collections favored religious content exclusively. Yet a visitor to the Eastern State Penitentiary in 1850, Frederika Bremer, noted with admiration, “The library was large and contained in addition to the religious books, scientific treatises, travel books, and literary works, selected with discrimination” (Eriksson, 1976). It can be fairly assumed that this particular collection was unusual in its size and breadth of subject-matter.

Perhaps the first documented library outreach experiment came in 1843 at New York’s Sing Sing Prison. The prison chaplain, John Luckey, supported the prisoner’s right to read for the purposes of moral and spiritual improvement. In fact, it was Luckey’s influence that led New York Governor William H. Seward to remove Elam Lynds as principal keeper of Sing Sing. Lynds was reputed as a tyrannical warden, relying on

flogging and other forms of violence to maintain order, and consistently cutting budgets for food, clothing, and medicine. Seward petitioned Luckey to make Sing Sing “consistent with the principles of Christianity,” and Luckey responded by creating a large library of religious titles “designed to inculcate correct moral principles” (Modern, 2011). He also applied pressure to the President of the Board of Inspectors, John Edmonds, to eventually have Lynds removed. This may be the prison library’s first triumph in championing a philosophy of literacy (although highly evangelical) over corporal punishment.

However, Luckey was challenged again in 1844 when Edmonds hired Eliza Farnham as matron of the women’s ward at Sing Sing. This was also the year that the New York Prison Association was organized to oversee state prison administration, an organization consisting of reformists dedicated to benevolent treatment and rehabilitation. Farnham was hired on the recommendation of these reformists, and she was successful in introducing innovative programs for her female charges, and enlarging the prison library collection and its aims. As prison scholar Janet Floyd notes,

Certainly, prison libraries and reading in prisons were objects of debate during this period and, in a scene where there seems to have been a range of practice, Farnham was certainly at the forefront in introducing books with no explicit religious content. She was especially unusual in choosing Dickens; where fiction was allowed to prisoners during this period, it took the form of ‘moral tales.’ There was also a diminution of religious instruction - the mainstay of rehabilitative practice at this time -- under Farnham’s regime (Floyd, 2006).

Although Farnham never published a memoir of her experiences at Sing Sing, her assistant, Georgiana Bruce Kirby, did. In it, she describes the new culture Farnham introduced into the prison environment, one of social congregative activity as opposed to the strictly silent, isolated nature encouraged previous to her tenure. She notes,

The matron ‘on guard’ during the noon hour changed the books left that had been read for fresh ones. Some read much faster than others, and as many books as were asked for, in succession, were allowed, as the great object was to keep the minds of the prisoners from dwelling on the evil past (Kirby, 1889).

In fact, the penitentiary had been devised as a machine made specifically to compel its inhabitants to dwell on their “evil past,” and Farnham’s concern for her wards’ future was a concept well ahead of her time. It is no surprise that relations between Farnham and her colleague, John Luckey, were under strain. He was responsible for maintaining the Sing Sing library and, as chaplain, for directing the spiritual maturation of Farnham’s wards. Vogel artfully states,

The chaplain did not approve of inculcating a ‘love of novel reading averse to labor.’ And Mrs. Farnham was placing ‘immoral’ works in Luckey’s library. Luckey and his supporters could not stomach the idea of convicts reading Dickens’s *Nicholas Nickleby* and the *Christmas Stories*, even though the matron has sufficiently bowdlerized them of ‘immoral’ passages (Vogel, 2009).

It can not be ignored that Farnham’s motivation came mostly from a strident support of phrenology, and much of her work with prisoners consisted of gathering phrenological data and reading aloud from such renowned phrenologists as George Combes. Unfortunately, many of Farnham’s denouncers used her phrenological work as the easiest target to excoriate her other, perhaps more valuable, contributions. Luckey was removed from his position in 1846, a highly controversial move on behalf of the

Board of Inspectors, but in 1848 Farnham resigned from her position, and her work in phrenology eventually led to her participation in the popular spiritualist movement. Both she and John Edmonds, her former primary advocate, became leading public speakers in spiritualism (Modern, 2011).

And thus ends the first great library outreach experiment of the nineteenth century, an experiment to treat criminality with the secular moral and emotional lessons of literature and social engagement, and an effort to maintain control without punishment. But Farnham's literacy legacy did influence a major legislative reform in New York state. The massive new law, covering thirty-seven pages, included forty-three provisions for the improvement of New York prisons. Two of them, pertinent to our investigation, are the provision requiring the chaplain to manage the library, and ensure that "no improper books are introduced into the cells of convicts," as well as the provision requiring the appointment of instructors of English education "to those inmates who might benefit from it" (Correctional Association of New York, 2014).

### 1.3 The Classification of All Things

The next few decades preceding and including the American Civil War shaped, to a large degree, the public and professional attitudes towards incarceration. The social sciences began to be treated similarly to the natural sciences (thus the popularity of such pseudo-sciences as phrenology, physiognomy, and eugenics), requiring systematic classifications of knowledge. At this same time, “penologists and criminologists claimed to know the laws that governed criminal behavior,” criminals were classified into severity of crime and appropriate treatment, and penal authorities were confident that a scientific method could solve the problems of all criminal behavior (Vogel, 2009). Yet this was mostly a Yankee optimism, and the effects of the Civil War led the practice of incarceration down two separate paths.

In the Southern states, the emancipation of slaves provided the greatest influence on the Southern prison. Slave Codes were rewritten to apply to free blacks, the Black Codes, for which only black people were criminalized. A black man could be convicted of vagrancy, absence from work, possession of firearms, or insulting gestures. The Thirteenth Amendment had abolished slavery “except as a punishment for crime.” Southern states were quick to create the convict lease system, whereupon black convicts were sentenced to hard labor in chain gangs and leased to private agencies, essentially replicating the slave labor economy. Prison activist Angela Davis speaks eloquently of the parallels between the slavery system and the prison system of the American South in

her book, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* She refers to Mary Ellen Curtin's study of Alabama prisoners in the decades just after the Civil War:

...before the four hundred thousand black slaves in that state were set free, ninety-nine percent of prisoners in Alabama's penitentiaries were white. As a consequence of the shifts provoked by the institution of the Black Codes, within a short period of time, the overwhelming majority of Alabama's convicts were black (Davis, 2003).

More recently, legal scholar Michelle Alexander investigates this phenomenon at length, and further analyzes how the current incarceration system is directly influenced by the Black Codes and attempts to recreate a similar system of racial control. As it is no longer socially acceptable to use race explicitly as a justification for discrimination or exclusion, it remains perfectly legal to discriminate and exclude convicted criminals. By targeting black men through the War on Drugs, Alexander argues that the U.S. criminal justice system maintains a system of racial control despite its public adherence to the principle of colorblindness. Her excellent survey is titled *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010).

It would be decades before southern prisons could be described as anything other than prison work farms. Although many prisons closed their farming operations once agricultural practice became heavily mechanized, some prison farms, such as North Carolina's Dan River Prison Work Farm, remain viable and even profitable today, providing vegetable produce to prison populations throughout the state. But the legacy of penal rehabilitation, and consequently, any literacy intervention, was left primarily to the Northern states throughout the Civil War era.

The optimism for prison reform in the North was strong, and in 1870 the National Prison Congress was formed. They defined the principles of reform that would dominate the prison culture into the next century: rehabilitation over retribution, criminal classification, probation, and education. And education required the provision of well-stocked libraries. The National Prison Congress recognized the need to avail their institutions with the resources to support these aims. The New York Prison Association's report of the 1870 National Prison Congress states, "There is no well ordered plan of either buying or using books, and for want of it, the wise benevolence of the legislature in appropriating money has been and will continue to be shorn of its reformatory power" (Hirsch, 1992).

By 1873 all state prisons in the Northern states had libraries for convict use. Although it is difficult to gain an exact count since documentation was inconsistent, the largest collections were found in New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois, averaging around fifteen hundred books, with most libraries averaging between three hundred and five hundred volumes (Vogel, 2009). While a few of these libraries had budgeted appropriations for book purchases from their institutions, many prison libraries funded book purchases through visitors' fees, a system that persisted into the twentieth century (Sullivan, 1994).

The first official document published specifically for the maintenance of prison libraries came in 1876, again from the New York Prison Association, and coincidentally the same year the American Library Association (ALA) was formed. The document is titled *Catalogue and Rules for Prison Libraries*. The catalogue includes one thousand

books found suitable for prison libraries, and marks the first instance of officially approved reading material. As the catalogue states, these volumes are:

...well adapted to increase the happiness and welfare of the prisoners and to benefit them in after life when released from confinement. The value and influence of every book in this catalogue have been carefully considered, and the titles have been so arranged and lettered that any prison, large or small, any jail or prisoner may make selections from these classified lists according to estimated excellence or the reader's preference (NY Prison Assoc., 1876).

The catalogue then describes an elaborate system of book ratings suggesting their order of excellence and relevance, so that a library restricted to only fifty volumes will contain the fifty "best" volumes from the catalogue. The document states its two main objectives thus:

First. To place within reach of all prisoners the best books for giving useful knowledge of the trades and employments, skill and habits which will help them to earn a livelihood and do well when they are released from prison, as well as to add to their happiness and usefulness while they are detained in prison;...

Secondly. To supply in the volumes of biography, history, travels, explorations, adventure, natural history, poetry, fiction and works of the imagination, special science and duty -- such instruction and influences as are most needed by the prisoners, and which experience has shown to be best adapted to fill the mind with noble aspirations, and not only to inspire substantial hopes and good purposes, but to point out the best ways of realizing them.

A perusal of the catalogue shows that of the one thousand recommended titles, three hundred of them are novels. Although the list is highly shepherded and controlled, it is a major turn, the same work Farnham had attempted fifty years prior, in providing creative works as an acceptable leisurely pastime and inspirational endeavor. This development falls in line with the era's ethos, as this is the time when Dewey develops

his library cataloging system, the ALA takes its first steps in professionalizing library work, the United States Bureau of Education publishes its first report on American public libraries, Carnegie begins funding thousands of libraries across the nation and, as information management is born, the educational value of literature is embraced by a Progressive society. This is also the first evidence of consistent support by a prison authority in addressing the futures of prisoners upon their release. Prison administrators acknowledge that prisoners need vocational training in order to become productive participants in the new Industrial Age.

#### 1.4 Education and the Prison Library

The first few decades of the twentieth century proceeded with tiny steps towards the standardization of prison libraries. ALA published several reports, and in 1930 the American Correctional Association published a prison library manual. In 1931, Austin MacCormick published *The Education of Adult Prisoners*. MacCormick was the assistant director of the newly formed Federal Bureau of Prisons, and founded the committee that later became known as the Correctional Education Association. In his book he states, “The possible values of directed reading are almost limitless, especially in the field of adult education. Reading must be moral and ‘directed’” (Vogel, 2009). MacCormick surveyed almost all of the prisons and reformatories for men and women in the United States in order to assess their educational and vocational programs. In his Preface he states, “The educational work in the penal institutions of the country was found to be so

limited that the writer soon realized that the major part of his task was not to record what was being done, but to formulate a workable program, indicating what might be done with adequate financial support and competent personnel” (MacCormick, 1931). He identified low priority and inadequate financial support as the key reasons for generally weak prison education programs. He proposed a philosophy of education where the inmate was an adult in need of education rather than a criminal in need of reform, a radical concept at the time. He recommended giving first priority to eradicating illiteracy, and encouraged a disassociation with the organization and content of the public school model. He advocated strongly for creating a pro-social prison community through active socialization opportunities such as self-government of inmate community organizations and interpersonal and life skills education.

MacCormick’s authoritative voice and influence on prison education cannot be overstated. Because he was employed and backed by such powerful institutions as the Federal Bureau of Prisons and his research funded by the Carnegie Corporation, his desires for education reform were heard and supported in ways that other reform organizations of the time, such as evangelical groups, Unitarians, or ladies’ clubs, were not. His long and varied career in powerful positions of penal leadership allowed his sentiments to be shared, heard, and acted upon in penal departments across the nation. He served in the US Naval Reserve during WWI as the executive officer of the US Naval Prison. Thomas Mott Osborne, another renowned prison reformer and former warden of Sing Sing (1914-1916), was his senior officer. MacCormick would eventually become commissioner of the New York Department of Corrections, Dean of Criminology at the

University of California Berkeley, executive director of the Osborne Association (a prison reform organization), first editor of the *Journal of Correctional Education*, and, with the publishing of his book *The Death Penalty* in 1964, a major influence in the movement to abolish the death penalty. After he published *The Education of Adult Prisoners*, he went on to focus on Southern prison farms, workhouses, and the convict lease system. So offended was he by the predominance of physical abuse and exploitation of prisoners in the Southern penal system, he made recommendations that were soon adopted by the Texas Prisons, transforming the prison experience -- for a few decades (Austin H. MacCormick Papers, 2014).

When the American Library Association, in a first partnership with the American Prison Association, published their first Prison Library Handbook in 1932, just a year after the publication of *The Education of Adult Prisoners*, ALA chose not to comment on the role of the library in the context of prison education, instead recommending readers go directly to MacCormick's work: "This subject is fully discussed in Chapter X of A. H. MacCormick's *The education of adult prisoners*, copies of which were sent to the heads of all prisons and reformatories. This chapter is commended to the attention of librarians in lieu of a discussion of the subject here." Although ALA declines to elaborate on the educative role of prison libraries, instead focusing on fundamental library management skills for the presumably untrained inmate-clerks that are assumed to be running them, ALA does assert, "It is difficult to overestimate the potential value of the library as an agency of education, both indirect and direct." So difficult, apparently, that they don't try to articulate this value. Interestingly, the 1932 Handbook was edited by Edith Kathleen

Jones, an active ALA member, and noted as being the first full-time librarian employed in a hospital, McLean Psychiatric Hospital in Massachusetts, hired in 1904. She had no experience in working with prison populations, but wrote extensively on medical library management, and may explain this deferment to MacCormick's authority (Perryman, 2006).

It was MacCormick's belief that a prison librarian performs, above the duty of maintaining the functions of a library, the service of stimulating and guiding the readers' interest. This is similar to what a public library's readers' advisor would do, but in the interests of moral and intellectual growth and reform. He states, "With prisoners guidance takes on double significance, for their tastes in most cases start on a relatively low level and it is the obvious task of the prison as an agency of intellectual as well as moral improvement to improve their reading tastes if it can be done" (MacCormick, 1931). He goes on to recommend, as a device for "stimulating" reader interest, the formation of book groups for discussing selected literature, the organization of a "read-a-book-together group," as he calls them. Although he does not elaborate on the potential for read-a-book-together groups to effect therapeutic benefits, he does allow that communal discussion can spur interest and intellectual arousal, and that the educational department and the library should be considered parts of the same general organization.

Trailblazing for its time so early in the twentieth century, MacCormick bravely asserts that prisoners are, generally, most interested in recreational reading, and the prison library need not apologize for that. He affirms, "The present discussion of the library as an educational agency is not intended to belittle its value as a recreational agency...If

prisoners read nothing but fiction the library's place in the prison would be justified. But its aim has not been achieved until an honest attempt has been made to raise reading tastes" (MacCormick, 1931). MacCormick was unwilling to advance a notion that fiction could satisfy any but a recreational value, yet he still acknowledges that recreational reading is a value in itself, and could lead to more substantial intellectual engagement. No penal authority, nor the ALA, was willing to make such a statement until MacCormick said it first.

MacCormick continues to explain the major aims of a prison education system, and includes a passage that reiterates his claim that education must be individualized; no national educational system will satisfy the needs of the masses through only a single approach. He, perhaps unfortunately, uses the following vocabulary: "It (education) must be based on individual diagnosis and prescription, so far as these are possible with available personnel. The prisoner should not go through a mass-treatment process, but should devote the limited time at his disposal to those particular studies which he most needs and wants and is capable of pursuing most effectively" (MacCormick, 1931). MacCormick's comments make good common sense -- every reader learns in their own way through their own self-motivations. A book that is helpful to one intelligent reader may be worthless to another equally intelligent reader, regardless of the quality of the book itself. The danger in MacCormick's words lies in the use of "diagnosis" and "prescription." MacCormick does not belabor medical terminology to describe reader interest, so it is likely not a literal endorsement of a diagnostic approach to readers'

advisory, yet this language will have a very direct influence on the future of prison reading, a program soon to be coined as “bibliotherapy.”

While the ALA’s Prison Library Handbook, published in the subsequent year, does not initially invoke this language, it does revisit MacCormick’s suggestions for encouraging reader interest, including creating reading courses (lists of recommended titles that elaborate a given interest) and “discussion groups.” ALA acknowledges the benefits of these groups as “...a strong educational force netting several advantages. They make for more careful reading; they stimulate reading on new topics; they fix the idea and information gained by reading and make them a man’s own in a way that they never are for the casual, tripping kind of reader who seldom ponders on what he has read” (Jones, 1932). ALA is not quite as generous in allowing for the value of the “casual, tripping kind of reader” as MacCormick, but the ALA’s discussion of book groups as a stimulation of closer reading builds on MacCormick’s assertion of the value of the social aspects of group discussion. ALA also recommends the prison librarian fulfill his obligation as an educational agency by fostering planned and purposeful reading through the creation of reading courses. But the ALA warns, “It should not become a fetish, however, and be pushed to the point where men are induced to try to follow a reading course when they are not genuinely interested or capable of profiting by it” (Jones, 1932). Unbeknownst to ALA in 1932, reading courses, prescriptions, and reading-as-therapy did, indeed, become a fetish for the next generation of prison librarians, as they sought to assimilate their work with the more general rehabilitative aims of the larger institution.

Only because of MacCormick's prestige and dominance in the fields of prison administration and reform was he able to convince the American Prison Association to establish a standing Committee on Institutional Libraries in 1938. The committee worked with a branch of ALA in creating a standardized, professionally administered library program, concomitant with a professional stature of the prison librarian, that was nevertheless ignored by most state prisons for decades. By the time state prisons were pro-actively developing their library service in the 1970's, MacCormick's federal prison library model had collapsed. Meanwhile, state systems became enamored of the pseudo-medical approach to literacy intervention, generally termed bibliotherapy.

### 1.5 The Era of Treatment

America's triumph in WWII, its investment in maths and sciences, and an abrupt professionalization of the social sciences, converged in the American prison environment. Prisoners were now viewed as victims of a social "disease" that could be cured with the proper socialization treatments that would conform them to the requirements of a civil society. Prisoners were caught in a paradox, seen both as enemies of society who had consciously violated the social contract, and also assumed to desire a place in society, but simply through lack of opportunity had not succeeded in claiming that place. A lack of opportunity was blamed as the reason an otherwise sane person would turn to crime, and by providing that opportunity, a prisoner would choose to conform. Never was it

considered that the conformity to established norms was being rejected altogether (Cummins, 1994).

Providing opportunity was a goal that could be achieved quite efficiently through directed programming, and the era of treatment began. In order to define the opportunities needed in each specific case, it was necessary to understand the attitudes and thought processes of each “patient.” Psychoanalysis became a required step in the prisoner classification process, and all branches of prison service were invited to contribute to the attitude analysis and moral rehabilitation of each prisoner. The penitentiary now became the “correctional facility.” In 1944 San Quentin, a California prison that took the lead in modeling this new approach, reinstated the California Indeterminate Sentence Law of 1917, sentencing prisoners for an indefinite time period. It was left to the prisoners to demonstrate through engaged participation and reformed behavior that they were ready to leave. “Programs” were established in education, treatment, therapy, vocational training, and the prison library. Medical doctor C.V. Morrison addressed the Committee on Institution Libraries in 1940 on the subject of book prescriptions, saying, “If bibliotherapy is to be effective, it will require the close cooperation of psychiatrist and trained librarian. Because of the intimate relationship between mental health and social adaptability every branch of the library can be used to aid the inmate in his adjustment” (Morrison, 1940). Programs that focused on group therapy were made available through the psychiatry department, but librarians were expected to supplement this programming with individual support and therapeutic attention. Due to large prison populations, individual psychiatric treatment was too costly

and unrealistic, but the department could manage group therapy, relying on (medically untrained) prison librarians to maintain a “continual intellectual atmosphere” that would encourage behavioral change that the group therapy aimed for (Floch, 1952).

The responsibility of providing bibliotherapy was both an opportunity for trained librarians (most predominantly to be found in federal prisons) to professionalize their work in the context of rehabilitation, and an opportunity to exploit the services of untrained librarians (most predominantly found in state facilities) in work that furthered the institutions’ aims while not requiring an extensive financial investment in medical professionals who would otherwise provide these services. The treatment consisted first of conducting a personal interview with the patient to establish current attitudes, concerns, and disabilities in conforming to civil society. The librarian would establish a general reading level, vocational and avocational interests, attitudes towards reading, and any “unhygienic” mental habits that might surface. The librarian would then create a reading course of titles that were felt to address the moral and emotional needs of the patient. Titles tended to be mostly of a non-fiction, self-help variety, at that time termed “mental hygiene.” Biographies were often employed, as well, as the subjects might be used as role models through a study of upstanding character. Fiction was used more sparingly, for those found in need of a “stimulated imagination,” but it was assumed that most patients “may already be living in a world of fantasy” (Morrison, 1940), and needed no additional encouragement.

Morrison, a doctor himself, likened the practice of prescribing books very directly to prescribing medication. Morrison explains that a pill’s essential ingredient is known as

the active principle and the solution that makes it “palatable” is the vehicle. In the same way, the idea described in a book is the active principle, and the cover or the writing style (or the genre, character, etc.) is the vehicle. Morrison insists that the unbiased rapport that a patient develops with a book is priceless, considering a therapist may more concisely and directly share the same lesson as a book, but the patient’s relationship with that therapist will shade his acceptance of the lesson. Inmates are naturally suspicious of staff authority, Morrison claims, but a book can speak plainly. Morrison quotes an inmate who had this relationship with books: “The man who writes a book has no axe to grind. He has no connection with the government and he can write just what he thinks” (Morrison, 1940).

From the 1940’s through the 1960’s, California’s correctional system led the nation in modeling successful innovations. “California was the model of good correctional management and inmate programming and its practices influenced American corrections for over 30 years,” states researcher Joan Petersilia (Petersilia, 2008). California’s system serves as a model for the implementations and concerns that affected all state systems in the nation, and has also been extensively documented. For these reasons it will serve as a model of contemporary correctional history in this paper.

California’s San Quentin, a leader in the grand experiment of the “corrections” facility, and also known for its unusually extensive library collection, was presided over by Warden Clinton Duffy from 1940-1952. Duffy was widely praised for his innovations and reorganization of the prison structure, but it has been suggested that his public persona was well-groomed; much of his professed dogma has been contradicted in the

record and through witness testimony. For instance, he very publicly denounced the death penalty, but he supervised ninety executions during his twelve-year tenure (Waggoner, 1982). Duffy had taken over San Quentin after a particularly grim period of excessive violence, inhumane punishments, and obscene abuses against prisoners. The previous warden had been forced to resign. Duffy fired the offending prison guards and added psychiatrists, therapists, a librarian, even several surgeons to his payroll. With the help of his colleague, the new California governor Earl Warren, Duffy advertised his prison as a model in rehabilitation and gentle kindness. Dr. Norman Fenton, Duffy's deputy director, described San Quentin thus: "Human kindness pervades the things that are done in attempting to help him (the prisoner) in the prison...With understanding help in an atmosphere of kindness this purpose can best be accomplished" (Mitford, 1973). This kind of reputation was easy to sell to a public that was indignant over the past incidents made public at San Quentin. But it may not have been as rosy as Fenton describes. James Park, a clinical psychologist working in the California prisons at the time, and later an associate warden at San Quentin, describes the place as "a fairly brutal, old-fashioned behind the times system. Duffy...got an awful lot of publicity, (but) people were still being beaten to death under Duffy's regime. He was not the great fucking savior that his own press agent built him up to be" (Cummins, 1994).

Using a framework of clinical treatment, San Quentin offered a contradictory solution to the problem of crime. If criminals were suffering an illness that treatment could cure, than there was no reason to use corporal punishment to maintain discipline, nor was it necessary to exact overlong prison sentences. When a prisoner was "cured,"

they would be released. The staff that decided when a prisoner had been cured, known at San Quentin as the Adult Authority and composed almost exclusively of law enforcement and corrections personnel, evaluated parole annually for any prisoner convicted under the Indeterminate Sentence Law. The Adult Authority leaned heavily on each prisoner's cumulative file to determine parole. These files contained an incredible amount of personal information, from descriptions of the prisoner's crime(s), his current attitudes concerning them, his involvement in rehabilitative and therapeutic programs, misconduct citations, even his library record -- a record of every withdrawal, librarian interview, reading course prescribed, and engagement in bibliotherapy or group therapy reading programs. The parole interview, usually lasting no more than ten minutes, included inquiries regarding program participation, plans for the future, and his religious beliefs.

This process was very susceptible to abuse and exploitation, and could not be regarded as successful. Program directors of various branches of the system became so influential in their contributions to a prisoner's file that they became something akin to custody officers, and prisoners learned to work the system to their benefit, enrolling in every program possible, regardless of their interest or desire for rehabilitation, just to get that gold star in their file. Though the program directors may have been sincere in their efforts to rehabilitate, prisoners need not have been sincere in their participation. Due to the lack of documentation or oversight of the Adult Authority, parole hearings need not sincerely evaluate each prisoner according to their progress, but could deny parole for any reason without explanation. As prison scholar Eric Cummins describes it, "...parole

hearings had the effect of making daily prison life a game” (Cummins, 1994). But there was one employee in Duffy’s San Quentin that took the “game” very seriously.

Herman Spector had been working as librarian of the New York Penitentiary when Duffy recruited him to San Quentin in 1947. Spector turned down the opportunity to be assistant warden, instead accepting the position of senior librarian, where he would be given the freedom to test his theories of bibliotherapy. Spector was young, earnest, and driven to apply his knowledge of criminal justice, psychology, and social work into his plans for library management. He conducted small-group therapy centered on Great Books discussions with therapeutic goals in mind. He created reading courses for inmates and prison staff alike. He kept incredibly detailed files of every prisoner’s reading record, preferences, and needs. By 1955 he had developed a reputation as the foremost expert on prison librarianship, perhaps owing in part to Duffy’s public relations success. Prison libraries and their use of bibliotherapy were frequently becoming the featured topics of library journals, and Spector’s conviction that the prison library should be at the center of rehabilitative strategy was getting support and sympathy from the outside public and library professionals.

However, the prison administration and custody staff were not so easily convinced. The idea that hardened criminals could be reformed by reading books was ridiculous to them, especially as the more redeemable criminals were now being sent to another institution, the California Institution for Men at Chino, and the worst were staying at Folsom or San Quentin. Nonetheless, the San Quentin administration complied with Spector’s requests to manage detailed oversight of prisoners’ access to information,

censoring all incoming and outgoing mail, as well as newspapers, magazines, and books from the outside. There was yet no television access for prisoners, but they did have radio, which was limited to two institutional channels. Prisoners could communicate only with the ten people on their “approved correspondence list.” Although the prison had an assistant warden who was meant to be responsible for censorship, except for personal mail, Spector assumed the role himself. He defines his censorship policy: “Those which emphasize morbid or antisocial attitudes, behavior, or disrespect for religion or government or other undesirable materials are not purchased” (Spector, 1957).

In the hopes that he could measure the success of his bibliotherapy endeavors in reforming prisoners, Spector was particularly fanatical about gathering statistics on what was being read in his prison, although he never did produce a study to confirm it. He kept meticulous files on each prisoner, including which administrative unit they resided in, aiming to track what type of criminal benefited most from what kind of reading material. In 1956 he reported that prisoners were reading at the average rate of ninety-eight books per year. In 1957 he reported that almost 90% of San Quentin prisoners were using the library, while only 18% of the free public were using lending libraries (Cummins, 1994). In 1960, he noticed that prisoners’ interest in non-fiction showed a marked rise. While in the late 1940’s non-fiction comprised only 16% of library circulation, by 1960 non-fiction circulation reached 30%. Spector did not speculate on this change in prisoner reading choices, but it signaled a change to come in the reading practice of prisoners in the 1960’s and ’70’s.

Through his role as censor, Spector recognized another change. He required oversight of all inmate writing, including manuscripts that prisoners intended to publish. In 1947, Spector had received 395 manuscripts for his perusal. By 1961, he received 1,989, and that number stayed consistent throughout Spector's tenure (1967), even though the prison population stayed around 5000 through these years. Again, Spector does not speculate on the significance of this rise in prisoner-authored texts (Cummins, 1994).

One particular prisoner-author is worth noting. Malcolm Braly first served time in San Quentin in 1948. By the time he was forty he had served a combined seventeen years in prison for burglary, at Nevada State Prison, San Quentin, and Folsom (Franklin, 1989). It was through Spector's reign that he first began to write, eventually publishing three novels behind bars, followed by two more, and an autobiography, prior to his death. His novel *On the Yard*, published in 1967, has become a classic of prison literature. In his autobiography, *False Starts*, Braly describes his impression of Spector: "...a strange obsessive man, who was a filing freak...Everything, every scrap of paper that passed through the library, was copied and filed. When he spoke to you on interview he made notes of the meeting and these notes were filed" (Braly, 1976).

In his autobiography, Braly explains how he and other prisoners learned to "play the game" of rehabilitation at San Quentin. "...(W)e quickly learned we were expected to view this journey through prison as a quest, and the object of our quest was to discover our problem." "The one thing we were truly seeking here was not an understanding of our problem, but the appearance of the search" (Braly, p.157, p. 246). Braly duly played the

game with Spector, gaining his friendship and support as an engaged reader/writer, while hiding the true subject of his writing (prison life and a condemnation of the system, ideas that would have been censored if Spector were aware of them). Under Spector's watch Braly did win clearance to submit his first manuscript, and its publication was celebrated as a Spector success story. Braly used his advance to purchase a typewriter through the prison canteen. Thus his career began.

Spector had dedicated so much of his career to gathering data to support his bibliotherapy ideals, but he never did get around to analyzing them. After he retired, all the files of reading and writing -- three decades of data -- were unceremoniously discarded. It appears that the prison administration had been humoring his whims, as his dedication to encouraging literate endeavors did help maintain a level of security and calm in the units, but there was little faith in the reformative benefits of bibliotherapy, at least within the administration. But libraries on the outside were infused with Spector's enthusiasm, and Spector's brand of bibliotherapy was embraced by social workers, public and school librarians, mental health practitioners, and group therapists serving all varieties of populations. Bibliotherapy was not the sole brainchild of corrections institutions, but its performance as a main pillar of educational rehabilitation was key in bringing the concept to rehabilitation projects for various populations. The trend would remain popular through the 1980's, and its influence, although somewhat reframed, is still strong in psychiatric practice.

## 1.6 The Right to Read

As of the 1950's or so, the story of prison libraries can be told from three very startlingly different perspectives. The reason for this is complicated and layered with influences from the culture of the time, the contradictory aims of various organizations and movements, and the waxing and waning confidence of the library profession, especially in appealing to the overarching interests of the state. The state prison authorities probably tell the least compelling narrative about the advantages of educational reform, and in fact the coming decades would introduce a steady tide of new legislation that improved the prisoner's access to information and crimped the state's ability to remand with impunity.

The security officers at San Quentin tended to roll their eyes in response to Spector's strange brand of bibliotherapeutic method, but they did support his model of strict print censorship. As Spector's encouragement of reading and writing increased, so did security's anxieties about this flow of information. One prison educator at the time recalls that even his beard was searched as he entered the prison, and he was confident that his classroom was "bugged" (Cummins, 1994). Although San Quentin officials denied it to the public and the press, throughout the 1950's and 60's, prisoner mail, both incoming and outgoing, was censored, especially letters to lawyers and government officials. A guard admitted in 1961 that "...all those letters are censored, even those to attorneys, and any complaints about food or conditions or parole reports are deleted" (Cummins, 1994).

If San Quentin's security didn't hear Spector's clarion call for the rehabilitative power of literature, the prisoners did. As noted earlier, many prisoners viewed bibliotherapy and its accessory programs as a "game," but the message of the power of literacy was not lost on them. The greater emphasis on education in the prison gave many the opportunity to become functionally literate, to study and, in some cases, pursue higher degrees, and to write. Spector had noted that in 1960, non-fiction titles amounted to 30% of his library circulation, double the percentage from when he first began recording the statistics, in the late 1940's. Although Spector provided an obstacle course of entry, he invited prisoners to write censor-approved manuscripts for publication, and the 1960's saw an enormous rise in submissions. Braly was not the only prisoner at San Quentin to achieve publication of his manuscripts behind bars. One particular prisoner-author, Caryl Chessman, sentenced to San Quentin's Death Row in 1948, forced a change in how San Quentin, and consequently, all state facilities in the nation, managed the rights of prisoners to read and write.

Chessman was penniless at the time of his sentencing, and access to library materials was difficult, as Spector did not offer more than a weekly book delivery from a limited menu to the inmates of Death Row. He did not see the benefit of rehabilitating those about to die. Law books were virtually unavailable. A clerical crisis had taken place during Chessman's trial -- the court reporter who had typed Chessman's trial transcript had died, and the shorthand transcript, hundreds of pages, was nearly indecipherable. Chessman could not afford an attorney, so he took it upon himself to educate himself in law and in writing legal writs, opposing the haphazard transcription that was pieced

together by the court. Over time Chessman amassed his own legal library, and was able to win a stay of execution. He built a reputation as a successful jailhouse lawyer, soon writing writs for other Death Row inmates. He was working full-time at no pay, providing legal assistance to his peers and defending his own case, flooding the courts with writs, thereby greatly annoying the prison administrators. Warden Teets recommended that maybe he should put his writing to other uses. Chessman then announced he wished to write his autobiography, and a private cell, typewriter, and desk were provided for him on Death Row. It was decided that allowing Chessman to write his autobiography would have “great therapeutic value” (Cummins, 1994). He was allowed to write from 8am to 10pm every day, and Chessman took full advantage of the time.

In this cell, in 1954, Chessman wrote *Cell 2455 Death Row*. Spector read it and disliked it immediately, and would have denied its submission for publication, but a copy also found its way to Warden Teets and then the California Director of Corrections, Richard McGee, and they approved it. The manuscript was immediately picked up for publication and rushed to the presses to be available before Chessman’s execution date. The book was an immediate success, earning Chessman enormous royalties and building himself a huge following. He obtained another stay, and dedicated himself to writing, earning enough money to afford a team of lawyers to defend his life.

Chessman achieved fourteen successful stays of execution, and wrote four additional books while on Death Row. He had built up fans around the world, and the press took great notice of Chessman’s legal triumphs. By this time San Quentin regretted the freedoms they had afforded him, and since then denied any prisoner the right to

compose their own works for publication. Nonetheless, Chessman (and many others) found ways to smuggle their work out, going to great lengths to camouflage their writing under guard.

Chessman's fifteenth appeal was denied in February of 1960. With the announcement of his execution, thousands of people worldwide petitioned for his life. A vigil of over seven hundred people took place outside the prison doors the night before his execution. Petitions came in from all strata of society, including celebrities Marlon Brando, Shirley MacLaine, Brigitte Bardot, and government leaders, including a Mexican congresswoman, Belgium's Queen Mother, and finally even Eisenhower's presidential administration. Thirteen hundred signatures came in from a petition from UC Berkeley. To no avail, the execution by gas chamber went forward on February 19, 1960.

Chessman's publications contributed to the public's growing awareness for the plight of the incarcerated. The world was primed for a radical movement, not only for prisoner rights, but the rights of blacks and other ethnic minorities, women, and those advocating resistance to the Vietnam War, nuclear weapons, and apartheid. 1960 is the year Martin Luther King, Jr. was arrested in the lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina. PEN International (Poets, Essayists, Novelists), an organization of literary artists who support freedom of expression, established its Writers in Prison Committee. The Black Panther movement was just forming, with strong representation in America's prisons. Throughout the decade, prisoners would continue to publish, despite harsher and harsher restrictions from prison authorities. Eldridge Cleaver, Bobby Seale, George Jackson, and Huey Newton, all published authors who served time at San

Quentin, were founding members of the Black Panther party. In 1965, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* was published shortly after his assassination, probably the most popular and influential American prisoner writing ever published. (Malcolm X credited Norfolk Prison Colony in Massachusetts for his self-education.) The public was finally paying attention to what was happening behind the prison gates, and, through reading a constant stream of prisoner-authored texts, were more informed than ever about prison abuses that epitomized the racial and civil inequalities of the social system as seen on the street.

As the public built its own resistance movement in civil rights reform, the American Library Association began to focus its attention on prisoners, as well. Prisoners' civil rights litigation began in earnest, and in 1966 Congress established the Title IVA to the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA), providing federal funding for institutional libraries. Although the initial funding did not directly make revolutionary improvements, it did raise the consciousness of state library agencies, as they were responsible for the financial distribution, and they began to lobby for prison library service (Vogel, 2009). Being able to offer federal funding allowed state library agencies to negotiate with prison authorities, altering the power structure extant since the first prisons in the nation. Libraries advocated for the need for institutional library service, and some correctional facilities began to hire trained librarians to manage their libraries, funded by federal monies. Prison libraries, for the first time, became networked with public libraries and other resources around the state. Prison library professionalization began. Unfortunately, the timing was terrible, as the momentum of the rehabilitation era was just ending.

As the political activism of extending rights to prisoners heated up, the institutions themselves returned, out of panic, to a system of lock-down and retribution. Critics of the system were claiming that rehabilitation was a failure. The library program, which had been a centerpiece of rehabilitation, became more and more marginal as classroom instruction proved easier to facilitate and measure. Researcher Marjorie LeDonne conducted a nationwide survey of prison libraries in 1972, and found “...few new library materials were added and staff...was drawn from unqualified personnel; the position of librarian was seldom filled by direct recruitment, but most often served as a place to transfer incompetent teachers” (LeDonne, 1972). The institution held dichotomous views of the purpose of incarceration that would confuse the issue for decades: prison authority supported simple punitive punishment, while treatment personnel lobbied for the civil rights of prisoners through education and rehabilitation. Librarians coming into the profession in the 1960’s and 70’s were of a mind to base the prison library on the public library model, to be user-centered, to provide for intellectual freedom, to protect the right of access to information. Spector’s era of treatment had advocated that prisoners *should* read; the civil rights era demanded that prisoners *have the right* to read.

Issues of prisoner rights continued to be brought to federal courts, and the system was forced to defend its policies and procedures. In 1977, the Bounds vs. Smith case forced state prisons to provide “meaningful access to the courts through people trained in the law or through law library collections” (Bounds vs. Smith, 1977). Law books that had been contraband as recently as the 1950’s were now required. Although this did mean that prisoners’ access to legal information was legitimized, the rest of the prison library

was neglected, both financially and dogmatically. The library beyond legal reference became a dumping ground of dog-eared, sporadically donated titles, frequently managed by inmate-clerks, and lacking any collection-management coherence. Few prison libraries survived this era intact, despite the advocacy of library outreach from the outside. Most were sustained only because they were still receiving funding from the LSCA. Vogel observes, “Too often the general prison library program was overshadowed, neglected, or terminated due to the law library mandate” (Vogel, 2009).

1982 saw the breakdown of partnership between the American Library Association (ALA) and the American Corrections Association (ACA - formerly known as the American Prisons Association), a breakdown indicative of the split between the aims of the library and the aims of the correctional institution. The associations had partnered since 1932 with the publication of the first *Prison Library Handbook*. Now, ALA supported its last<sup>3</sup> legislative action for prison libraries by adopting a “Resolution on Prisoners’ Right to Read.” The document advocates for serving the needs of a culturally diverse population, protecting intellectual freedoms, and curtailing censorship in all but specific instances of threats to security. The resolution is a highly admirable definition of standards, but is wholly unenforceable as law.

While the ALA was drafting this resolution, the ACA no longer defined itself as an organization of reform, and began to distance itself from the standards set by the ALA. Its own standards towards library administration were aimed at protecting prison

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<sup>3</sup> The resolution was updated in 2010, but the ALA has been conspicuously silent in advocating for the intellectual freedoms of the incarcerated in any additional substantial legislation since 1982. The updated resolution includes the recommendation that the incarcerated should have access to the internet.

administrators from lawsuits. Prison librarians, caught in the crossfire, abandoned ambitions of providing treatment and creating behavioral change, just as the corrections administration had, and instead began solely providing resources to meet the articulated interests of their users. This shift from prescribed reading to patron-driven selections permitted them continued support from their library colleagues.

This same time period saw the end of indeterminate sentencing, a consequence of the doubt that effective rehabilitation prepared prisoners to return to society safely. Determinate sentencing slowly returned to every state and federal prison, gaining momentum with the War on Drugs in the 1980's and the "three-strikes" laws of the 1990's. The United States now leads the world in incarceration rates, incarcerating 743 individuals per 100,000 population. As of 2009, 2.9% of the American resident population is under correctional supervision (prison, jail, probation, parole) (BJS, 2014). Incarceration rates doubled from the 1980's to the 1990's, and increased 500% in the period between 1970 and 1999. Incarceration rates in 2007 were five-and-a-half times higher than they were during the Great Depression of the 1930's. Researchers are fond of speculating the causes and contributors to this explosion of incarceration. It is, however, beyond the focus of this paper to expand on such beyond acknowledging that the contemporary correctional institution is in the midst of another epoch as yet to be entirely defined.

Some liberal-leaning historians claim that we are several decades into what has been coined the "penal-harm movement," an era rooted in the retributive model, where incarceration is meant to be painful and the measure of punishment is long. This

philosophy undergirds the “tough on crime” attitudes of the early 1980’s, implying that the more arduous the prison experience, the more that rational people will choose not to commit crime. This same era is referred to by more conservative historians as the “balanced model,” implying that rehabilitative efforts were mitigated in favor of additional reliance on retribution, incapacitation, and expansion of prison industries, providing a “balance” of correctional goals. Unicor, the government-owned corporation that maintains prison industry in federal prisons, promotes its work as offering valuable vocational skills training to its federal inmates while providing the government with needed manufactured products at no cost to the taxpayer. Critics view this program, which was launched in the early 1930’s, as a federal attempt to legitimize the contract-lease system of the prison farms and chain gangs, employing inmates to do menial, mostly unskilled factory labor at very low cost. Research historians Rusche and Kirchheimer propose a “severity hypothesis,” claiming that punishment becomes more severe when there is a surplus of labor, and more lenient when labor is scarce (Gardner, 1987). This circumstance can be observed in American prisons during WWII, where prison industries employed around three thousand federal inmates to manufacture many government products for the war effort. The 1940’s were a relatively peaceful decade in the history of American incarceration. Today, with a greater surplus than ever of available labor, thirty-seven states have labor contracts with private corporations, above and beyond government sponsored Unicor, and the reigning philosophy of incarceration today centers on punishment.

In addition to greater incarcerated populations, the 1980's and 90's also saw enormous construction of additional correctional facilities. Angela Davis observes the prison expansion in the state of California: "In all, between 1852 and 1955, nine prisons were constructed in California...Nine prisons...were opened between 1984 and 1989...And during the 1990's, twelve new prisons were opened" (Davis, 2003). As of 2014, California has thirty-three state prison facilities. In addition, it places around 9000 prisoners in private facilities out-of-state to tackle overcrowding, and contracts with two more private prisons located within the state.

The San Francisco Chronicle reported in 2002:

Before the mid-1970's, most sentences were indeterminate, meaning that most inmates could get off much earlier than their original sentence if they completed vocational or academic classes in addition to good behavior. The state replaced that system with one lacking an incentive for inmates to take classes or get counseling to help them prepare for life outside prison. Now, virtually everyone released from prison spends three years on parole. Most - about 71 percent - end up back in prison within 18 months - the nation's highest recidivism rate and nearly double the average of all other states (quoted in Kowal, 2011).

California's recidivism rates jumped from 10% in 1977 to 77% in 2009, in line with the systematic funding cuts on rehabilitation programming in the early 1980's. Although the incarceration rate in California has actually declined slightly over the last ten years, the three-strikes laws, which come with determinate sentencing of very lengthy duration, account for almost twenty-five percent of the prison population. California currently imprisons around 160,000 individuals, more than any other state in the country (BJS, 2014).

California's overcrowding problem has currently come to a head. In 2011, the Supreme Court judged the extreme overcrowding as a violation of prisoners' constitutional rights against cruel and inhumane punishment, contributing to disease and mental health infractions. Governor Jerry Brown was originally given a deadline of April 2014 to reduce prison populations to 137.5% above capacity, down from the current range of 144% averaged across facilities, while some operate at up to 200% over designed capacity. However, the state lobbied for additional time, and the deadline has been extended to February 2016. If the deadline had not been extended, Brown intended to spend about seventy million dollars to house inmates out-of-state for the next two years. Due to the extension, Brown now proposes contributing eighty-one million dollars over the next year to provide rehabilitation programs intended to lower recidivism and decrease prison populations over time. Those rehabilitation programs are vaguely defined as including mental health, substance abuse, and reentry. Brown defends his claim, stating, "The state now has the time and resources necessary to help inmates become productive members of society and make our communities safer" (Lovett, 2014).

Introducing rehabilitation programming now seems to be too little, too late, and multiple questions arise in considering Brown's plans for a solution to overcrowding. Why weren't strategies of rehabilitation designed long before overcrowding reached 144%? Michael Bien, lead lawyer representing around 33,000 inmates pressing for adequate mental health care, replies, "There is no justification for the delay. All of the things they are talking about doing now, they could have done years ago" (St. John, 2014). Is two years of as-yet ill-defined programming, hastily installed, going to

rehabilitate 20% of prisoners enough to return them to society safely? In fact, at the time of this writing, nearly two months have passed since Brown won his two-year deferral, but there is yet no media coverage concerning his plans for that additional rehabilitation programming he has promised. Part of Brown's compromise with the Supreme Court includes expanding parole for medically incapacitated prisoners, prisoners aged sixty or older who have served at least twenty-five years, and prisoners serving second-strike felonies for non-violent crimes (St. John, 2014). These classifications generally characterize low-risk, but only when the system is taxed with overcrowding to such a degree that incarceration is viewed as cruel and unusual punishment are low-risk offenders granted opportunities for expanded parole. It implies that low-risk offenders are more dangerous to society when there are fewer incarcerated individuals on the inside. Is danger relative? How will they define a rehabilitated prisoner? Meanwhile, prisoners will continue to live in overcrowded conditions for two more years. Critics such as Sherry Bebitch Jeffe, a senior fellow at Sol Price School of Public Policy at USC, also wonder if Brown hasn't extended the deadline in order to postpone returning prisoners to society before his re-election campaign this year. Jeffe asks, "How is a Republican going to hit on a politician who wants to keep these guys in jail a little longer?" (Lovett, 2014). Another critic, journalist Tim Kowal, blames the prisoner guard unions, who are guaranteed more jobs when there are more prisoners, with contributing to overpopulation trends to support their self-interest (Kowal, 2011).

Regardless of the best interests of state prisoners, prison governance is fraught with political maneuvering. Following Governor Jerry Brown's saga with the Supreme

Court clearly illustrates how issues of prisoner rights quickly become politicized. Thousands of prisoners suffer communicable diseases and debilitating environments while Brown plans his re-election campaign. As long as the aims of incarceration are entangled with federal budgeting, elected officials, and the public vote, discovering solutions to issues such as overcrowding will be a challenge. Political maneuvering directly buttresses the impasse of incapacitation vs. rehabilitation.

There is a burgeoning movement to abolish the prison system altogether. Such is the premise of Angela Davis's *Are Prisons Obsolete?* She is a co-founder of a grassroots movement called Critical Resistance, not surprisingly, located in Oakland, California. Begun in 1997, the organization aims to put a halt to California's prison-building boom, to support coalition-building, facilitate education within prisons, and develop resistance leadership through academic and public communities. They articulate their mission "... (T)o build an international movement to end the Prison Industrial Complex by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe. We believe that basic necessities such as food, shelter, and freedom are what really make our communities secure" ([criticalresistance.org](http://criticalresistance.org)). The organization argues that they do not aim to "fix" a broken system, since the system is doing exactly what it was designed to do -- contain, control, and kill those people representing the greatest threat to state power. They aim to approach prison abolishment through building infrastructure across communities, addressing issues like homelessness, the prison-to-school pipeline, the acceptance of queer communities, environmental issues, and government welfare programs.

Critical Resistance is just one example of the many organizations that recognize the need to address weaknesses in the American criminal justice system. Regardless of political allegiances, spiritual beliefs, or life experiences, it is generally accepted across the lines of political identification that the system is deeply flawed. California is only the first of what could just as easily be any state to experience the effects of critical oversentencing and the failures of the system to affect genuine rehabilitation. It is time to evaluate the record of American incarceration and ask ourselves, what do we expect a prison to do with criminals? Are we to punish them? To what end? Are we to educate them? To what end? Are we to simply hide them away from society? To what end? Most prisoners return to society. Many of those go right back. To what end?

CHAPTER 2:  
WHAT CAN LITERACY DO?: THE IMPLICATIONS OF HISTORICAL LITERARY  
METHODS ON CURRENT CORRECTIONS PRACTICE

2.1 Reform Through Evangelical and Moral Literature

Two hundred and fifty years ago, the reading of a bible verse was enough to save a prisoner from the gallows. Faith in God (or its appearance) was proof that one's soul was salvageable. Religious belief still plays a major role in today's prisons. Religious groups comprise the majority of outreach and volunteer programs, and every state prison is required to make allowances for religious observance. Some prisoners find or develop their faith behind bars, and some achieve a level of rehabilitation that genuinely turns them away indefinitely from criminal behavior. Facilitating literacy education for the purpose of religious study might benefit some, but the choice to practice religious beliefs must come from the seeker, not the jailer. Religious outreach, by virtue of our Constitution, cannot be a required component of rehabilitation, but rather a peripheral and optional service provider in our criminal justice system.

What happens when the freedom to read is limited only to the texts sanctioned by the prison authorities? We can ask this question broadly today when we consider what books are "appropriate" for a prison population, by considering the consequences of an era where the Bible was the only "appropriate" literature on offer. Although the following particular reader was incarcerated in New Prison, Clerkwel, England, in 1837, his

circumstances were similar to Americans incarcerated in institutions such as Eastern State Penitentiary. He remarks,

I attempted to read in the afternoon a chapter in the Bible to the rest, but it was so irksome that I was obliged to discontinue it. Not one in twenty ever takes up the Bible to look at, except to ridicule it. Yesterday a man took up the Bible, and was picking out and reading verses, to excite ridicule: there are not three in the ward who ever take up the Bible to read. Ordinary books, although of a moral kind, are not allowed, which I think is a pity (Second Report of the Prison Inspectors, 1837).

The late 1800's introduced the idea that reading morally-upright literature might help the reader assimilate to an upright culture through exposure. If only a reader could examine the motions and emotions of a kind, gentle, industrious, thoughtful, and law-abiding character, the experience would convey a lesson through example. For a few, perhaps, this method was successful. Yet again, the reader must seek the rehabilitative lesson. The book cannot reform any more actively than the jailer can by offering a library.

Nor can the jailer assume that the reading of sanctioned, morally-upright literature will draw appeal for those reasons and those reasons alone. Every reader seeks their own connections and makes their own inferences, regardless of the guidance or desired outcomes of authority. Consider this observation, related by Stuart Wood, a British prisoner and author of *Shades of the Prison House*, incarcerated during the first decades of the twentieth century:

At Wormwood Scrubs I lent a work on Henry VII to a jewel-thief. When he returned it he remarked that he had enjoyed it very much and that, if I had another similar book, he would like to read it. As he did not strike me as being the type of man to take so keen an interest in history as his praise of the book seemed to imply, I

asked him what aspects of Henry VII had aroused his interest. He replied that it was Henry's *penchant* for women that had intrigued him...this point of view is very general among the inmates of our jails. They put down for any book which may, by means of its sexual interest, titillate their morbid tendencies to satyriasis (Wood, 1932).

Prison reading scholar Megan Sweeney makes a similar observance in her work with female prisoners. In her discussion of female prisoner/reader interest in urban fiction, she notes that several of the prison librarians she met with were uninterested in including this genre in their collections. One unidentified prison librarian was quoted as saying, "I try to say there is more to life than urban books or true crime" (Sweeney, 2010). Clearly, this librarian is concerned with widening the imaginative scope of her readers. While her intentions are noble, she is not acknowledging the perspective of her readers, many of whom are inexperienced in finding an identification with characters, plot, or setting within a text. One prisoner/reader, identified as Wendy, refers to her recent reading of an urban fiction title, "This book, it gives me goosebumps how real it is!...I was Amen-ing at all this stuff going on because...there's a lot of things in this book that I know" (Sweeney). Her comment is enthusiastic, implying that reading about things "that I know" is an unusual and thrilling experience for her. The prison librarian may be discouraged that this reader's mind is not enlarging to appreciate "great" literature, when she should be celebrating the fact that this reader is finding meaning and relevance in a text, perhaps for the first time. This reader is just beginning her journey as a book lover, and there is no reason to rush ahead of her interest.

## 2.2 Educational Programming and the GED

The 1930's contributed perhaps the most successful literacy intervention the criminal justice system has known. The idea that education -- including literacy, vocational training, literature appreciation, social skills, and higher education -- might improve the quality of life for prisoners both while inside the prison and upon release, was both self-evident and revolutionary. The influence of this contribution is still evident in prisons today, but the benefits have been obscured. While today's prisoners do technically have access to higher education, as of 1994, the incarcerated are not eligible for Pell Grants, government loans that defray the cost of college tuition. Many were able to access degrees through correspondence courses in the mail, but most colleges and universities that offer this option have now gone digital, and internet access is required to download materials. As of 2009, only four state corrections facilities nationwide allow inmate internet access, and those under very strict supervision with limited access ("Computer use for/by inmates", 2009).

Today, when prison authorities refer to "education," what they are really referring to is the GED high school equivalency program. In 1982, the Federal Bureau of Prisons established its first mandatory literacy program for federal prisoners. A sixth grade literacy standard was established with a mandatory program enrollment period of ninety days. In 1986 the literacy standard was raised to eighth grade. In 1991, a high school diploma or GED (General Educational Development) certificate became the standard, with a one hundred twenty day enrollment period. In addition, a GED was required for

inmate employees to gain promotion in prison industry employment. Most state correctional facilities have complied with this standard, as well. In 2012, GED became a for-profit corporation, charging fees to test-takers (including state departments of correction), and discontinuing paper exams. Because the fees, cumulatively, were extraordinary, and corrections facilities are not equipped to provide the testing online, many states, including Iowa, moved to another equivalency test provider, HiSET, with lower fees and administered in paper. Iowa transitioned January 1, 2014.

It is very difficult to measure the impact that high school equivalency test training has had on lowering recidivism. Several studies, all conducted in the 1980's and 1990's, provide inconclusive evidence that literacy reduces recidivism. A Federal Bureau of Prisons analysis in 1994, studying data from 1987, concludes that "the more educational programs successfully completed for each six months confined, the lower the recidivism rate" (Harer, 1994). The analysis continues,

While there presently are few formal programs explicitly aimed at 'rehabilitating' the criminal offender, there are various operational practices and programs that do attempt to 'normalize' life in prison, such as education and social furloughs, and are meant to diminish or overcome the potentially negative effects of imprisonment (Harer, 1994).

Harer goes on to explain that, through his intense study of the data of 1987, the strongest support for educational programming comes from its normalizing effects on the prison population. The concept of the normalizing institution comes from Michel Foucault, in his book *Discipline and Punish*, published in 1975. Foucault describes the modern disciplinary system that, for the purposes of reform, imposes standards of normality and deviance. Of all social institutions, including hospitals, military services,

businesses, and schools, the prison offers the most concentrated power structure by imposing standards of normal and expected behavior. These institutions induce conformity through methods of surveillance, examination, and classification. Harer more optimistically characterizes normalization as the opportunity to counter the effects of prisonization -- a process by which prisoners become alienated from the rules of the staff, the institution, and the larger society, and create a subculture with its own rules and norms. Harer states, "Several criminologists link the inmates' alienation from institution rules and staff to poor communication between staff and inmates, long stretches of nonproductive activity, limited contact with community and family, arbitrary rules, and capricious rule enforcement" (Harer, 1994). He argues that educational programming such as literacy training is one way to combat the effects of prisonization, because it offers an opportunity for staff and inmates to communicate on issues besides the facts of imprisonment. Also, a shared goal of achieving a literacy and educational standard creates productive activity, and allow for inmates to acquire law-abiding habits and norms. But it is this Foucauldian view of the power/knowledge structure of the school for which critics of the prison industrial complex accuse this normalization process as a form of exploitation. Adult prisoners who cannot read at an eighth grade standard have been failed by or rejected the normalization process of the school, and, if the same structure is in place in the prison, can expect to fail or reject again. Replicating the classroom structure within the prison may not be an effective solution in and of itself. Again we are faced with the same phenomenon confronted in previous literacy interventions: if a prisoner (student) does not wish to conform to the norms of the prison (classroom)

culture, and if the cultural benefits of literacy, pro-social engagement, and academic achievement are not valued, how is rehabilitation to be achieved? The value of literacy must be demonstrated outside the classroom walls. Pro-social engagement must be available through social practice that is relevant to the participants. The benefits of academic achievement must be visible through direct, rewarding experience. How do we appeal to the overt needs of the student while simultaneously serving the needs of the disciplinary institution? This is yet another facet of the impasse American incarceration now faces. Educating prisoners includes the fostering of agency and self-reliance, skills that conflict with a regimen of incapacitation. Could systematic, personalized diagnoses, created in a clinic as opposed to a classroom, provide an opportunity to broach prisonization issues through individual attention, rather than the standardized lecture, textbook, and examination? Perhaps this was a question Herman Spector considered as he designed his bibliotherapy programs.

### 2.3 Bibliotherapy as a Medical Tool

As we have seen, the 1950's and 1960's saw the emergence of bibliotherapy as a tool for teaching literacy, while also supporting the psychiatric goals of providing therapy and "mental hygiene." Because of its formulaic and prescriptive nature, bibliotherapy can more easily be measured and controlled than generalized reading encouragement, and extends the goals of rehabilitation concretely into the domain of the prison library. It may

also be construed as an avenue of access to those who have rejected the standard classroom model of education.

An article published recently in *The Journal of Poetry Therapy* attempts to provide a thorough review of the historical perspective of bibliotherapy in the United States. From 1900-1958, one study found that 601 articles had been published concerning bibliotherapy. Another study, examining the years 1970-1975, discovered 131 articles published. In neither of these studies, nor in McCulliss' article, is there any mention of Herman Spector or bibliotherapy as it is used in prisons or other detention facilities. A study from 1998, studying the years 1993 to 1997, credits the authors of bibliotherapy articles as belonging to four main groups: psychiatrists (56%), librarians (20%) nurses (11%), social workers (10%) (McCulliss, 2012). Although there is no further delineation of the types of librarians counted in the study, McCulliss' review places bibliotherapy squarely within the domain of hospitals and their patient libraries. The practice is described as a cooperation between the medical practitioner and the librarian in providing guidance to the patient. According to McCulliss, three types of bibliotherapy are prominent. *Clinical bibliotherapy* utilizes imaginative literature (fiction, poetry, biography, etc) to encourage insight and behavioral changes in patients. *Developmental bibliotherapy* focuses on didactic self-help texts that support healthy patients in maintaining emotional and mental well-being. *Client-developed bibliotherapy*, a more recent adaptation, provides creative opportunities for readers to imagine alternative endings, role-play characters, and empathize as imaginative inhabitants of a text (McCulliss, 2012). While it may seem difficult to imagine how client-developed

bibliotherapy is different from any good high school English classroom, it is important to remember that all three practices are staged in a therapeutic context, for the purposes of healing, and only incidentally for learning. Bibliotherapy is a tool for healing mood disorders, primarily by virtue of identifying with uplifting or inspirational content. While various exercises can be employed to affect that identification, the cure is found in the content of the reading, and not in the act of reading itself.

## 2.4 Bibliotherapy as Self-Help

The 1999 publication of *Reading to Heal: How to Use Bibliotherapy to Improve Your Life*, by Jacqueline Stanley, is one of many books in the 1980's and 1990's representing a blending of an explosion in self-help literature and a recycling of previous experiments in literary practice. Stanley encourages her readers to "treat themselves" by developing a reading plan that focuses on personal issues of concern, from dealing with physical health issues, to dysfunctional families, to feelings of depression or loneliness -- there is no limit to the ailments prescriptive reading can address. Stanley implies that an identification with a character or narrator's voice may, among other benefits, "reinforce feelings of normality;" help a reader assess their values, attitudes, and behavior; create an awareness of similarities in others; expand focus beyond one's self; overcome resistance to change; vicariously experience the lives of others; and connect or reconnect with the larger community. These are all benefits that sentimentalists and reader-response theorists have been recognizing for centuries (Hume, 1751; Nussbaum, 1990; Rosenblatt,

1995), and many book lovers have surmised on their own. But what is new here is that these benefits of reading are being characterized as the aims, results, and triumphs of a science called bibliotherapy. Stanley (and many others) have co-opted the life-work of Spector and his colleagues' philosophy, that guided reading can encourage positive growth, but in its 1990's interpretation, the reader can prescribe one's own cure.

Stanley's short dust-jacket biography explains that she is a lawyer, author of several books "on legal topics," but in the context of this work, she is a layperson, a passionate book-reader, and that is authority enough to describe a cure.

Professionalization is no more necessary in diagnosing the ailment as it is in curing it.

The 1990's saw a flourishing of self-help titles, both by professionals in their fields, and by self-proclaimed "experts." Between 1972 and 2000, the number of self-help titles on bookstore shelves increased from 1.1 percent to 2.4 percent of all titles published (McGee, 2005). Several factors conspired to push self-help titles into bestseller status.

Group therapy gained popularity as a treatment method for mood disorders. Discouraged patients grew skeptical of the medical industry, and turned to alternative therapies or self-prescription instead. Culture impressed upon patients a desire to improve one's self more quickly and efficiently than conventional therapy, and encouraged a culturally-embedded desire that we all should constantly be seeking improvement.

Stanley, like many other self-help authors, did not expect her conception of bibliotherapy to substitute for necessary medical intervention. She is very careful to point out instances where bibliotherapy is inappropriate as a sole treatment option: If you are suffering from a diagnosed illness, if you are suicidal, if you are unable to function from

day-to-day, or if you are engaged in life-threatening or destructive habits. In each case she more or less reiterates the same refrain, “Before supplementing your treatment with bibliotherapy, you should consult with your doctor” (Stanley, 1999).

Of course Stanley would not wish her recommendations to read a book replace the sage and practical advice of a medical doctor, but at the same time, it is pretentious to recommend that a reader consult with one’s doctor before reading a novel. But she must make such a statement if readers are to accept her thesis that reading books is something more than a recreational activity. Bibliotherapy, as it is interpreted in the late-twentieth century self-improvement culture, takes on the gravitas of social science to deliver a message that, at its source, is much more simplistic: reading might make you feel better.

## 2.5 The Impasse of Rehabilitation vs. Incapacitation

Although the language might be more romantic, MacCormick, our pioneer of educational rehabilitation in American prisons, was saying the same thing as bibliotherapists about the benefits of reading fifty years earlier. In the APA Library manual for Correctional Institutions, published in 1950, he states, “...the institutional library is an instrument of wholesome recreation, of direct and indirect education, and of mental health. Books are for many prisoners the bridge to the free world; over that bridge they can pass to a better world with a broader horizon than they ever knew before” (APA, 1950). Within MacCormick’s rhetoric is the key to the persuasive power of literacy as rehabilitation, and his remarks point to the general failures of previous attempts in

classroom and bibliotherapy methods: “Books are *for many prisoners* the bridge...”

History has clearly illustrated that in order to achieve rehabilitation, the prisoner must desire that rehabilitation for themselves. Attempts at persuading the student to accept the cultural norms of academic success, the psychiatric benefits of prescribed inspirational literature, or the evangelical salvation found in religious texts, succeed only for those willing to be shaped by the authority that confines them. As we observed in the 1960’s and 1970’s, prisoners embraced literacy when the benefits were direct and outside of the prison authority (Foucault’s knowledge/power machine). Writing and publishing their own memoirs encouraged an information flow with the outside world, and while also undergirding a radical rights movement, encouraged an empowerment of self through the written word. Prison authorities were not prepared for the backlash of this form of empowerment, and reacted by increasing security measures and quashing self-expression, raising again the conundrum of rehabilitative incarceration. Where is the grey area where mental health, education, and sound cultural norms are achieved without disrupting the disciplinary authority of the state? How much can a prisoner achieve self-actualization without threatening the system? Some critics feel this is an unsolvable paradox, and that abolishing the system and investing in cultural infrastructure is the only way to achieve true rehabilitation for criminals and prevent future crime. Opposing critics assert that criminals have lost the right to self-actualization, and that rehabilitation should be defined as not only an acceptance of cultural norms, but an acceptance to the lower orders of cultural participation. If indefinite incapacitation cannot be achieved through a life sentence, then life upon release should be guided by lowered aspirations -- menial work,

limited access (for instance, enforcement of cultural limits by placement on the sexual offender registry), restriction of civic engagement through the revocation of voting rights, restrictions of eligibility for food stamps or other food aid, restrictions of eligibility for federal grants for college aid or home mortgages, even surgical castration for male sex offenders or hysterectomies for female offenders thereby limiting their abilities to plan their own families.

The current correctional system depends on methods of both rehabilitation and incapacitation to define success as measured through lower recidivism. If literacy intervention is to be successful under these terms, it must depend on the rehabilitation model. We cannot encourage literacy while simultaneously limiting the criminal's capacity to aspire. Continuing to attempt one goal (lowered recidivism) through two opposing means will frustrate any realization of success.

Some critics might argue that the efforts of rehabilitation should not be the means with which we treat all offenders. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that only about thirteen percent of federal prisoners are serving sentences for violent crime. More than half (55.7%) are serving for a drug offense. It is a moral analysis beyond the scope of this paper to determine if violent criminals as a whole are beyond the reach of rehabilitative efforts, but public opinion seems to be more cohesively in support of rehabilitative efforts aimed at first-offense, non-violent offenders. Using correctional measurements such as security classifications can be a handy way of sorting offenders into "treatable" and "non-treatable" classes. But we should be wary of generalized classifications. The best way of identifying offenders that are most amenable to rehabilitation is through self-selection, as

we have noted throughout the history of literacy intervention within prisons. Not every offender is seeking a transformative, rehabilitative experience. But if prison authorities could authentically provide that experience to all who sought it, the rate of recidivism might show a considerable decline. In an ideal setting, self-selected participants could contribute to the normalizing effects of the rehabilitative program, spurring additional self-selection. I concede, this notion depends on optimistic ideals, but it might show at least as much promise as the approaches currently in place.

## 2.6 Great Books

The experiment of self-selection has been forwarded multiple times, in multiple incarnations, and with multiple success rates. Perhaps one of the first organized experiments in a self-selected literacy intervention in the prison environment was provided by facilitators of the Great Books Foundation. Spurred by the mid-century ideals of a liberal education made available to all and the values of self-education, University of Chicago educators Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler formed the foundation in 1947. Classic texts (arguably of a narrow, Western perspective) provided the centerpiece for group discussion and participants were encouraged to develop critical thinking skills in analyzing the texts. Facilitators were entrusted to refrain from contributing their own interpretations, as priority was placed on the dialogue between the text and the reader. Great Books discussion groups were marketed to the public, especially the middle class reader who felt isolated from academic culture, yet yearned

for opportunities for self-improvement. By 1949, the Foundation estimates that fifty-thousand people were enrolled nationwide in Great Books book groups. The program was so successful, Adler and Hutchins published paperback editions of selected works through the Foundation, and recommended participants only use the official Great Books editions.

The Great Books method focuses on a learning technique called *Shared Inquiry*. The goal of this method is to encourage self-reliant thinkers, readers, and learners, engaging the imagination as well as the intellect. Readers engage solely with questions engendered from the text, rather than relying on likes and dislikes. The Great Books Foundation website explains:

...participants learn to give full consideration to the ideas of others, to weigh the merits of opposing arguments, and to modify their initial opinions as the evidence demands. They gain experience in communicating complex ideas and in supporting, testing, and expanding their own thoughts. In this way, Shared Inquiry promotes thoughtful dialogue and open debate, preparing its participants to become able, responsible citizens and enthusiastic, lifelong readers (<https://www.greatbooks.org/?id=1270>).

The Foundation did not actively and officially support prison outreach until 1999, but throughout the height of Great Books popularity, many facilitators brought their groups into their local prisons and jails. San Quentin hosted a Great Books group for some time during Spector's tenure. Today, the general public's interest in Great Books has slumped, but related prison outreach work continues. Great Books today has official groups in seven correctional facilities, all in Mississippi and Tennessee (<http://www.greatbooks.org/programs-for-all-ages/gb/prison-outreach/>). Sharmila Patel, the

Director of Education for the Tennessee Department of Correction, who has organized other book groups in her prisons before, describes the Great Books approach: “ In groups that talk about popular literature, it ends up being more about the pleasure of reading and feelings. But Great Books have a focus on ideas, so you’re not talking about whether or not you liked it, but on the thoughts behind it” (Amity360, 2008). Vice President of The Great Books Foundation, Daniel Born, rhetorically asks, “Why not make them read the latest crappy memoir or Danielle Steele (sic)? Reading the books that matter will help the inmates think about the issues that matter” (Amity360, 2008).

This presumptuousness that the latest memoir is, by definition, “crappy,” and disinterested in “issues that matter,” causes quite a bit of friction in today’s reading community. Opposers of the program argue that its narrow view of “classic” literature imposes a camouflaged class hegemony, where great ideas come only from a political elite. Literature discussion becomes a didactic incursion of the powerful upon the powerless. Attendance in the prison outreach program could be due to a practical interest in “issues that matter” as defined by Great Books facilitators, but it is just as likely that participants sign up out of a lack of other alternatives for literary engagement.

An important element to remember while considering the prison outreach work of The Great Books Foundation is that sponsorship of such programs is entirely supported through volunteers, participation is voluntary, and they are in no way officially endorsed or funded by the correctional institutions in which they operate. Programs like Great Books cannot be lumped with the educational endeavors of correctional strategy, and any measurements of recidivism or other benefits to the population have not been attributed

to voluntary opportunities in any state-sourced empirical studies. Nor has Great Books itself been successful in measuring its impact on criminal behaviors.

Great Books discussion groups are not nearly as popular as they once were in the general free public, owing in part to a decline in the veneration of the Western Canon as a unique vessel of “issues that matter,” and increased access to college-level literary coursework. Moreover, Great Books is an extension of the New Criticism, a theory of literature that was popular in the mid-twentieth century. This strategy of literature analysis stresses the authority of the text. The text is a self-contained aesthetic object, and it is the reader’s responsibility to objectively use the evidence found in the text to draw out conclusions, disregarding any affective response, the author’s intention, or any social or historical contexts. This approach has gone decidedly out of vogue; current reader-theory trends embrace the value of the text/reader relationship, acknowledging the value of the affective, emotional response to literature and its application to the reader’s lived experience. This reader-response strategy and its impact on current book-selling and publishing trends in middle brow fiction, not to mention the ethos of popular culture in general, is carefully examined in Jim Collins’ excellent book *Bring On the Books for Everyone: How Literary Culture Became Popular Culture* (2010).

The New Criticism has mainly been left to the academy, and voluntary book groups that spring up in communities of readers are generally approaching literature from a self-help or social interchange imperative. Elizabeth Long bolsters this view in her seminal study of contemporary book group practice, *Book Clubs: Women and the Use of Reading in Everyday Life* (2003). Long claims,

(Book group) discussion is a lens that reveals the books under discussion and the inner lives of coparticipants and, through this process, allows participants to reflect back on their own interior lives as well. In these conversations, people can use books and each other's responses to books to promote insight and empathy in an integrative process of collective self-reflection. In that sense, reading group discussions perform creative cultural work, for they enable participants to articulate or even discover who they are: their values, their aspirations, and their stance toward the dilemmas of their worlds. (Long, 2003)

Using books as tools that “promote insight and empathy” in a group setting that seeks integrated self-reflection is an approach to reading that emerged in popular culture just as the Civil Rights Movement of the 1970's incited the citizen's desire to empathize with, and recognize themselves as, the victims of social inequalities. Women's book groups of the era developed as ways for women to gain insight on and find empowerment in women's historical and contemporary social roles. Women readers carried the momentum of this literary turn, as they were and continue to be the largest consumers of middle brow literature, an arguably pejorative term that refers to literature that appeals to popular readers, encourages affective responses, and holds the majority of sales in the fiction genre. A successful exploration of the uses of reading as affective response, empathic experience, and therapeutic salve can be found in Timothy Aubry's *Reading as Therapy: What Contemporary Fiction Does for Middle-Class Americans* (2011).

## 2.7 Changing Lives Through Literature

Changing Lives Through Literature (CLTL) is an excellent example of a self-selected prison literacy intervention program that espouses the value of empathic identification with the text. Furthermore, it has documented statistical improvement in recidivism, as well as other less conveniently measurable benefits. CLTL once was a legitimate partner in the criminal justice system, available as an alternative to incarceration.

In 1991 in the state of Massachusetts, a literature professor, Robert Waxler, a judge, Robert Kane, and a probation officer, Wayne St. Pierre, together designed a literacy seminar offered as part of a probation program that provided an alternative to prison sentencing. The seminar consisted of twelve weekly required meetings, and included participation by the judge and probation officer. Participants included eight men, ranging in offense from theft to armed robbery, (sex and drug offenders were not eligible) with one hundred forty eight convictions between them. Although potential participants were pre-selected by prison authorities, the option to participate was wholly the choice of those potential participants. The alternative was serving a prison sentence. As CLTL explains it,

By discussing books,...the men began to investigate and explore aspects of themselves, to listen to their peers, to increase their ability to communicate ideas and feelings to men of authority who they thought would never listen to them, and to engage in dialogue in a democratic classroom where all ideas were valid. Instead of seeing their world from one angle, they began opening

up to new perspectives and started realizing that they had choices in life (<http://ctl.umassd.edu/abouthistory.cfm>).

The program was successful enough to continue, and was replicated at a neighboring women's prison. In 1998, a paper was published analyzing the data of the first thirty-two men to complete the program, titled "Combining Bibliotherapy and Positive Role Modeling as an Alternative to Incarceration." The study found that of the program participants, 18.75% were reconvicted within three years of their release, compared to offenders with similar risk/need assessments that did not participate. This control group's reconviction rate was 45%.

It is interesting to note the use of the word "bibliotherapy" in the study's title, a study authored by third-party investigators. Nowhere on the CLTL website do its authors refer to their program as bibliotherapy, nor do they describe their program as a therapy at all. They claim, "CLTL is not therapy, but the process of learning about our lives can be therapeutic" (<http://ctl.umassd.edu/AboutPhilosophy.cfm>). There are several ways in which their program differs from the mainstream conception of bibliotherapy, and the authors may have wished to distance themselves from those associations. First of all, the program is not intended to *heal*, but rather to *teach, inspire, affect transformation*. The authors make no medical claims. In addition, while great care is taken in selecting reading material, participants are not *diagnosed* with a particular and individual need, which could be treated with a particular reading. And no participant is required to participate, although failure to participate, in this instance, does mean a return to a prison sentence. By including a judge and probation officer in the literature discussion, and approaching the discussion with a democratic attitude, CLTL discussions encourage the

open consideration of all possibilities, rather than a scrutinized reading for the *correct* answer that leads to healing. As opposed to the Great Books program, participants are encouraged to draw parallels between the text and their own experience, to gain an alternate perspective in problem-solving, and to discuss their affective responses to the literature. The aim is in achieving a transformative experience that influences an intrinsic motivation to change behavior. But as in the case of Great Books, participation may just as easily be influenced by extrinsic motivators such as a shortened probation period, an evaded prison sentence, or simply that the program provides the only option available for literary engagement.

Unfortunately, and against all evidence of its proving a successful literacy intervention, CLTL has lost momentum in the last few years. The program's website has not been updated since 2007. It is difficult to find documentation that the program is still in use in the various pockets where it appeared quite vibrant at the turn of the millennium. How does one explain this decline? CLTL was formed during a very desperate period in corrections history. Prison populations were soaring, and corrections facilities did not have the space to house them. Alternatives to sentencing, even schemes as outrageous as a literacy intervention, were welcomed until more bodies could be accommodated. The acceptance by state and local criminal justice systems of the CLTL program waned to the same degree that new prisons were built. If recent history can be used as a predictor, it is quite likely that literacy interventions that are directly tied to the criminal justice system will only be considered when all other options are blocked. As California's crisis of prison over-population proves, priority lies in incapacitation by

incarceration; lowering recidivism through rehabilitation appears to be a worst-case solution.

Nonetheless, various outreach programs, none fully endorsed by the current adult criminal justice system, but tolerated as voluntary supplements, have gained a foothold in providing literacy intervention. Many of them gain the greatest support through targeting juvenile “at-risk” populations. Many have also succeeded in building partnerships with neighboring colleges and universities, inviting professors to teach and facilitate literature programming through for-credit or non-credit coursework. Much of the outreach is organized by public librarians. Some programs of note include: Read to Succeed, an adaptation of the CLTL model for teens (<http://www.naco.org/newsroom/countynews/Current%20Issue/10-18-10/Pages/Readingprogramsofferalternativetojail.aspx>). Write to Read is sponsored by the Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center (<http://juvievrite2read.aclibrary.org>). An adult ex-offender program is available through Alameda County public libraries. Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop serves juveniles and juveniles-tried-as-adults in Washington D.C. ([http://www.freemindsbookclub.org/about\\_us.html](http://www.freemindsbookclub.org/about_us.html)). The Hennepin County Library provides a plethora of services for the incarcerated, recently-released, and juveniles in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, comprising a program called Freedom Ticket (<http://www.hclib.org/pub/info/Outreach/freedomticket/>). Many state, federal, and private institutions host informal book groups, writing groups, parent-to-child reading support and other literacy interventions, but this work is often unpublicized to the greater community. These programs spring from the outreach efforts of various providers,

including institutional education and rehabilitation staff, prison, public, and academic library staff, professors, educators, and social work professionals. This outreach work is largely un-salaried, and only infrequently funded by grants.

## 2.8 An Academic Approach

While corrections authorities appear to be satisfied with incapacitation as a solution to crime, and the good will of local communities shoulder the responsibility to provide literacy outreach, academics have begun to take interest in literacy intervention as a legitimate approach to an issue which with increasing regularity figures into the flaws of our social infrastructure. Researcher Megan Sweeney notes that she has written the first analysis of women's prison reading practice. Sweeney was roused to investigate the issues when, in 2006, the Supreme Court decision *Beard vs. Banks* deemed it constitutional for a Pennsylvania prison to deny secular newspapers and magazines to forty of its "most incorrigible" prisoners. The decision, which won a 6-2 majority vote, claims that denying these reading materials serves as an "incentive for inmate growth" because it encourages prison rule compliance. Once inmates achieve a credible level of compliance (as defined by prison authorities), they can then be moved to a lower level security wing, where access is broader. However, only about 25% of the residents of this high-security wing are ever relocated (*Beard vs. Banks*, 2006). Concurring Justice Clarence Thomas supports the ruling because it is "consistent with eighteenth-century Pennsylvania practices" of isolating the prisoner and denying reading materials (except

the Bible) and contact with their families. The most recent publication that Justice Thomas cited for his historical justification was a book by Gerald Bramley, titled *Outreach: Library Services for the Institutionalised, the Elderly, and the Physically Handicapped*, in which he quotes that prisoners' library access is "subject to some form of censorship." This book was published in 1978, in London. Neither is it current, nor is it based on American practice.

Sweeney identifies a cause for concern in a contemporary criminal justice system that *denies* reading as a form of rehabilitation. Her study identifies the ways in which some women "habilitate" themselves, meaning that they empower and enable themselves, regardless of the presence or lack of a supportive literacy structure. While she introduces reading groups into three different women's prisons in North Carolina, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, her primary concern is in investigating the types of reading that female prisoners turn to on their own, without the guidance or structure of an organized reading group. Although women prisoners read (and don't read) as diverse a menu of genres as the free public does, Sweeney recognized a recurring theme of titles concerning victimization, inspirational and self-help, and urban street literature. Her book, *Reading Is My Window: Books and the Art of Reading in Women's Prisons*, explores how women prisoners use reading to "grapple with victimization, crime, and healing" (Sweeney, 2010). They use reading as a means to entertain themselves, experience a sense of escape, and stay connected to actual or imagined realities outside the prison. They also read to educate themselves, make meaning from their own experiences, reckon with suppressed emotions, locate mentors, and to become the "authors of their own lives."

Sweeney's work is an important step in developing an understanding of how literacy can play an important role in the "habilitation" of some prisoners. She does not make the claim that reading practice is a one-stop "cure" for criminal behavior, but it is through her first-person accounts of witnessing prisoner/readers adopt new perspectives towards others, towards themselves, and towards the act of reading itself that she observes how reading practice assists readers, for the time being at least, in navigating their own lives. She states,

...I do not want to speculate about whether or not those practices will exert a lasting influence over the lives of women who may one day leave prison. Indeed, I want to resist any notion that reading might serve as a permanent cure for, or antidote to, unethical or unlawful behavior. Such a notion not only seems deeply flawed; it also seems dangerous, given that bibliotherapy has served normalizing and coercive ends in penal contexts (Sweeney, 2010).

Sweeney is wary of prison literacy interventions that, despite their good intentions, might mirror the debilitating top-down approach that brought the failure of bibliotherapeutic practice in the past. Her readers volunteered to participate in her reading groups and interviews, and the texts they read served as tools for discussion, not as didactic lessons to be learned. As opposed to the goals of bibliotherapy, her participants were encouraged, not to think what authors told them to think, but to think for themselves. One of her participants, Olivia, a prisoner/reader in Ohio's Northeast Pre-Release Center, states, "If they really want to rehabilitate and change people's minds and thoughts and the way us women think and what our place is in the world, they would have more book clubs" (Sweeney, 2010).

Current corrections authority values the prison library in its ability to offer safe and secure leisure, but equal value is given to the art room, the gym, and the television room. Prison librarians in the past have valued the supposed influence of religious texts, the great books of the Western literary canon, or the bibliotherapeutic benefits of self-help instruction, in the hopes of guiding the reader down a shepherded path to rehabilitation. Sweeney posits the idea that prisoner/readers have their own views and individual entrances to texts that speak to their needs and desires. Choosing literature that affects their understanding of their own lives builds their own sense of agency and self-actualization, strengths that counter the imprisoning environment, but support their abilities to succeed in the world upon release.

CHAPTER 3:  
THE APPLICATION OF LITERACY INTERVENTIONS:  
NOTES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

3.1.Literacy as Framed by the Practice of Restorative Justice

In thinking deeply about the ways literacy can support the success of prisoners as they are released to society, I am consistently faced with a bothersome conundrum: Our justice system's current practice of incapacitation, both inside our prisons and extending to all facets of civic life upon release, continuously contends with all efforts to rehabilitate, "habilitate," and engage the agency of offenders. In order for literacy intervention to effect a transformation in the reader, the reader must have the space to aspire. They must be confident that a genuine attempt to gain vocational and job-searching skills will provide them an opportunity to actually find employment. They must own the certainty that improved social skills will affect positive changes in their relations with others. They must be assured that a genuine attempt to empathize with their victim will profit them in understanding how to make better life choices. If these assurances can not be made, how can we expect rehabilitation to be successful?

There is a note of hope. The last thirty years have seen a growing trend in a program known as Restorative Justice (RJ). The program urges a paradigm shift in how the legal system approaches criminal justice. The European Union actively supports the restorative justice process, and American state Departments of Correction, while not yet

dismantling the current system, are eager to appropriate aspects of the philosophy in their efforts to lower recidivism. Evidence of particular states' adoption of RJ principles can be found on the DOC websites of many states, including Missouri, Louisiana, Vermont, Minnesota, Ohio, Illinois, and Iowa.

According to Howard Zehr, considered to be the “grandfather” of RJ (Van Ness, 2010), restorative justice can be defined this way: “Crime is a violation of people and relationships. It creates obligations to make things right. Justice involves the victim, the offender, and the community in a search for solutions which promote repair, reconciliation and reassurance” (Zehr, 2004). Zehr urges a change of focus from retributive justice, based on punishment, to a focus on human relationships, restoring the humanity of each participant, including an acknowledgement of the wrong done to the victim and the community as a whole. Common RJ practices that have been adopted even within a retributive system include victim-offender mediation and conferencing, methods of restorative encounters that encourage communication between all involved parties.

The benefits of such encounters are manifold. Victims are able to “own” their voice in a conflict and its resolution; they can advocate for restitution that is practical and relevant to their needs, they can ask for and obtain the social services they require, and, in some cases, gain a sense of empathy for the offender and the community in which the crime takes place. Community representative participants can gain an understanding for the unique circumstances of an individual case, learn how to protect the community from future criminal acts, and recognize both the victim and offender as members of that community. Offenders are encouraged to gain an understanding of the victim's and

community's perspective of their crime, are given the opportunity to express apology, design a restitution program that is practical and relevant, and receive assistance in the reintegration process (Van Ness, 2010).

The RJ practices of victim-offender mediation and conferencing, practices employed by various tribal cultures long before the establishment of RJ (Van Ness, 2010), depend upon a victim-offender dialogue (though not necessarily in a face-to-face experience), that is in some way mediated by a community member, government authority representative, and/or an unbiased mediation professional. The aim of such an encounter is to allow healing, reconciliation, negotiation, vindication and transformation for all parties. The extant RJ literature infrequently uses the term "empathy" to describe the outcomes desired for offenders participating in such an encounter. And yet, it is the practice of empathy that decides the level of success of an offender's participation in an RJ program. Van Ness explains the offender's participation in an encounter program:

Offenders take responsibility for their actions and agree to make amends to the victim. Offenders often have not understood the effect their actions had on their victims, and this process gives them greater insight into the harm they caused as well as an opportunity to repair the damage. Both victim and offender are confronted with the other as a person rather than a faceless, antagonistic force, permitting them to gain a greater understanding of the crime, of the other person's circumstances, and of what it will take to make things right (Van Ness, 2010).

Clearly, gaining "greater insight", a "greater understanding...of the other person's circumstances" are acts of perspective-taking, also understood as empathetic responses. Speaking with one's victim can easily be imagined as a very threatening and highly

emotional experience, and the ability to empathize with a person across the legal divide of victim/offender takes a particular amount of maturity, sensitivity and empathetic practice. It is important to consider, before placing participants in this highly-charged environment, just how prepared an offender is in exercising their empathetic skills. But how does one gain practice in raising empathetic response? I posit that literacy interventions -- book groups, writing groups, any reading practice that encourages empathic identification and pro-social discussion -- pose as effective laboratories for low-stakes practice in perspective-taking, supporting the key responsibilities of the offender in a restorative justice scenario.

While there is extensive research available on the benefits of restorative justice for the offender, the victim, and the community, little research has been documented on the role of literacy in gaining skills conducive to perspective-taking in this context. If the case can be made that literacy intervention has real value in contributing to restorative justice success, perhaps literacy intervention programs can relinquish their marginalized status, and revive the role of the prison library as an active co-participant in facility-wide efforts to rehabilitate and support prison populations.

### 3.2 Why Read? The Process of Reading vs. the Content of Reading

The usefulness of literacy intervention in the terms of Restorative Justice relies on the offenders' ability to gain empathy for their victim, in hopes of achieving genuine apology and transformation from criminal proclivity. Sweeney identifies empathy as

playing a major role in prisoner/reader appeal in reading choices. Her research suggests that prisoner/readers may identify empathically with fictional characters and settings, and thus the appeal of urban fiction. They may identify empathically with the author or narrator's voice, as in the appeal of memoirs or narratives of victimization. They may also experience empathic response when discussing their reading material with fellow readers, listening and responding to the perspectives of others. An emotional, affective response to literature can rouse inspiration and behavioral change. This was the benefit sought in the prescriptive era of bibliotherapy, though self-directed learning and choice were never then considerable factors. The consciousness-raising era of the Civil Rights Movement supported the efforts of book group members to find empowerment and agency, but protecting the right to read tended to overshadow the campaign that the incarcerated should read, and fighting that battle lost the war for sanctioned literacy interventions in American prisons. So far, literacy intervention has been characterized by reading that effects an emotional, transformational, rehabilitative response to content. But recent research in cognitive science points to the possible benefits of reading as a process that exercises skills that improve the brain's ability to problem-solve, to rationalize, and to think outside one's own perspective.

There is a rich body of literature concerning empathy as it is approached from various disciplines, including psychology, literary theory, neuroscience, social work, and countless more. Definitions of the term vary across disciplines and alternate schools of thought, but it is generally agreed that empathy includes both an automatic physiological reaction (known as affective sharing) and the cognitive process of perspective-taking

(Barnett & Mann, 2013; Gerdes et al., 2010; Spreng et al., 2009; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006; Gallese, 2003; Duan & Hill, 1996). Empathy arouses a specific, observable, measurable brain activity, and recent research suggests that empathy can be learned and thereby increased. Research in empathy and its relation to reading has historically centered on the emotional response to text content -- when we read a sad story, we tend to feel sad, our brains register sadness as if we were actually experiencing the sadness of the textual character. What has been overlooked in the research until recently is the cognitive response to empathy -- the brain's ability to take another's perspective into account, regardless of attending affect or emotion, as it applies to the reading of literature. Using the framework of Theory of Mind (ToM), researchers David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano have explored this concept in their study titled "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind" (2013). They differentiate between affective ToM -- an ability to detect and understand others' emotions -- and cognitive ToM -- the inference and representation of others' beliefs and intentions. Their study demonstrated a significant impact on both reader affective and cognitive ToM when engaged in reading literary fiction, at least in the short term, and introduces a line of study that suggests ToM may be influenced by engagement with works of art. The researchers argue that fiction may explicitly convey social values and make other worldviews less strange, but beyond those benefits, the act of reading fiction may change not only *what* people think about others, but *how* they do it. Fiction affects ToM processes by forcing readers to engage in mind-reading and character construction. Kidd and Castano further explain,

Our contention is that literary fiction...uniquely engages the psychological processes needed to gain access to characters' subjective experiences. Just as in real life, the worlds of literary fiction are replete with complicated individuals whose inner lives are rarely easily discerned but warrant exploration. The worlds of fiction, though, pose fewer risks than the real world, and they present opportunities to consider the experiences of others without facing the potentially threatening consequences of that engagement. More critically, whereas many of our mundane social experiences may be scripted by convention and informed by stereotypes, those presented in literary fiction often disrupt our expectations. Readers of literary fiction must draw on more flexible interpretive resources to infer the feelings and thoughts of characters. That is, they must engage ToM processes (Kidd & Castano, 2013).

It is interesting to note the echo of the same observations found in the restorative justice process of offender/victim encounters as it relates to reading. Fiction presents the opportunity to practice perspective-taking “without facing the potentially threatening consequences” of a face-to-face encounter. The impact of this research is not yet fully realized, and, to my knowledge, has not been applied to the therapeutic uses of reading, especially with incarcerated populations. Further investigation in this area will lay the groundwork for establishing a strategy for reading that incorporates theory of mind, empathic response appropriate to the goals of Restorative Justice, and literary reading practice in a rehabilitative context, a strategy that I will refer to as Perspective-Directed Reading (PDR). Incorporating Vygostki's zone of proximal development, a PDR scaffold of affective and cognitive empathy could lead a reluctant or inexperienced reader through developmental stages of transformational identity with text that might mirror identity with real others and a self-actualization in the reader's real world. To my knowledge, no prison literacy intervention has ever focused on a cognitive theory of mind approach that

encourages the repetitive practice of thought processing that, irrespective of emotional response, exercises a reader's ability to take perspective and mind-read the intentions of an other. The emotional affect of a reading becomes secondary to the cognitive interpretations the reader must parse to gain comprehension of the literary landscape. It may be discovered that the ability to mind-read and understand the intentions and beliefs of fictional characters can be correlated to the ability to mind-read the intentions and beliefs of people in the real world, including an offender's family, peers, authority, and, most importantly, their victims.

This is not to imply that the emotional, affective response to literature is not valuable, but understanding the less-visible cognitive benefits to reading might have profound impact on the uses of literacy intervention. What is more, that cognitive benefit may be measurable, providing evidence to a system that relies heavily on evidence-based treatment programs to assess needs and risks, and secure funding for national goals in reducing recidivism.

### 3.3 Conclusion

There is room for much inquiry in the relations between reading practice, affect, cognitive neuroscience, and rehabilitative interventions for incarcerated populations. This thesis points to only a few aspects of intellectual speculation, with the hope that greater attention will be given to the benefits of literacy practices that support the needs of their participants as well as the needs of correctional authorities. The hierarchical position of

the prison library has shifted continuously over the history of American corrections, and we have arrived at a moment in time where its position, on the periphery, is threatened by overcrowding, underfunding, and the legitimate desires of corrections authorities to implement programming that is measurably effective and affordable. The recommendations for further inquiry that I have suggested -incorporating literacy interventions within the established Restorative Justice program, and exploring the benefits of cognitive reading practice through a Theory of Mind framework - are both ways of legitimizing the work of the prison library as an integral branch of the institutional system providing offender treatment. It is not enough to simply claim that the prison should retain its library because it has always had a library. It is not enough to say that the prison library should remain because it offers mental escape and relaxation, a pro-social environment, and a quiet place to think and study. It does all of those things, but the argument loses its persuasive appeal against the looming constraints of budget and the general ethos that prisoners do not deserve mental escape or relaxation. Equally daunting is the repeated mantra concerning rehabilitative interventions that “nothing works,” stated first by criminologist Martinson in 1974. Embraced by the political climate of the time, by liberals that desired social and cultural equity by eliminating indeterminate sentencing that was vulnerable to cultural bias, and by conservatives that desired harsher punishments and increased incapacitation, rehabilitation was considered an overall failure (Miller, 1989). While Martinson recanted his findings several years later, it was too late to change the tide in aggressive criminal justice reforms, and we are still living under the influence of a system of deterrence, even as qualitative data proves

that rehabilitation, administered skillfully and empathically, is effective in reducing recidivism (Petersilia, 2004; Seiter & Kadela, 2003; Harland, 1996).

What may be the most persuasive argument for rehabilitative interventions comes from the participants themselves. I hear these arguments anecdotally from colleagues engaged in similar intervention work, and I hear them in my own experience in facilitating book group discussion. A colleague engaged in a spectacular and innovative college program for residents of the Newton (IA) Correctional Facility shared an article written by a former participant. The program is a partnership between the prison and Grinnell College, offering both for credit and non-credit courses to the incarcerated. The participant, now released, is sharing his gratitude for the program, which sustained him during his difficult reentry process:

I realized that the single most important component of their (Grinnell educators) indelible mark on me was compassion. Compassion is redemptive and has a perseverance and intimacy that stays with me as time passes. Compassion's force alters the trajectory of tragic lives towards triumphant ones. This is the ultimate gift that Grinnell gave me, and it saved my life (Darrah, 2014).

If the cognitive behavioral strategies, the qualitative studies, and the recidivism statistics are not evidence enough that interventions have positive impacts on the lives of released prisoners, we can consider alone the testimony that the compassion of a caring community is inspiration, at least for some, for changing their trajectory towards a triumphant life. Evidence of compassion is transformative.

Enthusiasm for reading engagement motivated me to join the IMCC book group, but compassion has kept me there. I have been attending the book group for so long now,

and so regularly, that the security officers now allow me to walk alone from the entrance checkpoint, through the maze of hallways past the religion library, the gymnasium, the art room, the pharmacy, around the library and to the door of Classroom 3. An inmate has rushed to fetch the library supervisor to unlock the classroom door, and I chat with some early arrivals as we wait in the hallway. As we take our seats I call the systems operator and ask him to page an announcement that book group is about to begin. One inmate has planned ahead, bringing a bowl of hot, buttered popcorn to share. Today we have nine participants, fewer than usual, but a solid group, and our discussion is so engaging we lose track of time. We've been talking for an hour and a half, interrupted only once for a count. Today we have exercised a small freedom -- we've agreed to change the order in which we choose our next book. Instead of going to the next on the list, we chose to vote on which one we were most eager to read. Agreement came incredibly easily, and that tiny bit of agency has energized the group to get started on the next title right away. Dinners have already been served, and trays are going cold back on their units, but participants linger to finish conversations, get in one last word, wish me well until we meet again. No security officer has come to fetch me, so I steal a moment to admire the bulletin board that has just gone up in the classroom hallway. It is dedicated to the book group, with photocopied book covers of titles we look forward to reading. Interspersed are a dozen typed quotes from participants, explaining why they value the group. One book group member waits with me as I copy down all the quotes into my notebook, as I can't bring in my camera or my cellphone, and taking a photo, scanning it, and asking the ed supervisor to email it to me seems all too complicated, so I scribble as quickly as I

can. I write down every word, because these are the most persuasive arguments for me.

These quotes state why the prison library must remain, and this is why I come to book group every month. These are the words of my book group members:

“Book Club is the one place where we can have conversations about things that matter to me outside of prison.”

“The sharing of my personal thoughts in a group session with my peers that, when taken seriously, means a lot.”

“Book Club has become a habit. Good community, good discussions, good volunteers and staff, and usually treats!”

“It’s a great experience to interact with the volunteers from the outside and come together as a group to talk about a book a number of us have read.”

“The Book Club is fun to be in and I learn a lot about different books. The people are good to be around.”

“To gain knowledge you currently don’t have or never thought about.”

“My Top 10 Reasons For Being in Book Club

1. Reading is Fundamental!
2. It’s free
3. I can make suggestions for what books I would like to read
4. I vote on the suggestions that have been made
5. We read books that are current
6. It exercises my imagination
7. It allows me to have discussions with like-minded people
8. I read books I may not otherwise read
9. We have Great! volunteers and I like hearing their perspectives
10. IT IS A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE!!”

I slap my notebook shut and we head down the hallway. With one last farewell and a wave, the last remaining member swings left towards his unit and a cold dinner, and I swing right, on my way toward the outdoors.

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