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The following is one of several contributions from the United States to the program of the World Congress of Criminology in Paris, September 10 to 18, 1950.

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The rise of humanitarianism during the last two centuries has had its influence on penal practices in noticeable ways. Earlier societies employed corporal punishment strictly as personal retribution and with deterrence as only a vague and secondary purpose.[1] The development of imprisonment as a form of penalty for violation of laws is, in the historical sense, rather new. As humanitarianism has in minute and almost indescribable ways edged slowly into all human relations, so also has it influenced penal programs. The doctrine of humanitarianism has, for example, added a new concept to penal practice within fairly recent times—the concept of rehabilitation. This doctrine or trend has also recognized the youthful offender as a "juvenile," and it has been instrumental through modification of criminal codes, in reducing the single and absolute responsibility towards the offender. There have been many exceptions according to locality, and the humanitarian influence has been jagged in its slow, upward climb.

It is important to recall the historical newness of imprisonment as a penal method, and it is especially important to recognize that rehabilitation as a serious purpose has only a few decades of experience behind it. These views are needed for perspective as we lay bare in a descriptive way the manner in which American prisons contribute in some degree to the criminality of those they hold.

No scientific evidence exists to show in what precise manner or to what degree the influences of the prison culture moulds the lives of those subjected to its culture. There can only be observations and rather crude deductions from those observations. Reference is indicated here, of course, to the well-understood condition that the tools of research for understanding in a scientific way how a human being comes to be exactly what he is, are limited. Human nature is too complicated a phenomena to disect and analyze, and locate with certainty the precise set of causes of any particular human reaction. There are too many and

1. THORSTEN SELLIN, *The Historical Background of Our Prisons.* 157 Annals, 1931.

too complicated individual differences among people. Neither the psychiatrist nor the sociologist, in contrast to the chemist or mathematician, can claim full, logical understanding of casual factors. While it is a common-place to stress this view, it is pertinent as we attempt to survey in what manner imprisonment affects the personalities it holds.

What Happens After Release?

We do have certain fundamental information as to what happens to men after they are released from prison. We know, for example, that in the United States varying numbers, between 40 and 80 percent, are returned to prisons for additional offenses.[2] We know precisely that 83 per cent of the inmates admitted to the Jail in Washington, D. C. in the fiscal year 1949 had some type of prior criminal record.[3] Of the 19,980 admitted in the year mentioned, 46 percent had a prior felony record, and the balance a misdemeanor record only. In one of the revealing studies having reference to imprisonment it was found that four-fifths of the inmates of a reformatory in Massachusetts turned out to be failures so far as post-parole criminality was concerned, when the cases were followed up for a period of five to fifteen years following their release from the institution.[4] This study by the Gluecks though now quite common knowledge created, when it was published, great concern because it revealed that annual reports of penal administrators dealing with imprisonment had not distinctly showed what happened to ex-inmates after release from institutions.

Statistics currently being cited in America by parole authorities indicate the country over that between 10 and 20 percent of inmates placed on parole, violate it. These figures are accurate so far as they go, in that the calculations are made according to the length of time an individual is on parole. Thus, if a man is released from prison and has nine months to serve on parole, he is tallied as making a successful parole if he completes the nine months, even though the next month, he commits a new crime. It requires studies such as those made by the Gluecks to reveal the real facts. Such facts are also known to observant penal officials through their experience.

In the Federal parole system covering some 25 penal and correctional institutions, warrants for arrest have been issued for violations of

2. From a critical analysis of annual reports of penal administrators of many American states.
3. Annual Report, Department of Correction, D. C., Sept. 1, 1949.
4. Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, Five Hundred Criminal Careers, Alfred A. Knopf, New York (1939).

regular parole, as follows, over the last several years, by percentage of all those placed on regular parole: 1941, 7.7 percent; 1942, 9.8 percent; 1943, 6.7 percent; 1944, 10.8 percent; 1945, 13.6 percent; 1946, 10.0 percent; 1947, 13.1 percent; 1948, 19.2 percent.[5] These figures are cited to indicate that even in what is probably the most progressive prison system the world has ever known, almost one-fifth of men paroled in a recent year—men who are ordinarily considered the "good risks"—violated their parole.

Prison Culture May Play a Part in These Results

It is unnecessary to belabor the point further, that the inmates flocking out from American penal and correctional institutions, go forth in tragic numbers to engage in crime again. Though no tangible facts are now presented, the later crimes of those who have been in prison are frequently more sophisticated or heinous than the offenses for which they were first committed. Just what part the prison itself plays in what appears to be this advance in criminality is not known. Certain basic conditions of the prison culture are understood, however, and it is reasonable to presume that the culture of a prison influences the people participating in it, in the same way as culture anywhere plays a part in shaping the lives of men.

It is not possible to characterize the culture of a prison community in specific detail here. Some of its characteristics are easily discernible, such as the recognition that it is a community of persons of one sex, that those held in it have been stigmatized by the broad society because of law violation, and that the persons who make it up hold, or have held, attitudes which are predatory or sexually unconventional or assaultive in nature. We know further that the prison usually concentrates these people in a restricted area, without privacy of any real kind, and that they mingle and interact in personal ways. This writer, after struggling through 300 tedious pages attempting to depict the prison culture, attempted even more futilely, to summarize it in a few brief paragraphs.

The social world of an average prison was characterized thus. The prisoners world is a confused world, he said. It is dominated and it submits. Its own community is without a well-established social structure. Recognized values produce a myriad of conflicting attitudes. There are no definite communal objectives. There is no consensus for a common goal. The inmates' conflict with officialdom and opposition

5. Annual Report, Federal Bureau of Prisons (1948), p. 59.

toward society is only slightly greater in degree than conflict and opposition among themselves. Trickery and dishonesty overshadow sympathy and cooperation. Such cooperation as exists is largely symbiotic in nature. Social controls are only partially effective. It is a world of individuals whose daily relationships are impersonalized. It is a world of "I," "me," and "mine," rather than "ours," "theirs," and "his." Its people are thwarted, unhappy, yearning, resigned, bitter, hating, revengeful. Its people are improvident, inefficient, and socially illiterate. The prison world is a graceless world. There is filth, stink and drabness; there is monotony and stupor. There is disinterest in work. There is desire for love and hunger for sex. There is pain in punishment. Except for the few, there is bewilderment. No one knows the dogmas and codes notwithstanding, exactly what is important.[6]

It is not surprising, if the foregoing evaluation is even reasonably accurate, that men or women in durance vile are influenced by the culture in which they find themselves and which, by their basic personality traits, they help to make. Prisons and prisoners are what they are because of what they have been in the past, and because of the mood and temper of society concerning them. Institutions could be so organized as to be less deliterious, it is believed, but society is not ready for this step. Modern and progressive penological methods have done much in recent years to alter and counteract the harmful influences which are inherent in them. Certain paradoxes, society-wise, are apparent, however.

> . . . Even our modern prison system is proceeding on a rather undertain course because its administration is necessarily a series of compromises. On the one hand, prisons are expected to punish; on the other, they are supposed to reform. They are expected to discipline rigorously at the same time that they teach self-reliance. They are built to be operated like vast impersonal machines, yet they are expected to fit men to live normal community lives. They operate in accordance with a fixed autocratic routine, yet they are expected to develop individual initiative. All to frequently restrictive laws force prisoners into idleness despite the fact that one of their primary objectives is to teach men how to earn an honest living. They refuse the prisoner a voice in self-government, but they expect him to become a thinking citizen in a democratic society. To some, prisons are nothing but "country clubs" catering to the whims and fancies of the inmates. To others the prison atmosphere seems charged only with bitterness, rancor and an all-pervading sense of defeat. And so the whole paradoxical scheme continues, because our ideas and views regarding the function of correctional institutions in our society are confused, fuzzy, and nebulous.[7]

Director James V. Bennett in this statement has put the problem well. The confusion of the free community ramifies to the prison or correc-

6. DONALD CLEMMER, THE PRISON COMMUNITY, The Christopher Publishing Co., Boston (1940), pp. 297-298.
7. *Op. cit.*, ANNUAL REPORT, FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS, p. 3.

tional institutions. None-the-less, important progressive measures have been taken.[8] Yet in the prisons of America, in spite of classification, vocational and social education, psychiatric service and all the other efforts to treat inmates, prisons continue to "breed crime," to use a moralistic phrase.

The manner and way in which the prison culture is absorbed by some of its people can be thought of as a process of "prisonization." Prisonization is here regarded as similar to the sociological concept of assimilation. When a person or group of ingress penetrates and fuses with another group, assimilation may be said to have taken place. Assimilation implies that a process of acculteration occurs in one group whose members were originally quite different from those of the group with whom they mix. It implies that the assimilated come to share the sentiments, memories and traditions of the static group. It is evident, of course, that men who come to prison are not greatly different from the ones already there, so far as broad cultural influences are concerned. There are, however, differences in mores, custom folkways and group behavior patterns. As these are encountered, and when absorbed, some aspects of acculteration or prisonization are occurring.

Every man who enters the penitentiary undergoes prisonization to some extent. The first and most obvious integrative step concerns his status. He becomes at once an anonymous figure in a subordinate group. A number replaces a name. He wears the clothes of the other members of the subordinate group. He is questioned and admonished. He soon learns that the warden is all-powerful. He soon learns the ranks, titles and authority of various officials. Even though a new man may hold himself aloof from other inmates and remain a solitary figure, he finds himself within a few months referring to or thinking of keepers as "screws," the physician as the "croaker" and using the local nicknames to designate persons. He follows the examples already set in wearing his cap. He learns to eat in haste and in obtaining food he imitates the tricks of those near him.

After the new arrival recovers from the effects of the swallowing-up process, he assigns a new meaning to conditions he had previously taken for granted. The fact that food, shelter, clothing, and a work activity had been given him originally made no especial impression. It is only after some weeks or months that there comes to him a new inter-

8. See BRANHAM AND KUTASH, ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CRIMINOLOGY, The Philosophical Library, New York (1949).

pretation of these necessities of life. This new conception results from mingling with other men and it places emphasis on the fact that the environment *should* administer to him. Supplemental to it is the almost universal desire on the part of the man, after a period of some months, to get a good job so, as he says, "I can do my time without any trouble and get out of here." A good job usually means a comfortable job of a more or less isolated kind in which conflicts with other men are not likely to develop. The desire for a comfortable job is not peculiar to the prison community, to be sure, but it seems to be a phase of prisonization.

In various other ways men new to prison slip into the existing patterns. They learn to gamble or learn new ways to gamble. Some, for the first time in their lives, take to abnormal sex behavior. Many of them learn to distrust and hate the officers, the parole board, and sometimes each other, and they become acquainted with the dogmas and mores existing in the community. But these changes do not occur in every man. However, every man is subject to certain influences which we may call the *universal factors of prisonization.*

Acceptance of an inferior role, accumulation of facts concerning the organization of the prison, the development of somewhat new habits of eating, dressing, working, sleeping, the adoption of local language, the recognition that nothing is owed to the environment for the supplying of needs, and the eventual desire for a good job are aspects of prisonization which are operative for all inmates. It is not these aspects, however, which concern us most but they are important because of their universality, especially among men who have served many years. That is, even if no other factor of the prison culture touches the personality of an inmate of many years residence, the influence of these universal factors are sufficient to make a man characteristic of the penal community and probably so disrupt his personality that a happy adjustment in any community becomes next to impossible. On the other hand, if inmates who are incarcerated for only short periods, such as a year or so, do not become integrated into the culture except in so far as these universal factors of prisonization are concerned, they do not seem to be so characteristic of the penal community and are able when released to take up a new mode of life without much difficulty.

The phases of prisonization which concern us most are the influences which breed or deepen criminality and anti-sociality and make the in-

mate characteristic of the criminalistic ideology in the prison community. As has been said, every man feels that the influences of what we have called the universal factors, but not every man becomes prisonized in and by other phases of the culture. Whether or not complete prisonization takes place depends first on the man himself, that is, his susceptibility to a culture which depends, we think, primarily on the type of relationships he had before imprisonment, i.e., his personality. A second determinant effecting complete prisonization refers to the kind and extent of relationships which an inmate has with persons outside the walls. A third determinant refers to whether or not a man becomes affiliated in prison primary or semi-primary groups and this is related to the two points already mentioned. Yet a fourth determinant depends simply on chance, a chance placement in work gang, cellhouse, and with cellmate. A fifth determinant pertains to whether or not a man accepts the dogmas or codes of the prison culture. Other determinants depend on age, criminality, nationality, race, regional conditioning, and every determinant is more or less interrelated with every other one.

Influencing Factors in Prisonization

With knowledge of these determinants we can hypothetically construct schemata of prisonization which may serve to illustrate its extremes. In the least or lowest degree of prisonization the following factors may be enumerated:

1. A short sentence, thus a brief subjection to the universal factors of prisonization.
2. A fairly stable personality made stable by an adequacy of positive and "socialized" relationships during pre-penal life.
3. The continuance of positive relationships with persons outside the walls.
4. Refusal or inability to integrate into a prison primary group or semi-primary group, while yet maintaining a symbiotic balance in relations with other men.
5. Refusal to accept blindly the dogmas and codes of the population, and a willingness, under certain situations, to aid officials, thus making for identification with the free community.
6. A chance placement with a cellmate and workmates who do not possess leadership qualities and who are also not completely integrated into the prison culture.
7. Refraining from abnormal sex behavior, and excessive gambling, and a ready willingness to engage seriously in work and recreative activities.

Other factors no doubt have an influencing force in obstructing the process of prisonization, but the seven points mentioned seem outstanding.

In the highest or greatest degree of prisonization the following factors may be enumerated:

1. A sentence of many years, thus a long subjection to the universal factors of prisonization.
2. A somewhat unstable personality made unstable by an inadequacy of "socialized" relations before commitment, but possessing, none-the-less, a capacity for strong convictions and a particular kind of loyalty.
3. A dearth of positive relations with persons outside the walls.
4. A readiness and a capacity for integration into a prison-primary group.
5. A blind, or almost blind, acceptance of the dogmas and mores of the primary group and the general penal population.
6. A chance placement with other persons of a similar orientation.
7. A readiness to participate in gambling and abnormal sex behavior.

We can see in these two extremes the degrees with which the prisonization process operates. No suggestion is intended that a high correlation exists between either extreme or prisonization and criminality. It is quite possible that the inmate who fails to integrate in the prison culture may be and may continue to be much more criminalistic than the inmate who becomes completely prisonized. The trends are probably otherwise, however, as our study of group life suggests. To determine prisonization, every case must be appraised for itself.[9]

Among inmates who are prisonized to the least degree, the agencies of reform existing in many American correctional institutions take hold, and it is these individuals who do not recidivate. That is, among the individuals who do not return again and again to prison, it is reasonable to presume that some force during their incarceration has acted as cause or partial cause to prevent recidivism. By case study methods it can be demonstrated that a trade learned in prison, or re-directed attitudes, or by surgical or psychiatric treatment, many inmates have been "cured," as it were, of their criminality. Others who do not recidivate, refrain from further crime simply because the one experience in prison has been so painful and unpleasant, that further desire or impetus towards crime is blocked.

Prisons do affect the people who live in them. They "breed crime," it appears, but they also retrain some few people and scare others. The culture of the prison with its unseen environment does these things through many of the same processes that operate in any social group. It is fundamentally a learning process.

9. CLEMMER, *op. cit.*, pp. 299, 302. The concept of prisonization has been developed by intensive study of cases of men during various stages of incarceration.

In a scientific sense, the exact and precise role of the prison as cause of criminality can not be determined. Most persons admitted to prison already possess "criminality" in various degrees. After they leave, and if they engage again in crime, the "location" of criminality for such subsequent crime is difficult to determine. Presumably, the criminality which the individual brought to prison was intensified as a result of prisonization, and remained as a potential in the personality upon release. Also, when released, no forces of sufficient strength in the free community existed to thwart or divert the potential,—and thus it may be said that the post-release community was conducive of crime. By observation and presumption, however, it can be stated that imprisonment, even in progressive institutions with their carefully developed training programs, frequently increases the criminality of the individuals it holds.

As humanitarianism increases and as the sciences which deal with human nature improve their techniques of treating the maladjusted, and as other better methods than prison are found to deal with violators of the law—the criminality of the offender, which is currently increased by the methods used, may well be decreased in that brave, new world somewhere ahead.