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# INITIAL FAILURES IN REHABILITATION AMONG 16,965 OHIO STATE REFORMATORY INMATES

William P. DeStephens

The author was formerly on the staff of the Reformatory at Mansfield, Ohio. The research reported here was done there during the last six months of 1952. His appreciation and gratitude are extended to Mr. Forsythe, Chief Record Clerk at the Reformatory; Dr. D. E. Sell, presently the Supervising Psychologist in the Division of Corrections, and formerly the writer's supervisor at the Reformatory; G. J. Allarding, Acting Superintendent of the Reformatory; and A. L. Glatke, Chief of the Division of Corrections: whose assistance, support, and advice aided materially in the development and completion of this project.—EDITOR.

## PROBLEM

This paper reports a study of the initial effect of incarceration in terms of abstinence from further imprisonment, on nearly 17,000 persons who had been inmates at the Ohio State Reformatory. The period of study involved extends from January of 1940 through June of 1952, and concerns all of the inmates who had left the institution either by means of parole or through other methods during that time.

Numerous authors on the subject of rehabilitation failures have presented figures which seem to show that from 56 to 80 percent were recidivistic after having once been imprisoned in an institution.<sup>1</sup> Other authors, definitely in the minority in terms of number, advance the opposite statistics and/or state that rehabilitative measures when properly coordinated prove to be astonishingly efficacious in stifling criminal careers.<sup>2</sup> Still fewer authors advocate certain changes in our methods of treating the criminal which, in this writer's personal opinion, strike nearer the heart of the problem.<sup>3</sup> This latter variable will be considered very briefly at the end of the paper.

In an attempt to investigate the situation here at the Reformatory, the records of all the men who had been incarcerated here from 1940 onwards were examined. The completed project encompasses 12.5 years of history and the records of 16,965 former inmates.

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## METHOD

It was learned in an examination of the records that only about three-fourths of the inmates who left the institution each year during the last 12.5 years were released by means of parole. The remaining one-fourth left through other channels, such as transfers to other institutions, escapes, and so on. As a result, the records of these paroled inmates were examined first because this was the largest group, and because their progress could be followed easily and accurately while its inmate members were still attached to the institution. These inmates were 12,574 in number and constituted all who had been paroled since January of 1940 through June of 1952.

Channels of exit other than parole were then examined in terms of probable successes and failures, but because a small percentage of these records were incomplete in terms of information concerning further incarceration, the statistical results presented from an evaluation of this group ( $N = 4,390$ ) are to be considered as approximate, rather than exact. In this part consideration was given to the pre- and post-parole behavior of our juvenile and adult offenders, our disciplinary transfers to other institutions, our escapes, and our miscellaneous releases.

The final result is a picture, the most accurate that our records can provide, of the number of failures among inmates who leave this institution through parole or through other modes of departure. This picture, while admittedly incomplete, is presented as being one of the most dependable and reliable of its type in the investigation of initial rehabilitation failures among reformatory inmates.

## RESULTS

From January 1, 1940 through June 30, 1952, 12,574 inmates left the Ohio State Reformatory on parole (see Table I). Of these men 18.2 percent (2,282) were returned directly to the Reformatory as parole violators. An additional 1.3 percent (166) committed crimes while on parole, and, instead of being returned here, were transferred to the Ohio Penitentiary.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, it was found that 5.6 percent (704) more were able to obtain final releases from their paroles, but shortly thereafter, committed other crimes and were sentenced here a second time.<sup>5</sup> This raises the percentage of initial failures to 25.1 percent.

4. These men were not counted on the institution's records as parole violators, but as "book transfers." This practice began in 1948 and the figure, 166, represents the succeeding 4.5 years (see Table II).

5. These individuals were originally sentenced to the Reformatory as *juvenile* offenders. When they were released from this institution they were placed on parole until they became

TABLE I  
 A COMPARISON OF THE NUMBER OF INMATES PAROLED  
 WITH THE NUMBER OF INMATES DECLARED PAROLE VIOLATORS  
 DURING THE YEARS OF 1940 TO 1952

Year	Number Paroled	Number Ret'd PV*	% Ret'd PV
1940 .....	1,236	274	22
1941 .....	1,322	228	17
1942 .....	1,276	205	16
1943 .....	929	133	14
1944 .....	767	88	11
1945 .....	724	108	15
1946 .....	860	138	16
1947 .....	833	188	23
1948 .....	1,008	167	17
1949** .....	503	98	19
1950*** .....	1,056	195	19
1951 .....	1,025	212	21
1952 .....	1,035	248	24
Total .....	12,574	2,282	—
Average/yr. ....	1,006	183	18

\* Returned parole violators.

\*\* This year contains only the first six months of 1949.

\*\*\* This year comprises a fiscal year period; i.e., from 7-1-49 to 6-30-50. Years 1951 and 1952 are also fiscal year periods, while the preceding years have been considered as calendar year periods. All subsequent tables have been computed in the same manner, unless stated otherwise.

Twenty-five percent of the 12,574 parolees is accounted for. What about the remaining 75 percent? Can it be safely postulated that approximately three out of every four parolees leave here never to become involved in further difficulty which necessitates their being incarcerated a second time?

If it were possible to provide an affirmative answer to this question, our investigation of this phase of the study would end here. However, the answer is actually a negative one, and such a finding as three out of four being successful would be exceeding erroneous if accepted at face value since the Reformatory records reveal only the behavior of those men who are under the institution's *immediate* supervision. Two large groups of inmates who do not remain under the institution's supervision are the following:

21 years of age. Sometime after they reached this age, they committed another crime and were tried and sentenced, this time as *adult* offenders. These men are known as "recommissioned" inmates. However, inmates who have been sentenced here initially as adults, cannot be returned here a second time after they have been released by the State of Ohio from their paroles. Instead, they are sentenced to the Ohio Penitentiary.

TABLE II  
THE NUMBER OF INMATES  
WHO HAVE COMMITTED ADDITIONAL CRIMES AFTER LEAVING THE REFORMATORY  
AND WHO ARE DEFINITELY KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN INCARCERATED A SECOND TIME

Year	Book Transfers	Recommissioned Inmates*
1940 .....		62
1941 .....		61
1942 .....		42
1943 .....		42
1944 .....		44
1945 .....		49
1946 .....		52
1947 .....		84
1948 .....	16**	69
1949 .....	21	49
1950 .....	27	71
1951 .....	31	51
1952 .....	71	28
Total .....	166	704
Average/yr. ....		56

\* These were originally juvenile offenders.

\*\* Prior to this year (1948) a separate classification for "book transfers" did not exist in the Reformatory's record office. This is a relatively recent development.

(1) During the previous 12.5 years 12,566 men were sentenced to this institution *from the courts*. Only 11 percent (1,344) of these men were juvenile offenders whose behavior could be followed accurately years later.<sup>6</sup> The remaining 89 percent (11,222) were adult offenders, and, if they became involved in further difficulty after they were released from parole, they would not be sentenced here again, but would be imprisoned elsewhere since this institution is for first felony offenders. The institution's records are adequate only for known parole violators and most of the juvenile offenders. Of the larger group of adult offenders, little is known of their post-parole behavior.

(2) From January 1, 1940 to June 30, 1952, 16,965 inmates left the institution (see Table III). Of this number 12,574 were paroled and 4,332 left for other reasons, such as transfers to other institutions, escapes, expirations of maximum sentences, and so on.<sup>7</sup> Little is known of the disposition of nearly two-thirds of the 4,332 inmates who "left for other reasons," because their records were usually transferred with them, and if anything further developed which necessitated their re-incarceration for another crime, the Reformatory was not immediately notified, except through a routine F.B.I. report on the inmate, and this last information was largely inaccessible.

6. These inmates (ages 16 to 20) could be paroled, but they could not be released from parole (and the institution's surveillance) until they became 21 years of age. Their behavior during this time could easily be checked. Also, if they committed a second crime *after* they became 21, they could be returned here as an adult offender. The statistics on the behavior of these men are very reliable.

7. Fifty-eight died and are excluded from this total.

TABLE III  
TOTAL INTAKE AND OUTPUT OF INMATE PERSONNEL AT THE REFORMATORY  
DURING THE YEARS 1940 TO 1952

Year	Total Yearly Gain	Total Yearly Loss
1940 .....	1,583	1,548
1941 .....	1,262	1,629
1942 .....	1,097	1,618
1943 .....	1,094	1,221
1944 .....	1,152	1,204
1945 .....	1,217	1,129
1946 .....	1,319	1,238
1947 .....	1,399	1,164
1948 .....	1,366	1,407
1949 .....	913	662
1950 .....	1,504	1,364
1951 .....	1,238	1,354
1952 .....	1,377	1,427
Total .....	16,521	16,965
Average/yr. ....	1,322	1,357

In order to better visualize the possible post-parole behavior of the adult offenders indicated in (1) above whose actions are generally unknown to us, the files of our 1,344 juvenile offenders were examined. If any of this latter group committed other crimes after they were released from their paroles, most of them would have been returned here and the Reformatory's files would contain a record of this action.

Unfortunately, 269 of the 1,344 juveniles had to be eliminated because they were still under the institution's supervision at this time (9-20-52). All of this group were still under the age of 21 and would either be incarcerated here, or would be on parole. Eighty-five more were eliminated because of deaths, escapes, transfers, and so on. Juveniles who entered the institution before January 1, 1940 or after December 31, 1948 were not included in these computations. Thus, only 990 of the original 1,344 juvenile offenders were available for appraisal.

Of these 990 juveniles, 781 were given paroles but 302 (39 per cent) quickly returned as violators. The remaining 209 were never given paroles but were imprisoned here from the time they entered the institution until they became 21 years of age, when the laws of the State of Ohio require their release. Most of the juveniles who were not paroled were treated in this manner and considered a poor parole risk because of their inability to adjust behaviorally even while in the institution.

The high parole failure rate (39 percent) among these individuals is understandable in view of their instability. Juvenile offenders are notorious for their inability to adjust to either the institution's routine,

or to parole requirements. For example, from 1940 to 1948 inclusive, only about four-fifths of the juvenile offenders were given paroles, yet this group which comprised 9 percent of the Reformatory's population was responsible for 20 percent of all the parole failures during that period—more than twice their share. Also, a recent study of adult and juvenile offenders in terms of frequency of appearances in our own institutional court for breaking rules, revealed that nearly one out of every four (23 percent) of the last 1,000 institutional court cases were juveniles—again more than double what it should have been.

In regard to inmates who left the institution through other channels than parole, as mentioned briefly in (2) above, considerable significance can be attached to the fact that 1,492 inmates were transferred from this institution to the Ohio Penitentiary during the past 12.5 years. It is known that approximately 33<sup>8</sup> percent of these men were sent to the Penitentiary because of some misbehavior<sup>9</sup> on their part here which led the administration to believe that a stricter type of supervision was required than could be provided by the Reformatory. Thus, what actually is a measure to maintain optimal security of the inmate, is basically a reaction stemming from a pronounced maladjustment on the part of the inmate. Since this is a study of initial rehabilitation failures, their inability to adjust while at the Reformatory would assuredly be a possible indication of their future behavior, and deserves inclusion in our final statistics. Our 1,597 escapes might also be considered in this category.

#### SUMMARY

During the previous 12.5 years 16,521 inmates entered the Ohio State Reformatory and 16,965 left. Of the 16,965 who left, 12,574 were paroled and 4,332 more departed through other modes of exit; i.e., escaped, transferred to other institutions, etc. Deaths in the institution account for the remaining difference, but these men were omitted from our tabulations.

Nineteen and one-half percent (2,448) of the 12,574 who were paroled returned as parole violators to serve additional time soon after they left here; and 5.6 percent (704) more were returned to the Reformatory a second time for committing another crime after they had been released from their paroles. Thus, 25.1 percent (3,152) of

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8. This percentage was provided by G. J. Allarding, Acting Superintendent of the Reformatory, from a personal study of the subject, which involved the statistics for the previous 11 years, i.e., 1942 to 1953.

9. Assaulting an officer, inciting a riot, chronic institutional offender of a more serious type, etc.

the parolees are *definitely* known to have been imprisoned again. One out of every four of the parolees returned.

The picture is much worse for the 4,332 who departed from the institution through channels other than parole. Approximately 33 percent of 1,492 of this group were transferred from here to the Penitentiary because of their anti-social behavior, and 1,597 escaped. *At least* 48 percent of the 4,332 could be considered as initial rehabilitation failures.

Altogether, about 5,246 (31 percent) of the 16,965 who left the institution during the past 12.5 years could be conceived as having failed to mature sufficiently to profit from their incarceration at the Reformatory. This figure represents nearly one out of every three as a failure.

This is not unusual, however, when it is learned that approximately 39 percent of the men who are committed here have previously been imprisoned elsewhere for other offenses (see Table IV). Also, 61 percent of the men sentenced to the Ohio Penitentiary during the last five years have been imprisoned elsewhere before they were committed there. In addition, it is further postulated that if accurate records of our adult offenders' (89 percent of the institution's population) post-parole behavior were available, the failure ratio of 31 percent would rise a great deal higher than it is—unquestionably indicating that we still have a long way to go to achieve the optimally desirable aim of the rehabilitation of the novice in crime. In view of what has been

TABLE IV  
A COMPARISON OF THE PENITENTIARY WITH THE REFORMATORY  
IN TERMS OF NEWLY ADMITTED INMATES WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN INCARCERATED  
IN OTHER INSTITUTIONS\*

Year	% of OSR** Commitments	% of OP*** Commitments
1940 .....	55	
1941 .....	46	
1942 .....	36	
1943 .....	45	
1944 .....		
1945 .....	36	
1946 .....	33	
1947 .....	34	61
1948 .....	31	64
1949 .....	37	57
1950 .....	34	61
1951 .....	37	64
Average/yr. ....	39	61

\* Courtesy of John W. Main, Supervisor of Audits and Statistics, State Office Building, Columbus, Ohio.

\*\* Ohio State Reformatory.

\*\*\* Ohio Penitentiary.

learned here at the Reformatory, the largest institution of its type in the country, and considering that Ohio is fairly typical of other states, these figures may be a reflection of the rehabilitation procedures practiced by state institutions of the same kind throughout the United States.

It has been true that penology has been, and still largely is, punitive rather than rehabilitative in orientation. But, here in Ohio at least, the past three years have realized profound changes in administration, personnel, and methodology. Furthermore, it is my personal belief that the next twenty years will witness the development of a material superstructure in the State upon which will be built a rehabilitation program that will begin to *treat* the criminal, instead of merely confine him. And, by treatment in this sense, is meant the focalization of attention on the mental or psychological condition of the inmate; i.e., the changing of his attitudes and habits, the control of his impulses, the establishment of new goals or ideals, and so on. The teaching of trades, religion, school, etc., as practiced today, while contributing much, does not strike at the root of the problem, as most experienced prison personnel will voluntarily admit.

At the risk of appearing naive to the untutored, it is also my personal belief that only when a personality evaluation of each inmate entering the institution is obtained and then utilized by a psychologically oriented counselor who would begin to treat the inmate psychotherapeutically, can we expect a significant change for the better in the social behavior of our charges. There are many other changes or alterations that would need to follow to support this procedure including the changing of the parolee's environment, but *this one is basic* and constitutes the foundation for the entire rehabilitation structure. Until this approach is effected, other expectations regarding any remarkable improvement in the future adjustment of the criminal will be largely wishful thinking. The records for the previous 12.5 years at the largest U. S. Reformatory testify to that.

In the meantime, let us continue to lend our efforts in the advancement of penology as a science incorporating all known and proven therapeutic methods for the improvement of the criminal segment of our population in particular, and thus, of society in general.