

Homeboy Industries Providing a New perspective on the Way to Combat Crime: “Jobs not Jails”

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the way in which society has decided to treat people who have been involved in gangs, and who have been incarcerated. It criticizes the way in which these individuals are treated when they come out of prison, and takes a look at an organization that has chosen to help these individuals by providing resources without which they would not be able to reincorporate themselves back into society. While America has shifted from wanting to rehabilitate offenders, to wanting to incapacitate them, our nation has become the nation with the largest prison population in the world. I will conduct a case study of an organization known as Homeboy Industries” which attempts to fill the void that incapacitation has created. I will take a deep look at the organization and the resources it provides to the individuals who participate in it. I will be utilizing an ethnographic approach borrowed from Hondagneu-Sotelo in which I conduct participant observation and on-site interviews. I hypothesize that the magnitude of the effect that this program will have on rates of recidivism for the men who participate in it will be immense. The men who participate in this program will prove that if America decided to help these individuals rather than try to solve the problem of gangs and crime through incarceration they would be doing a greater good to society because these individuals would be able to re-incorporate themselves back into society rather than turn back to gangs as their only way to survive.

Introduction

Today, America is the nation with the largest prison population in the entire world. With an estimated 2, 419,368 inmates (U.S. Dept. of Justice), America has become the nation that attempts to solve its problems through incarceration. We are currently undergoing what has been called the largest prison expansion in the history of the world. And as our nation struggles in this time of recession, the prison industry flourishes. We as a nation have shifted from wanting to rehabilitate offenders to wanting to incapacitate them thus creating a population which will continue to be incarcerated.

Research Question

Does the lack of jobs and resources available to ex-offenders contribute to the high recidivism rates among Blacks and Latinos?

How can providing resources to ex-offenders benefit the ex-offender and society as a whole?

Hypothesis

I hypothesize that the people who utilize the services that Homeboy Industries offers will have lower recidivism rates than those of the people who come from the same socio-economic status and location but who have not utilized the services that Homeboy industries provides.

Literature Review

Race to Incarcerate

Marc Mauer's Race to Incarcerate focuses on research in the field of race, class, and incarceration. He is one of the most renowned experts in the study of minorities in the prison population. He is the executive director of one of the nation's leading criminal justice reform organizations. Mauer expresses his criticism for the way in which American society had decided to deal with those considered unfit for society. He includes a quote that says, "What an interesting populace we have. Nobody seems at all worried by the fact that we have the largest prison population and that it consists preponderantly of young blacks, a whole generation in jail". Mauer says that, the national inmate population has grown by 500 percent since 1972. He says that out of every three young black men, one will be incarcerated. He speaks about the effects that this has on a community that loses 25 percent of their young male population. In addition, Mauer utilizes up to date statistics that show that despite the decline in crime, arrests have gone up. And also, that despite the fact that blacks and whites use drugs at about the same rates, blacks are five times more likely to be arrested than whites. Mauer tells the true story of a nation which ignores societal issues by incarcerating a single population. He leaves us with an important idea which is fundamental in the research I plan to conduct, "If we started to put white America in jail at the same rate we're putting black America in jail, I wonder whether our collective feeling would be the same, or would we be putting pressure on the president and our elected officials not to lock up America, but to save America?"

Golden Gulag

Ruth Gilmore's Golden Gulag is centered on what Gilmore calls, "The Prison Industrial Complex". She says that prison building is a result of surplus of finance capital, land, labor, and state capacity. She says that, "It is a way to make use of idle land, get capital invested via public debt, and take more than 160,000 low wage workers off the streets. She refers to this happening between the 1980s and 1990s, and today those numbers have grown sporadically. Gilmore's research looks at political and economic reasons for the prison boom. She says that despite the fact that crime has been in decline for the past decades, there has been a rapid and extreme rise in incarceration. This has affected millions of families. In her book she describes her work with a group called Mothers ROC which stands for "Mothers Reclaiming Our Children". This is important because Gilmore looks at the societal toll that the incarceration of a generation of black males has on the society, on the community, on the family, and on the individual. Gilmore does an exemplary job of exploring the political, economic, and day-to-day realities of the prison boom.

Racial Issues in the Criminal Justice System

Marvin D. Free Jr.'s Racial Issues in the Criminal Justice System: The Case of African Americans looks at issues of race in the criminal justice system. Specifically he looks into the problem of racial profiling. It is used as a preventive measure, as a way to identify potential criminals. He talks about the way in which criminals are identified by race, ethnicity, national origin, and skin color. He says that this is a real problem because it creates situations in which ethnic minorities are singled out because of their skin color.

He provides example of situations in which racial profiling has occurred. In addition he does an exemplary job of explaining the “Cost of being African American”. By cost, he refers to high bails that are posted, the racial profiling, and the longer sentences. He utilizes up to accurate statistics that clearly depict the inequality in the American criminal justice system. Minority groups in America are often stigmatized because of their appearance. This creates situations in which individuals can fall into the criminal justice system because of their appearance and continue in a cycle of incarceration for the same reasons, policing and racial profiling.

Crime, Inequality, and the State

Mary E. Vogel’s Crime, Inequality, and the State, focuses on the way in which crime is defined in the United States. She asks the same fundamental question that researchers who study the prison system ask, “Why has crime dropped while imprisonment still grows?” She attributes this growth to, labour market dynamics, the rise of a “prison industry” and, the boost provide to economics of underdeveloped regions. She says that prison expansion contradicts what works in reducing crime and reoffending. Therefore, the creation and growth of millions of prisons, and America becoming the top nation in terms of incarcerating people is not really being instituted in order to help crime go down. On the contrary, the way in which America has decided to deal with criminals is not to help them rehabilitate themselves, but instead to lock them up in order to continue creating prisons. Therefore, she blames the mass creation of new prisons and incarceration of men of color not on crime itself, but the profit it creates for economics in underdeveloped regions.

Kids These Days

Karen Sternheimer's Kids These Days focuses on the way in which America depicts youth. The media make us believe that teens are violent thugs who need to be incarcerated. This creates a fear in society, a fear that leads to the incarceration of teens. Sternheimer looks at issues of incarceration concerning not only teens, but also teens of color. She talks about the way in which the media depicts young males of color as criminals but fails to depict the situations that contribute to their criminality such as racial profiling. Sternheimer presents a salient example of the idea that what we see on television is not the truth. For example, she addresses the fact that often what we hear on television is a distorted truth that makes it seem as if crime is on the rise, and teens are more violent than ever, especially teens of color. Sternheimer's work focuses in the misperception which the media has created of teenagers and which society takes as true. Sternheimer attempts to shed light upon the realities of crime and delinquency in order to teach readers to be more critical of the media and what they present.

Deviance, Crime & Criminal Justice

Bradley R.E. Wright's Boundaries: Readings in Deviance, Crime & Criminal Justice is extremely important to my research because it describes the many different theories and frameworks of crime and delinquency. The theories it includes are: Strain, Conflict, Labeling, Neutralization, Differential Association, Social Disorganization, Functionalist and Routine Activities. All of these theories are different approaches that are used by researchers in understanding crime and delinquency. This book goes in depth

into understanding why people act in delinquent ways. It addresses issues of gangs both in the inner city and in the suburbs. This book talks about the different ways in which adolescents of different ages are treated. For example one of the stories it tells are about a group called the “Saints” and a group called the “Roughnecks”. The Saints are rich kids who appear to be “good” and to never get into trouble. The Roughnecks are kids from less affluent families who are seen as troublemakers. Their social status and appearance dictate the punishment they will get. For example, both groups commit the same crimes but when the Saints get caught they say, “Boys will be boys”. And, when the roughnecks get caught they are punished and said to be leading lives of no good. This story is extremely important because it illustrates the way in which our judgment about delinquency is corrupt. We judge delinquency by people’s social status and appearance rather than by the criminal acts that they actually commit.

Tell Them Who I Am

Elliot Liebow’s Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women aided me in the art of interviewing. According to Publisher’s Weekly, “Liebow here succeeds in demolishing the anonymity of the homeless. Skillfully blending a social scientist's objectivity with humanitarian concern, he observes women who live in a variety of shelters near Washington, D.C.--how they interact with one another, family and shelter staff; pass their days; and struggle to retain their dignity in the face of rejection by society.” Liebow spends all of his time studying these women who he calls smart and educated. He says that they are all women who, with the adequate help, could succeed in society. He says that although some of these women are socially and mentally disturbed,

they only show the same symptoms of anyone else who would be under the same stresses. Liebow does a magnificent job of shedding light upon the unfortunate situation of a people who are often ignored and looked down upon by society. His research is instrumental in not only learning how to adequately immerse oneself in the setting which he wishes to observe but also in giving voice to a people who are oppressed by society. By truly trying to listen to the women's stories and trying to understand the experiences which lead them to a life of homelessness, Liebow opens up a new world not only for the readers but for the women whose side of the story is now finally heard. Because, whenever the issue of homelessness comes up, all I hear is about how they are a danger to society and how they make places look bad. Instead of thinking of way in which these women can be helped so that they can better their own lives, society only thinks of ways to get rid of them. Liebow's works is inspiring and will be helpful in my own research in trying to understand a group of people who face similar challenges, those who have been imprisoned.

Race, Respectability, and Masculinity

Mitchell Duneier Slim's Table Race, Respectability, and Masculinity, is "A moving testament to the power of integration over ingrained beliefs, this sensitive study reveals that the underclass has many faces. Unlike the "outer-directed, attention-seeking" black male stereotypes portrayed in sociology and the mass media, Duneier's African American cafeteria buddies are "consistently inner-directed," deriving their sense of self-worth from adherence to personal standards of civility, solidarity, decency, pride and discretion" according to Publishers Weekly. This story is based on a white master's

student who observes a man named Slim and tells his story. This book is extremely useful because it breaks down stereotypical misperceptions of Black men. Through this work, Duneier attempts to demonstrate that the man of color which often depicted in negative ways is simply a socially constructed stereotype which aids in oppressing men of color. His book tells the story of men of color who like white men are remarkable human beings who should not be judged by their appearance, which is often associated with negative connotations. Duneier does a remarkable job of disproving misperceptions about men of color.

G-Dog and the Homeboys

Celeste Fremon's G-Dog and the Homeboys: Father Greg Boyle and the Gangs of East Los Angeles, is an ethnography of the initial stages of Homeboy Industries and its founder and initial members. Fremon follows the life of Father Greg and the gang members of the community that he served. Fremon follows their lives for a period of over ten years during which she changes from being a reporter who only wants a story, to a concerned friend to the gang members of the community. Her book is an eye-opener because she tells the lives of the people whom the media depicts only as criminals. She presents these young men not as statistics, but as young men who struggle to survive in a world infested with social ills which are almost impossible to overcome. Fremon follows the life of gang members who commit heinous crimes and who inflict pain upon each other but who are non the less human. They have to put on a façade of strong, scary men because if not they will become victims in the dangerous neighborhoods they live in. The majority of the young men she follows fall into prison. The majority of them come out of

prison and want to change their lifestyles, but they lack the resources and support to be able to leave behind a past that haunts them. Fremon's book clearly illustrates the needs of these young men and addresses the fact that without rehabilitation and adequate resources we cannot truly help these young men save themselves and stay out of prison.

Hard Time: Ex-Offenders Returning Home After Prison

Joan Petersilia's article, "Hard Time: Returning Home After Prison" directly addresses recidivism rates and denounces the mass creation of prisons and incarceration of black and Latino males. Petersilia says that thirty percent of offenders fall back into prison within the first six months of their release. She claims that in order to stop wasting billions of dollars annually to incarcerate these individuals we would spend less money and effort in actually trying to rehabilitate them. Petersilia says that lack of resources available to ex-offenders highly contributes to their inability to successfully transition into society. She argues that since the first six months after release are critical to their success we need to spend our money and efforts on that time period which will in the long run save America money. This is because instead of having to provide for inmates constantly, we would only have to provide for them enough to help them re-incorporate themselves back into society and become contributors to society rather than a cost to society.

Data and Methods

Quantitative

In my research I utilized both quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative research I used is research that has already been done. For example, I looked at statistics in books such as Golden Gulag, and I also looked at the U.S. National crime report index. In addition, I looked at government information that has statistics that directly address recidivism rates. All of this information is related to the central aspect of my research project which is related the overrepresentation of Blacks and Latinos in the prison population and focuses on recidivism rates among a group of men who are in a rehabilitation program known as Homeboy Industries. I made sure that the statistics are representative of the population and that they have statistical significance. I also made a graph to demonstrate through imagery that the number of people of color in jail is not proportional to the number of people of color in America. According to the United States Department of Justice, more than one in one hundred adults in America are incarcerated. And, the number dramatically increases for Black and Latinos. Blacks are incarcerated at a rate of one in fifteen and Latinos are incarcerated at a rate of one in thirty-six.

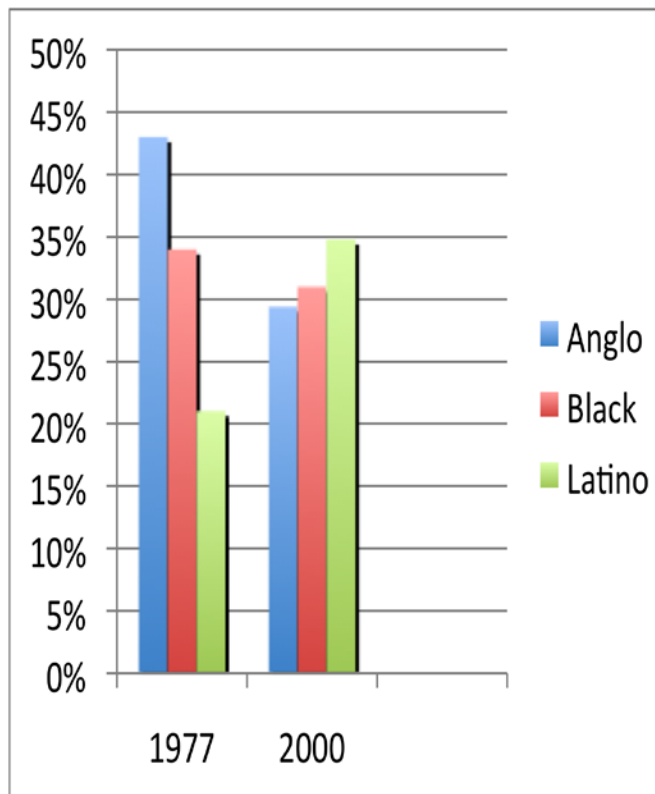


Figure 1.0: U.S. Dept. of Justice

Shows, the dramatic shift and the growth of the number of Black and Latino people incarcerated.

Qualitative

The Site

I also conducted qualitative research. I worked with a rehabilitation center called “Homeboy Industries”. Homeboy Industries is a salient example of the way in which providing opportunities to people can aid them in their attempt to better their lives and stay away from drugs and violence. “Homeboy’s services enable young people to redirect their lives and provide them with hope for their futures. Our free support services focus on case management, education (including Opportunities for Learning Charter High School), job training and placement, legal services, mental health counseling, twelve step meetings, pre-release and transition counseling, and tattoo removal”

(<http://www.homeboy-industries.org/overview-free-services.php>). Most of the people who are involved in Homeboy Industries are people who were involved in gang life, who

have been incarcerated, and who are now taking advantage of the help that Homeboy Industries has to offer. The main purpose of the program is to fill in the gaps that the government has failed to fill. For example the program is intended to provide social services such as legal aid and mental help. One of the most important aspects of the program is that the people who participate in it are helped by the director of the program to find jobs. It is difficult for men of color to acquire jobs, even more so for men of color who have been incarcerated. Therefore, this program is extremely helpful because they provide jobs for these men who otherwise would have nowhere to turn but to gangs. This program demonstrates that if the government really wanted to help these men stay out of prison they would be taking the steps necessary to help them reincorporate themselves back into society once they have been released from jail.

Ethnographic Approach & Mini on-site interviews

For my methods I followed Hondagneu-Sotelo's approach in her article, "There's a Spirit That Transcends the Border": Faith, Ritual, and Postnational Protest at the U.S.-Mexico Border". I conducted sixteen hours of participant observation during which I observed the way in which the institution works. I sat in the lobby and I also sat in the café in which members of Homeboy industries work. In addition I conducted six on-site mini interviews. I conducted impromptu interviews with both staff and participants of homeboy industries. These interviews are extremely important and useful because they were done while the interviewees were in the setting that they were asked about. They were being interviewed while experiencing the event rather than afterward when they would be removed from the setting in which they had the experience.

Results and Discussion

Through my research I have acquired significant evidence to support the idea that it is necessary to have adequate resources available to ex-offenders in order for them to reincorporate themselves back into society. In a time when America's goal has shifted from wanting to use the experience of incarceration as a time for the individual to acquire sobriety and skills and to prepare for the re-entry process, we have shifted to incapacitation. We have shifted from rehabilitation to incapacitation. This means that instead of helping ex-offenders rehabilitate because we know that they will eventually come back into society, we are instead shutting down any chance for their survival under legal means. There are many stigmas associated with having been incarcerated. As a society we expect individuals who have been incarcerated to become law-abiding citizens and to contribute to society upon their release. But as I have learned in my research, it is almost impossible for them to do so without resources and support.

Homeboy Industries provides an opportunity for these individuals who have been incarcerated to change themselves. By providing resources such as: Case Management, Education, Early Intervention Program: WIN (Work is noble), Twelve Step Meetings, Mental Health Program, Legal Services, Employment Counselors, Temporary Housing Job training, Tattoo Removal, Employment. Some facts about the program are that, 8,000 gang members a year come through the program, 1,200 in gang tattoo removal, 80-85 a year in Mental Health, 425 every month in job development, and 200-280 working at Homeboy Industries.

At Homeboy Industries, they are provided with the opportunity to change their life in a place where societal stigmas associated with having been incarcerated do not

exist. Participants are provided with the opportunity to recreate themselves and become productive members of society. According to information provided by Homeboy Industries' staff, although the people who utilize the resources that Homeboy Industries provides continue to fall back into prison, they are not going in as often or as frequently and, they are taking three times as long to fall back into prison as those from their same socio-economic status and location who do not utilize the resources that Homeboy Industries provides. They before had access to and which are instrumental to their staying out of prison utilize resources which they never.

Conclusion

I conclude by reiterating that America is the nation with the largest prison population in the world. And, that instead of utilizing our money to rehabilitate them, we spend it on incarcerating them. It costs us approximately \$35,000 dollars a year per inmate in prison yet it only costs \$4,000 to send a person to a Cal State. It doesn't make sense to continue spending on incarcerating individuals while that money could be spent helping those individuals become productive members of society and spending less in the process.

Homeboy Industries provides a salient example of the way in which providing adequate resources to ex-offenders can in effect prevent them from continuing in their life of crime. It has been proven that mass incarceration is not the solution to the problem of crime in society. Instead we have seen that allowing for the individual to have access to resources which are instrumental for success are key in the re-entry process into society. Homeboy Industries' motto is, "Jobs not Jails". These individuals are in dire need of a

second chance, of an opportunity to demonstrate to society that they can be and want to be productive members of society. They are shouting loud and clear that the solution to many of the social ills that exist in America today is not the creation of more prisons but rather the creation of opportunities for individuals who considered “at-risk”.

Limitations

Some of the limitations in my research were time constraints and lack of statistical information. The organization which I worked with, Homeboy Industries, does not keep a record of the people who come through the program and whether or not they fall back into prison. This is because they have very scarce resources and cannot afford to keep track .

Future Research

In future research I would like to conduct a longitudinal study with members of Homeboy industries in order to keep track of the people who utilize the resources that Homeboy Industries provides and whether or not they fall back into prison. According to the research, it is suggested that providing these resources is crucial to their success but I would like to acquire concrete statistical information to further prove these findings.

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