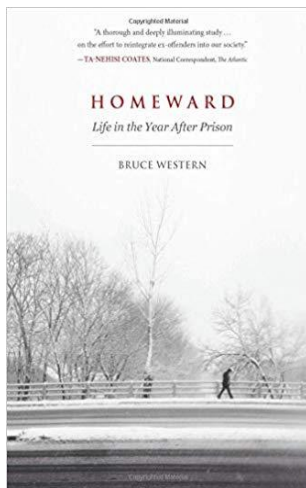


book review – Western: ‘Homeward: Life After Prison’



Bruce Western, *Homeward: Life in the Year After Prison* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2018) Illus., notes, refs., index, 216 pp.

The author is a sociologist and a professor of criminal justice policy at Harvard University. He also taught classes to inmates at two prisons. His previous books include *Punishment and Inequality in America*.

This book is a study based on the reentry of men and women who left Massachusetts state prison in 2012 and 2013. Since he posits that mass incarceration is characterized by inequality and injustice, the goal is “to reduce incarceration and its pernicious effects.” (p. xii). He raises questions about the ethics of punishment of the sort that occurs in American prisons, when punishment ends, and how a convict’s debt to society is extinguished. His goal is to “imagine a better path to justice.” (p. xiv).

Prior to 1970, the United States incarcerated people at about the same rate as other nations. But from that time to the present, the U.S. incarceration rate increased five times its historic average, and the U.S. became the world leader in incarceration. Those sent to prison were overwhelmingly poor. Especially among African-American and Latino populations, going to prison became commonplace. “The research showed that the vast American penal system only modestly reduced crime but was associated with a variety of negative effects. Mass incarceration was tearing up families, stoking unemployment, harming children whose parents had been incarcerated, and costing taxpayers over \$80 billion a year. [pp. 1-2].

Large factors in who gets incarcerated involve grim conditions of poverty and trauma in childhood, leading to learning problems at school (and subsequent low levels of educational attainment), poor health, mental illness, drug addiction, and homelessness. All of this is in a context of violence and daily life outside the usual patterns of steady adult employment and economic advancement. [p. 3] Such persons came out of situations of violence, and they were subjected to even more violence while incarcerated.

The 107 men and 15 women interviewed for this study (62 were African-American, 37 were Anglo, and 23 were Latino) had a median age of 32 and an average of ten-and-a-half years of schooling. Two-thirds reported histories of drug addiction and mental illness. Many had been homeless before they went to prison. Exposure to serious violence and other trauma in childhood was common. Chronic unemployment was widespread. [p. 5]

In all these respects, sex offenders are very different from the majority of prisoners in the United States. One irritating thing is the author chose to begin the book by complaining about a sex offender. In contrast to his sympathetic view of poor prisoners, he bluntly stated that “I never looked forward to meeting with Jim. ... The interviews revealed nothing about the origins of Jim’s pedophilia. He was a pariah in the jail” (p. xi). He mentions nothing about any other sex offender, so this book offers little on that specific topic. It does, however, reflect the antipathy that sex offenders face within prison culture, from other inmates, from staff, and evidently from sociologists as well.

Professor Western understands that the first few weeks after release are a time of unique stress. Disorientation, anxiety, depression, social isolation, loneliness, and anxiety – especially among older returnees after many years of living in prison – are common. Detachment from family is especially bad, since it leads to housing insecurity

HOUSING: [p. 26] Many men when they first get out of prison, are put in an open dormitory with many other men they do not know, and have to worry that their meager possessions will get stolen. At the least, halfway houses and shelters should supply private rooms, replicating on a small scale the housing they will be in later. A large open dormitory supplies none of this. Those who moved in with family members adjusted much better than those with nowhere to live.

[pp. 33-34] Having a supportive family to come home to, to provide help in establishing life again as well as a place to live, was crucial. Most young men lived with an older female relative, usually their mother, after release.

PROBATION: [p. 34] Many resented having to pay a monthly fee to a probation officer when they had no income. Officers provided little help in the most important needs of the released person: finding a place to live, getting a job, and reconciling with family members.

[p. 34] Halfway houses and shelters have so many restrictions, like curfews and severe limits on family visits, that it is difficult to accomplish successful integration into a home community.

[p. 35] The emphasis of probation officers is to avoid recidivism, instead of attaining a basic level of well-being in a community.

[p. 35] Having a close family helps reintegration, but prison disrupts families. Spouses often divorce when a mate goes to prison. Children often end up homeless when their parent is convicted, because the breadwinner is no longer able to support them. Children of prisoners are likely to have behavioral problems and trouble with school.

[p. 37] People with histories of drug addiction and/or mental illness were much less likely to receive family support while in prison and after they got out. Many with mental illness turned to drugs to self-medicate, and extended drug addiction led to or worsened mental illnesses. They mostly had to live in shelters or on the street. What this shows is the need to provide stable housing, especially for older prisoners with fewer family members to take them in, and especially for those with mental illness or addictions.

EMPLOYMENT: [p. 40] Besides housing, the other most important factor in successful reentry is getting a job. Employment also builds pride in self-reliance, social status as a productive person, and a daily routine to keep people out of trouble. However, obstacles to getting a job are lack of education, poor work history, poor health, and having a criminal record. Some suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, due to violence against them while in prison.

[p. 41] Few had full-time permanent employment. Most of those who did, were continuing in work-release jobs they had while in prison. There is a need to expand such programs.

[p. 83] The median wage for the first year after release was \$6,428, about half the poverty level for a single person. Most had great trouble getting and keeping a job. Not only criminal record, but also lack of a high school diploma, physical disability, and mental illness prevented other work. Most who worked had minimum-wage jobs. About half had no job at the end of the year, and a quarter had never been able to get a job.

[p. 84] Those few who were able to get a full-time job at more than minimum wage were able to work their way out of poverty. Such jobs were a source of pride and self-confidence. Working regular hours gave their life structure, and kept them away from drugs. Since they had good work, they did not need to do robbery or other crimes to provide a living wage. For the majority, who had no or only minimum wage, they had to piece together government support programs, help from family members, and sometimes illegal work to make ends meet. [Parole officers should give top priority to getting a good job for inmates. When that is not possible, push education to get GED or higher. For those with mental illness, provide adequate government support so the inmate is not a drain on family members. This helps avoid family conflicts due to resentment that the inmate is not paying his way.]

[p. 88] Work-release programs, where a prisoner gets an outside regular job at the last year of his imprisonment, and is allowed to go out each day and then must come back to the prison after work, provide great advantages. First, it allows the person to save money so that when he gets out he can pay rent plus security deposit. Second, it provides continuity with a continuing job, so the person has a set role immediately after release. Those who do not have a job upon release have a hard time financially as they struggle to look for a job. All prisoners who are capable of working should get work-release jobs while still in prison, and prison officials should give high priority to helping them find a job.

HEALTH CARE: [p. 49] The most difficult inmates are those who suffer from mental illness, especially “where psychosis may be associated with serious violence.” Many have chronic pain and physical disabilities.

[p. 28] Many took psychiatric medications in prison to control anxiety, panic attacks, and depression. But when released, prisoners often are provided no medications upon leaving. [This happened to this reviewer. When I left the halfway house I asked why I was not being given a 30-day supply. They told me I would get prescriptions from Medicare “immediately.” That was not true. It took weeks to get prescriptions, and eight months before I received full Medicare coverage.]

[p. 60] “Self destructive drug use and mental illness challenge how we think about the willpower and capacity of people who go to prison. Much of the agency—the will to change—that even our most humane rehabilitative programs ask of people in prison is compromised by precisely the

physical and mental difficulties that placed them at risk of incarceration in the first place. The people we ask to make the largest changes in their lives often have the least capacity to do so.”

[p. 60] Co-occurring physical disability and pain lead to drug and alcohol use to dull the physical and mental problems, and those addictions make the disability worse.

Poor schooling and employment availability are not the only factors. Many poor people have significant childhood trauma and PTSD, anxiety and physical pain that make their economic problems worse. Depression and anxiety can run in families, which “limits a person’s capacity to think clearly, without pain, and to bring energy to daily affairs.”

[p. 61] Schools need to have other ways to deal with behavioral or learning problems besides suspension and expulsion.

The poor need better medical care, which notices and deals with addictions, and provides relief for chronic pain.

At the same time, while violent people need to be separated from society in order to prevent them from harming another person in the future, there is no moral or practical justification for punishing and harassing them. Prison should not add to their stress levels, but should try to reduce it. The whole “punishment for deterrence” approach is not effective and does not work to reduce crime. Separation from society is punishment enough. They should be allowed to work at a job according to their capability, paid a living wage to provide for their own needs and their family’s needs, and given medical care to relieve their pain. This should include marijuana if needed.]

[p. 61] Prison should focus on helping very troubled people, in an individualized program that is suited to their problems: provide good health care and addiction programs, as well as other programs to develop skills in social interaction, in anger management, in dealing with learning problems to promote education, and in helping them see prison as a time to “engage in a project of life transformation.”

[p. 62] Physical and mental illness can greatly limit the ability of rehabilitation, “not because people are unwilling, but because they lack the physical and mental capacity to effectively intervene in their own lives.”

PROBATION: Reentry programs should focus on getting stable housing, a job, and good medical coverage that is immediately available after release.

ROOTS OF VIOLENCE IN CHILDHOOD: [p. 63] Inmates often had parents who physically abused them, and they witnessed abuse of others. Poverty exacerbated the problems of parents trying to deal with disorderly behavior. In contexts where young males grow up without much adult interaction, violence could be valid as a useful way of getting things done.

[There is a great need for more close adult interaction than what parents can provide on their own. Young males especially need adult male role models.]

[p. 64] “Violence is a dominating reality in environments of poverty and racial inequality. Building peace and nonviolence in both public policy and community life is one of the most urgent moral challenges presented by mass incarceration.”

Children who grow up in a household without consistency (for example, same meal times and bedtimes), in unpredictability (e.g., losing a job and being jobless, moving residence often, and

changing live-in partners), and chaos, which put family relationships under stress and interferes with warm interaction between parents and their children. Housing insecurity, family arguments, and high rates of incarceration add to the circulation of adults and children through poor homes.

[p. 65] Sociological studies by Robert Sampson and William Julius Wilson found that, as manufacturing jobs left America, many black men were left unemployed. Single parent households multiplied. With fathers absent, there was less supervision of adolescent boys. A culture emerged in which uncontrolled boys developed a view that violence is a way of life. Low-income single mothers are too short-handed to provide oversight of adolescent boys to curb delinquency. Murder and robbery rates are highest in neighborhoods with more single parents. Poor neighborhoods do not have strong community organizations to control violence.

[Such studies suggest that expanding Big Brother-type organizations, to provide adult male mentors to bond closely with boys in poor neighborhoods, could help to curb violence, drug addiction, and incarceration]

[p. 57] Survey of prisoners reveal that, as children, nearly half were beaten by their parent, another third grew up with some other kind of family violence, and 40 percent witnessed someone being killed. Nine out of ten got in fights while in childhood. Half said they were seriously injured while growing up. Three fourths witnessed assaults while in prison.

[p. 72] Most prisoners reported drug and/or alcohol abuse by adults in their household when they were children. Mothers' boyfriends were the most common source of domestic violence in the home. Women who were economically dependent on a man and who moved into a man's house, moved around a lot and had fights. These boyfriends were the most common source of violence to the kids. Heroin and cocaine provoked parental neglect, while alcohol provoked anger and violence.

[p. 82] Instead of focusing on individual offenders in the criminal justice system, government should recognize that violence is pervasive in poor communities and the prime need is to get rid of poverty.

Many of the mini-biographies cited show that the inmate was getting in trouble at school by age 12. Since this is so common, adult male mentors should be available to do more intervention to try to keep such students from going in a negative direction. If they are not good at school, they should be able to do employment that will keep them busy and provide income. Otherwise, with much time on their hands, they gravitate toward drug use.

PRISON POLICY: [p. 91] It really affects prisoners harshly if a parent or close relative dies and they are not allowed to go to the funeral. Funerals help with closure. [It is cruel not to allow prisoners to attend the funeral. They should be released with an ankle monitor and close supervision by local plainclothes police officers. There is no good reason to deny prisoners this important family connection. Prison is bad enough as it is, and should not pile on additional stress that inhibits reentry.]

NEED FOR JOBS: [p. 93] Many ex-prisoners report feeling stressed and disillusioned when they cannot find a job. One of them reported that after doing about a hundred job applications a month and an average of 20 interviews a month, without success for several months, he felt stressed "because I'm just at home on the Internet and do [job] applications all day. And I don't do nothing all day. I stay in the house so I won't get into trouble" with police.

[By being so afraid of being arrested again by police, he cut himself off from any kind of social life. Having a job is crucial, not only for the ex-prisoner but also for their family who are often impoverished by having to support him when he cannot bring in income. In Norway and other European countries, prisoners are provided a menial job working for the government when they are released. If they can find another job they are welcome to do so, but at least they have a job in the meantime and do not have the stress of not knowing what their future will hold.]

DELAYS: [p. 95] When disabled prisoners are released, it takes weeks for them to get qualified for food stamps, a bus pass, and disability income. In the meanwhile they have expenses, especially immediately after release, like a cell phone to receive probation and job calls, and clothes.

[p. 96] “This complex combination of income streams and in-kind assistance took several months to assemble, and only through great effort, navigating complicated bureaucracies, filling out forms and leaving phone messages, visiting programs, welfare offices, and health clinics. Upon arrival, often waiting for hours for their name to be called ... nothing was left to their own discretion. ... When a livelihood is patched together from so many sources, it requires active management, and each of the pieces is periodically at risk of being lost.” Many of the programs provide benefits for only a set number of months, and if someone does not have a job within that time their benefit is lost. If a person has to pay monthly court fees, child support, or probation fees, then there is often nothing left to live on.

[p. 97] By a year after release from prison, one-fourth of the ex-prisoners had never managed to find a job. Many of those reported high levels of chronic pain, mostly due to back injuries or arthritis, and depression. With average incomes of \$570 per month (\$6,840 per year) from government assistance programs, they were living in extreme poverty.

[p. 98] “Being extremely poor often meant walking from appointment to appointment because public transport was too expensive. And days were spent waiting in the offices of criminal justice and social services agencies. ... There’s a certain cruelty in this situation. Those who live with chronic pain, serious mental illness, and a long history of drug addiction ... accompany the greatest material hardship after incarceration. Leaving incarceration is most often a transition from prison to poverty.”

[p. 99] Most ex-prisoners were highly motivated to look for a job after release. But after looking unsuccessfully for months, many became discouraged and retreated into listless depression.

[p. 100] For those “without family support, there are no clear alternatives to prison. ... Institutions designed for punishment are pressed into service to feed and house those with no real survival strategies in free society.”

FAMILY RELATIONS: [p. 101] The crucial role of family support in successful reentry, especially mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters. Spouses or romantic partners provided a place to live for only ten percent of the ex-prisoners. Family often support the inmate, financially and emotionally, and provide a place to live and help him find a job. If family is not helpful, most ex-prisoners end up in shelters or homeless, and the reentry is much worse.

LACK OF MALE ROLE MODEL: [p. 102] Bobby’s father has been in prison for most of his life, and he and his younger brother were raised by his single mother. At age 13 he started doing drugs and staying out late. Several months later his mother got a court-ordered curfew to try to keep him in at night, but he would sneak out. She was working full-time to pay the rent. He earned money

selling drugs, and at age 18 he fathered a daughter with a local girl who did not want the baby. So Bobby's mother took in the baby and raised her when Bobby went to prison for drug dealing.

ADDICTION: Recidivism is usually viewed as a behavioral problem, a continuation of criminal conduct or a failure of rehabilitation. The biggest predictor of recidivism was drug addiction. Addicts get sent back to prison either because they failed a drug test, were caught buying or selling drugs, did a robbery in order to get money to buy drugs, or did acts of violence while high or in an alcoholic rage. The second most important factor was being younger in age.

PROBATION: The next biggest factor was being under a parole officer [p. 8]. Least likely to return were prisoners who were not under supervision by a parole officer. [p. 126] When probation offices were created during the Progressive era of the early 20th century, the officer was doing both supervision and social work. But in recent decades probation offices drifted away from their rehabilitation origins. Probation officers "now spend much of their time monitoring compliance with the many conditions of release ... [and] have a prevailing culture that emphasizes surveillance over services. ... They are focused on surveillance activities such as drug testing, monitoring curfews, and collecting fees."

[p. 127] Even though those ex-prisoners who were on supervision were less likely to commit a crime than those prisoners who had finished their sentence and had no probation period, they were more likely to be sent back to prison. 20% of those who were re-incarcerated were sent to prison without breaking a law, but because they violated a condition of their parole. Sometimes people would be sent back to prison for going outside the small district where they were approved to live, for having contact with a person under age 18 or with another ex-prisoner, for forgetting to report contact with a law enforcement officer, for being in a house or a car where drugs (even if marijuana was legal) or a firearm was present (even if he did not know such drugs or firearms were there), or for having pornography. Some were sent back to prison because they did not have money to pay their monthly parole fees.

[p. 129] For parole officers' "Reincarceration can be largely a procedural matter for busy agencies whose default perspective is suspicious, risk-adverse, and little concerned with the sacredness of liberty for the formerly incarcerated."

[p. 130] "Each probation officer has only a few tools with which to manage inevitable disruptions, and reincarceration is chief among them. ... The environment of surveillance is primed for the possibility of violation of many conditions. For men and women who are poor and often unemployed, monthly supervision fees simply add to the risk of noncompliance. ... Parole revocation is a bureaucratically organized deprivation of liberty that often seems purposeless and unaccountable.

AGE FACTOR IN RECIDIVISM: [p. 102] "The most basic social fact of criminology is that, after adolescence, criminal involvement declines as people get older. ... The relationship between age and reincarceration reflects not just people's decreasing involvement in crime but also their social context. Spending time with young friends and family members raises the risk of running into police, making arrest and return to custody more likely." [p. 134] For example, if a young person goes to a party, he or she may not even know if another person at the party is also an ex-felon. If police raid the party because a neighbor complains about the noise, and find more than one ex-felon present, both could be sent back to prison, much less if drugs or a gun were found (even if the ex-felons had no idea that anyone there was carrying a gun or drugs). [p. 138] Older people, in

contrast, are less likely to be stopped by police, and their peers are less likely to be involved in crime because, like most people, they grew out of it. Many people take a different attitude as they get older, they give higher priority toward their children or other dependents.

PROBATION PROBLEMS: [p. 131] Many young men who were involved in crime do not want to go back to their old neighborhood after release, because they do not want to be back in that same setting. But probation usually requires people upon release to move back into the same city, and sometimes even the same neighborhood. They may have enemies they want to avoid, and may feel the need to carry a gun to protect themselves. If they cannot afford to live in a safe neighborhood, they may feel the need to arm themselves if they fear break-ins or robberies. Having a firearm is a violation of probation, and will result in being sent back to prison.

PROBATION'S COUNTERPRODUCTIVE RULES: [p. 131] Probation requires a person to get a job, but then may also require attendance at a drug treatment program or a sex-offender treatment program that may have nothing to do with a person's specific case. They may require persons to take GED classes when they already have graduated from high school. Juggling such requirements while also looking for a job, and then finding a job that will accommodate the various absences is extremely difficult.

[p. 137] Probation sends people back to prison if they are discovered using drugs, which "show the shortcomings of a purely behavioral conception of recidivism. Drug addicts may resume drug use for many reasons. Sometimes drugs offer a way of coping with personal tragedy. ... Intermittent relapse is characteristic of attaining long-term sobriety." [p. 147] Prisoners are usually released with 30 days supply of medicines, but often it takes more than 30 days for a doctor to receive prison medical records. Some prisoners may be in such pain from physical or mental illnesses that they take illegal drugs to ease the pain. Others may not have housing and might end up at a homeless shelter, where other occupants may be using drugs and they get caught up in it. Still others may be so depressed at not having been able to get a job or housing, that they relapse.

FEMALE PRISONERS: [p. 139] Nine out of ten prisoners are male. Males are more involved in violence, start crimes at younger ages, and stay criminally active longer. Women are most likely to be arrested for drug issues, and few are involved in violence. They tend to have long histories as victims of sexual violence and other types of violence.

[p. 140] Prisoners mostly come from backgrounds of "poverty, family chaos, mental illness, addiction, and histories of trauma and abuse." Even more than men, women felons consistently had the most serious mental health problems and were the most troubled, with lifetimes of victimization beginning in childhood. Women retained stronger connections to their children and relatives than men.

[p. 154] "Where girls grow up in poverty, subject to sexual abuse and other violence in an environment where drug addiction and mental illness are hopelessly entangled and children are neglected or taken away, the prison emerges as a bad solution to many problems."

[p. 154] Many women get into dealing drugs or prostitution because they can do the work at home, while they look after their children, since they cannot make enough money at minimum-wage jobs to pay for childcare while they are gone to a work site. Others do those jobs to support their drug addiction, which often is a form of self medication due to pain and other health problems. In cases like these, "incarceration was not ordered according to any well-laid plan to deter crime or render

justice. Prison simply lay at the end of the road after a series of failures of support for mental health, drug treatment, stable housing, and child well-being. ... Punishment often adds suffering to the lives of those who have been victimized.” [p. 155] “Incarceration carries a special burden for women who are mothers, dividing them from the children with whom they have lived.”

[p. 155] “Theory says that incarceration deters crime when the pain of lost liberty exceeds the pleasures of crime. In the real world of criminally involved women, punishment’s deterrent effect is compromised by the conflict and disorder that accompany the failures of the American safety net An institution that is intended to produce justice through punishment perversely produces injustice.”

CHAPTER 10: RACE AND RACISM – [p. 156] African-Americans have gone from slavery to oppression by segregation, but progress after the civil rights reforms has been disappointing, since so many black people end up in poverty and prison. This is the New Jim Crow that keeps so many oppressed. School dropouts, poor job prospects, and the economic effects of incarceration after release combine to keep many black people in poverty.

[p. 172] It is not just animus toward black and brown people on the part of law enforcement officers, though such animus exists. It is also the structural way that black and brown communities are more heavily policed, especially young men, and crimes that black and brown people commit carry more harsh prison sentences that result in longer years in prison. “The economic marginality of young black and brown men, and all the antisocial behavior that follows, was answered with incarceration.” [This means that an effective way to address this disparity is to provide job training in prison and actual jobs for prisoners upon their release, so they can hope to have productive constructive lives.]

CHAPTER 11: SOCIAL JUSTICE – White prisoners were older, with long histories of drug, mental illness, and skid row homelessness. Black prisoners were younger, with little schooling or legal work history, in a labor market with few jobs to young men without high school diplomas. All marked by poverty, trauma, mental illness, and human frailty. [p. 9]

Although American criminal justice is predicated on “a bright line between guilty offenders and the innocent victims on whom they preyed, the reality is hard to find when the social contexts of incarceration are closely examined.” [p. 9]

Most prisoners grew up with daily violence on the streets and at home, where life is chaotic, without order and security, where victims and offenders are often one and the same. In this context, punishment does little to promote robust public safety. [p. 10].

The problem is how to find a response to violence that leads to justice “that acknowledges not only the harms suffered through crime but also the harms to those who, through poverty and racial minority, have historically been denied the full extent of their humanity by mass incarceration.” [p. 10]

[p. 175] A year after release, two-thirds were living in poverty. Most lived with older relatives or in shelters, in impoverished neighborhoods where “violence is abundant. Harms stack up like mail at a vacant address.” Mental illness, addiction, chronic diseases like diabetes, arthritis, hepatitis, and chronic pain, often related to accidents, fights, or heavy drug use. They typically had survived abusive childhood homes, grown up fighting, been stabbed or shot. Prisons also were filled with fighting.

[p. 178] Studies have shown that mass incarceration has only helped to reduce violent crime in the U.S. by about ten percent. There are other much more important factors in reducing crime.

NEED FOR ADULT MALE ROLE MODELS: [p. 181] “It is not police, courts, and the threat of punishment that create public safety, but rather the bonds of community produced by a raft of social institutions—families, schools, employers, churches, and neighborhood groups ... who monitor conduct and stand as a normative reminder of order. ... As children grow into adolescence and then adulthood, they are socialized into the roles of spouse, worker, and citizen. ... [by the] sustaining effects of family, education, work and community life.” [p. 182] Those who had supportive relatives, employers, and government assistance were much more successful in integrating back into society after release than those who did not have these advantages. This was “a thick kind of public safety that brought order and predictability to their daily lives ... materially secure in their housing, intimate relationships, and livelihoods ... allowing them to imagine a future in which it makes sense to invest in themselves.”

[p. 182] “The great failure of mass incarceration is that it tends to weaken the social bonds that produce order and predictability in daily life. The removal of community residents by incarceration reverberates through families, and so does their return.”

THREAT NOT FROM STRANGERS: [p. 181] “In reality, the violence that derails people’s lives does not usually occur in random confrontations with menacing strangers. Instead it emerges in family homes and neighborhoods.”

CONCLUSION: [p. 185] Incarceration should be confined to “the small fraction who pose immediate risks to themselves and to those around them.”

[p. 178] “Mass incarceration has failed to clearly bring justice and safety to America.” Instead, it has been extremely costly to taxpayers, it has separated parents from their children and had terrible effects on the children, it has made many families impoverished by lost income from their imprisoned relative, it has cost those families much money in supporting the relative while they are in prison and after their release, and it has led to a huge decline of respect for the government because of the many injustices inflicted on the accused and their families.

[p. 179] “Punishment—the state-sanctioned imposition of suffering—is an evil that requires justification for its legitimacy.” One justification that has been presented is retribution, “returning to an offender the injury he inflicted on a victim.” Another justification is for deterrence, to warn would-be criminals not to do criminal acts. A third is to protect society by removing dangerous persons from general society and keeping them separated in prisons. In 2017 President Barack Obama wrote, “Too many, especially nonviolent drug offenders, serve unnecessarily long sentences,” and he signed initiatives to reduce sentences for drug cases, but kept long sentences for “dangerous offenders” whose cases were defined as violence.

[p. 180] “Reducing drug-related incarceration will only produce a small reduction in the overall prison population. ... The ‘nonviolent drug offender’ is largely a mythic figure. The street trade in drugs is a dangerous business that must be protected from robberies and rival dealers. Guns and a willingness to use them are part of the business.” [If drugs were legalized, this would greatly reduce the violence, just as gangster violence of the 1920s declined greatly after the Prohibition of alcohol was repealed in 1933.]

POVERTY: [p. 180] Because violence is so prevalent, it “flares in contexts of family chaos, mental illness, chronic disease and pain, untreated addiction, and poverty. Having grown up in this context, people in prison have histories of trauma and abuse that date from early childhood. ... The great moral clarity is not to find the innocent among the guilty, but to treat with decency and compassion even those who have engaged in violence.”

[p. 183] “Justice is more readily found in the abatement of violent environments than in the punishment of violent people. ... recognizing the histories of victimization and trauma of those who have most recently been offenders as well as attending directly to the harms suffered by victims.”

[p. 186] “The wholesale state-sanctioned deprivation of liberty in America’s poorest communities is a collective and historical injustice—collective because incarceration has injured entire communities, affecting even those who have not been incarcerated themselves.” These historic injustices need to be publicized in designing museum exhibits, erecting monuments, sponsoring cultural events, setting school curricula, opening secret files, and acknowledging the collective injuries suffered by entire communities.

[p. 188] “To acknowledge the injustice of incarceration and the pain of state violence heaped on the frail and the poor recognizes that public policy intended for the common good has in fact had the reverse effect. Millions have been removed from their families, friends, and communities in greater numbers and for longer periods than the common good can justify.”

[p. 181] Instead of mandatory minimum sentences, the childhood problems, mental and physical illnesses, and prior social adversity of the accused should be considered as mitigating circumstances that will reduce the time of the sentence.

[Instead of reducing sentences, it is better to offer significant reduction in sentences by taking educational courses that are appropriate to the prior educational background. For example, offer a month off of the sentence for each month of classes that a prisoner successfully completes, such as tobacco, alcohol, or drug addiction, anger management, ethical issues, parenting, marriage and partner counseling, personal finance. If a person finishes his or her GED or college degree or technical training program, he or she gets additional time off. Prisons should become primarily educational and therapy classes, as well as reparative healthcare]

MOST IMPORTANT NEEDS FOR THOSE COMING OUT OF PRISON: [p. 183] First, “there is an urgent need for transitional support in the first weeks after release. The stress of transition from prison to the community interferes with everyday tasks, and dealing with countless bureaucracies can subvert even the most motivated efforts to find health care, housing, and a means of subsistence. One-stop shops, with staff who are knowledgeable and compassionate about the disorientation that follows incarceration, would smooth the path from prison to community. Second, continuity of medical and mental health care after incarceration is an urgent necessity for a population with high rates of disability and mental illness. Medicaid enrollment prior to prison release greatly reduces social insecurity.”

[p. 184] Providing immediate Medicaid to all prisoners upon release greatly reduces expensive emergency room visits to hospitals.

[p. 184] Third, there needs to be financial support for housing, either payment of security deposits and rents for up to a year, or payments to relatives who house and support a released prisoner. These programs are expensive, but cheaper than incarceration. Intensive outreach in individualized case

management has proved to be successful in reducing recidivism, and leading violent persons into nonviolent ways of living.

[p. 185] Instead, current policies that focus on “fines and fees for cost recovery, pretrial detention for want of bail, criminal record disqualifications for jobs and for government benefits, revocations of probation and parole for technical violations—all fail the test of social integration” of the successful reentry of former prisoners back into society. Criminal justice is a poor instrument for social policy because at its core it is a blaming institution. Finding alternatives requires a shift in perspective. ... to reimagining the criminal justice function as restoring community life. ... [while also counseling prisoners to] publicly acknowledge the injuries of victims, and remind offenders of their responsibility for the harms they have caused.”

[p. 188] “The antidote to violence is not more punishment but restoring the institutions, social bonds, and well-being that enable order and predictability in daily life. Recognizing historic harms might slow our reflex to punish and instead encourage socially integrative responses to crime.”