

THE ILLINOIS REENTRY IMPERATIVE: SHERIDAN CORRECTIONAL CENTER AS NATIONAL MODEL

INTRODUCTION

The State of Illinois incarcerates more than 47,000 inmates on any given day, and upwards of 36,000 are released each year. Roughly two-thirds (25,000 annually) return to just seven zip codes located on the West and South sides of Chicago, where black male unemployment exceeds 40% even before ex-felons return home. This paper introduces one particular measure by which policy and practitioner elites have responded to the re-entry imperative in an era of unprecedented fiscal austerity. From George Bush's 2008 Second Chance Act, to the 2009 Illinois Crime Reduction Act, to numerous municipal policy and practice initiatives, the re-entry imperative operates across multiple scales. It has been fueled by a convergence of disparate ideological positions and the formation of novel political coalitions among policy elites.

A central component of the Illinois re-entry initiative is the Sheridan Correctional Center, a medium security prison housing 1700 inmates. Billed as the nation's largest substance abuse treatment prison, the Sheridan Correctional Center is a bold experiment in the history of criminal justice reform. In our current economic and political crisis, Sheridan is a hopeful – and potentially replicable – model for changing the way in which

the criminal justice system addresses the complicated nexus between addiction, urban poverty, and recidivism. Opened in 2004, Sheridan has been designed and planned with an eye toward the pathways and channels to successful community reintegration in urban contexts, both in terms of neighborhoods and social service delivery systems.

Using Sheridan as a site of ethnographic analysis, I intend to explore how prison-based substance abuse treatment works as an ancillary modality of criminal justice to resolve the crises of recidivism, re-entry, and overcrowding. In this paper, I will provide a vestibular analysis meant to situate the Sheridan program within a particular political, economic, and historical context. After a brief overview of national and state trends attendant to the post-1970 carceral boom, I will discuss the impetus for the Sheridan program, followed by a provisional analysis of the stakes of contemporary prison ethnography for welfare critics.

THE LANDSCAPE OF PRISON REFORM

The explosive growth of the US prison system since 1970 is by now well documented. Statistical overviews are rehearsed with such frequency and alarm that they now have an almost numbing effect. Nonetheless, this descriptive rite of passage at the outset of any contemporary prison study seems important. Only then, perhaps, can we begin to understand the true magnitude of the prison and its central role in today's political economy of urban poverty, social welfare, and labor stratification. Of course this could also be an exercise in remembering to forget.

The basics. Following a 50-year period (1920-1970) in which the prison population in the United States held relatively constant at 200,000, the incarcerated population in state and federal prisons grew five-fold in three short decades, reaching 1 million persons by 1995 and 1.3 million persons by 2002 (Harcourt, 2011; Wacquant, 2009). If we include those incarcerated in local jails, the number reached 2 million persons by 2002 and is up to more than 2.3 million today. The increase in state and federal prisoners between 1970-1995 alone (from 200,000 to 1 million) represents a 442% increase in a quarter century, a growth magnitude never before witnessed in a democratic society (Wacquant, 2009). By 2008 the US was incarcerating more than 1% of its total population. The US has the highest incarceration rate in the world, five times the rate of England and twelve times the rate of Japan (Harcourt, 2011). With merely 5% of the world's population, the US now holds nearly 25% of the world's prisoners (Gottschalk, 2006).

The carceral boom has been anything but colorblind. In four short decades (1950-1990), the racial and ethnic composition of the incarcerated population *reversed*, from 70% white, 30% black and Latino inmates; to 70% black and Latino, 30% white inmates (Wacquant, 2001). The rate of incarceration for blacks tripled in only a dozen years between 1981-1993, up to 1,895 per 100,000 (nearly 7 times the rate for whites at 293 per 100,000). By 1995, blacks made up only 12% of the US population but supplied 53% of the prison population (as against 38 percent a quarter century earlier [Wacquant, 2009, p. 61]). One in nine black men between the ages of 20-34 were incarcerated by 2008, as compared to one in thirty of all males in that age group.

Historical explanations for the incarceration boom and its racial complexion are broad and diverse, but generally incorporate some combination of the following sets of factors: First and foremost, a resoundingly new consensus after 1970 that *prison works*, “not as a mechanism of reform or rehabilitation, but as a means of incapacitation that satisfies popular political demands for public safety and harsh retribution” (Garland, 2001, p.14); Second, prison growth is a consequence of the deindustrialization of the United States, as evidenced by the loss of as many as 500,000 manufacturing jobs in the city of Chicago alone (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982; Massey and Denton, 1992; Peck and Theodore, 2008; Wacquant, 2001, 2009; Wilson, 1996); Third, prisons have grown in concert with the deregulation of the economy and the shift toward free market policies pace the historical imperatives of globalization (Harcourt, 2011; Western, 1999, 2006; Western & Pettit, 2004); Fourth, in the post-industrial era, the building of new prisons facilitates the absorption of surplus land, labor, and political capital in contemporary state building projects (Gottschalk, 2006; Peck and Theodore, 2008; Wilson-Gilmore, 2007). This is evidenced by the addition of *one new prison each year* in the rural communities of Illinois and California between 1980-2000 (by comparison, California built a mere 12 prisons from 1850-1970); Fifth, a more punitive public outlook on crime, as evidenced by the shift in crime control policy from the courts to the legislature and concomitant shifts in sentencing laws, has catalyzed prison growth as a catch-all political solution to poverty since the 1970’s (Garland, 2001; Simon, 2007; Western, 2006). New laws in areas such as determinate sentencing, three strikes you’re out, mandatory minimums, and truth in sentencing reflect these changes in popular politics,

opinion and voting (Garland, 2001; Gottschalk, 2006; Harcourt, 2011; Wacquant, 2009); Sixth, prison growth is said to be the natural consequence of an unprecedented war on drugs fought on the terms of re-racialization and re-stratification, starting with Nixon in the 70's and continuing up through Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, William Jefferson Clinton, and George W. Bush (Harcourt 2011; Simon, 2007; Wacquant, 2001); Finally, prisons are theorized to reflect a more general retrenchment of the welfare state and an upsurge in social insecurity in the postindustrial age, to the extent that some welfare critics are referring to the prison as the welfare state of the 21st century (Fairbanks, 2009; Peck and Theodore, 2008; Wacquant, 2009).

While each of these historical trends will inform the macrostructural backdrop against which my study unfolds, I am most immediately concerned here with the putative eclipse of rehabilitative frameworks from the 1970's-early 2000's, and their eventual and (perhaps) still quite nascent re-emergence in the contemporary present. The most extensive historical exploration of this trend has been undertaken by David Garland (1985, 1993, 2001), whose books on 20th century criminal justice map the transition from "penal welfarism" (1900-1970) to what many critics have described as an actuarial turn in punishment policy. Garland sketched the monopoly that clinicians (social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, even sociologists) once held in the long rehabilitative horizon that dominated life in the prison up until the close of the 1960's. Since then, Garland contends, the correctional facility has reduced its rehabilitative ambition to ground zero. The core assumptions of criminology in the welfare era were premised on a faith in the

perfectibility of man. Crime was perceived as the sign of an underachieving socialization process, and society looked to the state and its clinical expertise for social adjustment (Dilts, 2008; Garland, 2001). Contemporary criminology, by contrast, is said to disavow the rehabilitative agenda of normalization and instead views crime as “routine, [and] committed by individuals who are for all intents and purposes normal” (Garland, 2001, p.15). Offenders are now envisaged as rational economic actors responsive to disincentives and fully responsible for their actions, leading to a theory and rationality of criminology that strongly reinforces retributive and deterrent policies. Crime is explained no longer on a theory of individual deprivation, but rather as an outgrowth of inadequate controls (Garland, 2001).

Garland’s veritable sea change, from penal welfarism grounded in the idea of state responsibility for the rehabilitative process, to an actuarial, risk-management model of crime control, was ironically assisted by a progressive revolution in the 1960’s. Widespread activism was fomented against the discretionary powers of clinical expertise in the life (and length of sentence) of the prisoner. A generation of liberal reformers turned against the rehabilitative agenda on the grounds that it had become a corrupt form of paternal regulation in which the state had perfected a mechanism of social control under the guise of clinical expertise. The collective efforts of reformers, which ultimately reached fruition with the popular mantra that “nothing works” in rehabilitative programming, was picked up by conservative reformers and free market thinkers in the 1970’s eager to retrench state bureaucracies of the postwar era. The result was a gutting of social spending for rehabilitative

programs in prisons and a series of sentencing reforms – most importantly determinate sentencing – that coalesced around a hybrid criminology grounded in several core principles: incapacitation, deterrence, retribution, tough on crime legislation, and the retrenchment of social spending in the prison and the welfare system.

While a full-scale historical analysis of this second phase of penology is beyond the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that the disappearance of rehabilitative programming in prisons has been eulogized consistently in the literature on prisons since 1970 (Garriott, 2011; Garland, 1985, 1993, 2001; Gottschalk, 2008; Rhodes, 2004; Wacquant, 2001, 2009; Wilson-Gilmore, 2006 – for an important counter-argument to this analytical trend, see Phelps, 2011). The shift from “nothing works,” the early 1970’s liberal consensus co-opted and seized upon by conservatives, to a “prison works” approach to crime and poverty has been posited as a mainspring of the forty-year build up of the carceral state.

By Garland’s own admission, however, we would be wise to take precautions when dealing with broad-brush strokes and historical periodizations when it comes to the US prison system. In part, this is a generic refrain long espoused by historical institutionalists and state regulation theorists alike. We must be vigilant in our analysis of the ways in which history evolves from institutional legacies, the balance of political forces, and the changing economic and political conjunctures in which reform imperatives take hold. It is perhaps more prudent then for welfare critics to consider how the institutionally-inherited landscapes of penal welfarism continue to *matter* in contemporary welfare state restructure. Vestigial political forms funda-

mentally slow the rate of change (Polanyi, 2001), producing chronic unevenness and partiality as stubborn path dependencies yield hybrid modalities of governance. It behooves us then to challenge the hegemony of neoliberal roll-out narratives by focusing on the complex and contradictory regulatory climate of the post-welfare moment.

Moreover, if neoliberalism is characterized by – and even makes a virtue of – unevenness and variegation across institutional, economic, and political contexts (Brenner, Peck, & Theodore, 2010), then certainly there are important – and importantly elusive – variations and problematics still to be considered in the grand narrative of the late twentieth century prison. The point here is not to simply uncover variation for variation sake. Rather, critics of the contemporary prison are still at pains to answer: what is the historical significance of variegated neoliberal regulation *vis-à-vis* the question of prison reform?

Apart from this more general refrain of regulation theorists and historical institutionalists, there are more pedestrian reasons to adopt a more finely grained, locally driven analysis of today's prisons. In recent years the institutional warehousing of the poor in prisons filled to excess by the war on drugs and its sentencing policies have become quite contentious. This unprecedented prison boom in the late twentieth century and its attendant consequences in the early twenty first reveals an important but often overlooked history in the annals of political development (see for example Gottschalk, 2006; Simon, 2007). Resolution of the consequences and crises of the actuarial turn have perhaps entered us into a new phase for consideration; one in which the cragginess of institutionally inherited

landscapes and the chronic unevenness of political development requires a closer look at the myriad scales of prison reform. The Illinois version of the carceral boom certainly points us in this direction.

“REHABILITATION IS BACK:” THE SHERIDAN MODEL, TRENDING TOWARD THE PAST?

Illinois has experienced its own exceptionally aggressive incarceration boom. The state’s prison population doubled from 1973-1982, then doubled again by 1991, and then rose another 55% by the close of the 1990’s (Peck and Theodore, 2008). Put another way, from fewer than 20,000 inmates prior to 1987, the Illinois prison population grew to 45,000 by the year 2001 and stands at nearly 50,000 today (Olson and Rozhon, 2011). To accommodate the population growth, Illinois opened 21 prisons between 1980 and 2004, adding 20,318 beds to the system’s statewide capacity of 31,000 (the present population of almost 50,000 inmates speaks conspicuously to the crisis of overcrowding in Illinois).

As David Olson succinctly reveals, Illinois prison growth was fueled by three primary factors: 1) a dramatic increase in the number of felony drug-law violators arrested, convicted and sentenced to prison during this period; 2) an increase in the number of previously incarcerated individuals returning to prison due to new arrests or technical violations of their Mandatory Supervised Release (hereafter MSR, which is essentially tantamount to parole); and 3) an increase in the length of sentences, and time to serve, for those convicted of violent crimes, particularly those crimes subject to Truth-in-Sentencing (Olson, 2011, p. 9).

The current study focuses in particular on the re-emergence of rehabilitative programming, primarily for non-violent drug offenders. In particular, the Sheridan prison was engineered to solve the current crises of recidivism and overcrowding (the population comprising #1 and #2 in Olson's summary, above). The stakes of doing so are quite pronounced when we consider that non-violent offenders accounted for more than three quarters of the prison population (state and federal) between 1978-1996, leading to an excess of one million non-violent offenders behind bars for the first time in 1998 (Gottschalk, 2006). In Illinois for the year 2005, a full 40% of the IDOC population had been incarcerated for drug offenses and a further 28% for property crimes (robbery, theft, burglary). Moreover, in this same year more than one-quarter of Illinois prisoners "had been returned to prison due to 'technical' violations of parole." Within this group, "the average number of arrests prior to the most recent sentencing was 12, one-third of which were for drug-law violations" (Peck and Theodore, 2008, p. 254; see also La Vigne *et al.*, 2004).

At the heart of this study lies a very tentative hypothesis that we may have entered a new, "third" period in the history of prison reform. The current trend at least partially harkens back to the rehabilitative era of penal welfarism from 1900-1970 (although it should be noted that there are no attempts to rehabilitate *all* prisoners, and the supermax/warehouse prison is still very much intact to buttress the sparsely distributed, if surely emergent, rehabilitative efforts). In my assessment, however, this newer period is unique in that it is characterized by three nationally prevalent and historically specific trends, all of which have shaped the programmatic visions

of Sheridan: 1) a crisis in the rising costs of incarceration, made even more acute by the financial collapse of 2008 and its associated fiscal austerity mandates; 2) an increase in public and political attention to the costly problems of recidivism/overcrowding, and a concomitant imperative for prisoner re-entry programming at the Federal (e.g. George W. Bush's 2008 Second Chance Act), State (e.g. the Sheridan Correctional Center, as well as the 2009 Illinois Crime Reduction Act that includes sentencing reform, The Risks Assets and Needs Assessment task force [RANA], and Adult Illinois Redeploy) and Municipal levels (e.g. the Cook County Collaborative on Re-entry, which includes numerous initiatives such as Greenworks); 3) and finally, the growing intersection in policy and practice between criminal justice, substance abuse recovery, and urban social welfare (Fairbanks, 2009, 2011). This intersection has catalyzed a new wave of substance abuse treatment models deployed in prison administration, probation and parole programming, and housing/re-entry programming for ex-offenders. I will now speak to each of these trends as relates to the history of Sheridan Correctional Center in what follows.

First, as chronicled by Loïc Wacquant, Bruce Western, Bernard Harcourt, and Marie Gottschalk, the era of big carceral government has required massively enlarged budgets at the Federal and state levels. Federal funding for criminal justice multiplied more than five-fold between 1972-1990, from less than \$2 billion per annum to more than \$10 billion today. With the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, Congress forecasted an increase of the prison population from 925,000 to 2.26 million in just one decade, with requisite expenditures exceeding \$351 billion dollars that included \$100

billion for new prison building projects alone (Wacquant notes that this figure of \$351 billion was nearly 20 times the AFDC budget for that year [2001, p.64]). On the state level, funding for criminal justice increased to \$28 billion per year by 1990, an increase of 8.4 times the budget of 1972 (Wacquant, 2009, p.64). Put another way, in 1987 the states spent a total of \$10.6 billion on corrections. This figure increased to \$28 billion by 1990, \$38 billion by 2001, \$44 billion by 2007, and \$47 billion by 2008 (Harcourt, 2011; Wacquant, 2009). As Harcourt states, “the increase in correctional spending is not just a result of growing budgets – or growing deficits – but has outpaced the overall rate of government spending” (Harcourt, 2011, p. 199). To this effect, the state of California alone had a prison budget of \$10 billion by 2008. Illinois currently spends \$1.5 billion per year on corrections out of a state budget of \$25 billion.

In the wake of these unprecedented expenditures, the fiscal crisis of 2008 has produced a series of interesting developments in prison reform circles. Strange political bedfellows from a range of ideological backgrounds are now in agreement that the exorbitantly expensive carceral state is no longer tenable. Christian fundamentalists, prisoner’s rights advocates, political progressives, libertarians and fiscal conservatives are driving toward a new consensus that the prison build up of the last 40 years is simply unsustainable. Not to be outdone by high visibility states such as Texas, New York and California, Illinois is experiencing its own inchoate renaissance in prison reform and reentry policy, and the Sheridan program plays a key role as a national model in this regard. As Sheridan’s chief architects have long professed, if treatment can be shown to

work behind bars, then the search for alternatives to incarceration can possibly follow to alleviate the prison crisis.

The second prevalent trend, closely related to the first, is the growing attention to the costly problem of recidivism. The Illinois recidivism rate (defined as the number of inmates returned to prison within 3 years of release) hit record highs of 54.4% in 2003 and 54.6% in 2004. As Olson shows, the recidivism rate was even higher—nearly 66 percent—when based on *rearrests* for a new crime within three years (i.e., regardless of whether it resulted in their subsequent return to prison) (Olson, Dooley, and Kane, 2004). These numbers belie the common myth that the prison is a vast holding tank for long term criminals, as the reality is most are released after relatively short sentences. As Peck and Theodore contend, “the reality is that the flows both into and out of prisons are continuous and large in scale” (2008, p. 252). In the year of 2005, for example, IDOC released 39,226 adults, which is equivalent to more than four-fifths of the prison population. Peck and Theodore aver, “Reflecting a perverse sort of equilibrium, the annual intake to Illinois correctional facilities roughly equals the flow out of the gates” (2008, p. 252).

The churning of IDOC inmates becomes even more alarming when we pause to consider the demographics of the problem, both in terms of racial composition and category of offense. As Peck and Theodore (2008) show, a large majority of IDOC prisoners are male (90%) and African-American (68%); most are relatively young (48% are aged under 31) and unmarried. Peck and Theodore further reveal that of those releasees returning to Chicago (the most prominent destination by far, home to at least 80% of all IDOC inmates), “nine

out of ten are African-American; 61% had served time for drug offenses; 92% of drug offenders were black; and 55% returned to majority (70% plus) African-American neighborhoods” (Peck and Theodore, 2008; see also Street, 2002).

The early architects of Sheridan paid close attention to the rising recidivism rates of the late 90’s and early 2000’s, and upon researching best practices in leading states (those with the lowest recidivism rates) came to focus on substance abuse treatment as the most effective, evidence-based intervention to reduce recidivism and to strengthen reentry programming. Early advocates for Sheridan (notably Deanne Benos, as well as Diane Williams at Safer Foundation and Pam Rodriguez of Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities [hereafter TASC]) convinced then-Congressman Blagojevich to take a chance on reopening the recently closed Sheridan Correctional Center as the nation’s first fully dedicated substance abuse prison. In so doing, they joined a national conversation that is emblematic of the third prevalent trend in contemporary criminal justice; namely the proliferation of substance abuse treatment models to address the prison crisis (see Brook, 2010; Fairbanks, 2009, 2011; Malkin, 2005; Wacquant, 2010). All parties now agree that the austere, tough on crime approach of providing inmates with a mere \$50 in gate money for a bus ride back to Chicago is simply too costly for the region. A social service bridge is necessary for reintegration. Suddenly, rehabilitation is back.

THE SHERIDAN CORRECTIONAL CENTER: A BRIEF HISTORY

The Sheridan Correctional Center is a Level 4 Medium Security prison located 70 miles southwest of Chicago. Originally opened as a juvenile center in 1941, Sheridan changed to an adult prison facility in 1971. After a brief closure between 2002-2004 (due to a budget skirmish under former Governor Ryan's watch), the Sheridan Correctional Center was re-opened as a fully dedicated substance abuse treatment prison on January 2, 2004 (Olson and Rozhon, 2011).

Sheridan is one of 27 prisons currently operated by the Illinois Department of Corrections, and one of just two prisons devoted entirely to substance abuse treatment in the state (the state's smaller, *minimum* security prison, consisting of 600 beds, is called the Southwestern Correctional Center, located near East St. Louis, Illinois). The Sheridan compound is comprised of 25 separate housing units (mostly single story "k houses," although two of the larger housing units are two-story "x houses"). Within each housing unit at Sheridan, the population is divided into several (usually four) therapeutic communities or "families." The therapeutic community model (TC – to be discussed below) is the primary intervention for substance abuse treatment at Sheridan.

On the national scale, the development and planning of Sheridan clearly articulates with the three aforementioned trends driving the contemporary debates in prison reform: cost effectiveness, recidivism/reentry, and recovery. On a local or state level, the original architects of Sheridan saw themselves as responding to three closely related sub-factors: a) large numbers of inmates being admitted to IDOC who were in need of

substance abuse treatment, b) relatively few substance abuse treatment services available within Illinois' prisons, and c) a desire to reduce admissions to prison in Illinois by cutting the recidivism rate through effective treatment and rehabilitation programs.

As David Olson and Jennifer Rozhon note, it was estimated in 1994 that roughly 50 percent of adults admitted to IDOC were substance abusers in need of treatment (Cho, Johnson, Kelly-Wilson and Pickup, 2002; as cited by Olson and Rozhon, 2011). This number is relatively consistent with 2004 national estimate that revealed a history of drug dependence or abuse within 53 percent of the nation's prison population (Mumola & Karberg, 2006). Despite this pattern, Olson and Rozhon have charted a dearth in the availability of substance abuse treatment programs and services, both within IDOC as well as nationally. Treatment options were limited during the 1990s and into the early 2000s, and Olson and Rozhon estimate that less than 20 percent of adult male inmates released from prison in Illinois who were in need of treatment were actually able to access it while incarcerated (Olson, 2005).

The architects of Sheridan based their model on the premise that substance abuse treatment was desperately needed not only *within* IDOC facilities, but also in those communities to which Illinois' prison inmates most often return. For example, a study conducted by the Urban Institute estimated that fewer than 10% of IDOC prisoners returning to Chicago neighborhoods had participated in treatment programs within eight months of their release (LaVigne, 2004; see also Olson, 2001; Peck and Theodore, 2008).

To address this problem, the original architects of Sheridan insisted on a prison phase of treatment, to be followed (as per the contract with Sheridan inmates) by an aftercare phase of at least 90 days of treatment in the community. For the prison phase of the process, all bets were placed on the TC model, described by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (2002) as “residential [programs] using a hierarchical model with treatment strategies that reflect increased levels of personal and social responsibility.” As Olson and Rozhon expound, the TC model depends upon “peer influence, mediated through a variety of group processes....used to help individuals learn and assimilate social norms and develop more effective social skills” (2011, p. 13). At Sheridan, this is accomplished through the provision of individual and group treatment, delivered by a contractual service provider known as WestCare Foundation. Inmates also receive a variety of ancillary services, including educational programming, job training, vocational training, anger management classes, parenting skills, and relationship skills (Olson and Rozhon, 2011).

The research to date on the Sheridan model seems promising. A six and a half year process and impact evaluation conducted by Dr. David Olson and Jennifer Rozhon bodes well for the institutional longevity of Sheridan. To summarize some of the key findings of the report:

- The earned good conduct credits received at Sheridan during the first six full state fiscal years of operation (SFY 2005-2010) translates into a savings of 714 years of incarceration, which equates to \$16.7 million, or \$2.78 million per year, in reduced incarceration costs.

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- Inmates released from Sheridan had a 16 percent lower likelihood of being returned to prison after three years in the community than a comparison group of inmates released from other Illinois prisons during the same time period, and a 25 percent lower recidivism rate than those removed from Sheridan due to disciplinary reasons.
- Sheridan graduates who also completed aftercare had a 44 percent lower likelihood of being returned to prison after three years than a comparison group.¹

In addition to these important findings, Olson and Rozhon illustrate the following institutional achievements at Sheridan:

- During the time period examined, 32 percent of Sheridan graduates completed at least one vocational certificate program (with a peak of 50 percent of inmates released during SFY 2008).
- A consistently low rate of inmates (less than 5%) were referred that did not meet the eligibility criteria, and over time there was quicker identification and removal of these inmates.
- Consistently low rates of inmates were removed from Sheridan due to disciplinary reasons. The ratio of inmates who successfully complete the prison-

¹ Olson, D. E., & Rozhon, J. (January, 2011). A Process and Impact Evaluation of the Sheridan Correctional Center Therapeutic Community Program During Fiscal Years 2004 through 2010. Unpublished report.

phase of the program to those removed for disciplinary reasons was 4 to 1.²

The Sheridan Correctional Center has made great strides in its relatively short period of operation as a treatment prison. Sheridan is thus provisionally – and potentially – well positioned to serve as a national best practice model in what is clearly an important moment in the history of criminal justice reform.

However, the objectives of Sheridan as a treatment model are exceptionally ambitious. To achieve a workable community intervention strategy grounded in the principles of mutual self-help, peer accountability, and rigorous honesty is a tall order in any context. Within prison walls, the challenges seem even more daunting. The competing logics of deterrence, incapacitation, and retribution, when held in direct conversation and co-habitation with the supposedly emancipatory logics of recovery discourse and practice, create at once a set of rich potentialities as well as potentially insurmountable barriers to success. It is precisely at the nexus of these tensions and challenges that I will locate myself in the position of a participant-observational researcher. The stakes in doing so, I will argue, are quite significant.

² Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Ethnographic research entails the close and systematic study social phenomena, relying first and foremost on first hand observation but also interviews and available records for archival analysis. The primary methodological instrument in the ethnographic tradition is participant observation research. As a time-honored research methodology with a deep tradition at the University of Chicago in particular (predominantly in sociology but also in social work studies dating back to the settlement house movement), ethnographic participant observation is based on the premise that deep immersion into a research setting (institution, neighborhood, etc) over extended periods of time is the most ideal strategy to ascertain the organic values, daily rhythms, rules, tactics, traits, cultures, strategies of resistance, and structures of meaning associated with social phenomena. The purpose is to provide analytic and descriptive accounts designed to inform the wider citizenry about social conditions that are otherwise elusive, obscured from public view, or otherwise not conducive to the convenient categories of quantitative analysis or even survey techniques.

Ethnographic methods are ideally suited and well positioned to advance the post-disciplinary project of mapping welfare regulatory restructure (Fairbanks, forthcoming). With exceptional capacity to work across the shifting scales, sites, and domains of policy and practice formation, ethnographic sensitivity offers an eye for the unfinished and differentiated, as well as the contextually specific ways in which processes of “neoliberalization” must always forge alliances on the ground (Peck & Tickell, 2002). Ethnographic researchers have the potential to elucidate translations of policy mandates in local contexts,

charting local variations and complex pathways as well as edges, weak spots, contestations, contradictions, and sites of breakdown/failure (Peck, 2001).

For many reasons, however, ethnographic research has been woefully underdeveloped in prison research. In a prison context, one can easily see how complicated the crucial question of access becomes due to a range of idiosyncratic challenges endemic to corrections. Issues such as safety, custody and control, politics, isolation and administrative insularity have made it exceedingly difficult to conduct ethnographic research inside the prison walls. Over the past 40 years in particular there has been a tremendous dearth of ethnographic research in prisons due to the changes in correctional policy but also due to the extraction of clinical research roles within carceral settings (see Wacquant, 2002 and 2010). During the era of penal welfarism, when rehabilitative programming was more prevalent, it was typical for prisons to have not only social workers but also sociologists on staff (The University of Chicago, under the guidance of Robert Parks, was at the forefront of “actuarial science,” pioneering the prediction of criminogenic risk for the better part of the 20th century [see Harcourt, 2007]). It was much more common for research to take place inside the prison during this time. Since the 1970’s, however, ethnographic monographs have slowed to a trickle in the United States. We can more or less summarize these by recounting James Jacobs’ study of Stateville (1977), Lorna Rhodes study of maximum-security prisons (2004), Donald Braman’s *Doing Time on the Outside* (2007, fieldwork conducted with families of prisoners), Megan Comfort’s work on San Quentin (*Doing Time Together*, 2008 – all fieldwork con-

ducted in the visiting room), and Lynn Haney's *Offending Women* (2010). The current study therefore presents an exceptionally unique opportunity to conduct ethnographic research inside the walls of arguably the most important, yet vastly under-studied institutional context for social welfare scholars of the twenty first century.

Policies and politics are made and remade through devolutionary pathways. It is here too that we are able to work with the notion of discerning historical continuity from rupture, precisely through finely grained analysis of how institutionally inherited landscapes are repurposed or discarded. Herein lies the key to understanding how institutional mechanisms of power interact with poor neighborhoods and urban subjects, reshaping their regulatory functions in accordance with historical imperatives. Tracing the interplay and interrelationships between subjectivities and political rationalities of prison reform provides the necessary link between the microphysics of power and macro-structuring principles of neoliberal logics. To the extent to which crises and failures have become the engines of regulatory restructure in the contemporary age, we are in dire need of ethnographic knowledge on the question of how these concepts do their work in local contexts. It is here again that ethnographers are uniquely positioned to chart the moments at which mechanisms of reform break down and exhaust themselves; as well as how local regulatory experimentation achieves a state of creative destruction through a politics of failure, patronage, and security.

Ethnographic analyses of local policy initiatives in prison reform will help to flesh out the historical and geographical specificity of model reentry projects such as the Sheridan

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Correctional Center. It is imperative to work inductively and locally in order to problematize and recast the seductively grand narratives of the late twentieth/early twenty first century prison. By doing so, we become cognizant of the many ways in which rehabilitation is alive and well as a partial salve for the prison crises perhaps; but also as a mechanism to transform the relationship between prisoner and state.

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