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Title:

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NA

Testimony:

More Time More Torture is a movement that seeks to condemn and contest the draconian practices of disproportionate youth and adolescent sentencing in the state of Connecticut and the U.S. as a whole. A sentence that exceeds 25 years or more is essentially a death sentence. Generally, the intention of the court is not to mete out death; rather, a lengthy term is meant to ensure an individual's rehabilitation and to deter them from future instances of offending. By punishing people with a lifetime of imprisonment, however, these excessive sentences lead to increased harm, not rehabilitation.

Although the American dark ages of "tough on crime" politics and collateral consequences has recently been eclipsed by the new age brilliance of critical thinkers and scientific breakthroughs, outdated and excessive sentencing policies and procedures remain in place. Put differently, the times have changed, but the sentences have not. Which leads to the question: what is the purpose of continued incarceration when an individual has demonstrated the rehabilitation the court initially prescribed, long before their sentence is complete? The only answer is more punishment, more damage, more destruction, and more torture.

Just as the consensus on crime and punishment is drastically changing before our very eyes, so are the parameters and opportunities for rehabilitation. While times past lent little to no recourse for those who were incarcerated and their actual rehabilitation, today, there is ample programming that fosters and accelerates rehabilitation. For example, the Second Chance Pell Program—an initiative supported by both the Obama and Trump administrations—provides financial aid to incarcerated students. In turn, many colleges and universities have initiated programs and opportunities that assist their host states in rehabilitating the prison population through education. These institutions are going so far as to create partnerships that offer degrees and pipelines that lead former prisoners to college campuses to further their education upon release. These efforts have contributed to the lowest recidivism rates ever known to the American justice system. And they should lead to sentencing reform as well.

More Time, More Torture declares that higher education not only accelerates rehabilitation, but unequivocally contributes to the transformation of an individual's entire being, making continued incarceration senseless, futile, and after more time, destructive. Higher education inherently does the difficult and sensitive work of forcing one to challenge and change their beliefs and recognize the error of their past ways. Moreover, higher education instills in learners the values of empathy, community, collectivity, charity, solidarity, honor, and integrity.

For instance, many college curriculums require that learners critically investigate oppressive periods in world history, such as the gruesome discovery of the New World in 1492, the tragic transatlantic slave trade, or the horrific Holocaust. In engaging with such dark world history, one can't help but draw parallels to today, such as the catastrophic war in Ukraine, the devastation of mass incarceration, or the genocide of the Palestinian people. But more than mere comparison, becoming critical of these world events naturally compels an individual to likewise become critical of their own conduct in the world.

Being awakened to the suffering of others forces one to reconcile to the suffering they too have endured, and reckon with the suffering they themselves have caused. This pivotal juncture in one's academic career can be likened to a great realization or breakthrough, an "aha! moment" of sorts, that demarcates a drastic shift in the individual. After much practice of turning a critical gaze to the text or a world event, one can begin to turn inward in an effort to assess everything left unchallenged in an individual's life.

From adverse cultural beliefs that have been ingrained since birth, to social conditionings that don't lend themselves to being successful in the world, to the conduct these problematic perspectives may lead to, higher education enables an individual to question every past adverse experience and condemn any and every negative result. Ultimately, the transformative powers of higher education work to change an individual's mindset which manifests as productive future conduct, too.

Higher education also fosters multifaceted accountability. Accountability is unquestionably the single most important aspect of rehabilitation. At first, learners have to hold themselves accountable at the most basic level—making it to class on time, earnestly engaging with their work, and completing their assignments by the due date. These responsibilities directly correlate to rehabilitation in that they mirror being a productive member of society, but they also begin to instill the value of personal accountability within the individual. Essentially, higher education cultivates accountability that begins with critical engagement with classwork and eventually leads to individual personal accountability and transformation, rendering the subject forever changed as a result.

Excessive sentences do not contribute to the rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals, but higher education does. In fact, higher education takes rehabilitation a step further. Higher education helps people discover and maximize their potential by changing their mindset, rather than simply punishing them until their debt to society is restored. The transformative powers of education go far beyond the limitations of rehabilitation by changing the foundation of an individual's core beliefs into those that are in alignment with peace and prosperity. But the More Time an individual spends incarcerated after reaching their transformative peak, the More Torture they will increasingly endure. The punitive ways we've come to view rehabilitation have changed. And as a result, it is time for the punitive practices to change too.