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Prison Systems in Northern Europe Versus the United States: Differences in Treatment and Success Rates

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Prison Systems in Northern Europe Versus the United States: Differences in Treatment and Success Rates

Researchers: Ava Kovacevic and Emma Settle

United States



Felton Davis / Flickr

Education

Only 35% of state prisons provide college-level courses, and these programs only apply to 6% of prisoners nationwide. Research has shown that correctional education reduces recidivism, due to the link between education and employment.

Forced Labor

Penal labor in the United States is explicitly allowed by the 13th Amendment and occurs frequently.

Counseling Services

According to the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation, the U.S. spent \$594 per prisoner and 7% of their healthcare dollars were spent on mental healthcare.

Race

1 in 17 white men is expected to go to prison throughout their lifetime. 1 in 3 Black men is expected to go to prison throughout their lifetime.

≈ 50%

Recidivism Rate

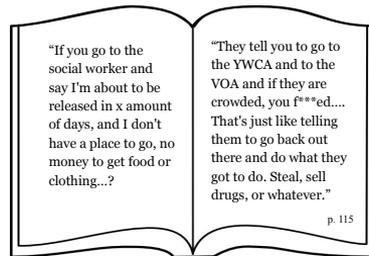
20%

Introduction

Our main focus with this research project is to examine the effects of rehabilitation versus punishment. The United States prison system tends to prioritize punishment and public safety, while Northern European prison systems focus on rehabilitation. The methods used to treat prisoners correlate to differences in recidivism and reintegration.

Prison and Social Death

Joshua M. Price, 2015



Conclusions

We found that Northern European prisons prioritize rehabilitation over punishment, providing their inmates with the tools needed for successful reintegration, education being one example. Reentering society with a GED or a college degree could be the difference between employment or homelessness. Northern European countries have some of the lowest recidivism rates in the world, and the United States has one of the highest. This shows that there is definite correlation between recidivism and their respective prison systems, with a rehabilitative one yielding far better societal results.

Northern Europe



David B. Torch / NY Times

Education

Nearly all prisons offer primary and secondary school, work qualifying courses, vocational training, and tertiary studies.

Norway and Finland have a literacy rate of 100% and Sweden and Denmark have a rate of 99%, while in the United States the rate is 86%.

Forced Labor

When the forced labor provision of the Vagrancy Act was abolished in 1970, the practice ceased to exist.

Counseling Services

Norway spent \$693 per prisoner in 2013 and consumed 12% of the total health spending, according to the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation.

Race

Northern European countries do not track statistics connected to race and incarceration.



References