

Moshe Canty  
Professor Jennifer Kimble  
Punishment & Corrections  
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### **Prison Town USA: The Culture of Incapacitation**

The documentary entitled Prison Town USA reveals a disturbing reality that permeates the American landscape. At best, it shows us how jobs can be utilized to help stimulate local economies. At worst, however, it highlights the inhumanity associated with a prison industrial complex responsible for housing over 2 million people. Unapologetically, America incarcerates its citizens at an alarming and unprecedented rate; in fact, America is in a class of its own. When it comes to incarceration, no other nation that has ever existed on the face of this earth comes even close. Thus, Prison Town USA helps us grapple with a sickening, yet addictive culture of incapacitation that—at the very least—should convince us of the need to examine the nature at which we, as a nation, punish those defined as criminals.

Prison Town USA is based on the lived experiences from prisoners, guards, and citizens who either are incarcerated, employed, or live in Susanville, California. Each of their individual stories are interwoven into a shared experience that highlights a common theme Americans in rural communities are confronted with. These issues are grounded in the devastating loss of jobs that have reduced these communities to ruins. What is obvious in the film was not just an absence of jobs per se, but the perceived need for the presence to build and maintain a prison which proponents in Susanville argued would be the solution for their financial woes. While watching, one is left wondering if the need for building prisons requires empowering one group of people at the expense of another? Apparently, a significant percentage of the residents of

Susanville believe that obtaining employment takes precedence over the incarceration and punishment of criminals. The film depicts some residents expressing remorse and even guilt for their participation in a culture that has perpetuated a cycle of incapacitation. For them, the end justifies the means.

Prison Town USA also details the experience of a formerly incarcerated paroled man previously sentenced to prison to sixteen months for stealing food to feed his family. Although this man appears to be rehabilitated, it is painful at times to watch him struggle to find employment. What is also troubling to observe are the litany of rules his parole officer tells him that he must abide by and if not then he will be returned to prison; however, at no time does this same parole officer seek to assist his client by referring him to potential job opportunities designed to assist the formerly incarcerated from recidivating. Thus, the implication is that the justice system condones the culture of incapacitation while failing to create systems designed to lower recidivism. Whether true or not, the film shows us that both the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated lack the basic means in which to compete with their counterparts.

Overall, Prison Town USA offers some insight into the hot button issue of mass incarceration which, over the last 40-years or so, has contributed to the exponential rise of the prison population. What we now know from available data is that this growth has spurred the rapid expansion of rural communities across America who, today, can boast prisons as one of their primary sources of revenue. This is the culture of incapacitation that has become an acceptable practice in America.

