Civic Engagement and Reentry: Returning Citizens Respond During the Freddy Gray Uprisings

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Overview of the Discussion

- Policies influencing US incarceration rates/ The Carceral State
- Smart decarceration efforts
- Collateral consequences
- Desistance and successful reentry
- Civic engagement / Restorative reentry
- Returning Citizen responses to unarrest during the Baltimore Uprising of 2015

“If continued criminal activity is dependent on negative self-scripts, then desistance involves reworking self-narratives” S. Maruna, 2014
“The Gray Wastes”
- From 1865-1965 184,901 inmates
- From 1965-1985 increased by 251,107 inmates
- From 1985-current a total of 2.2 million inmates
- A 943 % increase from 1865 to the present

The Rise of the Carceral State
- Legislation/Regulations
  - 1961 President Kennedy's Attack on Delinquency
  - 1965 Law Enforcement Assistance Act
  - 1968 Safe Streets Act
- Constituency groups and the rise of the Carceral State
  - “Conservatives”- habitual offender/ three strikes statutes
  - “Liberals”- mandatory minimum sentencing
  - The Black Middle Class- Rockefeller Drug Laws- NAACP Citizens’ Mobilisation Against Crime
  - Near Unanimous Complicity

Smart Decarceration Efforts
Policies that reduce prison costs and prison populations while ensuring public safety
- Bipartisan Efforts
  - Right on Crime- Grover Norquist
  - Open Society Foundation
- Federal: 2014 Changes by the U.S. Sentencing Commission - 6,000 inmates newly eligible for release
- Municipal: NYC Diversion Courts / Programs
Collateral Consequences

- Lack of preparation for release
  - Curtail education and job training programs
- Structural barriers to reentry
  - Accessing healthcare (substance misuse and mental health services)
  - Accessing housing
  - Employment barriers and financial instability
- Cultural barriers to reentry
  - Stigmatization
  - Moral/social exclusion

Identity Theory of Desistance (ITD)

- Change in self perception
- Formation of personal identity
- Formation of social bonds in the community
- Rational choice to cease offending
- Desistance

Civic Engagement / Restorative Reentry

- If continued criminal activity is dependent on negative self-scripts, then desistance involves reworking self-narratives
- Restitution is self-guided behavior
- Identify and use the assets of Returned Citizens (RC's)
  - Restorative acts should be as overt as the violation/criminal act
  - Produce tangible good just as the offense produced tangible harm
- Helping, volunteering, or mentoring promotes desistance
Context of the Research

Penn North Community Source Center

- University of Maryland Integrated Health Health
- MUH started PNCRC in 1993 to provide both free acupuncture services to the community and an urban field placement for its acupuncture students
- GED preparation classes, 170 units of supportive housing, job training/placement, and criminal record expungement assistance

Freddie Gray Uprising 2015

- Freddy Gray lived in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood
- Police took Gray into custody on April 12, 2015, and he died on April 19, 2015 due to injuries sustained while in custody
- August 27, 2015, city residents fight back against police
- Unrest swept across the city ➔ State Of Emergency ➔ National Guard called in
A Part of the Solution: Civic Engagement and the Baltimore Uprising of 2015

- The purpose of the study was to investigate how RCs responded to the call to deal with community unrest.
- Questions addressed in the study: What motivated these RCs to respond to the call? What methods did they use intervene with agitated community members? What were the effects of their interventions?
- Informants to date were three RCs receiving services at Penn North Community Resource Center (PNCRC) self-identified as participants in efforts to intervene during community unrest.
- Phenomenological tradition of qualitative research
- In-depth interviews
- Coded and Thematized responses using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)
Preliminary Findings

- Civic engagement/Volunteerism may create pathways for successful reentry
- May promote change in self-narratives
- May promote a change in how the community views returning citizens
- May allow people combat stigmatization, moral/social exclusion accompanying a felony conviction
- May provide the opportunity to further build pro-social bonds

Preliminary Findings

- Change in self-perception
  
  "For so many years I've been a part of the problem and I figure I'm going to spend the rest of my life being a part of the solution." –Jim

- Restitution is self-guided behavior
  
  "Men it was beautiful. It wasn’t about people being mad and angry because we weren’t forced to do it. We knew that we had to be a part of the cleanup. It was about nurturing the community and cleaning up the mess. We wanted to be a part of the cleanup effort." –Malcolm

- Building pro-social bonds
  
  "My friend and his crew went up Penn North—let’s go help clean up there… We’re going to help clean up there…" –Clyde

Further Research

- Investigate the long-term desistance rates of participants.
- Investigate and document pro-social bonds, employment, and housing opportunities.
- Document their narratives
References


