Chapter 5
Prison Education in the United States of America:
The Racism Connection

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ABSTRACT

The United States of America ranks third among the most populous countries in the world behind India and China. However, the US ranks first among countries with the most prison population. Recent statistics from the Office of Justice program in the US Department of Justice show that about 2.5 million people are locked up in prisons or the so-called correctional facilities across the United States. These facilities are made up of nearly 2000 state prisons scattered among the 50 states, 102 federal prisons, about 2300 and 3300 juvenile prisons and local jails respectively, including 79 Indian Country jails (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016; Wagner & Rabuy, 2015). This chapter looks at the state of prison education in the US through the prism of racism. However, the chapter does not claim to have a complete evaluation of the situation of learning and teaching in penitentiaries in the US.

INTRODUCTION

Many countries in the world and their people accept the view that the US is the greatest nation on earth. Such a viewpoint has so far stood the test of time because, for about two centuries, the US has established leadership positions and continues to maintain the lead in numerous fields of human endeavor. Such fields include, but are not limited to, global commerce, liberal democracy, military might, and

technological know-how. However, one other area within which the US has come to establish notorious leadership is in the area of the number of incarcerated citizens. Although policies relating to imprisonment did not set out to massively imprison US citizens, decades of political, economic and educational policy manipulations at the federal, state and county levels have made the US become the nation with the most incarcerated citizens on earth. Both casual observation and current statistics show that US imprisonment profile does target specific groups of citizens. This chapter looks at the state of prison education in the US through the prism of racism. However, the chapter does not claim to have a complete evaluation of the situation of learning and teaching in penitentiaries in the US.

BACKGROUND

The US is a country in North America where Native Americans lived for thousands of years before the incursion of the Europeans and the subsequent British rule. By 1733, European immigrants have formed 13 colonies, and in 1775, these colonies fought the Revolutionary War and afterward declared independence from Britain on July 4, 1776. The US has an enormous racial mix including Native Americans or Alaska Natives, White Americans, African Americans or Blacks and Asian Americans to name but a few (Race, 2013). According to Grieco and Cassidy (2001), Blacks or African Americans makeup about 13 percent of the US population and represent the largest racial minority whereas White Americans are a majority and have about 70 percent of the US population. The US has four percent (4%) of the world's population and ranks third among the most populous countries in the world behind India and China (Carson, 2014; Internet World Stats, 2016). Nevertheless, the US ranks first among countries with the most prison population because 25 percent of the world's prison population is in the US, the highest in the history of the world (Carson, 2014). There is also a booming private prison industry in the US pioneered in 1983 by the trio of Thomas Beasley, Doctor R. Crants, and T. Don Hutto, doing business under the name Corrections Corporation of America (CCA). As such, the world's first private prison company began in the US in 1983 (Pauly, 2016).

Recent statistics from the Office of Justice program in the US Department of Justice show that about 2.5 million people are locked up in prisons or correctional centers across the US (United States, 2016). The facilities holding these prisoners are made up of 102 federal prisons and nearly 2000 state prisons scattered among the 50 states in the country. These facilities equally include about 2300 juvenile prisons, 3300 local jails and 79 Indian Country jails (United States, 2016; Wagner & Rabuy, 2015). Indian Country refers to those lands that are under the US jurisdiction located outside the boundaries of Indian reservations (EPA & OCSPP, 2016). Equally

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