

Chapter 8

History of Prison Education in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The needs to discipline and train prisoners for work, has become a convention that all nations including Ghana have come to accept with a view to churning out productive ex-prisoners. Thus, the aim prison education programs in Ghana is to turn inmates into useful citizens and the purpose of vocational training is to equip prisoners with skills which they can utilize to make a living. Additionally, the purpose for setting up the Junior and Senior High Schools is to give a second chance to inmates who dropped out of school before they were incarcerated. Similarly, the functional literacy program was introduced to teach illiterate prisoners how to read and write English, Akan, Ga, and Ewe languages. The chapter also discusses the duration, enrollment, teachers and the challenges of the programs. In addition, the general education program focuses on the curriculum, examination, and class attendance. The themes covered provide information on how prisoners are prepared toward reintegration in Ghana.

INTRODUCTION

Barnes (1972) states that prior to the 1820s and the 1830s, the modern type of prison never existed. Thus, offenders were not imprisoned for the purpose of punishment or reform. Rather offenders were fined, banished, whipped, or publicly placed in the pillory or executed. As stated by Rothman (1971), from the 1820s, Americans increasingly perceived crime as a product of social disorder. Therefore if social

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disorder was the root cause of crime, then the solution was to place the offender in an orderly environment. Such environments had to be created and this resulted in the concept of reformation. The reformers agreed that such orderly environments should be based on a set of principles namely obedience to authority, religion, hard work, and separation from all criminal influences. Enclosed by high, thick walls, the prison became the ideal setting for this utopian community. The problem with this community was how to prevent criminal influences or contaminating each other since they were being concentrated into a society of captives. In Pennsylvania, the reformers solved the problem of contamination by adopting the solitary system that is, placing offenders in a single cell which became known as perpetual solitary confinement. In New York, the reformers adopted the congregate system in which offenders slept alone but ate, worked, and attended religious service together. Contact between offenders was not allowed and the rule of absolute silence was observed (McKelvey, 1977). Those who disobeyed were severely punished with the whip. This first phase of reformation was premised on the fact that if they could perfect the daily regime of the prison, if they could create that orderly community which they believed could have curative powers, offenders could be reformed and thus get rid of recidivists in their society. The reformers believed that it is the daily routines that will break the will of offenders and open them up to a spirit renewal and to transformation. Three decades after the utopian community was established, it became obvious that the solitary and congregate systems were not working. After the American civil war, the prisons were filled with large numbers of offenders which made solitary confinement virtually impossible.

With the prisons in crises, the reformers affirmed that the supreme aim of prison discipline is the reformation of criminals, not the infliction of vindictive suffering (Wines, 1871/2008 p.541). Resulting from the flaw that was detected from the design of the prison, reformers agreed on the use of “determinate” sentences that is, prison terms whose lengths were determined by judges prior to incarceration of offenders, but were quick to realize that determinate sentences offered no incentive to the wayward. Following from this, the reformers adopted the indeterminate sentence that is, putting an offender into prison without the offender knowing his/her release date. The reason advanced is that release would be contingent on the offender showing indications of reform which can be assessed. Thus, the offender had to show commitment to change in order to earn his/her release. According to the reformers, the prisoner’s destiny should be placed, measurably, in his own hands....A regulated self-interest must be brought into play, and made constantly operative (Wines, 1871/2008 p. 541). To help offenders to reform, the reformers used principles such as progressive classification of prisoners; the use of rewards, more than punishments; special training in order to make a good prison or reformatory officers; access to “education” and “industrial training”; and efforts to reintegrate

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