

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/reimagining-prison-print-report>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

Prison in America causes individual, community, and generational pain and deprivation. Built on a system of racist policies and practices that has disproportionately impacted people of color, mass incarceration has decimated communities and families. But the harsh conditions within prisons neither ensure safety behind the walls nor prevent crime and victimization in the community.

In this report, the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) reimagines the how, what, and why of incarceration and asserts a new governing principle on which to ground prison policy and practice: *human dignity*. Basing American corrections practice on human dignity acknowledges and responds to the role formal state punishment systems have played in creating and perpetuating inequality. Vera proposes three practice principles to give life to this tenet: (1) respect the intrinsic worth of each human being; (2) elevate and support personal relationships; and (3) respect a persons capacity to grow and change.

Conditions of confinement in American prisons are dismal, and they disproportionately affect people of color. It is time to acknowledge that the United States has used incarceration as a tool of racial subordination and to radically alter how prisons function by infusing human dignity into every aspect of correctional operations.

The prison experience today is harsh, restrictive, and dehumanizing resulting in the loss of each incarcerated persons sense of self, autonomy, and capacity to control his or her own destiny.

Today's American prison system did not arise fully formed out of 20th century politics and policies, but is interwoven with this country's deep and divisive history of unequal race relations.

To transform the goals and experience of incarceration in this country requires that the bold but simple value of human dignity govern all facets of a newly shaped prison system.

SPECIAL REPORT (SLIDESHOW)

SPECIAL REPORT (CHAPTERED)

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