



Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences Corrections Section

What's Really Wrong With Rikers

Norman Seabrook, Op-Ed

The New York Times (reprinted from Aug. 24, 2014)

A recent investigation by the Department of Justice concluded that a culture of violence permeated the jails on Rikers Island in New York City, particularly the facilities housing adolescent detainees. The report came just a few weeks after this newspaper published its own investigation into violence against mentally ill patients at the jails.

These reports have led many in the public and city government to blame the correction officers at Rikers, and have generated calls for radical changes to the correction system.

There's no denying that some correction officers have crossed the line and acted in a brutal fashion. Neither I, as the president of the New York City Correction Officers' Benevolent Association, nor any correction officer I know, condone this kind of conduct. Those found guilty should be punished.

Nevertheless, blaming correction officers for what is happening on Rikers Island is counterproductive, misleading and profoundly unfair.

Part of the furor over Rikers rests on a belief that correction officers are little more than hired brutes, poorly screened and barely trained. But that's not true. They are dedicated law enforcement professionals doing an extremely difficult job. Nearly half the officers are women, and the majority of them are people of color. Many are second- and third-generation members of the department.

Like police officers, correction officers are hired after background checks, psy-

chological exams and physical and medical screening. They undergo 16 weeks of extensive training at the Correction Academy facility in Middle Village, Queens, and are trained in everything from riot prevention to the appropriate use of force techniques and chemical agents.

After all this, they are asked to do an almost impossible job, on a daily basis. At any given time there is approximately one correction officer for every 50 inmates on Rikers Island. We don't carry firearms in the jails, yet we are locked in with the most violent members of society. Many of these inmates, an increasing number of whom have diagnosed mental disorders, are skilled at manufacturing deadly weapons, which they regularly use on one another and on officers.

To be blunt, the fact that people are not regularly dying there is a testament to the professionalism of the officers. If it were not for their daily struggle against the mounting chaos, I am sure the federal courts would have closed Rikers long ago. The officers are blamed for the violence that exists without being given credit for the lives they are saving.

What is not apparent to the public are the physical and emotional costs that come with serving as the first line of defense in the jails system. Last year 196

correction officers were seriously injured by inmate assaults, including several whose faces were disfigured with razors. Such assaults are fully documented, but the public rarely learns of them.

Conditions at Rikers and other city jails are more dangerous for another reason. Unlike jails elsewhere in the country, court decrees here give most inmates permission to move widely around the jail and interact with one another — at group recreation, in the library — making each jail more like Grand Central Terminal than a correctional facility. This holds true even for many of the system's violent and mentally ill inmates; care, custody and control of this kind of population in this kind of setting is demanding and very stressful.

Correction officers aren't alone in bearing the brunt of the violence at Rikers; attacks by inmates against doctors, nurses and mental health workers increased to 39 in 2013, from eight in 2011.

And yet the response from the system's leadership — both the top echelons of the Department of Correction and the private contractors



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Fall 2014 - Corrections Now

Message from the Chair



Welcome to Fall 2014! As we start another academic year, I would like to take a moment to highlight a major accomplishment, years in the making. The Section has successfully worked out final details for a new academic journal. I especially want to thank David May for the persistence needed to make this a reality! Below, you can read about the journal's focus and the search for an editor. Editorial board members will also be solicited, based on experience and expertise in various areas of corrections, and reviewers will be

solicited in the near future.

The Board hopes to have its first publication by 2016. I would like to also thank previous executive officers for their assistance and oversight from the start of this journey.

To help cover the costs of publishing the new journal, section dues have been approved by the ACJS executive board to increase to \$35 for regular members, and \$15 for student members. The increased figures were presented to the membership at the 2014 annual business meet-

ing and were overwhelmingly supported. You will see the changes on this year's membership application.

I encourage you to attend ACJS in Orlando where changes have been made to the time of the general business meeting, based on member feedback. Also, a karaoke challenge that has been laid down by David May (see the back page for more)!

Lastly, I wish everyone the best as a new academic term commences and look forward to seeing you all in Orlando!

~ Jeff

Corrections Section Journal—APPROVED!!!!

With the approval by the ACJS Executive Board and support of Taylor and Francis, the Corrections Section executive officers would like to announce the launch of a quarterly peer-reviewed journal, entitled, *Corrections: Policy, Practice, and Research* in January 2016. Three years of hard work and diligence

led by **David May**, Vice Chair, have led to this moment!

The journal will have a broad correctional focus encompassing a wide range of relevant topics and innovative approaches from new theoretical perspectives and research findings to their implications for improving policy and practice. Both national and international in scope, the journal

will address these issues and challenges as they relate to sentencing, prisons, jails, and community corrections. While both quantitative and qualitative empirical research will be emphasized, comprehensive non-empirical articles of high quality and potential impact will also be published. We look forward to working with Taylor and Francis as we launch this exciting new

Application for New Journal Editor

The ACJS Corrections Section will be taking applications for consideration as the new journal's editor immediately. Applicants must have a Ph.D. in Criminal Justice/Criminology or a related field, substantial publication record on corrections-related topics in peer review journals, and previous experience on an editorial board or as a peer reviewer. Previous editorial experience and affiliation with an academic institution is pre-

ferred.

Curriculum vitae must be submitted to the editor selection committee along with a statement of vision for the journal and support that would be provided by his or her institution.

Submissions for editor can be sent to ACJS_Corrections@yahoo.com.



ORLANDO NEWS

The 52nd annual meeting of ACJS will be held **March 3-7, 2015, at the Caribe Royale All-Suite Hotel and Convention Center in Orlando, Florida.**

Paper and poster submissions are due September 19, 2014, with an extended deadline of September 30, 2014.

The Section encourages faculty, students and professionals in the field to submit a paper or poster presentation. Also, we highly recommend you attend the meeting! Here's why....

Per the email sent out on August 25th from Brian Payne, a number of events will be taking

place! While **Piper Kerman** will be a draw, the most important event will be the **karaoke showdown between Brian Payne and the Section's own, David May!** Based on the 3-year average attendance, the over goes to Brian and under goes to Dave! Song selection will undoubtedly be crucial and relevant! Given the scheduled Friday evening event, you will be able to enjoy the Section's **Spring training- themed general business meeting**, and then be entertained by two people who could cut a record!

Based on results of a 2012 sur-

vey on Section membership preference, the annual 7am breakfast and general business meeting has been moved to an afternoon event! **The general business meeting will be held on Friday, March 6, from 3:30-5pm at the conference site.**

Suggestions are welcome for a **corrections-related charitable organization** in the Orlando area. Please inform the E-Board via email (**ACJS_Corrections@yahoo.com**) for consideration of a donation made on behalf of the Section by **December 1.**

See you in Orlando!!!!



Corrections Section Purpose

The purpose of the Corrections Section is to bring together academy members who have a particular interest in corrections, to facilitate and encourage research and theory development related to corrections, to encourage appropriate and effective teaching techniques and practices for corrections courses, to serve as a resource network for and encourage interaction

among academic, research, practitioner and policy-making sectors in order to further knowledge about corrections, and to encourage the organization of corrections-related conference activities.

Solicitations for op-eds or research items are welcome for the next edition of the newsletter!! Email us!

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