

To: Professors Deborah McDowell, Claudrena Harold and Vesla Weaver

From: Carlton Weaver (#257620)

RE: Symposium on Crime and Punishment

April 4, 2009

Dear Professor McDowell,

Hello, my name is Carlton Weaver, an inmate of nearly twenty years currently imprisoned in Virginia's Wallens Ridge State Penitentiary. This morning, I learned of the upcoming symposium to be hosted by your university broadly concerning crime and punishment. It is within this and like researches that I wish to have a voice!

This past January, I disseminated 156 twenty page hand-copied essays entitled "An Application for Dialogue" to the entire Virginia General Assembly and federal counterparts, regarding my life, leading to self-reformation. Since then, Senator Webb has responded to my call for dialogue and supplied information noting his holding of a recent and similar symposium at George Mason University and also delivering the keynote address for a Brookings Institute panel. Such people and institutions are who and where I aim to communicate with in order to have included that which has been excluded – the prisoner's perspective!

I believe that select offenders, those who through their experience sought education and became enlightened, should be competent and consulted for their viewpoint. Who else has undergone the living of crime, apprehending of law, processing of courts, and finally banishment to obscurity, where if one became conscious, one can uniquely think, study, observe, and resolve in contributing to a better understanding of the criminal justice system.

Though my environment is deficient in these kinds of persons, and while most offenders deny themselves access to any forum to express their concerns through self-seeking measures, conversely the authorities have scarce established mediums interactive with serving offenders. But to those that can be distinguished, they need to be utilized and evaluated apart from the stereotypes and as an individual.

John S. Mill said, "Human nature and human life are wide subjects, and whoever would embark in an enterprise requiring a thorough knowledge of them, has need both of large stores of his own, and of all aids and appliances from elsewhere. His qualifications for success will be proportionate to two things: the degree in which his own nature and circumstances furnish him with a correct and complete picture of man's nature and circumstances; and his capacity of deriving light from other minds."

I am in near total absence of the criteria just described and it is those influences which I need most to enhance my ideas and character. But on such matters of discussion soon convening, it is requisite, to be at all successful, that the very cause being conferred be actually cognitively participant and not as a patient under anesthesia for dissection.

Because of my acquired autonomy and through my daily studies I have gained insight not only into prison management, its ideology, and its antiquated operations, but more extensively philosophical, ethical, and external dynamics; like “what is the purpose of the criminal justice system?”, “how are urban and minority classes oppressed?”, the religious vs. secular authority, their supreme dominion; our educative and media spheres of influence and how they shape the unexamined mass perception – just to name some things.

With infinite free time, I am at leisure to deeply reflect on living issues where others do not have such luxury. Whether reading philosophy, the various social sciences, or watching informative PBS programs, all of these activities are chosen in resiliency anew every day, with the goal being to improve on existing standards.

If I can be of any assistance in the related in the related subject matter then I request that you make use of me as my faculties suggest worthy. Should I not grasp or provide a fresh outlook to the material under study well, it will not be without a total exertion in effort. I care about myself and this fascinating but cruel world. And ever since I realized this, I have been unable and unwanting to ever return to ignorance. This despite the acute mental anxiety such revelations affect.

In closing, I have learned from a late book called *Marching to a Different Drummer*, just how exactly each generation singles out a class, sex, age, and race of society to scapegoat and keep downtrodden. Clearly, African Americans and offenders are at the current forefront of exploitation. An unprecedented psychological overhaul is needed to treat and teach the deep-seated mentality an abused minority maintains. This will be no easy feat to undo but I will strive to change that fact.

Ever Appreciative - Peace,

Carlton Weaver