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## Book Review: Rethinking Prison Reentry: Transforming Humiliation into Humility

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*Book Review & Resources*

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## **Book Review: Rethinking Prison Reentry: Transforming Humiliation into Humility**

**Joni Schwartz**

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*Gaskew, T. (2014). Rethinking prison reentry: Transforming humiliation into humility. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. ISBN: 978-0-7391-8312-0.*

Perhaps there is no other contemporary American social issue more relevant to adult education and social justice than the mass incarceration of Black males and their reentry to society. And, there is arguably no more knowledgeable and able author to write about this issue than Tony Gaskew who as a Black male social activist scholar has spent over 30 years as a criminal justice professional. His goal in writing *Rethinking Prison Reentry: Transforming Humiliation into Humility* in his own words is “to break the cycle of the socially constructed lies faced by so many Black men who fill our nation’s prisons and jails and are trapped in a Black counter-culture of crime, through the simple concept of owning the truth” (p. 35). Gaskew introduces his prison-based education pedagogy called *Humiliation to Humility Perspective (HHP)*, which is a pedagogical framework that has the potential to transform the humiliation of the criminal offender to the humility of an incarcerated student through owning the Black American experience and understanding collective *Black Cultural Privilege (BCP)*.

In chapter 1, the author reflects on the “reality of truth” as a Black American male and his own personal, professional and academic lived experiences. He encourages Black students to discover and own their own truths as Black males that is often hidden in the social constructs created about them. Chapter 2 builds on the first chapter by examining the collective truths and knowledge of *BCP* and discusses the role that unexamined white privilege, white supremacy, and the construction of black inferiority has played in incarcerated students’ perceptions of themselves. In addition, he addresses the role that African American legacy and history can play in unearthing the returning citizen’s rich cultural heritage thereby affecting their self-perception. Chapter three shows how to educate Black students so that they can process the criminal justice system by looking at policing, courts, and corrections. Gaskew uses the metaphor of the *Great White Shark* for a system that has a voracious appetite for young Black men. Chapter four examines the role of the incarcerated Black father who Gaskew says can move from humiliation

to humility by owning his own truth and protect his Black son from the jaws of the shark. Finally, chapter five looks at the final stage of Gaskew's transformation from humiliation to humility pedagogical framework, which is decision-making or "freedom to make choices." Through understanding Black cultural privilege, understanding the criminal justice system, owning your own truth about Black counter-culture, Gaskew states that incarcerated Black students can free themselves from transgenerational helplessness, distancing themselves from others, and the politics of shaming by moving from humiliation to humility.

For adult educators working in prisons, transitional programs or reentry organizations, this is a must read, but the value goes beyond just those working in programs with and for the incarcerated and returning citizens. Gaskew is addressing transformative learning at its best. All adult educators will be interested in his powerful Humiliation to Humility pedagogical framework, which examines methodically how to walk students through the process of personal reflection, cultural reframing, social imaginative pedagogy toward transformative individual, and collective learning. Social activist scholars will appreciate Gaskew's strong, no-nonsense tone in regard to race and white supremacy and his honest and transparent use of self in narrating a counterstory of the Black student and, in particular, the incarcerated Black male. He aptly makes visible "the invisible elephants in the room, racism, white supremacy, and white privilege" and how they "attached to my Black American experience whether I liked it or not" (p. 11); this book is Gaskew's choice on how to manage those elephants and to show others a way to do so as well.



**Joni Schwartz** is an Associate Professor and Social Activist Scholar in the Department of Humanities, City University of New York, LaGuardia Community College, NYC. Her new co-edited book, "Race, Education, and Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Citizens" will be published this summer (2017) by Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield, Publishers.