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DSJ Editors' Introduction to the Mass Incarceration Issue: Adult Educators, Prison, and Re-Entry Education

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From the Editors

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The 2016 American presidential election season was one of the most provocative in modern history with the final results leaving the marginalized feeling more disenfranchised. Within this marginalized population, a person formerly or currently connected to the criminal justice system is no exception. Fear and anxiety have created a type of neurotic anxiety permeating a society that is divided on views that supersede those fundamental beliefs that our country has stood upon – life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Furthermore, the impact of the past election on formerly and currently incarcerated citizens has intensified the need to respond to this social justice issue, which has reached epic proportions (Alexander, 2010). The intersection of social justice and education is poignantly felt in the disproportionate mass incarceration of so many of our black and brown brothers and sisters in addition to the inequality of educational opportunity based on income and race across the country. These two intersecting injustices may very well be the greatest civil rights issue or challenge of our day.

Given the prior administration's progressive actions on issues relating to persons with a criminal background versus the current administration's regressive stance, adult educators are forced to reevaluate their current pedagogy in response. We make the argument that if anyone should be concerned and involved in prison education, advocacy, and re-entry work at this juncture in our history, it is the adult educator. Therefore, *Dialogues in Social Justice: An Adult Education Journal* has devoted its third issue to adult education and prison/re-entry.

The four interrelated goals of this DSJ issue are: (1) to make the argument that education and the support of opportunity for adult education is a substantiated solution to decreasing recidivism; (2) to emphasize that institutionalized racism and educational inequality support

mass incarceration in America; (3) to open a space for the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated to speak; and (4) finally to highlight adult education programs that serve the incarcerated and include innovative and creative ways of preparing adults for life after incarceration. We hope this themed issue of DSJ initiates and contributes to this conversation. The following research articles, reflections, book reviews, and visual art reflect the broad range of adult education advocacy activity in prisons through re-entry, where adult educators play a major role.

A final thought—Rikers Island, a notoriously horrific New York City prison filled with violence and corruption, is anticipated to close in the next few years due to the advocacy work of individuals who were formerly incarcerated and other civic-minded individuals (<http://www.closerikers.org/media/press/a-growing-number-of-elected-officials-and-a-coalition-of-representatives-from-98-advocacy-groups-march-to-demand-mayor-de-blasio-close-rikers-island-jail-complex/>). This kind of social justice advocacy is a model for current initiatives and continues the tradition of social justice adult educators. Our hope with this issue is that readers will be inspired and encouraged to continue to work to engage in prison reform, adult education prison work, re-entry solutions, and education and advocacy for change.

References

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- Chaney, J., & Schwartz, J. (2017). *Race, education, and reintegrating formerly incarcerated citizens*. Lanham Maryland: Lexington Books.



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