

Portrayals of Prison in Cinema and Television Drama



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The Purpose of Prisons?

People disagree on what the primary function of prisons should be:

- To punish
- To rehabilitate
- To deter future crimes
- To keep criminals off the streets



We Vote for Policies We Believe In



http://timesnews.typepad.com/photos/uncategorized/voting_booths.jpg

What Shapes Our Beliefs About Prisons?

Most of us “learn” about prison and prisoners through popular film and television, for we lack direct experiences.

Portrayals of Prisons

I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang (1932)

Director: Mervin LeRoy



How did this film help prison reform?

- It **alerted** both politicians and the public to the horrors of the chain gang practices.
- It **encouraged empathy** with a marginalized group—the prison population. It **humanized** prisoners.

The Shawshank Redemption: Innocence

- Showed the system as fallible, and it made us **sympathize** with a convict who was wrongly accused.



But what about the guilty?

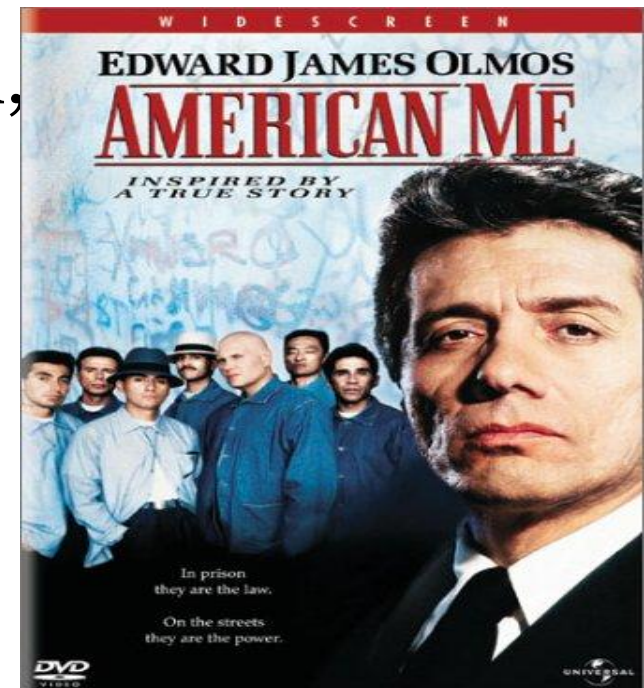
American Me (1992)

Director: Edward James Olmos

We may or may not feel sympathy for the main character, Santana, a murderer.

We may see him as both a criminal, and a victim of injustice.

Like *Dead Man Walking*, this portrayal is not one-sided.



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Portrayals of Prisoners and Effects

- **Prisoners-as-human** portrayals may lead us to favor policies that emphasize rehabilitation

WHILE...

- **Prisoners-as-monster portrayals** may lead us to favor more punitive and restrictive policies
- Wilson and O'Sullivan argue that since prison exists as a 'secret world' to most of us, any portrayal of inmates that is humanizing is positive, for, "...society needs to be encouraged to see prisoners as people who potentially have rights and aspirations before it can even begin to engage in debate about the acceptability of penal regimes" (2008, 486).

Prisoner Representations in *Oz*

- Horrific images
- Ultra-violent



<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/9/9d/Ozposter.jpg/225px-Ozposter.jpg>

Are the *Oz* Portrayals Accurate?

- *Oz*: 2002 season averaged 13.6 violent inmate incidents per hour-long episode.
- Reality: The majority of prisoners in the U.S. have been incarcerated for non-violent crimes. (Austin and Irwin, 2001)
- *Oz*: 3 out of every 4 deaths in prison are caused by murder.
- Reality: The most common causes of death in prison are suicide, disease, and old age.

Ex-Prisoners View Oz as Unrealistic

-William Yousman Dissertation Project

They cited:

- Poor health care and nutrition
- Limited educational opportunities
- Limited job and rehabilitation programs
- Verbal abuse by corrections staff
- Corrections staff involvement with prison drug trade
- Placement of non-violent prisoners alongside offenders with violent records

Yousmann's Conclusions Regarding *Oz* and other Popular Prison Media

- “*Oz* and other dramatic and news programming...do much more than just reflect reality—they shape, twist, and filter reality to fit the needs of a commercial media system.”
- “The Prisons Outside and the Prisons in our Heads: Television and the Representation of Incarceration” (2003)

Do These Portrayals Really Have an Effect on Our Policy Decisions?

- The National Criminal Justice Commission says **YES.**
- Rapid U.S. expansion of prison system since 1980.
- Media has played a central role in this growth “as images of crazed, violent criminals and messages of fear inundated the airwaves, **even when crime itself was on the decline.**”

The National Criminal Justice Commission Report 1996,
p. 31.

Most of us learn about prison through popular film and television

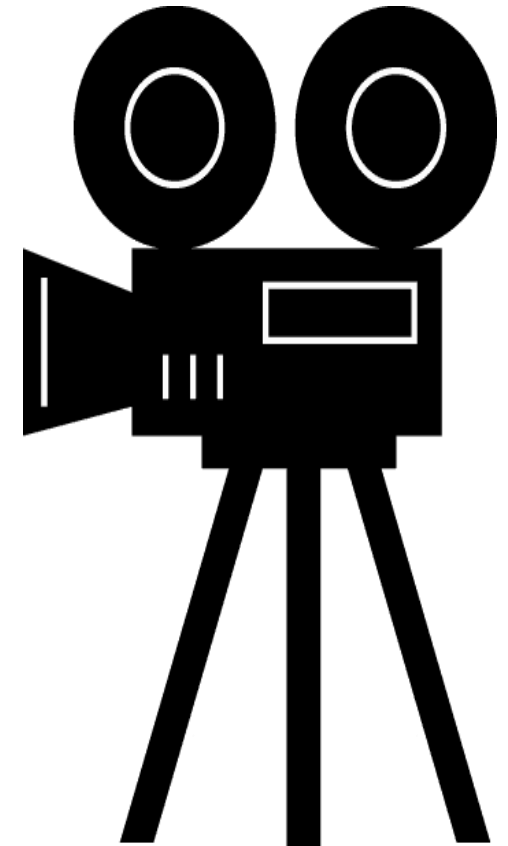
These mediums have the power to:

- present prisoners as human beings
- portray prisoners as monsters
- expose injustices

They can arouse our:

- concern
- empathy
- fear

How do you feel about the way the entertainment industry chooses to use this power?



Works Cited

Wilson, David and O'Sullivan, Sean. "Re-theorizing the penal reform functions of the prison film: Revelation, humanization, empathy and benchmarking." *Theoretical Criminology*. September, 2008.

Yousmann, William. "The Prisons Outside and the Prisons in our Heads: Television and the Representation of Incarceration." Dissertation, May, 2004.

College Behind Bars

Teaching English at San Quentin State Prison

Jon Kitamura

Background- San Quentin in context



- San Quentin is one of 33 state prisons in CA

Background- San Quentin in context

- All of the state prisons in CA are classified by security level on a scale from 1-4.
- Level 1 prisons are minimum security prisons, and Level 4 prisons are maximum security prisons
- Despite its reputation and its history, San Quentin is a Level 2 prison (medium security)
- San Quentin is also the only prison in CA that houses inmates on Death Row (close to 650 men)

Background—San Quentin in context



- San Quentin is one of the few prisons in CA that offers its inmates the opportunity to receive an AA degree

Patten College Program at San Quentin

- College classes run in the evening and meet at least twice a week
- Students must have a high school diploma or GED
- Students take 2 classes a semester on average
- All students work full-time during the day
- Their monthly paycheck averages \$25

Patten College Program at San Quentin

- Most students take 3 1/2 years to complete the requirements for the Associate of Arts degree
- Cost to the students as well as CA taxpayers= \$0

Initial Expectations- Misguided by Popular Culture and Others?

- Influenced by representations of prisons and inmates in popular culture
- Training/Orientation– inmates as con-men

Impressions from *My First Night*

- Greetings from the students
- The students: self-segregation
- The students: respect for others as well as for the instructor
- The students: complete willingness to participate, to learn, and to engage in class discussions
- The classroom: no guards

Revelations- Seeing Past the Stereotypes

- New perception of prisoners– dedicated college students who are passionate about learning
- Benefits of college education—changes inmates' lives
- Helps inmates influence others
- Blackout

San Quentin Student Writing

“Why should higher education be given to inmates who may never leave prison?”

“The infectious nature of higher education has a ripple effect, meaning that those educated will encourage and assist others in educating themselves. We should offer higher education to inmates because it is the lifer who has the most persuasive influence over the percentage of the population who will get out of prison. . . . So it is the lifer who should not only have the answers on how to do the time, but also the solutions for how to grow, mature, change, and stay out of prison. Higher education can equip an individual with these tools” (Mainor, Sr).

San Quentin Student Writing

Listen

Listen—
Stems from the heart of a well-seasoned O.G.
That's O.G. as in the original gentleman,
One who has erred much too often,
But now has softened,
And has high hopes of reaching and teaching
Pre-dominantly the youth,
No one excluded, all of us included,
That we may curtail our erratic behavior,
Reconnect with our savior,
And become more effective human beings.

San Quentin Student Writing

Listen (continued)

Please listen,
You in blue, like I,
Know we are missing out
On a wonderful life that we forfeited for
Prison politics and strife.
This kind of life ain't nice.
No!
I'm not content, until I'm totally spent,
My quest is to prevent
Our youth
From making the same mistakes
You and I made.

San Quentin Student Writing

Listen (continued)

The lifestyle we previously lived was
Moronic,
Some demonic,
Thus it's ironic
This message comes from a guy like myself,
Whose life is basically on the shelf.
I'm doing 25 with a "L"
For a twenty dollar sale
Of rock cocaine. Years confined. Over ten.
How do I explain to my family and friends
When this misery ends.
I can't—
It's hell.
Young America, stay out of jail.

San Quentin Student Writing

Listen (continued)

So I share with our youth,
Be young, have fun,
But in society don't be out there doing
Something that can ruin
The rest of your natural lives.
Instead, choose a life that's constructive,
Productive,
Sometimes be exclusive
But do the thing that's conducive
To making the world a better place.

Danny Vince Cox, San Quentin College Program

Silencing Voices

Teresa Morris, Librarian

September 26, 2008

ABCs of Brothahood

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*Accelerate
Beyond
Complete
Destruction
Exclude Ferocious Games,
Harboring Innocence.
Just
Keep
Lovin' Me.
Nauseous Of Pallbearers,
Quirky Rebellion,
Senseless.
Tenors
United
Vocally
Warbling, Xeroxed &
Yelling
Zealously*

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THE WORLD'S LARGEST DJ DIRECTORY

Mixed In Key m

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Hey DJ Massive! The DJ List has been reset. All DJs have been re-ranked.

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- DJ MIXES
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INDUSTRY LOGINS

- DJ login
- AGENT login

COMPANY

- about us
- advertise
- promotional jobs

HELP

Done


Prison Poets - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Delicious Bookmarks Tools Help

http://www.madpoetry.org/prisonpo.html

CSM shortcuts Library shortcuts Other Libraries PLS shortcuts Fall 2008 Schedule WebSMART Librarians: Keeping Up... The Weather Channel: ...


Online Databases csmref's DMW Boo... Writing Outside the ... Jevon Jackson - Go... NoodleBib: Create ... Prison Poets



Prison Poets:

In 1997, Judy Washbush published *Poems From The Dane County Jail* as a prison awareness project. Many of the men involved subsequently were sentenced to prison terms, but kept writing and sending poems. Judy has sent a newsletter of these poems to about 40 men; over 100 have participated since the newsletter began. Jeannie Bergmann now manages the newsletter; e-mail for info or to subscribe. These are all poems written in prison; click on the author's name. Anthony Sandifer and Caliph Stevens are currently in the [Supermax Prison](#) (now called the Wisconsin Secure Program Facility) in Boscobel. * indicates added in 2005.

- [*Carlos Abadia](#)
- [Anthony Hall](#)
- [Arvester Hawkins](#)
- [*Jevon Jackson](#)
- [*Jerome L. Jenkins](#)
- [*Hans M. Jensen](#)
- [Andre Johnson](#)
- [Donna Dawn Konitzer](#)
- [Benjamin Luttrell III](#)
- [*James Miller](#)
- [Richard Player Paul](#)



LOCAL POETS
FEATURED POEM
POETRY READINGS
OPEN MIKES
NEWS & REVIEWS
WORKSHOPS
FAVORITE LINKS
POETRY CONTESTS
ORGANIZATIONS
PUBLICATIONS
BOOKSTORES
POETRY OF TERRA
POLITICS
ABOUT US

updated 10/27/05

Done

photo not available

zotero

How and Where can I use that?

- College projects or papers – yes most of the time
- You tube video – probably not
- iTunes University video – yes if done very carefully

Giving Credit

- Doing the right thing
 - Keeping the voice and the author together Jevon Jackson
- Doing the Legal thing
 - Four Factors of Fair Use

Four Factors of Fair Use

- **Factor 1:** the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes;
- **Factor 2:** the nature of the copyrighted work;
- **Factor 3:** amount of the copyrighted work in comparison to the whole work
- **Factor 4:** the effect of the use on the market for or value of the copyrighted work.

Giving Credit - Giving Voice

Geraghty, M., & Jackson, J. (2005). Writing outside the bars: A journey of self-discovery. *The Quarterly of the National Writing Project*, 27(2). Retrieved September 20, 2008, from <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/2228>