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Book Review: Derek S. Jeffreys, *America's Jails: The Search for Human Dignity in an Age of Mass Incarceration*. New York University Press. 2018. ISBN: 978-1479814824 (Paperback). 225 pages. $32.

Reviewed by Carl M. Ustupski[1]

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In *America' Jails: The Search for Human Dignity in an Age of Mass Incarceration*, Derek Jeffreys attempts to primarily focus on the human dignity of inmates in U.S. jails. He draws from his experience volunteering in a prison chapel, visiting various jails and prisons in Wisconsin and overseas, and his access that was granted to him inside the Cook County Jail by Sheriff Thomas J. Dart. Jeffreys states that he was freely able to speak with both inmates and staff inside the jail. He does his best to bring about many disturbing abuses inside the jail system but resists the temptation to portray those working in corrections as evil and to blame. Throughout the book, Jeffreys discusses a long common practice of placing those thought to be insignificant or in a powerless position in mental hospitals, jails, prisons, or other institutions. Jeffreys discusses his ideas of proposed policy changes that may assist in preventing abuse and neglect of inmates in jail and how to reduce the populations of those incarcerated.

Jeffreys gives an account of his first day entering the Cook County Jail and how it left him emotionally exhausted. The unpleasant smells and constant noise produced inside caused a sensation of disorientation and confusion that was present in every future visit to the jail. This description allows readers the opportunity to visualize what an inmate has to deal with daily. Jeffreys contests that most people in jails are legally innocent. He made a point to share this opinion several times in

[1] **Carl M. Ustupski** is a graduate student at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas and has been a commissioned New Mexico peace officer for over 18 years. Address correspondence to: Carl M. Ustupski, e-mail: custupski@lamar.edu.

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the book. It is important to note that he states this point prior to going into the brutal history of mistreatment of inmates incarcerated in the jail and the poor housing conditions. Jeffreys states early history consisted of a poorly administered jail and certain criminals went about their time as they pleased. The jail used a system called the barn-boss system where gangs in the jail were allowed to control large sections inside. Inmates were sexually assaulted frequently, which led to several lawsuits and arrests of corrupt officials. The war on drugs caused a huge increase in those incarcerated. Many inmates were forced to sleep on the floor because of overcrowding. Strip searches of males and females were being done upon entering the jail and exiting. The searches were found to be very degrading and involved cavity searches. This was the start of many lawsuits for mistreatment and forced Cook County into a Consent Decree with the U.S. Department of Justice. Monetary damages were awarded to tens of thousands. The protection and safety of inmates were found to be non-existent. Inmate on inmate violence was routine. Inmates that questioned or disagreed with staff were met with groups of corrections officers savagely stomping and beating inmates. Health care and mental health services were limited and often neglected. Staff shortages and under trained personnel were causes of this. Jeffreys gives insight on the steps that takes someone to the Cook County Jail. It starts with an arrest and being booked and placed in local police lockups that are overcrowded and filthy. The journey then starts to being transported to the Cook County Jail and landing in what is called the bullpen for intake. The area is also overcrowded and dirty. Medical screening is quick and in front of other inmates when information about health and medication is disclosed. Inmates are moved around to other small and crammed areas and eventually are seen by a Judge. Many are not able to post bail and are ordered to be incarcerated at the Cook County Jail. Conditions from the start of the process for the inmate are poor and often confusing. With so many being moved about and limited staffing, everything is often rushed and hurried. Jeffreys states that staff often rudely answer questions brought about by inmates, but staff are probably overworked and suffering from mental exhaustion of the daily routine every day. At the jail mental health and staffing is a serious issue. Jeffreys talks about the many inmates that are in need of some type of mental health intervention but overcrowding and the amount of those in need seem endless. Jefferys does speak about some dedicated staff members that are motivated to help, but their caseloads are far too many for one individual to have. If the ability to help an inmate struggling with mental health is achieved, the chance of them reoffending outside of the

jail and returning is far too great. Like many other locations in the United States, recidivism is a constant problem. Jeffreys does a good job of painting a picture of what someone goes through after being arrested. He shows just how difficult it is for the poor to get out of incarceration and the need for more resources for those in a mental crisis. The search for human dignity of those incarcerated starts from the moment one is arrested in Cook County.

Larger jails seem to have the biggest concerns. Cook County is one of the largest in the United States. Therefore, with so many people coming and leaving the jail, it is difficult for upper administration to know everything that is going on. Jeffreys states that keeping the facility clean is a problem. Because of the amount of inmates and the damage they often inflict on the facility, it creates a problem. Studies have shown that overcrowding and harsher prison conditions have been associated with greater odds of reoffending. (Van Ginneken et al. 2023) Staff violence and staff sexual assaults are major issues in both large and small facilities. The ACLU has filed numerous lawsuits against prisons and jails. Some of these lawsuits listed brutal attacks that even included the use of dogs that growled and lunged at inmates. The Department of Justice has investigated several prisons and jails for sexual assaults on inmates. A 2014 study released by the U.S Bureau of Justice showed that 49 percent of sexual assault and harassment cases involved staff members against inmates. The DOJ has investigated numerous prisons for their inability to control inmate on inmate violence. These investigations looked into staff using violent inmates to control other inmates, deliberately segregating black inmates, and using juvenile inmates as "trustees" all which caused problems within the facilities. Jeffreys writes about the lack of medical and mental health care in prisons and jails. Many jails throughout the country are not ready to deal with inmates with mental health disorders which leads to unsafe conditions for inmates and staff. Medical care for inmates is often poor or not available in some cases. Initial screenings often get missed according to DOJ findings at several prisons. Not having these programs and resources available further confirms what Jefferys writes about when searching for the human dignity of those incarcerated. The facilities that have those resources available still often do not see someone incarcerated as important enough to make sure a screening is completed, or treatment is offered.

Jeffreys explores the impact of the explosive growth of public and private jails housing undocumented immigrants. He writes that two major corporations, Corrections Corporation of America and the GEO

Group, INC, had profited substantially from building private immigration jails. These corporations have donated several millions of dollars to political parties and several millions more in policy lobbying. This has influenced politics to maximize the financial interests of the private prisons and assist with securing government contracts. (Park 2023) With the contracts awarded and these facilities being built in places in secluded areas, it makes staying in touch with family harder for those being housed. Jeffreys describes the facilities and the poor and unsanitary living conditions of those incarcerated and the undignified regard to how they are treated. He attempts to look at dignity in different aspects from many approaches. Those include different kinds of dignity, attacks on dignity, and the ways people deny the inherent possession of dignity. He starts with a philosophical approach to dignity and references many historical philosophers and their understanding of dignity. With different kinds of dignity and different understandings, it is important to note that all thoughts on dignity will be different in some way. What is of importance is asking why people reject the significance of dignity altogether from an ethical standpoint. Of major importance to save someone's dignity is the steps U.S. Congress took when passing the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA). Jeffreys discusses the horrors of rape and sexual assaults in prisons and jails. Although PREA was a positive step, these crimes still take place because some U.S. states refuse to comply with the PREA regulations. Research has shown that if PREA is implemented correctly and receives full staff cooperation, it is effective. If those two things are not present, then PREA will be ineffective. (Niver 2022)

In America's jails, the search for human dignity in an age of mass incarceration, Jeffreys discusses how inmates are stigmatized. With tens of thousands of people being released from jail daily, the stigma of having a criminal record will follow them in many areas of their life. Jeffreys continues to write about the money-making opportunities of private prisons when he discusses the economic incentives to maintain jails and prisons. It gives those companies running the prisons little incentive to care about the humanity of inmates and can be disgusting. Disgust has a big impact on our senses. People have often found certain groups disgusting, such as child molesters. Disgust can be defined as something we encounter that we think does not belong. This may explain people's perception of inmates and how some may feel disgust toward them. Most would say that nobody good should be incarcerated and those that are could cause us to be disgusted with them. If someone is disgusted with inmates, this can affect their perception of an inmate's

value. Jeffreys writes that those arrested in the United States are often subjected to treatment that makes them objects of disgust. Those with mental conditions, drug addicts, and alcoholics are viewed as disgusting because of their state. The addicts going through withdrawals or the alcoholic vomiting on oneself. The human dignity of helping these individuals can disappear because of those feelings of disgust. Disgust often leads to contempt because one may feel superior over what they consider to be disgusting. The arrest and booking process in America's jails and prisons send a clear message of expressing contempt. Police officers are accused of parading those arrested in front of others. The Chicago Police Department had a history of racial violence and often were accused of torturing, brutalizing, and abusing criminals. Contempt can also be shown by not acknowledging or believing those that claim to be harmed while incarcerated. The Department of Justice conducted an investigation into complaints against the Chicago Police Department. The end result showed many disturbing findings. One being that by the time someone arrested arrived at the Cook County jail the individual had been degraded and devalued. Jeffreys writes that contempt often yields deadly consequences in many U.S. jails. He gives three examples of how correction officers disregarded medical procedures for three inmates in crisis. All three were shown contempt during their incarceration, either through negligence or not properly caring for them. All three died in custody and further showed how not valuing someone's dignity can create terrible results. In an article by Renee McNab, the author discusses her experience in going into an Australian prison. She writes that prison is not meant to be easy, but it should not be an inhumane place. McNab states that the staff in prisons say that prison rehabilitates you, but there is more harm than good. (McNab 2024) Jeffreys states that if we want to change our feelings on how we value people, we need to link policy changes with personal transformation. Prison should not be a place that does more harm than good. This is a major reason why recidivism is constant across the country.

Today's jails lack clarity and transparency on what occurs inside the walls. We cannot trust those that watch inmates to do the right thing and they must have some oversight as well. A theory discussed by Jeffreys called the Inspection Principle was a plan by philosopher Jeremy Bentham. The plan was for an institution that was designed in a circular manner with inmates housed around an inspector housed in the middle. The inspector would watch over the inmates without them knowing when they were being watched. Bentham suggested those watching the inmates should be watched as well in the same manner. I would ask the question

on who is than watching those watching the inspectors. It seems like this would be a never-ending circle of overwatch. I do agree that the lower rung of the circle needs to be watched, the ones dealing with the inmates the closest and have the most opportunity for corruption. Luka Muntingh writes that fighting corruption is prisons should not be, "aimed at removing the proverbial rotten apple from the barrel but at tackling the barrel itself." (Muntingh 2008) He makes a great point that the goal should be to fix the system that gave an opportunity for corruption to prevent further abuses of power. Jeffreys writes about employing monitoring organizations that would act independently from the department of corrections. They need to be able to speak freely with inmates. Monitoring organizations can report abuse, assist inmates with contacting their families, and help with transparency. The need to help those struggling with mental illness is of most importance when providing dignity to those struggling. The creation of Crisis Intervention Teams and training of all staff in this area would be a start. Training should not be an excuse on why there is a failure to care for someone that has been arrested and in crisis.

America's Jail the Search for Human Dignity in an Age of Mass Incarceration was an insightful book on the struggle of those entering the criminal justice system have to deal with. Derek Jeffreys takes note that those that cannot afford representation or bail struggle with the procedure. He discusses the poor conditions from the start. Those include poor treatment from those in power and their potential feelings of disgust and not caring for those going through the system. The inhumane housing conditions that the inmates must live in and with overcrowding making it unbearable. Jeffreys does make it a point to write that not all those working in jails or all jails in general are unjust. He states that most confront similar problems and questions the moral legitimacy of the jails based on the ones he has knowledge of. He concludes his book writing that he has met several in the field that are cynical about their work. They view inmates with contempt and have lost an idealism they once had. They believe the worst in humans. Jeffreys does write that there are a few he has met that are still committed to human dignity in the system. He says that "even among those most damaged by violence or mental illness, the beauty of the human person exists." We must protect those that still feel this way and assist those that have lost their belief in the good in humans to find their way back.

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