

Name: _____ Class: _____

'I Am Not An Inmate ... I Am A Man. And I Have Potential'

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2014

Incarceration in the United States is one of the main forms of punishment for felonies and other offenses. The United States has the largest prison population in the world, and the second-highest number of prisoners when compared to its national population. Men account for 93% of all prisoners within the United States and many of them study, experience growth, and learn valuable lessons while in prison. As you read, take notes on the way the men who were interviewed describe the effect incarceration had on them and the efforts they made to reclaim their lives.

- [1] If you want to know how prison can shape a man, talk to Dan Huff. He's spent more than half of his 59 years locked up. He says he was "raised by the state of California."

"Even judges, when they would send me away — looking back at it now — they [were] kind of more like a father figure sitting up there," he says. "Closer to fatherly than any father that I ever had."

Those judges had plenty of reason to be concerned about him: Huff used heroin. He committed robberies.

"I'd go to the spoon,¹ and I'd get a pistol. Or I'd go to the hardware store and get a shotgun and a hacksaw, and leave a piece of that barrel in the parking lot," Huff says.



"Prisoner of the Heart" by qthomasbower is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

- [5] Huff has served time for robbery, prison escape and manslaughter.² He felt comfortable behind bars.

"I surrounded myself with other people, and we patted each other on the back and told each other how swell we was," he says. "We was the real men — and everybody else is a slug³ or worthless or a mark."⁴

1. Drug abusers use a spoon to prepare heroin for injection.
2. Manslaughter is the legal definition of the crime of killing a human being without intending to murder them.
3. A "slug" is a lazy person.
4. A "mark" is a target: someone who is easily deceived or taken advantage of.

About 2 million men are currently serving time in prison or jail in America. For many of them, incarceration has played a big role in shaping their sense of what it means to be a man. And for several former inmates now living in Portland, Ore., like Huff, being on the outside has meant forming a whole new definition of manhood.

'Prison Told Me To Be Hard'

Keith Moody served a few short sentences in his youth. But when he was 30, a drug trafficking charge put him away for a decade.

"It definitely ... gave me a lot of time to think," he says. "And I started saying, 'OK, I've been proclaiming to be a father, proclaiming to be a man. But the whole time, everything I ever done was for myself.'"

[10] Behind bars, Moody enrolled in college classes, including sociology.⁵

"It really just started opening me up, because it let me know, that's not me," he says. "I'm not a convict. I'm not an inmate. ... I am a man. And I have the potential to be much more."

The classes and the time definitely helped. But Moody says he didn't become the man he is because of prison. Nobody does.

"Those bars can't change you. Those guards can't change you. There has to be something in you that recognizes that change is necessary," he says.

Felton Howard spent a year in prison along with Moody. Prison is "not a rehabilitation center," Howard says. "It's a warehouse. That's what prison is; it's a warehouse."

[15] For the past five years, he's worked at Portland's Reentry Transition Center, where he's helped thousands of former inmates. There's a lot of growing that these men have missed, he says.

"They find a way to fit in prison, but that doesn't mean that they've grown as a man — they're just growing older," Howard says. "My formula is, if you go into prison and you're 26, and you're there for five years, you might be 27 when you get out."

Prison doesn't just slow down your path forward. It can also set you back, says Emanuel Price. He was a college junior when he fell in with some old high school friends and got picked up for robbery.

Going to prison "was like throwing me into a lion's den," he says. "I'm not a lion; I'm not an animal. But here I am, surrounded by lions."

"Prison told me to be hard, not show your emotions, walk around with a frown on your face," he adds.

5. **Sociology** (*noun*): the study of the development, structure, and different functions of human society

'It's Tough Being A Square'

[20] That five-year sentence convinced Price to never make those mistakes again. Like Felton, he also works helping former inmates. But having to bottle up his feelings for so long, he says, made him a different man.

"And when I got out, I was just like, 'Everybody out here is soft. Why is everybody smiling? Why is everybody so happy?' And then I began to unpack those things, like, 'Wait a minute — I can smile!'"

For Price, that transition — redefining what it means to be soft, and what it means to be strong — happened because of friends and family. But it can also happen in prison. And slowly, it even happened to Dan Huff.

"There was just times, when, reading books and stuff, there would be things in there that would bring it to my attention that I was a fraud," he says. Huff started valuing people who were compassionate and honest, and trying to be that same sort of man himself.

It's hard work. Since getting out a couple of years ago, Huff has basically been figuring it all out from scratch.

[25] "There ain't nothing I've done that I had any experience of doing. It's traumatized⁶ me a time or two," he says. "Just little stuff, like being laid off from work, and bills come up. I had it all mixed up. And now I see that it's tough being a square."⁷

But while dealing with hardships of daily life has been difficult — especially with a criminal record — it's that shift in thinking that's been the biggest change.

"It's devastating. On the one hand, you've been thinking all this time that you're Superman, or God, or something. And now you find out you're not even a man."

And whether it's because of prison, or in spite of it, Huff and others like him are figuring out what kind of men they want to be.

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6. **Traumatize (verb):** to experience lasting shock as a result of an emotionally disturbing experience

7. A "square" is a dull or boring person who leads a conventional, law-abiding, mainstream life.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best identifies the article's central idea? [RI.2]
 - A. Many prison inmates' views on what it means to be a man are changed by their experiences during and after their time spent in prison.
 - B. Inmates see prison as the best way to learn how to be tough. It is a view that helps shape their attitudes towards the general public.
 - C. Spending time in prison prevents men from maturing and developing in a way they normally would if they were never incarcerated.
 - D. It's difficult for men trying to adjust to general society after prison because they don't know how to express their emotions.

2. PART B: Which phrase from the text best support the answers to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "For many of them, incarceration has played a big role in shaping their sense of what it means to be a man." (Paragraph 7)
 - B. "Those bars can't change you. Those guards can't change you. There has to be something in you that recognizes that change is necessary..." (Paragraph 13)
 - C. "And when I got out, I was just like, 'Everybody out here is soft. Why is everybody smiling? Why is everybody so happy?'" (Paragraph 21)
 - D. "On the one hand, you've been thinking all this time that you're Superman, or God, or something. And now you find out you're not even a man." (Paragraph 27)

3. How does paragraph 15 contribute to the development of the ideas presented in the article? [RI.5]
 - A. It is evidence that that the only people who can help troubled inmates are those people who have had similar experiences.
 - B. It confirms that former inmates are often required to perform community service as a condition of their release.
 - C. It demonstrates that former inmates can change and can have a positive influence on other inmates.
 - D. It proves that people who are released from prison are able to mature and easily adjust to life in the general society.

4. PART A: Which of the following most closely matches the meaning of the word "warehouse" as it is used in paragraph 14? [RI.4]
 - A. A large wholesale or retail store
 - B. A facility for preparing inmates for release
 - C. A rehabilitation center
 - D. A stowing space that provides no assistance

5. PART B: Which phrase from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "guards can't change you" (Paragraph 13)
 - B. "not a rehabilitation center" (Paragraph 14)
 - C. "That's what prison is" (Paragraph 14)
 - D. "Portland's Reentry Transition Center" (Paragraph 15)

6. How do inmates' opinions of themselves when in prison contrast to the ways in which [RI.3] they view themselves once they are released? Cite evidence from the text in your response.

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. What do you make of Huff's admissions in paragraphs 25-27? Do you appreciate his honesty? Do you feel that his musings gave you valuable insight into his life and his internal struggle?
2. Moody discusses the positive impact that education had on him. Horace Mann, an American political and educational reformer, once called education "the great equalizer." Do you agree? How can education improve a person's situation?
3. Why do you think Howard emphasizes that prison is "not a rehabilitation center" but a "warehouse" (Paragraph 14)? Based on what you know about the American prisons in the United States, do you agree?
4. Huff summarizes his experiences with the world outside of prison by drolly suggesting that "it's tough being a square" (Paragraph 25). Do you think it's more difficult to get ahead the lawful, moral way than to simply break laws and commit crimes for personal gain?
5. Price notes that "having to bottle up his feelings for so long [while in prison]...made him a different man" (Paragraph 20). In the context of this article, can you change your identity? How can rehabilitative efforts help? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.