



**Remarks of  
Jeremy Travis  
President, John Jay College of Criminal Justice**

**On Receipt of  
The Maud Booth Correctional Services Award**

**From the  
Volunteers Of America**

July 23, 2012  
Denver, Colorado

I am deeply honored to receive this year's Maud Booth Correctional Services Award. Over the years, the Volunteers of America has presented this prestigious award to some of the truly outstanding thinkers and practitioners doing critically important work on sentencing, corrections and reentry – people such as Joan Petersilia, now at Stanford Law School, Marc Mauer, Director of the Sentencing Project, and three individuals here today, Reggie Wilkinson, former Director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, Gary Hill, one of the foremost voices for international corrections reform, and Helen Corrothers, a former Visiting Fellow at the National Institute of Justice. I consider your former honorees to be my heroes, people who have devoted their entire lives to raising critical questions about our country's policies and practices in this area. I am truly humbled to be considered in their company.

I am the first to acknowledge that, when I learned of this award, I had no idea who Maud Booth was. I received a generous briefing on her history from Dan Lombardo, President of the VOA of Delaware Valley, and became quite fascinated by this remarkable woman. I learned some things that most of you already know. Of course I was told she was the co-founder of the Volunteers of America, but I became intrigued by her involvement in corrections and, in particular, in promoting what we would today call prisoner reentry.

I love the story of how Maud Booth became interested in prison issues. The year was 1896. The Volunteers of America had just been founded by Maud and her husband Ballington Booth on March 8. Maud was looking for a personal mission that would speak to her soul, while taking her in a different direction from the work of the Salvation Army. True to her faith, she sought God's guidance. Her prayer was answered in May when she received a letter from a prisoner at Sing Sing, which arrived with a letter of transmittal from Sing Sing's warden, Omar V. Sage. The prisoner had met Maud during her work in the slums of New York City. He was concerned about his family on the outside and was asking for her assistance. Warden Sage had heard about a speech Maud had given at San Quentin. The San Quentin warden had written to Warden Sage telling him that Mrs. Booth's lecture – a sermon, really – had been inspirational. Warden Sage invited

Maud Booth to give a similar lecture at Sing Sing. She did, on May 24, 1896 when 800 men crowded into the chapel at Sing Sing, to hear her, and the rest is history.

After her speech, she received dozens of letters from the men at Sing Sing. On her second visit, she decided to capitalize on this interest and organized the Volunteer Prison League. Sixty prisoners joined the League, committing to support each other and recruit others. They took as their motto, "Look up and Hope." Consistent with this theme, they committed to support the creation of residences on the outside to help them transition back to society. Hope Hall, the first halfway house in America, was opened in September that year, on 189th Street in the Bronx. Soon, Hope Halls were established in San Francisco, Chicago, followed by Hope Halls in Waco, Texas, Hampton Florida, Columbus Ohio and Walla Walla Washington.

The success of her efforts was remarkable. Within a year of her visit to Sing Sing, she had launched Volunteer Prison Leagues in seven state prisons. In the first seven years, 14,000 men joined the League. By 1912, the Volunteer Prison League had spread to twenty-eight states, and more than 60,000 men were League members, and 7,500 men had graduated from four Hope Halls. This is a truly remarkable story. I would be hard-pressed to find another example of prison-based reform that has expanded so quickly, and touched so many lives. The Volunteers of America should be proud to be associated with this legacy.

Of course we should recall that this was happening at the same time that the Volunteers of America was founded and launched. In the first six months after its founding, 140 posts had been established with 450 employees and volunteers. And the Volunteers of America was not focusing solely, or even primarily, on prisoners – it was extending its reach to offer support for people with disabilities, the homeless, and the mentally ill. What an amazing history. So Maud's work with prisoners was embedded in an organizational culture that attended to the needs of a broad spectrum of the population. There's an important lesson here for organizations that

work on prisoner reentry issues – the people coming home from prison are not all that different from others in need.

There is another aspect of the Maud Booth story that appeals to me. She was also a writer. The title of one of her books caught my eye – she wrote a book called, “After Prison – What?” This title is strikingly similar to my book, “But They All Come Back: Facing the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry.” So I learned that Maud Booth was working on issues of prisoner reentry long before we rediscovered the topic in the later 1990s! This is certainly a reminder that the phenomenon of prisoner reentry has existed as long as we have had prisons, but our attention to it has waxed and waned.

My curiosity was peaked, and I asked our Chief Librarian, Dr. Larry Sullivan, whether we had a copy. Turns out we did not, but he called his network of antique book dealers, and found a copy in Kennebunkport Maine. And now it is in our library .... But in fact I have it here with me now – a copy of “After Prison – What?” personally inscribed by Maud Booth.

I would like to share with you a short passage to give you a sense of Maud Booth, as a woman with a vision that resonates today. This is from the Preface:

This message from my pen is not a work on criminology or penology. No gathering of statistics, nor comparative study of the works or theories of learned authorities on these subjects will be found within its pages. It is a just a plea from the heart of one who knows them, for those who cannot voice to the world their own thoughts and feelings. We ask no sentimental sympathy or pity, no patronage or charity, but only understanding, justice and fair play.<sup>1</sup>

Maud Booth wrote these words at a time of great intellectual and political ferment in our country on the issue of justice for people convicted of violating our laws. In 1870, a group of prison reformers and academics met in Cincinnati and adopted a revolutionary document, the “Declaration of

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<sup>1</sup> Maud B. Booth, *After Prison – What?* (New York: F.H. Revell, 1903) 7.

Principles” which declared, among other points, that the object of imprisonment should be their “moral regeneration ... [and] the reformation of criminals, not the infliction of vindictive suffering.”<sup>2</sup> The Declaration also proposed the abandonment of the existing system of determinate sentences to be replaced with a system of indeterminate sentences. To promote successful reintegration after prison, the Declaration also called for a system of early release, later called parole.

The impact of the Declaration was swift and far-reaching. By 1877 New York State had passed the first indeterminate sentencing statute. In 1885, Ohio enacted the first parole system. By 1900, a few years after Maud visited Sing Sing, five states had adopted indeterminate sentencing systems. By 1920, fifty years after the conference in Cincinnati, every state but three had indeterminate sentencing provisions, nearly half of the inmates in those states had been received indeterminate sentences, and about half of the releases were to parole supervision.<sup>3</sup>

As the historian David Rothman pointed out:

The rapidity with which these transformations occurred, the fact that criminal justice assumed a new character within twenty years, reflected the broad nature of the supporting coalition. State after state passed probation and parole legislation with little debate and no controversy. Concerned citizens, settlement house workers, criminologists, social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists stood together with directors of charitable societies, judges, district attorneys, wardens and superintendents.<sup>4</sup>

So Maud Booth was doing her prison reform work at a time when – in Rothman’s phrase -- a “supporting coalition” was pushing broad and deep criminal justice reforms. The new model of sentencing that emerged from that era – the indeterminate sentencing model – reigned supreme in our

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<sup>2</sup> Enoch C. Wines, ed., *Declaration of Principles Adopted and Promulgated by the Congress*, in *Transactions of the National Congress on Penitentiary and Reformatory Discipline*. (Albany, NY: Weed Parsons & Company, 1871) 11.

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Travis, *But They All Come Back: Facing the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> David Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and Its Alternatives in Progressive America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980) 12.

country for nearly fifty years, until the early 1970s, when states began to abolish parole, switch to determinate sentencing, enact sentencing guidelines, and ultimately adopt mandatory minimums, three-strikes and truth-in-sentencing laws. Today's patchwork quilt of sentencing laws is a far cry from the indeterminate sentencing model uniformly adopted by every state in the US, the District of Columbia, and the federal system at the turn of the last century.

I dwell on this story because I think it resonates with our current situation. Over the past forty years, our country has embarked on a social experiment of unprecedented proportions. We have quadrupled the rate of incarceration in America. For fifty years, from the 1920s to the 1970s, our rate of incarceration was remarkably stable – at about 110 per 100,000. Now it is nearly five times that level. What is the result? We now live in a land where, according to the Pew Center on the States, one in 104 American adults is behind bars, where one in 33 American adults is under correctional control (including prison, parole and probation), where one in 8 state employees works for state corrections, where we spend \$52 billion on state corrections, up from \$12 billion in 1987<sup>5</sup>. The consequences of this high rate of incarceration are far-reaching, and threaten our pursuit of racial justice. We now live in a country where an African American man faces a thirty percent lifetime probability that he will spend at least a year in prison,<sup>6</sup> where in the year 2007, 6.7% percent – 1 in 15 – of all African American minor children had a parent in prison,<sup>7</sup> where in some states nearly a quarter of all African-American men cannot vote for the rest of their lives because of life-time felon disenfranchisement laws.<sup>8</sup>

I count myself among those who believe that this state of affairs is untenable for our democracy. No other western democracy punishes its

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<sup>5</sup> The Pew Center on the States Public Safety Performance Project, *Time Served: The High Cost, Low Return of Longer Prison Terms* (Washington D.C.: The Pew Charitable Trust, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas P. Bonczar, Allen J. Beck, *Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S. Population, 1974-2001*. (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice; Office of Justice Programs; Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Laura E. Glaze, Laura M. Maruschak, *Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children* (Washington DC: US Department of Justice; Office of Justice Programs; Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Uggen, Sarah Shannon, Jeff Manza, *State-Level Estimates of Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States, 2010* (Washington D.C.: The Sentencing Project, 2012). Those states are: Florida, Kentucky, and Virginia.

citizens so severely. Indeed, no other country in the world has such a high rate of incarceration – we long ago surpassed Russia and South Africa for this distinction and now house a quarter of the world’s prisoners, with 5 percent of the world’s population. The story of Maud Booth -- and the story of the criminal justice reformers who came together in common purpose at the turn of the century -- reminds us that we can choose a different path, that we can mobilize what Rothman called a broad “supporting coalition.” But this effort will succeed, in my judgment, only if we can keep a focus on the people in prison, and our common humanity. We need to say, in the words of Maud Booth, that “we ask no sentimental sympathy or pity, no patronage or charity, but only understanding, justice and fair play.” This is the legacy of Maud Booth, carried out in communities across the country by today’s Volunteers of America, who are making a difference in the lives of millions of people. She took as her challenge the goal of shaking the country from its lethargy, its prejudice, its willingness to simply forget those we have chosen to put behind prison bars. We should embrace that goal as well.

As I accept this honor, and as we reflect on the lessons of an earlier era and the inspiration of Maud Booth, let me express the hope that today’s Volunteers of America, and today’s corrections professionals, will find the courage, and the means, to support a change in direction in our country’s response to crime from one that is overly punitive to one that is humane and promotes reconciliation and reintegration, one that reaffirms human potential and seeks “understanding, justice and fair play.” This vision speaks to the American character. This vision finds resonance in our country’s history. Because of the people in this room – and a broad “supporting coalition” –this vision is once again within our grasp.

I thank you again for this honor.