

Book Review

Epperson, M. W., & Pettus-Davis, C. (Eds). (2017). *Smart decarceration: Achieving criminal justice transformation in the 21st century*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

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Drs. Epperson and Pettus-Davis are the network co-leads for the American Academy of Social Work & Social Welfare Social Work Grand Challenge Promote Smart Decarceration. They lead this grand challenge as faculty directors of the Smart Decarceration Initiative (SDI), a partnership between George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, and the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration in Chicago, Illinois. The Smart Decarceration Initiative was launched in 2015 with the first national conference, but the criminal justice transformation work of Drs. Epperson and Pettus-Davis has continued for nearly two decades and includes multiple published articles and collaborations.

The contributors to this book review long-held systems and policies within the criminal justice system that are upholding social inequality and contributing to social injustice while challenging the criminal justice system's conflict with social work values and ethics. They showcase innovative reform strategies featuring perspectives from all sides of the issue and address research, policy, and practice through the voices of formerly incarcerated leaders, advocates and practitioners.

The editors' note that the book's division into four parts is intended to relate back to the conference structure. While this may not hold significant meaning for someone who did not attend the conference, its natural progression from background to possible strategies and recommendations for

implementation has a logical flow. Additionally, while each part builds on the previous part, each part has a stand-alone quality that might be useful for research or discussion.

Part I: Setting the Context for Decarceration. This section of note includes co-leads and co-editors Drs. Epperson and Pettus-Davis outlining the problem, cause and resultant need for the grand challenge of smart decarceration. They also address the policy action statement and guiding concepts of the initiative. Although this section may be regarded as a review by those familiar with smart decarceration, this section is especially important for those readers who are not acquainted with the initiative or grand challenge.

Part II: Advancing Justice and Community Reforms. This section discusses the need for prosecutorial reform including its contribution to racial disparities and overcriminalization and is balanced by the stories of a victim of prosecutorial misconduct and a prosecutor who saw the need for reform. Individualized interventions, reentry preparation and education, and parole are discussed in detail to include diverse perspectives. A discussion of the importance of human capital and social capital in reentry demonstrates a strengths-based perspective approach to reentry and is discussed further in Parts III and IV with an emphasis on the social impact for both the individual and community.

Part III: Rethinking Policy and Practice. This section reviews the policies of Nazgol Ghandnoosh and

Ernest Drucker through the lens of effectiveness and sustainability. It discusses the move from punitive, “tough-on-crime” thinking to more approaches and interventions that are intended to be “smart-on-crime,” such as shortened prison sentences and community-based interventions. It includes discussion on recidivism, civil disability policy and a public health approach to decarceration.

Part IV: Moving from Concepts to Strategies. This last section focuses on actualizing the forward-thinking concepts reviewed in the book as compared to the initiative guideposts and challenging the reader to add to the efforts.

Key questions from Drs. Epperson and Pettus-Davis found in Part I can be utilized for critical thinking purposes for an individual, group or classroom setting to provoke thought or for discussion purposes. In addition, there are numerous opportunities in each section for additional discussion including case studies and analyses.

Despite its social work origin and value for helping professions, its structure and style extend its value to the lay reader interested in social issues. While the statistical data and charts may be cumbersome for some readers, they contain useful information to understand the complexities of decarceration.