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Eastern Kentucky University

The Effects of Culture and Punishment Philosophies on Recidivism: Comparing Prison Systems  
in the United States and Scandinavia

Honors Thesis  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the  
Requirements of HON 420  
Spring 2019

By  
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The Effects of Culture and Punishment Philosophies on Recidivism: Comparing Prison Systems  
in the United States and Scandinavia

Alexis Riep

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Abstract

Overcrowding in prisons is a huge problem in the United States and one that we have yet to deal with successfully. A key factor is recidivism, which is defined as offenders returning to prison or jail post-release. The United States has one of the highest recidivism rates in the world, especially when compared to Scandinavian countries which have the lowest. The socioeconomic historical development and cultural characteristics of both the United States and Scandinavian countries affect the culture of their prison systems and in turn, affects the prison populations and recidivism rates. Comparing the history, cultural attitudes, and prisons of the United States to Scandinavia shows a gap in the literature of not connecting what really affects the prison systems and the recidivism rates. Is it the history, the culture, the prisons themselves, or a combination?

*Keywords:* recidivism, Scandinavia, prisons, thesis, honors program

The Effects of Culture and Punishment Philosophies on Recidivism:  
Comparing Prison Systems in the United States and Scandinavia

Despite having less than 5% of the world's population, the United States houses over 20% of the world's prisoners (Campbell & Schoenfeld, 2013). While countries in Scandinavia have an incarceration rate averaging only 75/100,000 people, the rate in the U.S. is more than 700/100,000. Scandinavian countries have the lowest recidivism rate in the world: less than 20%, and the United States has a recidivism rate of 70% (Deady, 2014). So why are there so many people in prison in the United States, and what are countries in Scandinavia doing that the United States is not? The socioeconomic historical development and cultural characteristics of both the United States and Scandinavian countries affect the culture of their prison systems and in turn, this affects prison population numbers and recidivism rates. I hypothesize that the history, culture, and prison systems of the United States negatively affect recidivism rates, while the history, culture, and prison systems in Scandinavia positively affect recidivism rates.

Recidivism, as noted earlier, greatly affects the number of prisoners in our prison systems. According to the National Institute of Justice, recidivism is defined as a person's relapse into criminal behavior after previous convictions and jail/prison time has occurred, resulting in re-arrest or returning to prison during a three-year period after the prisoner's initial release (Durose, Cooper, & Snyder, 2014). However, comparing recidivism rates internationally can be difficult because countries may track offenders differently, use varying definitions for recidivism, and may even use different terminologies. Notwithstanding, recidivism rates have a significant impact on the number of people in prison. A large number of prisoners in the United States will be back in jail or prison within three years of their release (Deady, 2014). Unlike in



Scandinavian countries, as noted earlier, prisoners return to prison less than 20% of the time. Historically in the U.S., punishment has always been the focus in and out of the prison itself, while history and prisons in Scandinavia paint a much different picture. Whereas in the U.S., prisoners are released with no better skills, tools, or knowledge to return to society and live normally, and there is little to no support after being released, increasing the likelihood that they will end right back up in prison (Deady, 2014).

Scandinavian countries can be seen as models for their incarceration practices, as numbers show their way of doing things is very effective. In Scandinavia, the focus is on rehabilitation, releasing the prisoners, and giving them the skills and tools they need to succeed. The philosophy is thinking of justice for the society as a whole, which is done best by releasing a prisoner who is less likely to harm society again and return to prison (Deady, 2014). To them, oppressive traditional ways that prisons operate in the United States do not work, and instead, prisoners need to be treated humanely. Prisoners keep all their rights, and life is like it is on the outside, with certain restrictions and lack of freedom of course. Cells have televisions, refrigerators, large windows, a comfortable bed, and sometimes even kitchen facilities. A knife to a prisoner in the U.S. may be a weapon, but in Scandinavia a knife is simply a knife. After being released from prison, reintegration programs do not stop there, with programs in place by the government to make sure prisoners have a place to live, a job, education, and even health care and addiction treatment if needed (Deady, 2014).

Some people in the United States may see that the treatment of prisoners in the countries of Scandinavia as unfair and even a joke, but the incarceration rates and recidivism rates show Scandinavia's way is working. (Deady, 2014). Rehabilitation in the U.S. has been examined with more forethought, but there is a long way to go, especially financially. It may be financially

difficult in the beginning, but in the long run, it will help save money and help the society in the United States as a whole.

Incarceration in the United States is a growing problem and it will continue to be until our prison systems, along with politicians and lawmakers, understand the internal and external problems and how to solve them. Scandinavian countries having the lowest incarceration rates and lowest recidivism rates in the world, show their way of doing things is very effective. However, no one has examined the differences between prison systems in these countries and cultural characteristics or argued what truly affects the recidivism rates, if is it the prison systems or the culture within the country. Many factors go into this, not just the prison itself. The history, the culture of the people in the specific countries, the government, etc., all have significant impacts on how the prison is effectively run and the numbers that we see.

### **Review of the Literature**

*Law and Order*, *Criminal Minds*, and *NCIS*, all fictional shows about criminals, victims, police, and prosecutors, paint a false picture of the United States' criminal justice system. The functionality and overcrowding of the American prisons are due to the surrounding culture and ideals of punishment in the U.S. Rare instances of trials deciding guilt or innocence, people never meeting their attorney, witnesses and victims being coerced, unreasonable searches and seizures by the police, and harsh penalties/sentences, along with many other factors show what the system in the U.S. is really about (Alexander, 2012). The philosophies on punishment is nothing new, it is embedded in our history.

### **The History of the United States**

According to Campbell & Schoenfeld (2013), the incarceration rate has increased by over 285%, doubling every year between 1997 and 2000. While one of every hundred people in the United States are in jail, one out of fifteen is an African-American male. However, to understand prisons in the U.S. today, we must start at the beginning. Although incarceration rates did not start to see exponential growth until the Civil Rights Era, the growth of our prison can be argued that it started at the beginning when our country was just starting to grow, a country that had millions and millions of slaves.

The racial history in the U.S. has adapted throughout the years. Although slaves were “free” in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, new ways of controlling blacks arose: Jim Crow, mass incarceration, and especially the war on drugs. According to Alexander (2012):

Drug offenses alone account for two-thirds of the rise in the federal inmate population and more than half of the rise in state prisoners between 1985 and 2000. Approximately a half million people are in prison or jail for a drug offense today, compared to an estimated 41,100 in 1980— an increase of 1,100 percent. Drug arrests have tripled since 1980. As a result, more than 31 million people have been arrested for drug offenses since the drug war began (p. 60).

The number of people that are in jail and prison today only for drug offenses is more than the number of people incarcerated for all criminal charges combined in 1980. Alexander (2012) states, “Nothing has contributed more to the systematic mass incarceration of people of color in the United States than the War on Drugs” (p. 60). Reagan used the War on Drugs to advance his political career, along with other politicians who made crime and drugs seem more dangerous and more of a problem than they were. Campaigns were used to scare the people in the U.S., saying things like there was a “crack epidemic,” and it was a threat to the white community

(Campbell & Schoenfeld, 2013). In reality, 80% of all drug arrests were for marijuana possession only during this time (Alexander, 2012). Even though most drug arrests were for nonviolent minor offenses, this paved the way for harsher punishments and a tough on crime philosophy in the United States.

The United States' penal system began to see major changes that many have labeled as: "the new penology," "mass imprisonment," a "culture of control," "governing through crime," "hyperincarnation," and even the "New Jim Crow." The idea behind the "new penal system" is incapacitation and retribution, to be labeled soft on crime is bad and to be tough on crime is a necessity (Campbell & Schoenfeld, 2013). Where the penal system pre-1970 was shaped by judges, social workers, criminologists, and community organizations, it is now shaped by politicians, law enforcement and victim's organizations with one goal in mind: to incarcerate. "As a result, the new penal order is distinguished by uniquely high and racially disproportionate incarceration rates" (Campbell & Schoenfeld, 2013, p. 1376). Politicians have been a major driver of mass incarceration especially in the 1980s and early 1990s:

Beckett 1997, for example, argues that conservative politicians' framing of "street crime" as a problem of "lack of control" was an effective vehicle for reconstructing popular conceptions of the poor and therefore creating support for conservatives' larger agenda to replace social welfare with social control as a governing theme. Hagan's 2010 research supports a variation on this claim, finding that while the Reagan administration increased social control of poor and vulnerable populations, it simultaneously reduced control over corporations, industry, and financial markets (Campbell & Schoenfeld, 2013, p. 1381).

There is a link between public support for more social control and the politicians' ideals of racial resentment: The United States' history of "categorization, political subjugation, and

empowerment along lines of race, and cultural beliefs about racial categories structures political competition, political institutions, and policy choices and implementation” (Campbell & Schoenfeld, 2013, p. 1381). This comes to be particularly true of policies of crime influenced by racial stereotypes of African Americans. Research suggests that because of the declining social and economic positions of the white working class, conservatives tried to explain it away with “welfare cheats” and “drug pushers” that tapped into racial resentment (Campbell & Schoenfeld, 2013).

From the early 1990s to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, crime rates began to drop and stabilize, but the “tough on crime” campaigns were still supported by politicians. Crime was seen as “too big of a problem” and harsh laws were increasingly being passed, putting more officers on the streets, and provisions like “three strikes and you’re out,” and “truth-in-sentencing” were implemented. September 11, 2001, made the philosophy of “all criminals should be incapacitated or supervised for as long as possible, regardless of cost,” even clearer in the eyes of politicians and many people in the U.S. (Campbell & Schoenfeld, 2013).

Although we have seen things like Jim Crow laws in our past become “illegal”, they have adapted into a new form, the “New Jim Crow”. This New Jim Crow, along with other institutions in the history of the U.S., has affected our incarceration rates dramatically. Alexander (2012) states that: “More black men are imprisoned today than at any other moment in our nation’s history” (p. 180). A lesser percentage have the right to vote today than in 1870, the same year that the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed. “Young black men today may be just as likely to suffer discrimination in employment, housing, public benefits, and jury service as a black man in the Jim Crow era— discrimination that is perfectly legal, because it is based on one’s criminal record” (Alexander, 2012, p. 181).

The reality is that mass incarceration is due to the injustices of slavery and Jim Crow (Alexander, 2012). Many people deny or do not know about the mass incarceration cycle.

Most Americans only come to “know” about the people cycling in and out of prisons through fictional police dramas, music videos, gangsta rap, and “true” accounts of ghetto experience on the evening news. These racialized narratives tend to confirm and reinforce the prevailing public consensus that we need not care about “those people”; they deserve what they get (pp. 182-183).

Some people may blame African American men for choosing their life of crime, and in some cases, this may be true, but not all. However, there is a possibility that their lives were “structured in a way that virtually guaranteed their early admission into a system from which they can never escape” (Alexander, 2012, p. 184). It all starts when they are put into the system, some stopped and frisked for no reason, coercion takes place, most of them forced to take plea bargains whether guilty or innocent, and life after being behind bars does not make life any easier. Post-prison, black or white, people are discriminated against, denied essential needs, i.e., employment, education, housing, and benefits. The American system fails these people, no matter the color, nor gender, nor any other circumstances, and unfortunately because of our system, these men and women will eventually return to prison (Alexander, 2012).

### **Prisons in the United States**

When looking at specific prisons, it will be easier to understand just how much the history and culture of the United States has affected them. To understand the prison life in the U.S., three different prisons will be discussed through the eyes of Lucian (2011). A state prison and a federal prison that he visited in 2010, and then a supermax prison will be discussed from sources including Kurki and Morris (2001), Lippke (2004), and Rhodes (2010). Before discussing these

prisons, one must understand that not every single prison nor jail in the U.S. are exactly alike. There are similar philosophies and features in the way prisons in the U.S. are to function, however, depending on various factors, such as the level of security in the prison will differ on how the prisons operate and how the day in the life of a prisoner exists.

This specific state prison discussed is a maximum-security prison, which was built in the 1800s, surrounded by a colossal brick wall, razor-wire fencing, and numerous guard towers with snipers ready at moment's notice. This prison, like the majority of prisons in the United States, is very overcrowded: currently holding 3,500 prisoners, even though the full capacity is 2,000 (Lucian, 2011). Lucian (2011) describes how just entering the facility feels "foreboding," the prisoners were only living in the central wings, the others being condemned, and the cells reminded him of the movie *The Shawshank Redemption* (p. 219). Every door, including cell doors, had to be manually opened by the guards. It was dark, damp, and the mortar was crumbling. Inside the cells were metal beds with thin mattresses, a small exposed lightbulb, a small television, and it was so narrow that there is little room to even get around easily. He goes on to describe the days of the prisoners. Most of the time the inmates are lying in their beds, with little choice to do otherwise, and are allowed out for short periods for various activities, but there is little to do but lie in their cell for the majority of the day. Some inmates do get to work simplistic machines and the prison offers a GED program, but Lucian (2011) states, "there appears to be little commitment to making it an effective and widespread undertaking" (p. 420-421). According to Lucian (2011), there are negative implications that result from this,

First, the prison loses a significant source of much needed revenue as a result of the vast majority of its inmates whittling away their time in their cells each day. Second, inmates who have little to occupy their time and no investment in the institution have no incentive

—other than avoiding segregation—to follow institutional regulations and avoid violence. Third, the vast majority of inmates at this institution who are eventually released—and many are eventually released—have acquired no skills or education with which they might compete for jobs as they attempt to reenter society (p. 421).

This demonstrates that the lack of attention and commitment, along with the lack of funding, can have negative consequences to establishing any real sense of humanity and help to the inmates.

Lucian's (2011) description of the recreation areas did not differ significantly. In the cafeteria is a rifle target, used when the inmates become uncontrollable, which happens often at this prison. When the prisoners get violent, an officer who is in a higher bunker fires a warning shot, if this fails to do anything, the officer is ordered to shoot to kill. The athletic facility had some unmaintained basketball courts with a sign next to it that read, "Inmates approaching helicopters will be shot" (p. 421-422).

Various factors may have an impact on the state of this prison, known and unknown, but Lucian (2011) feels that the living conditions and lack of support for work and educational programs have a monumental impact. He states that there is no sense of community and the prisoners have no purpose other than to survive and avoid solitary confinement causing negative results (p. 422-423). The perpetuating cycle of failing to provide a safe environment, which leads to more violence, more guards just to maintain order, resulting in a lack of funding that makes it impossible to help with educational and rehabilitation programs and better living spaces in general (Lucian, 2011).

Next, is the federal prison that Lucian (2011) visited. This prison was built in the 1960s and houses about 1000 inmates, and like the state prison, there are several large guard towers with sharp wire fencing, used to stop and kill prisoners trying to escape, if necessary. Walking



down the long hallway, Lucian (2011) saw bullet holes, evidence of a sniper rifle firing at an inmate attempting to escape. He was quite surprised that, after getting over the intimidating initial entry, the prison was clean, organized, and quiet. The cells are in large pods designed for three people, and were in reasonable condition: comfortable mattresses, a dresser for their clothes, their own toilet and sink, and even a small window. The pods are controlled by one guard in charge of maintaining order, which is oddly successful. Lucian (2011) observed in the cell block about fifteen inmates socializing at tables and casually watching TV in the recreation area. Everything was controlled and contained (Lucian, 2011).

Lucian (2011) comments that making sure the inmates are invested in their environment is key to the prison's-controlled atmosphere, and states that there are two methods of achieving this sense of investment. First, the inmates are allowed to move freely, and are unaccompanied during their 10-minute break periods each hour. They are allowed to walk unaccompanied to other approved areas, such as the recreation center or their work assignments. Resulting from this is saving money, where in the state prison noted above, the prisoners must be accompanied everywhere they go, resulting in having to pay for more officers to supervise these movements. Knowing that this is a privilege, the inmates are incentivized to do the right things, no violence, disruptions, or violations, so they will not lose this. Unlike the state prison, this federal prison had a well-maintained gym, where he witnessed a group of guys arrive, unescorted, for a basketball game under the supervision of one guard. "This small freedom to move throughout the facility for recreation, study, and work appeared to create a sense of ownership and community that likely contributes to the successful administration of this facility" (p. 416).

The second method is something that the state prison had in place but was not given a chance because of the prison management: education and work. In the federal facility, inmates

are required to be engaged in educational studies or they had to work five days a week (Lucian, 2011). If an inmate arrives without a high school diploma, they are required to take part in the GED program, and if they had a degree, inmates can continue advanced studies at night. Work is not an option. Here inmates participate in programs that are beneficial to them, as they have specialized job training, which is profitable to the prison. Working in engaging trades, such as the creation of advanced electronic cables, these inmates are endowed with skills that make them competitive in that job market, and this will help them greatly after their release (Lucian, 2011).

Lucian (2011) makes a smart point stating that “The creation of a positive prison environment should in itself be a sufficient justification for any penitentiary to adopt the type of strategies that have been successful at this federal prison, as it is a moral responsibility to care adequately for those within the custody of the state” (p. 417). This is just an example of how doing the right things and investing in the prisoners can be beneficial to everyone: the inmates, the prisons, and society in general. Additional benefits include being able to incentivize the prisoners, so they can maintain these privileges and benefits. Lucian (2011) mentions how studies have shown that neighborhoods with a strong sense of community have low crime rates, and prison can be just the same as long as management and guards are invested, making the inmates invested as well. Another benefit is saving money, with more violence, more staff is needed, and less money is spent on programs that help the prisoners. Not only do these prisons with less violence save money on their staff with overtime and sick days, but medical expenditures as well. The perpetual cycle is once brought up again, as a system is lacking money, the prison suffers, and the prisoners do as well.

Finally, the supermax prison discussed is the only one located in Florence, Colorado, a place that houses the most dangerous and violent inmates that most will never see life outside

those walls again. A supermax prison in the U.S. is completely isolated and is full of deprivation of environmental stimuli (Kurki & Morris, 2001). The prison is described as made of concrete and steel, including the cell doors, lacking any windows, as well as the cell itself. The complete design is to isolate the inmates, no views of the outside, and no one can see in. Architecturally, the prison is made to limit the need for interaction between the inmates and the guards, and inmates are alone in their cells for over twenty-three hours a day and are limited to communication with the guards and communication is highly restricted with the outside world, as well. If allowed, phone calls or visits are allowed only once a month, and sometimes the visits are through video screens. Unlike the prisons noted above, no programs are available, working is not allowed, but some educational materials may be delivered to the cells. If treatment is needed, it is usually through television or written materials (Kurki & Morris, 2001).

When inmates are let out of their cells, they are restrained and escorted by two guards who are discouraged from interacting with them (Lippke, 2004). Inmates are permitted three to five showers per week, five to seven hours of exercise per week, and one to four visits per month. The lights are always on, so they can always be monitored by prison personnel. Mental and medical care is required to be available to inmates, however, the quality and quantity are inadequate, and psychiatrists are rarely available. Prisoners are completely controlled in every single aspect of their lives; their movements, their privacy, communication, clothing, food, labor, and even their political participation is controlled. The conditions are terrible and of near impoverishment, and there is little communication with persons of the same sex and even less (or none) with the opposite sex. "They are told what to do, when to do it, how to do it" (Lippke, 2004, p. 115).

Their social interactions are meant to isolate. From constantly being cuffed and shackled to being passed meal trays through metal slots on their cell doors, these things create the very climate they are supposed to be suppressing: desperation and violence (Rhodes, 2010). As inmates crave any type of social interaction, they attack their guards, throw human waste at them and find any way to cause trouble and get attention. This affects them and society too, if they were ever to get out. The isolation and deprivation can lead to antisocial behavior, affecting the inmates' families, neighborhoods, and society overall. Rhodes (2010) notes that this negative treatment can lead to increased anxiety, insomnia, delusions, hallucinations, depression, and violence. Those who exhibit these behaviors are punished, when they may need to be treated, and the punishments may be excessive force, which may do nothing but overwhelm the prisoner. Not all prisoners act out in these ways, but due to the conditions in the prison others may be affected in less obvious ways.

Going through this type of isolation and extreme sensory deprivation, for not just weeks or months but typically years, takes a toll on these prisoners and the prison itself overall. Prisoners are with people like themselves or even worse, and are subject to brutality, ridicule, or humiliation, and although they may adjust to this, the extent of such losses and deficiencies are extreme. Supermax confinement does nothing but intensify the situation. Lippke (2004) describes it as "a kind of living death on inmates" (p. 115). Prisoners in the supermax prison tell Rhodes (2010) about the madness they go through, "There's no way to keep your mind going in here," "Anger just builds up," "It's pretty much like not living." "You're locked in a cell, twenty-three hours a day. ... No outside air . . . you can't see out the windows," "When you are without the elements of life, it'll make you go crazy. You end up talking to yourself" (p. 48). No

perception of time or space can make your social awareness distorted. Rhodes (2010) found that 25% of supermax inmates are mentally ill and it is the social environment that contributes to this.

There is little research on the long-term effects of being incarcerated in a supermax, making it even harder to evaluate the individuals released. Hearing from the prisoners themselves and the staff that works with them, suggests that people held in a United States supermax prison where they are used to strict schedules and someone always telling them when to eat, shower, exercise, etc. will find their lives to be much difficult in a less structured outside world (Rhodes, 2015).

### **The History of Scandinavia**

Scandinavian countries have turned out to be quite the opposite, but like the United States, their penal system is due to long-term socio-political forces and cultural values. Pratt and Eriksson (2011) argue that there were three phases that led to the current prison system: “(1) 1870s–1930s: separate confinement, penance and the influence of Lutheran pastors in prison practice; (2) 1930s–1960s: welfare, medicalization and work; and (3) 1970s–present: a tension between the ‘normalization’ of prison life against recent concerns with security” (p. 7).

It was the Philadelphia system of imprisonment that inspired how prisons were built in the early 1800s. Forty-five prisons of this style were built in Sweden, one in Norway, and four in Finland. Separation used to be thought of as productive and was enforced quite harshly, but this only lasted until 1946 in Sweden, 1950 in Norway, and until 1971 in Finland. Pratt & Eriksson (2011) note that cellular confinement was in existence so long because of the influence of the Lutheran Church, as religious homogeneity existed throughout Scandinavia. In the teachings of Lutheran, crime and punishment were especially important, and it was believed that all are sinners and crime was just one of many earthly sins. Criminals and the rest of the society were

not to be seen as separate, and criminals were not “ipso facto dangerous outsiders” (Pratt & Eriksson, 2011, p. 9).

In the 1930s, the prison was considered a sanctuary from temptation. In the 19th century when the dominance of pastors died out in small communities, and doctors, civil servants, and teachers took over, prisons were the last thing that pastors had an influence over. Cellular confinement was thought to bring about redemption through “self-reflection, repentance and knowledge of God” (Pratt & Eriksson, 2011, p. 9). It was argued that solitary confinement is good, and to work in their cells makes offenders think about their crimes, reflect and change their lives, and stop blaming society. Around 1910, more relaxed prisons systems were being introduced and prison farms and colonies were established, and it was being driven by economic reasons:

In Finland, especially, training in agricultural work was still suited to the characteristics of its economy. Within the cellular prisons, Swedish law changes in 1921 made it possible for adult prisoners to work with others outside their cells after one year’s separation. In 1933 in Norway, the progressive stages were reduced and living conditions improved in the final stages of separation. Inmates were also allowed out of the prison wearing their own clothes. Church attendance was made voluntary in 1939. (Pratt & Eriksson, 2011, p. 10).

It was in the 1930s that Scandinavian authorities turned their focus to the mental health of prisoners, leading to the second phase of Scandinavian prison system development.

Medico-psychological knowledge and the rise of the Scandinavian welfare state were the two influences that brought about this change. Olof Kinberg, a criminologist, was a major influence on criminology in Scandinavia, and he believed “criminal behavior was a symptom of

mental illness unique to each individual which could be altered by a skilled psychiatrist” (Pratt & Eriksson, 2011, p. 11). This way of thinking was influential because of the way the law and its purpose were understood: “bringing about social improvement and social protection” (Pratt & Eriksson, 2011, p. 11). As Scandinavian living conditions improved, prisoners were not forgotten. The welfare model of Scandinavia embodied no outsiders, no one was shut out, and this includes prisoners. Imprisonment was restricted, prisons were planned to be depopulated by implementing day fines, waivers of prosecution, and suspended sentences. Committees argued that treatment, based on medico-psychological knowledge, should be the foundation for punishment (Pratt & Eriksson, 2011).

Finally, the third phase began in the 1970s and remains in Scandinavia to the present day. The collapse of the sanitarium model started with vocal prisoners’ rights groups’ commands.

For the most part, the protests were aimed at the democratization – prisoners’ representatives to be allowed a role in local management policy – and the normalization of prison life: that is, prisoners should be understood as rational rather than deficient citizens and entitled to the same rights of citizenship as those outside the prison (Mathiesen, 1974). If, in reality, little was gained regarding the former, there were tangible successes regarding the latter. These included winning the right to vote, the installation of coin-operated telephones, more frequent home leave and uncensored letter writing (Pratt & Eriksson, 2011, p. 15).

Normalization became the official policy and it was stipulated that “prison conditions in penal institutions have to be arranged as well as possible to resemble the common living conditions in society” (Pratt & Eriksson, 2011, p. 17).

Pratt and Eriksson (2011) conclude that to get where Scandinavia prisons systems are today it is because of the complex history and changing culture mixed with various social forces which include “state formation, religious homogeneity, comparatively egalitarian social relationships, a high value on education and expert knowledge, and the particular model of the welfare state that was developed in this region” (p. 19). However, this was in no way easy or quick, it happened gradually over time and at a cost to many who endured separate confinement, medical and psychological abuse, along with many other social changes. Prisons in Scandinavia are seen as a place of “redemption, learning, training, cure, until ultimately, with the commitment to normalization,” not a place of “suffering, fear and deprivation” (Pratt & Eriksson, 2011, p. 20). They are intended to resemble the outside world, not shut it out.

### **Scandinavian Attitudes Towards Crime**

Understanding the history of Scandinavian prisons gives a pretty good idea of how prisons function and the philosophies behind them. However, to understand them more, the culture of these Scandinavian countries and the public attitude towards crime must be examined. Research has pointed to identical things that stand out for Scandinavian countries that influence their culture and attitudes.

Social spending and services, taxation, governmental legitimacy, and levels of trust are high compared with most other countries; income inequality and fears for personal safety are low. Imprisonment rates are among the lowest in developed countries, punishment policies are moderate, and criminal justice policy debates are not heavily politicized (Lappi-Seppälä & Tonry, 2011, p. 2).

Each country does have some differences regarding their own justice institutions and policies, but their homogenous interrelated history and culture have made them very similar. Their laws,



procedures, and correctional system organization are similar. What seems to be very important is that their justice system careers are based on professionalism, not politics. Scandinavian countries have very homogenous populations with little national differences, and these countries have democratic constitutions but have unitary political systems, and Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are constitutional monarchies, while Iceland and Finland are republics (Lappi-Seppälä & Tonry, 2011).

At the core of these countries is the Scandinavia/Nordic welfare state, where welfare programs and services are provided, investment in human capital, labor markets are coordinated, and unemployment benefits.

Its key feature is recognition of public, that is, state, responsibility for welfare provision based on principles of universal coverage and entitlement. The welfare state encompasses the entire population. Benefits and entitlements are available to every member of the society with no exceptions made on the basis of employment, social status, or family situation (Lappi-Seppälä & Tonry, 2011, p. 3).

The welfare model has five main elements. First, it is comprehensive. The welfare policy encompasses many services including education and training, employment, and social security, with the main idea being that the needs of everyone are met. Next, the government is active in all policy fields, whether it be social policy, market policy, or labor policy, etc. Third, this system is based on a high degree of universalism, meaning everyone is entitled to these programs and services. Fourth, is income protection, which is based on two things: income-independent basic insurance and income-dependent benefits. Finally, Nordic countries are characterized as service states where local democracy plays a noteworthy role (Lappi-Seppälä & Tonry, 2011). As one can see, the underlying philosophy in Scandinavia is equality: “everyone should be treated in the

same manner, as a basic right in these societies” (Ingebritsen, 2002). This transfers to inmates as well, not just everyone outside of prison benefits. Punishment by taking away someone’s freedom is enough in Scandinavia, as there is no need to make someone suffer in prison, the normalization of a person’s life while in prison is encouraged. Lappi-Seppälä & Tonry (2011) explain the achievements of this model has made,

These arrangements are aimed at enhancing individual autonomy, ensuring universal provision of basic human needs, and stabilizing the economy. The Nordic welfare state is distinguished from other welfare states by its emphases on maximizing labor force participation, promoting gender equality, maintaining egalitarian and generous benefit levels, redistributing income on a large scale, and using an expansionary fiscal policy liberally. Nordic political economies run within a controlled capitalist market economy in which inequalities in income and distribution of wealth and power are less tolerated than in many other countries (p. 4).

This has created a high level of trust between the residents of these countries and the government, resulting from the security, flexibility, and fairness of the welfare state (Lappi-Seppälä & Tonry, 2011).

To get a better idea of attitudes towards crime in Scandinavia, we will specifically look at Finland, which is very similar to the other Scandinavian countries. Many countries around the world, one being the United States, feel that crime should be controlled by imprisonment, increased certainty of punishment, and increasing the severity of punishment. In Scandinavia, it is quite the opposite; penal policies are based on “gentle justice” (Ekunwe, Jones, & Mullin, 2010). One indication of this is in a speech delivered by the President of the Republic of Finland,

...We need to ask whether these people are receiving the help and treatment they need or if the problems are being neglected because society cannot agree on who will pay the bill. However, tackling the drug problem would be an effective means of getting young people to abandon a career of crime in its very early stage. It would also often be the fastest way of reducing the number of repeat offenders—not to speak of the other savings that could be achieved through treatment and rehabilitation ... (Ekunwe, Jones, & Mullin, 2010, p. 2).

This explains how they will go to extreme lengths to rehabilitate offenders in prison in order for them to return to society as renewed citizens, helping them not to return to prison. Rehabilitation may not be the easy way, but just sending one to prison and forgetting about them is not how Finland or any of Scandinavia sees as a solution (Ekunwe, Jones, & Mullin, 2010).

The main purpose of prisons is to rehabilitate these offenders so that they will not return to prison and live a life free of crime after returning to society. A 2007 study conducted in Finland, found that 80% of respondents believe that criminals need to be rehabilitated.

Statements from two respondents reflect public attitudes:

I would concentrate largely on crime therapy, probation, and aftercare. Handling these issues builds a bridge to the offender's sentimental life, therefore taking care of the others and taking 1 responsibility help to prevent recidivism. ... Long-term therapy and treatment should be applied in all prisons. Finding stimulating activities that ' could become new hobbies, education, vocation, or profession is also important. Prisoners should ' be encouraged to take more responsibility for their lives, for example as for catering, cleaning, and developing free time activities (Ekunwe, Jones, & Mullin, 2010, p. 5).

Crime is a social problem. It requires resolving, changes of attitudes and minds. People who are guilty of crimes often have had no basic education that would have improved their heart and mind... they live in a community which emphasizes money instead of human values, which is a good growth base to all crime (Ekunwe, Jones, & Mullin, 2010, p. 5-6).

This attitude reflects Scandinavian ideals that rehabilitation can change a person and that being a criminal is not something that is permanent, but a learned trait that can be unlearned. We see this in another survey question: “once a criminal, always a criminal,” a majority of the respondents at 71% disagree with this statement.

This policy of gentle justice has had many positive effects and has helped mitigate penal policy with regards to rehabilitation. The open prison system has helped deter criminal behavior through their rehabilitation programs that focused on helping inmates’ function normally in society after prison without returning to a life of crime. By breaking down the prison cycle of violence we see in the prisons in the United States, Scandinavian prisons are transformed from the typical culture of prisons into a prison that heals. This has greatly affected recidivism as these open institutions have seen repeat offenses drop drastically in all areas of crime (Ekunwe, Jones, & Mullin, 2010).

In Scandinavia, the total number of prisons in the entire region is about 200, wherein the U.S. there about 2,000. As noted earlier, the state prison discussed above has over 3,500 prisoners, ten times the number held in the largest prison in Sweden, which is 350 (Pratt, 2008). Fitting the Scandinavian ideals of normalization, most prisoners are incarcerated close to their homes and families. The Finnish Sentences Enforcement Act 2002 makes it clear about their normalization values, “... punishment is a mere loss of liberty. The enforcement of the sentence

must be organized so that the sentence is only loss of liberty. Other restrictions can be used to the extent that the security of custody and the prison order require” (Pratt, 2008, p. 120). Prisoners even have input on prison management. In Sweden, inmates are allowed to meet with the warden to present their views and in Norway, there are yearly meetings.

Pratt (2008) notes, “prison work seems a relatively more attractive career option than in most other modern societies” (p. 121). In Finland, 80 officers are recruited every year from over 300 applicants and in Norway, 150 from 2,000 (Pratt, 2008). Nearly all the officers have had some postsecondary education and receive two more years of additional training. The environment is so relaxed that Norwegian students often work as officers in the prison on a casual basis, and there is even a unit for elderly prison officers who are near retirement who supervise the aging and most well-behaved prisoners.

### **Prisons in Scandinavia**

In these countries, there are two types of prisons: open and closed. Close prisons are the higher security prisons, with airport-like security checks for visitors, inmates, and officers. However, unlike the situation in most American prisons, there is a lot of “personal space and material comfort” (Pratt, 2008, p. 121). Prisoners commonly have their own cell, along with their own television, and internal sanitation stations. Despite being a maximum-security prison, movement is still relaxed. Most prisoners receive education beyond the remedial level and are encouraged to study to further their education and obtain degrees. There are common rooms within each of the units, lounge rooms with televisions and kitchens, and in other lower security prisons, inmates are allowed to go to local shops for their kitchen/food needs. Officers and inmates eat together at a communal table. Whereas in the U.S. some meals cost a total of less than \$2, inmates in Denmark are allowed to cook their own meals (Voydat, n.d.). Here servings are

generous and sufficient servings are provided. You will not see orange-colored jumpsuits here like in the U.S.; in Scandinavia, inmates wear their own clothes. Spouses and children are even allowed to stay occasionally on weekends unsupervised.

Pratt (2008) talks about how in open prisons fences and walls are minimal if there are any at all. The cell doors have no bars on their windows, and some inmates are even allowed to lock them. After attending to their education or work, inmates are free to walk the grounds of the prisons, and in sometimes the communities nearby. With their wages, inmates can pay taxes, buy food, and give money to their families.

An open prison in Norway would come as a shock to most Americans and prisoners in our correctional institutions. In one prison that Pratt (2008) discusses, there are no fences and it is built on an island surrounded by hills and water. Pratt (2008) describes further:

Its complement of 100 inmates live in chalet-type facilities (no walls or fences anywhere) that are self-catering, although main meals are provided in a canteen for the whole prison. It aims to provide prisoners with social rather than professional competencies and help them to develop a sense of responsibility for their actions (p.123).

The superintendent of the prison explained to Pratt (2008) that, “the usual thing is that prisons are all about security ... on the island, inmates work with knives and saws and axes. They need these if they are to do their work. And if an inmate increases his responsibility, you have to give him trust” (p. 123). This comes as no surprise to people in Norway, as the social distance between prison and the outside world is narrow. There is even a guest house for the prisoners to stay with their families, and one of the open prisons is built near a kindergarten (Pratt, 2008).

There is no denying that despite the privileges these inmates have, a prison is still a prison and prisoners are still prisoners. There still are strict rules that need to be followed,

surveillance, record keeping, and denial of privileges (Pratt, 2008). Scandinavian prisons are not 100% perfect, there are escape attempts, corruption, fights, and riots, however, it is much more controlled and not anywhere near the level as in the United States. Scandinavia recognizes there are problems, but their philosophies, values, and policies are there to try and bring about solutions. For example, their prevention policies for education sees that education is important inside the prison to help the inmates after being released, but it is important on the outside as well. In the Nordic countries, everyone is given free high-quality education, and support is given to anyone who needs it (Takala, 2004). Reasons why education is important to preventing crime and recidivism it noted later. Furthermore, Takala (2004) states:

There is a tendency to see these measures as guarantees for equal access to education, rather than ways to prevent criminality, even though dropping out of school is known to increase the risk of marginalization and, thus, susceptibility to criminal behavior. Some of the internationally best-known crime prevention projects would not be applicable in the Nordic countries because their core strategies are already implemented as part of the routine work of the authorities. Professor Lawrence Sherman mentions Nordic-type parental counseling centers as examples of ‘universal’ (as opposed to ‘targeted’) programs of family-based crime prevention (p. 139).

Moving on to two specific prisons: an open prison on Suomenlinna Island in Finland, and the supermax prison in Halden, Norway. First, the open prison as seen through Larson’s (2014) eyes, is a prison containing inmates serving time for theft, drug trafficking, assault or murder. There are many similar features in the open prisons described above, such as cellblocks that look like college dorms with TVs and mini-fridge. Prisoners even work for wages of 4.10 to 7.30 euros per hour. The prisoners are allowed to spend time with their families with electronic monitoring

and enjoy wearing their own clothes while enjoying a barbecue pit, a gym, and a dining hall where both prisoners and staff eat together. The staff looks relaxed as well, wearing navy pants, blue shirts, and nametags, they do not carry weapons such as a baton, taser, or pepper spray. The officers do not just fill the security role, but a rehabilitative one as well. Each inmate has a “contact officer,” who helps them take steps to get out of prison. Larson (2014) notes that this practice was introduced to “help officers avoid the damage experienced by performing purely punitive functions: stress, hypertension, alcoholism, suicide and other job-related hazards that today plague American corrections officers, who have an average life expectancy of 59” (p. 3).

As in the other prisons, the supermax prison in Norway is no different, and the primary goal is to rehabilitate their inmates and keep them from returning. The sole focus is on helping to prepare them for life after they get out (Benko, 2014). Unlike in the United States, there is no death penalty or life sentence, the maximum sentence is 21 years (Howell, 2017). The supermax prison in the U.S. is dull and lifeless, Norway’s supermax prison is just the opposite. Normalization still exists inside these walls, and the inmates can have their phones, computers, TVs, shower when they please, they participate in education, training and skill-building programs, and can wear their own clothes.

Upon entering the prison there is no razor wire in sight, no electric fences, and no towers manned with snipers in waiting, nothing that would give you an indication that this prison houses Norway’s most dangerous prisoners. Benko (2015) states how the prison was built with the very design of keeping rehabilitation in mind. “Every aspect of the facility was designed to ease psychological pressures, mitigate conflict and minimize interpersonal friction” (Benko, 2015, para.7). Many people were surprised by the number of trees inside the walls. People have asked what if an inmate tries to escape, to which one guard replied, “Never has anyone tried to hide



inside. But if they should run in there, they won't get very far — they're still inside" (Benko, 2015, para.8). Inside, meaning inside the wall, which is the prison's most defining feature. It is visible everywhere, reminding prisoners of their inescapable imprisonment (Benko, 2015).

Whereas in the American supermax prison, isolation is key and controlling every aspect of the inmate's lives is the norm, they use what Norway would call "static security," "a philosophy that sees interpersonal relationships between the staff and the inmates as the primary factor in maintaining safety within the prison" (Benko, 2015, para.11). Static security is designed to prevent an inmate with bad intentions from doing something, preventing an inmate from ever getting bad intentions. Halden's guards are forced into close contact with inmates as much as possible, due to the purposeful designs of their guard stations being tiny and cramped. The inmates are allowed to move unaccompanied by guards, building a bond of trust, which is crucial to their progress. Surveillance cameras are not even in the classrooms, most workshops, common rooms, cell hallways, or the cells themselves, and in over five years the isolation cell has never been used. There are opportunities to act out, but inmates have chosen not to (Benko, 2015). The kitchens are used by inmates and are fully equipped, there are wooden doors allowing light to enter, rather than bars and metal doors. Their philosophy of: "Allow people, even dangerous people, to feel like humans and they'll behave more civilly than if treated like forces of evil" describes their reasoning as to why their justice systems do what they do (Weller, 2017, para.8).

### **A United States and Scandinavian Comparison**

As understood from the discussion above, the United States and Scandinavia prisons operate very differently, and the effects of being in prison in one country compared to the other are quite different. Many more people will return to a prison in the U.S. than are likely to return to prison

in Scandinavia; recidivism rates in the U.S. are very high and in Scandinavia, they are very low. Research has shown that with a focus on rehabilitation and education, recidivism rates will fall.

The U.S. focuses on retribution and harsh sentences whereas in Scandinavia incarceration is used a lot less frequently, rather using fines, probation, and community service, all with the goal in mind of sending a changed person back into the community (Deady, 2014). Research has shown that harsher prison conditions and sentences have led to more crime after getting released (Chen & Shapiro, 2007). Chen and Shapiro (2007) found this to be true by observing inmates over a six-month period, and then through a database for three years post-release. In conclusion, they found that inmates in higher-level security prisons, which have fewer freedoms and harsher conditions, were most likely to recidivate than in the lower level security prisons with better conditions and lesser sentences.

### **Recidivism**

Hall (2015) reviewed numerous studies showing that education in the correctional system reduces the likelihood of an offender to recidivate. As less money is funded for rehabilitation programs, more money goes towards building more prisons and longer sentences. Some complain that it is not fair for inmates who have committed crime to get free education, however, what has been reported is that “for every \$962 spent on academic education for inmates the criminal justice system will save \$5,306 per inmate” (Hall, 2015, p. 6). Even though some may disagree with providing educational programs in prisons, and because of political and societal influence it is discouraged, overall it saves the system and taxpayers money. Deady (2014) would agree with this, stating that reducing recidivism rates which lower the prison population numbers, will lower the tax burden put on the citizens.

Hall (2015) then goes on to state that “Previous research has shown that correctional education reduces recidivism, claiming gainful employment as the direct link to recidivism reduction” (p. 6). Education reducing recidivism has many benefits for the United States and the offender within the prison: costs of incarcerating people are reduced, the strain on the offender and the families of the offender is less, the society benefits economically, and crime is down as there is a link between employment, education and reduced recidivism (Hall, 2015).

The two most recent studies that Hall examined were conducted in 2003 and 2005 and showed the link between education and recidivism. Gordon and Weldon, in the 2003 study, examining a small sample number of 350, specifically looking at the program levels of General Education Development (GED) and vocational training. The findings were that 8.75% of those who completed vocational training recidivated, 6.71% of those who completed the GED and participated in vocational training recidivated, and 26% of nonparticipants in correctional education recidivated. In the 2005 study, Batiuk looked at high-school completion, GED, Vocational training, and college, finding that 62% of college participants had not recidivated. The highest recidivism rates were among high school participants, and there was some reduction among GED and vocational training participants (Hall, 2015). It can be concluded from both studies that education has a direct negative correlation with recidivism. Another study that Hall (2015) looked at was conducted by Steurer, et al. (2001) using a much larger sample of inmates (3,170). It was concluded here as well that the inmates who participated in correctional education had lower levels of recidivism than the inmates who did not participate. Hull, et al. (2000), in another study examined by Hall (2015), examined the differences between participation and completion and how this affected recidivism. As expected, the results showed that inmates who completed the programs had lower rates of recidivism than those inmates who only participated

in these programs but did not complete them. The studies examined by Hall (2015) continue, but they all conclude the same thing: education lowers recidivism and the higher education the better reduction in recidivism rates. Education plays a major role in rehabilitation and keeping an offender from coming back to jail/prison time and time again.

Sellers (2016) is another scholar who agrees with correctional education programs, specifically stating that, “prisoners who receive education or training while in prison do not return to prison or reinvest in crime in anywhere near the levels of those who don’t receive such education (p. 632). However, he notes that the cost of education in prisons is extremely expensive and is a major reason why it is not used in the United States, in a system that is already severely underfunded. A solution to this would be online learning; the long-term savings that will pay off in the end are far greater than the short-term costs.

People are not deterred from imprisonment, and education and rehabilitation are the answer. According to Sellers (2016), only 6% of inmates receive post-secondary education and a total of only thirteen states account for 86% of all college education participation by inmates. “Education of inmates not only provides job skills, knowledge and a positive behavioral disposition toward work, but also supports security and safety within the prison and outside in the community and improves the economy by improving chances for inmates to fill jobs” (p. 633). Education makes entering the community a lot easier, and a person reentering society will be much more successful, have a higher chance of getting a good job, and the reduction in crime benefits society as a whole. The inmate specifically will have more self-confidence, higher self-esteem, more self-reliance, and better skills to cope in society (Sellers, 2016). Whereas in Scandinavia the government is highly invested in educating their citizens, this is not always the case in the United States. Here inmates have less education, around 40% have no high school

diploma, compared to the general population of only 18%. Two countries in Scandinavia (Norway and Finland) have a literacy rate of 100% and the other two countries (Sweden and Denmark) have a rate of 99% while in the United States the rate is at 86% (Burton, 2018). Inmates in the U.S. are most likely poor students or who have just dropped out altogether (Sellers, 2016).

### **Methodology**

As noted, it is the socioeconomic historical development that affects the culture and prison systems within the United States and Scandinavia and in turn, has impacted the prison population and recidivism rates. By comparing the long, complex histories and prisons system of these countries, as well as specifically looking at current prisons in both the United States and Scandinavia, we can understand why the complex systems are the way they are today.

### **Analysis**

The United States' problems within prisons, as noted before, has a long history. The United States' racial history of slavery, Jim Crow, mass incarceration, the War on Drugs, political campaigns, and the New Jim Crow has had a big impact on the United States prison system's functions, prison population numbers, and the recidivism rates. Even when crime rates were dropping, the tough on crime mentality did not abate. However, in Scandinavia it was the influence of Lutheran pastors in prison practice, welfare, medicalization, the tension between the normalization of prison life, along with the cultural and social forces of state formation, religious homogeneity, a high value on education, and the particular model of the welfare state, etc. that affected how the current prisons operate, their population numbers, and recidivism rates. With such different and complex histories and societies, it is no surprise that these systems vary so much in their functions, goals, various rates and prison numbers.

**TABLE I: PRISON POPULATIONS AND INCARCERATION RATES (2017).**

	United States	Sweden	Denmark	Norway	Finland
Prison Population Total	2,121,600	5,979	3,635	3,373	2,842
Incarceration rate	655	59	63	63	51

Source: World Prison Brief, 2017.

As you can see from Table I, the total prison population in the United States is over 100 times that of the combined four countries that make up Scandinavia. The average incarceration rate for Scandinavia is over 11 times smaller than the United States, and even though one may argue the whole population of Scandinavia roughly equals only the state of Texas alone —U.S.: 329 million (2019), Scandinavia: 27 million (2019)—the incarceration rate of the United States is still astronomical compared to these countries in Scandinavia combined (World Population Review, 2019).

If we look at the trends over time from the United States (Table II) and just two countries in Scandinavia (Finland and Sweden), (Table III) we see a significant difference.

**TABLE II: PRISON POPULATIONS AND INCARCERATION RATES IN THE U.S. (2000-2014).**

Year	Prison Population	Incarceration rate
2000	1,937,482	683
2002	2,033,022	703

2004	2,135,335	725
2006	2,258,792	752
2008	2,307,504	755
2010	2,270,142	731
2012	2,228,424	707
2014	2,217,947	693

United States. Source: World Prison Brief, 2014.

In Table II, we see that the prison population has grown from 1.9 million to 2.2 million in fourteen years, roughly a 15% increase. The incarceration rate steadily increased over time, until 2010 where the incarceration rate started to drop to 693/100,000 in 2014. Even though the incarceration rate increased over time, from 2000 to 2014 it only increased by 1.5%. While the prison population peaked in 2010, the incarceration rate actually peaked in 2007.

These rising and falling numbers could be due to the fact that the United States’ justice system recently being more open to alternatives to prison, knowing there has been an overcrowding issue for some time and finally taking minute steps to solve it. From 1976 to 2012, offenders on probation grew from just 923,000 to almost 4 million. With the crime rates dropping in the early 2000s affecting the number of people to arrest and put in prison or jail, this greatly affected the change in incarceration rates as well as recidivism rates (Travis, J. & Western, B. 2014).

**TABLE III: PRISON POPULATIONS AND INCARCERATION RATES IN FINLAND AND SWEDEN (2000-2016).**

	Sweden		Finland	
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Year	Prison Pop.	Incarceration rate	Year	Prison Pop.	Incarceration rate
2000	5,326	60	2000	2,855	55
2002	6,097	68	2002	3,433	66
2004	7,020	78	2004	3,577	68
2006	7,196	79	2006	3,778	72
2008	6,884	75	2008	3,526	66
2010	6,902	74	2010	3,291	61
2012	6,558	69	2012	3,236	60
2014	5,869	61	2014	3,097	57
2016	5,762	58	2016	3,120	57

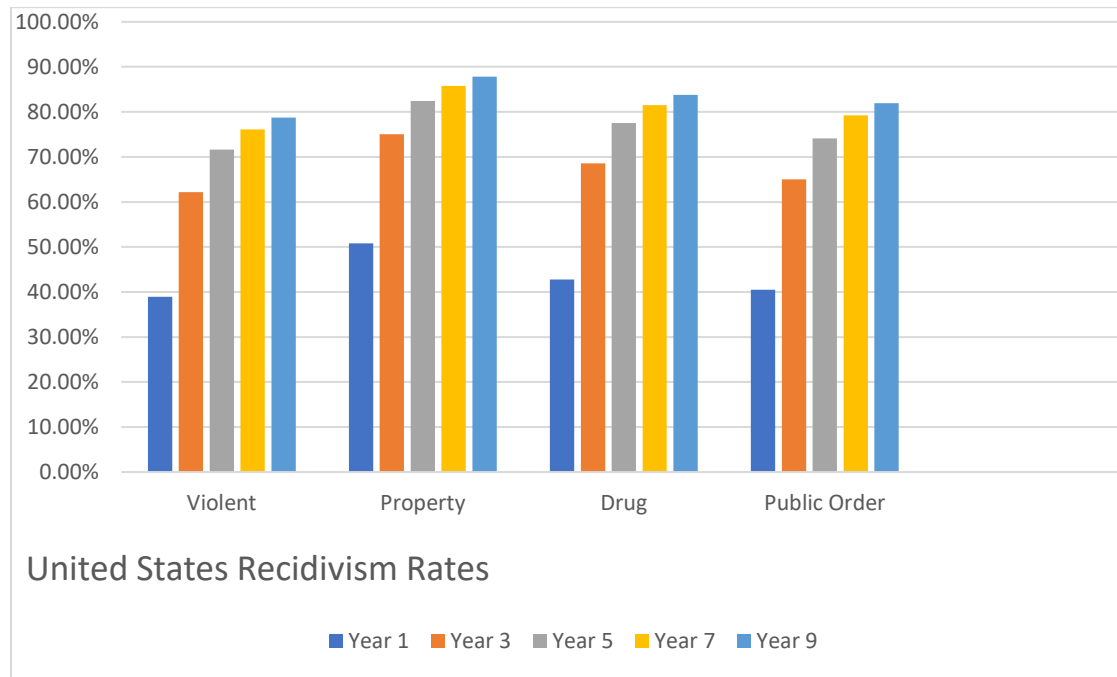
Source: World Prison Brief, 2016.

Looking at Table III, there are significant differences in the numbers in both countries compared to the United States in Table II. These numbers recorded by the World Prison Brief, show that in Sweden we see the prison population steadily rise and fall from 2000-2016. Starting at 5,326 and remaining at only 5,762 by the year 2016, Sweden had about an overall 8.2% increase in the prison population. The incarceration rates rose from 60/100,000 but eventually dropping to 58/100,000, a 3.3% decrease. In Finland, we see a similar pattern: the prison population was at 2,855 in 2000, and by 2016 it is 3,120, increasing by about 9.3%. The incarceration rate in 2000 was 55/100,000 and by 2016 it rises by 2 to 57/100,000, a 3.6% increase.

Both of these countries, as well as the other countries in Scandinavia, have very low prison populations compared to most other countries—Denmark: 3,635 and Norway: 3,373—



and incarceration rates, both being 63/100,000, and after reviewing the literature it is easy to understand why.



**FIGURE I: RECIDIVISM RATES FOR SELECTED OFFENSES (U. S.)**

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Release Period in 2005, 2018.

Although information for Scandinavian countries with their specific rates for specific crimes could not be located, we know that the rates are very low, as Scandinavia’s recidivism rate as a whole is only 20%. In Figure I, we see that originally 404,638 prisoners were tracked and by the end of the study, it was 401,288 due to individuals in the sample dying. Tracking these prisoners was over a 9-year from the years 2005-2014 with the data being reported by the Bureau of Justice in the United States in only thirty out of the fifty states. The figure shows various crimes: violent, drugs, property, and public order crimes (ex: public intoxication, disorderly conduct, or prostitution).

For violent crimes, the recidivism rates were 38.9% in year one and by year nine climbed its way up to a rate of 78.7%. Regarding property crimes, rates went from 50.8% to 87.8%. From

year one to year nine, the rates for drug-related crime went from 42.8% to 83.8% by the ninth year. Lastly, public order crimes had the largest increase in recidivism rates, at year one the rate started was 40.5% and by year nine it rose up to 81.9%. All of these crimes have around a 40% increase from year one to year nine. As seen from Figure I, the more time that goes by the recidivism rates continue to increase in every type of crime. Over 83% of these prisoners were re-arrested at least once during these nine years post-release, with the majority of them being arrested within the first three years.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, numerous things have contributed to the prison systems, prison numbers, and recidivism rates in both systems. It is easy to just say that the United States needs to change what they are doing and if they want less crime and a lower recidivism rate, then do what Scandinavia is doing. However, this is easier said than done as numerous factors contribute to these complex systems. Both countries have complex histories that have led to making the histories the way they are today. The United States' history of influencing prisons began from slavery to politicians trying to advance their careers by "saving society" from the "dangerous criminals" that ran the streets, to the War on Drugs and the New Jim Crow that led to mass incarceration of people of color. All of this led to a justice system that has failed the people in the United States, whereas Scandinavia took positive steps throughout their history. First, religion had a huge impact on the prisons, with separate confinement and penance followed by prison farms and colonies. The interest in mental health, along with the formation of the welfare state where no one was forgotten, impacted the depopulation of prisons. Treatment was essential and highly argued to be the foundation for punishment. Finally, the concept of normalization that began to take place in the 1970s is still currently influential throughout the system.

The attitudes of people in the U.S. have always been tough on crime, even though recently people realize there is a need for change, The U.S. has a long way to go before real changes will ever be seen. Scandinavians believe in a gentle justice system where people should have a second chance, and rehabilitation is truly the answer, and while they realize that rehabilitation may not always be the easiest way, it is what needs to be done for their system.

We see these same attitudes inside the prisons, which are very overcrowded and contain violent inducing environments, from just the outside these places are not very welcoming. As we saw in the state prisons, guards are ready to shoot at a moment's notice, cells were in horrible condition, and although there were rehabilitative programs in the prison, they were barely used and encouraged, inmates do nothing but lie in their cells. The supermax prison was not much different and is a violent inducing environment full of sensory deprivation. Unlike the majority of prisons in the United States, the federal prison discussed above is the closest in comparison to a Scandinavian closed prison. However, guards are still everywhere waiting to stop and kill an escapee. After the initial entry, the prison was clean, organized, and the cells were somewhat comfortably livable. This prison has a very controlled, but free, atmosphere with an investing sense of community. Investment in the atmosphere and environment does not stop there, education and work are required. By having incentives, education, and work opportunities, this prison has created a positive environment in which more prisons and jails in the U.S. should model their systems. This means less money for staff, more money for rehabilitation programs, lower recidivism rates, and an overall safer community, both within and out of the prison. Scandinavian prisons do this but on a whole other level.

As noted, Scandinavia has two different types of prisons, open and closed, both with the goal of rehabilitating their offenders to keep them from returning to prison. This is similar to the

federal prison but with a lot more personal space, material comforts, relaxed movements, and good education and work programs. With minimal security, inmates are allowed to move throughout the prison and into the lounge rooms, kitchens, shops, spend time with their families, eat and converse with the staff, etc., with normalization in mind. Open prisons are even more relaxed, having more freedom and comforts than most American prisons, but there are still strict rules to be followed, as a prison is still a prison and these prisons do experience similar things as in the U.S. (i.e., riots, fights, and escape attempts), but it very much more controlled. As the literature states, the Scandinavian government does not stop there. Programs are put in place to keep the former prisoners from coming back, whether it be education, work options, and more rehabilitation programs. The supermax prison operates in the same way focusing on rehabilitating prisoners and keeping them from recidivating. Unlike here, normalization is in the eyes of the management. The prison would be unrecognizable in the U.S., as there are no wire fences, no towers with snipers waiting, no electric fences, just a wall. Using dynamic security everything is relaxed, controlled, and safe.

A tough on crime attitude is not working. With this attitude, more money in the United States is being spent on re-incarcerating these prisoners, over 70% of whom return in a matter of years when money could be going towards rehabilitating these prisoners to keep them from returning. It is easy to see Scandinavia's system is doing it right, preparing their inmates for a life outside of prison. Whereas in the U.S., the system provides them with no better skills or knowledge to live outside of prison normally, the government does not provide any support in the U.S.

It is easy to see how all of these factors contribute to the change in recidivism rates. There have been numerous studies and a great deal of research that states how important

education and rehabilitation is in the justice system, specifically the correctional system. As more money goes toward longer prison sentences, then less money is available for rehabilitation programs. Education within the correctional system greatly reduces recidivism numbers as employment outside of prison has been seen to have a direct link in recidivism reduction. With recidivism rates reduced, the tax burden on citizens paying for incarceration will be lessened, strains on the family and victims will be reduced, and crime rates will fall. There is a direct negative correlation between education and recidivism, as a person will have higher chances of being successful during their life post-release.

The American system is founded on retribution when it should be focused on rehabilitating offenders. To make initial steps towards rehabilitation and less harsher punishments in the United States would be a start, however, as stated before, it will be a long and hard journey before seeing any real change as there are long historical and cultural forces that made each system in each country the way it is in the present day. The mindset of politicians and lawmakers needs to change, and they must understand the internal and external problems and understand that rehabilitation is the answer to help the society and the struggling system financially. Throwing a person in jail who knows nothing in life but how to commit crime and to expect that harsh punishment in a violent inducing environment to be successful post-release is not the answer. We must help the person, so they can survive on the streets. They should not feel that crime is the only answer in life. Prison is supposed to be about rehabilitation, if you lock people up like animals, they are going to act like animals.

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