

“58% of the average daily jail population is either in custody for a parole or probation violation or a new charge”

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 *Latest in a series of posts on the Arts in Bethlehem* 

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What I Know, Right Now, About Incarceration in The United States:

A History of Learning Through Experiences and Exposure

part 6

Though there is a shortage of data needed to definitively state the percentage of the jail and prison population who are incarcerated because of some form of probation or parole violation, a 2020 article published by the Prison Policy Initiative explains that the data that is available suggests that they make up a significant percentage of the incarcerated population. For example, in Philadelphia County 58% of the average daily jail population is either in custody for a parole or

probation violation or a new charge while also on parole or probation (Sawyer, Jones, & Troilo, 2020).

Six months after my experience at court, I am visiting Derek in jail. I sit on the other side of a glass screen and watch as guards lead my friend to the bench on the other side. His once full head of hair is shaved, he has acquired several DIY tattoos, and he is somehow even scrawnier than I remember. There are dark circles under his eyes and when he smiles at me, I notice two of his teeth are beginning to rot. We talk about his two sons, both of whom are under three years old. I ask if his girlfriend has brought them in to visit. He shakes his head and fights back tears as he explains he doesn't want his family to see him this way. In another six months, Derek is released. He is unable to keep a job and quickly turns to hard drugs like methamphetamine and heroin. He has another son with his girlfriend and, soon after, they break up. He takes his eldest son to Florida, where his mother lives, and gets sober. He no longer sees his younger sons, but he has a job and is finally able to pay off the remainder of his legal fees. I often wonder if his family would still be together if he had not been forced to spend a year away from them.

sixth part in a series . . .

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