

Dvoskin, J. A., Skeem, J. L., Novaco, R. W., & Douglas, K. S. (2011). *Using social science to reduce violent offending*. New York: Oxford. 312 pages.

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What if psychology redesigned the criminal-justice system? Dvoskin, Skeem, Novaco, and Douglas take this fantasy seriously.

“For nearly three decades . . . our criminal justice system has operated under a model that is unapologetically punitive. During this period, the number of people in the United States under criminal justice supervision has mushroomed to over 7 million—3 of every 100 American adults are now under correctional supervision. The United States leads the world in its rate of incarceration, being 5-8 times higher than that of Canada and Western Europe. . . . Most inmates are eventually released, but most quickly return to prison, despite community monitoring. The cost of building and operating prisons to house this population has skyrocketed” (Dvoskin et al., p. xiii), creating a U. S. “prison-industrial complex” (Schlosser, 1998) that is unrivaled in numbers or costs, but “has done little to reduce crime” (Dvoskin et al., p. xiii). “Correctional officials see danger in prison overcrowding. Others see opportunity. The nearly two million Americans behind bars<sup>1</sup>—the majority of them nonviolent offenders—mean jobs for depressed regions and windfalls for profiteers” (Schlosser, 1998).

“This state of affairs has led international observers to declare it ‘a truism that the criminal justice system of the United States is an inexplicable deformity’ (Vivien Stern, Secretary General, Penal Reform International, 2002)” (Dvoskin et al., p. xiii). What then must be done?

The editors of this volume convened a two-day, invitation-only conference to address this question: “How can expert psychological knowledge about shaping prosocial behavior be applied to design a criminal-justice system?” Researchers, policy makers, and practitioners discussed the state of corrections practice and what reforms could be implemented. The editors then shepherded the experts’ contributions into this edited volume. The book is published within the series sponsored by the American Psychology-Law Society (APLS). Series editor Ronald Roesch writes that this book “shows that the application of principles based on psychological research and theory will lead to a more scientifically informed justice policy, one that will ultimately help change

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<sup>1</sup> Now over two million.

the lives of offenders for the better, reduce the level of violent offending, and ultimately do more to promote public safety than the current, and largely ineffective, justice system approaches” (Dvoskin et al., p. viii).

Anyone interested in human beings in the United States should read this book and consider its recommendations. These are not just armchair musings. Careful consideration of the problems and science-based solutions leads to a call to action. In the final chapter, when the editors become authors, they present principles for correctional intervention that are framed by Donald Meichenbaum and inspired by Don Andrews, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela.

Read this book. If you agree with these science-based solutions, take action.

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### Reference

Schlosser, E. The prison industrial complex. *The Atlantic*. Accessed 11/15/11 from <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1998/12/the-prison-industrial-complex/4669/>