



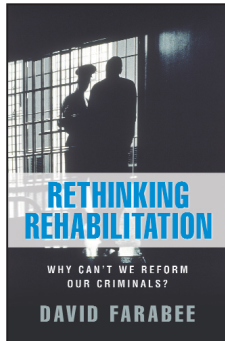
Media inquiries: Véronique Rodman
202.862.4871 (vrodman@aei.org)
Orders: 800.343.4499
www.aei.org/books

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 4, 2005

WHY CAN'T WE REFORM OUR CRIMINALS?

New Book Uncovers Disturbing Facts Behind Prison Rehabilitation Programs

Though crime rates in America are declining, recidivism is on the rise. Nearly seven in ten prisoners are rearrested within three years of release. With the cost of maintaining state prisons topping \$40 billion a year, the need for rehabilitation is obvious, but is it working?



In a new book released this week, *Rethinking Rehabilitation: Why Can't We Reform Our Criminals* (AEI Press, March 2005), UCLA research psychologist David Farabee gives a failing grade to this country's prison rehabilitation programs while offering a variation of the "Broken Windows" approach to combat increasing prisoner recidivism rates.

Dr. Farabee draws on his thirteen years of experience in conducting federal- and state-funded correctional program evaluations to outline both the ineffectiveness of the current "social program" approach and the alarming underlying sources of bias in offender rehabilitation research.

Drug abuse treatment, vocational classes, and social skills training—while intuitively appealing—continue to be funded based on what Farabee calls politicized science. "Open and frank discussions on the efficacy of social programs is routinely suppressed," says Farabee. "The reality is, these programs have little or no lasting effect on recidivism, but continue to be funded by presenting selective data that simply does not hold up to scientific objectivity. Unfortunately, the objective of many evaluation studies is not to seek the truth, but to cherry pick data that ensure that the programs continue."

Farabee offers several suggestions for ways to correct the weak scientific methodology employed in prisoner rehabilitation programs, while offering compelling new ideas that could ultimately produce better results. His suggestions include:

- Require randomized, controlled evaluations of all publicly supported offender programs.
- Establish evaluation contracts with independent agencies (rather than the agency operating the program).
- Use structured activities and programs to manage inmates while they are in prison, not as means to achieve long-term behavior change.
- Increase the use of indeterminate community supervision, requiring a parolee to complete three consecutive years without a new offense or violation.
- Reduce parole caseloads to 15 to 1 and increase the use of new tracking technologies, such as Global Positioning Systems.

"This book is not about ideology, it's about effectiveness," adds Farabee. "Solutions are out there, and we'll find them a lot faster if we keep our politics and personal preferences in check and let science lead the way."

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