

[APM Reports signature]

Stephen Smith: From American Public Media, this is an APM Reports documentary.

Almost half of the people released from prison are back within three years. But there is a way to change that.

Lynch: A diploma really is a crime stopper

Long: They've got their books open and they're serious at it. Got pencils and paper and they going over lessons

Pica: There were people that were very optimistic saying, they would never take away college. It's the only thing that's going to give us a chance of staying out.

Kauffman: Well, we don't have paper, pens, books, internet or a library. Other than that it's a piece of cake.

Coming up, "Rewriting the Sentence: College Behind Bars" from APM Reports.

Stephen Smith: Sean Pica isn't the kind of guy that you might expect to find in a maximum security prison. He grew up in a quiet middle class neighborhood on Long Island. His parents were New York City cops. He wanted to be an Eagle Scout and a carpenter.

Pica: I came from a good neighborhood, large supportive family, had never been in trouble before

But when Sean was 16 and in high school he did what he calls "the horrible, horrible thing". There was a girl in his homeroom class – her name was Cheryl. A lot of what happened between Cheryl and Sean is disputed, but the essential story goes like this: Cheryl says that her father was raping her, and she hired Sean to kill him. On February 5th of 1986, Sean hid behind a tree on Cheryl's lawn and shot her father dead. He was arrested, convicted, and sent to a maximum security prison. He was still a kid when he went in - so baby-faced that the other inmates called him 'Angel'.

Pica: There was this picture in my head as I went into a 24 year sentence that my life was over. That there was going to be nothing at the end of this worth salvaging, and there was no future ahead for me.

But pretty soon after he started serving his sentence, Sean signed up for a program offered by a local college at the prison. And he says that taking classes kind of broke down the grey walls of the prison, and let him imagine something else on the other side.

Pica: Literature classes and learning about the arts and humanities and critical thinking and Socrates, reading about them and discussing them, and in the end, as I started to go to school and start to think about what the future looked like for me, it really did change for one reason only: that I had a chance to go to college.

MUSIC

Stephen Smith: From American Public Media, this is an APM reports documentary, *Rewriting the Sentence: College Behind Bars*. I'm Stephen Smith.

Samara Freemark: And I'm Samara Freemark. If you ask people what the purpose of prison is, you'll probably hear a lot about punishment. But you might also hear about reform. About how to take people who commit crimes and change them into the kind of people who don't.

Stephen Smith: Because the thing about people who go to prison is that they almost always come out again. More than 600 hundred thousand people will leave prison just this year. And within three years almost *half* of those people will be back behind bars. That's called the recidivism rate, and it's something that troubles a lot of people, because we don't like the idea of inmates cycling in and out of prison and also because it costs *a lot* to jail people – almost 32 thousand dollars per inmate per year.

Samara Freemark: The good news is that there are a few things we know about that can lower the recidivism rate. One of the best, and most effective is education.

Stephen Smith: In 2013, a report from the Rand Corporation found that when inmates took any kind of education classes while they were in prison the recidivism rate when they got out dropped by 13 percentage points. When they took *college* classes, the recidivism rate dropped by 16 percentage points.

Samara Freemark: So this is a little hard to visualize, but basically it means that if you take 100 inmates who *don't* get education while they're in prison and release them, about 43 will be back within three years. If you take the same 100 inmates and this time you educate them, and release them, three years later only 27 will be back. Now, those 16 hypothetical inmates, they might not sound that impressive. But if you multiply that across all the people who are released from prison every year, it starts to look like a lot.

Stephen Smith: You'd think that something that works so well...that saves us so much money...would be widely available. But today.... higher education programs.... are almost non-existent in American prisons. And to find out why...you have to go back.

Samara Freemark: All the way back to the 1970s.

MUSIC

And to give you a sense of how even experts were thinking about America's prison population back then, let me introduce you to a guy named John Linton. Until this year he was the director of correctional education programs at the federal department of education. But in 1970 he was working in prison education in Maryland. And at the time, it was a pretty low profile field, because the nation's prison population... was *one eighth* what it is today.

Linton: [laughs] Yes. The good old days.

Early in his career, Linton wrote a grant proposal asking the federal government for money to put together a guide to design classrooms in prison.

Linton: It was rejected and we asked for the scoring sheets-and the primary reason it was rejected because there wasn't any anticipation that there would be more prisons built.

Freemark: like, 'nope. We're done! We have capped out!'

Linton: Yes, exactly.

So this was the mentality at the time.

But then...

Newscast: from dusk last night til dawn today, 8 shootings and 1 stabbing....

Newscast: another sign of a society under siege...

By the 1960s, crime rates had started to rise. And they kept climbing.... for three decades.

Gingrich: [archival] a drug addicted underclass with no sense of humanity, no sense of civilization, no sense of the rules of life in which humans respect each other...

Clinton: [archival] they are often the kinds of kids who are called super predators. No conscience, no empathy....

Politician: [archival] the number 1 problem in America, crime without punishment.

By the 1990s there was this growing sense that what America needed to do was put more people in prison and make prisons worse places to be.

Pica: We knew that there was a storm brewing.

This is Sean Pica again. In the early 90s, he was serving time in a New York State prison, and taking classes through a local college that ran a program there.

Pica: We started to hear that folks were really not happy with the fact that we were getting a free education.

Most students in Pica's program paid for it using Pell grants. That's the pot of money that helps low income students pay for college, and since the beginning of the federal Pell program, inmates had been eligible. In fact, Claiborne Pell, who the grants are named after, specifically designed the program that way. He said that "education is our primary hope for rehabilitating prisoners" that "diplomas are crime stoppers."

But by the 1990s, that idea was falling out of favor.

Dateline music

In 1994 the NBC program Dateline aired an episode called Society's Debt. It was set up as an exposé on prisoners using Pell grants.

Dateline Anchor: So many deserving young people can't afford to go to college. But for many others there's no problem. Who are the lucky ones, with no income and plenty of time to study? Prison Inmates.

Male voice: Thank you very much for killing someone, we're going to give you a college education.

The day after Society's Debt aired, during a debate in the US House over the massive 1994 crime bill, a Congressman named Bart Gordon proposed an amendment that would take Pell grants away from prisoners.

Gordon: Just because one blind hog may occasionally find an acorn, doesn't mean many other blind hogs will. The same principal applies to giving federal Pell grants to prisoners, certainly there's an occasional success story, but when virtually every prisoner in America is eligible for Pell grants, national priorities and tax payers lose.

I talked to a few guys who were incarcerated back in 1994. And they all remembered hearing about the Pell grant debate and talking about it on the prison yard. One of them told me that prison is like the biggest game of telephone you've ever seen. So one guy would hear that Pell

grants were under threat and by the next day, everyone in the prison would be talking about it.
This is Sean Pica again.

Pica: There were people that were very optimistic, saying, they would never take away college. We were kinda like, hey they're right. Why would they take education away? It's the only thing that gives us a chance of staying out.

Congress archive: Recorded vote has been ordered those in favor say aye

Watching the Pell debate on CSPAN, you can see the recorded vote totals creep up as the Representatives vote.

And then...

Congress archive: The ayes are 312, the nays are 116, the amendment is agreed to.

It passes.

[Gavel]

And that's it

Pica: Then literally one day, the college programs, they came and packed up the crates with books, unplugged the computers and walked out of the prison. And it was gone.

MUSIC

Before the 1994 Crime Bill passed, there were about 350 college degree programs in prisons across the country. But without money to support them, the colleges and universities that ran the classes pulled out. Ten years later, there were just twelve programs, in twelve prisons, in the entire country.

It's been more than two decades since Pell funding for prisoners went away. And today there are just a handful of 4 year Bachelors and 2 year Associates degree programs left in state and federal prisons. Many of them are non-profits funded by donations and run by volunteers.

I spent a semester visiting one program like that, at San Quentin State Prison, just across the bay from San Francisco. It's called the Prison University project, or PUP, and students in the program earn Associates degrees.

But the most students start with what PUP calls its 'college prep' classes. They're designed to take students who may have never graduated high school who haven't had any formal education for decades and step by step turn them into students who can succeed in a college classroom.

And that all starts with new student orientation.

Guard: Arms out

To get to the classrooms at San Quentin, you pass through security – guards check your ID, they wand you down and they buzz you through two gates and a very thick metal door.

[Clanging noise]

And then you walk out across the prison yard.

Inmate: Hey guys, how you doin'?

San Quentin has a range of security levels, from minimum to death row, and so some of the inmates have a certain freedom of movement. This evening, a lot of people are out on the yard, playing basketball, or just hanging around talking.

[yard noise]

Across the yard is a set of portable trailers where classes take place. On the night of the orientation, one of the rooms in the trailers is filled with men sitting at tables – guys mostly in their 30s and 40s. There are PUP staff there, and guards watching over the whole thing.

The head of the Prison University Project is a woman named Jody Lewen.

Lewen: Can I just ask how many of you transferred here to be in the program?

Most hands in the room go up.

Lewen: And can I just ask how long it took you to get here?

Student 1: 17 months...

Student 2: Been working my way here for probably 5 years...

Student 3: 5 months...

Student 4: 10 years.

Because the thing is, San Quentin is the only prison in the California system that offers this kind of program. So if you're an inmate and you want to go to college you have to work your way here, by staying out of trouble and creating a record of good behavior. And that can take a really long time. And once you get to San Quentin, you can't just sign up for the PUP program. There's a waitlist for it, with almost a hundred names on it. So you have to wait another 3 or 6 months before you can actually enroll in classes.

Lewen: Super. We're so happy you made it.

And from there on out, it's a pretty standard college orientation. They do an ice breaker, they talk about expectations and materials, they talk about academic preparedness

Student: I haven't been in school for years. So I'm kind of apprehensive about whether this is the right thing for me or not

Winfrey: So it's not college. It's college prep. And there's no pressure.

The guy fielding that question is named Tommy Winfrey. He's a graduate of PUP and he works as a clerk for the program, but he's also an inmate here.

Winfrey: I'm guessing you're here to get one of these – this is the diploma I got in 2014. I'll tell you, I spent a lot of time on a lot of different prison yards. Prison was one way for me. College is totally different. This is a place outside of prison. Although we exist inside of a prison, this is actually a college campus. There will be things discussed you'll have to get used to. Race will be discussed heavily in the classrooms. You'll be forced to read things that you might not want to read about homosexuality. I sat in a classroom right next door and read Brokeback Mountain out loud. A very graphic story short story about homosexuality. You chuckle but those things happen in college and not on the yard. I mean, college is different place.

MUSIC

Before the semester starts, PUP has students write what they call “academic autobiographies”. Reading them is like reading a catalogue of all the reasons people fail at school. *I didn't know I had ADD... I was expelled in 9th grade for assaulting a teacher....I was an honors student but I was in foster care.....I dropped out of high school to support my kids*

MUSIC

And one of the first PUP students I met checked a lot of those boxes.

Long: You're talking to Clay. Or Clarence Long.

I met Clarence Long at one of the first college prep English classes of the semester.

We were in one of the classrooms in the cluster of trailers on the side of the yard. There were fluorescent lights. No windows. About a dozen students, all dressed in pale blue scrubs with the word PRISONER printed on the back in bright yellow letters. It was noisy – there were a lot of other inmates and guards hanging around outside the room.

Clarence was sitting stiffly at a table with two other students. He still seemed to be settling in to things a bit. Clarence is 58, and he's been in prison for almost 31 years.

Long: Long time, huh?

Clarence hated school growing up. He sat in the back of the classroom. Teachers ignored him or punished him, but he says they never really *taught* him.

And so the years passed 3rd grade Clarence couldn't read ... 5th grade.... couldn't read...9th grade.... still couldn't read.

Long: I went all the way to 11th grade, I just never learned how to read while I was in school.

And this whole time, no one seemed to notice.

Long: they just passed me on.

Clarence dropped out in 11th grade. He started dealing drugs. In 1985, he was convicted of strangling an ex-girlfriend who had threatened to tell police he was selling cocaine.

So there Clarence Long was, 27 years old, sitting in a prison cell and wondering what to do with the rest of his life. And he decided to teach himself to read.

Long: Teach myself because I was too ashamed to let anybody know.

Everyone else would go off to play basketball or tennis, and Clarence would stay there, alone in his cell, puzzling over the letters, trying to pry some meaning from the symbols on the page.

Long: for nineteen years, I taught myself to read.

Nineteen years. And then one day Clarence got a letter from his mother. He had gotten mail from home before, but this time, for the very first time, he could actually *read* what was written on the page.

Long: and I was like, what is this, right? I couldn't understand it.

The letter was gibberish.

Long: then I realized that my mother couldn't read neither

Which suddenly explained a lot: why his mom had never read to him, or even noticed when he didn't do his homework.

And realizing that kind of pushed Clarence to keep studying. He enrolled in a GED program.

Long: I got in school and I started liking it, I thought I was gonna get in just to pass the GED and come out, but I got in and started liking it cause I was learning stuff I had never learn before. When I graduated from getting my GED in 2015 they said, we're going to sign you up for college, and I was like, really? I thought I was done with school! Now I'm going to college, right?

So being in this classroom today, in a class that is all about reading and writing and discussing ideas, this moment is the endpoint of an extremely long and extremely improbable journey for Clarence Long, and it is a moment that slightly terrifies him.

Dannhaus: Good afternoon, how's everyone doing?

Tonight, college prep English is taught by a volunteer named Austin Dannhaus.

Dannhaus: Warm up - Chris will you read it?

Marshall: Describe what freedom means to you. How is your understanding different from others?

Dannhaus: Great, would anyone like to start?

There's Chris Marshall with a parole date in 2032. James Wortham, high school dropout, 30 years in prison for second degree murder. Andrew Wadsworth, who has a tattoo under his left eye and keeps a faded, folded up picture of his grandmother in the breast pocket of his prison scrubs. Sydney Johnson, in since 1998, and Clarence Long

Long: Me, what I realized is that freedom has to start within. My freedom started within once realized that I was in control of my emotions. And once I realized that, I couldn't wait, I can't wait, until I'm out to feel free. I start feeling that while I'm in here. So when I do change locations, won't nothing change. I have that freedom already in my head.

The simplest and most obvious argument you can make in favor of educating prisoners is this: that education helps you get a job. And jobs keep people on the straight and narrow. And there is some truth to that argument. But it's a little more complicated than that, which I realized partway through the semester when I talked with a former inmate and PUP graduate named Harrison Seuga

[Restaurant noise]

I met up with Harrison at a Mexican restaurant in Oakland, a block down from the coffee roaster where he works.

Freemark: How'd you make it to San Quentin?

Seuga: Um, Accidentally...

Harrison served 21 years in the California prison system for 2nd degree murder. He got his Associate's degree through PUP in 2009. When he heard he was getting out, Harrison started looking around at what was going on with the people who were released before him and it

didn't look good. This was 2010, still the great recession, it was a tough year for anyone looking to jump into the job market especially coming from prison

Seuga: Even in boom years companies don't hire felons. So It was very hard out there.

Maybe this was naïve, but I was thinking about that fresh degree in Harrison's pocket as kind of a magic amulet– something that would counteract at least some of the prejudice against hiring people with a criminal record. Like, yes, I've got a felony conviction in my past, and that's bad, but I've also got this piece of paper that tells you something else about me that's *really good*. And Harrison said sure, maybe a little. But employers weren't exactly lining up around the block. He ended up getting the job he has now through a program specifically for formerly incarcerated people.

Seuga: I been locked up for 20 plus years, have no work history, been in there since I was 17, never had a job in my life. For most of us, education has its own value, for education's sake.

This is a pretty common story. A lot of former inmates have trouble finding work, even with a college degree.

But what's interesting is that even if they don't find jobs, the data seem to show that inmates who get education in prison are still less likely to get arrested for new crimes after they're released. Something else about taking classes seems to change them in some way.

And Harrison says that's what happened with him. Education changed him in a profound and real way in a way that cut much deeper than earning potential. And this change – to hear him tell it, was good and it was also bad.

Seuga: I think for me it was very invasive.

Freemark: What do you mean?

Seuga: I disconnected from my culture in some ways.

Harrison says now that he's gone through a college program, it's hard for him to talk to the people he grew up with. He feels removed from them.

Seuga: Everything is sort of conceptualized academically whether I like it or not.

Freemark: You were afraid your brain would get colonized.

Seuga: Yes, and it did. It really did. You can't help it. You write so many essays. Your brain starts to function in that way, in how you categorize and look at things and break things down.

Freemark: You sound kind of bitter about it

Seuga: Because I feel like something is missing too. I feel like something was taken away in that learning process that I didn't know how to hold on to. But in some ways that's the benefits and results of my education.

MUSIC

[Study hall sounds]

Long: We're in the study hall right now and they got outside guests, outside teachers in here helping students with their homework.

A few weeks after classes started Clarence Long stopped by the PUP study hall at San Quentin. There are rows of long tables, some prisoners working one on one with volunteer tutors from the outside, others studying together in small groups for exams. Clarence goes every Monday.

Long: They've got the books are open and they're serious at it. Pencils and paper, going over the lesson. So I'm pretty sure that something's in the works right now!

Clarence had been getting the hang of class.

Long: It's going great. It's a lot of homework all the time. And writing. Forming essays, I never formed an essay before, it's my first time.

Clarence said that he had never really read for fun before. He's more of a finance guy, interested in reading about the stock market and thinking about how he'd invest his money if

he ever got any - but he had just read an essay in English class about whether the government had the right to quarantine disease carriers, and he was still thinking about it.

Long: We run into that in here where people are sick and they don't want to turn themselves in because they'll get locked up. They don't want to be quarantined. But you can't give everybody that right. They need to be locked up. Because it contaminates thousands of people and I don't want to be one of those people.

So I have to take a step back here and say that there are times when it's really strange to be talking to people at San Quentin. It's like there are two Clarence Longs in front of me – the one who's thinking and talking about writers and study hall and the one who I know, because I looked up his criminal history, strangled his ex-girlfriend, stabbed her with what's described as a "screwdriver-like instrument", and threw her body into a gully. And those two people kind of flicker back and forth in my mind as Clarence talks.

Clarence says that after more than three decades in prison, he's changed. He says education is part of that change, and part of the way he's preparing to leave prison, but it's about more than that too.

Long: My education is for me. If I don't never get out, I'm still going to get my education.

At the end of college prep English, the professors all meet to go over their students' work, and decide whether they can pass them on. This past semester, about half the class had to repeat, or dropped out, or got transferred or paroled out of San Quentin.

But Clarence Long? He passed. He'll be moving on to the upper level college prep English class. And after that, to the Associate's degree program. It took him awhile to get here, and he's doing it in a prison uniform, but finally, after all these years, Clarence Long will be going to college.

MUSIC

Stephen Smith: You're listening to an APM Reports documentary, "Rewriting the Sentence: College Behind Bars." That was Samara Freemark and I'm Stephen Smith.

Loretta Lynch: A diploma really is a crime stopper

In July of last year, Attorney General Loretta Lynch visited the Jessup Correctional Institution in Maryland. She was there to announce a new program called Second Chance Pell. It's a pilot program – it will give Pell funding to about 12 thousand inmates at prisons across the country. And it's the first time in more than 20 years that prisoners will be able to use Pell grants to pay for higher education.

One of the 67 programs chosen to participate in Second Chance Pell is called Hudson Link for Higher Education. It runs classes in prisons in New York State. The director of Hudson Link is a former inmate. That former inmate is Sean Pica, the guy who was 16 when he committed the murder that sent him to prison, and whose life was changed by the classes he took behind bars.

MUSIC

Samara Freemark: So after I read all the research on education and recidivism and spent the semester at San Quentin, I started to wonder how many programs like the Prison University Project are out there and what they look like and how they're funded, all these really basic questions.

Stephen Smith: So what did you find out?

Samara Freemark: Well, I thought this would be a pretty simple research task, so I passed the job on to our colleague Lila Cherneff.

Cherneff: Yup, uh.. my name is Lila... How's that?

Lila started off by calling up this guy named Todd Clear. He's a professor of criminal justice at Rutgers University, and he's an expert on prison education.

Cherneff: So what we're trying to get a sense of is how many inmates are participating in college programs in this country.

Clear: yeah that is such a great question and I have no idea how you would come up with an estimate of that.

Okay. So Lila calls a few more people.

Cherneff: As I talked to more and more people, it was widely known that the data doesn't exist.

Freemark: so when you say the data doesn't exist, do you mean literally no one knows how many people are taking higher ed classes?

Cherneff: yeah. Often even the administration in charge of that prison don't know the number of inmates enrolled in post-secondary education in that prison.

Samara Freemark: Let me just underline this for a second. Prisoners are counted all the time – that's kind of the whole point of prison. And we know that prison education is a really powerful tool to combat recidivism. You'd think we'd at least know how widely that tool is being used.

But we don't.

Cherneff: And it's really hard to draw any meaningful conclusions from that because it feels like this giant experiment that nobody is keeping track of.

Smith: The best estimate Lila could find was that between 3 and 6% of prison inmates participate in some form of higher education.

MUSIC

Samara Freemark: We called around to a few states to see what was going on in their prisons, and we found this range of educational programs that was pretty astonishing. So, for example, the state of Florida runs prison programs in hydroponics and bee keeping. South Carolina teaches cattle breeding and milk processing and in New York State, some prisoners are studying braille transcription. In New Hampshire, where only 15 prisoners are enrolled in higher education programs, the director of correctional education told us a lot of inmates are taking correspondence courses to be pastors and paralegals. And Georgia has just opened its prisons to a state-based degree-granting institution for the first time since Pell grants went away in 1994. Instead of, say, going through their community college system, Georgia contracted with a school called Life University. Life is the largest chiropractic college in the world, it's known for its stellar rugby team and the fifteen prisoners and fifteen correctional officers in its program will earn Associate's degrees in something called Positive Human Development and Social Change.

Stephen Smith: So depending on what state you commit a crime in...and what prison you're sent to after you commit that crime, your mileage, as they say, will vary dramatically.

Samara Freemark: Yeah. And maybe the best example I found of that crazy randomness was at a maximum security prison in Indianapolis called the Indiana Women's Prison - or IWP.

MUSIC

Baldwin: Good afternoon, my name is Kimberly Baldwin.

I first heard about the prison scholars of IWP when they presented their research at this year's meeting of the American Historical Association. The conference was in Atlanta, and the women weren't able to attend being, you know, in prison. So they appeared via video.

Baldwin: The paper I will be presenting to you today is entitled Counterfeit Decency: Charity as Exploitation in the Creation of Women's Reformatories. This paper challenges the notion that reformatory institutions....

In one video, you see a prisoner named Kim Baldwin sitting at a table in a white cinderblock room. She's wearing tan prison scrubs and glasses. She looks nervous, she takes a deep breath and then lets it out but then she begins speaking clearly and confidently. And if you close your eyes and just listen, Kim's presentation is indistinguishable from the kind of lecture you'd hear delivered on the campus of any elite college.

Baldwin: There is an underside to every age about which history does not often speak because history is written from the records left by the privileged.

I met Kim Baldwin and a couple of other IWP students a few months later at the Indiana Women's Prison.

Freemark: Let's do your IDs first so I have the correct pronunciations on tape

Schmid: Do you want us to go in chronological order? Cause we actually have a chronological order.

Freemark: Really?

Schmid: Yeah we do. You were here first, then me, then Kim.

Jones: I guess that's me. My name is Michelle Jones,

Schmid: Anastazia Schmid,

Baldwin: Kimberly Baldwin.

Michelle Jones got here first, in 1997. Anastazia Schmid came a few years later in 2002, and Kim Baldwin arrived in 2005. They all have very long sentences, and I know a bit about the specifics of their crimes. But we didn't talk much about that. Anastazia told me they want their work to stand on its own. Not to be diminished by their status as inmates.

Schmid: The world wants to focus on why we're here, what they see is the felony of a crime that happened 20 years ago, but they associate with the crime they see every single day saturated every time they turn on the television and that's all people see. Nobody wants to know what in the hell is happening while we're here.

Michelle and Anastazia are in their mid 40s – Kim is 50 –and they don't look like a group of women you'd necessarily see hanging out together on the outside. Michelle's got long dreadlocks and glasses. Anastazia has dyed blond hair and tattoos running up her arms, and

she's wearing bright lipstick and heavy eyeliner – she studied cosmetology here at IWP. Kim has short straight brown hair, and looks a bit like a kindergarten teacher. They're all wearing khaki prison uniforms. Anastazia and Michelle showed me the clip-on badges they all wear that read – in capital letters - “offender” – Offender Jones, Offender Schmid, Offender Baldwin. Those badges are a sore spot.

Schmid: I mean what do you think of when someone is calling you an offender every day?

Jones: Every day.

Anastazia told me that all of them had finished high school and dabbled in college on the outside, before coming to prison, though none of them had earned bachelor's degrees on the outside.

Schmid: We're not the average, we're not what most people assume prisoners to be.

We met in IWP's new computer lab which looked pretty much exactly like the computer lab in my high school, circa 1996. Half the computers in the lab still run on floppy disks, and none of them are connected to the internet. But the women were happy to have them.

Jones: Take advantage of it while it's here cause you don't know...

Because the women of IWP, they know a lot about losing things.

MUSIC

In the late 1990s, a local college started offering classes at IWP. Anastazia and Michelle signed up, along with a ton of other women. Michelle, the woman with the long dreadlocks, says it was a kind of golden age for education at the prison.

Jones: You would see students coming in and out of their classroom rushing over here to get PowerPoints and papers done.

Baldwin: We had study hall. And classrooms. Every space in that education building was utilized. There was always something going on.

This is Kim Baldwin

Baldwin: I remember one year, Ana, you were working in the laundry reading, was it War and Peace? *[laughs]*. And so you were sitting waiting for clothes to finish washing or drying or whatever so you spent the summer reading War and Peace. But I was, I was hungry for knowledge.

Freemark: Did you have graduation ceremonies?

Jones: Girl, yes. *[laugh]*

Graduation was the biggest day of the year. All the other women in the prison would come and watch and cheer. There were big round tables set up for the reception afterwards, and you could invite 7 of your friends and family to come and eat and celebrate with you. The staff came too, and sat with you, and toasted you. Michelle Jones says it was beautiful.

Jones: The table decorations, the center pieces, the name tags, the table covers, the meal, the drinks, the cake.

Schmid: Oh my god those cakes were so beautiful. You'd think they went to the bakery, like some really fine bakery. You guys did that in culinary, right?

Jones: Yeah and we were able to make graduations special because this must be a benchmark moment. For some women with 20, 30 years to do, this is it. This is all. Because once you get your bachelor's, you're done. Where does the next benchmark come? New career? Your house, your home? You're done.

Back then, the state of Indiana had one of the most vibrant prison education systems in the country. Seven colleges had full time programs in Indiana prisons, with 400 professors working with thousands of students. The recidivism stats for its graduates were looking great. The program's administrators considered it a huge success.

And because there was no Pell funding by this time all this was paid for by something called Frank O'Bannon grants. O'Bannon grants give low income Indiana students money for college –

they're like Pell grants on a state level. But this whole time, there was a tiny line buried deep in the O'Bannon legislation that said that the state could deny funds to people in prison. But for years, no one enforced that line.

MUSIC

But then in 2011, for reasons that no one I spoke with could quite explain to me, the state started enforcing it. And all of a sudden there was no more money for incarcerated students to take college classes. And without money the college programs all pulled out including the one at IWP. Anastazia remembers how sudden it all was,

Schmid: So, college ends. And volunteers who had been here for a while weren't bringing stuff in. All of a sudden it went from this packed schedule to absolutely nothing to do. The boredom hits almost an ungodly level. It's almost maddening.

MUSIC

In 2012, a volunteer named Kelsey Kauffman showed up at IWP.

Kelsey is a tall woman, a bit gangly, with glasses and short hair— she looks bookish and a little unassuming but she's actually kind of a bad ass. She told me that she's always been interested, intellectually, in the question of *violence* – what violence is, and what makes people commit it. The year Kelsey graduated from Yale – 1971 – was also the year of the Attica prison revolt. 43 people were killed: 32 prisoners and 11 correctional officers and civilians. It dominated the news for weeks.

Kauffman: After Attica I thought to myself there were really only two ways to understand prisons – one is to be an inmate the other is to be an officer. So I didn't have any particular reason to be inmate, so I became officer.

Kauffman spent a year working as a guard at a prison in Connecticut, and she says that even today, she's got a core of empathy for people who work in prisons because she knows how hard the job is. She went on to write a book on prison guards, she got a doctorate in education and she moved to Indiana, where she worked as an independent researcher and prison reform advocate.

After Indiana cut funding to college prison programs, Kelsey went to IWP's superintendent and pitched him a program that would be run by volunteers and cost the state nothing.

Kauffman: His reaction and the reaction of the Department of Corrections was, we doubt you can do that, but if you can, we would welcome you with open arms.

So Kelsey recruited some volunteers from the faculties of various colleges around the state. And she started designing a program. She wanted to set up something for students who already had college degrees from the earlier programs at IWP something that would teach them how to do graduate-level research. And she came up with this idea to study IWP itself. It was known as the oldest women's prison in the nation.

Kauffman: And I knew that the prison, state archives and the state library had all the original documents. Information on every single woman who was in prison in the 19th century, all stuff no one else had ever used. And I thought this is great, we'll learn how to use original sources.

So she gathered the students together – there were about 20 of them – and she said,

Kauffman: I said, we're going to write a history of the prison in one semester.

There was only one problem: none of the IWP students was particularly interested in 19th century American history. Here's Anastazia Schmid, the woman who also studied cosmetology.

Schmid: No. Absolutely not. It was not really my interest, was not something I wanted to do.

But they figured it was better than spending their days doing nothing but laundry. So they said okay.

MUSIC

So here was the vision Kelsey laid out for the history project: IWP was the first women's prison in the nation. It was founded in 1873. And for years, its historical reputation was glowing. The facility's founders were two Quaker women named Rhoda Coffin and Sarah Smith, they founded the prison as a way to separate female inmates from male convicts and they were held up as models of gentle correction and reform. No one had ever written a full history of the prison before, and Kelsey thought her students could be first.

Kauffman: And it's going to be this happy story about how these two Quaker women started the first women's prison and then became the model for prisons all over the country.

Freemark: Which is a great story.

Kauffman: It would have been a great story. Would have made the Department of Corrections happy and the prison happy and everything.

So they started working. And academic research in prison looks pretty different than in the Ivory tower.

Kauffman: Well, we don't have paper, pens, books, internet or library *[laughs]*. Other than that it's a piece of cake.

Kauffman drafted a team of 8 librarians on the outside to hunt down materials for the students. They would scan all these primary source documents and print them, and then Kelsey would bring these huge stacks of paper into the prison.

Kelsey assigned Michelle Jones the job of doing data analysis on the list of women who were imprisoned at IWP in its early years.

Jones: I took the registry, I broke it down, I broke down education, temperance, marriage, age at incarceration, crime.

And as she went through all this data, Michelle noticed something odd,

Jones: Where are the prostitutes? I said where are these prostitutes? I'm sure they're somewhere. You had other historians for that time period saying the prostitutes were everywhere, like there was a prostitute on every corner. So I'm saying if they're everywhere and not in the jails and they're not in the prisons, where are they?

Finally, something turned up: one of the librarians helping the students from the outside found an old article in the state archives that made passing reference to a *second* correctional institution that opened earlier in 1873, just before IWP. This one was Catholic, run by nuns, and it housed Indianapolis' prostitutes. Kelsey says it was modeled on the Irish Magdalene Laundries, where female inmates figuratively cleansed themselves of their sins by washing clothes.

Kauffman: And that's what led us then to discover that the Indiana Women's Prison was not the first women's prison in U.S., it wasn't even in the first women's prison in Indianapolis, but there was this whole network of private Catholic prisons for women of any denomination.

From there, the women started rewriting the history of IWP from within its own walls. They published articles on the forgotten Magdalene laundries, and on an 1881 state investigation, in which prisoners and staff testified that the two Quaker women that founded IWP beat their prisoners, put them in solitary confinement, pulled their hair and pounded them against walls, even water boarded them.

Anastazia Schmid discovered that IWP's first physician, a doctor named Theophilus Parvin, had also served as the president of the American Medical Association while he worked at the prison. Kelsey Kauffman thought this was great.

Kauffman: You know, we had the best doctor in the country, the lucky women at the prison, he vaccinated all of them, so none of the women at the prison got cholera during the big cholera epidemic, et cetera et cetera.

That was not how Anastazia saw things.

Schmid: I said are you effin' kidding me? Why would the president of the AMA work at a women's prison? Especially when we're lucky to get a doctor on probation coming through here to work here now. Come on, it's night and day, it doesn't make any sense. There's more to that story. She'd argue with me, back and forth, Well how do you know? That's so kinda far fetched. I don't understand, I don't get it. I'd say what do you mean how do I know? I am these women.

Anastazia discovered that Theophilus Parvin had advocated for removing women's clitorises and ovaries to cure nymphomania and masturbation. He applied cocaine to the genitals of women he believed suffered from what he called "excessive desire." He used female inmates as study subjects. Anastazia believes that Parvin took the job at IWP because it gave him something invaluable: a captive population he could study without the restraints that existed on the outside.

Schmid: Was I a historian? Did I want to be a historian? Do I even think I'm a historian now? No, I'm a historian by default. But I've got some really great stuff that I've dug up historically and I would love to share that with the world.

[LOUDSPEAKER]

Jones: That's funny. Five minutes...

Baldwin: The great Oz has spoken...

Jones: Yeah, five minutes before he's closing the building...

MUSIC

There's a room in the education building at IWP that holds a couple of tables and a bulky old television that's usually used to conduct remote parole hearings.

Student: Just touch the button in the middle.

On Monday evenings, the TV is used to beam in university professors to lead a history seminar. A professor from Indiana University named Alex Lichtenstein comes in to the prison to run the class.

Lichtenstein: Marcus, can you hear us?

Rediker: I can hear you

Lichtenstein: Can you see us?

Rediker: I can see you

Anastazia, Michelle, Kim, and five other women sit at a few tables that have been pushed together. The old television is at the head. This evening, Marcus Rediker, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh, is discussing his book on the mutiny aboard the Amistad slave ship. It's maybe the most famous slave rebellion in American history – Steven Spielberg made a movie about it. And Rediker's colleagues thought the idea of doing a book about the Amistad was a loser.

Rediker: And almost all of them said, good luck, you won't find anything new.

[Groans]

Rediker: Being naturally hardheaded as I am–

Woman: We like that –

Rediker: I didn't listen to a word they said –

Woman: We don't either....

The women read Rediker's book this week.

Lichtenstein: Michelle, I can see you want to ask a question.

Jones: Well I'm thinking about, we've had an introduction to historical scholarship – what's it called in real world? – historiography – We've been learning a lot about Foucault obviously and the subjugated knowledges and one of the things I wrote in margins, even with 2500 articles published, the story of the Amistad Africans themselves are still subjugated. It reminded me, we see this in the women's prison

Schmid: Well we don't have the story thus far of anyone other than the story of the reformers who've been heralded as mothers of feminism.

This is Anastazia Schmid.

Schmid: So there's a whole block of voices that have been completely obliterated from history. And this part of what we're attempting to do, is to put that voice into history

When you sit in on a class here, you realize that what's happening at IWP gets beyond the idea that educating prisoners is good because it reduces crime or spending on prisons. Michelle Jones will apply for parole next year, Anastazia Schmid in about six years; but Kim Baldwin's earliest release date is 2040. The question of whether she'll commit another crime isn't particularly relevant. She'll be 74 – probably older – by the time she's out.

Anastazia Schmid says the history project is about something different than that.

Schmid: What we've done with this history project now is given the world knowledge that the world previously did not have until we found what we found and we've given it to them. Just because we're incarcerated, just because we've been here for a length of time, just because at one point in our lives we all made a bad decision. We're valuable human beings with something to offer the world. And that's what we've done.

MUSIC

It's hard to get things in and out of a prison. Mail is read visitors are patted down, packages are checked for contraband. That endless flow of information that we're so used to on the outside, the trillions of gigabytes of data that we can access with the tap of a finger, that flow stops at the prison walls. And information rarely flows the other way, either, from the inside to the outside.

And so, the women of the Indian Women's Prison have had to find their own way to talk to the outside. And they've done it through the stories of the women who lived and died here, 150 years ago.

MUSIC

Stephen Smith: That was Samara Freemark.

Since Samara visited Indiana Women's Prison, Kim Baldwin was transferred to a much larger women's prison in Rockville, Indiana. There are some technical programs at Rockville – culinary arts and cosmetology – but no higher education classes.

Anastazia Schmid won a court appeal, and could get a new trial in her case.

Michelle Jones has a parole hearing next fall. She's optimistic she's going to get out and right now she's working on putting together applications to PhD programs in history and American studies, on the outside.

MUSIC

You've been listening to "Rewriting the Sentence: College Behind Bars."

It was produced by Samara Freemark. and edited by Catherine Winter. The web editor is Dave Peters. The web producer is Andy Kruse. Associate production by Suzanne Pekow and Ryan Katz. Research and production help from Lila Cherneff and Alex Baumhardt. Additional reporting by Briana Breen. Special thanks to Liz Lyon for music help. The APM Reports team includes Emily Hanford, Sasha Aslanian, Ellen Guettler, Chris Worthington and me, Stephen Smith

We have much more about this story at our web site. You can see some of the articles written by the women at the IWP, and get more information on the state of prison education across the country.

That's at APM Reports.org ... you can also browse through our archive of documentaries about education and sign up for Educate, our weekly education podcast.

We'd like to know what this program has made you think about. Please let us know. You can find contact information at our website. Or write us a review on iTunes.

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