

INCARCERATION AND THE LAW

CASES AND MATERIALS

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Excerpt (p. 256)

Benny Rios is incarcerated at the Illinois state prison at Stateville. He reflects on a prison law class in which he was recently enrolled, half of whose students were prisoners and half Northwestern Law students.

BENNY RIOS, REFLECTION ON PRISON LAW CLASS

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I've been locked up for almost 17 years and when I first got to prison, things looked very bleak. I saw myself caught in a system that I believed to be unbeatable. I felt lost to the world, because nobody in the outside world seemed to care about those of us in prison. Every time I read something that revealed the evils of the criminal justice system, I seemed to drain of hope because it felt like there was nothing I could do to contribute in changing the system. For the past five years though, my hope has been revitalized through the new spiritual and academic program offered here at Stateville. We now have a connection to the outside world through these programs and our voices are being heard. We are exchanging knowledge, ideas and experiences with people from different communities. And together we are changing the definition for what community means. The amazing thing is that the volunteers we have coming into this prison with the intention of teaching us something, and often they leave here being taught something in return. Together we are creating change that is disrupting the system and it is truly an honor to be a part of improving community that is on the forefront of laying down the foundation for change.