

In The News:

For the best conservative, feel-good take on crime in New York, check out [City Journal](#) , published quarterly by the think-tank The Manhattan Institute. The Spring and Summer issues paint a sunny picture of New York's progression from the Dark Ages (pre-1995) to Triumph (the Present). The writers attribute our safe streets and safe prisons to essentially the same paradigm shift in management -- decentralizing, giving more opportunity and responsibility to local command, and providing detailed statistics on criminal activity to help local officials.

Whether you're reading for confirmation of your worldview or to find an infuriating strawman, City Journal is a valuable resource.

Jerome Sounds Off:

Steve Schwalb is one happy businessman. The CEO of Federal Prison Industries watched his company bring in \$540 million in revenue last year. His workers, prisoners serving sentences in 94 federal prisons, earn 23 cents to \$1.15 an hour making electronic parts, clothes, and furniture.

The future looks even better. The federal prison population is expected to reach 200,000 by the year 2006; Schwalb will employ 30,000 of these inmates. Mirroring the shifts that have transformed the low-wage job market on the outside, FPI workers have begun performing data entry and other service-oriented tasks. Now Congress has proposed that FPI be allowed to expand beyond government contracts to offer their services to private companies.

Supporters of the proposed bill, the Prison Industries Reform Act, say that jobs lost to overseas sweatshops can be snatched back by prison labor and that these jobs will in turn help lower high recidivism rates. But you can hear these politicians and their business backers rubbing their hands: a growing, cheap workforce -- behind bars! Even ignoring the irony of undercutting sweatshop wages, the supposed benefit of lowered recidivism is a crock. Will the "work experience" gained from a \$1 an hour data-entry job go very far on the outside? And what happens when companies start to replace their workers (say, for instance, unionized workers making a decent salary with benefits) with inmate-power? At this rate, it's only a matter of time before someone suggests that inner city public school kids devote one period a day to stuffing envelopes.

by {ga=jchou}

Wednesday, January 22, 2003 12:00 AM - Last Updated Thursday, September 04, 2014 12:55 PM

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