

## Capitalizing on Punishment: Norbert Elias and American Prison Privatization

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Under the governmentally sanctioned war on drugs, incarceration rates in the United States have risen to historical extremes. The United States out incarcerates every other nation in the world, including both Russia and China. The wave of new inmates being funneled into America's correctional system have prison administrations turning to private, for-profit corporations to manage America's ever growing prison population. These for-profit correctional institutions are a multi-billion dollar a year industry that tend to focus on cost-effectiveness, contract management, and outsourcing. Michael Hallet and Randall Sheldon (2006) state that private prisons reveal truth about our culture and social system, but have little to do with crime control, but have much to do with exploitative characteristics of our capitalist economic system. This paper seeks to understand how America's private prison industry has taken advantage of social disorganization as a lucrative market opportunity by profiting off of what Karl Marx once called "surplus populations." I argue that Norbert Elias's conception of the Civilizing Process can help explain the rise of prison privatization while Karl Marx's critique of capitalism can be used to clarify the exploitative nature of such a system. In respect to Elias's work, even if he himself had virtually nothing to say about incarceration has the potential to provide a very different but very significant contribution to this area. That is to say, the way in which it can be assumed that modern Western societies should punish their offenders is to keep with the values of the 'civilized world' (Pratt 2011). The values that modern US society often deem as 'civilized' are connected with the values of modern capitalism but all too frequently result in uncivilized outcomes. The United States as a leader of world capitalism runs up against the limits of capital faster than other countries thus creating new avenues of capital accumulation in the form of prison privatization that is unique to American society. In reference to Elias's contribution to Figural Sociology, I argue that the growing influence of capitalist demands during the late 1980s have contributed to a change in both individual psychology and larger social structure that have given rise to the possibility of prison privatization. Under the growing trend of prison privatization inmates are not only stripped of liberties but are reduced to commodities and become a very real incentive in maintaining capitalist modes of incarceration. Crime control, in short, has become big business and deserves a deeper understanding by examining its relationship to the prevailing capitalist economic system.