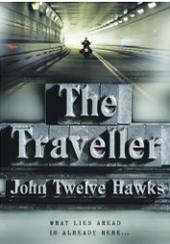




Reading Group Round-up

Promoting reading and reading groups in prisons



The report this month comes from HMP Albany Isle of Wight, where the group recently read *The Traveller* by John Twelve Hawks.

Los Angeles: A city where you have to work hard to live beneath the surface. Gabriel and Michael Corrigan are trying to do just that. Since childhood, the brothers have been shaped by the stories that their mystical father, a man of strange powers and intuition, has told them about the world in which they live. After his violent death, they have been living 'off the grid' - that is, invisible to the intricate surveillance networks that monitor our modern lives.

London: Maya, a tough and feisty young woman, is playing at being a citizen, is playing at leading a normal life. But her background is anything but. Trained to fight since she was a young girl, she is the last in a long line whose duty is to protect the gifted among us.

Prague: Nathan Boone, a disciplined and amoral mercenary, watches Maya leave the meeting with her father before brutally killing him. Tasked to hunt down the brothers, he tracks Maya as she seeks to fulfil what turns out to be her father's last command. When Maya flies to California to find them, an extraordinary chase begins, the final running battle in the war which will reveal the secret history of our time...

The Traveller is the first instalment of 'The Fourth Realm' trilogy by John Twelve Hawks who claims himself to "live off the grid". This book generated a lively discussion about how we live today with CCTV, microchips in passports and credit/debit cards, and identity trails from personal computers, tablets and smartphones. Big Brother is here and watching us closely! Would we be willing to sacrifice this technology for complete privacy? Not sure about that!

Most members enjoyed both the story and the characters:

"I do not enjoy Sci Fi but found the characters very real and the story gripping. A warning of how things are and becoming worse."

"Once you get past the clichés, you find a good book with some intriguing concepts. Yes, the dialogue is a little stilted sometimes and slips into far too much 'telling' and not enough 'showing', but despite this the plot flows along with some okay twists. It's the concept of higher planes that really grips and makes you want to carry on reading."

"Good read, not a lot of 'filler'. A nice plot with a few twists and turns with Maya, the last of the harlequins, defending the last of the travellers who keep people from being controlled."

"An easy read with a compelling storyline, however I believe that it was written in the hope of a movie franchise deal. It has a storyline that would work well as a movie."

"A good book that looks into the future and gives you something to think about."

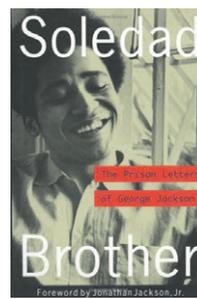
One member found similarities with 1984 "but George Orwell definitely has the edge". He also thought there was too much gratuitous violence in The Traveller and "not enough positivity or useful messages."

But the majority view was much more positive and FIVE of the book group members have requested to read the two other books in the trilogy. A successful read!

The Albany group is part of the Prison Reading Groups (PRG) network, sponsored by the University of Roehampton and generously supported by charities including Give A Book www.giveabook.org.uk

If your prison doesn't have a reading group, encourage your librarian to have a look at the PRG website www.prison-reading-groups.org.uk

Book Review



Soledad Brother

by George Jackson

Review by Kevan Thakrar - Close Supervision Centre HMP Wakefield

Having just read George Jackson's 'Soledad Brother', two things have struck me. This book was written in 1960's America during the black rights movement and detailed the racism found in their prisons then but could quite easily depict the current state of English prisons today. Cowardly white prisoners colluding with the prison officers in order to subject the minorities to a worse quality of life than they face, rather than seeing their fellow prisoner as an ally in attempting to improve life for all, is a growing problem in England although those with Islamic beliefs are the main targets rather than the Blacks. The expansion of Nazi gangs which is facilitated by prison service personnel at all levels, with random unprovoked attacks on minorities being the result is successfully dividing the prison population, causing a distraction from the serious deterioration in conditions within prisons which are creeping behind the racists.

The book covers much wider ground, looking at capitalism and imperialism as the route causes for the exploitation of humans by America but it is within prisons where these effects are magnified. The fact that this conservative government are oppressing the masses today, demonizing immigrants and Muslims whilst dropping bombs all over the middle east is no different to

the American government in the 60's implementing Jim Crow, warring with Vietcong and misleading the public with propaganda. The only real difference I can see is an almost complete lack of resistance by those most affected, and lack of direction by the few who take on the burden but this may be due to the expertise developed by this country in dealing with previous dissidents like the IRA.

Back in 2010 during my brief stay in HMP Frankland which can be summed up as a continuous struggle against brutality, racism and oppression, I was driven to the position of attempting to defend against those responsible. At 23 years old, I was naïve in thinking the endemic problem at Frankland stopped there and could be resisted when in reality the issue goes beyond being systematic. It is not only those administering the oppression who are responsible or their masters who facilitate it at prison service HQ, but it is a direct consequence of this country operating a policy of exploitation which is inherent in the capitalist experiment and exacerbated by imperialism. The greater the level of greed of those in power, the higher levels and intensity of oppression and its population which is most easily seen by examining the treatment of its prisoners and so called justice systems, something which is all too evident through

Jackson's writing.

I saw a statistic recently that per head of 100,000 prisoners, suicides take place in the USA at 15, India at 18, Canada at 22 but in Britain at 17. If this figure is correct, there can be no confusion in just how bad things have become yet apart from a few workers strikes about matters which personally effect those on the pocket lines nobody is resisting. Capitalism has led to a culture of selfishness where the majority do not stand up unless they are to face the fire, happy to accept the lies that is so obvious - the government are to blame for everything. Why is it that the nations who do not follow the doomed capitalist path have the best education and healthcare in the world if they are not the ones in the wrong? While prisons remain disenfranchised we face the brunt of the decisions to elect fascist governments without the power to change it through accepted means, and are limited on the effects we can have beyond the prison walls without support from those outside.

As well as English prisons resembling Americans in Jackson's time, my second realization is that this situation has been going on here for far too long and infected far too wide for a simple cure to work without a serious operation being completed. Until that day, the prisoners will suffer and those of a minority the worst, so please have some consideration for those of us stone on the front-line against our wishes and look at the prison system imposed upon us. Every hostage of the state is a political prisoner whether they know it or not, a quick look at the headlines which attack the detained demonstrate this fact, I advise everyone to read this book then ask themselves when will it be time to say enough is enough.

"Locked in here all days; you don't turn criminals into citizens by treating them this way"

with kind permission from Billy Bragg

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