



# TURNING INTELLECT — INTO — ACTION

Three  
Manhattan  
Institute  
Case Studies

Foreword by Lawrence J. Mone

MOVING MEN  
INTO THE  
MAINSTREAM:  
The Newark Prisoner  
Reentry Initiative

Newark, New Jersey, is a tough town. The nation's third-oldest city once boasted a prosperous and upwardly mobile middle class supported by a vibrant industrial economy. But the late twentieth century was unkind to Newark, as it was to many northern manufacturing cities. By the 1990s, a punishing combination of poverty, political corruption, and violent street crime led *Money* magazine to name Newark the "most dangerous city in America."

Enter Cory Booker.

Notwithstanding the election of Barack Obama to the presidency in 2008, the rise of

Cory Booker remains one of the most compelling American political stories of recent memory. A 6-foot-3-inch former All-American high school football star with bachelor's and master's degrees from Stanford University and a law degree from Yale, not to mention a Rhodes Scholarship under his belt, Booker narrowly lost his first attempt to topple longtime Newark mayor Sharpe James in 2002.

But when James bowed out of an expected rematch in 2006, Booker and his slate of reformist city council candidates won easily.

*The Manhattan Institute has long had an interest in reversing the decline of America's cities.*

“There are not too many Rhodes Scholars who move into public housing in Newark and run for mayor. And he did that. And he won. That got our attention,” observes Howard Husock, the Manhattan Institute’s vice president for policy research. The Manhattan Institute has long had an interest in reversing the decline of America’s cities. Since its founding, the Institute has promoted ideas that have reduced

crime and improved life in urban areas. Often this has involved finding ways to draw the urban underclass into the social and economic mainstream.

In 1982, the Institute sponsored the publication of Charles Murray's influential book *Losing Ground: American Social*



Downtown Newark, NJ

*Policy, 1950–1980.* Murray's thesis—that welfare programs drove recipients deeper into poverty—paved the way for the landmark Welfare Reform Act of 1996. “*Losing Ground* was the Manhattan Institute’s first policy triumph,” wrote novelist Tom Wolfe in 2004, on the occasion of the Institute’s 25th anniversary. “But the triumph of all triumphs was the now-famous ‘broken windows’ strategy for reducing crime.” The Institute worked closely with New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani throughout the 1990s to develop and implement innovations in policing—such as the broken-windows theory

and the data-driven approach known as Comp-Stat—that brought crime to historical lows and revitalized the Big Apple, which, like Newark, was once considered an “ungovernable city.”

While welfare reform helped poor women and single mothers break out of poverty, and improved policing revived neighborhoods in cities that had been written off or declared dead, these reforms did not totally solve the problem of urban poverty. Specifically—as anyone monitoring developments in cities such as Newark could tell you—the problem of how to help poor men remained a significant challenge.

So when Cory Booker mounted the stage of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center to deliver his inaugural address in July 2006, the Manhattan Institute was listening. One of the policy priorities that Booker outlined that day was solving the problem of the tens of thousands of newly released prisoners returning to Newark’s streets every year. During his transition to office, Booker said, he had traversed the city, asking citizens what they considered to

be Newark's most urgent challenges. Over and over, people told him of the difficulties that they or a formerly incarcerated family member had experienced while attempting to transition back into society from prison or jail.

"I meet a lot of guys out there in the community who say to me, 'Mayor, I need a job,' " Booker has said. "But then, they say, with almost a sense of surrender, 'But I have a past conviction.' "

The prisoner-reentry issue was not a new one to the Manhattan Institute. In 2002, the Institute had enlisted Columbia University professors William Eimicke and Steven Cohen to conduct a study of the "work first" strategy employed by America Works, a for-profit workforce-development firm that pioneered the practice of moving welfare recipients into jobs. Shortly thereafter, Eimicke and former Indianapolis mayor (and former New York City deputy mayor) Stephen Goldsmith authored a qualitative study of prisoner reentry programs for the Manhattan Institute. That study, *Mov-*

*ing Men Into the Mainstream: Best Practices in Prisoner Reentry*, found that the most successful prisoner-reentry programs were those that employed the work-first model.

Simply, this model holds that while ex-offenders need a variety of social services—including assistance with transportation, housing, substance abuse treatment, and legal issues—such services should complement, not substitute for, a focus on employment. The work-first approach, alternately called the “rapid attachment to work,” seemed likely to be as effective a solution for the problem of prisoner reentry as it had been for welfare dependency.

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There are few cities in the United States where the problem of integrating ex-offenders is as acute as it is in Newark. Nearly a quarter of Newark residents have at some time either been

incarcerated or had significant “involvement” with the criminal-justice system. Ex-offenders return to Newark from a variety of places. Some come from the federal prison system; others come from the state prison in Trenton. According to Booker, “At any given time, nearly 6

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percent of Newark men between the ages of 18 and 49 are in New Jersey State Prison.” But the majority of Newark’s ex-offenders have been incarcerated in the Essex County Jail. The city welcomes back about 1,400 recently released county prisoners each month. An additional 4,500 Newark residents are under probation supervision.

The sad fact is, for someone with a criminal record who is intent on turning his life around, Newark is not an easy place to come home to. Temptations are many. “Newark is a city that is profoundly impacted by the cycle of incarceration, recidivism, and reincarceration,” Mayor Booker has said. “This cycle contributes to crime, unemployment, and the destabiliza-



tion of families, and it sucks up so much of our precious public resources and ultimately undermines the economic and social fabric of our community.”

High rates of incarceration and recidivism undoubtedly have a corrosive effect on individuals and families. But the financial costs associated with this vicious cycle are borne by taxpayers. In 2011, New Jersey is expected to spend nearly 10 percent of its \$28.3 billion budget on public safety and criminal justice. That is money that can't be spent on education, infrastructure, or other vital public services. The Department of Corrections, with a budget of \$1 billion, is the single largest operating agency in New Jersey state government. The state parole board spends about \$100 million to oversee recently released prisoners, and other state agencies—including the Departments of Labor and Workforce Development, Corrections, Human Services, and Law and Public Safety—spend an additional \$180 million. The Department of Human Services budget includes over \$59 million for prisoner-reentry efforts and \$29 mil-

lion for the state's "drug court," a program designed to deal with nonviolent offenders with substance-abuse problems who agree to enter and complete treatment programs.

So in addition to reducing crime and restoring the individual human potential of a large number of formerly incarcerated men, breaking the cycle of recidivism in Newark and elsewhere throughout the state would likely save New Jersey's taxpayers a significant amount of money.

Booker's desire to do something about this costly and seemingly intractable problem struck a chord with the scholars and



Larry Mone (left) and Cory Booker

policy analysts at the Manhattan Institute. "The fact that there were hundreds of thousands of men who would get out of prison and then end up going right back in seemed to us a serious impediment to the fuller realization of the dream embodied in welfare reform," said Husock. In

keeping with the Institute's long-standing interest in reform mayors—Giuliani, Goldsmith, and Milwaukee's John Norquist, for example—and seeking to undertake or support projects at the local level that could have broader implications, the Manhattan Institute began thinking of ways to partner with the Booker administration on the problem of prisoner reentry.

When the possibility of collaboration was broached in preliminary meetings between Booker and Manhattan Institute president Larry Mone, the reaction from both sides was positive. The market-oriented think tank was eager to offer its help, and the Democratic mayor was eager to enlist a partner. Husock began assembling a “kitchen cabinet” of experts charged with addressing the recidivism problem in Newark, including:

- Peter Cove, founder of America Works;
- Deborah Daniels, U.S. assistant attorney general with responsibility for prisoner reentry during the George W. Bush administration;
- Fred Davie, president of Public/Private

Ventures, who had extensive experience evaluating work-oriented programs for ex-offenders through the federally funded Ready4Work demonstration project; and

- Jeremy Travis, president of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and author of a pioneering U.S. Department of Justice study of prisoner reentry.

At the end of 2007, Husock's blue-ribbon committee briefed Booker's staff on the rapid-attachment-to-work strategy. Among those present at the briefing was Deputy Mayor for Economic Development Stefan Pryor, under whose authority Newark's prisoner-reentry services would run. Unlike many traditional programs geared toward skills training, interview coaching, or addiction counseling, the committee explained, this approach would focus exclusively on getting ex-offenders into the workforce as quickly as possible and leave the provision of other essential services for later.

At the briefing's end, Booker declared, "That's what I want to do."

With the partnership firmly established and a commitment to the rapid-attachment-to-work concept in place, the city and the Institute began thinking about how to put this bold idea into action. Newark already had an Office of Reentry, but like many city agencies in the pre-Booker era, its effectiveness had been undermined by a lack of resources and high employee turnover. The Institute put the word out that it was looking for bright people with experience running complex projects in difficult environments to administer what was now being called the Newark Prisoner Reentry Initiative (NPRI).

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That road led to Richard Greenwald, a specialist in the development and implementation of workforce, welfare-to-work, and prisoner-reentry programs, with over 20 years' experience addressing issues facing unemployed people. The Institute hired Greenwald, who began working out of an office in City Hall as a

“loaned executive.” While Mayor Booker and Deputy Mayor Pryor had energy and ambition to spare, they did not have any fiscal flexibility, so Greenwald and the Institute began looking for funding partners.

As this work proceeded, the Institute invited Booker to address a special meeting of its membership at the University Club in New York. In attendance that day was Brent Orrell, then deputy assistant secretary for employment and training at the U.S. Department of Labor. In a private meeting after the speech, Orrell, who was very taken with Booker’s remarks, offered to help secure a \$2 million federal grant to establish NPRI. There was one condition: the money would need to be matched by private donations.

Greenwald and the Institute again hit the pavement in search of philanthropic support, ultimately securing \$3 million in additional funding from individual donors and foundations such as the New Jersey-based Nicholson Foundation, which provided \$1.7 million. Other New Jersey-based foundations, such as the F.M.

Kirby Foundation, also provided significant support. The money would be used to coordinate assistance for up to 1,200 ex-offenders through a network of six providers, such as the Nicholson-funded Opportunity Reconnect program at Essex County College, specializing in different types of clients. The Office of Reentry, located in



Cory Booker addresses the  
Manhattan Institute

City Hall, would be responsible for tracking, measuring, and comparing the results of providers in the network in hopes of improving per-

formance. In a nod to the Manhattan Institute's history and association with data-driven policing, the regular meetings at which performance was analyzed and compared would eventually be dubbed "Reentry-Stat."

"There were lots of social-service providers in Newark already—a crazy quilt of contracts from various levels of government agencies, parole officers, substance-abuse counselors, half-

way houses,” according to Husock. “In effect, we were overlaying a control system—as a pilot—on a very small corner of the whole reentry world to try to show that things could be done in a different way.” NPRI would provide a streamlined one-stop shop for referrals and wraparound services from long-established provider organizations in the Newark community.

In November 2008, the search began for someone to administer the new incarnation of the City of Newark’s Office of Prisoner Reentry. A state hiring freeze meant that the Manhattan Institute and the Booker administration would have to come up with a creative way of paying the successful candidate’s salary. The job went to Ingrid Johnson, a New Jersey native and Rutgers Law School graduate who gave up a promising career in a Top 100 law firm to become supervising attorney of Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ), a statewide, independent nonprofit corporation providing free legal assistance to the poor. At LSNJ, Johnson managed 15 attorneys, four paralegals, and more than 750 active cases for low-wage and immi-



grant workers and individuals with criminal records. Critically, she had experience launching a prisoner-reentry program and had testified before the New Jersey legislature regarding help for ex-offenders. As chair of Reentry Initiatives in the City of Newark, Johnson assumed responsibility for executing the Department of Labor grant, contracting with providers, and articulating the vision of NPRI. Her salary was paid by the Manhattan Institute.

“I think that Mayor Booker has recognized that when people come home from prison or jail, most of them want to work. They want a good job. They want to support their families; they want to support themselves,” said Johnson. With NPRI’s help, more and more ex-offenders in Newark are doing just that. As of November 2011, the agencies that have contracted with the city through NPRI had enrolled 1,436 program participants, exceeding the benchmark set by the Department of Labor. Provider organizations have placed more than 1,000 people in unsubsidized jobs, with an average hourly wage of \$9.32.

More impressive than the number of ex-offenders being served is that those placed in jobs are, by and large, holding on to them. “We have achieved a less than 10 percent recidivism rate for a one-year recidivism mark,” said Johnson. “Seventy-five percent of our participants who obtain jobs keep them for six months or longer.”

*The partnership between the Democratic mayor and the right-leaning think tank caught Chris Christie’s attention.*

It wasn’t long before the successful partnership between the Democratic mayor and the right-leaning think tank caught the attention of another reform-minded New Jersey politician: Chris Christie. Short-

ly after Christie’s election in 2009, the Institute’s senior staff and a select group of scholars met with the Republican governor to explore opportunities for collaboration with his new administration. One of the many areas of mutual interest that were discussed at that meeting was prisoner reentry, which the governor was famil-

iar with from his time as U.S. attorney. Based on the Institute's success in Newark, Christie asked the Manhattan Institute for a report on how his administration could implement similar reforms on a statewide level.

From the beginning, the major stakeholders hoped that the NPRI approach would lead to insights that could be taken to scale. According to Orrell, the federal government's goal in making the grant was "to establish Newark as a learning platform for communities across the country that are grappling with the reentry crisis" and "move from helping a few hundred individuals in cities with thousands of ex-offenders to a strategy that serves enough ex-offenders and thereby helps an entire city." In recent months, representatives from numerous cities around the country have inquired about the success of NPRI and, specifically, the role played by the Manhattan Institute as a relationship broker, fund-raiser, and project facilitator. These cities include Detroit, Washington, D.C., Indianapolis, and Camden and Paterson, New Jersey.

“The plan was always to test the idea, establish proof of concept, and try to influence the standards system. States spend billions of dollars on this stuff, to little effect,” Husock maintains.

From late 2010 to early 2011, the Manhattan Institute spent six months conducting intensive interviews with top New Jersey officials and stakeholders at every level of government in the state to get their thoughts and recommendations for how reentry systems could be improved. The final report, which includes a set of recommendations on how to better align corrections, parole, labor, law enforcement, child welfare, and other New Jersey agencies around a successful reentry strategy, was the subject of a page one, above-the-fold story in the *Star-Ledger* in March 2011. “The report’s conclusions are the result of a broad, months-long review involving several state departments and the Manhattan Institute, a conservative New York City-based think tank with a progressive reputation on prison issues,” the newspaper stated. Governor Christie and his staff are currently considering the report’s recommendation to

make the parole board the lead state agency coordinating all aspects of prisoner reentry.

Bringing the Newark model for prisoner reentry to scale at the state level in New Jersey and beyond represents the culmination of the Manhattan Institute's original hopes for the project. "We wanted to create a model that would inspire imitation—just as the CompStat system in policing has inspired imitation," said Husock. "That's our long-term goal: to redeploy the resources that are routinely spent by states all across the country on reentry services in such a way that people don't end up going back to prison but instead join the social and economic mainstream."

## ABOUT THE MANHATTAN INSTITUTE

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