

Prison reform in the 19th century

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So, every time I re-read a source or try to write, I keep thinking back to what I am actually trying to argue. I've finally figured out my argument:

Hawthorne portrayed Hollingsworth as a failure because he did not believe in the prison reform efforts of the time. I came to this through looking at a lot of parallels in my sources, and finding different reasons for why my hypothesis is true. The two types of prison reform in the early 1800s were meant to reform criminals through very strict methods.

They were so strict that prisoners were not allowed to communicate at all. I think that the strictness of these systems was too harsh for many people. Also, these systems died out quickly because people started to realize that reforming criminals did not actually prevent crime itself. So, because Hollingsworth's school was never accomplished, Hawthorne is showing how these types of systems will fail. Advocates of prison reform were also very extremist. Like other reforms of the time, prison reform had advocates to only stuck to one idea.

For example, people believed that the source of criminal misbehavior was the family. Thus, prison chaplains were brought in to inspire the criminals and be their new family. However, this idea of replacing an entire family with a chaplain was obviously not going to help criminals that much. But, everybody believed that religion was the only way to solve the problem. This extremism is shown through Hollingsworth - he does not want to believe in any other ideas.

His failure is a warning against the extremism of prison reformists. One of my sources described how many of the reform movements failed in the early

1800s. Dorothea Dix helped improve insane asylums and hospitals, and was able to cause a vast increase in funds to help these causes. However, even with all the money that asylums got, they were not prevented from class discrimination. Depending on one's race, he/she would receive different treatment, and some would receive it faster than others.

Also, many looked down on reform movements in general because they feared that constantly giving help would make criminals dependent on others. Thus, they would not know how to take care of themselves.

Transcendentalists saw philanthropy in general as a threat to self-reliance. So, Hawthorne was disoriented with prison reform because the ideas behind the reform only caused more problems - like increasing class divisions and only hurting the poor more.