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Prisons in Turmoil

John Irwin

The changes within the penal institution during the last two centuries have been fairly well documented, both in the greater literature and in the preceding pieces. Irwin examines three major periods in the development of the penal institution. The author first examines a composite of what he terms "The Big House." This amounted to an institutional warehouse in which the goal of doing time was of paramount concern for both administrators and residents. After World War II, however, The Big House evolved into the "Correctional Institution," a clear shift toward the goal of rehabilitation and reform. The indeterminate sentence, offender classification, and treatment were all major portions of this new format. Yet a third shift occurred, defined by Irwin as the "Contemporary Prison." The latter is characterized by severe racial divisions, violence, and gang influence. The reader is encouraged to consider possible next steps in penal institutional evolution, when examining Irwin's ideas.

The Big House

Most of our ideas about men's prisons are mistaken because they fix on a type of prison—the Big House—that has virtually disappeared during the last twenty-five years. A dominant type of prison in this century, the Big House, emerged, spread, and prevailed, then generated images and illusions and, with considerable help from Hollywood, displayed these to the general society. It caught and held the attention of both the public and sociology. Its images and illusions linger on, surrounding contemporary prisons like a fog and blurring our sight. We must clear the air of false visions, distinguish the Big House as a type, and then move toward an analysis of succeeding types of prisons.

The Big House developed during a long and important phase in the varying history of the prison in the United States. This phase began early in this century and lasted into the 1940s or 1950s and even into the present in some states. Long before this era, the prison had outgrown its infancy as a penitentiary, where the prison planners intended that prisoners be kept in quiet solitude, reflecting penitently on their sins in order that they might cleanse and transform themselves. It also had passed through a half century during which prisoners spent their time in "hard labor," working in prison rock quarries or in profit-making industrial and agricultural enterprises. Eventually, federal legislation and union power forced most convict labor out of the public sector. More recently, prisons in the East, Midwest, and West were touched (most lightly, some belatedly, and a few not at all) by the humanitarian reforms of the "progressive era." Cruel corporal punishment such as flogging, beating, water torture, shackling of inmates to cell walls or hanging them by their thumbs, entombment in small cribs and lone solitary confinement as well as extreme corruption in the appointment of personnel and in the administration of the prison were largely eliminated. The Big House phase followed these reforms.

Although Big Houses appeared in most states, there were many notable exceptions. Many state prison systems never emerged from cruelty and corruption. In a few states, guards unofficially but regularly used brutality and even executions to control prisoners. Some prison administrations continued to

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engage prisoners in very hard labor throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Even in the eastern, Midwestern, and western states where the Big House predominated, there were many residues of earlier phases; silence systems endured through the 1940s. But in most states outside the South, there emerged a type of prison that was relatively free of corporal punishment and that did not engage most prisoners in hard labor. This prison predominated until the "rehabilitative ideal," a new theory of reform, altered penology and the correctional institution appeared. Since the Big House has been the source of most of our ideas about prisons, I shall construct a composite picture of it and then consider some of the exceptions to the type. This will help us to understand its modern progeny.

Physical Description

The Big House was a walled prison with large cell blocks that contained stacks of three or more tiers of one- or two-man cells. On the average, it held 2,500 men. Sometimes a single cell block housed over 1,000 prisoners in six tiers of cells. . . . Overall, cell blocks were harsh worlds of steel and concrete, of unbearable heat and stench in the summer and chilling cold in the winter, of cramped quarters, and of constant droning, shouting, and clanking noise.

The other prominent physical features of the Big House were the yard, the wall, the mess hall, the administration building, the shops, and the industries. The yard, formed by cell blocks and the wall, was a drab place. . . . Better-appointed yards had a few recreational facilities: a baseball diamond, perhaps basketball courts, tables and benches, and handball courts, which often were improvised by using the walls of the cell blocks. The mess hall had rows of tables and benches and invariably was too small to seat the entire population at one time. The thick granite wall encircled the place and, with its gun towers, symbolized the meaning of the Big House.

This granite, steel, cement, and asphalt monstrosity stood as the state's most extreme form of punishment, short of the death penalty. It was San Quentin in California, Sing Sing in New York, Stateville in Illinois, Jackson in Michigan, Jefferson City in Missouri, Canon City in Colorado, and so on. It was the place of banishment and punishment to which convicts were "sent up." Its major characteristics were isolation, routine, and monotony. . . .

Social Organization

The Big House was like all prisons, a place where convicts lived and constructed a world. This world had divisions and strata, special informal rules and meaning, set of enterprises. Some of the patterns and divisions were built upon external characteristics. The prisoners came from both the city and the country. In Clemmer's study in the 1930s it was about half and half. By and large, they were the poorer and less educated persons, those from the wrong side of the tracks. Many of them were drifters, persons who floated from state to state, looking for work and, when they failed to find it, stealing and then brushing against "the law." About half previously had been in a prison or reform school. The most frequent criminal type was the thief, a criminal who searched for the "big score"—a safe burglary or armed robbery. But most of the prisoners never came close to a big score, and those who were serving a sentence for theft, which was over half the population, were typically convicted of very minor crimes. Clemmer noted that most prisoners were "amateurish and occasional offenders. Most typical of burglars are those who break into a house or store and carry away loot or money seldom exceeding eighty dollars—and not those who tunnel under a street and steal sixty thousand dollars worth of gems from a jewelry store."[1]

Many prisoners were black or other nonwhite races, but most in the Big Houses outside the South were white. Racial prejudice,

discrimination, and segregation prevailed. Blacks (and sometimes other nonwhite prisoners) were housed in special sections, in special cell blocks, or at least with cell partners of the same race; and blacks held menial jobs. By rule or informal patterns, blacks and whites sat in separate sections in the mess hall. In fact, in all facets of prison life, patterns of segregation and distance were maintained.

White prisoners kept blacks and, to some extent, other nonwhites "in their place." They did not accept them as equals in the informal social life of the prison and directed constant hate and occasional violence at them. . . .

According to the formal routine, the prisoners rose early; hurriedly ate breakfast; returned to their cells for one of the four or five daily counts; proceeded to work, school, or the yard for a day of idleness; hurriedly ate lunch; counted; went back to work, school, or idleness; hurriedly ate dinner; and returned to their cells for the night. After count, they read, wrote letters or literary works, pursued hobbies, talked to other prisoners, listened to the radio on their ear phones (when this innovation reached the prison), and then went to sleep when the lights were turned off. . . .

This was the formal, or more visible, routine. Within this general outline a complex, subtle, informal prisoner world with several subworlds was also operating. It pivoted around the convict code, a prison adaptation of the thieves' code. Thieves were not the majority, but they were the most frequent criminal type, and their strong commitment to thieves' values, their communication network—which extended through the thieves' world, inside and out—and their loyalty to other thieves gave them the upper hand in prison. . . .

The central rule in the thieves' code was "thou shalt not snitch." In prison, thieves converted this to the dual norm of "do not rat on another prisoner" and "do your own time." Thieves also were obliged by their code to be cool and tough, that is, to maintain respect and dignity; not to show weakness to help other thieves; and to leave most other prisoners alone. Their code dominated the Big House and generally it could be translated into these rules: Do not inform, do not openly interact or cooperate with the guards or the administration, and do your own time. These rules helped to produce a gap of hostility and unfriendliness between prisoners and guards, a hierarchy of prisoners, a system of mutual aid among a minority of prisoners, and patterns of exploitation among others.

The prisoners divided themselves into a variety of special types. In addition to the yeggs, "Johnsons," "people," "right guys," or "regulars"—thieves and persons whom they accepted as trustworthy—there were several types more indigenous to the prison. There were gamblers, who were involved in controlling prison resources, and prison "politicians" and "merchants," supplying and exchanging commodities. There were prison "queens," who openly presented themselves as homosexuals, and "punks," who were considered to have been "turned out"—that is, made into homosexuals by other prisoners or by the prison experience. There was a variety of prison "toughs," persons who were deeply and openly hostile to the prison administration, the conventional society, and most other prisoners and who displayed a readiness to employ violence against others. These types ranged from the less predictable and less social "crazies" to the more predictable and clique-oriented "hard rocks" or "tush hogs." There was the "character," who continuously created humorous derision through his dress, language, story-telling ability, or general behavior. There were the "masses," who broke into the subtypes of "assholes" or "hoosiers," lower- and working-class persons having little or no criminal skill and earning low respect, and "square johns," persons who were not viewed as criminals by the rest of the population and were oriented to conventional society. There was a variety of "dingbats," who were considered to be crazy, but harmless. Finally,

there were "rapos," persons serving sentences for sexual acts such as incest and child molesting, which were repulsive to most prisoners, and "stool pigeons," "rats," or "snitches," who supplied information about other prisoners to authorities.

These types were arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, power, and privilege. At the top of the stack were the right guys, through their propensity to cooperate with each other, their prestige as thieves, and their presentation of coolness and toughness. . . . Very close to the top were the merchants, politicians, and gamblers. They occupied this high position because they largely controlled the scarce prison resources. Characters, when they were accomplished, were awarded a special position with considerable respect and popularity, but not much direct power. Down the ladder were the toughs, who had to be respected because they were a constant threat. The cliques of hard rocks occasionally hurt or killed someone, though seldom anyone with prestige and power. The crazies, who were often very dangerous, were treated with extreme caution, but were avoided and excluded as much as possible. In the middle were the masses who were ignored by the leaders, stayed out of the prison's informal world, and restricted their social activities to small friendship groups or remained "loners." Below them were the queens, punks, rats, and rapos, the latter being at the very bottom of the pile. On the outside of all informal prisoner activities were the dingbats, who were ignored by all.

Most prisoners followed one of three prison careers. The most frequent was that of just doing time. This was the style of the thief and of most other prisoners who shared the thief's primary concern of getting out of prison with maximum dispatch and minimum pain. Doing time meant, above all, avoiding trouble that would place a prisoner in danger or lengthen or intensify his punishment. But in addition, doing time involved avoiding "hard time." To avoid hard time, prisoners stayed active in sports, hobbies, or reading; secured as many luxuries as possible without bringing on trouble; and formed a group of close friends with whom to share resources and leisure hours and to rely on for help and protection.

Thieves who established this style generally confined their group associations to other thieves. Since they had prestige and power in the prison world, however, they occasionally entered into general prisoner affairs, particularly when they were trying to secure luxuries or favors for themselves or friends. Most of the masses followed the pattern of doing time established by thieves, but their friendship groups tended not to be so closely knit and they tended not to enter into the general prison social activities.

Some prisoners, particularly the indigenous prison types, oriented themselves more completely to the prison and tended to construct a total existence there. Donald Cressey and I once described the style of adaptation of convicts who

> seek positions of power, influence and sources of information whether these men are called "shots," "politicians," "merchants," "hoods," "toughs," "gorillas," or something else. A job as secretary to the Captain or Warden, for example, gives an aspiring prisoner information and consequent power, and enables him to influence the assignment or regulation of other inmates. In the same way, a job which allows the incumbent to participate in a racket, such as clerk in the kitchen storeroom where he can steal and sell food, is highly desirable to a man oriented to the convict subculture. With a steady income of cigarettes, ordinarily the prisoner's medium of exchange, he may assert a great deal of influence and purchase these things which are symbols of status among persons oriented to the convict subculture. Even if there is not a well-developed medium of exchange, he can barter goods acquired in his position for equally desirable goods possessed by other convicts. These include information and such things as specially starched, pressed and tailored prison clothing, fancy belts, belt buckles or billfolds, special shoes or any other type of dress

> which will set him apart and will indicate that the prisoner has both the influence to get the goods and the influence necessary to keep them and display them despite prison rules which outlaw doing so.[2]

Many of the persons who occupied these roles and made a world out of prison—that is, followed the strategy sometimes referred to by prisoners as "jailing"—were individuals who had long experiences with jails and prisons beginning in their early teens or even earlier. Actually, they were more familiar with prison than with outside social worlds. . . .

One last strategy followed by a small number of prisoners I labeled "gleaning" in a later study of the California prison system.[3] An old style, it must be included in the description of the Big House. Gleaning involved taking advantage of any resource available to better themselves, to improve their minds, or to obtain skills that would be useful on the outside. In trying to improve themselves, prisoners in Big Houses read, sought formal education through the prison's elementary and high schools (when these existed) and university correspondence courses, and learned trades in the few vocational training programs or in prison job assignments. In addition, they tried to improve themselves in other ways—by increasing social skills and physical appearance. Generally, in gleaning, prisoners attempted to equip themselves for life after prison.

To a great extent, Big House homosexual patterns were a form of prison improvisation. With no possibility for heterosexual contacts, some prisoners performed homosexual acts as "inserters," although they would not do this on the outside. In addition, many young, weaker, less initiated, and perhaps effeminate prisoners were tricked or forced into the role of "insertee" (that is, they were turned out). Often they were trapped in this role by the knowledge that they had succumbed in the past, and after years of performing as a punk, they developed homosexual identities and continued as homosexuals even after release. Finally, some prisoners, particularly prisoners who were thoroughly immersed in the informal prisoner world—that is, who jailed—performed the role of "wolf" or "jocker." A few of these individuals, after an extended period of continued homosexual activities (ostensibly as the inserter, but actually as both the inserter and insertee in many cases), developed a preference for homosexual relationships and continued in their masculine homosexual role on the outside.

Stupefaction. When I was in the Los Angeles County Jail in 1952, waiting to be sentenced to prison, I met a "four-time loser" who was going back to Folsom, the state's long-term Big House. He advised me, "Don't let them send you to Folsom. It's the easiest place to do time but, man, you leave something there you never get back." He was alluding to Folsom's impact on prisoners' mentality, which prisoners referred to as "going stir." I think the term *stupefaction* catches the sense of this expression. The dictionary defines *stupefaction* as the "state of being stupefied; insensibility of mind or feeling." Serving time in a Big House meant being pressed into a slow-paced, rigid routine; cut off from outside contacts and social worlds; denied most ordinary human pleasures and stimulations; and constantly forced to contain anger and hostility. Many persons were able to maintain their spirit under these conditions, and some were even vitalized by the challenge. But most prisoners were somewhat stupefied by it. They learned to blunt their feelings, turn inward, construct fantasy worlds for themselves, and generally throttle their intellectual, emotional, and physical life. In the extreme they fell into a stupor. Victor Nelson describes an old con:

> A trustee in a suit of striped overalls was standing with his arms folded lazily against the handle of the rake, his head resting dejectedly on his arms, his whole attitude that of a man who had worked all day and was very tired although it was only about nine

> o'clock of a cool spring morning. He seemed almost in a coma. There was an expression of utter indifference on his face and his eyes were glazed with absentmindedness. He was, although I did not know it then, a living example of the total, final, devastating effect of imprisonment upon the human being.[4]

The Big House did not reform prisoners or teach many persons crime. It embittered many. It stupefied thousands.

The Correctional Institution

After World War II, many states replaced Big Houses with correctional institutions, which, when they were newly constructed, looked different, were organized differently, housed different types of prisoners, and nurtured different prison social worlds. Importantly, they had a different effect on prisoners. They spread and became the dominant type of prison in the 1950s, if not in numbers, at least in the minds of penologists. And, like Big Houses, their images live on, blurring our view of contemporary prisons. Consequently, we must distinguish this type of prison to understand the modern violent prison. The correctional institution's emergence was related to broad changes in our society. Briefly, the postwar United States—prosperous, urbanized, and mobile—confronted a new set of pressing social problems. Hard times, natural disasters (floods, droughts, and tornadoes), epidemics, illiteracy, and the "dangerous classes," had been updated to or replaced by poverty, mental health, family disorganization, race relations, juvenile delinquency, and urban crime. Americans faced these with a fundamentally altered posture. The Great Depression and World War II had moved them from their isolationist and individualist position, and they accepted, even demanded, government intervention into conditions that they believed should and could be changed.

Along with all organs of government, agencies whose official function was intervention into domestic social problems grew, gained power, and proliferated. Peopling these agencies and leading the large social services expansion were old and new professionals: physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, urban planners, sociologists, and a new group of specialists in penology. The latter group—a growing body of college-educated employees and administrators of prisons, parole, and probation and a few academic penologists whom I will hereafter refer to collectively as "correctionalists"—went after the apparently mushrooming crime problem. These correctionalists were convinced and were able to convince many state governments and interested segments of the general population that they could reduce crime by curing criminals of their criminality. . . .

The innovative penologists kept abreast of the developments in the new social sciences and began constructing a philosophy of penology based on the concept that criminal behavior was caused by identifiable and changeable forces. This led them to the conclusion that the primary purpose of imprisonment should be "rehabilitation" a new form of reformation based on scientific methods. This new penology is generally referred to as the rehabilitative ideal. . . .

The nation's leading penologists agreed as early as 1870, when they formed the National Prison Association, to establish rehabilitation as the primary purpose of prisons and to alter prison routines in order to implement rehabilitation (particularly to introduce indeterminate sentencing). At that time, however, the society was not ready for what appeared to be a nonpunitive approach to crime. Until World War II and the changes described above had occurred, the architects of rehabilitation experimented in juvenile institutions like Elmira, New York, where Zebulon Brockway introduced a full rehabilitative program, and they slipped bits and pieces of rehabilitation into Big Houses—for example, a more elaborate classification system and a small department of rehabilitation. After the war, receiving an okay from

the public and various state governments and an infusion of more funds and more college-trained employees, the innovators in penology created the new prison, the correctional institution. In some states, such as Wisconsin and Minnesota, this meant reorganizing the staff structures and introducing new programs into old prisons, but in others, such as California and New York, it also meant constructing many new facilities. In both cases, the correctionalists organized the prisons around three procedures: indeterminate sentencing, classification, and the treatment that they had been developing for decades.

The Indeterminate Sentencing System

According to the early planners of the rehabilitative prison, prison administrators should have the discretionary power to release the prisoner when the administrators or their correctional experts determine that he is cured of criminality. Many early supporters of the rehabilitative ideal, such as Karl Menninger, advocated sentences of zero to life for all offenders so that correctional professionals could concentrate on treating criminals and releasing them when their illness (criminality) was cured. In actuality, no prison system in the United States or any other place achieved this extreme, but California, after thirty-five years of developing an indeterminate sentence routine through legislation and administrative policies, came the closest. After 1950, the Adult Authority—the official name of the California parole board—exercised the power to determine an individual's sentence within statutory limits for a particular crime, to set a parole date before this sentence was finished, and, at any time until the fixed sentence was completed, to restore the sentence back to its statutory maximum or any other length within the margins. It exercised these powers with no requirements for due process or review of decisions. The statutory limits in California—for example, one to ten years for grand larceny, one to fifteen for forgery and second-degree burglary, one to life for second-degree robbery, and five to life for first-degree robbery—gave the Adult Authority large margins within which to exercise their discretion.

Under this system, prisoners remained unsure of how much time they would eventually serve until they completed their sentence. While in prison, they appeared before the Adult Authority annually until the Adult Authority set their release date, invariably within six months of their last board appearance. While individuals were on parole or awaited release, the Adult Authority could refix their sentences back to the maximum and reactivate the process of annual board appearances for violations of the rules of the prison or conditions of parole.

Board appearances were the most important milestones in the inmates imprisonment, and the Adult Authority had full power over their lives. According to the ideal, parole boards should use this power to release prisoners when they were rehabilitated. This presupposed, however, that the correctionalists had procedures for identifying and changing criminal characteristics, which they did not, and that parole boards had procedures for determining when these changes had occurred, which they did not. It also presupposed that rehabilitation of the offender was parole boards' major concern, which it was not. Even in the early planning stages the advocates of indeterminate sentencing intended the discretionary powers to be used to control prisoners and detain indefinitely those who were viewed as dangerous by various authorities (district attorneys, police chiefs, and influential citizens). . . . In addition, although they never admitted this, the advocates of indeterminate sentence systems understood and appreciated that its discretionary powers permitted them to give shorter sentences, or even no sentences, to influence individuals. So, in actual practice, while professing to balance the seriousness of a crime and rehabilitative criteria, parole

boards used their discretionary powers to enforce conformity to prison rules and parole routines, avoid criticism from outside authorities and citizens, award higher social status, and express personal prejudice and whim. . . .

Classification

An ideal correctional institution primarily organized to rehabilitate prisoners would require an elaborate, systematic diagnostic and planning process that determined the nature of the individual's criminality and prescribed a cure. Through the decades before the 1950s, the creators of the rehabilitative approach steadily developed more complex classification systems, ostensibly to accomplish these ends. Theoretically, the finished version that they incorporated in the new postwar correctional institutions operated as follows. First, a team of professionals—psychologists, case workers, sociologists, vocational counselors, and psychiatrists—tested the criminal, interviewed him and gathered life history information. Then a team of these correctionalists formed an initial classification committee and reviewed the tests and evaluations, planned the prisoner's therapeutic routine, assigned him to a particular prison, and recommended particular rehabilitative programs for him. In the final stage, classification committees at particular prisons periodically reviewed the prisoner's progress, recommended changes in programs, and sometimes transferred him to another prison.

The classification committees in the first correctional institutions tended to follow this ideal in appearance, but they actually operated quite differently. First, the social sciences never supplied them with valid diagnostic methods and effective cures for criminality. Second, the committees never abandoned control and other management concerns, which classification systems had acquired in the decades when they operated in Big Houses. . . .

Treatment

A variety of effective treatment strategies would complete the ideal correctional institution. As stressed above, none were discovered. What actually existed in the correctional institutions in the 1950s was care and treatment. An administrative branch that coexisted with the custody branch, planned and administered three types of treatment programs—therapeutic, academic, and vocational—and generated reports on prisoners' progress for the institutional classification committees and the parole board.

The most common therapeutic program was group counseling, which, because it was led by staff persons with little or no training in clinical procedures, was a weak version of group therapy. Originally, the plan was to hire psychiatrists and clinical psychologists, but the pay was too small and the working conditions too undesirable to attract those professionals. Some persons with social work training, who were willing to work for the lower salaries, filled in some of the gaps, but in states such as California, where dozens of group leaders were needed, even their numbers were too small. So staff persons with no formal training in psychology led many, if not most, groups in correctional institutions. Most prisoners participated in group counseling programs, because they were led to believe by parole board members and the treatment staff that they would not be granted a parole unless they participated. Also, they believed that unacceptable traits or attitudes revealed in the sessions would be reported by the staffers, and this would reduce their chances of being paroled early. In addition, many prisoners had a strong distaste for discussing sensitive, personal issues and disparaged other prisoners for doing so. The result was that group counseling sessions were invariably very bland. Few prisoners took them seriously or participated sincerely or vigorously.

. . .[F]ew prisoners received individual treatment from psychiatrists or psychologists. Toward the end of the 1950s, the more

persistent correctionalists experimented with "milieu therapy" by attempting to convert prisons or units within prisons into "therapeutic communities." More recently, contemporary correctionalists have introduced more intense therapeutic forms, such as "behavior modification" and "attack therapy." However, group counseling, which is inexpensive and easier to implement, was the dominant form of therapy when correctional institutions were at their peak. The academic and vocational education programs had more substance than the therapy treatment programs. All the innovative correctional institutions had formed elementary and high school programs in the 1950s, and many had formed links with universities and were making correspondence courses available to some prisoners. All correctional institutions attempted vocational training. In California during the 1950s, those who desired and were able to enter the programs (there were fewer openings than prisoners) could receive training in cooking, baking, butchering, dry cleaning, shoe repair, sewing machine repair, auto mechanics, auto body and fender repair, small motor repair, sheet metal machining, printing, plumbing, painting, welding, and nursing. All these training programs had inherent weaknesses, and they seldom fully equipped a prisoner for a position in the trade. One of these weaknesses was that some training programs, such as baking and cooking, were appendages of prison housekeeping enterprises and were insufficiently related to outside vocational enterprises. In other cases, the equipment, the techniques, and the knowledge of the instructor were obsolete.

Indeterminate sentences, classification, and treatment were the actualization of the rehabilitative ideal in correctional institutions. As the descriptions indicate, they fell short of the ideal. The reasons for this are varied. In spite of the intentions and efforts of the most sincere visionaries of rehabilitation, they were never able to realize their plans. The public and most government policy makers continued to demand that prisons first accomplish their other assigned tasks: punishment, control, and restraint of prisoners. In addition, the new correctional institutions were not created in a vacuum but planned in ongoing prison systems which had long traditions, administrative hierarchies, divisions, informal social worlds, and special subcultures among the old staff. The new correctionalists were never able to rid the prison systems of the old regime, though often they tried; and the old timers, many of whom were highly antagonistic to the new routines, resisted change, struggled to maintain as much control as possible, and were always successful in forcing an accommodation between old and new patterns. So correctional institutions were never totally, or even mainly, organized to rehabilitate prisoners. Nevertheless, an entirely new prison resulted from the rehabilitative ideal and through its rhetoric, which correctionalists used to defend new programs and disguise other purposes, achieved a temporary unity in the ranks. This type of prison spread throughout the United States, replacing many, perhaps most, Big Houses. In many ways it was a great improvement, and some correctionalists still look on it as the best we can hope for. However, it contained many unnecessary inhumanities, injustices, and idiocies, though for many years these were less visible. Eventually, its own flaws and certain external social changes destroyed it (or at least damaged it beyond repair).

To complete the description of the correctional institution, I shall focus on Soledad, which was opened in 1952, which was planned and operated as an exemplary correctional institution, and in which I served five years during its golden age. All correctional institutions, certainly, had some unique features, but Soledad during the 1950s is a superior example of the type.

Soledad: The Formal Structure

Soledad prison was part of California's very large investment in the new penology.

The state emerged from World War II with a rapidly expanding population, an apparently rising crime rate, relatively full state coffers, and a liberal citizenry. In a few years the state allocated massive sums for higher education, highway construction, and prisons. In the 1950s, in addition to two new "guidance centers," the state constructed six new men's prisons, a new women's prison, and a special narcotics treatment center. Soledad, the first of the men's prisons to be completed after the war, was planned, constructed, and operated as one of the essential parts in a large rehabilitative correctional organization. It was labeled California Training Facility and was intended as the prison for younger, medium risk, more trainable prisoners.

Soledad's physical structure radically departs from that of the Big Houses. It has no granite wall; instead, circling the prison is a high fence with gun towers situated every few hundred feet and nestled in the corners. The nine cell blocks stem over a long hall. Two relatively pleasant dining rooms with tile floors and octagonal oak tables, a spacious library, a well equipped hospital, a laundry, an education building, a gym, several shops, and the administration building connect to this hall. In fact, the entire prison community operates in and around the hall, and prisoners can (and many of them do) live day after day without ever going outside.

Each cell block (called a "wing") had a "day room" jutting off the side at the ground level, and all the inside walls in the prison were painted in pastel colors—pale blue, pale green light yellow, and tan. All blocks originally had one-man cells though many were assigned two occupants later. All cells except those in one small wing used for new prisoners and for segregation and isolation (O wing) had solid doors with a small, screened inspection window. The cells in all cell blocks (except O wing) were in three tiers around the outside of the wings, so each cell had an outside window. Instead of bars, the windows had small panes with heavy metal moldings. All cells originally had a bunk, a desk, and a chair. The close security cells also had a sink and toilet. In the five medium-security cell blocks, the prisoners carried keys to their own cells. A row of cells could be locked by a guard's setting a locking bar, but in the 1950s, except for regular counts and special lockdowns, prisoners in medium-security wings entered and left the cells at their own discretion.

The formal routine at Soledad was more relaxed than in most Big Houses. On a weekday the lights came on at 7:00 A.M., but there was no bell nor whistle. The individual "wing officers" released their cell blocks one at a time for breakfast. A prisoner could eat or could sleep another hour before work. The food was slightly better than average prison fare, which is slightly inferior to average institution fare and ranks well below state hospitals and the armed services. One pleasant aspect of the dining routine was that prisoners were allowed to linger for ten or twenty minutes and drink unlimited amounts of coffee. After breakfast, prisoners reported to their work or school assignment. Before lunch there was a count, during which all prisoners had to be in their cells or at a designated place where guards counted them, then lunch, a return to work or school, and another count before dinner. During the day the cell blocks were open, and prisoners could roam free, from their blocks, through the hall, to the large yard and its few recreational facilities, and to the library or gym. After dinner the wing officer kept the front door to the cell block locked except at scheduled unlocks for school, gym, library, and, during the summer, "night yard."

On the weekends, prisoners were idle, except for kitchen and a few hospital and maintenance workers. The cell blocks, gym, yard, and library remained open all day. Although they could visit on any day, most visitors came on weekends. The visiting room had clusters of padded chairs around coffee tables, and prisoners could sit close to and even touch their visitors, a relatively pleasant visiting arrangement. On Sunday the highlight of the week occurred: two show-

ings of a three- or four-year-old Hollywood movie.

A few rules were perceived by prisoners as unnecessary, arbitrary, and irksome—rules such as, "no standing on tiers" or "prisoners must walk double file on one side of the hall." But in general, Soledad had a more relaxed and pleasant formal routine than most prisons.

The rehabilitative aspect of Soledad was prominent. As its official name implied, it offered a broad selection of vocational training programs. It also had a good elementary and high school program, through which a prisoner could receive a diploma from the local outside school district. Rounding out rehabilitation was the group counseling program in which the Adult Authority, classification committees, and prisoners' counselors coerced prisoners to participate (if they did not, they were warned that they would not receive a parole). One psychiatrist treated some individuals, but usually only the few whom the Adult Authority referred for special reasons, such as a history of violent or sex crimes. The counseling groups met once a week, and the majority of inmates attended them. In the second half of the 1950s, the treatment staff introduced more intensive counseling programs in which the groups met daily. But weekly group counseling led by relatively untrained guards and other staff members was the total therapy component for most prisoners.

Informal Life. Soledad, like all correctional institutions, developed different group structures, intergroup relationships, and informal systems of social control from those in Big Houses. Some of these differences were a result of changes in the prisoner population, the most important being the shift in ethnic and racial balance. In California the percentages of non-white prisoners had been increasing steadily and, by 1950, had passed 40 percent: about 25 percent Chicano and 15 percent black. This shift towards nonwhite prisoners was occurring in most large eastern, midwestern, and western prison systems. The era of total white dominance in Big Houses was rapidly approaching an end.

More and more Tejanos—Mexicans raised in Texas—were coming to California and its prisons. The Tejanos were different from Los Angeles's Chicanos, who made up the largest group of Mexicans. More Tejanos were drug addicts; in fact, they introduced heroin to the Los Angeles Chicanos. They spoke more Spanish and Calo, the Spanish slang that developed in the United States, and were generally less Americanized. The two groups did not like each other, kept apart in jail, and sometimes fought.

All the Chicanos had experienced extreme prejudice throughout their lives, particularly in the public schools, and were somewhat hostile toward white prisoners. However, many Los Angeles Chicanos had associated with whites, particularly white criminals with whom they had engaged in crime. Heroin, which was spreading from the Tejanos through the Los Angeles Mexican neighborhoods and then into some white neighborhoods, intermixed Chicanos and Anglos even more. While some white prisoners disliked Chicanos, in general they feared and respected them, because whites believed that Chicanos would quickly employ violence when insulted or threatened. Consequently, between the two ethnic groups there was enmity, mixed with respect on the part of whites, but many individuals from both groups crossed over this barrier and maintained friendly relationships.

Black prisoners also divided into two groups: persons raised in Los Angeles or the San Francisco Bay Area and others who had migrated to California from the South and Southwest. Here, too, were prejudice and hostility between whites and blacks, but there were many whites and blacks who had intermixed and cooperated in criminal activities. This was more likely to have occurred between urban blacks and whites. So again, there was a gap between the two racial groups, but considerable crossing over the gap. The gap between Chicanos and blacks was wider, because Chicanos were more

deeply prejudiced and hostile than whites were toward blacks.

Still over half of Soledad's population in the 1950s was white. Most white prisoners were working-class and lower-class youths raised in Los Angeles, San Diego, and the San Francisco Bay Area. There was a smaller group of whites from the small cities and towns in California: Fresno, Bakersfield, Modesto, and Stockton. Even though most whites in the prison were descendants of migrants from Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas, the heartland of the United States, the prisoners from the smaller towns carried many more rural traditions and were labeled "Okie" in the prisons. The remainder of the white prisoners were a conglomeration of middle-class persons, drifters, servicemen, and state raised youths (individuals who had been raised by state agencies, including the California Youth Authority).

Members of all these different ethnic segments tended to form separate groups and social worlds in Soledad. This differentiation was further complicated by the divisions based on criminal orientations, which were more numerous than in past eras. The thieves were present, but their numbers were diminishing. This system of theft had been carried to California from the East and Midwest, but it was not crossing racial lines and was being replaced by drug addiction among whites. The thieves present in Soledad were very cliquish, practiced mutual aid, did not trust other prisoners, but were respected by them. However, they were not able to dominate the informal world as they had in Big Houses.

A new deviant subculture, that of the "dope fiend" (heroin addict), was spreading in California and became very prominent in the California prisons during the 1950s. Drug addiction brought to Los Angeles by the Tejanos had metastasized in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and most of the Chicanos and a large number of the young, working-class and lower-class white and black prisoners from Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, and Oakland carried the patterns of this special subculture. In the era of the Big House, other prisoners, particularly thieves, did not trust dope fiends, because they believed that drug addicts were weak and would inform under pressure. But in Soledad and other California prisons in the 1950s, dope fiends were the emergent group, had respect, and, in fact, were rather snobbish. While in prison, perhaps in compensation for their individualistic, antisocial, passive, and often rapacious lifestyle while addicted, they were very affable, sociable, active, and verbal. At work and leisure they tended to form small cliques and spend their time telling drug stories Many of them were involved in intellectual anti-artistic activities.

A smaller group of "weed heads" or "grasshoppers" (marijuana users) were present in Soledad. This was before the psychedelic movement and weed heads were urban lower-class or working-class white, Chicano, and black youths who participated in a cultlike subculture; whose carriers lived in "far-out pads," wore "sharp threads," rode around in "groovy shorts," listened to "cool" jazz, sipped exotic liqueurs or wine coolers, and generally were "cool." In prison, weed heads continued to be cool and cliquish. Other prisoners, particularly dope fiends, thought they were silly and stayed away from them. . . .

Most black prisoners who had engaged in systematic theft were not thieves, but "hustlers." Segregation and prejudice cut blacks off from the older tradition of theft. When they migrated to the northern, midwestern, and western cities, blacks developed their own system of thievery, which was fashioned after patterns of early white con men—flimflammers—who toured the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These flimflammers victimized all categories of rural people and imparted the styles of "short con" to blacks. In the cities, many blacks built on these original lessons and became hustlers. In general, hustling meant making money through one's

wits and conversation rather than through force or threat. It involved short con games such as "greasy pig," "three card monte," and "the pigeon drop" [and] rackets such as the numbers, and pimping.

Like the other types of criminals, hustlers formed their own groups. Conversation was a major part of their style of theft, and conversation—"shucking and jiving," bragging about hustling, pimping, and the sporting life—was their major prison activity. An ex-convict describes the activities of a black prisoner:

> he was off into that bag—Iceberg Slim [a famous pimp who wrote a successful paperback description of pimping] and all that—wearing their Cadillacs around the big yard.[5]

A special deviant orientation shared by at least 10 percent of the population at Soledad was that of the state-raised youth. Many prisoners had acquired this special orientation in the youth prisons; it involved the propensity to form tightly knit cliques, a willingness to threaten and actually to engage in violence for protection or for increases in power, prestige, and privilege, and a preference for prison patterns and styles as opposed to those on the outside. Many state-raised youths formed gangs in adult prisons, stole from and bullied other prisoners, and participated in the prison sexual world of jockers, queens, and punks.

Most prisoners were not committed "criminals." At least a quarter of the young people in prison in the 1950s were working- and lower-class people who had been "hanging out" in their neighborhoods or drifting around the country, looking for work and a niche for themselves. They had been involved in crime only irregularly and haphazardly, and usually it was very unsophisticated crime. They were often confused about the world and their place in it and saw themselves as "fuck-ups" or losers.

. . . These fuck-ups were the masses in the prison. In the Big Houses they were the hoosiers and in Soledad the assholes, and they were pushed aside and demeaned by other criminals. However, Soledad was a more heterogeneous prison, and the disparagement and exclusion were not as intense or complete. So fuck-ups occasionally rose to positions of power (to the extent that these existed), joined groups of other criminally oriented prisoners, and even began to identify themselves as dope fiends, heads, or hustlers. Thieves were more careful about associating with assholes, but on occasion one might befriend and tutor an inexperienced young person.

In addition to fuck-ups, there were many prisoners, mostly white, who had committed only one felony or a few serious crimes and did not consider themselves, nor were they considered by others, as criminals. Other prisoners referred to them as square johns and ignored them unless they wanted to take advantage of their knowledge or skills. (Many of these square johns were better educated, and a few of them were professionals). In general, however, they were ignored, and they kept to themselves. They either served their time as isolates or formed very small friendship groups with other square johns.

This subcultural mix of prisoners resisted the establishment of a single overriding convict code or the emergence of a single group of leaders. The old convict code did not have the unanimity and force that it had in the Big House. The number of thieves who formerly established and maintained this code was too small, and other criminals—hustlers, dope fiends, heads—with other codes of conduct competed for status and power in the informal realm.

The administrative regime influenced by the rehabilitative ideal inhibited the development of the exploitative, accommodative system, described by Sykes and Messinger, in which politicians' power depended on their control over certain enterprises, allowing them to make important decisions and obtain scarce material, and on their monopoly on information. In this era of professionalism, the staff was much more deeply involved in the day-to-day running of the

prison. There was a partially successful attempt to prevent convicts from controlling the prison, and much more information flowed between staff and prisoners. Unlike his counterpart in most Big Houses, a captain's clerk could not autonomously transfer prisoners from one cell to another, squash disciplinary reports, transfer disliked guards to the night watch in a distant gun tower, or place friends on extra movie unlocks. Similarly, the storeroom clerk could not confiscate 20 percent of the prison's coffee, sugar, and dried fruit supply for his and his friends' use or for "wheeling and dealing." These prisoners could manipulate the routine slightly or skim off some commodities, but not enough to elevate them to the levels of power possessed by politicians or merchants in the Big Houses.

Despite the absence of these order-promoting processes, Soledad was still a very peaceful and orderly institution during most of the 1950s. The general mood among prisoners was tolerance and relative friendliness. The races were somewhat hostile toward each other and followed informal patterns of segregation, but there was commingling between all races and many prisoners maintained close friendships with members of their racial groups. During my five years at Soledad there were only a few knife fights, two murders, and one suicide.

Soledad's Ambience. To a great extent, the peace and order at Soledad were the result of a relatively optimistic, tolerant, and agreeable mood. Part of this mood stemmed from the enthusiasm for the new penal routine that the prisoners, returning or returning to prison, experienced in those early years. Most of us who came through the Chino Guidance Center and then moved into Soledad had been raised in the neighborhoods around Los Angeles, where we were involved in a variety of criminal subcultures. Consequently, we had received considerable information about the "joints" before coming to prison. We knew approximately how much time convicts served for a particular crime and how to conduct ourselves in prison: "don't rap to bulls," "don't get friendly with or accept gifts from older cons," "play it cool," and "do your time." The Chino Guidance Center threw us off track. It was a new institution with physical attires similar to Soledad's. It had pastel-colored cell blocks named Cyprus and Madrone and guards who had been selected for the guidance center because of their ability to relate to prisoners. We were bombarded with sophisticated tests administered by young, congenial, "college types." We were examined thoroughly by dentists and physicians. For six weeks we attended daily three-hour sessions with one of the college types. During the rest of the day we played basketball, sat in the sun, worked out, or engaged in other recreation while we recovered from our profoundly deleterious "dead time" period, the county jail.

In this relatively agreeable environment, we became convinced that the staff members were sincere and were trying to help us. It was implied or stated that they would locate our psychological problems, vocational deficiencies, and physical effects and would fix them. The guidance center staff promised (mostly by implication) and we believed that they were going [to] make new people out of us.

The enthusiasm and the new hope continued into the early years of Soledad and the other correctional institutions. We believed then that the new penal approach was producing a much more humane prison routine. We experienced the new attitudes of many staff persons as a positive outcome of the new era. Although there were many old-school guards, there were many new guards with college experience and a new attitude toward prisons and prisoners. Many of the old guards were even converted or drawn into the new attitude by the new penology, and they tended to see themselves as rehabilitative agents or at least as more humane "correctional officers," as their new job title read.

The physical environment was not as harsh as in older prisons. The one-man cells,

modern heating system, dining room, visiting room, gym, and so on were marked improvements over Big Houses. Rules and rule enforcement were not as strict; there was more freedom of movement; and the relationships among prisoners and between staff and prisoners were more tolerant and friendly than in Big Houses. . . .

Tips and Cliques. The peace and order at Soledad also resulted from a system of "tips" and cliques. Tips were extended social networks or crowds that were loosely held together by shared subcultural orientations or preprison acquaintances. Most of the tips were intraracial, and they were overlapping and connected. Consequently, an individual could be involved in more than one tip and usually was related to the tips that connected with his own. For example, I was a member of a large network of Los Angeles young people who had been involved in theft and heroin. My Los Angeles thieves-dope fiends tip was connected to a similar tip of San Francisco thieves-dope fiends through ties established in the youth prisons. There were tips of persons who had experienced the youth prisons together, lived in the same town or neighborhood ("home boys"), and engaged in the same criminal activities. A sense of loyalty existed between members of a tip. A member may not have known other members well, but common membership in the network automatically established some rapport and obligations and increased the possibility of friendship.

Prisoners formed smaller cliques within or across tips. . . . Clique members worked, celled, hung around the tier, yard, and day room, ate, and engaged in the same leisure activities together. The basis of organization varied greatly. Sometimes they formed out of small groups of prisoners who became acquainted at work or in the cell blocks. More often, they developed among persons who shared interest in some activity in prison, preprison experiences, subcultural orientations, and, thereby, tip membership. When clique members were also members of the same tip, the cliques were more cooperative, stable, and cohesive.

Most cliques were constantly transforming. Members were paroled, were transferred, or shifted friendships and interests. Former clique members continued to experience ties of friendships, and this extended friendship bonds outside existing cliques. These clique friendship ties and the ties to other tip members who were interconnected with the cliques established overlapping and extensive bonds of communication, friendship, and obligation through which cooperative enterprises were accomplished and conflict reduced. . . . Many disputes were avoided by indirect negotiations through the tips and cliques. . . . In the absence of more effective social organization, the tip and clique networks established ties and bridged gaps between prisoners, even between races, serving to promote peace and cooperation among prisoners. This system is similar to the clan, extended family, or totem organizations that served as ordering systems among primitive peoples before the establishment of larger, overreaching social organizations.

The Rehabilitative Ideal and Order

The rehabilitative philosophy and its actualizations directly promoted social order. Many of us accepted the altered self-conception contained in the new criminology that underpinned the ideal. We began to believe that we were sick, and we started searching for cures. Many of us adopted Sigmund Freud as our prophet, and we read and reread the *Basic Writings* as well [as] the works of the lesser prophets: Adler, Jung, Horney, and Fromm. Some of us became self-proclaimed experts in psychoanalysis and spent many hours analyzing each other. (Freudian interpretations provided us with new material for the old game of the dozens.)

Accepting this conception of ourselves as sick directed, our attention inward and away from social and prison circumstances. It in-

hibited us from defining our situation as unfair and from developing critical, perhaps collective, attitudes toward the society and the prison administration. We were divided psychologically by focusing on our own personalities and searching for cures of our individual pathologies.

In attempting to cure ourselves, we involved ourselves in the programs that grew out of the rehabilitative ideal. The formal policy in Soledad was that every prisoner had to have a full-time work, school, or vocational training assignment. The classification committees and the Adult Authority encouraged prisoners to pursue either academic or vocational training. Prisoners were required by policy to continue school until they tested at the fifth-grade level. A few prisoners refused to work or attend school or vocational training programs, but they were usually transferred or placed in segregation. Most prisoners were busy at work or school whether or not they believed in the rehabilitative ideal, and this promoted peace and stability.

The most effective order-promoting aspect of the rehabilitative ideal was more direct. With the indeterminate sentence system and with release decisions made by a parole board that used conformity to the prison routine as a principal indicator of rehabilitation and refused to review a prisoner who had received any serious disciplinary reports within six months, the message was clear: You conform or you will not be paroled. Most prisoners responded to the message.

However, even from the outset there were a few prisoners who were not persuaded to engage seriously in the rehabilitative programs, were not deterred by the threat of the indeterminate sentence system, and continued to get into trouble. This created a special problem for the administration, which was trying to implement the new, ostensibly nonpunitive routine. They solved it by opening up "adjustment centers" in each prison. The adjustment centers were segregation units where prisoners were held for indefinite periods with reduced privileges and virtually no mobility. The rationale for the units was that some prisoners needed more intensive therapy in a more controlled situation. In fact, no intensive therapy was ever delivered, and the adjustment centers were simply segregation units where troublesome prisoners could be placed summarily and indefinitely. By the end of the decade, the state could segregate a thousand prisoners in these units. The combination of these and the rehabilitative ideal with all its ramifications kept the peace for ten years.

The Seeds of Disruption

Later this peace was shattered by at least two developments that began in the 1950s in Soledad as well as other correctional institutions. First, black prisoners were increasing in numbers and assertiveness. They steadily moved away from their acceptance of the Jim Crow arrangement that prevailed in prison and began to assume equality in the prison informal world. As stressed above, many black prisoners crossed racial lines, maintained friendships with whites and Chicanos, and participated fully in all aspects of prison life. During most of the 1950s, the racially prejudiced white and Chicano prisoners disapproved of this, but rarely demonstrated their disapproval and prejudice. However, when black prisoners became more assertive and finally militant, racial hostilities intensified and set off an era of extreme racial violence, which disrupted the patterns of order based on tips and cliques.

Second, many prisoners in California and other states with correctional institutions eventually soured on rehabilitation and its artifacts. After years of embracing rehabilitation's basic tenets, submitting themselves to treatment strategies, and then leaving prison with new hope for a better future, they discovered and reported back that their outside lives had not changed. . . .

After prisoners were convinced that treatment programs did not work (by the appearance of persons who had participated fully in the treatment programs streaming back to prison with new crimes or violations of parole), hope shaded to cynicism and then turned to bitterness. The disillusioned increasingly shifted their focus from their individual pathologies to their life situation. They realized that under the guise of rehabilitation the correctionalists had gained considerable power over them and were using this power to coerce prisoners into "phony" treatment programs and "chickenshit" prison routines. In addition, they realized that parole boards arbitrarily, whimsically, and discriminatorily were giving many prisoners longer sentences and bringing them back to prison for violations of parole conditions that most prisoners believed to be impossible.

Rehabilitation inadvertently contributed to mounting criticism of itself by promoting a prison intelligentsia. Partly because of the expanded possibilities and the encouragement stemming from rehabilitation, more and more prisoners began educating themselves. Once we freed ourselves from the narrow conceptions contained in the rehabilitative philosophy, we began reading more and more serious literature. Most of us came from the working and lower-classes and had received very poor, if any, high school education. Our narrow life experience before and after school did nothing to expand our understanding. But in prison in the 1950s, with time on our hands, the availability of books, and the stimulation of the self-improvement message contained in the rehabilitative philosophy, we began to read. At first, we did not know how or what to read, so we read books on reading. Then when we acquired a preliminary sense of the classics, we plowed through them. Malcolm X expressed it well: "No university would ask any student to devour literature as I did when this new world opened to me, of being able to read and *understand*."[6] Most of us started with history, then turned to other areas: philosophy, literature, psychology, economics, semantics, and even mysticism. After several years of intense reading, we developed a relatively firm foundation in world knowledge. It was constructed under peculiar circumstances and in isolation from large intellectual enterprises; consequently, it was somewhat uneven and twisted here and there. But it was broad and mostly solid.

With this new perspective, we saw through things: our culture, society, the prison system, even our beloved criminal careers. They were all stripped of their original meanings, and what we saw made all of us critical and some of us bitter and cynical. . . . Our new understandings guided us in different directions. After being released, some of us "dropped out" and became bohemians or students. Others, particularly many blacks, became activists. Still others, finding no satisfying avenues of expression for their new perspective, returned to old criminal pursuits. But all of us, in different ways, continued to work on a criticism of the "system" and to spread this criticism. This eventually contributed heavily to the great disillusionment with and the eventual dismantling of the rehabilitative ideal. Racial conflict and the sense of injustice that followed this dismantling tore the correctional institution apart. . . .

Division began when black prisoners increased in number and shifted their posture in prisons. The latter change was linked to the civil rights and black movements outside, but it also had very unique qualities. For instance, the civil rights phase was never very important in prison. The tactics of the civil rights protectors were too gentle to catch the imagination of black prisoners, and the central issue, unequal treatment under the law, was not as apparently salient in prison. All convicts, to a greater degree than free citizens, were equally treated and mistreated under the law. Other aspects of the black movement, such as "black is beautiful" and black separatism, were more important in prison than on the outside. . . .

The Contemporary Prison

The reverberations from the 1960s left most men's prisons fragmented, tense, and often extremely violent. The old social order, with its cohesion and monotonous tranquility, did not and perhaps will never reappear. The prisoners are divided by extreme differences, distrust, and hatred. Nonwhites, especially blacks, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans, have risen in numbers and prominence. A multitude of criminal types—dope fiends, pimps, bikers, street gang members, and very few old-time thieves—assert themselves and compete for power and respect.

Nevertheless, chaos and a complete war of all against all have not resulted. They never do. When human social organizations splinter and friction between the parts increases, people still struggle to maintain old or create new collective structures that supply them with basic social needs, particularly protection from threats of violence. Complex social forms and a high degree of order still exist among prisoners, even in the most violent and fragmented prisons, like San Quentin, but it is a "segmented order."

So it is in prison today. Races, particularly black and white, are divided and hate each other. In general, prisoners distrust most other prisoners whom they do not know well. The strategies for coping with this are similar to those employed in the Addams area. There are virtually no sex strata and much less age stratification in the prison, but increasingly prisoners restrict their interaction to small friendship groups and other small social units (gangs, for example) formed with members of their own race. Other than race, prisoners retreat into small orbits based on social characteristics such as (1) criminal orientation, (2) shared preprison experiences (coming from the same town or neighborhood or having been in other prisons together), (3) shared prison interests, and (4) forced proximity in cell assignment or work.

Racial Divisions

The hate and distrust between white and black prisoners constitute the most powerful source of divisions. After being forestalled by the moves toward unity during the prison movement, the conditions and trends discussed [earlier] were reestablished. Black prisoners continued to increase in numbers and assertiveness. Whites, led by the more prejudiced and violent, increasingly reacted. Hate, tension, and hostilities between the two races escalated. . . . White prisoners, whether or not they were racially hostile before prison, tend to become so after experiencing prison racial frictions. . . . Whites hate and, when they are not organized to resist, fear black prisoners.

The divisions and hatreds extend into the guard force and even into the administrations. . . . Black prisoners have consistently testified that white guards verbally and physically abuse them and discriminate against them.[7] Some radical commentators have suggested that guards and administrators have political motivations in their expression of racial hatred. This may be true, in some very indirect fashion. But the discrimination against blacks by white staff has a more immediate source: hatred for black prisoners. In expressing their hate, they sometimes give license to racist prisoners. . . .

White and black prisoners do not mix in informal prisoner groups, and many form groups for the purpose of expressing racial hatred and protecting their friends from the other race. A wife of a San Quentin prisoner described her husband's drift toward organized racial hatred:

> He didn't used to be prejudiced but now he hates blacks. He and some other white friends formed an American National Socialists group which I guess is a nazi group because they hate blacks so much. . . .

Other minority groups, such as Chicanos, Puerto Ricans Chinese, American Indians, and French Canadians, relate to whites and

blacks in a more complex fashion. For instance, Chicanos in California prisons are more hostile toward black than toward white prisoners. White prisoners generally fear, distrust, and dislike Chicanos, because Chicanos speak Spanish or Calo and are believed to have a tendency to attack other prisoners with relatively less provocation than members of other groups. However, most white prisoners respect them for their toughness and do not threaten or derogate other white prisoners who befriend, hang around, or identify with Chicanos. Many white and Chicano prisoners have associated with each other in the "streets" and other joints and still maintain close friendship ties, even in the racially divided prison milieu. Puerto Rican, American Indian, French Canadian, and other racial or ethnic minorities have similar ambivalent positions in the complex racial matrix.

Violent Cliques and Gangs

In many men's prisons today, groups of prisoners regularly rob and attack other prisoners and retaliate when members of their clique or gang have been threatened or attacked. This has intensified the fear and widened the gap between prisoners, particularly between prisoners of different races. Presently these groups—which range from racially hostile cliques of reform school graduates, friends from the streets, biker club members, or tough convicts to large, relatively organized gangs—dominate several prisons.

Prisons have always contained violence-prone individuals, who were kept in check by the elders and the code enforced by the elders. In the 1950s and 1960s, small cliques of young hoodlums, such as the lowriders, hung around the yard and other public places together, talked shit (loudly bragged), played the prison dozens, occasionally insulted, threatened, attacked, and robbed unprotected weaker prisoners, and squabbled with other lowrider groups, particularly those of other races. . . . Most of these early lowriders were young juvenile prison graduates and fuck-ups (unskilled, lower- and working-class criminals) who had low respect among older, "solid" criminals and regular convicts. But they were a constant threat to the other prisoners who were trying to maintain peace. For most of the 1950s and 1960s, other prisoners disparaged, ignored, and avoided the lowriders, whose activities were kept in check by the general consensus against them and the belief (accepted by the lowriders and most other prisoners) that if the lowriders went too far, the older prison regulars would use force, including assassination, to control them.

Lowriders steadily increased in numbers. In the states with large cities whose ghettos bulged during the 1950s and 1960s and whose youth prison systems expanded to accommodate the increase in youth crime, the adult prisons began to receive growing numbers of tough youth prison graduates and criminally unskilled, more openly aggressive young urban toughs. They could no longer be controlled. They entered the growing racial melee and stepped up their attacks and robberies on other prisoners. When there were no successful countermoves against them, they took over the convict world and particularly one of its most important activities: the sub rosa economic enterprises.

In different states the young hoodlums arrived at the adult prisons with different backgrounds and consequently formed different types of groups in the prison. In California the takeover began in 1967 in San Quentin when a tightly knit clique of young Chicanos, who had known each other on the streets of Los Angeles and in other prisons, began to take drugs forcefully from other prisoners (mostly Chicano). The clique gained a reputation for toughness and the label of "the Mexican Mafia." Other aspiring young Chicano hoodlums became interested in affiliating with the Mafia, and, according to rumor, the Mafia members insisted that initiates murder another prisoner. This rumor and the actual attacks aroused and consolidated a large number of "independent"

Chicanos, who planned to eliminate the Mafia members. On the planned day, the other Chicanos pursued known Mafia members through San Quentin, attempting to assassinate them. Several dozen prisoners were seriously wounded and one was killed in this day-long battle, but the Mafia held its ground, won many of the knife fights, and was not eliminated. After this unsuccessful attempt, some of the formerly independent Chicanos, particularly from Texas and the small towns in California who had been in conflict with Los Angles Chicanos for decades, formed a countergroup: La Nuestra Familia. In the ensuing years, the conflict between the two Chicano gangs increased and spread to other prisons and even to the outside, where the gangs have tried to penetrate outside drug trafficking. The attacks and counterattacks between members of the two gangs became so frequent that the prison administrators attempted to segregate the gangs, designating two prisons, San Quentin and Folsom for the Mafia and Soledad and Tracy for La Nuestra Familia. When Chicanos enter the California prison system, they are asked their gang affiliation; if they are to be sent to any of those four prisons (which are the medium- to maximum-security prisons), they are sent to one dominated by their gang.

The Chicano gangs' escalation of robbery, assault, and murder also consolidated and expanded black and white lowrider groups, some of which had already been involved in similar violent and rapacious activities. But on a smaller scale. Two gangs, the Aryan Brotherhood and the Black Guerilla Family, rose in prominence and violent activities. Eventually, the Aryan Brotherhood formed an alliance with the Mafia and the Black Guerilla Family with La Nuestra Familia, and a very hostile and tentative stalemate prevailed. However, peace has not returned. Other racist cliques among the black and white prisoners occasionally attack other prisoners; the Chicano gangs still fight each other; and there seem to be factions within the Chicano gangs themselves. Although the California prisons have passed their peak of violence, the violence and fear are still intense.

In Illinois, black Chicago street gangs—the Blackstone Rangers (changed later to Black P Stone Nation), the Devil's Disciples, and the Vice Lords—and a Latin street gang named the Latin Kings spread into Stateville and finally took over the convict world. . . . By 1974 the aggressive black and Latin gangs had precipitated counterorganizations among white prisoners who, in their reduced numbers, had been extremely vulnerable to assault, robbery, rape, and murder by the other gangs.[8]

The activities of these violent groups who, in the pursuit of loot, sex, respect, or revenge, will attack any outsider have completely unraveled any remnants of the old codes of honor and tip networks that formerly helped to maintain order. In a limited, closed space such as a prison, threats of attacks like those posed by these groups cannot be ignored. Prisoners must be ready to protect themselves or act out of the way. Those who have chosen to continue to circulate in public, with few exceptions, have formed or joined a clique or gang for their own protection. Consequently, violence-oriented groups dominate many, if not most, large men's prisons.

The New Convict Identity

The escalation of violence and the takeover of the violent cliques and gangs have produced a new prison hero. Actually, the prison-oriented leader has been undergoing changes for decades. In our earlier study, Donald Cressey and I separated the prison world into two systems, one with the ideal type, the "right guy," who was oriented primarily to the prison.[9] In my later study of California prisons, conducted in a period when the right guy was disappearing, the "convict" identity was a blend of various vestigial criminal and prison identities.

This [the convict perspective] is the perspective of the elite of the convict world—the

"regular." A "regular" (or, as he has been variously called, "people," "folks," "solid," a "right guy," or "all right") possesses many of the traits of the thief's culture. He can be counted on when needed by other regulars. He is also not a "hoosier": that is, he has some finesse, is capable, is levelheaded, has "guts" and "timing."[10]

The upsurge of rapacious and murderous groups has all but eliminated the "right guy" and drastically altered the identity of the convict, the remaining hero of the prison world. Most of all, toughness has pushed out most other attributes, particularly the norms of tolerance, mutual aid, and loyalty to a large number of other regulars. Earlier, toughness was reemphasized as a reaction to the soft, cooperative "inmate" identity fostered by the rehabilitative ideal. . . . [T]he stiff and divisive administrative opposition weakened convict unity, and then the attacks of violent racial groups obliterated it. When the lowrider or "gang-banger" cliques turned on the remaining convict leaders (many had been removed from the prison mainline because of their political activities) and the elders were not able to drive the lowriders back into a position of subordination or otherwise to control them, the ancient regime fell and with it the old convict identity.

Toughness in the new hero in the violent men's prisons means, first, being able to take care of oneself in the prison world, where people will attack others with little or no provocation. Second, it means having the guts to take from the weak. . . .

In addition to threats of robbery, assaults, and murder, the threat of being raped and physically forced into the role of the insertee (punk or kid) has increased in the violent prison: "'Fuck it. It's none of my business. If a sucker is weak, he's got to fall around here. I came when I was eighteen and nobody turned me out. I didn't even smile for two years.'"[11]

Prison homosexuality has always created identity problems for prisoners. Long before today's gang era, many prisoners, particularly those with youth prison experiences, regularly or occasionally engaged in homosexual acts as inserters with queens, kids, or punks, though not without some cost to their own masculine definitions. There has been a cynical accusation repeated frequently in prison informal banter that prisoners who engaged in homosexual life too long finally learn to prefer it and, in fact, become full, practicing homosexuals, both insertees and inserters: "It was a jocular credo that after one year behind walls, it was permissible to kiss a kid or a queen. After five years, it was okay to jerk them off to 'get 'em hot.' After ten years, 'making tortillas' or 'flip-flopping' was acceptable and after twenty years anything was fine." The constant game of prison dozens among friends and acquaintances, in which imputation of homosexuality is the dominant theme, reflects and promotes self-doubt about masculinity. Presently, the threat of force has been added to the slower process of drifting into homosexuality, and fear about manhood and compensatory aggressive displays of manhood have increased drastically.

Today the respected public prison figure—the convict or hog—stands ready to kill to protect himself, maintains strong loyalties to some small group of other convicts (invariably of his own race), and will rob and attack or at least tolerate his friends' robbing and attacking other weak independents or their foes. He openly and stubbornly opposes the administration, even if this results in harsh punishment. Finally, he is extremely assertive of his masculine sexuality, even though he may occasionally make use of the prison homosexuals or, less often, enter into more permanent sexual alliance with a kid.

Convicts and Other Prisoners. Today prisoners who embrace versions of this ideal and live according to it with varying degrees of exactitude dominate the indigenous life of the large violent prisons. They control the contraband distribution systems, prison politics, the public areas of the prison, and any pan-prison activities, such as demonstrations and prisoner representative organizations. To circulate in this world, the convict

world, one must act like a convict and, with a few exceptions, have some type of affiliation with a powerful racial clique or gang.

This affiliation may take various shapes. Most of the large racial gangs have a small core of leaders and their close friends, who constitute a tightly knit clique that spends many hours together. Moving out from this core, a larger group of recognized members are regularly called on by the core when the gang needs something done, such as assistance in an attack or display of force. Very often these fringe members are young aspiring initiates who want to be part of the inner core. Then, if the gangs are large, like the Mexican Mafia or the Black P Stone Nation, many more, sometimes hundreds of prisoners, claim an affiliation and are available when a massive display of force is needed.

Most prisoners who circulate in the convict world fall into one of the three categories. However, some highly respected convicts have very loose friendship ties with one or more of the gangs and circulate somewhat independently with immunity from gang attack. . . . A few very tough independents circulate freely, because they have withstood so many assaults from which they emerged victorious. Nevertheless, they still have to be careful with the more powerful gang members, because nobody can survive the attacks of a large group committed to murder.

In some large prisons a few prisoners who refrain from violent and sub rosa economic activities and devote themselves to form organizations and coalitions in order to pursue prisoners' rights and other political goals are tolerated by the gangs and other violent and rapacious prisoners. Occasionally, these organizers are able to create coalitions among warring gangs on particular issues. They have immunity only as long as they stay away from the other activities of the convict world and avoid disputes with the convict leaders.

Finally, other independents circulate freely, because they are viewed as unthreatening to the power of the convict leaders and they supply the convict world with some service. This includes characters and dings, who supply humor, and less desirable homosexuals. Younger, more desired homosexuals, however, must have affiliations with powerful individuals or groups.

In some of the large, more violent prisons, certain groups of prisoners, such as the Muslims and the cliques of "syndicate" men and their friends, are prominent in indigenous prison worlds even though they do not follow the aggressive and rapacious patterns of the gangs. Other prisoners believe that these groups will protect their members and retaliate against attacks; consequently, the other prisoners fear and respect them. These groups often become involved in a prison's informal political and economic activities and sometimes assume leadership in periods of disorder. When these groups are present and prominent, they are a stabilizing force that prevents the complete takeover by the violent cliques and gangs.

Withdrawal. [I]ncreasingly prisoners are shying away from public settings and avoiding the activities of the convict world. Although they occasionally buy from the racketeers, place bets with gamblers, trade commodities with other unaffiliated prisoners, or sell contraband on a very small scale, they stay away from the rackets and any large-scale economic enterprises. They dissociate themselves from the violent cliques and gangs, spend as little time as possible in the yard and other public places where gangs hang out, and avoid gang members, even though they may have been friends with some of them in earlier years. They stick to a few friends whom they meet in the cell blocks, at work, through shared interests, in other prisons, or on the outside (home boys). With their friends they eat, work, attend meetings of the various clubs and formal organizations that have abounded in the prison, and participate in leisure time activities together. Collectively, they have withdrawn from the convict world. . . .

The convicts disrespect those who withdraw, but usually ignore them: "If a dude wants to run and hide, that's all right." They

even disrespect formerly high-status prisoners, such as older thieves, who previously received respect even if they avoided prison public life. Prisoners who withdraw occasionally have to display deference or acquiesce subtly in accidental public confrontations with convicts, but they face minimal danger of assault and robbery. This is much less true for young and effeminate prisoners, who will be pursued by aggressive, homosexually oriented convicts, perhaps threatened or raped, even if they attempt to stay to themselves and to avoid the convict world. Segregation may be their only safe niche.

The strategy of withdrawal has been encouraged and facilitated by prison administrations, which have always feared and hindered prisoner unity. The history of American prisons, in a sense, is a history of shifting techniques of separating prisoners. The original Pennsylvania prisons completely isolated prisoners. The Auburn system, which prevailed in the initial era of imprisonment in the United States because of cheap costs, employed the "silence system" to reduce interaction between prisoners and to forestall unity. More recently, the system of individualized treatment, emphasizing individual psychological adjustment, was a mechanism of psychological separation. In the last decade, convinced that large populations of prisoners are unmanageable, prison administrators have recommended, planned, and built smaller institutions for the primary purpose of separating prisoners into smaller populations. In the large prisons that are still used (not by choice, but by economic necessity) some states have split the prison into small units and have formally separated the prisoner population within the large prison. In many prisons these separate units (usually cell blocks with some additional staff and restrictions on access) vary in levels of privilege, some being designated "honor" units that offer many more privileges, more mobility for the residents, and less access for nonresidents.

Since the late 1960s, prison administrations have contravened the movements toward prisoner-organized unity by allowing, even encouraging many small apolitical organizations. . . . Prisoners who withdraw have certain channels provided by the administration to help them and make prison less onerous: if they maintain a clean disciplinary record, they can eventually move to an honor block or unit which houses a preponderance of persons who are withdrawing like themselves, which affords many more privileges, and to which access is restricted. In addition, they may fill in their leisure hours with formal organizational activities located in closed rooms away from the yard and other settings of the convict world.

More recently, in some prisons the administrations are combining the unit structure, segregation, and behavior modification into a system of hierarchial segregation that encourages withdrawal and conformity and greatly reduces contact between prisoners. . . .

This stratification system has succeeded in facilitating withdrawal, but has not eliminated violence in the prison. It has merely concentrated it in the lower levels of the hierarchy. Also, it has produced some added undesirable consequences. Individuals housed in the maximum-security (and more punitive) units become increasingly embittered and inured to violence. Many of them believe that they have been placed and are held there arbitrarily. (Often this is the case, because suspicions and prejudices operate in the classification to various units.) Intense hate between prisoners and guards builds up in the maximum-security units. Different clique and gang members, different races, and guards and prisoners verbally assault each other. Often guards on duty in the units, having grown especially hostile toward particular prisoners, depart from the formal routine and arbitrarily restrict the privileges of certain prisoners (for example, not releasing them for their allowed short exercise period).

All this precipitates regular violent and destructive incidents. San Quentin continues to experience incident after incident in

its most secure and punitive units. In February 1978, for several days the prisoners in Max B fought among themselves during exercise periods and defied or even attacked guards who were trying to control them, even though they were risking injury, death, and long extensions of their segregation and prison sentences. More recently, in April 1979, a group of prisoners in the same unit continued to damage their cells for three days. They were protesting not having received their "issue" (toilet paper, tobacco, and the like), showers, or exercise periods for five weeks. They broke their toilets, tore out the electric lights in their cells, burned their mattresses, and pulled the plumbing from the walls. Finally, a large squad of guards (the "goon squad") brought them under control. A guard told Stephanie Riegel, a legal aide who had been informed of the incident by one of the prisoners involved, that "this type of destruction in that section is fairly routine."

Race and Withdrawal. The strategy of withdrawal is more open and appealing to white prisoners. In general, independent black prisoners are not as threatened by gangs. Blacks have more solidarity, and the black gangs tolerate the independents, most of whom are pursuing a more present-oriented expressive mode in prison. . . . Unless several black gangs become very organized and hostile to each other (as in Stateville), unaffiliated blacks participate much more in the convict world and hang around much more in public places, as the big yard.

With few exceptions, Chicanos in the large California prisons—Soledad, San Quentin, Folsom, and Tracy—must have at least a loose affiliation with one of the Chicano gangs. The gangs force this. However, many have token affiliations and actually withdraw and largely avoid the trouble and gang activity that abound in the convict world. However, they may occasionally be called on for some collective action; and if they ignore the gangs' call, they might be attacked. . . .

Concluding Remarks

This is the situation in many—too many—large, men's prisons: not chaos, but a dangerous and tentative order. It is not likely to improve for a while. The sources of conflict are deeply embedded in prisoners' cultural and social orientations. Most male prisoners are drawn from a social layer that shares extremely reduced life options, meager material existence, limited experience with formal, polite, and complex urban social organizations, and traditional suspicions and hostilities toward people different from their own kind. Prisoners, a sample with more extreme forms of these characteristics, are likely to be more hostile toward others with whom they do not share close friendships or cultural backgrounds and less firmly attached to the conventional normative web that holds most citizens together. For decades, the potentially obstreperous and conflictive population was held in a tentative peace by prisoner leaders, a code, and the constant threat of extreme force. When the informal system of peace disintegrated, the formal force was brought in, used (in fact, misused), withstood by the prisoners, and dissipated. For a short period, 1970 to 1973, prisoner organizers pursued the promise of some power for prisoners, mended some of the major rifts that were growing between groups of prisoners, and forestalled further fractionalizing. The administrations, because they fear prisoner political unity more than any other condition, smashed the incipient organizations and regenerated fractionalization. The parts scattered in familiar paths followed by other splintered populations of oppressed peoples: religious escapism, rapacious racketeering, fascism, and withdrawal.

The administrations are not happy with the results, but continue to apply old formulas to restore order. Mostly, they attempt to divide and segregate the masses and to crush the more obdurate prisoners. In California, for instance, the Department of Corrections has continued to search for gang leaders and

other troublemakers, transfer those who are so labeled to the maximum-security prisons, and segregate them there in special units. The growing numbers of segregated prisoners are becoming more vicious and uncontrollable. In recent incidents at San Quentin the prisoners in a segregation unit fought among themselves and defied the guards for several days, even though they were risking injury, death, and extensions in their sentences. When the department has succeeded in identifying gang leaders and removing them, new leaders have sprouted like mushrooms. The prisons remain essentially the same.

The violent, hostile, and rapacious situation will probably continue until all prisoners are held in very small institutions of less than one or two hundred or completely isolated (both at astronomical costs) or until administrations begin to permit and cultivate among prisoners new organizations that can pull them together on issues that are important to them as a class. It seems obvious to me that these issues are the conditions of imprisonment and postprison opportunities. Thus, in order for these organizations to obtain and hold the commitment of a number of leaders and thereby to begin supplanting the violent, rapacious group structures, they will have to have some power in decision making. These organizations, however, are political in nature, and presently this idea is repulsive and frightening to prison administrations and the public.

Study Questions

1. Describe The Big House era in American prisons, including their architecture and social organization.
2. Why and how did the purpose of imprisonment in the correctional institutions change after World War II?
3. How were the major tenets of the correctional institutions (indeterminate sentencing, classification, and treatment) intended to work together in rehabilitating inmates?
4. How did the inmate social system change from The Big House era to the "Correctional Institution" era, particularly in terms of indiginous argot roles as well as those imported from the outside?
5. What factors disrupted the order of the correctional institutions and ushered in the era of "Contemporary Prisons?"
6. Describe race relations throughout the various eras and how black power and gangs have changed the power structure in Contemporary Prisons.
7. How does the new convict identity in the Contemporary Prison differ from that of The Big House and the correctional institution?

Notes

1. Donald Clemmer, *The Prison Community* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1958), p. 7.
2. John Irwin and Donald Cressey, "Thieves, Convicts and the Inmate Culture," *Social Problems*, Fall 1963, p. 149.
3. Claude Brown, *Manchild in the Promised Land* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 412.
4. Victor Nelson, *Prison Days and Nights* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1933), p. 219.
5. *Popeye* (Pamphlet distributed by Peoples' Court Comrades, San Francisco, 1975), p. 6.
6. *The Autobiography of Malcom X* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 173.
7. *Attica: The Official Report of the New York State Special Commission on Attica* (New York: Prager, 1972) has the most convincing reports on such testimony.
8. *Stateville* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 157–158.
9. "Thieves, Convicts, and the Inmate Culture," *Social Problems*, Fall 1963, pp. 145–148.
10. John Irwin, *The Felon* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970), p. 83.
11. Bunker, *Animal Factory* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 32. ✦