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"ALL THE NEWS THAT'S FIT TO PRINT"

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE CORRECTIONAL DEBATE IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

Michael Welch, Lisa Weber, & Walter Edwards

Since the 1970s, scholars have generated significant research documenting various ways in which the media projects official images of crime and criminal justice (Barak, 1988, 1994; Chermak, 1994, 1997; Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987, 1989, 1991; Fishman, 1978; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978; Humphries, 1981; Kidd-Hewitt & Osborne, 1995; Surette, 1992). In particular, those investigations show that mediated information about crime is commonly traced to government sources; namely, political leaders, law enforcement officials, and other state managers. By occupying elevated positions within the hierarchy of credibility, politicians and government officials enjoy the privilege of offering to the media primary—and self-serving—definitions of crime (Becker, 1967, 1973). As a result of this social arrangement, the media afford political and government leaders valuable opportunities for advancing a criminal justice agenda that serves the state's political, ideological, and economic interests by generating public support, legitimizing power, and garnering funds for resources and manpower (Fishman, 1978; Hall et al., 1978; Kasinsky, 1994). The reciprocal relations between the state and the media contribute to the projection of governmental (or official) versions of crime to the public, producing what is *socially thinkable* about the nature of crime and strategies to control it.

Given the pivotal role of politicians in manufacturing the news, critics accuse the media of carrying out propaganda functions for the government's ideological machinery (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Kappeler & Potter, 2005;

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Tunnell, 1992). Similarly, our previous research uncovered important elements of ideology (i.e., beliefs on crime causation and crime control) contained in crime news (Welch, Fenwick, & Roberts, 1997, 1998). Those studies, the first of their kind, were based on a content analysis of experts' quotes appearing in feature articles about crime in four major newspapers (i.e., the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune*). In sum, we discovered further evidence of journalism's reliance on politicians and law enforcement officials as news sources who in effect serve as primary definers of crime. Compared to intellectuals (i.e., professors and non-academic researchers) also sourced in those articles, politicians spoke more ideologically about crime causation and crime control insofar as they routinely disavowed the relationship between social conditions and crime.

Applying a similar method of content analysis, this investigation examines newspaper articles devoted to corrections—a widely neglected area in media studies (Marsh, 1989, 1991). While remaining attentive to which issues comprise the corrections agenda, the study tracks chief patterns of news sourcing, particularly among sources supporting the government's correctional strategies vis-à-vis sources opposing such policies. In doing so, we set out to weigh the relative balance of press coverage in the debate over corrections, thus shedding a critical light on agenda setting in criminal justice.

Sample

While being able to generate mass attention to social issues, the media possesses a unique power to shape the nature of debate by defining parameters and selecting key items for public discourse. The debate over corrections presented in the press adheres to that pattern of news production, especially considering the selection process by which certain correctional issues are deemed more newsworthy than others. To further our understanding of how the correctional debate is framed by journalists, we turned our attention to the most circulated and arguably most influential newspaper in the nation.

Ranking first among metropolitan newspapers, the *New York Times* reports a daily circulation figure of 1,074,741, which surpasses its chief competitors, the *Los Angeles Times* (1,050,176), the *Washington Post* (775,894), and the *New York Daily News* (721,256) (Detroit Free Press, 1998). Largely due to its vast circulation, the *New York Times* is considered a highly influential newspaper that commands the attention of political, government, and business leaders, as well as the public. Given such influence, the *New York Times* has the capacity to present social issues in ways that dictate the nature of debate on matters of social policy. With this idea in mind, we set out to examine the manner in which corrections is covered by the *New York Times*.

To learn the extent to which correctional issues appeared in the *New York Times*, we administered a computerized literature search using the terms *corrections* and *prisons* as key words in locating appropriate articles. The search was limited to medium (6 to 18 column inches) and long (exceeding 18 column

inches) stories to ensure depth of coverage. Between 1992 and 1995, the *New York Times* published 206 articles on corrections, spanning a wide array of 19 issues.¹ Institutional violence ($n = 40$) and correctional programs ($n = 34$) were the most frequently covered topics, constituting 19% and 17% of all articles, respectively. Other notable correctional issues included health care ($n = 17$, 8%), "get tough" policies ($n = 16$, 8%), and privatization/corrections as industry ($n = 16$, 8%). By comparison, less attention was directed at overcrowding ($n = 10$, 5%), drugs (including the war on drugs) ($n = 9$, 4%), famous (and celebrity) inmates ($n = 9$, 4%), community concerns (including fear) ($n = 8$, 4%), correctional budgets ($n = 8$, 4%), and institutional issues ($n = 8$, 4%). Furthermore, even less coverage was aimed at juveniles ($n = 6$, 3%), officers ($n = 6$, 3%), the death penalty ($n = 4$, 2%), detention in Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) centers ($n = 4$, 2%), contraband ($n = 3$, 1%), early release ($n = 3$, 1%), women prisoners ($n = 3$, 1%), and prison history ($n = 2$, 1%) (see table 1).

Method

A principle objective of the study was to examine in-depth the manner in which the *New York Times* covers corrections; in particular, we set out to eval-

Table 1 Correctional Issues in the *New York Times*, 1992 to 1995:
Number of Articles and Percentages ($N = 206$)

Issue (abbreviation)	Number of Articles ^a	Percentage
Violence (VI)	40	19
Programs/rehabilitation (PR)	34	17
Health care (HC)	17	8
Get tough (GT)	16	8
Privatization/industry (PI)	16	8
Overcrowding (OC)	10	5
Drugs (DR)	9	4
Famous inmates (FI)	9	4
Budgets (BU)	8	4
Community concerns (CC)	8	4
Institutional issues (II)	8	4
Juveniles (JV)	6	3
Officers (OF)	6	3
Death penalty (DP)	4	2
Immigration and Naturalization Service (IN)	4	2
Contraband (CB)	3	1
Early release (ER)	3	1
Women (WM)	3	1
History (HI)	2	1

Note: Figures do not total 100% due to rounding.

^aTotals exceed the number of articles due to cross-listing of overlapping topics.

uate the relative balance of coverage by attending to news sourcing. To achieve this undertaking, we administered a content analysis on the sample of 206 articles by identifying and coding all sources along with their direct quotes and attributed statements. While acknowledging the identity of every source (e.g., politicians, corrections officials, reform advocates), we analyzed the content of their quotes to determine whether they supported or opposed the government's correctional strategies. It should be noted that the research design relied on mutually exclusive categories dichotomizing support and opposition to the government's correctional strategies.

Interestingly, there were no quotes that could be construed as neutral; perhaps the lack of neutrality stems from the nature of interview questions presented by journalists who force news sources to take firm positions on issues in the correctional debate. Each correctional issue (e.g., institutional violence, correctional programs) was scrutinized according to the classification scheme, thereby permitting us to ascertain whether the debate over corrections in the *New York Times* appeared balanced or biased. Upon delineating the pattern of sourcing, we delved further into the qualitative content of the articles to extract nuances of news coverage aimed at corrections.

Findings

Comparing various news sources in the correctional debate presented in the *New York Times*, we found that 62% ($n = 593$) of the sources supported the government's correctional strategies whereas 38% ($n = 363$) opposed them. A similar pattern also was evident among the sample of quoted statements: 62% ($n = 1486$) endorsed the government's prison policies whereas 38% ($n = 893$) expressed criticism of them (see table 2). By examining the relative proportion of sources and quotes within each category of issues, table 2 demonstrates that the number of sources (and their quotes) supporting the government's correctional strategies consistently exceeded the sources (and quotes) voicing opposition; this pattern emerged in 15 of the 19 topics studied. On only four correctional issues (i.e., overcrowding, famous inmates, NS, and history) did the sources (and quotes) expressing opposition outnumber those supporting the government's stance on corrections. And on only one issue (i.e., budgets) did the number of sources (and statements) representing both sides of the debate reach parity.

The largest margin of imbalance emerged in articles on programs and rehabilitation (34 articles), a bias favoring the government's position with 13% ($n = 174$) of the sources and 84% ($n = 392$) of the quotes. The second widest gap was found in the articles on privatization/corrections as industry (16 articles); on that issue, 72% ($n = 49$) of the sources and 74% ($n = 121$) of the quotes supported the government's position. In due course, we shall explain precisely what the government's position is on each of the issues examined, thus allowing us also to interpret more fully the scope of the correctional debate in the *New York Times*. Nevertheless, in the next section we

delineate the emergent pattern of sourcing that illuminates the perspectives from which the correctional debate is framed.

Sources and Quotes Supporting the Government's Correctional Strategies

Overall, 23 types of news sources ($N = 593$) supporting the government's correctional strategies were identified, altogether generating 1,486 total quotes. The leading sources in this category are officials in political and government positions (elected and appointed officials, e.g., legislators, attorneys general), accounting for 24% ($n = 144$) of the sources and 22% ($n = 325$) of

Table 2 Support for Government Compared to Opposition, Number of Sources and Quotes per Issue: *NY Times* 1992 to 1995 ($N = 206$)

Issue (abbreviation)	n	Sources			Quotes		
		Support	(%)	Oppose	(%)	Support	(%)
Violence (VI)	40	95	(59)	66	(41)	266	(63)
Programs/ rehabilitation (PR)	34	174	(83)	35	(17)	392	(84)
Health care (HC)	17	36	(56)	28	(44)	100	(59)
Get tough (GT)	16	36	(53)	32	(47)	128	(61)
Privatization/ industry (PI)	16	49	(72)	19	(28)	121	(70)
Overcrowding (OV)	10	22	(44)	28	(56)	49	(44)
Drugs (DR)	9	38	(53)	34	(47)	79	(51)
Famous inmates (FI)	9	11	(32)	23	(68)	34	(29)
Budgets (BU)	8	17	(50)	17	(50)	19	(37)
Community concerns (CC)	8	21	(55)	17	(45)	41	(55)
Institutional issues (II)	8	22	(64)	13	(36)	50	(63)
Juveniles (JV)	6	20	(66)	10	(34)	86	(86)
Officers (OF)	6	13	(59)	9	(41)	30	(47)
Death penalty (DP)	4	9	(60)	6	(40)	21	(50)
Immigration and Naturalization	4	6	(43)	8	(57)	15	(36)
Service (IN)	3	10	(59)	7	(41)	16	(57)
Contraband (CB)	3	6	(55)	5	(45)	14	(50)
Early release (ER)	3	7	(64)	4	(36)	20	(71)
Women (WM)	2	1	(33)	2	(67)	5	(27)
History (HI)	206	593	(62)	363	(38)	1486	(62)
Totals						893	(38)

the quotes. The second and third leading sources supporting are corrections officials (e.g., correctional commissioners, deputy commissioners) (20%, $n = 116$) and correctional managers (e.g., wardens, deputy wardens) (13%, $n = 76$), accounting for 24% ($n = 352$) and 15% ($n = 220$) of the total quotes, respectively. It should be noted that this emerging constellation of sourcing conforms to the government's hierarchy of state managers; indeed, the highest ranking officials were the most often quoted, followed by those officials occupying the lower strata of government power. The dominance of these groups is especially significant because they comprise 57% of the sources and 60% of the quotes endorsing the government's position on corrections. Interestingly, the fourth largest group of sources supporting the state version of corrections consists of inmates, representing 13% ($n = 76$) of all sources and 12% ($n = 174$) of all quotes. The remaining 19 types of news sources clearly remained underrepresented; still, together they contribute substantially to the overall support of the government's position on corrections (comprising 43% of all sources and 40% of all quotes). Other sources include the following: health care professionals ($n = 33$), correctional staff (e.g., officers and various staff members, $n = 26$), prosecutors ($n = 16$), volunteers ($n = 14$), religious personnel (e.g., chaplains and various religious leaders, $n = 12$), judges ($n = 12$), program directors ($n = 10$), reform advocates (e.g., correctional watchdogs, civil liberties activists, $n = 9$), researchers ($n = 7$), professors ($n = 7$), residents ($n = 6$), attorneys representing inmates ($n = 6$), corrections union officials ($n = 6$), relatives of crime victims ($n = 5$), teachers of inmates ($n = 5$), "tough on crime" advocates ($n = 4$), a labor arbitrator ($n = 1$), an attorney representing corrections officers ($n = 1$), and a relative of an inmate ($n = 1$).

Sources and Quotes Opposing the Government's Correctional Strategies

Overall, 24 types of news sources ($N = 363$) opposing the government's correctional strategies were identified, altogether contributing to 893 total quotes. Perhaps expectedly, the leading critics were reform advocates (e.g., correctional watchdogs, civil liberties activists) who represented 18% ($n = 67$) of all critics, offering 20% ($n = 175$) of all quotes. The second largest group of critics consisted of officials in political and government positions (elected and appointed officials, e.g., legislators, attorneys general), accounting for 15% ($n = 55$) of all sources and 12% ($n = 105$) of all quotes. Inmates ($n = 52$, 14%) emerged as the third most prevalent source of criticism, attributed to 20% ($n = 180$) of all statements, and attorneys representing inmates were the fourth most cited critics ($n = 44$, 12%, offering 95 quotes or 10%).

The government's correctional policies and practices also were called into question by numerous other critics, including 27 professors (7%), 21 corrections union officials (5%), 16 correctional staff members (e.g., officers) (4%), 14 corrections officials (e.g., correctional commissioners, deputy commissioners) (4%), 12 judges (3%), 12 residents (3%), 11 health care profes-

sionals (3%), 9 correctional managers (e.g., wardens, deputy wardens) (2%), 5 religious personnel (e.g., chaplains and various religious leaders) (1%), 3 program directors (0.8%), 2 researchers, attorneys representing correctional officers, "tough on crime" advocates, teachers of inmates, and prosecutors (0.5% each), as well as a collector, an auctioneer, a juror, a newspaper editor, and a volunteer (0.2% each).

Interpreting the Nature of the Debate Over Corrections

Reaching beyond a basic quantification of sources and quotes, this study also set out to explore in-depth the content of articles on corrections, drawing more fully on the qualitative aspects of the data. This approach enables us to offer additional interpretations about how the correctional debate is formulated by the *New York Times*, while remaining attentive to the pattern of sourcing. In this section, we concentrate primarily on the five most prevalent correctional issues: institutional violence ($n = 40$ articles), programs and rehabilitation ($n = 34$), health care in corrections ($n = 17$), get-tough campaigns ($n = 16$), and privatization/corrections as industry ($n = 16$).

Institutional violence and riots. As the most common correctional topic, institutional violence (and riots) ($n = 40$) comprises 19% of the articles in the sample. Upon closer scrutiny, however, it should be noted that there are distinct subtopics in this category. For instance, 10 articles were devoted to institutional violence occurring at Rikers Island jail complex (New York City); 8 articles focused on the 1993 prison riot at Lucasville, Ohio; 3 articles covered the questionable deaths in Mississippi jails; 3 articles followed the controversy surrounding prison disturbances that observers claimed were precipitated by the disparity in sentencing for crack (versus powdered) cocaine; finally, 3 articles chronicled the beatings and mistreatment of detainees held by the INS.

Not surprisingly, incidents of institutional violence were covered primarily as *events* (e.g., a particular riot, disturbance, or incident); by comparison, most other articles in our sample were presented as discussions or debates over certain correctional issues. Also prevalent in most of the articles in this category were exposés and other forms of investigative journalism, a type of media coverage rarely found among the other topics, except for a few articles on drugs, contraband, and the INS.

As table 2 illustrates, there is considerable reliance on sources supporting the government's correctional policies in this category (accounting for 59% of the sources and 63% of the quotes). Interestingly, the nature of opposition in several of those articles unveils an otherwise uncommon coalition in the correctional debate. Correctional watchdogs, attorneys representing inmates, prisoners, and correctional officers unions linked institutional violence (or the threat of violence) at Rikers Island to a lack of adequate funding and allocation of resources. Together, those groups opposed New York City's correctional policy that reduced spending for municipal jails. In the words of William H. Booth, chairman of the Board of Correction (a watchdog group),

"I'm not one to predict riot, but I know very well when you make cuts like this and take away people's services and rights, they're going to react and you never know how" (Clines, 1994, p. B1). In response, New York City Mayor Giuliani adamantly defended the government's budgetary cuts for the city's jails, accusing the union of issuing "unfounded warnings" for the purpose of "budget manipulation" (Clines, 1994, p. B8). Stan Israel, president of the Correction Officers Benevolent Association injected further the alarming claim that "gang organization is on the rise" at Rikers Island (Clines, 1994, p. B8). As if in riposte, the Commissioner of Correction, Anthony Schembri, announced after a visit to Rikers Island that "a correctional officer, not an inmate had been arrested in possession of contraband—four razor blades and a sharpened knife blade presumably intended for sale to inmates" (Clines, 1994, p. B8). In projecting the government's interpretation of crime expressed through the media, Surette (1992, pp. 42–44) reminds us that animal metaphors abound in criminal justice rhetoric insofar as the role of police and corrections officers ("sheep dogs") is to protect the public ("sheep") from the criminal element ("wolves") (also see Welch, 1996, 1999; Welch et al., 1997, 1998). The wolf pack metaphor is especially popular in reference to gang violence. Conforming to this pattern of hyperbole, union president Israel referred to Hispanic and Black gangs at Rikers Island as "out-of-control wolf packs roaming the prison at will and attacking any rival before correction officers can intervene" (Sullivan, 1994, p. B3).

As the debate on this issue suggests, even in articles about institutional violence, a theme of correctional economics is unmistakable. Moreover, political rhetoric and hyperbole is not only issued by the government to justify increased spending on corrections, but also by corrections officers unions who deploy similar tactics to protest budget cuts that affect adversely their membership. Equivocally, corrections officers unions either support or oppose the government's correctional policies depending on how it best serves their interests. It should be noted that the voices of correctional unions were heard early and often in the *New York Times*; union representatives were sourced in 7 of 10 articles about violence at Rikers Island.

Programs and rehabilitation. Although adequate funding for correctional programs has been denied greatly for the past three decades, contrary to the claims of some correctional pundits, the issue of rehabilitation is far from dead (see Clear, 1994; Flanagan, 1996; Welch, 1995, 1996, 1999). As a rough indicator of the degree to which correctional rehabilitation resonates in the mind of the press, our sample features 34 articles (17%) on programs, the second most common topic. Even more to the point, this grouping of articles generated more sources ($n = 209$) and quotes ($n = 466$) than other correctional topics in our sample; undoubtedly, the correctional debate over programs and rehabilitation is very much alive (see table 2).

Consistent with the economic motif already acknowledged, the most common types of programs specified in these articles ($n = 6$) were those

related to the promotion of meaningful work and gainful employment as a means of rehabilitation. Similarly, the subtopic of employment also alluded to the correctional value of instilling a work ethic. Perhaps underscoring the unspoken spiritual importance of a work ethic, an equally common subtopic in this section was religion as a source for reform ($n = 6$ articles). The next largest subsets of articles were devoted to the debate over the treatment of sex offenders ($n = 5$ articles) and for substance abusers ($n = 4$ articles). Although the virtues of the vocational, moral, and medical models were fairly well represented in this subsample, the education model, however, remained conspicuously neglected ($n = 3$ articles).

News sources (83%) and their quotes (84%) favoring the government's policies and practices overwhelmingly outnumbered voices of opposition; still, the government's stance on rehabilitation requires clarification. Remarkably, in all 34 articles, the government supported rehabilitation and programs, including those designed for sex offenders. The nature of criticism, however, centered typically on the complaint that correctional programs should be more available and better funded; likewise, many government officials concurred. Interestingly, opposition in the form of advocating harsher punishment rather than rehabilitation was minimal. More significantly, in 24 articles there was not a single news source (or quote) rejecting the government's claim that rehabilitation is an important aspect of its correctional strategy.

Upon reflection, the near absence of opposition on this issue could very well mean that the debate over rehabilitation constitutes a *false polarity*, insofar as it is more universally supported by citizens than politicians realize. Indeed, public opinion polls demonstrate that citizens generally favor correctional rehabilitation, especially in the form of substance abuse treatment (Maguire & Pastore, 1995, pp. 165, 176, 198; also see Cullen, Cullen, & Wozniak, 1988; Flanagan, 1996; Welch 1997a, 1997b; Welsh, Leone, Kinkade, & Pontell, 1991). True, citizens may also demand punishment (Maguire & Pastore, 1995), but contrary to the mind-set of politicians who exploit the crime issue for campaign purposes, rehabilitation and punishment really do not exist as mutually exclusive categories (see Clear, 1994).

Similarly, Wilkins (1991) refers to false polarities in criminal justice by pointing to "just deserts": the idea that offenders ought to receive the punishment that they justly deserve. Elaborating on what he means by a false polarity, Wilkins insists that it is precisely the popularity of "just deserts" that diminishes its value as a principle of jurisprudence, "since no one can really oppose the idea of 'just deserts' due to the absurdity of calling for unjust undeserved punishment" (1991, p. 2). In light of overwhelming public approval for correctional programs—along with the government's endorsement—the debate over rehabilitation often seems superficial, constituting a false polarity. Rather than depicting rehabilitation as a hotly contested issue, the *New York Times* appears to reflect a wide consensus supporting correctional programs.

Health care in prisons. Given the amount of concern and anxiety about health care in the general population, it is of little surprise that medical issues in corrections ranked third among the topics in our sample ($n = 17$, 8%). The most common subtopic in this category was the issue of AIDS/HIV ($n = 8$), followed by tuberculosis (TB) ($n = 4$) and smoking in correctional facilities ($n = 3$).² As table 2 illustrates, news sources (56%) and quotes (59%) supporting the government's strategy for prison health care outnumbered the voices of opposition.

Consistent with the coverage on many of the topics, the theme of correctional economics is clearly evident in articles on health care. Indeed, the government's policies on prison health care were predicated largely by economic initiatives that, in turn, polarized the correctional debate. The government's plan to privatize prison medical services was staunchly opposed by correctional staff unions. Similarly, the government's policy requiring inmates to pay for health care was criticized by reform advocates and attorneys for inmates as well as inmates themselves. Government sources commonly pointed to the rising costs of medical care, including staffing and medication (especially for AIDS/HIV and TB) as reasons to reduce health care expenses.

Issues of correctional debate also included controversial prison management practices, particularly in the realm of AIDS/HIV, TB, and smoking. In 1992, the Erie County, N.Y. jail was sued by Louise K. Nolley, an inmate (charged with passing a check with insufficient funds and forgery) who was subjected to humiliating and improper treatment by correctional staff. The county government approved an institutional policy confining inmates with AIDS to an isolation unit, requiring them to wear plastic gloves while using the typewriter in the prison library and having their belongings labeled with red stickers identifying them as being infected with AIDS. Defending the county's correctional policy on AIDS, jail superintendent John Dray argued that the red stickers were introduced in 1986 when "AIDS became the epidemic that was terrorizing everybody in the business" and they are still necessary "to protect the 13,000 inmates we have in our system every year" (Sullivan, 1992, p. B4). Prisoners and reform advocates challenged the county's correctional policy and practice on AIDS. Eventually the courts intervened on behalf of the prisoners. Judge John T. Curtin of the Federal District Court in Buffalo, N.Y., awarded Nolley \$155,000, commenting that, "there is no question that the red-sticker policy was developed, not in response to contagious diseases in general, but specifically in response to the hysteria over HIV and AIDS" (Sullivan, 1992, p. B4).

In its coverage of smoking in prisons, the *New York Times* clearly pointed out that the government's correctional policies and practices included defending itself against inmates suing prisons for illnesses caused by secondhand smoke. In *Helling v. McKinney* (1992), a Nevada prisoner sued the state department of corrections for being housed (in a six-by-eight foot cell) with a cell mate who smoked five packs of cigarettes a day. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the case that prisoners who can show that exposure to smoking is a

threat to their health may have a constitutional right not to be confined with a chain-smoking cell mate.

On the issue of smoking in prisons, the government's stance is particularly revealing. During the initial stages of litigation involving *Helling v. McKinney*, the Bush administration as well as 34 states petitioned the Court to rule against the prisoner, insisting that "smoking is wide-spread in society" and that "smoking is a habit that is deeply rooted in our history and experience" (Greenhouse, 1993, p. A8). The Bush administration further argued that "there was no basis for ruling that exposure to secondhand smoke could even theoretically violate the Eighth Amendment" (Greenhouse, 1993, p. A8). Whereas the *text* (or manifest content) of the debate appears to focus on the issue of health in correctional facilities, the *subtext* (or latent content) seems to be geared toward the Bush administration's (along with 34 state governments') support for the tobacco industry.

Get-tough campaigns. The fourth largest grouping of articles ($n = 16$, 8%) was devoted to get-tough campaigns, a punitive social movement that significantly impacts the form and function of corrections. A principle theme of those articles centered on the retributionist claim that correctional facilities are not tough enough to fulfill their mission of imposing punishment, instilling discipline, and deterring lawbreakers from committing future offenses. Advocates of get-tough campaigns insinuate that corrections coddles inmates and, confounding the issue, imply that high rates of recidivism are the result of institutional conditions that are inadequately punitive. While being driven by a staunch sense of retribution, those campaigns also are inspired by nostalgic sentiments involving criminal justice (Garland, 1990; Jameson, 1991; Simon, 1995; Stauth & Turner, 1988). Get-tough proposals include "three strikes" legislation, the return to hard labor (e.g., breaking rocks), chain gangs, correctional boot camps, the reduction or elimination of institutional amenities (e.g., programs, televisions, weight lifting), and the construction of super-maximum security penitentiaries.

The nostalgic worldview in corrections has emerged as a reaction to the modern and so-called liberal American prison where convicts are afforded certain constitutional protections, allowed to participate in institutional programs, and permitted to keep personal belongings while incarcerated (e.g., civilian clothes, televisions, coffee, cigarettes, snack food). Critics argue that depictions of prisons as country-clubs (or "three hots and a cot") are wildly exaggerated, inaccurate, and politically manipulative (Welch, 1997b, 1999). Nostalgia marks a return to harsh images of prison life, similar to those projected in such classic movies as *Cool Hand Luke*. In describing support for the get-tough campaigns in Arizona, Governor Fife Symington waxed his personal nostalgia with movie imagery which includes a sheriff's 400 member "executive posse" patrolling Phoenix in search of lawbreakers: "I remember, going way back, watching Tom Mix and Gene Autry and Roy Rogers . . . and I always remember the sheriff swearing in business people on a horse as posse men and saying, 'Go after the

horse thieves'" (Mydans, 1995, p. A6; see Koppes & Black, 1987). Sounding the alarm of perceived lawlessness, social disorder, and moral panic, the nostalgic view of corrections expresses a need to regain control of convicts and penal institutions, as well as a return to a simpler society. In doing so, notions of retribution and deterrence are politicized to the extent that the locus of power is personified in criminal justice officials. Sheriff Joseph M. Arpaio, who was elected in 1992 to administer the Maricopa county jail, Arizona, announced to the press, "I want everybody in this country to know that if you commit a crime, you are going into a very bad jail. . . . I want people to say: 'I hate that sheriff. I hate his jails'" (Mydans, 1995, p. A6). Correspondingly, Sheriff Arpaio proudly boasted his beliefs about the virtues of expanding the criminal justice system, saying, "My whole philosophy is, put more people in jail. We've got a vicious crime problem out there, and the answer is to take them off the streets and educate them through punishment" (Mydans, 1995, p. A6).

Illuminating the tendency for elected leaders to resort to political hyperbole in justifying the government's financial commitment to increasing the criminal justice apparatus, Georgia Congressman Newt Gingrich proclaimed, "We should build as many stockades as necessary, and as quickly as though this were wartime and people were dying, because they are" (Berk, 1994, p. A9). Likewise, California Governor Pete Wilson blended populism and correctional economics into his personal vernacular of political crime-speak: "There's really no dispute that these reforms will require considerable additional expense for building prisons and operating them. That is an expense, I submit, that the public is willing to pay. We cannot afford not to pay" ("California Governor," 1994, p. A16). Joining the prevailing political mantra to expand the correctional machinery, New York Governor George E. Pataki pleaded to his constituents, "We cannot fail to build new [correctional] facilities if public safety requires it" (Levy, 1995, p. B4).

Whereas the divide between news sources supporting the government's correctional strategy of getting tough (53%) and its opposition (47%) was narrower than others, the total number of statements favored the government (61%; see table 2). Nevertheless, many dissenters offered insightful and reasonable criticisms of get-tough campaigns. In particular, a critic of Alabama's revived chain gangs and rock-breaking ritual pointed to the futility of those practices. Dalmus Davidson, a highway director in Alabama, reported that the Department of Corrections' rock-breaking program would "provide no financial benefit to the state, which already has contracts with quarries to crush rock in various sizes that can be used along highway shoulders and for some road construction" ("Alabama to Make Prisoners," 1995, p. A5). In essence, get-tough campaigns often resort to a form of prison labor that ironically is void of utility and profit, suggesting that such penal exercises take on a purely punitive significance (Foucault, 1979; Welch, 1999).

Privatization and corrections as industry. Correctional economics evident in the growing correctional-industrial complex remained a principle theme

in articles on privatization ($n = 9$) and corrections as industry ($n = 6$) (1 additional article focused on the privatization of health care; together these articles comprise 8% of our sample). Overall, 72% of news sources ($n = 49$) and 70% of quotes ($n = 121$) supported the government's correctional strategy advocating both privatization and the use of corrections as local industry. While downsizing the armed services and closing military bases, a move that erodes the economic base of those communities, the government has endeavored to offset local financial loss by installing penal institutions that promise to boost the local economy.

A case in point: In 1992, the federal government announced the closing of Fort Dix, N.J., army base, sending shock waves through a community that had deep financial ties to the military. (In fact, nearly 4,000 civilians worked at Fort Dix, one of the nation's largest employers.) An agreement between the Pentagon and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, however, softened the blow by converting Fort Dix into the federal system's biggest prison (housing 3,200 inmates). An estimated 700 new jobs were created, albeit little compensation for the massive civilian layoffs caused by the closing of the army base. According to Daniel R. Dunne, a spokesman for the Federal Bureau of Prisons,

It's a win-win situation for everyone involved. . . . It's an excellent opportunity for the taxpayers. We'd move into a facility that's already established. Both organizations see the importance and economic significance this has and are looking to make it work. (Hanley, 1992, p. 33)

Similarly, in other articles describing the support for corrections as local industry, a Weed, California, city councilwoman retorted, "prisons don't go out of business" ("Residents of Dying," 1994, p. 28) whereas a resident in Appleton, Minnesota, quipped, "It's not a smoke-stack industry. . . . It's a renewable resource" (Terry, 1993, pp. 1, 14).

On the other side of the debate, relatively few sources were quoted opposing the government's correctional strategy of privatization and use of prisons to generate revenue ($n = 19$ articles, 28%; $n = 53$ quotes, 30%). Six of the 16 articles did not cite a single source (or statement) of criticism, and in 4 articles, only one critic was quoted. Still, some critics of the government's correctional policies did shed light on the ironic nature of correctional economics contributing to the proliferation of the correctional enterprise.

Ideally, prisons should be trying to put themselves out of business by doing everything in their power to reduce the recidivism rate. . . . But the very function of a for-profit prison company is to keep people locked up, as long as possible because the companies are paid a certain amount per prisoner, per day. (Jenni Gainsborough, spokeswoman for the National Prison Project of the American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], quoted in Van Natta, 1995, p. A24)

In a similar vein, Alvin Bronstein, executive director of the National Prison Project of the ACLU, cited criminal justice as one of the few growth industries in the United States, adding, "Corrections today is a gigantic cash machine" (Holmes, 1994, p. 3).

Conclusion

Proponents of dominant ideology theory argue that the media's manufacturing of news relies heavily on government sources who, in turn, exploit public access to reinforce state power (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1980; Hall et al., 1978; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). From a Marxian view of the media, the power of the ruling class extends beyond the ownership and control of the means of material production by exerting influence over the means of mental production. Public pronouncements ratifying the government's criminal justice apparatus, for instance, are mental products transmitted in line with the imperatives of the dominant ideology (see Gramsci, 1971; Larain, 1983; Marx, 1978; Sahin, 1980).

This research discovered considerable evidence of the politicization of punishment and criminal justice agenda setting. Emulating the hierarchy of state managers, political and government leaders were quoted considerably more often on correctional issues than any other news source, even corrections officials and prison managers. Our findings suggest that media discourse on corrections provides additional opportunities for high-ranking government figures to institutionalize their authoritative position (Becker, 1967, 1973; Chermak, 1997; Hall et al., 1978). In our sample, government sources pronounced repeatedly their agenda to expand the correctional system and to harshen the nature of incarceration, both of which are prominent features of coercive social control. Whereas political posturing on corrections serves to cultivate public support for criminal justice policy, it also functions to legitimize state power through the distribution of punishment (Foucault, 1979; Welch, 1999). By serving as primary news sources, politicians and government officials benefit ideologically, insofar as they determine what is *socially thinkable* about crime and criminal justice; likewise, they also gain materially by promoting their institutional goals and needs (e.g., increased spending on prison construction, maintenance, resources, and personnel) (see Chermak, 1994, 1997; Fishman, 1978; Hall et al., 1978; Humphries, 1981; Kappeler & Potter, 2005; Kasinsky, 1994; Surette, 1992; Tunnell, 1992).

The politicization of punishment and criminal justice agenda setting in the media have significant implications to correctional policy and practice. The correctional debate presented in the *New York Times*, whose motto is "All the news that's fit to print," concentrates heavily on issues of institutional violence and correctional programs. To a lesser degree, the *New York Times* addresses prison health care, get-tough policies, and privatization/corrections industry, while neglecting other important correctional issues (e.g., capital punishment, juveniles, and female prisoners). More to the point of agenda setting, which influences correctional policies, those selected issues are introduced more often from the viewpoint of politicians and government officials whose perspectives determine the fate of policy and the flow of funding.

The phenomenon of agenda setting in corrections is highly relevant to criminal justice research, especially considering that popular notions about

crime and criminal justice are constructed by the media, often according to the political views of government leaders. Criminal justice scholars entering the public debate over corrections should assess critically what is being reported in the media, remaining attentive to which issues are subject to discussion and which issues are ignored. Equally important, scholars should ascertain which groups serve as the dominant news sources and decipher their recommendations for correctional policy and practice. In doing so, it is crucial that scholars be mindful of the biases among news sources and confront the numerous myths and misconceptions shaping the government's correctional strategies.

In sum, our analysis of newspaper articles on corrections yields findings consistent with previous research documenting the media's dependence on government sources in manufacturing images of crime and criminal justice (Barak, 1994; Chermak, 1994, 1997; Ericson et al., 1987, 1989, 1991; Fishman, 1978; Hall et al., 1978; Humphries, 1981; Kasinsky, 1994; Surette, 1992; Welch, Fenwick, & Roberts, 1997, 1998). However, we also revealed that the press tends to include voices challenging the government's correctional strategies, suggesting perhaps a sense of pluralism. In fact, 38% of the sources (and their quotes) in our sample opposed the government's correctional policies and practices. Still, the degree of diversity evident in this study must be interpreted cautiously. Our examination of news sourcing was confined to the *New York Times*; as a result, the extent of pluralism in our findings may be unique to that newspaper. Additional research is needed to determine whether these findings are representative of other newspapers and media outlets. Despite these limitations, our investigation contributes further to a critical understanding of the social construction of crime news by offering an analysis of corrections: a vital component of criminal justice, though widely neglected by media researchers.

Notes

¹ In keeping to our task of evaluating the relative balance of press coverage on corrections in the United States, we eliminated articles on international corrections ($n = 23$), leaving 206 articles in the sample.

² Newspaper articles on drug and alcohol treatment were assigned to the previous section on programs.

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