

**CRISIS IN CARCERAL CITY:
AMERICAN CORRECTIONAL SERVICES AT THE CUSP OF THE 21st CENTURY**
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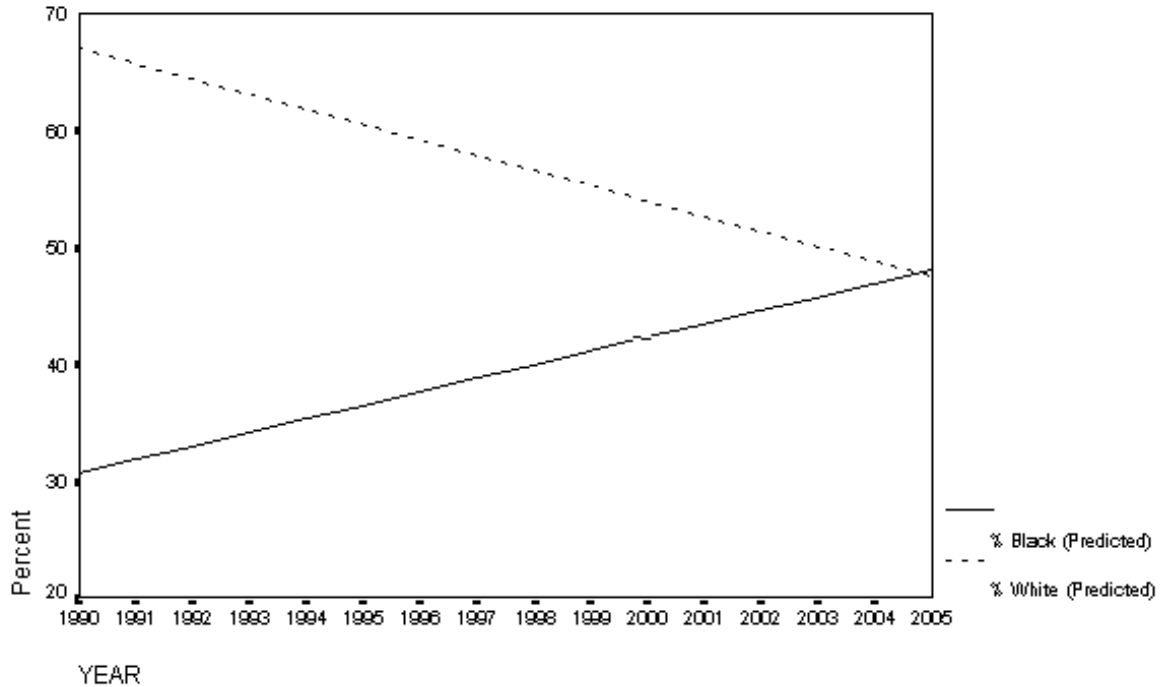
As other forms of institutionalization decrease the prison is becoming increasingly identified as the central and dominant form of confinement. The *punishment paradigm*, with its emphasis upon increased use of prisons and greater penal austerity, has become the operative social response to reduce crime and increase public safety. The current incarceration solution for crime is comparable to approaches used in Victorian times.¹ “Specific problem groups--for example, drug users or the unemployed--become loosely grouped as a category reminiscent of the dangerous classes of the 19th century and for which only the loose label *underclass* appears applicable.”^{2(p.97)} An attending and troubling aspect of the current incarceration policies is the dramatic re-emergence of the private-for-profit prison industry.³ It is not surprising, therefore, that the Norwegian criminologist, Nils Christie, has warned of rapidly approaching western-style gulags as *a form of industry*.⁴

In January 1997, the Bureau of Justice Statistics announced that the incarceration rate in federal and state prisons and in local jails of the United States had almost doubled during the past decade alone.⁵ At midyear 1996, more than 1.6 million U.S. residents were incarcerated. State and Federal prisons housed about two thirds of the incarcerated population (1,112,448). Relative to the number of U.S. residents, the rate of incarceration in prisons at year-end 1996 totaled 427 sentenced inmates per 100,000 residents -- up from 292 in 1990. We now incarcerate, at a per capita rate, more of our own citizens than any other country in the world.

A matter of further concern is the changing racial demographics of these incarceration rates. The average percentage of nonwhite inmates in state adult correctional agencies rose by more than 2 percentage points in 1990, up from 46.8 percent to 49.1 percent. This percentage has since grown steadily over time. The average reached 50.7 percent in 1993 and approached 52 in 1996.^{6(p.9)} When interrupted time-series analysis is applied to these data, the levels after 1989 are significantly different at the $p < .01$ probability level. This analysis highlights the time frame and racial divide embodied in increased crack/cocaine convictions. Projections by government and private sector researchers indicate that the racial component of the prison population will continue to grow in the future. Chart I profiles this situation in the Federal prison system.

Chart I:

**PROJECTED RACIAL PROFILE:
FEDERAL PRISONERS THROUGH 2005**



Least squares regression was applied to existing 1990s data on the racial breakdown in federal prisons (Bureau of Justice Statistics: *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics - 1995*, 574). The black population percentage is growing, on average, at a rate of 1.16% per year; the white population percentage is falling at a rate of 1.31% per year. The graphical representation of the predicted values suggests that these statistically significant linear trends will intersect by the year 2005.

As noncompetitive government agencies, correctional institutions do not compete for clients and have little to no control over the velocity and scale of incarceration rates.^{7,8,9} The traditional bipolar prison of the past has now been fully transformed into a modern-day, complex tripolar prison, consisting of an interplay between operational exigencies and constituent interests that belie the traditional interactional dyads of officer-inmate relations of past times.¹⁰

Incarceration trends amplify the prison system's social and legal complexities. The size and velocity of the prison population are a result of many factors, including the nation's crime level, sentencing laws, and law enforcement policies (e.g., crack cocaine and related drug offence penalties). The primary factor governing this

situation is the enactment of mandatory sentencing legislation in all 50 states, with the United States Congress legislating the predominant approach to deter potential offenders and incapacitate convicted criminals. This especially applies to the new get-tough mandatory minimum sentences aimed at repeat offenders. The very existence of the correctional journal, *Overcrowded Times*,¹¹ published as a compendium on crowding issues, demonstrates the inordinate number of prisoners living in overcrowded conditions.

Recidivism has been characterized as a built-in feature of the criminal justice system. "Be it either offenders returning with past custodial sentences or while still on parole, the facts indicate that correctional services are increasingly admitting, processing, and managing past clients of the system."^{12(p.3)} Conditional release returns in Canadian prisons have doubled in the past 20 years and close to 25 percent of all admissions to prisons in Canada and the United States are returns to custody following the technical breach of release conditions.^{13(p.21)} The recycling of veteran inmates has a contagious effect on both inmates and staff. Hardened, repeat offenders, bring an operative and contagious form of social violence into correctional facilities. The infiltration of gangs in the prison environment has become institutionalized. This recycling process has come to serve some of the more sophisticated gang enterprises as an opportunity for recruiting and reconnoitering in the staging of their illicit activities and sub-rosa control of the general population. Gang activities are now present in juvenile facilities and are emerging in adult women's prisons.

Violence is on the rise in the nation's correctional facilities. As prisons fill to capacity to capacity and beyond, constraints on behavior increase, and inmates may react angrily (and calculatedly) against infringements on their space and circumscribed autonomy. The dangerous offenders seem to spur each other into more and more extreme acts of rebellion and opposition. An inmate oppositional culture arises which focuses its rage against the authorities. Prison overcrowding is characterized as a situation that ". . .breeds criminality by contiguity."^{14(p.181)} . Essentially, prison officials face two main problems -- the growing organizational scale and threat of conflict among well-entrenched blacks, whites, and Hispanics gangs and the threat of individual acts of predatory behavior by members of the strongest group against members of the weakest group."^{15(p.82)} Responses to this crisis focus on two main solutions: the prison must first decide whether it wishes to *concentrate or* disperse the most dangerous and disruptive inmates.¹⁶

It is now commonplace in some prisons to find 20 per cent or more of the inmates serving time in administrative or punitive segregation. Segregated prisoners are much harder to service and their attitude toward staff can become extremely hostile. The population of these units can thus tend to become permanent, precipitating a very dangerous situation. This “solution” to dangerousness and violence has a stultifying effect on prison programs, operation, and the morale (sense of security) of both inmates and staff.

One of the strongest objections to enhancing the institutional focus on frequent, violent offenders is that the present system is already sharply focused. If correctional agencies are already concentrating on the most dangerous offenders, it will do little good and conceivably some harm to urge still greater concentration. The safety and security of those inmates who seek to do their time and cooperated with institutional programs are jeopardized in the process of overarching efforts solely focused on controlling inmate gangs. The ability for non-gang inmates to avoid gang involvement is becoming less tenable. This population of inmates is seriously in need of primary focus. They, along with the correctional officers, are increasingly forced to survive within a security regime designed solely to control gang-bangers and troublemakers.

Chart II:

Summary Findings - Prisoners in 1995

**Chart II Summary Findings State Prisoners Incarcerated for a Violent Offense
In 1995, an estimated 46% of State prison inmates were incarcerated for a violent offense.**

Most Serious Offense	1995 Percent of Inmates in State Prison
Total	100%
Violent Offense	46
Property Offense	24
Drug Offenses	23
Public-order offense	7
Other/unspecified	1

* Among sentenced Federal inmates in 1995, an estimated 60% were serving a sentence for a drug offense.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, June 1997

Note: A sharp rise in violent offenders among white inmates (accounting for 42% of the 10-year increase in white prisoners) and in drug offenders for black inmates (42% of their increase) for 1996.

Character and Control of the Contemporary Inmate

The rate of assaults of officers and institutional staff have reached a crisis proportion nationally. Institutional violence is escalating to lethal proportions. In the first six months of 1997, a Federal and a State correctional officer were murdered in line-of-duty deaths and fellow correctional officers sustained vicious stabbing wounds in these incidents. The emerging profile of the inmate perpetrators of these lethal assaults reveal a hardened, gang affiliated, repeat offender, usually serving a 10-to-20 year prisons term for aggravated assault and related violent crimes. Quite simply, today's prisons and jails are more dangerous because of the unpredictability of the inmate population, which is composed of a new and highly distilled group of inmates. They are more alienated, more violent, more difficult to manage. This new generation of inmates have been termed as *super predators*.^{17(p.31)} A general profile of them includes the following characteristics:

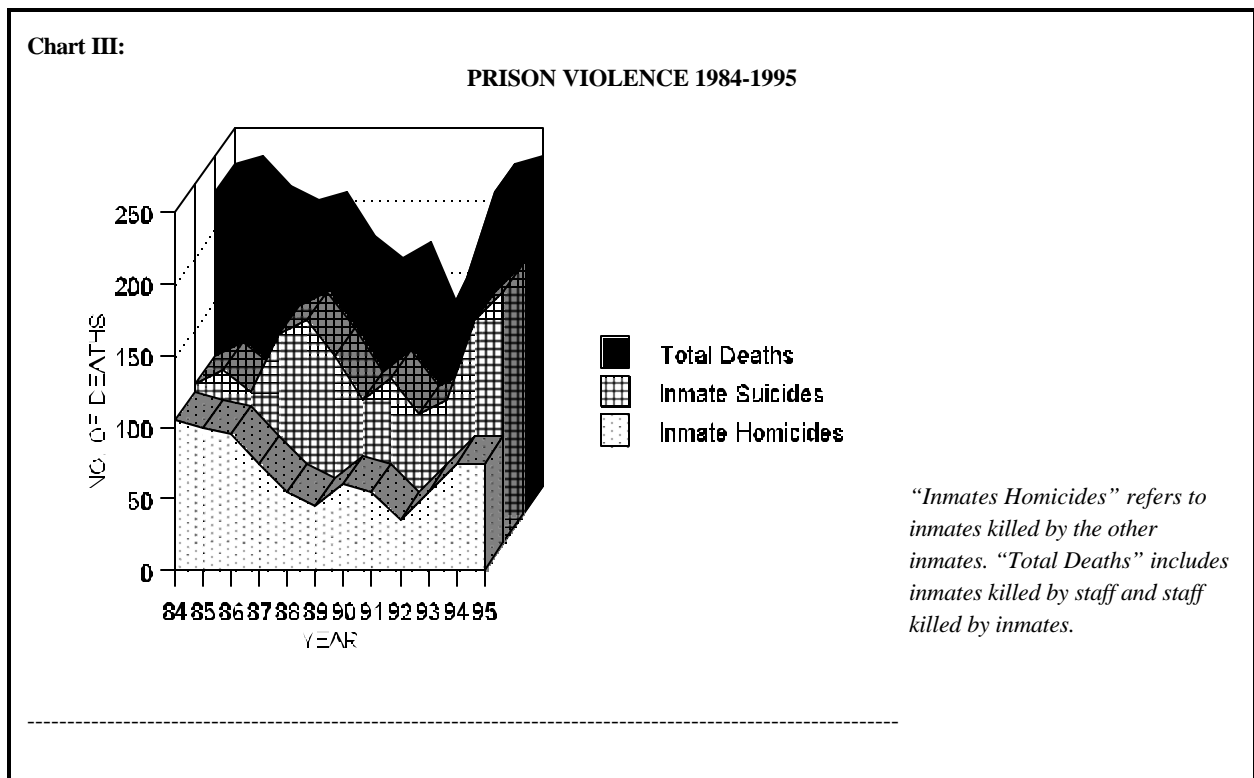
- ? young
- ? minority
- ? less healthy (10 years older than physical age)
- ? HIV positive/Tuberculosis/STD
- ? drug/substance abuse offender
- ? violent predator
- ? gang affiliated
- ? tattooed
- ? emotional/mental health problem
- ? emotionally/spontaneous/hedonistic
- ? children having children
- ? not married
- ? welfare client
- ? product of single parent home (usually matriarchal)
- ? unskilled
- ? undereducated

On the extreme side the gang rules of the street now apply to the correction facility. The mentality of the gang "drive-by execution" has become manifest behind the walls of our correctional facilities. Gangs flourish in prisons for protection purposes, just as gangs flourish in the street for social reasons of turf and protection. Just as gang leaders may "police" neighborhood turf these strategies often erupt into assassinations. Inmates and staff are murdered and mutilated on "orders" from prison gang leaders.

In many ways, the confinement itself makes the gang leader more "visible," providing anti-hero status. Ironically, incarceration contrasts with the usual fugitive and furtive existence of living in the shadows, one step

ahead of the police or FBI. Imprisonment can become a time for reunion and reconnecting with family, friends, and associates that were too precarious to manage in the gang-turf environs of the streets.¹⁸ In this context, incarceration is seen as an opportunity to learn new skills, share information, gain alliances, settle old feuds, begin new ones. Gang loyalty in some prisons is so fierce that inmates are willing to risk prolonging their sentences or losing their lives to comply with gang orders.¹⁹ As a result, a new sophisticated inmate code has emerged that now more closely follows racial and cultural boundaries but includes also a virile capacity for collaborative violence in sustaining control over the illicit inmate economy and respective gang turf.

Florida prison officials have identified more than 900 inmate members of 240 groups, mostly Florida-based street gangs with such names as the International Posse, the Gangster Disciples, the Insane Gangster Disciples and the Zulu Nation,. Although the gang members represent a fraction of Florida's 64,000 inmates, the system identifies 30 new gang members each week, officials say. Recent correctional studies show that Florida inmate gang members are five times as likely as non gang inmates to engage in disruptive behavior and are transferred more often because they are difficult to manage or they pose an internal security threat. Florida prison officials are particularly concerned because many of their gangs identify with the Folk or People alliances. Such affiliations strengthen otherwise insignificant groups. For instance, some gangs require members to defend all fellow gang members and allies. In once case, 30 Florida prisoners got into a fight because one of them inadvertently sipped water from the cup of a rival inmate.²⁰



Anti-gang policies and procedures have moved to the forefront of institutional security priorities. Current security and custody jargon refers to the prison gang problem as Security Threat Groups (STGs). The U.S. Bureau of Justice Administration's (BJA) now provides information related to prison gangs, gang members, and prison gang activities through its Regional Information Sharing System (RISS). It also provides technical assistance and training on a national basis to correctional agencies and allied law enforcement personnel. This network is evolving into a formal system for the sharing of gang intelligence data and strategies.²¹ Connecticut, California, and Michigan have developed several of the more sophisticated strategies for gang control, including telephone call monitoring, canine teams, and increased collaboration with law enforcement agencies.²² The following case-study of the Connecticut anti-gang PHASE Program provides an excellent model for managing the new generation inmate.

Connecticut: A Case Study

In 1990, the Connecticut Department of correction was experiencing a proliferation of organized gangs and violence within the state's correctional facilities. As a result, in 1991, the Department of Correction formally established a gang management unit. The employees assigned to this unit along with designated staff at each of the state's correctional facilities began to gather information on gangs and monitor and investigate all gang activities. By the beginning of 1992 an agency-wide policy was developed to both monitor and control gangs and gang members. This policy established a system for formally designating a security risk group (gang), and individual inmates as security risk group members.

The following disincentives and restrictions were established for inmates that were designated as a member of a security risk group:

- ? Not eligible for placement in a minimum security prison
- ? Not allowed to have a home furlough
- ? Not allowed an overnight family visit
- ? Not allowed to work outside the prisons secure perimeter
- ? Not eligible for having any lost good time restored
- ? Not allowed to work in a prison industry program
- ? Increased sanctions for any disciplinary infractions

Despite these initiatives gang activities and violence continued to escalate within the prison system. In late 1993 and early 1994, the department established two new prison programs, one for those inmates that were designated as security risk group members and displaying violent behavior, (or were security risk group leaders) and the other for any inmate that assaulted a staff member. Both programs require the identified inmates to be placed in a high security housing unit that operates a specialized management program. The first phase of each program is very restrictive with inmates that demonstrate appropriate behavior and program participation being able to progress through and ultimately out of the program. Criteria for program advancement is based on the inmates effort, attitude, behavior and graded achievement, with a corresponding increase in privileges and responsibility as the inmate moves through the system. It was felt that traditional policies of segregating inmates that were prone to violence without program intervention, or without a structured release program had not proven successful in reducing violent behavior within the prison system.

Although the specific restrictions, privileges, and programs are different in the gang management units and the assaultive inmate units, each established a "PHASE" model consisting of three levels.

Gang Management Program

PHASE I encourages rudimentary disciplines while gauging inmates in program adaptability and attitude. Cross-cultural sensitization is taught encouraging inmates to live and work together harmoniously. During the PHASE I process, inmates are reviewed by the unit team for progression into PHASE II. Before acceptance into PHASE II, inmates are required to sign a *Letter of Intent* stating their intention to renounce any and all gang affiliations upon completion of the PHASE Program.

PHASE II develops socialization skills while delving into educational, management, and awareness programming. Programs are presented providing an understanding of social delineation's and divisions and how to recognize and prevent them. This philosophy is incorporated into a program of understanding, awareness, and alternatives to "gang" membership.

Upon acceptance into PHASE II, inmates are grouped into "squads" consisting of twelve (12) inmates of differing gang affiliations with no more than four of the same affiliation in each squad. Furthermore inmates are required to have a cell partner from a rival gang. All activities and daily events take place as a "squad." Inmates are required to attend a week-long orientation program designed to familiarize them with the program and to allow staff to insure their appropriateness for continued participation. Inmates must continue to meet the expectations of PHASE I and PHASE II to progress, and are continually evaluated and reviewed by the unit team for progression into PHASE III. The PHASE II portion of the program takes

approximately 60 days to complete.

PHASE III continues the emphasis on programming by diversifying into anger and violence control forums. The cross-cultural sensitization continues to be taught in practical application through successful inmate-to-inmate interaction. The ability to channel aggressive feelings into positive modes with real resolutions and expectations is explored.

The intended product of PHASE III is a culturally-adapted and socially-appropriate individual, capable of dealing successfully with the pressure of incarceration and gang affiliations. Interactive and interpersonal skills are taught to help inmates live together without violence. The PHASE III portion of the program can be completed in approximately 90 days. Through each of the phases inmate behavior, compliance with programming, and continued gang affiliation or activity is monitored.

Ultimately, if the inmate is unable to progress through the phases and remains in PHASE I for a period of a year, placement in the more restrictive Assaultive Inmate Management Program is considered. However, most inmates take advantage of the program and finally, upon successful completion of all three phases, and a formal renunciation of gang affiliation are reintegrated into general population at other facilities throughout the state.

Assaultive Inmate Management Program

PHASE I is designed to limit the inmate's acting out behavior making him amenable for programming in PHASE II and PHASE III. This phase is less restrictive than PHASE I with limited out-of-cell group programming. Programs dealing with criminality and self change, and effective communication are taught. The individual inmate is allowed to progress through each phase at his own pace and is held strictly accountable for his action.

The inmate in PHASE II may advance at his pace to the next phase, remain in the status quo or be returned to PHASE I if his behavior warrants.

PHASE III provides considerable out of cell programming and gives the inmate opportunities to learn methods to avoid assaultive behavior. This phase contains the final steps proper to an inmate being considered for release in general population. These steps include an intensive psycho educational programming model which each individual inmate must successfully complete. Programs dealing with anger management, violence reduction and relapse prevention are conducted.

Since their inception these programs have had a direct impact on reducing both the level of violence and gang activity throughout the Connecticut prison system. Less than six percent of the inmates that have completed the Assaultive Inmate Management Program have had to be returned to the program because of continued violent behavior.²³ Through the development of these programs the Connecticut Department of Correction has had significant success in controlling and managing the

violence prone new generation inmate. It is hoped that these programs will prove to be not only a behavior management program for inmates while they are in prison, but also a behavior change program for inmates when they return to their communities.

Custodial Management Implications

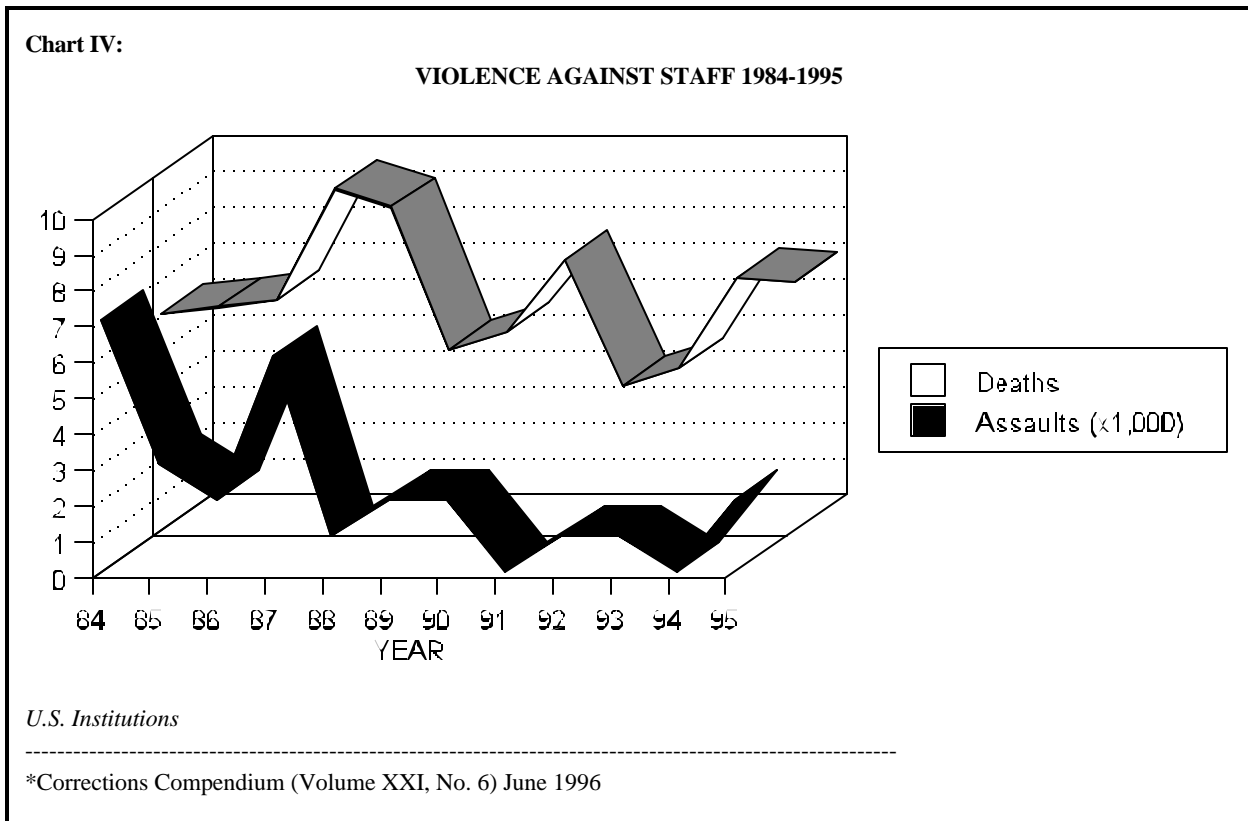
A violence-threat paradigm is emerging that influences inmate-inmate and inmate-officer interactions. Cellular telephones are now reported as a major new contraband item relative to prison gangs and their activities.²⁴ Another example is found in the nefarious ways in which gangs obtain information on facility staff, work schedules, supplies, and materials. Gang acquisition of personal car license plates, social security numbers, credit card numbers, and other information on institutional staff is linked to both internal and external sources. In some jurisdictions, it is not unusual for correctional officers to find themselves on duty in a cell block or in a dormitory that houses inmates from their own neighborhood in the free community. Close proximity between officers and prisoners creates a situation fraught with potential security and safety problems. Correctional officers, like police officers, are easy prey for extortionists.²⁵

The deployment of the correctional officer workforce also has been directly affected by overcrowding. Traditional two-officer duty-post assignments are being altered to one-officer posting. Aggregate duty-post assignments are concentrated in these new congregate housing areas. Towers are being closed and new video surveillance and other security technology is being introduced to augment or replace archaic staffing models. While this new technology represents important innovation, it also precipitates a precarious process when it causes staff reductions in crucial support service areas. It is in these places--mess halls, corridors, chapels, recreation areas, classrooms, clinics and hospitals, transportation vans, shops, and work details--where violence most frequently occurs. Research and documentation of current incidents of institutional violence patterns indicate that these incidents are indeed more frequent, more violent, more severe, and more planned vis-a-vis spontaneous events.^{26, 27} The development of custodial control mechanisms and classification systems is correlated increasingly to the containment of institutional violence. Accurate, aggressive, and highly flexible inmate classification is crucial to institutional safety and inmate welfare. In this context, custodial control is not unlike the current initiatives to

reinvent law enforcement through community policing programs that enable both officers and inmates to perceive the mutuality of their safety concerns. Interpersonal communication skills have become the life-blood of effective correctional officer performance. This includes the capacity to understand the full range of inmate (verbal and nonverbal) modes of communication: the culture, the slang, the signals, the threat, and the fear that abounds. The fact that correctional officers are *locked-in* and *unarmed* as they maintain daily custodial control is perceived only as an occupational responsibility. The simple fact that correctional officers *can't walk away* from a confrontation or crisis within the institutional setting is often overlooked. The deployment of correctional officers, including the proper mix of new and seasoned officers, is of paramount importance.²⁸

Overcrowding also has increased the likelihood of enforced overtime duty for correctional officers. Excessive overtime or shift rotation necessitated by overtime potentially strains the physical and psychological well-being of staff and results in negative stress escape such as over-indulgence in smoking and alcohol, poor diet, and the failure to exercise. Correctional officer divorce and suicide rates are inordinately high.²⁹ These situations easily can lead to a contagious pattern of deep cynicism. Chart IV illustrates this pervading pattern of violence against correctional staff.

An aggressive retrofitting-construction industry that provides inflated sprung structures, tents, and trailers has emerged in response to the needs of the overcrowded prison market. Most of these structures only meet minimum standards for basic infrastructure security/safety needs. These include retrofitted traditional security cell blocks changed into open dormitory housing. In some cases, these changes in physical plant usage obscure the appropriate security classification rationale for medium- and maximum-security risks inmates. Correctional agencies are resorting to a wide range of jerry-built, environmental solutions (e.g., janitor closets converted to cells,



gymnasiums, chapels, auditoriums, "the flats" or public areas of cell blocks, and day rooms converted into prefabricated modular dormitory buildings). Overcrowding has also resulted in the redeployment and use of structures not designed to be prisons (e.g., hospitals, schools, and staff correctional academies). Efforts to accommodate overcrowding have also included the conversion of river barges, ferry boats, U. S. Coast Guard and Navy boats for use as correctional institutions.

The trend is moving toward higher security with much more sophisticated technology and operating. Ultra-security architectural models are emerging for correctional custodial control. Consequently, an aggressive construction of “maxi-maxi” at the state level has occurred. For budgetary reasons, most of these institutions have been created by renovating existing prisons, lacking the architectural advantage of a purpose-built prisons such as the U.S. penitentiaries in Marion, Illinois and the new super-maximum Federal facility at Florence, Colorado.

Despite this security-conscious architecture and secure operating procedures, a great deal of violence continues to occur in maximum security prisons. This is hardly surprising given the violent proclivities of offenders who are forced to live together in these crowded and restricted conditions. In some instances, the very architecture and regime constructed to prevent violence has had a perverse violence-generating effect. For example, controlled movement and long periods of being locked up in cells may generate a great deal of tension and frustration. Indeed, all the *signals* that indicate that the inhabitants of these institutions are dangerous might set off something of a *self-fulfilling prophesy*, producing the very type of behavior that is unwanted. Severe overcrowding, institutional violence, racial tensions are significant symptoms of this crisis situation.

The necessity of effectively utilizing scarce resources by the cross-designation of federal, state, and local resources represents a practical alternative for addressing these problems. The reality of diminishing resources and increased population without parallel growth in the employee workforce, innovative design and increased construction of correctional facilities will further compound this crisis. As federal and non-federal prison and detention systems become more bureaucratic, it is most important that this enhanced coordination be handled expeditiously through identify interrelated factors concerning staff expertise, delivery systems, policy and procedures, physical plant designs and variety of correctional programs, all of which effect the potential for controlling violence in a correctional facility.

A viable correctional agency research unit, often in concert external expertise from academe and private research centers, can guide an agency in examining both standard and elusive questions concerning institutional violence. Research has suggested that inmates who spend more time each week watching television were more likely to commit property crimes and were more likely to be victims of personal crimes: this is an activity that is usually less directly supervised than ?other forms of recreation.”^{30(p.371, 376)}. Inmate violence is multidimensional. Policies for

reducing inmate victimization require a knowledge of the characteristics of inmates and their lifestyles (pre-institutional and institutional) which potentially influence both their likelihood of committing crime and of being victimized during incarceration.^{31, 32, 33} Unfortunately, many state and local correctional agencies have eliminated full-time internal operational planning and research functions.

Conclusion

The fastest growing segment of most state budgets is corrections. From 1973 to 1993, state corrections spending increased 1200 percent while State expenditures for higher education increased 419 percent. For the third consecutive year, corrections received more new state dollars than higher education.^{34, 35} The Justice Policy Institute report, *From Classrooms to Cell Blocks: A National Perspective*, projects this trend continuing into the 21st century.³⁶

The American correctional system already functions, to a large degree, as a surrogate public health system. The racial demographics of our prison population mirror deeper social problems, problems that correctional agencies increasingly are being asked to solve. Across the nation, state and federal penitentiaries exist as urban bubbles where city problems are custodially contained. If the city that feeds the prison has gangs on its streets, the prison has gangs on its blocks. If there is rampant drug use, drug dealing, and violence on the outside, these activities will ensue on the inside. The tasks of maintaining custody, security, and control in a humane and safe manner will become more challenging and difficult.

The magnitude of incarceration in the United States at the close of this century casts a shadow on our larger social infrastructure. This situation raises important questions about the purpose and scope of incarceration: questions that can only be answered by social programs and other resources outside of prisons. The current trend is toward higher security with more sophisticated technology and procedures.^{37, 38} Current philosophies and techniques of unit management, direct supervision, and related operational methods for delivering services to inmates will assume even greater industrial and programmatic proportion.

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