

An overview of the prison systems

[Sociology](#), [Social Issues](#)



This critique on the criminal justice system is going to focus on prisons.

Prisons are institutions for the confinement of persons convicted of criminal offenses. This paper is going to discuss the early history of prisons, early American prisons, goals of prisons, North Carolina prisons, and an overall overview of the prison system.

Throughout history, most societies have built places in which to hold persons accused of criminal acts pending some form of trial. But the confinement of persons/criminals after a trial for punishment is relatively new. In ancient times (around the 15th century), the penalties for crime were often some type of corporal punishment. Whipping, drawn and quartered, broken on the wheel, burned at the stake, beheaded, hanged, or stretched on the rack.

In the 16th century England, vagrants and petty offenders were committed to correctional institutions known as workhouses, a correctional facility for persons guilty of minor criminal violations. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, the government began to transport convicted felons to the English colonies. The punishment was initially thought of as the hard labor to which the prisoners were consigned. However, the idea that persons convicted of crime could be punished and then released after a relatively long period of time, was a new concept. Jails were first used as collection points for criminals awaiting transportation.

Early jails were mostly dark, overcrowded, and filthy. The prisoners were held together indiscriminately, no separation of men and women, the young and old, the convicted and the unconvicted, or the sane and the insane.

In America, the concept of imprisonment became a realization. The English Quaker, William Penn, abolished the death penalty for most crimes in the late 1600s, substituting imprisonment as a punishment. After battling between the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1718 and the replacement with incarceration in 1789, the Walnut Street Goal (Philadelphia) became the first prison in the United States. By the mid 19th century, most of the other states had followed.

Two prison models soon emerged in the U. S. The first system, known as the Auburn Model, began in New York in 1817. The prisoners worked together in total silence during the day, but were housed separately at night. Very strict discipline was enforced, and violators were subjected to severe reprisals. The second model, Pennsylvania, began in 1829 at Cherry Hill (Eastern State Penitentiary). The Pennsylvania model was based on solitary confinement for convicts both day and night.

The two models were both criticized very vigorously. Proponents of the Pennsylvania model focused on its hope of rehabilitation. The theory of being a felon and locked up alone all day in a cell with nothing but a Bible to read, would help out drastically. The Auburn model was criticized as being virtual slavery. This was thought because of the fact that the prisoners were often put to work for private entrepreneurs who had contracted with the state for their labor. Prisoners were never paid, leaving profits for the business owners and the state. Advocates of the Auburn model alleged that the idleness of the prisoners in the Cherry Hill penitentiary sometimes caused madness.

Proponents stressed the activity of the prisoners and the profits from their labor, which meant that the states did not have to finance the prison.

Rehabilitation was the system's main goal. In 1870, the National Congress on Penitentiary and Reformatory Discipline (known as the American Correctional Association) met for the first time in Cincinnati, Ohio. The congress adopted a set of principles for corrections, chief of which was the primary goal of rehabilitation. This led to the juvenile reformatories. Although the attempts to rehabilitate were relatively unsuccessful, the goal of rehabilitation changed the criminal justice system in the following decades. Probation and parole, work release, community corrections, and even a separate system of procedures and courts for dealing with juveniles, can all be traced to what was discussed at the first meeting in 1870.

The Rehabilitation programs such as vocational training, guidance counseling, and psychotherapy began as part of the whole rehabilitation goal. In 1975, a study of more than 240 such programs essentially concluded that none was truly successful in reducing the recidivism rate (relapse into criminal behavior). Although there has been much criticism to this study, many believe the basic conclusion that participation in these programs was often not really voluntary, because prisoners hoped parole boards would look favorably on those who enrolled. Most penologists (a branch of criminology dealing with prison management and the treatment of offenders) now agree that rehabilitation is not a proper reason for imprisoning someone. Thus, rehabilitation is no longer the only, or even the main objective of correction agencies.

In North Carolina, it wasn't until 1868 that the state adopted a new constitution that provided for a state penitentiary. Inmates began building North Carolina's first prison, Central Prison, in 1870. It was a completed castle-like structure near the state capitol. It was finished in December 1884, when the prisoners started moving in.

- In 1875, these same inmates were leased to private employers as laborers and farmers. Under the lease, businesses had complete responsibility for the inmates. Many worked in rock quarries and built railways, while others farmed two tracts of land that the state leased.

- In 1901, inmates began working on state roads. They were moved from work sight to work sight in horse-drawn prison cages. In 1910, the incentive wage system began and inmates could then earn up to 15 cents a day, paid upon release, for the work that was being done.

- In 1925, the General Assembly enacted a law changing the state's prison from a corporation to a department of state government. At the time, the state prison system included Central Prison, Caledonia Prison Farm, Camp Polk Prison Farm and eight road camps. Then, due to lack of regular maintenance and repair, the conditions were diminishing. The state took over the control of the prisons and the inmates, and provided new construction money from the Highway Fund for prison renovation.

- In 1935, women inmates from Central Prison moved to a south Raleigh prison camp, the site of today's Correctional Institution for Women. Women

from the Caledonia Prison Farm moved to the Raleigh facility permanently in 1956.

- In 1957, North Carolina became the first state to initiate a work release program that allowed inmates to work in private employment during the day and return to confinement at night.
- In 1958, striped prison clothing was replaced with gray uniforms for close custody, brown for medium, and green for minimum.
- In 1965, all prisons were desegregated and mental health services were established in prisons.

Prisoners in North Carolina have numerous things they can do. Prisoners can work, volunteer, go to the correctional chaplain, work out, or just about anything.

These inmates work in many different places. Food Services, Unit Services, Work Release, Prison Industry, Road Squads, Construction, State Agencies, Local Agencies, Community Work Crews, Vocational Education, and Academic Education. Other inmates take part in substance abuse treatment, have health problems, or are being admitted into prison.

Ministry to the incarcerated is as old as incarceration itself. Chaplaincy in North Carolina dates back to 1876. In the spring of 2000, over 100 chaplains were serving the inmate population. Annually, countless numbers of worship services, scripture studies, seminars, counseling sessions, segregation visits, and chaplains conduct special events. Prison chaplaincy is a special ministry

of opportunity. It can be a rewarding spiritual endeavor for those persons who have felt a divine call to this challenging ministry.

At the beginning of 2001, North Carolina's prison system consisted of 78 prison units of various sizes with eight of the units having a standard operating capacity of less than 90 inmates. However, the largest facility, Central Prison, has a capacity of 937. The cost of North Carolina's prison system varies from different forms of custody. For the Fiscal Year 1999-2000, the daily operating cost of the 64 bed medium security prison unit at Cleveland County was \$54. 06 per inmate per day, compared to the \$36. 44 per inmate daily cost of the 832 bed medium security unit at Brown Creek.

The cost goes by prison security level. The system wide average operational cost for housing inmates in North Carolina prisons in Fiscal Year 1999-2000 was \$65. 65 per day. It is broken down into:

- Minimum Custody at \$52. 52 per day

In theory, the U. S. prison system today consists of a variety of institutions (minimum, medium, maximum, jails, and federal institutions) each adapted to the characteristics and risks posed by its population.

Minimum-security prisons are often built on a campus like arrangement, which allows the prisoners autonomy and freedom within broad bounds. It is a prison facility with the lowest level of security for nondangerous, stable offenders. Prisoners may have rooms with opaque doors rather than cells that are under constant surveillance. Visits are normally private, where close

contact with visitors is encouraged in order to enhance their prisoner's ties with the family and community.

Medium-security prisons are a middle-level prison facility with a more relaxed security measures and fewer inmates.

Maximum-security prisons (the most secure prison facility) are often massive buildings, with high masonry walls or electrified fences, where the primary concern is security. Prisoners are under constant surveillance where their movements are severely restricted, and many are required to remain in their cells almost the entire day. Outdoor recreation is minimal, and visits, when allowed, are often conducted by telephone, with a glass partition between the prisoner and the visitor. There are about 130 of these maximum-security prisons that collectively house more than 100, 000 prisoners.

Jails, a place of confinement for persons held in lawful custody: such a place under the jurisdiction of a local government (as a county) for the confinement of persons awaiting trial or those convicted of minor crimes , are typically not part of the state prison system. They are often managed individually by the districts or counties in which they are located. Many criticize the jail, saying that is the worst part of the U. S. penal organization.

In recent decades, most prison systems in the U. S. have come under legal scrutiny, and the courts have found them severely wanting. Many have been declared unconstitutional in the sense that the conditions- including idleness, overcrowding, poor medical care, substantial violence, and lack of rights accorded prisoners- render confinement in these institutions " cruel and

unusual" punishment and hence in violation of the 8th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution, (Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted). Such judicial decisions have increased the pressure on state prison authorities to replace their antiquated prison facilities with more modern and humane institutions, in keeping with the ideals set forth by penologists a century ago.