

What was the most important point about the history of corrections in your mind? ...



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The advent of the penitentiary was perhaps the most important occurrence in the history of corrections or penology. Clear et al (2005) observe that galley slavery, imprisonment, transportation, corporal punishment, and death constituted the main practices in corrections from the Middle Ages to the American Revolution. The Enlightenment brought about a focus on humanism and how the good of humans could be advanced. This focus on the welfare of humans had a great influence of penal thought. Influential thinkers and activists like Beccaria, Bentham, and Howard advocated for a corrections system that was aimed at reforming the offender instead of just meting out retributive punishments. This form of utilitarian thought in penology focused on the good of humans – both the offender and the society at large.

If reformation was achieved through punishment, the offender would become a better and more responsible member of society and the society will have less crime to deal with. (Braithwaite, 1995) The penitentiary became the focal point of achieving the reformation of the offender. It was meant to be a place where the imprisoned offender would soberly reflect on his conduct through solitary confinement and other inputs and activities like visitations by the clergy and hard labour. In the history of corrections in America, the Eastern Penitentiary which was located in Pennsylvania and became operational by 1829 became the model for others that followed. The Eastern Penitentiary was described as “ the most imposing in the United States”.

(Clear et al 2005, p. 38) The use of incarceration (the penitentiary) as a tool for achieving reformation or rehabilitation has continued to be one of the central pillars in penology.

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