

# Prison food chain

[Business](#), [Industries](#)



Michella Abel ANTH4113-001 10/16/12 Professor Dowell & Hirschfeld

Capstone Anthropology PrisonFoodChain The United States has had reform after reform of their prison systems in an attempt to better them and in hopes of making them not only a punishment, but a rehabilitating system. The prisons of today are not what these reforms hoped to achieve, they are over populated, dangerous, and under-funded. Gangs have taken over the positions that wardens are supposed to fill and they rule by survival of the fittest or at least survival of the better connections.

In order to achieve the reforms' goals, data collected from ethnographic and statistical studies must be put to better use. Prison gangs have become a huge contributing factor to the overcrowding within the prisons due to its positive correlation to repeat offending and high recruitment efforts. The word Penitentiary comes from the Greek word that means to be penitent. The reality of what it is like to be in a prison may not be what most people believe it to be. There are different levels in the prison system that offenders, pending on their crime and record, will be assigned to. Marchese, 45) Super-max Prisons are for the worst of the worst offenders. Maximum security houses a variety of violent offenders. Minimum security and halfway houses restrict the comings and goings of the lowest menace threat in the system and help to make an offender ready to rejoin the outside world. The prison society is based upon a set of social rules and boundaries built and based upon respect and fear. Each kind of prisoner has a different way of obtaining this respect and attempting to claim the prison food chain.

A prisoner that was transferred would need to fight another prisoner to establish his place among the hierarchy. Prisons are a society unto

themselves and outsiders are not welcome as scientists and journalist have discovered. (Fleisher, 1989) To be a prisoner and be at the top of the hierarchy has multiple meaning for that individual, how he got there and how he keeps that position varies from one inmate to the next. Every inmate at the top of the food chain in the prison system has his or her own story as to how they got where they are, and how long it took them to get there, but the common thread is their gang connections and affixations. The top of the hierarchical system however are the guards. The guards are one of the prisoners' only interactions with the outside world that is guaranteed and occurs on a regular basis. The Stanford Experiment in (1971) showed how guards and prisoners interact on the bases of who has the authority and who doesn't. Stanford students played the role of guards and some as prisoners. It didn't take long before the students started to really believe they were guards or prisoners.

The student guards became more forceful in their commands, and showed less respect for the students that were prisoners. The student prisoners showed more compliance for the guards and submissive, even though they were just role playing. The experiment was forced to release all of the participants after the students playing the role of the prisoners started to riot and entrench themselves within the cells. Their ability to separate reality from their roles was so greatly diminished they actually started attacking each other.

There are theories that this diminishing started when they were all very publically arrested for show, but to them it felt very real. (Zimbardo) Fleisher attempted to study the prison society by becoming a guard at a prison, but

soon discovered that even he could not separate himself from the role of a guard, “ I began to think of myself as a correctional worker... I was becoming lost... What hacks did was right what convicts did was wrong”. (Fleischer, 1989, 112) There are federal cases in which inmates claim that guards either go to far to prevent gang activity or don't do anything at all to protect them.

Babock vs. White and Doe vvs. Welborn are both 8th amendment violation cases in which the guard knowingly put an inmate in harm's way with a gang, but with the overpopulation some do not have an option of where an inmate is housed despite the danger. (Eckhart, 61) A prison guard is not a police officer and cannot arrest anyone. They are babysitters for some of the most dangerous people in the world. Prisoners can and do hurt or even kill guards every year; however, there have been documented cases of guards beating and killing prisoners who attack guards.

If an inmate gets away with something like killing or attacking a fellow inmate, it was because one or more of the guards protected him. Inmates cannot be prosecuted if the guards do not speak up and turn in the inmate committing the acts. That is a system that gives the guards a great deal of power over the men in their custody. (Marchese, 1) Someone looking at a penitentiary from the outside couldn't ever imagine the set of circumstances that an inmate faces the moment they step foot behind the gates. The single biggest threat to a new inmate is the gang affiliation and if the guards recognize you as gang member.

Gangs are stronger in the prison systems than anywhere on earth. They can quickly tell a new inmate from a repeat by talking to you for a few minutes and by the confidence level the inmate portrays. Then the recruitment

begins. If the new inmate wasn't part of a gang on the outside, he is very vulnerable and has to make some fast decisions. He can attempt to remain gang free, which is very dangerous since that means you have no one looking out for you, or you have to join a gang and they choose you, you don't choose them. (National Geographic, 2007) Race is the gang of choice in prison.

Whites stick together and blacks with blacks and so on. Most sections of the prisons facilities are divided up into the race sections for each race. Whites use these three showers and these three tables and so on. White, African American, Mexican, and Other (Native American or Asian) are the more commonly used terms when prisoners are dividing the prison into race. If you get rejected from that gang you will not be allowed to join any other white gang, and a prisoner without a gang is typically beaten, raped, or killed by the enemies you acquired while in the gangs.

If you fail to join a gang from the start you are more likely to be in danger from your own race. Mostly because they have asked you to join their gang and you have refused. When you have so many dangers threatening you every day of what is now your life, joining a race gang and fighting becomes the only way to stay alive in the current prison system. Think about who is in prison. Most inmates are killers and rapist and burglars already, so the things that go on in prison isn't new to them, but the ones that are in prison for something non-violent have to share the same space as those who have committed murder and rape.

Inmates who are not violent are targets for the life term inmates just because they want to have the power over someone, just as the guards have

power over all inmates. The control issues don't stop there. To be in the gang you have to prove yourself to be worthy to be in the gang. Most acts of worth involve you beating someone up, and sometimes killing someone who has disrespected the gang recently. You can move up in the ranks very quickly in the prison gang hierarchy pending on the nature of your sentence. "Lifers" are known as inmates that will never see the outside world again, meaning they will die in the prison system. They know that a "lifer" is more likely to kill, than someone who has only a few years to serve. "Lifers" become some of the most powerful people in the prison hierarchies because they are more willing to kill you because they will never see freedom anyway. (Yost, 2010) Incidentally women prisons do not necessarily work the same as men. Many do have gang ties outside of prison, the same gangs as the men, but the connections that make while in prison are tighter than the gangs.

They set up familylike groups and the longer term inmates adopt children and watch out for them. They do have to follow their gang rules while in prison. If fellow gang member is attacked or disrespected you better do something about it. (Yost, 2010) The guards will automatically segregate gang members from the general population in small prisons, but the larger prisons are overcrowded and do not have space available to segregate them all. They have everyone from drug addicts with no violent recorded to murder's and rapist in the same common areas and cells.

Guards in the super-max facilities automatically place gang members in the SHU or Security Housing Unit. The super-max facilities are where known gang members and violent inmates are sent because they have been

deemed too large of a security threat to be housed in minimum security prisons. The guards will take the tiniest connection of gang affiliation and run with it. (Tachiki, 1118) However, these super-max and segregation cells are not doing the job that are meant to do. The leaders of these gangs are able to carry on gang business from within these cells.

For example, the Mexican Mafia can extort drug dealers because they pose a threat to the people in system and drug dealers know that are likely to end up in prison and with individuals only in segregation for a few days or weeks at a time notes can be passed containing hit lists. (Skorbek, 714) Prison gangs started back in the 1950's with the Gypsy Jokers in Washington State Prison. The Mexican Mafia emerged in 1957 in California and was the first gang to have nationwide ties consisted of Northern California Mexicans.

These gangs started out just as a way of protecting themselves from the other races, but they soon started using their numbers and influence to run the black market within the prisons. The Aryan Brotherhood is a white supremacist gang that started in California in 1967 at San Quentin. The Black Guerilla Family combined all the black rights groups of 1966 in San Quentin. La Nuestra Family was established in the 1960s in California's Soledad for the southern California Mexicans. The Texas Syndicate emerged in 1958 at Deuel Vocation Institute in California to protect the Texan Mexicans and native Texans.

The Mexicanemi is the fastest growing established in 1984 and also known as the Texas Mexican Mafia. The Newest gangs being the Nortenos, The Surenos, and the Crips and Bloods from LA. (Fleisher, 2001, #1) (Morningstar, 1-4) The reasons for joining a gang are many, but all very similar. Individuals

<https://assignbuster.com/prison-food-chain/>

join gangs for protection from other gangs or from the gang itself. This situation lends to the old phrase “ If you can’t beat them join them. ” There is also the very human variable: the need to fit in and feel wanted.

Individuals will join a gang because even though it is a bad identity it is still more than what they had before and even though the company is bad and dangerous they feel like they belong. The rules that the gangs enforce are all slightly different but are based on the same basics and this does supply these individuals with structure that their lacking. The basic rules are always bare your allegiance, always respect other members, always protect other members, always support the gang, always obey the gang, secrecy, and the most known blood in, blood out.

In other words, you are a gang member for life and the only escape is death and most of the time a young one. (Fleisher, 2001,#1, 3) The process of joining a street gang is very different than joining a prison gang. A street gang the individual is mostly likely jumped in and that in tells letting all the members beat up on them for a certain amount of time a few minutes at a time. Whereas a prison gang the individual would be asked to fight a certain individual or a guard. It also might be as simple as smuggling a note out or crafting a leader a shank and hiding it for them.

In many cases, they are required to take out a member of a rival gang either by getting them locked up in segregation for a few weeks and hurting their operation or simply killing them. (National Geographic, 2007) The newer gangs are based on more criminal organizations than a true sense of word gang. They are in it for the profit and run the black markets. Only 15-20% are hard core members the rest are foot soldiers that are expendable. The



reasons for defecting from a gang seems more like a cheesy movie scene where the character is debating between going against their own moral code and killing a child.

If they don't kill the mark then they are next on the list and are hunted down. There are a few that go to the state for protection for exchange for the testimony and witness protection. The most common reason for defecting from a gang is that the individual broke a rule and are scarred of retribution so they go to the state. They either stole gang money/product or they slept with wrong person's wife/girlfriend. (Fleisher, 2001, #1, 3) There are prison programs that force the inmate to renounce their gang affiliations and sign a written contract affirming their defection.

These programs allow the prisoners to be released earlier, but they also force many inmates to become serious targets. (National Geographic, 2007) Inmates fear these programs because in order to graduate from the programs they are forced to relinquish the only identity they know. Prisons are their own culture in and of themselves. They vary from prison to prison and have been described as small city with all the intricacies that come with one. They use their own form of language when communicating to each other and with those on the outside. The breaking of gang code is its own department within the FBI.

They have even started using texting abbreviations within their codes. (Klivans, 1) There are whole alphabets to the prison gang code and they also utilize their own form of sign language. Most of them use their tattoos to tell their stories and to inform other gang members of just where they belong within the hierarchy. They also most bare their gangs sign. Most prison

gangs use tattoos simply because they look menacing and the guards can't remove them. The street gangs use bandanas or colors, which is near impossible to replicate within a prison. National Geographic, 2007) We have implemented multiple prison programs from education to religion. One of the interesting ones described in the documentary *The Dhamma Brothers* is a 10 day program that a group of inmates many of which that are on death row are secluded from the rest of prison population and are instructed in the practices of Buddhism. They were not so much instructed on the religious practices and beliefs, but on the deep meditating practices that help them focus and deal with emotions. The prisons showed a remarkable difference in both attitude and behavior after they experienced 10 days of complete silence and meditation. Kaikum, 2008) Another program started in Luther Lockett Correctional complex has focused on rehabilitating their inmates through education. One of their programs is called *Shakespeare Behind Bars*. This program was designed to get the inmates interested in classics and possibly keep them out of trouble during the production of the plays. A group of inmates are allowed to produce plays by Shakespeare and perform them for the prison. They have an instructor that helps them learn to act and memorize their lines.

The interviews reveal that although the individuals within the program are minimum security that they feel a sense of accomplishment and wish continue their education. One in particular graduated from college and was paroled in 2006. (Rogerson, 2005) What we have to realize though for these individuals to graduate they first had to overcome their gang ties, rules, and culture. Also, survive any hits if their exit causes bad blood. They will still

bare the gang tattoos and scars mental and physical. A backward step in prison system programs is the re-institution of chain gangs. Alabama re-instituted chain gangs in 1990.

There are not as bad as the ones that were shut down and outlawed in many states, but there is still the humiliation of walking around in public with chains binding your feet. The males are less cumbersome since their feet are chained together with about 2 feet of slack, but females in Arizona are literally chained together with about 5 to 6 in a group. Arizona re-institutionalized chain gangs in 1996 in Estrella Correctional Facility near Phoenix. The Alabama chain gangs are forced to work in fields and clean-up crews. While working they are surrounded by guards and dogs watching for any sign of escape.

Many of the inmates feel that the chains are not necessary that no one can escape between the dogs and guards. The cruelest of the punishments given out within the chain gang system was the hitching post. If an inmate refused to work they would be hand cuffed to a metal pole in the middle of the front lawn of the prison for 24 hours. This practice was considered to be a violation of the inmates civil rights and terminated in 1997. Because of the lack of results from this program Alabama quietly discontinued use of chain gangs in 1999. However in 2004, Maricopa County started a chain gang for juvenile offenders.

Arizona was the first female chain gang and is still in use and has not had much as far as results either. They clean the streets of Phoenix and trim trees. They vary in offenses but the most dominate seems to be drug abuse or trafficking. Of the 6 people the documentary interviewed 3 returned to prison

<https://assignbuster.com/prison-food-chain/>

within a few months. (Irving, 1999) Another form of punishment within the prison systems besides chain gangs and probably the most common is solitary confinement. This practice is being challenged as inhumane because of the possible psychological damage it can create within the inmates.

Humans are social creatures and being locked up in a small cell with no human contact for possibly years is destructive to their psyche. A study done with mice shows that mice, who are locked up with no contact with other mice for just 2 weeks, show considerably different behavior. They will avoid open areas and become paranoid around other mice. (Yost, 2010) Most inmates released from solitary confinement will return for bad behavior and almost immediately lash out at the guards or other inmates. They believe that solitary confinement decreases the inmate's ability to control themselves. (Yost, 2010) Drug addiction, emotional damage, low education, and poor employment skills define the inmates and these disabilities endanger the community upon release, because they retreat to what will support them instead of that minimum wage job. That minimum wage job like flipping burgers at McDonalds is the only type of job an ex-con can get most of the time. They are going to look down at that job just as much a law-abiding citizens and the only difference is they won't stoop to that level, they will go back to the gang to support themselves and their family.

They are also behind on the technology in some cases. Inmates that have been locked up for more than 5 years won't know how to run the newer computers and the idea of cell phone always in their pocket is completely foreign to them. (Fleisher, 2001, #1, 2) (Fleisher, 2001, #2, 70) Fleisher and his colleagues have ideas of integrating the x-cons into the community upon

release. He notes that the men who are sent to prison are individuals who were never fully integrated into our law-abiding society and upon release they simply go back to what they know, criminal behavior.

He believes that some things could be done within the community. If the community didn't hold their gang affiliations against the individuals when they are not active members then maybe they would not return to the gang. Forcing the individual to cut his ties to the only family he has ever known or to the only identity he has ever had makes them very uncertain of their place and makes it difficult for them to form a new one from scratch. Also, the implement of in-town treatment centers for them would also increase their ability and willingness to attend their sessions.

Most treatment centers are too far for them to get to and having to pay to ride a bus clear across town is something they won't be willing to do, especially if they are working that minimum paying job. (Fleisher, 2001,#2, 66-71) “ We have little hard data on the demographics of today's prison gangs and the nature and levels of prions gang-related disorder in American prisons. This lack of data is a serious impediment to making progress against a serious and growing problem. ”(Fleisher, 2001,#1, 8) There has been a increase in both repeat offending, parole violators, sentence length, and lifers since the emergence of prison gangs.

Most of the increases are above 30% during the 90s and have only averaged out instead of decreasing since. As of 1998 California and Texas had the largest prions populations even above the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Oklahoma was just behind Louisiana and Texas for highest incarceration rates per 100, 000 state residents. (Fleisher, 2001,#2, 67) There is a <https://assignbuster.com/prison-food-chain/>

connection between gangs and violence. A study conducted by John Worrall and Robert Morris found that individuals who are members of a gang have more reports of misconduct, violence toward inmates, and violence towards guards. Worrall, 430) To understand a gang or just a gang member, one would have to live where they live and grow up in the types of neighborhoods they grew up in. They join gangs for reasons and those reasons are logical to them even though they are not to us. Joining a gang for them is probably much like joining the cheer squad, football team, or academic team would be to us. It is just what you do to be involved with a group that understands you and makes you feel wanted. Most of these kids probably just want the attention, which is why gangs are now using them to traffic their drugs.

They don't receive the harder sentences as an adult would and are less suspect. (Morningstar, 8) For the adults that are released from prison, there needs to be more than chain gang experience on their resume. They need the vocational and college classes to make it as well as a strong community support system that is not going to judge them. (Krienert, 57) How do we get to the point that society doesn't judge an ex-con for his past crimes? I don't believe as a society we will ever make that change.

A business owner will not take a chance on a gang or even a former gang member for fear that he / she will use that position to take advantage of the business and all its assets. As far as the rest of society is concerned about ex-cons in general is that it doesn't matter why you went to prison, you will never be trusted being a member of the community or the work force again. That being true for the thousands of ex-cons that can't get a job, or find

livable housing, it's a wonder why they go back to doing the only thing they are good at.

Gang membership and repeat offenders go hand in hand when you put those two elements together, and force those people to live in the life of a career criminal. Bibliography Articles \* Barnett, Arnold. 1987. Prison Populations: A Projection Model. *Operations Research*. Vol. 35. No. 1. Pp. 18-34. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/170907> \* Carlson, Peter. 2001. Prison Interventions: Evolving Strategies to Control Security Threat Groups. *Corrections Management Quarterly*. Jan. 2001. Vol. 5. Issue 1. P. 10 \* Davis, Mark and Flannery, Daniel. 2001. The Institutional Treatment of Gang Members.

*Corrections Management Quarterly* Jan. 2001 Vol. 5. Issue 1. P. 32 \* Drury, Alan and Delisi, Matt. 2008. Gang Kill: An Exploratory Empirical Assessment of Gang Membership, Homicide Offending, and Prison Misconduct. *Crime & Delinquency* 2011 57: 130 <http://cad.sagepub.com/content/57/1/130> \* Eckhart, Dan. 2001. Civil Actions Related to Prison Gangs: A Survey of Federal Cases. *Corrections Management Quarterly*. Jan. 2001. Vol. 5. Issue 5. P59. \* Fleisher. 1989. *Warehousing Violence*. Newbury Park, CA. Sage. \* Fleisher and Decker. 2001. \* 1. An Overview of The challenge of Prison Gangs.

*Corrections Management Quarterly* Jan. 2001. Vol. 5. Issue 1. P1. \* 2. Going Home, Staying Home: Integrating Prison Gang Members into the Community. *Corrections Management Quarterly* Jan. 2001. Vol. 5. Issue 1. P65 \* Klivans, G. S. 2012. Use of Texting Abbreviations in Gang Codes. *American Jails*. Mar/Apr 2012. Vol. 26. Issue 1. P 35-38. \* Krienert, Jessie and Fleisher, Mark. <https://assignbuster.com/prison-food-chain/>

2001. Gang Membership as a Proxy for Social Deficiencies: A Study of Nebraska Inmates. *Corrections Management Quarterly* Jan. 2001. Vol. 5. Issue 1. P. 47 \* Marchese, Joseph. 2009.

Managing Gangs in a Correctional Facility: What Wardens and Superintendents Need to Know. *Corrections Today*. Feb 2009. Vol. 71 Issue 1 p. 44-47 \* Morningstar, Dennise. 1997. Prison Gangs, Norms, and Organizations. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 82 (2012) 96-109 \* Phillips, Corretta. 2012. "It Ain't Nothing Like America with the Bloods and Crips". *Gang Narratives Inside Two English Prisons*. *Punishment & Society* 2012 14: 51. <http://pun.sagepub.com/content/14/1/51> \* Rhodes, Lorna. 2001. Toward an Anthropology of Prisons. *Annual Review of Anthropology*. Vol 30 (2001) pg. 5-83. Annual Reviews <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3069209> \* Sharbek, David. 2011. Special Needs Offenders. *The Federal Judicial Center Bulletin*. No. 12. October 1997. \* Tachiki, Scott. 1995. Indeterminate Sentences in Supermax Prisons Based Upon Alleged Gang Affiliations: A Reexamination of Procedural Protection and a Proposal for Greater Procedural Requirements. *California Law Review*. Jul95 Vol. 83. Issue 4 pg. 1115-35 \* Waterston, Alisse. 2005. The Story of My Story: An Anthropology of Violence, Dispossession, and Diaspora. *Anthropological quarterly*, Volume 78, Number 1, Winter 2005, pp. 43-61.

George Washington University Institute for Ethnographic Research \* Worrall, John and Morris, Robert. 2012. Prison Gang Integration and Inmate Violence. *Journal of Criminal Justice* 40 (2012) 425-432 Documentaries \* Irving, Xackery. 1999. American Chain Gang. \* Kukura, Andrew and Philips, Jenny. 2008. The Dhamma Brothers. \* National Geographic. 2007. National



Geographic: Aryan Brotherhood. National Geographic \* Rogerson, Hank. 2005. Shakespeare Behind Bars. \* Yost, Peter. 2010. Solitary Confinement. National Geographic. Websites Zimbardo, Philip G. 2012. The Stanford Prison Study. [http://www. prisonexp. org/](http://www.prisonexp.org/)