

# Introduction

The United States confines more people per capita than any other equivalent industrialized, democratic country. It is also one of the last remaining such nations to practice capital punishment, and one of only a handful of countries anywhere that executes juveniles. Sentences are longer in the United States than in most places, and the numbers of people of color behind bars is particularly disproportionate to their presence in society. In 1999, the United States crossed a threshold when, for the first time, the nation's penal institutions held more than 2 million people. In fact, prisons, jails, and detention centers have been filling since the 1980s at a rate faster than most can handle. As a result, overcrowding is rampant, even with growing numbers of privately run facilities being established and new state and federal institutions being opened each year.

This encyclopedia is a timely and necessary publication for anyone wishing to understand why confinement has become so commonplace in the United States. As many of the entries detail, prisons have become big business in the United States, spawning not just private prison companies but also a multitude of small businesses that service penal facilities (maintenance, laundry, food, clothing, etc.). In some communities, prisons provide one of the only sources of employment. In others, they have taken away almost all of the young men.

As increasing numbers of men, women, and children are being locked up—the prison, the jail, and the detention center are becoming part of many people's lives. The collateral effect of incarcerating more than 2 million is enormous. Many of us now know someone behind bars. More than that, however, prisons are part of our collective cultural imagination. We, as a society, seem to find it hard to imagine a different solution to criminal behavior.

Yet, as the historical entries in these two volumes demonstrate, the prison has not been used so extensively for very long. Moreover, as other authors show, there are numerous alternative possible ways of dealing with those who break the law.

This encyclopedia draws together up-to-date statistics and academic research to sketch out the scope of prisons and punishment in the United States. Its goal is to provide information on all the different types of penal facilities currently being used while keeping a broad focus on the prison itself. Authors strive, where possible, to address issues of race and gender and to make clear how current and historical policies and practices have affected communities and individuals differently.

All of the entries are written in an accessible and engaging style that aims to be appealing for a wide readership. We hope that high school students, visitors to the public library, those who are confined, and criminal justice practitioners, and academics can all find matters of interest to them here. By including race and gender in each entry, the authors have sought to provide a critical assessment of their topic that reveals the differential impact of criminal justice policy.

Though the primary focus of the encyclopedia is on the United States, where possible authors have included comparative information about what is happening elsewhere around the world. There are also specific entries on a handful of other English-speaking penal systems, to provide a sense of comparison.

## THEMES

With nearly 400 entries, the two volumes truly provide an encyclopedic analysis of prisons and correctional facilities. To help the reader make sense of

the wealth of information included in this collection, it is possible to characterize all of the topics into 12 distinct, yet overlapping, themes.

First, a number of entries are concerned with *prison architecture*. In them, authors map out the historical development of the physical design of penal institutions, showing how changing ideas and goals of punishment, along with the arrival of specific populations, and overcrowding, influence the way in which prisons are built. Likewise, how a correctional facility is designed shapes how prisoners are treated. To illustrate the effect of design, a number of specific prisons are described in some detail.

*Theories of punishment* constitute the second major theme in the encyclopedia. Specific entries describe goals of punishment, from deterrence to incapacitation. Accounts of particular methods of dealing with offenders, such as the capital punishment, explain how certain practices correspond to particular ideas about what punishment can achieve.

Entries on *prison populations* provide detailed accounts of specific groups of people within penal establishments. Particular attention is given to those groups that are particularly overrepresented such as African Americans and Latino/as. Women prisoners and the elderly are also dealt with separately, as are juvenile offenders.

A number of authors tackle *prison reform*, describing specific groups and organizations that are currently active, as well as individuals who have been crucial to attempts to ameliorate conditions within prison. Entries on abolition and activism point to alternative ideas about punishment that do not involve confinement.

*Juvenile justice* is another key theme. As with the entries on adult prisons, authors examine treatment of young offenders in historical and contemporary settings. Attention is paid to specific legal cases that particularly affected the treatment of juveniles and to key institutions where they were housed.

*Staff* are crucial to any penal institution. To that end, a number of entries examine the historical development of correctional officers as well as their present work conditions. Attention is paid to the issue of professionalism, as well as to staff training.

To convey how prisons attempt to address offending behavior, a number of authors focus on a range of *treatment programs*. Topics in this field include psychological services, drug treatment programs, Alcoholics Anonymous, work, education, and vocational courses. There are also a number of entries on related issues such as prison health care, mental health care, HIV/AIDS, and gynecology.

As the penal system in the United States has become increasingly overcrowded, many aspects of it have been handed over to private companies. As a result, *privatization* is another common strand of this encyclopedia. Entries provide information about the move to the private sector overall, as well as describing specific parts of prison life that are now run by corporations. Entries are also included on the two biggest private prison companies in the United States.

Ever since the first penitentiaries, prisoners have been put to *labor*. In a number of entries, authors describe the historical development and changing nature of prison work. They also detail how penal systems train inmates in employable skills to help reduce reoffending rates.

Where possible, each entry in this encyclopedia includes an examination of *race, gender, and class*. Some entries concentrate specifically on these issues, to describe racial dynamics, racism, or specific groups of inmates.

Prisons and other correctional facilities are shaped by the context of *sentencing policy and laws*. Authors describe significant legal cases that have changed penal policy, as well as explain the relevance of constitutional amendments to prison policy. Sentencing guidelines, sentencing laws, and the rationale for different types of sentences are also considered.

Finally, certain entries center on issues of *security and classification*. These include examinations of classification systems, along with description and analysis of prison discipline. The different levels of security are also explained individually, while examples of key types of institutions are outlined. Related topics include entries on specific types of punishment such as probation, parole, community corrections, electronic monitoring, and house arrest.

## **ORGANIZATION**

The entries are organized alphabetically. Each one is cross-referenced to point the reader to related topics that they might find relevant. The essays also all include a list of further readings to help the reader in any additional research. The index provides a guide to the topics covered in specific entries as well as those listed under alternative names.

## **SIDEBARS AND ILLUSTRATIONS**

The encyclopedia contains 25 sidebars and a number of illustrations, including graphs, tables, and photos. In the sidebars, prisoners share their firsthand accounts of life behind bars.

## **APPENDIX**

The appendix lists institutions in the federal prison system. Included in this list are the address and location of each facility, along with brief descriptions of the programs and treatment each place offers. It gives an overview of one of the largest and most important prison systems in the United States

to provide a greater sense of the opportunities available for those behind bars.

## **CHRONOLOGY**

A detailed timeline is listed at the start of each volume. This chronology dates key legal cases, publications, and the founding of certain penal establishments in the United States.

## **CONCLUSION**

While a collection of this size is not designed to be read cover to cover, it is hoped that readers will find the information in each entry absorbing enough to lead them onto another. To that end, readers should take note of the cross-references listed below each entry to direct them to other, related areas. As with all reference books, this collection is designed not just to inform but also to explain and analyze. Reflecting the work of many different individuals, at various stages in their careers and from a number of different places, this encyclopedia aims to provide the most comprehensive overview of issues related to prisons, punishment, and confinement in the United States today.