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USP Marion

The First Federal Supermax

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The U.S. Penitentiary in Marion, Illinois (USP Marion) was the first federal supermax prison. The “mean little house” is one of the most significant U.S. prisons built in the past century. It has served as a model for high-security detention confinement and been copied worldwide. Marion also has a history of violence, mistakes, and inflicting serious damage on prisoners. This article employs a “convict criminology perspective” to discuss the history of Marion, the profile of federal prisoners, control units, programs and services, prisoners released from Marion, the prison camp, transfer of high-security prisoners, and comparable supermax penitentiaries. Early in 2007, USP Marion was converted to medium security, closing one of the most infamous chapters in recent American penal history.

Keywords: *Federal Bureau of Prisons; USP Marion; supermax; control unit; administrative detention; Marionization*

The brutal truth about U.S. Penitentiary Marion (USP Marion) has never been fully explored by academic scholars. Although the academic literature on prisons is large, the research on federal prisons is relatively limited in both depth and breadth. Very few authors have narrowed their focus to look exclusively at USP Marion.

Those who write about high security prisons can be divided into six groups: The first group consists of employees of the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) and consists of administrators, staff, and archivists (e.g., Carlson,

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Hess, & Orthmann, 1999; Corrothers, Alexander, Carlson, & Quinlan, 1994; Henman, 1988; Neal, 2003; Roberts, 1994). The second group consists of academic scholars (e.g., Bosworth, 2002; Fleisher, 1989; Hamm, 1991, 1995, 1997; Hamm, Coupez, Hoze, & Weinstein, 1994; Kahn, 1996; Keve, 1991; Lockwood, 1980; Ross & Richards, 2002, 2003; Silberman, 1995; Ward, 1987, 1994). Some of this work is officially sanctioned by prison administrators. The third group consists of journalists and freelance writers (Abramsky, 2002; Annin, 1998; Earley, 1993; Harrington, 1997; Mitford, 1973; Parenti, 1999). The fourth collection of authors includes prison reform activists (e.g., Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Marion Committee; American Friends Service, 1985, 1993). The fifth group is composed of prisoners writing from a "convict perspective" who have done time or are still doing time in federal prisons (Abbott, 1981; Abbott & Zack, 1987; Burton-Rose, 1998; Dowker & Good, 1993; Dunne, 1993; Griffin, 1993; Levasseur, 1998; Levasseur & Burton-Rose, 1998; Peltier, 1999; Pens, 1998; Raine, 1993; Wilson, 1993). The sixth and final group are former federal prisoners who are now professors of criminology or criminal justice and write from a "convict criminology" perspective (Mobley, 2003; Murphy, 2003; Richards, 1990, 1995, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Richards & Jones, 1997, 2004; Richards & Ross, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Richards, Terry, & Murphy, 2002; Ross & Richards, 2002, 2003; Terry, 1997, 2003).

The six groups write very different accounts of federal penitentiaries. Prison administrators and staff tend to write noncritical articles and books that highlight their own achievements and discuss how prisons have improved over the decades. The academics, a bit more distant from the subject, provide a more varied approach. Much of this work attempts to penetrate the reality of high-security punishment through research and critical discourse. Nevertheless, few academic authors fully understand the horrors of segregation in prison. The journalists and freelance authors are an eclectic group who write from diverse perspectives. The fourth group consists of prison reform activists. This may include convicts, ex-convicts, their family or friends, and a wide assortment of persons concerned with social justice. Their writing may also include pamphlets and Internet web pages designed to organize and encourage prison reform. Individuals in the fifth group (convicts) write from direct, firsthand experience, from the "belly of the beast" (Abbott, 1981; Abbott & Zack, 1987). The last group, which is composed of authors who were federal and state prisoners and are now academics, merges firsthand experience and scholarly methods to analytically discuss the subject.

USP Marion

USP Marion is located 300 miles south of Chicago and 120 miles east of St. Louis in the southern tip of Illinois. Marion is a small penitentiary used to isolate high-security male prisoners. The prison has no wall but is surrounded by a high-security fencing wrapped in razor wire and protected by gun towers, with multiple cell blocks divided by a maze of security grills and doors (USP Marion, 2001).

Marion, like all FBOP facilities, is federal property situated on a U.S. government reservation, not that different from a Native American reservation or military base. Legally, USP Marion is not part of Illinois because it is outside state jurisdiction. For example, investigations of criminal incidents at USP Marion are conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

All federal penitentiaries (maximum security) and correctional institutions (medium security) have disciplinary or administrative detention cell blocks that hold hundreds of prisoners for weeks or months at a time. Typically, 10% to 20% of the convict population in a federal maximum-security penitentiary (USP) or medium-security correctional institution (FCI) are held in segregation, designated officially as special housing units, or called simply the "hole" by prisoners.

In comparison, USP Marion is a disciplinary supermax prison, where all the cells are used to isolate individual prisoners for years at a time. There is no "general population." The prisoners do not leave their cell blocks to walk the halls to the mess hall or work assignments or venture outside to the "yard." There is no "controlled movement" or dining hall where meals are served to the "general population." There is a gym and yard, but no prisoners have been allowed recreation for more than 20 years. The gym is empty, and the small yard has a tennis court with deteriorated asphalt and a torn net. As the prisoners rarely ever leave their cell blocks, they may never see the gym or yard.

The control and segregation units are filled with maximum-security male prisoners who are escape risks, political problems, threats to the order of other institutions, gang members or associates, or convicts who have assaulted or murdered prisoners or correctional staff. The entire prison has been on high-security lockdown status for more than 20 years. The prisoners sleep, eat, exercise, live, and die in their cells alone. For the past two decades, Marion has served as a model for construction of similar high-security prisons all over the Western world. Marion opened in 1963, the same year Alcatraz closed, with a capacity for 500 prisoners.

History of USP Marion

USP Alcatraz served as the nation's highest security prison until it closed in 1963. As Alcatraz was decommissioned, the prisoners were transferred to large maximum-security penitentiaries, such as USP Leavenworth, USP Atlanta, USP Lewisburg, and USP Lompoc. These are "mainline" penitentiaries that hold several thousand prisoners. In these "big house" prisons, convicts live in large cell blocks that may be four or five tiers (floors) tall. "Big house" refers to full-scale penitentiaries with tall walls and gun towers, many federal examples of which were built in the first decades of the 20th century. The men sleep in locked cells but are allowed to walk the "range" (the common area in front of their cells) during the day. They travel to the dining hall, work station, and yard through a "controlled movement" that happens once an hour. Many of the prisoners in USP Marion are men who caught serious "shots" (disciplinary reports) while they were housed as general population in "mainline" penitentiaries (Hershberger, 1979; Holt & Phillips, 1991; Roberts, 1994).

In 1963, FBOP built USP Marion as a smaller prison to house the Alcatraz convicts and others. Most of these were the "incorrigibles" or "two percenters," troublemakers who resisted prison authority or assaulted staff or other prisoners. Some of these were political prisoners, who were associated with the Black Panthers, the Japanese Red Army, anarchist groups, and the American Indian Movement. In 1973, the "control unit" cell blocks were first created at Marion. These consisted of segregation cells where prisoners were locked in their cells but allowed out for limited activities. In 1979, Marion was designated the only Level 6 institution (5 was maximum, 4, 3, and 2 were medium, and 1 was minimum security). Nevertheless, the penitentiary still had "controlled movement" of convicts from their cells to designated areas in the institution. Only a small number of prisoners were locked in disciplinary cells all day and night. In effect, Marion was a small version of a "mainline" penitentiary. At this time, Marion became the primary destination for federal prisoners considered by the FBOP to be disruptive or dangerous (Hershberger, 1979; Roberts, 1994).

In 1983, Marion erupted in violence, when during a six-day period two officers and one prisoner were killed, whereas two other officers were seriously injured.

The modern history of the supermax began on Saturday, October 22, 1983, when Thomas Silverstein, an inmate at the federal maximum-security penitentiary in Marion, Illinois, stabbed a correctional officer 40 times, precipitating

a total lockdown of the prison. The guard was one of two correctional officers to die that day in separate incidents. The Federal Bureau of Prisons reacted by converting Marion into a disciplinary institution to confine inmates considered escape risks or especially dangerous. (Harrington, 1997, p. 16)

To restore order, additional officers were brought into the prison. It is reported that the officers retaliated by brutally beating prisoners. Since that time, Marion has had a history of unrelenting warfare between convicts and correctional staff.

Since 1983, the entire prison has been in permanent lockdown (see Kaberon, 1988; Olivero & Roberts, 1987, 1990). Prisoners confined in control-unit cell blocks are confined at least 23 hours a day in their one-man cells and are not allowed any physical contact with other convicts. Many prisoners are locked in their cells 24 hours a day for years and are rarely let out even to walk the "range" outside their cell door. They are fed in their cells and are subject to intense security procedures. The cells consist of concrete beds, concrete floors and walls, combination toilets and sinks, and heavy metal doors. They have no television and very few personal possessions. Most of the prisoners never leave their high-security cell blocks (called units), except for occasional no-contact family or lawyer visits or medical attention.

Profile of Federal Prison Population

The FBOP population is very different from the population of state prisons (Janus, Mabli, & Williams, 1986). Prisoners tend to be older, better educated, and more successful at criminal pursuits than their state counterparts. They tend to come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, to have more personal resources, and to be successful at eluding law enforcement. The average federal prisoner may be more sophisticated and better traveled than the typical prisoner incarcerated in state prisons. This is because of the fact that federal law targets individuals and organized groups who transcend state lines.

A large number of federal prisoners were or still are connected to organized criminal organizations, gangs, combinations, syndicates, or cartels. Their illegal activities were sponsored or supported by local, national, or international conspiracies. For example, some may have been involved in local rackets such as extortion, gambling, drugs, prostitution, auto theft, or fraud schemes. Still others were associated with larger national conspiracies, for example, drug operations, counterfeiting currency, distributing "knock off" corporate consumer products, or selling fake corporate securities or government bonds.

A final group includes persons related to international conspiracies, for example, drug cartels, smuggling of either legal or illegal commodities, or political- or religion-based terrorist groups. The point is that many federal prisoners were connected to sophisticated criminal activities that required planning, organization, and collaboration with numerous people.

Historically, the federal government has used federal law enforcement to track, arrest, and incarcerate those persons who were too well organized to be deterred or successfully prosecuted by local law enforcement. Organized criminal activity travels across state lines and national borders at will. Participants may speak multiple languages, change their names, or use forged identities and passports. For example, criminal organizers might run an illegal activity in one state or country and invest the profits in legal businesses in another.

Of federal prisoners, 25% are foreign citizens (U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003), more than 50% are serving their first prison sentence, and nearly 70% are “drug war” prisoners (Richards, 2003a). Many of these are low-level operatives who were employed or associated with organized criminal organizations. For example, there are thousands of “drug mules” who were convicted of transporting illegal drugs. Many of these are serving long sentences in federal penitentiaries because they either refused to provide information to federal prosecutors or had no knowledge to share. This group may include private pilots, merchant seamen, military personnel, airline crews, college students, and displaced peasants. These are the people who were caught or convicted of conspiring with others to smuggle large amounts of illegal commodities into the United States.

Until recently, White prisoners were the majority population in federal prison. Prior to 1980, FBOP prisons were dominated by a large population of bank robbers and White ethnic gangsters. The “war on drugs” has shifted the racial and ethnic population of the system. The federal prosecution of small-time crack and heroin distributors has led to tens of thousands of relatively minor offenders given long sentences. Today, federal penitentiaries are filled with “corner boys” who were responsible for low-volume retail sales of various chemical intoxicants. The trend is a dramatic increase in the number of African American and Hispanic prisoners and a FBOP that is beginning to mirror the demographics of state prisons; the White prisoner majority is being replaced by Blacks, Latinos, and Chicanos.

The changing racial demographics, and the increase in minority prisoners convicted of low-level retail trade in illegal drugs, has increased the number of street gang affiliations in federal prisons. Still, the federal joints are different from the state prisons. For example, California state prisons (see Irwin,

1970, 1980, 2005) are known for Latino (Mexican Mafia, La Nuestra Familia) gangs and African American (Bloods and Crips) gangs. Illinois state prisons are controlled by the Latin Kings, El Rukin, and Black Gangster Disciples. In comparison, the FBOP (Ross & Richards, 2002, pp. 115-134) prison population is still dominated by La Cosa Nostra, biker gangs (Hell's Angels, Outlaws, Bandidos, Pagans), and the Aryan Brotherhood. In addition, Columbian, Cuban, and Native American prisoners form their own cliques or support groups within the prisons. Regardless of the affiliation, organized crime and gang leaders with national reputations are usually prosecuted by the federal courts and do their time in federal custody.

The FBOP has a unique advantage in managing gangs and organized criminals. States have few options when it comes to repressing affiliation in their prisons. Typically, they either concentrate gang members in the same cell block or lock down the leadership in solitary confinement. In comparison, the federal government, with more than 100 prisons, can transfer gang members to different FBOP facilities all over the country. This is especially useful when the purpose is to isolate leaders from membership (e.g., mafia dons and capos from soldiers). For more than 20 years, USP Marion has been the primary high-security prison where the FBOP has isolated leaders.

The "Mean Little House"

Marion is known for having some of the most violent prisoners in the FBOP. Some of these are spies, terrorists, and political activists sent to prison directly from court. Most of the men who are transferred to Marion from other institutions have become violent after years of brutal survival in other federal or state penitentiaries. The minimum success of Marion has been keeping some of these dangerous individuals locked up securely. The FBOP claims that isolating violent prisoners at USP Marion and ADX Florence (ADX Florence, 2002; Annin, 1998) has lowered the rate of assault in the rest of the federal prison system.

Nevertheless, prison reform activists suggest that only a small number of federal prisoners require the close supervision provided by USP Marion's control unit design. Furthermore, critics argue that Marion and other supermax penitentiaries are systematically socializing prisoners to be more violent. Sensory deprivation, physical and mental deterioration of prisoners, and high rates of suicide and murder seem intended to bend, break, and destroy prisoners. As a result, it could be argued that those men not broken may get even more dangerous and meaner.

Marion Prisoners

Marion has housed political prisoners, organized gangsters, drug cartel members, spies, terrorists, gang leaders, government informants in need of protection, and foreign officials. Some of the most famous individuals have been convicts who have become “legends in their own time” among federal prisoners. These are those men who have defied federal prison authorities by disrupting the orderly operation of different penal institutions or masterminding prison demonstrations, rebellions, escapes, or gang organizations.

By FBOP standards, Marion has a small population. For example, the inmate count at Marion is only 357 and its rated capacity is only 440, compared to “big house” penitentiaries such as USP Atlanta with 2,151 and USP Leavenworth with 1,200. All prisons count their prisoner population several times a day.

Some prisoners, especially those serving long sentences, may be difficult to manage in large institutions, where two or more men live in a cell and where prisoners walk the corridors on the way to the dining hall, work station, or recreational yard. The FBOP sends prisoners to Marion when they have been designated as unable to live in “general population” maximum-security penitentiaries.

Control Unit

Marion is the first experiment by the federal government with high-security “administrative detention.” All prisons have “disciplinary detention,” which refers to prisoners being confined in solitary confinement when found in violation of prison rules. These violations carry specific penalties, for example, loss of “good time” credit or so many days in the “hole.” Typically, in the FBOP a prisoner is “written up” by an officer for violating a serious rule (given a “shot”), then given a hearing, and, when found guilty, taken to disciplinary detention special housing unit (the hole) to serve so many days.

In comparison, administrative detention is based on the dictates of the prison administration and does not require a disciplinary charge, hearing, or conviction. For example, gang leaders, mafia soldiers, or political terrorists may be in the hole without being found guilty of violating prison rules. Therefore, no specific violation or penalty is indicated. A prisoner can be locked down in the hole or a control unit for months, years, or indefinitely. In effect, prison authorities may use administrative detention to isolate individual prisoners without recourse or relief.

Administrative detention may be used for many reasons, including the protection of prisoners. For example, all federal prisons allow prisoners to

request protective custody (PC) when they are in fear of being attacked. Elderly prisoners may ask for PC when they are ill, need a rest, or just wish to escape the noise of densely populated cell blocks. On occasion, prison administrators may decide to lock up a prisoner under investigation for new crimes, accused of being a “snitch,” being discussed in media reports, suspected of having sexual relations, or having HIV or AIDS. Most of these prisoners, except for those who die in the hole, are released back into general population after a few weeks or months. In comparison, many Marion prisoners have been in solitary confinement for many years.

Since 1983, USP Marion has been an administrative detention supermax prison. There is no general population or controlled movement of the prison population. All the convicts are locked in their cells at least 23 hours a day, where they receive all meals and are not allowed to talk or socialize with one another. Marion has separate control-unit cell blocks reserved for violent prisoners, a high-security unit for PC prisoners, and additional units that, although restrictive, provide a gradual increase in institutional privileges.

Federal prisoners transferred to USP Marion are required to spend at least 36 months at the facility. Generally, after 18 months of good conduct reports, prisoners may be moved to less restrictive cell blocks, where they are gradually allowed more privileges. For example, they are issued sheets and a pillow. Eventually, after many months in several stages of gradual increases of “privileges,” these may also include eating in a dining hall, federal prison industry work, commissary, and limited social activities. Typically, only a few Marion prisoners are granted these privileges at one time. These are prisoners who have spent many years in control units and are being prepared for return to federal penitentiaries or release on completion of sentences.

Programs and Services

Marion has few programs or services for rehabilitation (USP Marion, 2001). The FBOP officially repudiated rehabilitation in 1976. Still, most federal prison facilities do have education, usually limited to adult basic education (ABE; 8th grade) and general education degree (GED; 12th grade) classes, job training programs (e.g., grounds and building maintenance and food service), and short courses on anger management, stress reduction, parenting, and substance abuse. In comparison, Marion prisoners have few program opportunities until they reach the less restrictive cell blocks. Even then, their options are limited to self-study to pass ABE or GED, television, reading, and UNICOR (federal prison industries).

Once Marion prisoners have graduated from the control units, they may be assigned to work in the UNICOR prison cable factory. UNICOR Marion

produces electronics communication cables for the military, used in tanks, armored personnel carriers, and helicopters. During the Gulf War, the prisoners were compelled to do overtime production. Larger factories producing the similar military hardware operate at FCI Oxford and FMC Lexington. Marion prisoners are required to work in the small prison factory before they are transferred back to mainline penitentiaries or released to the street.

Prisoners Released From USP Marion

What happens when prisoners locked down in control units, after years of brutal conditions and socialization, are released to the “free world” without the benefit of programs, services, furloughs, or halfway houses (see Richards & Jones, 1997, 2004)? Marion prisoners, like those released from most maximum-security prisons, go straight to the street when their sentences are completed because they are too hard core to live in halfway houses. The outcome is often sadly predictable. One famous example is Jack Henry Abbott (1981), whose book, *In the Belly of the Beast*, became a national best seller. Abbott, who served 25 years in prison, did 15 years in solitary confinement. He stabbed a waiter to death on a Manhattan sidewalk within six weeks of release from Marion and was returned to federal prison, where he expired (Abbott & Zack, 1987).

Federal Prison Camp

The federal prison reservation includes a satellite minimum-security camp immediately adjacent to the prison (FPC Marion). The Marion “campers” work doing grounds keeping and food service inside the main institution. They prepare the food that is served to the high-security convicts in their cells, clean the prison common areas, and maintain the lawn that surrounds the prison. The FPC prisoners never see the USP prisoners. The USP prisoners are never transferred to the camp.

The FBOP constructed a new supermax in 1994. Administrative MAX (ADX) Florence (ADX Florence, 2002) is one of four federal prisons in the Florence Correctional Complex built in southern Colorado. This modern supermax was built on the “lessons” learned from the mistakes at USP Marion (American Friends Service, 1985, 1993). It has the same high-security level as USP Marion.

ADX Florence has developed new security measures and technology to further its mission (Hershberger, 1998). The institution is built on flat ground, with the cell blocks constructed at the bottom of a slope. The prison is very

quiet; the wide halls are empty except for occasional correctional personnel, and the entire facility is monitored by video camera and high-tech control centers made of steel and bullet-proof glass. There are 550 permanent lock-down one-man cells, but only half of these are occupied at any given time. The empty cells are kept empty and reserved for prisoners who may be transferred in from rebellious or rioting institutions.

ADX Florence, like USP Marion, is a penitentiary where the staff employ brutal measures to control and punish recalcitrant prisoners. In 1998, Ray Luc Levasseur (1998; Levasseur & Burton-Rose, 1998), a prisoner at ADX Florence, wrote about four-point spread-eagle restraints, forced feedings, cell extractions, mind-control medications, and chemical weapons used to incapacitate prisoners.

Transfer of High-Security Prisoners

High-security prisoners may be transferred back and forth among USP Marion, ADX Florence, and segregation cell blocks in mainline federal penitentiaries. Some of these are especially dangerous prisoners, sentenced by state courts, who have been moved into federal custody. The FBOP uses transfers to further isolate high-security prisoners who are suspected of planning escapes or insurrections. Every day, hundreds of high-security prisoners are driven by federal marshals in cars and buses from one prison to another. A few very dangerous prisoners are transported in steel cages loaded on flatbed trucks.

USP Marion and Comparable Supermax Penitentiaries

As the U.S. prison population expands, sentences get longer, and federal prison-type construction plans become the standard for the states, more Marion-type prisons will be built. USP Marion represents the old blueprint for building new, super-secure, state and federal facilities. There is a trend in correctional policy to build more high-security cells (personal communication with FBOP administrators, 2001 to 2007). For example, many medium-security facilities have recently built new administrative segregation cell blocks (solitary confinement) to suppress the resistance of prisoners serving longer sentences.

Recently, many states have also turned to the use of supermax units or entire institutions to control the most disruptive or potentially troublesome prisoners. A survey conducted by the National Institute of Corrections in 1997 found at least 57 supermax facilities, with more than 13,500 beds, in the

United States, and 10 jurisdictions were developing 3,000 additional super-max beds. The survey was updated in 1999 to 34 states with nearly 20,000 cells. Still, the figures are only estimates, as *supermax* is defined differently by many prison systems. Abramsky (2002) wrote,

All told, more than 8,000 prisoners in California and at least 42,000 around the country, by the conservative estimate of the *Corrections Yearbook*, are currently held in similar conditions of extreme confinement. As of 2000, Texas alone boasted 16 super-max prisons and super-max units, housing some 10,000 inmates. In Florida, more than 7,000 inmates were double-bunked in such facilities and the corrections department was lobbying to build another one (at an estimated cost of nearly \$50 million dollars) to house an additional 1,000 offenders. (p. 26)

At the very least, we know that across the country there are a growing number of prisoners confined in high-security cell blocks, control units, segregated housing units, and supermax penitentiaries (Dowker & Good, 1993). By 2000, more than 2 million persons were incarcerated in jails and prison (see Austin, Bruce, Carroll, McCall, & Richards, 2001; Austin & Irwin, 2001; Irwin, 2005; Irwin, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000). Assuming 10% of prisoners are in disciplinary detention, including those persons locked in solitary confinement in local jails, there may be as many as 200,000 prisoners at this moment locked in some variation of high-security confinement.

“Marionization” refers to the adoption of Marion design and operations features in the redesign of existing prisons and the construction of new prisons. Since 1983, USP Marion has been closely studied by correctional experts all over the world. Abramsky (2002) reported,

First, prison authorities developed procedures to minimize inmate-staff contact; then they took to “locking down” entire prisons for indefinite periods, keeping inmates in their cells all day and closing down communal dining rooms and exercise yards. Eventually, they began to explore the idea of making the general population safer by creating entirely separate high-tech super-max prisons in which “the worst of the worst” gang leaders and sociopaths would be incarcerated in permanent lockdown conditions. (p. 27)

Prison administrators moved to high-security detention as a means to control dangerous prisoners, protect prison staff from violent assaults, deter main-line prisoners, isolate politically active convicts who spread revolutionary ideas, and segregate gang leaders.

Isolating prisoners for many months in segregation cell blocks or years in new stand-alone disciplinary prisons became the trend in the United States.

Harrington (1997) wrote, "Marion was the model for programs adopted in prisons at McAlester, Oklahoma, in 1985, at Pelican Bay, California, in 1989, at Southport, New York, in 1991, and at Walpole, Massachusetts, in 1992" (p. 16).

Prison administrators assert that to isolate and segregate is cost-effective. This is predicated on the idea that prisoners confined in solitary confinement require fewer amenities, services, and programs. The fact is that this has not proven to be the case. It is estimated that it costs \$50,000 a year to lock down one convict in a supermax, compared to \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year in a lower-security prison (Abramsky, 2002, p. 28). Much of the additional expense is a result of the number of prison staff needed to patrol, service, and maintain the high-security regime in these institutions. This is more than it costs to live for a year in an inexpensive motel with color television, maid service, and a swimming pool.

The \$50,000 a year does not include the original cost of constructing the supermax facility. High-security prisons are very expensive to build, as they require massive gun towers, heavy security fences with many rows of razor wire, high-tech surveillance equipment, and specially designed steel and concrete cell blocks. Supermax penitentiaries are the battleships of the correctional fleet; their construction and operational costs will only escalate in the future.

Conclusion

USP Marion was the first federal prison operated entirely as a high-security isolation supermax, which became the model for all the new state supermax cell blocks and prisons. Unlike USP Alcatraz or Pelican Bay, USP Marion does not release any prisoners to roam the halls or outdoor yard. Marion has low-tech security based on the separate confinement model first employed in 1790 by the "Penitentiary House" of the Walnut Street Jail and later refined in 1829 as the cornerstone of Pennsylvania System as the design for Eastern Penitentiary (Johnson, 2000, p. 68). Built in the 1960s, Marion has few of the high-tech features used in new construction. The newer supermax facilities built in the 1980s and 1990s are based on isolation and are monitored by some combination of video and audio surveillance.

Although USP Marion (1963 to 2007) is low tech and ADX Florence (1994 to present) is high tech, they are both entirely devoted to solitary confinement. In 2007, USP Marion, with the addition of new buildings, will be renamed as a medium-security FCI. Nevertheless, the prison will still retain

the high-security cell blocks. Like most FCI, there will be a large general population with a few hundred prisoners in detention or administrative segregation. In effect, USP Marion will continue on as part of a larger institution.

In comparison, most states have only added supermax cell blocks to existing prisons. In most cases, these are no more than high-tech segregation cells where prisoners are kept for a few weeks or months. Many states do not have a stand-alone supermax prison where prisoners can be isolated for years at a time until they are transferred to a lower-security institution. Even the infamous Pelican Bay State Prison in California is only maximum security, with a yard, controlled movement, and a small number of prisoners confined in a supermax housing unit.

Regardless of the use of low-tech or high-tech security, the conditions of confinement in these cell blocks and prisons may be more restrictive than those on death row. Virtually every federal and state prison (medium and maximum security) has an isolation unit or disciplinary cell block in which disruptive, difficult to manage, aggressive, or escape-risk prisoners are kept, sometimes for months or years. We know very little about these supermax facilities and the long-term consequences on prisoners. We do know that convicts assigned to supermax facilities may not receive the services and programs they require to prepare for release. We also know that some portion of this population is released directly from prison to the streets, in some cases with no parole supervision, assistance, or plans for their reentry to the community.

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