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Book Reviews: Irwin, J. (2005). The Warehouse Prison: Disposal of the New Dangerous Class. Los Angeles: Roxbury

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The Warehouse Prison: Disposal of the New Dangerous Class. By John Irwin, Afterword
   by Barbara Owen. Los Angeles, Ca: Roxbury Publishing Company, 2005. 318
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In "The Warehouse Prison: Disposal of the New Dangerous Class," author John

Irwin offers a well developed current account of the new U.S. prison. In addition, Irwin

discusses the creation and impact of North America's incarceration binge on prisoners,

the prison system, prison facilities, and society as a whole. Irwin suggests that the

creation of the new warehouse prisons, in combination with newly designed super-max

prisons, has resulted in the continued subjugation of what he terms "the new dangerous

class."

Beginning in the 1970s, the punishment philosophy in the United States

dramatically shifted from rehabilitation to more punitive forms of justice. Due to this

dramatic shift in punishment philosophy, North America's use of incarceration grew to

unprecedented levels. For instance, from 1972 to 1990 the incarceration rate in both state

and federal jurisdictions increased by over 300%, from 93 per 100,000 residents in 1972

to 292 per 100,000 residents in 1990, an increase of 570,000 additional individuals in

state or federal prisons during this period (Kappeler, Blumberg, & Potter, 2004). This

trend continued throughout the 1990s and into the early part of this century. In 2004,

there were 2,135,901 individuals in state or federal prisons or local jails, which equates to

a rate of 724 prisoners per 100,000 residents (BJS, 2005). In addition, specific

populations have been disproportionately impacted by the increased use of incarceration.

One group that has been disproportionately impacted by the incarceration binge

has been women. From 1995 to 2004, the number of women under the jurisdiction of

state or federal corrections increased by roughly 51%, from 68,468 to 104,848 (BJS,

2005). During this same time period, the number of men under the jurisdiction of state or federal corrections increased by roughly 32%, from 1,057,406 to 1,391,781(BJS, 2005).

In addition to women, some racial minorities continue to be overrepresented within the prison system as well. In 2004, 40.7% of U.S. prisoners were African American, while 34.3% were white (BJS, 2005). Shockingly, according to the most recent census data, African Americans make up roughly 12% of the total U.S. population, while whites make up just over 75% (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2001). When considering the interaction between race and gender, the disparity between certain groups becomes even clearer.

African American males have the highest rate of incarceration at 3,218 African American male prisoners per 100,000 African American male citizens. This rate is over two and a half times the rate for the next closest male group, Hispanics, and almost seven times greater than the rate for white males. In terms of female prisoners, African American females are the most likely to be imprisoned with a rate of 170 black female prisoners per 100,000 black female citizens. Although this is a small number compared to the rate for the male racial groups, this rate is roughly 2.6 times greater than the rate for Hispanic women, and just over 4 times greater than the rate for white women (BJS, 2005). Therefore, it appears as the incarceration binge continues, an increasing number of minorities are being placed under the jurisdiction of state and federal correctional authorities.

However, early on it was noted that as the rate of incarceration in North America climbed to unprecedented heights, the crime rate either remained relatively constant (e.g. violent crime) or in some cases actually dropped (e.g. property crime) (BJS, 2004).

Therefore, as U.S. society became increasingly concerned with the "crime problem" there was very little evidence that the use of incarceration provided any sort of general deterrent effect. Unfortunately, among the undeterred were politicians, the popular media, and the public, all of who continued to insist on harsher penalties and a "get tough" approach to crime prevention and punishment. All of these current statistics lend support to the arguments set forth by Irwin in this book.

For instance, Irwin points out that beginning in the 1960s U.S. politicians began to emphasize a hard line approach to crime and crime prevention. As conservatives in Washington pushed for a tougher approach to crime prevention and punishment, the Democrats began to wage a war of their own. In an attempt to alter the public's perception of the Democratic Party as soft on crime, the Democrats in power during the 1980s began to dramatically shift their political focus. This shift moved the focus of their rhetoric from the "war on poverty" to a now more salient "war on crime" and even more specifically a "war on drugs." Unfortunately, as a result of the Republican Party's get tough stance and the Democratic Party's attempts to reinvent their image, most of the legislation that they both agreed on was aimed at increasing penalties for crime and more specifically drug related offenses, resulting in the now widely recognized incarceration binge which continues to plague the criminal justice system.

This incarceration binge and its impact have been the focus of a great deal of debate among academics, and more importantly among policy makers at the local, state, and federal levels. As a result, these issues have also been addressed by a number of researchers. However, unlike other researchers, Irwin offers a perspective that is informed by both his personal and professional experiences with the North American

prison system. His insights, and those of the many individuals that he interviewed

throughout his career, provide a deep understanding of the impact that mass

imprisonment has had on prisoners, prison administrators/staff, and U.S. society as a

whole.

In the first chapter, Irwin briefly describes the incarceration binge and its causes.

Irwin continues this discussion in Chapter 8, with specific examples of how the

combination of unemployment, "get tough" legislation, increased poverty, and political

maneuvering led to the creation of a new dangerous class, whose members, mainly poor

inner-city minority men, have been increasingly targeted by the U.S. prison system for

more than 30 years. As the public and legislators in North America waged a number of

social "wars," including the war on crime, the war on poverty, and the war on drugs, the

popular media began to characterize inner city ghettos as "crime cauldrons" under siege

by large numbers of dangerous young minority men. As a result, more and more people

living in inner city ghettos were being placed under the jurisdiction of either state or

federal prisons.

In addition to the incarceration binge, Irwin discusses the evolution of the U.S.

prison system throughout history. Chapter 2 offers a historical review of prisons in North

America, from the early prisons at Auburn in New York and Eastern State Penitentiary in

Pennsylvania to their contemporaries, the big houses. What sets this particular discussion

apart is the emphasis that the author places on both the formal and informal structure of

these prison facilities. Not only does Irwin offer the standard discussion of how and why

these prisons were built (i.e. control, reform, rehabilitation, or strict punishment and

segregation) he also considers the changing prison social structure that coincided with the

physical and administrative changes that occurred. Each U.S. prison incarnation is discussed in terms of its physical layout, formal structures, including the rationale behind its creation and/or the rules and regulations of each particular facility, and the informal social structures that the prisoners developed and cultivated in each type of prison.

In chapters 3 and 4, Irwin provides a much more detailed description of what he calls the new "warehouse" prisons. Chapter 3 presents a detailed account of the warehouse prison, including their physical layout, the administrative strategies employed at these facilities, and the informal prisoner social structure. This chapter ends with a brief example and description of one of the new warehouse prisons built in Solano, California.

In chapter 4, Irwin goes into much greater detail about "doing time" in Solano. This chapter seems to be one of the main focuses of this book. In it, he includes a detailed description of this prison population and provides the reader with a better understanding of how prisoner social organizations and adaptive modes have changed with the creation of these new warehouse prisons. He suggests that prisoners generally fall into one of four categories in terms of how they respond to life in the new warehouse prisons. These four categories are the "mix," doing time, withdrawal, and self-improvement.

The mix includes those individuals that continue to participate in deviant or criminal behavior while on the inside (i.e. selling/using drugs). Doing time refers to individuals who keep their future release in sight. They attempt to stay out of trouble by finding ways to occupy their time outside of crime/deviance. Individuals who withdraw simply do not associate with others while in prison. They remain in their cells as much as

possible in order to keep from socializing with other prisoners, or find small cliques of friends and rarely venture beyond them. Finally, some prisoners attempt to improve themselves in some way or another while in prison. These individuals usually participate in education classes, vocational training, or self-help programs in an attempt to change themselves for the better.

In comparison to the warehouse prisons, the next chapter describes the new supermax prisons. Irwin points out that one of the first U.S. prisons, Eastern State Penitentiary, was built to provide complete solitude and segregation of all prisoners, which are also qualities of the new supermax prisons. However, the solitary nature of these supermax prisons results in serious harm related to serious psychological impairments and a breakdown of legitimate socialization skills. Irwin provides a broader discussion of the harms associated with imprisonment in the next chapter. These harms include a loss of agency, assaults on the self, damage to sexual orientation, degradation, anger, frustration, and economic exploitation.

Unfortunately, the harms associated with the warehouse and supermax prisons extend well beyond the prison walls. Like many other books on imprisonment that have been published in recent years, this book includes a chapter on issues of prisoner reentry. Irwin suggests that the structure of the new warehouse prison does little to help prisoners prepare for reentry into society.

Irwin exposes the barriers to successful reentry in the order that most prisoners experience them, which creates a simulated time-line that many readers may find helpful. Chapter 7 begins with a discussion of the initial impact of reentry on the prisoner. Perhaps most damaging is the fact that many newly released prisoners must go back to

the types of neighborhoods that they were in when they were first involved with crime. In addition, Irwin suggests that due to a lack of economic resources, most newly released prisoners live in "run-down motels" or halfway houses in poor inner-city neighborhoods. Many newly released prisoners face barriers when trying to find employment. Employers may refuse to hire former prisoners, and there is no legislation that inhibits employers from refusing to hire an individual because he/she was in prison. Finally, the parole system has evolved from a social work-oriented approach to a more punitive security-oriented approach. Irwin suggests that the combination of living under prison rules, the lack of adequate housing and employment, and the relatively strict nature of parole leads to six different patterns of adjustment after prison. These include failure, "doing good," dependency, drifting on the edge, dereliction, and laying low.

The final chapter suggests that the impact of the incarceration binge and the resulting warehouse prison structures go well beyond the direct harm caused to prisoners. Society has begun to experience serious social problems as a result of the continued use of imprisonment in the U.S. For instance, many social services, including education, have experienced serious funding shortages due to the diversion of public funds for the purpose of building more prisons. Also, many of the individuals swept up by the incarceration binge have families, including children. Both the incarceration binge and the new warehouse prison structures have caused a serious breakdown in the social networks that once existed in many communities.

Irwin also suggests that the wars on crime and drugs have resulted in what is often referred to as net-widening, which results in a large number of people being held in prison who would not have been under other circumstances. In addition, some of the

legislation that has been passed during the get tough era has infringed on basic civil liberties that many U.S. citizens have come to take for granted. Finally, the increased use of both public and private prisons has created a new political powerhouse that continues to lobby for harsher penalties and the increased use of incarceration as punishment.

In addition to the chapters authored by Irwin, Barbara Owen provides an afterword which offers insight into how women have been impacted by the incarceration binge. Owen follows the framework of Irwin's chapters to show how women's experiences with the incarceration binge and imprisonment are unique and how the issues discussed throughout the book relate to women. This is an important aspect that many writers and researchers in the area of corrections tend to leave out. Owen does a great job of relating the topics of the entire book to women, both in prison and after release.

Overall, this book is well written and provides insight into the creation, implementation, and impact of the new form of imprisonment being used across the United States. The warehouse prison emphasizes control and security at the cost of any attempts to rehabilitate and reintegrate prisoners back into society, therefore, doing little to help prisoners prepare for life after release.

Unfortunately, Irwin's discussion of the political and social movements that led to the incarceration binge is relatively standard. He did not offer many new insights into how the political culture from the 1960s through today has supported the dramatic increase in the use of imprisonment as the primary form of punishment in the U.S. This is not to say that his description of the incarceration binge is inadequate, however, when compared to the rest of the book it seems to fall short. Also, Irwin could have spent more time discussing the specific policy implications associated with the harm that these new

prisons cause. Although many policy issues are weaved in throughout the book, readers may have benefited from a direct discussion of how the problems associated with the use of these new types of prisons could be alleviated.

To his credit, and the reader's benefit, Irwin is open about his history with the California prison system. He is able to combine his experiences as a former prisoner with his extensive work as a researcher and author in the field of corrections. He seems to effortlessly intertwine these experiences with those of other individuals who he has interviewed during his career as a researcher. His use of quotes from these interviews throughout the book offers insight from prisoners, prison staff and administrators, researchers, and academics. His style of writing allows the reader to become fully immersed in the world of the modern warehouse prison, and would be a great introduction to this world for students of corrections and other individuals that are interested in gaining a more detailed understanding of North America's newest prison system.

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