Thieves, Convicts and the Inmate Culture
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tries which make use of a union hiring hall.

In the absence of studies which isolate the effect of such factors, our findings cannot readily be generalized. It is tempting to suggest after an initial look at the results that social class differences provide the explanation. But subsequent analysis and research might well reveal significant intra-class variations, depending on the distribution of other operative factors. A lower class person with a scarce specialty and a protective occupational group who is acquitted of a lightly regarded offense might benefit from the accusation. Nevertheless, class in general seems to correlate with the relevant factors to such an extent that in reality the law regularly works to the disadvantage of the already more disadvantaged classes.

CONCLUSION

Legal accusation imposes a variety of consequences, depending on the nature of the accusation and the characteristics of the accused. Deprivations occur, even though not officially intended, in the case of unskilled workers who have been acquitted of assault charges. On the other hand, malpractice actions—even when resulting in a judgment against the doctor—are not usually followed by negative consequences and sometimes have a favorable effect on the professional position of the defendant. These differences in outcome suggest two conclusions: one, the need for more explicit clarification of legal goals; two, the importance of examining the attitudes and social structure of the community outside the courtroom if the legal process is to hit intended targets, while avoiding innocent bystanders. Greater precision in communicating goals and in appraising consequences of present practices should help to make the legal process an increasingly equitable and effective instrument of social control.

THIEVES, CONVICTS AND THE INMATE CULTURE

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In the rapidly-growing literature on the social organization of correctional institutions, it has become common to discuss "prison culture" and "inmate culture" in terms suggesting that the behavior systems of various types of inmates stem from the conditions of imprisonment themselves. Use of a form of structural-functional analysis in research and observation of institutions has led to emphasis of the notion that

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internal conditions stimulate inmate behavior of various kinds, and there has been a glossing over of the older notion that inmates may bring a culture with them into the prison. Our aim is to suggest that much of the inmate behavior classified as part of the prison culture is not peculiar to the prison at all. On the contrary, it is the fine distinction between "prison culture" and "criminal subculture" which seems to make understandable the fine distinction between behavior patterns of various categories of inmates.

A number of recent publications have defended the notion that behavior patterns among inmates develop with

a minimum of influence from the outside world. For example, in his general discussion of total institutions, Goffman acknowledges that inmates bring a culture with them to the institution, but he argues that upon entrance to the institution they are stripped of this support by processes of mortification and dispossession aimed at managing the daily activities of a large number of persons in a small space with a small expenditure of resources.[1] Similarly, Sykes and Messinger note that a central value system seems to pervade prison populations, and they maintain that "conformity to, or deviation from, the inmate code is the major basis for classifying and describing the social relations of prisoners."[2] The emphasis in this code is on directives such as "don't interfere with inmate interests," "don't lose your head," "don't exploit inmates," "don't weaken," and "don't be a sucker." The authors' argument, like the argument in other of Sykes' publications is that the origin of these values is situational; the value system arises out of the conditions of imprisonment.[3] Cloward stresses both the acute sense of status degradation which prisoners experience and the resulting patterns of prison life, which he calls "structural

accommodation."[4] Like others, he makes the important point that the principal types of inmates—especially the "politicians" and the "shots"—help the officials by exerting controls over the general prison body in return for special privileges. Similarly, he recognizes the "right guy" role as one built around the value system described by Sykes and Messinger, and points out that it is tolerated by prison officials because it helps maintain the status quo. Cloward hints at the existence in prison of a *criminal* subculture when he says that "the upper echelons of the inmate world come to be occupied by those whose past behavior best symbolizes that which society rejects and who have most fully repudiated institutional norms." Nevertheless, his principal point is that this superior status, like other patterns of behavior among inmates, arises from the *internal* character of the prison situation. McCleery also stresses the unitary character of the culture of prisoners, and he identifies the internal source of this culture in statements such as: "The denial of validity to outside contacts protected the inmate culture from criticism and assured the stability of the social system," "A man's status in the inmate community depended on his role there and his conformity to its norms," "Inmate culture stressed the goals of adjustment within the walls and the rejection of outside contacts," and "Status has been geared to adjustment in the prison."[5]

The idea that the prison produces its own varieties of behavior represents a break with the more traditional notion that men bring patterns of behavior with them when they enter prison, and use them in prison. Despite their emphasis on "prisonization" of newcomers, even Clemmer and Riemer noted that degree of conformity to prison expectations depends in part

[1] Erving Goffman, "On the Characteristics of Total Institutions," Chapters 1 and 2 in Donald R. Cressey, Editor, *The Prison: Studies in Institutional Organization and Change,* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961, pp. 22-47.

[2] Richard A. Cloward, Donald R. Cressey, George H. Grosser, Richard McCleery, Lloyd E. Ohlin, and Gresham M. Sykes and Sheldon L. Messinger, *Theoretical Studies in Social Organization of the Prison,* New York: Social Science Research Council, 1960, p. 9.

[3] *Ibid.,* pp. 15, 19. See also Gresham M. Sykes, "Men, Merchants, and Toughs: A Study of Reactions to Imprisonment," *Social Problems,* 4 (October, 1957), pp. 130-138; and Gresham M. Sykes, *The Society of Captives,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958, pp. 79-82.

[4] Cloward, *et al., op. cit.,* pp. 21, 35-41.
[5] *Ibid.,* pp. 58, 60, 73.

on prior, outside conditions.[6] Schrag has for some years been studying the social backgrounds and careers of various types of inmates.[7] Unlike any of the authors cited above, he has collected data on both the pre-prison experiences and the prison experiences of prisoners. He relates the actions of inmates to the broader community as well as to the forces that are more indigenous to prisons themselves.[8] Of most relevance here is his finding that anti-social inmates ("right guys") "are reared in an environment consistently oriented toward illegitimate social norms,"[9] and frequently earn a living via contacts with organized crime but do not often rise to positions of power in the field. In contrast, asocial inmates ("outlaws") are frequently reared in institutions: "The careers of asocial offenders are marked by high egocentrism and inability to profit from past mistakes or to plan for the future."[10]

However, despite these research findings, even Schrag has commented as follows: "Juxtaposed with the official organization of the prison is an unofficial social system originating within the institution and regulating inmate conduct with respect to focal issues, such as length of sentence, relations among prisoners, contacts with staff members and other civilians, food, sex, and health, among others."[11] Garrity interprets Schrag's theory in the following terms, which seem to ignore the findings on the pre-prison careers

of the various inmate types:

Schrag has further suggested that all inmates face a number of common problems of adjustment as a consequence of imprisonment and that social organization develops as a consequence. When two or more persons perceive that they share a common motivation or problem of action, a basis for meaningful interaction has been established, and from this interaction can emerge the social positions, roles, and norms which comprise social organization. Schrag suggests that the common problems of adjustment which become the principal axes of prison life are related to time, food, sex, leisure, and health.[12]

Garrity himself uses the "indigenous origin" notion when he says that "the axial values regarding shared problems or deprivations provide the basis for articulation of the broad normative system or 'prison code' which defines positions and roles in a general way but allows enough latitude so that positions and roles take on the character of social worlds themselves."[13] However, he also points out that some prisoners' reference groups are outside the prison, and he characterizes the "right guy" as an "anti-social offender, stable, and oriented to crime, criminals, and inmates."[14] "The 'right guy' is the dominant figure in the prison, and his reference groups are elite prisoners, sophisticated, career-type criminals, and other 'right guys.' "[15] Cressey and Krassowski, similarly, seem confused about any distinction between a criminal subculture and a prison subculture. They mention that many inmates of Soviet labor camps "know prisons and maintain criminalistic values," and that the inmates are bound together by a "crim-

[6] Donald Clemmer, *The Prison Community,* Re-issued Edition, New York: Rinehart, 1958, pp. 229-302; Hans Riemer, "Socialization in the Prison Community," *Proceedings of the American Prison Association,* 1937, pp. 151-155.
[7] See Clarence Schrag, *Social Types in a Prison Community,* Unpublished M.S. Thesis, University of Washington, 1944.
[8] Clarence Schrag, "Some Foundations for a Theory of Correction," Chapter 8 in Cressey, *op. cit.,* p. 329.
[9] *Ibid.,* p. 350.
[10] *Ibid.,* p. 349.
[11] *Ibid.,* p. 342.

[12] Donald R. Garrity, "The Prison as a Rehabilitation Agency," Chapter 9 in Cressey, *op. cit.,* pp. 372-373.
[13] *Ibid.,* p. 373.
[14] *Ibid.,* p. 376.
[15] *Ibid.,* p. 377.

inalistic ideology,"[16] but they fail to deal theoretically with the contradiction between these statements and their observation that the inmate leaders in the labor camps are "toughs" or "gorillas" rather than "right guys" or "politicians." Conceivably, leadership is vested in "toughs" to a greater extent than is the case in American prisons because the orientation is more that of a *prison* subculture than of a criminal subculture in which men are bound together with a "criminalistic ideology."

It is our contention that the "functional" or "indigenous origin" notion has been overemphasized and that observers have overlooked the dramatic effect that external behavior patterns have on the conduct of inmates in any given prison. Moreover, the contradictory statements made in this connection by some authors, including Cressey,[17] seem to stem from acknowledging but then ignoring the deviant subcultures which exist outside any given prison and outside prisons generally. More specifically, it seems rather obvious that the "prison code"—don't inform on or exploit another inmate, don't lose your head, be weak, or be a sucker, etc.—is also part of a *criminal* code, existing outside prisons. Further, many inmates come to any given prison with a record of many terms in correctional institutions. These men, some of whom have institutional records dating back to early childhood, bring with them a ready-made set of patterns which they apply to the new situation, just as is the case with participants in the criminal subculture. In view of these variations, a clear un-

derstanding of inmate conduct cannot be obtained simply by viewing "prison culture" or "inmate culture" as an isolated system springing solely from the conditions of imprisonment. Becker and Geer have made our point in more general terms: "The members of a group may derive their understandings from cultures other than that of the group they are at the moment participating in. To the degree that group participants share latent social identities (related to their membership in the same 'outside' social groups) they will share these understandings, so that there will be a culture which can be called *latent*, i.e., the culture has its origin and social support in a group other than the one in which the members are now participating."[18]

We have no doubt that the total set of relationships called "inmate society" is a response to problems of imprisonment. What we question is the emphasis given to the notion that solutions to these problems are found within the prison, and the lack of emphasis on "latent culture"—on external experiences as determinants of the solutions. We have found it both necessary and helpful to divide inmates into three rough categories: those oriented to a criminal subculture, those oriented to a prison subculture, and those oriented to "conventional" or "legitimate" subcultures.

THE TWO DEVIANT SUBCULTURES

When we speak of a criminal subculture we do not mean to imply that there is some national or international organization with its own judges, enforcement agencies, etc. Neither do we

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[16] Donald R. Cressey and Witold Krassowski, "Inmate Organization and Anomie in American Prisons and Soviet Labor Camps," *Social Problems,* 5 (Winter, 1957-58), pp. 217-230.

[17] Edwin H. Sutherland and Donald R. Cressey, *Principles of Criminology,* Sixth Edition, New York: Lippincott, 1960, pp. 504-505.

[18] Howard S. Becker and Blanche Geer, "Latent Culture: A Note on the Theory of Latent Social Roles," *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 5 (September, 1960), pp. 305-306. See also Alvin W. Gouldner, "Cosmopolitans and Locals: Toward an Analysis of Latent Social Roles," *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 2 (1957), pp. 281-306 and 2 (1958), pp. 444-480.

imply that every person convicted of a crime is a member of the subculture. Nevertheless, descriptions of the values of professional thieves, "career criminals," "sophisticated criminals," and other good crooks indicate that there is a set of values which extends to criminals across the nation with a good deal of consistency.[19] To avoid possible confusion arising from the fact that not all criminals share these values, we have arbitrarily named the system a "thief" subculture. The core values of this subculture correspond closely to the values which prison observers have ascribed to the "right guy" role. These include the important notion that criminals should not betray each other to the police, should be reliable, wily but trustworthy, cool headed, etc. High status in this subculture is awarded to men who appear to follow these prescriptions without variance. In the thief subculture a man who is known as "right" or "solid" is one who can be trusted and relied upon. High status is also awarded to those who possess skill as thieves, but to be just a successful thief is not enough; there must be solidness as well. A solid guy is respected even if he is unskilled, and no matter how skilled in crime a stool pigeon may be, his status is low.

Despite the fact that adherence to the norms of the thief subculture is an ideal, and the fact that the behavior of the great majority of men arrested or convicted varies sharply from any "criminal code" which migh be identified, a proportion of the persons arrested for "real crime" such as burglary, robbery, and larceny have been in close contact with the values of the subculture. Many criminals, while not following the precepts of the subcul-

ture religiously, give lip service to its values and evaluate their own behavior and the behavior of their associates in terms relating to adherence to "rightness" and being "solid." It is probable, further, that use of this kind of values is not even peculiarly "criminal," for policemen, prison guards, college professors, students, and almost any other category of persons evaluate behavior in terms of in-group loyalties. Whyte noted the mutual obligations binding corner boys together and concluded that status depends upon the extent to which a boy lives up to his obligations, a form of "solidness."[20] More recently, Miller identified "toughness," "smartness," and "autonomy" among the "focal concerns" of lower class adolescent delinquent boys; these also characterize prisoners who are oriented to the thief subculture.[21] Wheeler found that half of the custody staff and sixty per cent of the treatment staff in one prison approved the conduct of a hypothetical inmate who refused to name an inmate with whom he had been engaged in a knife fight.[22] A recent book has given the name "moral courage" to the behavior of persons who, like thieves, have shown extreme loyalty to their in-groups in the face of real or threatened adversity, including imprisonment.[23]

Imprisonment is one of the recurring problems with which thieves must cope. It is almost certain that a thief will be arrested from time to time, and the subculture provides members with patterns to be used in

[19] Walter C. Reckless, The Crime Problem, Second Edition, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1945, pp. 144-145; 148-150; Edwin H. Sutherland, The Profesisonal Thief, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937.

[20] William Foote Whyte, "Corner Boys: A Study of Clique Behavior," American Journal of Sociology, 46 (March, 1941), pp. 647-663.
[21] Walter B. Miller, "Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency," Journal of Social Issues, 14 (1958), pp. 5-19.
[22] Stanton Wheeler, "Role Conflict in Correctional Communities," Chapter 6 in Cressey, op. cit., p. 235.
[23] Compton Mackenzie, Moral Courage, London: Collins, 1962.

order to help solve this problem. Norms which apply to the prison situation, and information on how to undergo the prison experience—how to do time "standing on your head"— with the least suffering and in a minimum amount of time are provided. Of course, the subculture itself is both nurtured and diffused in the different jails and prisons of the country.

There also exists in prisons a subculture which is by definition a set of patterns that flourishes in the environment of incarceration. It can be found wherever men are confined, whether it be in city jails, state and federal prisons, army stockades, prisoner of war camps, concentration camps, or even mental hospitals. Such organizations are characterized by deprivations and limitations on freedom, and in them available wealth must be competed for by men supposedly on an equal footing. It is in connection with the *maintenance* (but not necessarily with the *origin*) of this subculture that it is appropriate to stress the notion that a minimum of outside status criteria are carried into the situation. Ideally, all status is to be achieved by the means made available in the prison, through the displayed ability to manipulate the environment, win special privileges in a certain manner, and assert influence over others. To avoid confusion with writings on "prison culture" and "inmate culture," we have arbitrarily named this system of values and behavior patterns a "convict subculture." The central value of the subculture is utilitarianism, and the most manipulative and most utilitarian individuals win the available wealth and such positions of influence as might exist.

It is not correct to conclude, however, that even these behavior patterns are a consequence of the environment of any particular prison. In the first place, such utilitarian and manipulative behavior probably is characteristic of the "hard core" lower class in the United States, and most prisoners come from this class. After discussing the importance of toughness, smartness, excitement and fate in this group, Miller makes the following significant observation:

> In lower class culture a close conceptual connection is made between "authority" and "nurturance." To be restrictively or firmly controlled is to be cared for. Thus the overtly negative evaluation of superordinate authority frequently extends as well to nurturance, care, or protection. The desire for personal independence is often expressed in terms such as "I don't need *nobody* to take care of me. I can take care of myself!" Actual patterns of behavior, however, reveal a marked discrepancy between expressed sentiments and what is covertly valued. Many lower class people appear to seek out highly restrictive social environments wherein stringent external controls are maintained over their behavior. Such institutions as the armed forces, the mental hospital, the disciplinary school, the prison or correctional institution, provide environments which incorporate a strict and detailed set of rules defining and limiting behavior, and enforced by an authority system which controls and applies coercive sanctions for deviance from these rules. While under the jurisdiction of such systems, the lower class person generally expresses to his peers continual resentment of the coercive, unjust, and arbitrary exercise of authority. Having been released, or having escaped from these milieux, however, he will often act in such a way as to insure recommitment, or choose recommitment voluntarily after a temporary period of "freedom."[24]

In the second place, the "hard core" members of this subculture as it exists in American prisons for adults are likely to be inmates who have a long record of confinement in institutions for juveniles. McCleery observed that, in a period of transition, reform-school graduates all but took over inmate society in one prison. These boys called themselves a "syndicate" and engaged in a concentrated campaign of argu-

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[24] *Op. cit.,* pp. 12-13.

ment and intimidation directed toward capturing the inmate council and the inmate craft shop which had been placed under council management. "The move of the syndicate to take over the craft shop involved elements of simple exploitation, the grasp for a status symbol, and an aspect of economic reform."[25] Persons with long histories of institutionalization, it is important to note, might have had little contact with the thief subculture. The thief subculture does not flourish in institutions for juveniles, and graduates of such institutions have not necessarily had extensive criminal experience on the outside. However, some form of the convict subculture *does* exist in institutions for juveniles, though not to the extent characterizing prisons for felons. Some of the newcomers to a prison for adults are, in short, persons who have been oriented to the convict subculture, who have found the utilitarian nature of this subculture acceptable, and who have had little contact with the thief subculture. This makes a difference in their behavior.

The category of inmates we have characterized as oriented to "legitimate" subcultures includes men who are not members of the thief subculture upon entering prison and who reject both the thief subculture and the convict subculture while in prison. These men present few problems to prison administrators. They make up a large percentage of the population of any prison, but they isolate themselves —or are isolated—from the thief and convict subcultures. Clemmer found that forty per cent of a sample of the men in his prison did not consider themselves a part of any group, and another forty per cent could be considered a member of a "semi-primary group" only.[26] He referred to these

25 Richard H. McCleery, "The Governmental Process and Informal Social Control," Chapter 4 in Cressey, *op. cit.,* p. 179.
26 *Op. cit.,* pp. 116-133.

men as "ungrouped," and his statistics have often been interpreted as meaning that the prison contains many men not oriented to "inmate culture" or "prison culture"—in our terms, not oriented to either the thief subculture or the convict subculture. This is not necessarily the case. There may be sociometric isolates among the thief-oriented prisoners, the convict-oriented prisoners, and the legitimately oriented prisoners. Consequently, we have used the "legitimate subcultures" terminology rather than Clemmer's term "ungrouped." Whether or not men in this category participate in cliques, athletic teams, or religious study and hobby groups, they are oriented to the problem of achieving goals through means which are legitimate outside prisons.

BEHAVIOR PATTERNS IN PRISON

On an ideal-type level, there are great differences in the prison behavior of men oriented to one or the other of the three types of subculture. The hard core member of the convict subculture finds his reference groups inside the institutions and, as indicated, he seeks status through means available in the prison environment. But it is important for the understanding of inmate conduct to note that the hard core member of the thief subculture seeks status in the broader criminal world of which prison is only a part. His reference groups include people both inside and outside prison, but he is committed to criminal life, not prison life. From his point of view, it is adherence to a widespread criminal code that wins him high status, not adherence to a narrower convict code. Convicts might assign him high status because they admire him as a thief, or because a good thief makes a good convict, but the thief does not play the convicts' game. Similarly, a man oriented to a legitimate subculture is by definition committed to the values

of neither thieves nor convicts.

On the other hand, within any given prison, the men oriented to the convict subculture are the inmates that seek positions of power, influence, and sources of information, whether these men are called "shots," "politicians," "merchants," "hoods," "toughs," "gorillas," or something else. A job as secretary to the Captain or Warden, for example, gives an aspiring prisoner information and consequent power, and enables him to influence the assignment or regulation of other inmates. In the same way, a job which allows the incumbent to participate in a racket, such as clerk in the kitchen storeroom where he can steal and sell food, is highly desirable to a man oriented to the convict subculture. With a steady income of cigarettes, ordinarily the prisoners' medium of exchange, he may assert a great deal of influence and purchase those things which are symbols of status among persons oriented to the convict subculture. Even if there is no well-developed medium of exchange, he can barter goods acquired in his position for equally-desirable goods possessed by other convicts. These include information and such things as specially-starched, pressed, and tailored prison clothing, fancy belts, belt buckles or billfolds, special shoes, or any other type of dress which will set him apart and will indicate that he has both the influence to get the goods and the influence necessary to keeping and displaying them despite prison rules which outlaw doing so. In California, special items of clothing, and clothing that is neatly laundered, are called "bonaroos" (a corruption of *bonnet rouge*, by means of which French prison trusties were once distinguished from the common run of prisoners), and to a lesser degree even the persons who wear such clothing are called "bonaroos."

Two inmates we observed in one prison are somewhat representative of high status members of the convict subculture. One was the prison's top gambler, who bet the fights, baseball games, football games, ran pools, etc. His cell was always full of cigarettes, although he did not smoke. He had a job in the cell block taking care of the laundry room, and this job gave him time to conduct his gambling activities. It also allowed him to get commissions for handling the clothing of inmates who paid to have them "bonarooed," or who had friends in the laundry who did this for them free of charge, in return for some service. The "commissions" the inmate received for doing this service were not always direct; the "favors" he did gave him influence with many of the inmates in key jobs, and he reputedly could easily arrange cell changes and job changes. Shortly after he was paroled he was arrested and returned to prison for robbing a liquor store. The other inmate was the prison's most notorious "fag" or "queen." He was feminine in appearance and gestures, and wax had been injected under the skin on his chest to give the appearance of breasts. At first he was kept in a cell block isolated from the rest of the prisoners, but later he was released out into the main population. He soon went to work in a captain's office, and became a key figure in the convict subculture. He was considered a stool pigeon by the thieves, but he held high status among participants in the convict subculture. In the first place, he was the most desired fag in the prison. In the second place, he was presumed to have considerable influence with the officers who frequented the captain's office. He "married" another prisoner, who also was oriented to the convict subculture.

Since prisoners oriented either to a legitimate subculture or to a thief subculture are not seeking high status within any given prison, they do not

look for the kinds of positions con-
sidered so desirable by the members
of the convict subculture. Those ori-
ented to legitimate subcultures take
prison as it comes and seek status
through channels provided for that
purpose by prison administrators—
running for election to the inmate
council, to the editorship of the institu-
tional newspaper, etc.—and by, gen-
erally, conforming to what they think
administrators expect of "good prison-
ers." Long before the thief has come
to prison, his subculture has defined
proper prison conduct as behavior ra-
tionally calculated to "do time" in the
easiest possible way. This means that
he wants a prison life containing the
best possible combination of a maxi-
mum amount of leisure time and a
maximum number of privileges. Ac-
cordingly, the privileges sought by the
thief are different from the privileges
sought by the man oriented to prison
itself. The thief wants things that will
make prison life a little easier—extra
food, a maximum amount of recreation
time, a good radio, a little peace. One
thief serving his third sentence for
armed robbery was a dish washer in
the officers' dining room. He liked
the eating privileges, but he never sold
food. Despite his "low status" job, he
was highly respected by other thieves,
who described him as "right," and
"solid." Members of the convict sub-
culture, like the thieves, seek privileges.
There is a difference, however, for the
convict seeks privileges which he be-
lieves will enhance his position in the
inmate hierarchy. He also wants to do
easy time but, as compared with the
thief, desirable privileges are more
likely to involve freedom to amplify
one's store, such as stealing rights in
the kitchen, and freedom of movement
around the prison. Obtaining an easy
job is managed because it is easy and
therefore desirable, but it also is man-
aged for the purpose of displaying the
fact that it can be obtained.

In one prison, a man serving his
second sentence for selling narcotics
(he was not an addict) worked in the
bakery during the entire term of his
sentence. To him, a thief, this was a
"good job," for the hours were short
and the bakers ate very well. There
were some rackets conducted from the
bakery, such as selling cocoa, but the
man never participated in these activi-
ties. He was concerned a little with
learning a trade, but not very serious-
ly. Most of all, he wanted the eating
privileges which the bakery offered. A
great deal of his time was spent read-
ing psychology, philosophy, and mysti-
cism. Before his arrest he had been a
reader of tea leaves and he now was
working up some plans for an illegal
business involving mysticism. Other
than this, his main activity was sitting
with other inmates and debating.

Just as both thieves and convicts
seek privileges, both seek the many
kinds of contraband in a prison. But
again the things the thief seeks are
those than contribute to an easier life,
such as mechanical gadgets for heating
water for coffee and cocoa, phono-
graphs and radios if they are contra-
band or not, contraband books, food,
writing materials, socks, etc. He may
"score" for food occasionally (un-
planned theft in which advantage is
taken of a momentary opportunity),
but he does not have a "route" (highly
organized theft of food). One who
"scores" for food eats it, shares it with
his friends, sometimes in return for a
past or expected favors, but he does
not sell it. One who has a "route" is
in the illicit food selling business.[27]
The inmate oriented to the convict
subculture, with its emphasis on dis-
playing ability to manipulate the en-
vironment, rather than on pleasure, is
the inmate with the "route." The dif-
ference is observable in the case of
an inmate assigned to the job of clerk

[27] See Schrag, "Some Foundations for a
Theory of Correction," op. cit., p. 343.

in the dental office of one prison. This man was known to both inmates and staff long before he arrived at the institution, for his crime and arrest were highly publicized in the newspapers. It also became known that he had done time in another penitentiary for "real crime," and that his criminal exploits had frequently taken him from one side of the United States to the other. His assignment to the dental office occurred soon after he entered the prison, and some of the inmates believed that such a highly-desirable job could not be achieved without "influence" and "rep." It was an ideal spot for conducting a profitable business, and a profitable business was in fact being conducted there. In order to get on the list to see the dentist, an inmate had to pay a price in cigarettes to two members of the convict subculture who were running the dental office. This practice soon changed, at least in reference to inmates who could show some contact with our man's criminal friends, in or out of prison. If a friend vouched for a man by saying he was "right" or "solid" the man would be sitting in the dental chair the next day, free of charge.

Generally speaking, an inmate oriented to the thief subculture simply is not interested in gaining high status in the prison. He wants to get out. Moreover, he is likely to be quietly amused by the concern some prisoners have for symbols of status, but he publicly exhibits neither disdain nor enthusiasm for this concern. One exception to this occurred in an institution where a thief had become a fairly close friend of an inmate oriented to the prison. One day the latter showed up in a fresh set of bonaroos, and he made some remark that called attention to them. The thief looked at him, laughed, and said, "For Christ's sake, Bill, they're *Levi's* (standard prison blue denims) and they are always going to be Levi's." The thief may be

accorded high status in the prison, because "rightness" is revered there as well as on the outside, but to him this is incidental to his being a "man," not to his being a prisoner.

Members of both subcultures are conservative—they want to maintain the status quo. Motivation is quite different, however. The man oriented to the convict subculture is conservative because he has great stock in the existing order of things, while the man who is thief oriented leans toward conservatism because he knows how to do time and likes things to run along smoothly with a minimum of friction. It is because of this conservatism that so many inmates are directly or indirectly in accommodation with prison officials who, generally speaking, also wish to maintain the status quo. A half dozen prison observers have recently pointed out that some prison leaders—those oriented to what we call the convict subculture—assist the officials by applying pressures that keep other inmates from causing trouble, while other prison leaders—those oriented to what we call the thief subculture—indirectly keep order by propagating the *criminal* code, including admonitions to "do your own time," "don't interfere with others' activities," "don't 'rank' another criminal." The issue is not whether the thief subculture and convict subculture are useful to, and used by, administrators; it is whether the observed behavior patterns originate in prison as a response to official administrative practices.

There are other similarities, noted by many observers of "prison culture" or "inmate culture." In the appropriate circumstances, members of both subcultures will participate in fomenting and carrying out riots. The man oriented to the convict subculture does this when a change has closed some of the paths for achieving positions of influence, but the thief does it when privileges of the kind that make life

easier are taken away from him. Thus, when a "prison reform" group takes over an institution, it may inadvertently make changes which lead to alliances between the members of two subcultures who ordinarily are quite indifferent to each other. In more routine circumstances, the thief adheres to a tight system of mutual aid for other thieves—persons who are "right" and "solid"—a direct application in prison of the norms which ask that a thief prove himself reliable and trustworthy to other thieves. If a man is "right," then even if he is a stranger one must help him if there is no risk to himself. If he is a friend, then one must, in addition, be willing to take *some* risk in order to help him. But in the convict subculture, "help" has a price; one helps in order to gain, whether the gain be "pay" in the form of cigarettes, or a guarantee of a return favor which will enlarge one's area of power.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE TWO SUBCULTURES

In the routine prison setting, the two deviant subcultures exist in a balanced relationship. It is this total setting which has been observed as "inmate culture." There is some conflict because of the great disparity in some of the values of thieves and convicts, but the two subcultures share other values. The thief is committed to keeping his hands off other people's activities, and the convict, being utilitarian, is likely to know that it is better in the long run to avoid conflict with thieves and confine one's exploitations to the "do rights" and to the members of his own subculture. Of course, the thief must deal with the convict from time to time, and when he does so he adjusts to the reality of the fact that he is imprisoned. Choosing to follow prison definitions usually means paying for some service in cigarettes or in a returned service; this is the cost of doing

easy time. Some thieves adapt in a more general way to the ways of convicts and assimilate the prisonized person's concern for making out in the institution. On an ideal-type level, however, thieves do not sanction exploitation of other inmates, and they simply ignore the "do rights," who are oriented to legitimate subcultures. Nevertheless, their subculture as it operates in prison has exploitative effects.[28]

Numerous persons have documented the fact that "right guys," many of whom can be identified as leaders of the thieves, not of the convicts, exercise the greatest influence over the total prison population. The influence is the long run kind stemming from the ability to influence notions of what is right and proper, what McCleery calls the formulation and communication of definitions.[29] The thief, after all, has the respect of many inmates who are not themselves thieves. The right guy carries a set of attitudes, values and norms that have a great deal of consistency and clarity. He acts, forms opinions, and evaluates events in the prison according to them, and over a long period of time he in this way determines basic behavior patterns in the institution. In what the thief thinks of as "small matters," however—getting job transfers, enforcing payment of gambling debts, making cell assignments—members of the convict subculture run things.

It is difficult to assess the direct lines of influence the two deviant subcultures have over those inmates who are not members of either subculture when they enter a prison. It is true that if a new inmate does not have definitions to apply to the new prison situation, one or the other of the deviant subcultures is likely to supply them. On

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[28] See Donald R. Cressey, "Foreword," to Clemmer, *op. cit.,* pp. vii-x.
[29] "The Governmental Process and Informal Social Control," *op. cit.,* p. 154.

terms are likely to move toward the middle, toward a compromise or balance between the directives coming from the two sources. A member of the convict subculture may come to see that thieves are the real men with the prestige; a member of the thief subculture or even a do right may lose his ability to sustain his status needs by outside criteria. Criminologists seem to have had difficulty in keeping the two kinds of influence separate, and we cannot expect all inmates to be more astute than the criminologists. The fact that time has a blending effect on the participants in the two deviant subcultures suggests that the subcultures themselves tend to blend together in some prisons. We have already noted that the thief subculture scarcely exists in some institutions for juveniles. It is probable also that in army stockades and in concentration camps this subculture is almost nonexistent. In places of short-term confinement, such as city and county jails, the convict subculture is dominant, for the thief subculture involves status distinctions that are not readily observable in a short period of confinement. At the other extreme, in prisons where only prisoners with long sentences are confined, the distinctions between the two subcultures are likely to be blurred. Probably the two subcultures exist in their purest forms in institutions holding inmates in their twenties, with varying sentences for a variety of criminal offenses. Such institutions, of course, are the "typical" prisons of the United States.

Despite these differences, in any prison the men oriented to legitimate subcultures should have a low recidivism rate, while the highest recidivism rate should be found among participants in the convict subculture. The hard core members of this subculture are being trained in manipulation, duplicity and exploitation, they are not sure they can make it on the out-

side, and even when they are on the outside they continue to use convicts as a reference group. This sometimes means that there will be a wild spree of crime and dissipation which takes the members of the convict subculture directly back to the prison. Members of the thief subculture, to whom prison life represented a pitfall in outside life, also should have a high recidivism rate. However, the thief sometimes "reforms" and tries to succeed in some life within the law. Such behavior, contrary to popular notions, is quite acceptable to other members of the thief subculture, so long as the new job and position are not "anti-criminal" and do not involve regular, routine, "slave labor." Suckers work, but a man who, like a thief, "skims it off the top" is not a sucker. At any rate, the fact that convicts, to a greater extent than thieves, tend to evaluate things from the perspective of the prison and to look upon discharge as a short vacation from prison life suggests that their recidivism rate should be higher than that of thieves.

Although the data collected by Garrity provide only a crude test of these predictions, they do support them. Garrity determined the recidivism rates and the tendencies for these rates to increase or decrease with increasing length of prison terms, for each of Schrag's inmate types. Unfortunately, this typology does not clearly make the distinction between the two subcultures, probably because of the blending process noted above. Schrag's "right guys" or "antisocial offenders," thus, might include both men who perceive role requirements in terms of the norms of the convict subculture, and men who perceive those requirements in terms of the norms of the thief subculture. Similarly, neither his "con politician" ("pseudosocial offender") nor his "outlaw" ("asocial offender") seem to be what we would characterize as the ideal-type member of

the convict subculture. For example, it is said that relatively few of the former have juvenile records, that onset of criminality often occurs after a position of respectability has already been attained in the civilian community, and that educational and occupational records are far superior to those of "right guys." Further, outlaws are characterized as men who have been frequently reared in institutions or shifted around in foster homes; but they also are characterized as "undisciplined trouble-makes," and this does not seem to characterize the men who seek high status in prisons by rather peaceful means of manipulation and exploitation. In short, our ideal-type "thief" appears to include only some of Schrag's "right guys"; the ideal-type "convict" seems to include some of his "right guys," some of his "con politicians," and all of his "outlaws." Schrag's "square Johns" correspond to our "legitimate subcultures" category.

Garrity found that a group of "square Johns" had a low parole violation rate and that this rate remained low no matter how much time was served. The "right guys" had a high violation rate that decreased markedly as time in prison increased. In Garrity's words, this was because "continued incarceration [served] to sever his connections with the criminal subculture and thus to increase the probability of successful parole."[32] The rates for the "outlaw" were very high and remained high as time in prison increased. Only the rates of the "con politician" did not meet our expectations—the rates were low if the sentences were rather short but increased

[32] *Op. cit.,* p. 377.

systematically with time served.

Noting that the origins of the thief subculture and the convict subculture are both external to a prison should change our expectations regarding the possible reformative effect of that prison. The recidivism rates of neither thieves, convicts, nor do rights are likely to be significantly affected by incarceration in any traditional prison. This is not to say that the program of a prison with a "therapeutic milieu" like the one the Wisconsin State Reformatory is seeking, or of a prison like some of those in California, in which group counseling is being used in an attempt to change organizational structure, will not eventually affect the recidivism rates of the members of one or another, or all three, of the categories. However, in reference to the ordinary cutodially-oriented prison the thief says he can do his time "standing on his head," and it appears that he *is* able to do the time "standing on his head"—except for long-termers, imprisonment has little effect on the thief one way or the other. Similarly, the routine of any particular custodial prison is not likely to have significant reformative effects on members of the convict subculture—they will return to prison because, in effect, they have found a home there. And the men oriented to legitimate subcultures will maintain low recidivism rates even if they never experience imprisonment. Garrity has shown that it is not correct to conclude, as reformers have so often done, that prisons are the breeding ground of crime. It probably is not true either that any particular prison is the breeding ground of an inmate culture that significantly increases recidivism rates.