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Chapter 5

Being Behind Bars

At age fifty-five, Woody D. was released from prison where he had been for twenty-five years. He had killed a railroad clerk. Before that sentence, Woody had already spent five years behind bars for burglary. He said he had heard people say they wanted to kill themselves while in prison, but he knew he could never do that. He found that if you woke up again every morning, still alive, then you could get through it. Woody made three rules to survive behind bars: (1) be strong, (2) stay calm to avoid going crazy, and (3) keep out of trouble to be set free on time.



CHECK vocabulary words in bold.
LOOK UP word meanings in the glossary beginning on page 92.

Today, Woody is getting to know his three grandchildren. He never had much chance to know his own children while they were growing up. He is now on parole from a life sentence. This means that if he ever commits another crime, he will surely go back to prison for the rest of his life.



CRITICAL THINKING
How can life in prison be even more dangerous than life outside of prison?

In this chapter, you will learn about the U.S. **correctional** system. It is called a correctional system because it is supposed to punish criminals. As a result, the system hopes to improve or correct the way convicts will behave in the future. This system includes more than jails and prisons. Read on to discover what else the correctional system is about and how it is always trying to improve.

The History of Corrections

More than two hundred years ago, there were no jails or prisons in the United States. Punishment for crimes might be public whipping and some other punishment that caused great injury or death to the suspect. Criminals could even be beaten with clubs in front of the whole town or have an ear cut off. They also could have a hot iron burn the letter *T*, for thief, into their skin. Finally, they could even be hanged.

In 1787, the first prison was built in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. People who broke the law were sent there to work very hard and for no pay. The people in charge of the system thought that the work should be so hard that no one would ever want to commit a crime again. They also thought that making prisoners work hard was better than beating them because hard work would change their **behavior**.



Former offender Woody D. says: "Sometimes, I would cry at night, thinking about how I had hurt my family and the family of the man whose life I had taken. It is not worth the pain. You will end up feeling sorry and sad about what you have done."

sad about what you have done."

Today, the system still tries to have prisoners work very hard for very little or no pay. It also tries to keep young people separate from older criminals so they cannot learn how to commit more serious crimes from more experienced offenders. There are also different areas and buildings for prisoners. Where they are sent depends on whether they are very dangerous, or not dangerous.

Why are there prisons? Prisons keep criminals away from the rest of society so that they cannot commit more crimes or harm society further. Prison is a strong punishment. Some people believe that prisons should also help people change their ways so that they learn to do something instead of committing crimes. They can learn to help the society they had once harmed.

Prisons Today

There a difference between prison and jail. People often use these words as if they are the same. But they are different. **Jail** is a place where people are kept for a short time while they wait for a trial or for sentencing. Also, a person who commits a misdemeanor and is sentenced to up to a year can go to jail.

Prisons are for people serving longer sentences. A person who commits a felony goes to prison. There are federal and state prisons just as there are federal and state courts. The federal prisons are for people convicted of federal crimes, and the state prisons are for people convicted of state crimes.

There are many kinds of prisons. People who have committed very serious crimes and have long sentences are put into prisons that have thick walls. The prisoners are locked up for the safety of others most of the time. One such prison has a wall that is 30 feet high above the ground and 30 feet below the ground. The wall is also 3 feet thick. No one has ever escaped by going over, under, or through the wall.

Another kind of prison is for people who are judged to be less dangerous. The fences may be made electric so that people trying to climb over them will receive an injury or electric shock.

A third kind of prison is for prisoners who are not dangerous. Here, convicts are more free to move around.

Finally, some prisons for first-time offenders who are not violent are like army camps located in the woods. The prisoners do farm and other outdoor work. The prisoners spend three to six months doing physical exercise and drills and can also get drug treatment. By changing behavior, some people believe that this kind of prison may be able to keep prisoners from committing crimes again when they get out.

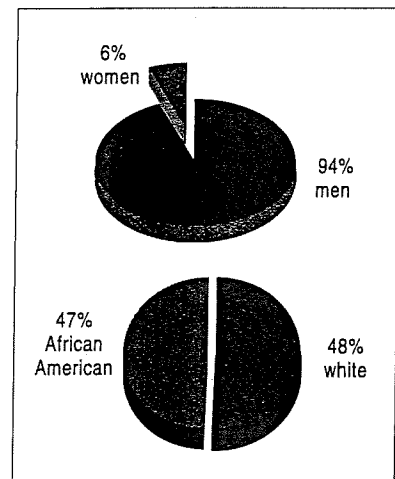
Prison drug-treatment programs help. The prisoners help each other to get off and stay off drugs. But there are three rules in this kind of program (1) no violence, (2) no stealing of drugs, and (3) no drug use. If anyone breaks one of the rules, that person must give up all right to the program.



CRITICAL THINKING

Three out of four women in U.S. prisons are mothers. One out of two of the children of these prisoners never see their mothers while they are behind bars. Explain this statement: "Mothers are not the only ones who are in prison. Their families are too."

DID YOU KNOW? The fifteen-to-nineteen year age range has the highest rate of criminal offenses. Also, 73 percent are between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four.



EYE OPENER Of approximately 850,000 criminals in U.S. jails and prisons, about 94 per cent are men, 6 percent are women, 48 percent are white, and 47 percent are African American.

Chapter 5

1. Why was Woody D. in jail? _____
2. What were the three rules Woody made to survive in prison?
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
3. What does being on parole from a life sentence mean? _____
4. A correctional system is supposed to do what? _____
5. What was the punishment for crimes two hundred years ago? _____
6. Where was the first prison built in the U.S.? _____
7. What did the people in charge of the prison think about work? _____
8. Why does the system keep young people separate from older criminals? _____
9. Why are there prisons? _____
10. What do some people believe that prisons should help people do? _____
11. What is a jail? _____
12. What are prisons? _____
13. What are state prisons for? _____
14. What age range has the highest rate of criminal offenses? _____
15. Why do you think that is true? _____
16. Describe the prisons for those judged to be less dangerous. _____
17. What are prisons for first time non violent offenders like? _____

Critical Thinking

(pages: 24 & 25)

1. How can life in prison be more dangerous than life outside of prison?
2. Do those in prison hurt their family? How?
3. What does the phrase "Mothers are not the only ones in prison, their families are too" mean?
4. Why do you think the fifteen to nineteen year age range has the highest rate of criminal offenses?