

Summary of “A Study of Adult Corrections in Louisiana,” by the Louisiana State Advisory Committee to the US Commission on Civil Rights (1976)

- At the beginning of this report, the authors included Wm. T. Allen’s touching and poignant writing, “Look at the Convict.” Wm. T. Allen was incarcerated at Angola.

I. Introduction:

- This Louisiana Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights is one of 14 such committees across the United States tasked with discovering and discussing the condition of prisons throughout the United States.
- The goals of the commission are as follows: “(1) develop information on the need for a set of guide- lines to establish basic rights of inmates; (2) develop information on the extent to which women and minority inmates, in particular, are denied opportunities or rights afforded to the general prisoner population, and whether the adoption of uniform minimum standards of treatment will improve the lot of these groups; and (3) develop evidence and support for such minimum standards and for a set of model prisoner rights.”

II. A Short History of Adult Corrections in Louisiana

- The history of adult incarceration in Louisiana, began with the opening of the Louisiana State Penitentiary (“LSP”) in 1837. Interestingly, in 1844 the Governor of Louisiana “leased the entire prison industry . . . to private interests.” Louisiana leased out its prison labor until 1900. The State purchased the Angola farm and moved the entire prison from Baton Rouge to Angola.
- There was a prison protest in the 1950s which served as a catalyst for prison reform.
- The Louisiana Correctional and Industrial School was created, which directed treatment programs at young people after their first convictions.
- The Forgotten Man’s committee, which interviewed individuals incarcerated in LSP to determine if the state penal institution had forgotten them inside the prison, freed 107 people from LSP. This led to an expansion of the probation and parole system.
- After a slash to funding, the *Times Picayune* reported about the worsening conditions, catalyzing a new fund to improve conditions, construction of a women’s prison, and other such changes.
- In 1971, there was a lawsuit against St. Gabriel women’s prison in which Plaintiffs asked for the prohibition of disciplinary actions against incarcerated people without Due Process, cruel and unusual solitary confinement, and punitive transfers.
- In 1972, there was a suit against the prison in which the Plaintiffs were correctional officers complaining about insufficient personnel leading to unsafe conditions for the officers.

- Louisiana's citizens views about people who are incarcerated discouraged prison reform. People who were not incarcerated in Louisiana generally wanted to punish people who were convicted of a crime.

III. Louisiana Department of Corrections

- Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC) incarcerates people at the State level.
- The DOC is evaluated by the Board of Corrections, a committee with seven members. The Board of Corrections does not dictate policies, but it does make decisions about DOC real property.
- The Board of Parole meets monthly at each adult correctional institution.
- The director of corrections is the administrator for all DOC facilities and is appointed solely by the Governor.
- There are also 6 divisions under the director which carry out the director's programs.
 - Fiscal and Budget Division - finances
 - Probation and Parole Division - supervises adults on probation, parole, or work release status.
 - Correctional Services Division - supervises treatment programs.
 - Personnel and Training Division - training employees
 - Agri-Business Division - functions pertaining to the revolving fund at Louisiana State Penitentiary.
 - Material Division - inventory and property control.
- Juvenile Institutions:
 - Juvenile Reception and Diagnostic Center, Baton Rouge
 - Louisiana Training Institute, Baton Rouge
 - Louisiana Training Institute, Monroe
 - Louisiana Training Institute, New Orleans
 - Louisiana Training Institute, Pineville
- Adult Institutions:
 - Louisiana State Penitentiary, Angola
 - Louisiana Correctional and Industrial School, DeQuincy
 - Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women, St. Gabriel
- Demographics:
 - Total population incarcerated by DOC- 4,759
 - Black population - 3,304 (~70%)
 - White population - 1,295 (~30%)
 - Black people constitute almost 30% of the population of people in all of Louisiana.
 - Louisiana DOC employee demographic takeaways (January, 1975):
 - 28.8% of the DOC's employees were Black.
 - 30.2% of the DOC's employees were women.

- DOC was experiencing a high attrition rate of 25% - 30% across all facilities.
 - There is a higher attrition rate for Angola, attributed to low salaries and the distance from Angola to urban areas.
 - Black employees and women employees earn less than white, male employees.
- DOC was facing a funding problem because its budget was not keeping pace with the rising costs of imprisonment.
- The inadequate funds meant that people who were incarcerated did not receive the appropriate programs to ease their reintegration with the rest of society.

IV. Louisiana Correctional and Industrial School (“LCIS”)

- Located 30 miles outside of Lake Charles in Beauregard Parish, LCIS opened in August 1958, as the Louisiana Correctional Institute.
- In January 1974, the prison, designed to hold 500 people, held 472 people and 335 of those people were Black.
- The prison did not have barriers between the incarcerated people and the guards. Moreover, there were no armed posts.
- The people incarcerated at LCIS were selected first offenders from Louisiana State Penitentiary. LCIS functioned to “provide an organization of qualified correctional personnel. . .”
- There were two types of housing units at LCIS: dormitories and honor cottages. The honor cottages provided each person with his own room and furnishings and allowed the person to control his ventilation in lighting. The dormitories provided people with less control and space from other people than the honor cottages allowed.
- People were assigned housing by a board. Assignment to honor cottages depended on the person’s grade point average, a number that was determined by the person’s involvement in the prison and other behavioral activities.
- The board determined work assignments based on the information about the incarcerated person from LSP. The people incarcerated at LCIS claimed that there was a racial bias in job assignments. The numbers reveal that LCIS was more likely to assign jobs like Plumbing Shop, Electric Shop and Auto Mechanics to white people, while LCIS reserved jobs like Trashmen, Barber and Shoe Repair, and Laundry for Black people.
- LCIS did not have adequate medical staff. LCIS contracted with doctors from Lake Charles to respond to sick calls twice a week. There were also two medical technicians on staff. The American Correctional Association recommended a total of 8 full staff medical personnel for a prison of LCIS’ size.
 - The Prison Hospital Supervisor contended that because incarcerated people at LCIS were selected from Angola, they went through thorough screening before arriving at LCIS, implying that they needed less medical care than other prisoners.
- People incarcerated at LCIS were allowed two visits per month with each of their nine designated visitors. Visits generally lasted two hours but may have been extended to four

hours. Visitation rights could not be taken away for disciplinary infractions unless that infraction was for violating a visiting procedure. However, the visitation facilities were too small to accommodate full two hour visits for everyone, according to someone who was incarcerated at LCIS.

- People at LCIS were permitted to send mail to anyone on his nine person mailing list, but could only send two pieces of paper in each envelope. The people incarcerated at LCIS were concerned that their mail was being censored.
- Disciplinary actions against people in LCIS included write-ups and placement in administrative segregation for serious offenses. After a write-up, a hearing was held in which the incarcerated person could choose counsel from one of the three staff members assigned to the task. When found guilty, punishments included extra duty, loss of privileges and warnings. Only 7% of people incarcerated at LCIS faced disciplinary action. People incarcerated at LCIS complained of a lack of Due Process in the disciplinary actions and retaliation for appealing guilty findings.
- The grade point average system gave incarcerated people points for engaging with treatment programs, working, and maintaining their dormitories. The higher the GPA, the better the status.
- The rehabilitation goals were to encourage the people incarcerated at LCIS to want to do useful work, assign people to work that interests them, nurture their “academic abilities,” allow them to engage in leisure activities that are “acceptable to society,” and allow them to participate in religious activities. Only 26.6% of people were in a program in January 1974.
- People incarcerated at LCIS worked for four hours a day and spent the rest of the day engaging in programs and resting. The educational programs included standard GED classes and a college level speech class. There was also a class for people who could not read or write. There were also recreational activities like basketball and dominoes and an extensive library.
- There were no inmate counsel at LCIS, and the lack of Black correctional officers limited understanding between the incarcerated people and the guards.
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V. Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (“LCIW”)

- The report gives an overview of LCIW and details a range of topics from housing to inmate representation at the prison.
- Each person incarcerated at LCIW lived in her own room.
- The most common work assignment was to the garment factory which was not a coveted job. After leaving LCIW, very few people actually found employment working in a garment factory. People were not paid for their work until they worked for six months. After that they receive from 2 to 5 cents per hour.

- LCIW did not have a permanent physician or around the clock medical care. Most women who were pregnant received their care at Earl K. Long Hospital in Baton Rouge and gave birth there.
- The incarcerated people at LCIW were allowed to wear their regular clothes when not working, on duty status, or visiting family and friends.
- Visitors were permitted to visit on weekends and the women at LCIW did not complain about their access to visitation.
- The incarcerated women were only allowed to correspond with the 9 people on their correspondence lists and those people must not have serious criminal records. Married women were not permitted to correspond with men who were not their husbands or family. Single women were not allowed to write to married men outside their families.
- LCIW chose which news media the people incarcerated there have access to.
- Each woman received a copy of the rules handbook upon her incarceration. When a person was written up for a disciplinary infraction, a committee determined the incarcerated person's guilt or innocence. Punishments included solitary confinement for a maximum of ten days.
- The women incarcerated at LCIW had access to Protestant and Catholic religious services but no other religion. One woman reported that although it was not mandatory to attend religious services, most women did in order to receive good time.
- The women at LCIW had no access to a law library except through limited correspondence with inmate counsel at Angola.
- While incarcerated at LCIW, the women had access to educational and vocational training, but few women participated in these programs. The vocational training was gendered. Moreover, the training was disfavored by LCIW because if too many people participated in training there would not be enough people to do the janitorial work.
- Recreational activities were limited by security concerns and lack of facilities. LCIW occasionally allowed the incarcerated women to go on field trips, but the security personnel had to volunteer their time for the trips to Baton Rouge. The library was inadequate.
- Women incarcerated at LCIW complained that they could not afford items sold at the commissary because they made too little money at work and because the items were priced higher than products sold outside of the prison.
- There was an inmate council made up of women elected by the other incarcerated women at LCIW which helped LCIW develop rules for incarcerated women. Most of the other women did not approve of the council.

VI. Louisiana State Penitentiary ("LSP")

- LSP was one of the largest prisons in the United States and is one of the most isolated, 50 miles from the closest urban area, Baton Rouge.

- LSP incarcerated people on maximum, medium, and minimum security. Maximum security facilities had individual cells. Both Medium and Minimum security facilities had open dormitories. There were also camps, a reception center, and a hospital that housed people. All of these facilities were overcrowded. Some dorms indicated a pattern of racial segregation.
- Job assignments ranged from farm sector to dining hall attendant to clerical worker. Black people were disproportionately assigned menial jobs. Pay was limited to 5 cents an hour with a cap of \$5.72 per month deposited into a person's drawing account; the rest of the money he made went into his savings account. Vocational training was available to very few people. The inmates felt disappointed about their opportunity to gain meaningful skills while incarcerated. There was a work release program that allowed people to work outside of the prison.
- Health care was bleak at LSP: unlicensed clinicians were delivering inadequate health care. Warden Henderson claimed that the situation was improving. However, incarcerated people reported a lack of care in some facilities. LSP did not have a much needed psychiatric unit. Food quality was poor.
- People incarcerated at LSP were allowed two visits per month. Visit privileges could not be taken away for disciplinary actions not related to visit procedures. The visiting room only accommodated 300 people.
- People incarcerated at LSP were allowed to write to any number of people as long as they were approved. People feared that the prison was screening their confidential legal mail.
- People incarcerated at LSP had access to all print news media.
- The report lauded LSP's disciplinary proceedings thanks to mediations between the prison officials and the prisoners' representatives that revised the disciplinary proceedings. Despite the procedural changes, punitive segregation was still one of the potential punishments; however, punitive segregation could not last more than 10 consecutive days. Extended lockdown was available for the most serious offenses and did not have a number of days limit. There was a prisoner grievance committee made up of incarcerated people which aimed to establish a "self-government," but the prison did not support that vision.
- Although LSP contended that everyone was allowed to freely practice any religion, incarcerated people reported that Black prisoners were discriminated against for practicing Islam and were often confined to cellblock for organizing other prisoners.
- Legal services were sparse and restricted at LSP. Inmate lawyers were not allowed to interview other incarcerated people about their cases, and the law library was limited.
- People incarcerated at LSP were "young, poorly educated, and largely unskilled." 60% of the prisoners were illiterate. There were very few vocational or educational programs for incarcerated people. The educational programs could only educate 100 people at a time. The vocational program could train about 200 people at a time. Correctional officers often discouraged attending academic or vocational programs.

Conclusions

- The adult prisons in Louisiana do not prepare incarcerated people for life outside prison. To shift the state of prisons, the public must shift its view of prisoners.

Findings and Recommendations

- Louisiana was not concerned with prison reform.
 - The committee recommended a citizens task force to mobilize public support for reform and State Legislatures to provide funding for reform.
- DOC had a staffing problem because of low pay, isolated facilities, and “the emphasis on custodial rather than on rehabilitative services.”
 - The committee recommended that the State increase salaries and benefits and train staff better.
- Black people, other People of Color and women made up too little of the staff at DOC facilities.
 - The committee recommended DOC to reassess staffing patterns, create goals to close the disparities, and to create an equal opportunity office.
- There was not enough access to educational and vocational programs, and those programs are inadequate.
 - The committee recommended a reworking of the current programs and funding of several specific modifications to the programs’ procedures.
- The medical and mental health care at the DOC facilities was inadequate.
 - The committee recommended that the DOC ensure every incarcerated person received adequate care through the implementation of several specific recommendations.
- The work options that were available did not prepare people for work outside of prison and were under compensated.
 - The committee recommended that DOC integrated work assignments with vocational training and that the State legislature increase the pay rate for inmates.
- The work release program was an effective tool for reintegration.
 - The committee recommended expansion of the program and funding for the expansion.
- The disciplinary procedures at LCIS and LCIW did not have Due Process safeguards.
 - The committee recommended that those prisons address the lack of procedural safeguards and that the DOC implement a statewide disciplinary policy.
- The people incarcerated by DOC did not have adequate access to legal services.
 - The committee recommended that the DOC establish a legal services program that trained inmates to be effective inmate counsels and provided adequate law libraries.
- The relationship between the prisoner grievance committee and the administration of LSP was strained, which limited the power of the grievance committee.

- The committee recommended that LCIS and LCIW establish their own grievance committees and clarify the committees' roles at the prisons.
- LSP was not conducive to education or rehabilitation.
 - The committee recommended that the prison be decentralized and that the DOC focus on creating a system of “regionalized” prisons instead of a big, isolated one. Furthermore, the committee recommended that the State government create a task force and plan for revamping the current system that moves away from isolation and moves toward community-based programs.

Appendixes

- Prisoner Grievance Committee By-Laws: These by-laws look very democratic and include provisions for electing committee members and operating subcommittees.
- Revision to Agreement Between the Negotiation Teams for the LSP and Prisoner Representatives: This details the new disciplinary procedures for LSP.
- Letter to State Board of Education Members: This letter details the unacceptable state of vocational and educational programs at LSP.
- Response of the Louisiana DOC to this report: The response is brief with comments made on only 9 of the pages in the report. It also included a few internal documents that changed the status of some of the Committee's findings.
 - Report of Medical Services and Health Standards at LCIS: This report was created by a medical doctor hired by the Director of Louisiana DOC to observe the state of the medical care at LCIS and make recommendations to improve that state. The report recommended updating the facilities, maintaining better medical records, and hiring a consultant psychiatrist to provide services once a week.
 - Inmate Visiting and Correspondence: A DOC wide policy on visitation and correspondence that provided for no limitations on who prisoners could write and that incarcerated people should have access to two, two hour visits each month.
 - Law Library: a list of legal books to be purchased for each institution.