

# Recidivism in the American prison system

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Bridget Fogell was pregnant when she began serving a prison sentence for traffic violations and driving under the influence. When she complained of severe cramps and vaginal bleeding, contract health care workers ignored her cries and deemed her healthy. Even later when her water broke, they said she had just urinated on herself, and again ignored her. The next day she gave birth to Anna Lee who died hours later.

Freddie Booker was sentenced to 30 years in prison for a \$90 drug deal in Beloit, Wis.

Gary Ewing is serving 25 years to life for stealing three golf clubs from a pro shop.

Joanna Verduzco, a 10 year old from Riverside, Calif., will grow up without her father who is serving 29 years to life for possession of less than a gram of methamphetamine.

In America, 2.2 million people are incarcerated, more than any other country in the world. That

is a 700 percent increase since 1970. However, the crime rate hasn't changed; offenders are just serving longer sentences.

"We're not incarcerating everybody who should be incarcerated ... We might need two and a half million or three million incarcerated," said David Mulhausen, a senior policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation.

A study of prison inmates in 2000 showed that over half of the prison population was made up of non-violent offenders and 21 percent of those were drug offenders, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

A high percentage of incarcerated Americans suffer from mental illness, drug addiction or infectious and chronic diseases. Right now, prisoners are the only Americans to have the right to health care.

With harsh sentencing of three strike offenders (25 years to life), of whom a majority are mentally ill or addicted to drugs, the prison population is not only growing but aging as well. This is driving up

health care costs passed on to the taxpayer. When these prisoners are released it is often without any rehabilitation or treatment, therefore the majority wind up back in prison within three years. Another concern is the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS through homosexual conduct, often in the form of rape, in the prison system.

A study of 300,000 released inmates in 1994 showed that an astounding 67.5 percent were rearrested within three years. Property crime offenders owned the highest re-arrest rate at 73.8 percent followed by drug offenders at 66.7 percent, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. This high recidivism rate of non-violent offenders shows a need for better rehabilitation to deter future crime and prepare offenders to be a functional part of society.

President Bill Clinton once said, "Three quarters of the growth in the number of federal prison inmates is due to drug crimes. Building new prisons will only go so far. Drug courts and

mandatory testing and treatment are effective. I have seen drug courts work. I know they ... make a difference."

The first Drug Court was established in Miami-Dade County, Fla., in 1989 as a grassroots movement to rehabilitate drug offenders and lower crime. Today there are nearly 2,000 operational programs. Drug courts are used as alternative intervention for drug abusing offenders. It provides strict court monitoring and community supervision, coupled with long-term treatment services.

Scientists at the Treatment Research Institute at the University of Pennsylvania reported, "To put it bluntly, we know that drug courts outperform virtually all other strategies that have been used with drug-involved offenders."

Skeptics of drug courts believe that it will cost too much for these programs; however the cost of incarcerating a drug offender is between \$20,000 and \$50,000 per person per year. Compare

that to the average drug court program, which costs between \$1,500 and \$11,000 annually per person. On top of this, current drug courts convert 120,000 addicts into drug free, productive members of society, according to the National Association of Drug Court Professionals.

The high recidivism rate of non-violent offenders shows that prison does not fix the problem. Many of these people come from under-privileged communities, suffer from addiction and have no idea how to fit into society. These people can be helped and not only is it a moral imperative, but it will have a positive effect on all society. It will lessen crime rates, because there will be fewer repeat offenders and it will free up tax money now used to house prisoners. Freed up tax money can then be invested in education and health care for everyone, which in turn deters children from growing up to be criminals. There will always be crime in every society, but how that problem is dealt with is what defines each culture.

## INAUGURATION: Planning the details for big day on Jan. 20

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from the Capitol along the Mall. Gantman said talks are ongoing with the National Park Service regarding how much of the Mall and whether such things as JumboTrons might be used.

The committee has ordered more than 10,000 square feet of blue carpet, trimmed in red, for the platform, 28,000 chairs, and blankets and ponchos in case of bad weather. Umbrellas are prohibited in the audience, in part for security reasons.

For the swearing-in, timing is crucial, Gantman said. The Constitution requires the new president to be sworn in by noon.

"If it doesn't happen by noon, you're basically in a situation where the Constitution does not grant the outgoing president the authority to remain president," he said. So it must happen on time.

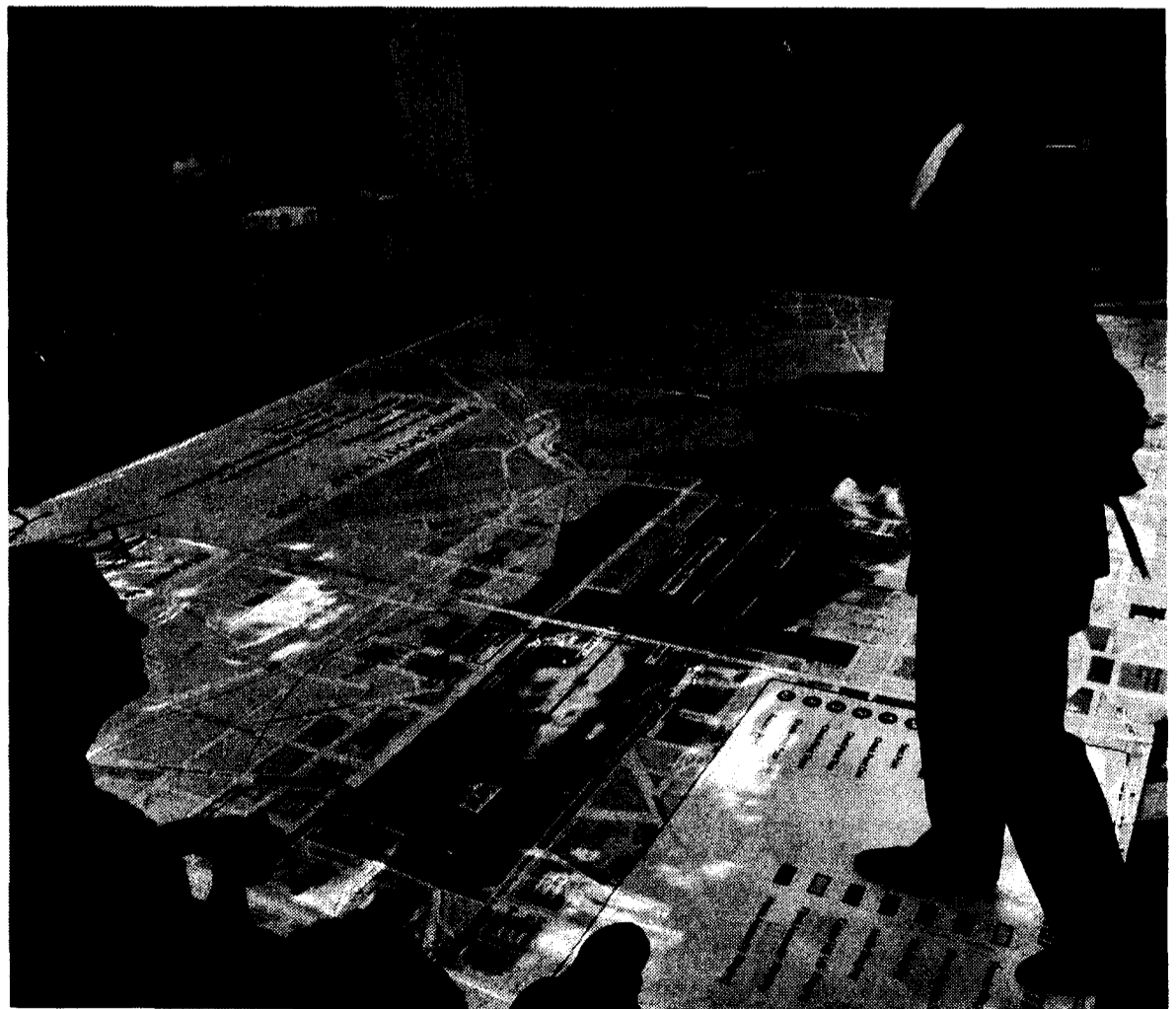
"It'll be done," he said. "Pure and simple, it'll be done."

Afterward, a parade along Pennsylvania Avenue will feature 12,000 people, 20 floats, 40 horses and a slew of marching bands.

The Pentagon's Armed Forces Inaugural Committee has been working for more than a year to plan for the thousands of service personnel who will serve as aides, honor guards and musicians. Lining most of the parade route, 10 feet apart, will be 1,580 members of the military.

Recently, officers studied moves on a gigantic floor map of downtown, as if plotting an invasion, under the direction of Thomas Groppe, the committee's director of ceremonies who has been involved in every inauguration since 1973.

The event is a powerful lesson in civics, Groppe, 65, said. "This is the way you peacefully change governments," he said. "This is not a coup. ... This is the way it's supposed to be done. This is the way civilized people conduct themselves."



Washington Post photo by BILL O'LEARY

A giant floor map Washington helps the Armed Forces Inaugural Committee, led by Director of Ceremonies Thomas Groppe, right, prepare for the inauguration in Washington. "This is the way you peacefully change governments," says Groppe, who has been involved in every inauguration since 1973. "This is not a coup. ... This is the way civilized people conduct themselves."