

CROWDING, SOCIAL CONTROL, AND PRISON VIOLENCE: EVIDENCE FROM THE POST-*RUIZ* YEARS IN TEXAS

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In this paper, I examine two explanatory models for prison violence. In the first, the crowding model, violence is said to arise from the cognitive confusion and tension induced by crowded conditions. In the second, the social control model, violence is seen as one among several important control mechanisms deeply rooted in the social order of prison life. While these models are clearly not mutually exclusive, they have taken researchers along quite distinct paths. I consider three forms of violence in the Texas prison system: homicide, inmate-inmate assaults with weapons, and inmate-staff assaults. My results, which support the control model over the crowding model, have several methodological and policy implications.

I. INTRODUCTION

Two paradigms are frequently used to explain serious prison violence. In one, violence is said to result from psychological tensions induced by crowded conditions (see, e.g., Cox *et al.*, 1984). In the second, violence is seen as one among several important control mechanisms deeply rooted in the authoritarian, economic, sexual, and racial order of prison (see, e.g., Sykes, 1958; McCleery, 1961; Irwin, 1980). While these models are clearly not mutually exclusive (see, e.g., Ellis, 1984), they have taken researchers along quite distinct paths.

Those envisioning violence as a response to crowded conditions have arrived at hypotheses linking prison size and density to the lack of privacy, cognitive strains, fear, anxiety, and goal interference. An emphasis on violence as a control mechanism has led to concern with the nature of disputes and the maintenance of power, as well as the availability of alternative control

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mechanisms such as negotiation, mediation, adjudication, and the application of sanctions. Drawing on data collected from the Texas Department of Corrections, I will explore implications of both models of prison violence.

II. THE SETTING

While some of my data allow me to examine trends starting in 1968, much of the analysis is restricted to the years 1979 through 1984. During these years the Texas Department of Corrections (TDC) was undergoing dramatic changes. In terms of the issues addressed here, these changes are particularly important in that they were largely stimulated by a concern with overcrowding as expressed in *Ruiz v. Estelle*, 503 F. Supp. 1265 (S.D. Tex. 1980). In his wide-ranging opinion in *Ruiz*, Judge William Wayne Justice concluded:

The overcrowding at TDC exercises a malignant effect on all aspects of inmate life. . . . Virtually all inmates are exposed to, and many are victimized by, the concomitants of unguarded, overcrowded cells and dormitories—the ever-present risk of assaults, rapes and other violence—for every day of their incarceration at TDC. . . . Included among the [other] consequences were the spread of disease and the enhancement of stress, tension, anxiety, hostility and depression. Among the distinguishable manifestations of hostility and depression . . . were increased blood pressures, aggressive behavior, and extreme psychological withdrawal. . . . [O]vercrowding at TDC has substantially contributed to increased rates of disciplinary offenses, psychiatric commitments, and suicides. . . . Finally, as already noted, the overcrowding at TDC translates into a total dearth of personal privacy for its inmates, as well as extreme physical discomfort to them, resulting from packing human beings together, in excessively close proximity, for long periods of time, day in and day out.

In response to the court's demands to reduce overcrowded prison conditions, the State of Texas continued the construction of new units (in 1979 there were eighteen, by 1984 there were twenty-seven) and, as a temporary measure, moved many inmates into tents. Between 1981 and 1983 the sixty-seventh and sixty-eighth Legislatures passed a comprehensive corrections package that included increased emphasis on community alternatives to incarceration such as restitution centers and, perhaps most importantly, a bill designed to keep the TDC at no more than 95 percent of capacity. Did the construction and legisla-

Table 1. Population Density and Rates of Violence:
TDC, 1979–84

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Average monthly population ^a	24,865	27,077	30,091	32,424	36,838	35,619
Living area ^b (sq. ft./inmate)	27.49	26.70	28.16	29.61	32.41	35.20
Violence rate ^c (per 1,000 inmates)	9.21	4.65	8.81	11.75	12.62	18.61

^a From TDC, 1979–84.

^b Based on report from Management Services, TDC. Does not include temporary housing (mostly tents) added in 1981 and 1982 to comply with court order. Square footage refers to the amount of space allotted to cells and dormitories, excluding all activity areas (e.g., dayrooms, toilets, showers, and dining halls).

^c Includes homicides and major incident reports filed for inmate-inmate and inmate-staff assaults. These latter reports constituted a subset of the larger number of disciplinary reports discussed in greater detail in later sections of the paper.

tion reduce prison crowding, and if so, was there a corresponding reduction in the level of prison violence?

As shown in Table 1 the measures taken did in fact lower the level of crowding in the TDC. It is equally apparent that the level of reported violence rose dramatically. Between 1980 and 1983 the TDC compared favorably with other state systems of comparable size and the Federal Bureau of Prisons in terms of violent death rates.¹ In 1984 there was an unprecedented number of inmate homicides (twenty-five), which would have

¹ Average Yearly Violent Death Rates in Prison per 1,000 Inmates (1980–83)*

State System	Total	Homicide	Suicide
California	1.01	.46	.55
Maryland	.97	.51	.46
Federal Bureau of Prisons	.84	.48	.36
Michigan	.67	.17	.50
Georgia	.50	.35	.15
Florida	.47	.30	.17
Texas	.47	.30	.17
Ohio	.46	.10	.36
Pennsylvania	.37	.05	.32
North Carolina	.24	.13	.11

* Includes state systems that have an average monthly population of more than 10,000 as recorded in Criminal Justice Institute, 1983. Data from the New York and Illinois systems were not available. Four-year population averages for 1980–83 were as follows: California, 29,573; Federal Bureau of Prisons, 26,575; Florida, 22,834; Georgia, 13,216; Maryland, 8,808; Michigan, 13,082; North Carolina, 16,142; Ohio, 14,111; Pennsylvania, 9,582; Texas, 31,720. The number of homicides and suicides was furnished in response to a written inquiry from the Texas attorney general's office.

placed the rate, .70 per thousand inmates, well ahead of all other systems. It was more than double the number (twelve) of the previous two high years, 1981 and 1982.

The number of inmate-inmate stabbings in Texas in 1984 was 404. Precisely comparable statistics were not kept in previous years, but this number was more than *all* inmate-inmate assaults with a weapon recorded in 1983 (331), a high year itself. This latter figure included not only stabbings but also hitting another inmate with a food tray, a shoe, a board, and the like. Whatever the precise numbers, there is no doubt that 1984 was the most violent year in the recently recorded history of the TDC in terms of inmate assaults on other inmates.²

There are, of course, alternative explanations for the apparent lack of connection between a reduction in prison population density and rates of violent behavior. Perhaps the link between crowding and violence is not as strong as the *Ruiz* court thought. Perhaps the data mask what was going on within specific units. The figures are system averages. Violence may have risen in institutions that remained crowded and fell in those with increased per capita space. Perhaps there is a connection between population density and some forms of violence but not others. Perhaps there were changes in reporting practices that distort the data over the five-year period covered. Given past levels of density and violence there may not have been enough time for the lower levels of crowding to have much influence. Furthermore, reduction of population density was only one aspect of the court's decision, and other changes may have overridden the improved levels of population density.

Judge Justice's decision in *Ruiz* mandated changes not only in population levels but also in disciplinary procedures, the staff-inmate ratio, and the use of prisoners in supervisory and administrative positions. Such changes were designed to reorganize and strengthen the official control structure within the prison system. When these changes were implemented it became obvious that more than the formal control structure was effected. Surveillance within the cellblocks changed along with sources of information and the experience level of the staff. Such changes present a number of additional questions regarding the rather dramatic rise in violence in the Texas prison system between 1979 and 1984: Did events during this period cre-

² The number of inmate-inmate homicides in 1985 was 27. At the time of this study, complete systemwide data on living area and average population were not yet available for 1985. A tight lock-down policy was instituted in late 1985 that reduced, at least temporarily, the number of fatal and near-fatal stabbings as of the latter months in 1985 and the first few months of 1986.

ate shifts in the prison's power structure? Did violence become a less costly and therefore a more viable mechanism for settling disputes or righting perceived injustices among inmates and staff?

III. THEORETICAL MODELS

A. *The Crowding Model*

Cox *et al.* (1984) present a "social interaction-demand model" for studying the effects of prison crowding. This model suggests that crowding produces increased levels of uncertainty, cognitive loads, and goal interference when social interaction takes place. These psychological states in turn raise the level of fear, anxiety, cognitive strain, and frustration. Finally, these manifestations of stress are linked to tolerance for crowding, depression, blood pressure, mood changes, illness complaints, and aggression. Gaes (1985) has provided a useful, detailed review of evidence relevant to this as well as other models of crowding. Most relevant to my concerns is evidence suggesting that population density in prison is linked to less serious forms of aggression in prison such as fighting but not, contrary to the assertions of Cox *et al.* (1984), to heightened levels of more serious violence such as suicide or homicide.

B. *The Social Control Model*

"Social control," when used as a theoretical construct, can be quite broad (see, e.g., Gibbs, 1981). I will limit my attention here to the controlling influence of interpersonal networks. This influence can be proactive through the constraining influence of various bonds such as exchange, beliefs, and emotional attachments. It can also be reactive, as when networks rely on negotiation, mediation, and arbitration as well as adjudication and the more formal application of sanctions.

The hypothesized importance of social control structures is deeply rooted in the early prison literature (see, e.g., Cloward, 1960; McCleery, 1961). More recently, Irwin's account of the California prison system, which links violence to the activities of cliques and tips, provides a useful illustration:

In the absence of more effective social organization, the tip and clique networks established ties and bridged gaps between prisoners, even between races, serving to promote peace and cooperation among prisoners. This system is similar to the clan, extended family, or totem organizations that served as ordering

systems among primitive peoples before the establishment of larger, overreaching social organizations (1980: 60).

When this system of bridging ties became strained by racial tensions and inmate attempts to establish control over prison commodities, Irwin argues, violence became more likely:

The tip and clique system depended greatly on racial disputes being mediated through the network. After racial hatred reached a high level, this became less likely, if possible at all. Consequently, the extended overlapping tip network atrophied, and cliques increasingly became organized for their own member's protection (*ibid.*, p. 74).

Within the social control model, prison violence is pictured as an important mechanism for establishing power and settling disputes. This type of violence lies closer to revenge, anchored in a feudlike system of justice, than it does to the spontaneous outburst, born from the cognitive strains induced by crowded conditions.

C. *Similarities Between the Crowding and Social Control Models*

While researchers pursuing the crowding and social control models have taken separate paths, conceptually the models overlap. The two frameworks are similar in this respect to strain and control explanations of deviance more generally (Eklund-Olson, 1982). Ellis (1984) has provided a useful starting point for a possible synthesis of the two perspectives. In Ellis's scheme density is pictured as having indirect effects on violence through its influence on scarce resources, population size, transiency, and social control. Crowding-induced change in the inmate population is said to affect three sources of social control. First, it weakens interpersonal attachments among staff and inmates. Second, it undermines the sanctioning process by reducing the certainty of punishments and the availability of benefits. The third hypothesized effect is very close to the first. Transiency is said to weaken exchange structures among prisoners, primarily by undermining interpersonal trust. Thus through their effect on the proactive controls inherent in stable interpersonal relationships and on the reactive controls inherent in sanctioning mechanisms, crowding and transiency in the inmate population affect levels of violence.

Uncertainty and interpersonal interaction provide the conceptual bridge between the model proposed by Cox *et al.* (1984) and the construct offered by Ellis (1984). By itself, the uncer-

tainty induced by “interaction overload” may have little influence on serious violence in prison. However, if interpersonal relationships are in transition and sanctioning processes are shifting, the effects of crowded conditions may be more noticeable. Gove and Hughes (1980: 886) have suggested that we turn from the question Does crowding ever have effects? to focus instead on specifying the conditions that maximize or minimize the effects of crowding. One important set of mediating conditions may be the strength and stability of interpersonal control structures.

IV. SOURCES OF DATA

To explore further the rise in prison violence during the post-*Ruiz* years within the context of the crowding and social control frameworks, I collected data from a number of overlapping sources, as outlined below.

A. *Homicide Data*

So-called death logs maintained by the TDC which listed location, time, and cause of death were available for the years 1968 through 1984. These were cross-checked with other records, including the official death certificate for each inmate death. Detailed profiles of homicides from 1979 through 1984 were compiled, and included information on the backgrounds of both the victim and offender(s) as well as on the time, location, and circumstances of the homicide.

B. *Disciplinary and Major Incident Reports*

I used all available disciplinary and major incident reports, which are overlapping sources of data, to map trends in inmate-inmate and inmate-staff assaults. Disciplinary reports were to be filed anytime an inmate could lose good time or time-earning status or be placed in solitary confinement. Major incident reports were to be filed when the infraction involved possible felonious behavior.

C. *Field Observations and Other Data Sources*

I made numerous visits to the majority of institutions in the TDC system over a two-year period to pursue, through conversations and observations, the substantive reasons for the statistical trends in violence. In addition, I examined nonstatistical records such as newspaper files, reports of gang activities, reports from court-appointed monitors, and court decrees to further inform questions raised by the conversations, observations, and statistical data. In the latter stages of the research, I

profited from a separate research project (Martin and Ekland-Olson, forthcoming) designed to document the prison reform movement in Texas.

V. ANALYSIS OF DATA

In the following sections I summarize the information gathered from these data sources with particular emphasis on the link between violence and variables identified in the crowding and social control frameworks. Previous researchers have drawn a distinction between *spatial density*, the amount of space per person, and *social density*, the number of people encountered over time (see, e.g., Nacci *et al.*, 1977). Studies of prison population density have measured social density by the number of persons housed in a system or in particular institutions within a system. Spatial density has been measured by the ratio of the number of persons to design capacity or some other specified standard, such as sixty square feet per person. I consider both types of density here.

Measuring control structures is a bit more difficult. I rely in part on observations, conversations, and nonstatistical records such as newspapers, court decrees, and interoffice communications. In addition, I match summaries of gang membership with data contained in the detailed homicide profiles to estimate the level of gang involvement in fatal assaults. I use statistical data kept by the TDC to map the inmate-staff ratios, the average length of prison sentences, the level of previous prison experience, and the average age of inmates within institutions.

VI. CROWDING, HOMICIDE, AND NONFATAL ASSAULTS

Most of the available literature on prison crowding and assaultive behavior (see, e.g., Ellis *et al.*, 1974; Farrington and Nuttall, 1980; Ekland-Olson *et al.*, 1983; Flanagan, 1983; Walkey and Gilmour, 1984; Gaes and McGuire, 1985) focuses on nonfatal and less serious forms of violence such as fighting. Available data on fatal prison assaults (see, e.g., McCain *et al.*, 1980) have serious problems stemming from levels of aggregation and the absence of controls for plausible alternative explanations (see, e.g., Ekland-Olson, 1984; Gaes, 1985). I first present data on fatal assaults, then turn to assaults defined by the staff as felonious, and finally to disciplinary reports for charges involving "aggravated assault on an inmate with a weapon" or "striking an officer."

A. *Systemwide Homicide Trends*

Table 2 presents data on homicides in the TDC between 1968 and 1984. Since the number of homicides in any given year for most of this period was rather low, rolling totals and averages are presented in three-year intervals for both the homicides and average monthly population. The trend is not linear. While the population continued to rise between the late 1960s and mid- to late 1970s, the rate of homicide was declining. While precise figures on the level of spatial density are not available for the 1968–78 period, it is safe to say that the amount of space available per inmate during this period was decreasing. Indeed, this was one of the major factual findings in the *Ruiz* case, which neither side disputed. In the 1977–79 period the rate of inmate-inmate homicides began to rise until it reached an all-time recent high in the 1982–84 period.³ While this latter period saw an increase in systemwide population levels, as shown in Table 1, there was a slight drop in the level of institutional population density.

These data are far from conclusive, but they certainly raise questions about the strength of the relationship between levels of prison population density and rates of inmate-inmate homicides. These data are also relevant to one of the possible explanations for the rise in violence in the years immediately following *Ruiz*, namely that the rise was the result of more careful record-keeping practices. While this is a possibility, by far the best-kept prison statistics regarding violence are those for homicide. The rise in homicide rates from 1979 to 1984 therefore cannot be attributed to a shift in record keeping. Whatever the reasons for the fluctuation in homicide rates, it is important to keep in mind that these are systemwide data. Given the nature of the crowding hypothesis, interinstitutional comparisons are critical.

B. *Interinstitutional Comparisons of Homicide Rates*

A single unit (Ellis), which housed many of the system's most violent inmates during these years, accounted for just under half the homicides between 1979 and 1983. Fourteen of the eighteen homicides occurring in this institution took place in 1981 (6), 1982 (5), and 1983 (3). After Ellis, the units with the next highest number of homicides were Ramsey I with four and Ramsey II with three. All four killings on Ramsey I oc-

³ See n. 2 above for 1985 data.

Table 2. Homicides and Population Levels: TDC, 1968-84

	1968-70	1969-71	1970-72	1971-73	1972-74	1973-75	1974-76	1975-77	1976-78	1977-79	1978-80	1979-81	1980-82	1981-83	1982-84
Number of homicides	5	6	6	5	5	6	5	5	4	8	9	21	29	33	46
Average monthly population	12,336	13,302	14,610	15,660	16,463	16,877	17,994	19,273	21,122	22,907	24,952	27,344	29,864	33,118	34,960
Rate per 1,000 inmates	.41	.45	.41	.32	.30	.36	.28	.26	.19	.35	.36	.77	.97	1.00	1.32

curred in 1982. The three on Ramsey II occurred in 1983. Like Ellis, both Ramsey units housed high-risk inmates.

Records indicate these homicides were not random outbursts, born from the cognitive strains of crowded conditions. Rather, as I will discuss in a later section, they were patterned largely by ongoing disputes. I will treat the dramatic increase in homicides in 1984 (twenty-five) separately in a following section. I argue that the episodic clustering of homicides across institutions and time is better understood with the social order/social control model of violence than with the crowding/tension/aggression model.

C. Five-Year Felonious Assault Rates

In prison, altercations defined as assaults might range from spontaneous fist fights between inmates to more serious planned attacks involving some sort of weapon. Consistent with my interest in serious prison violence, I first examine major incident reports (i.e., assaults defined by the staff as felonious) involving inmate-staff and inmate-inmate assaults.

I constructed five-year averages for a number of institutional variables and calculated correlation coefficients to estimate the relationship between these variables and the five-year inmate-inmate and inmate-staff assault rates. Male and female institutions are quite different in their patterns of assaultive behavior. There were only two female institutions and one other institution converted from female to male during this period. I eliminated these institutions, along with the Diagnostic Unit where the transient nature of the prisoner population made comparisons suspect, from the cross-sectional analysis of major incident reports. The results are reported in Table 3.

Unfortunately, the number of institutions (fifteen) with five-year data precluded multivariate analysis. Likewise, when I separated the data into monthly and yearly rates across institutions, the sporadic distribution of reports made any conclusions from pooled time series analysis quite suspect. With these limitations in mind, the data in Table 3 reveal no relationship between either the five-year average population or the five-year average density index and the assault rates. These data also suggest that, without additional controls, there is a relationship between the inmate/staff ratio and the inmate-staff assault rate. Institutions with a higher number of inmates per staff member had a higher inmate-staff assault rate. While this finding is consistent with the control framework, these institutions differed in a number of ways other than their inmate-staff ra-

Table 3. Correlation Coefficients between Inmate-Staff and Inmate-Inmate Assault Rates and Selected Variables

	PO ^a	HO ^b	2 ⁺ ^c	MS ^d	MA ^e	CII ^f	AP ^g	AD ^h	ISR ⁱ
Inmate-staff assaults	.06	.01	.08	.12	-.12	.02	-.08	-.17	.66 ^j
Inmate-inmate assaults	.21	.45 ^j	.40	.61 ^j	.28	.55 ^j	.13	-.22	.18

^a Average percent inmates charged with personal offenses.

^b Average percent inmates classified as habitual offenders.

^c Average percent inmates with two or more prior confinements in TDC.

^d Average median sentence.

^e Average median age of inmates.

^f Average percent inmates in segregation class II (high repeat offenders) or higher.

^g Average population.

^h Average density index (population divided by design capacity).

ⁱ Average inmate/staff ratio.

^j $p < .05$

tios. Without the possibility of additional controls this finding should be viewed as quite tentative. There appears to be a link between inmate-inmate assault rates and the percentage of habitual offenders in the institution's population, again without additional controls. A related finding is the link between the median sentence of the institution's population and the inmate-inmate assault rate.

The fact that I found no relationship between the median age of the institution's population and either assault rate bears special comment. Much research suggests inmate age as an important conditioning variable for the effects of crowding. This is hardly surprising since a virtual mountain of research has established what Hirschi and Gottfredson (1983) refer to as the brutal fact that various forms of misconduct, both inside and outside prison, are related to age (see, e.g., Ellis *et al.*, 1974; Jensen, 1977; Ekland-Olson *et al.*, 1983; Flanagan, 1983). There is little reason to disagree with Flanagan's claim that "the most adequately established correlate of misconduct among prison inmates is age" (1983: 30).

What is less often recognized is that the relationship between age and various forms of misconduct may differ by type of misconduct. Prison violence takes many forms. Homicide, staff-inmate, inmate-staff, and inmate-inmate assaults and fights are the most obvious. Table 4 suggests that while age is related to various forms of violence, the peak ages for each type are different. Fighting and soliciting sex through threats were

Table 4. Age Distribution for Four Types of Prison Violence

Age Category	Fight without Weapon ^a	Sex by Threat ^a	Felonious Assault (Inmate-Inmate) ^b	Single-Offender Homicides ^c
Under 22 years	49.7	3.1	8.8	0.0
23–28 years	48.5	1.3	17.4	1.2
29–34 years	37.0	.4	24.3	2.3
35–40 years	27.4	.2	21.9	1.5
41 years and over	17.6	.5	11.3	1.2

^a One-year rate (1983) per 1,000 inmates.

^b Four-year rate (1979–82) per 1,000 inmates. Data on age breakdown in 1983 were not available.

^c Five-year rate (1979–83).

most likely in the lowest age groups. Assaults defined as felonies and homicides tended to peak among those in their early to mid-thirties.

This still leaves us with the question of why no relationship was found between median age of the institution's population and serious inmate-inmate and inmate-staff assault rates. While Table 4 clearly shows an age difference at the individual level for inmate-inmate assaults defined as felonious, the age composition of the various institutions may have obscured this differential.

D. Disciplinary Report Rates

I have raised several interpretative questions about the apparent lack of connection between levels of crowding and violence, including: Was the increase in violence restricted to particular institutions, perhaps those that did not lose population or increase in per capita living area? and Was there an increase in some forms of violence and not in others?

The number of homicides and major incident assaults precludes an interinstitutional comparison of changes in these offenses across years. To remedy this problem disciplinary report records were analyzed. Disciplinary reports were to be filed anytime an inmate was charged with an infraction which might result in solitary confinement, loss of good time, or loss of time-earning status. The large number of these reports allows comparisons across years and institutions. Drawing on data from the more extensive disciplinary reports collected for 1983 and 1984, I compared changes across institutions in the TDC for charges involving "aggravated assault on an inmate with a weapon" and "striking an officer." There were systemwide in-

creases in each of these offenses.⁴ For “striking an officer” the rate per thousand inmates rose from 13.77 to 40.23; for “aggravated assault on an inmate with a weapon,” from 9.03 to 14.5.

These systemwide trends were reflected, to a greater or lesser degree, throughout most of the twenty-four institutions in the TDC for which comparable yearly figures were available. Nineteen institutions experienced a decrease in population. Five institutions experienced an increase. Seventeen institutions experienced an increase in inmate-inmate assaults with a weapon. The range of change in the assault rate for these offenses was from +37.06 to -17.68 per thousand inmates between 1983–84. Seventeen institutions experienced an increase in inmate-staff assaults. The range of change for this assault rate was from +117.88 to -2.00 per thousand inmates. The correlation coefficients between offense rates and institutional levels of crowding were not statistically significant at the .05 level.

E. Summary

These data indicate that the crowding model is of limited utility when explaining patterns of homicide and serious assaultive behavior. The relationship between systemwide homicide rates and population levels was curvilinear. Prior to 1978 there was a negative relationship between homicide rates and population levels. Between 1979 and 1984 the relationship was positive. However, during this latter period the amount of space per inmate was increasing. Within institutions homicides concentrated in high-security units and tended to be episodic. Neither inmate-inmate nor inmate-staff assaults were related to cross-sectional measures of population size and density or to changes in population and density levels from 1983 to 1984.

It is certainly true that the failure to find a direct link between crowding and serious violence does not absolutely refute the idea that crowded conditions are a major cause of serious prison violence. In the years following *Ruiz* there were changes taking place within the system that may have overridden any beneficial effects of the lowered levels of population density. However, the negative relationship between crowding and rates of homicide that was found for the years preceding *Ruiz* is more convincing.

As discussed previously the control framework sees serious assaultive behavior not as a result of confused cognitive tension

⁴ Data for “striking an officer” were not available for December 1984. Thus the increase is underestimated. The underestimation, however, is slight.

but rather as an important control mechanism rooted in a sense of justice, a desire for revenge, and a struggle to establish power and control. This is the image of prison violence I examine in the next section.

VII. THE SOCIAL ORDER OF PRISON VIOLENCE

As the statistical data were analyzed and the above patterns, as well as those discussed in the following paragraphs, became evident, I visited a number of prison units to explore more fully specific situational factors that might be accounting for the rise in prison violence. Numerous "structured conversations" were held with inmates and staff, both past and present, between 1982 and 1984. Detailed profiles of incidents of violence were compiled. In addition newspaper archives, records of court hearings, and interim reports from court-appointed experts and monitors were examined. These data suggested, rather strongly in my mind, support for the social control framework (see Appendix). Since these data and ideas evolved together, the following sections cannot be considered a rigid test of the social control framework. Nevertheless, they do shed important light on the subject.

If violence plays an integral part in social control within prison, it is reasonable to assume that changes in the control structure might help explain the dramatic rise in serious violence following the implementation of the *Ruiz* decision. Throughout the *Ruiz* proceedings there was ample evidence that TDC employees had engaged in abusive practices. Many of these practices had been viewed as functional for maintaining order and were thus systematically encouraged by the staff (Martin and Ekland-Olson, forthcoming). In addition, it was clearly established that, contrary to statutory law at the time, inmates were routinely used in administrative and disciplinary positions over other inmates. In several units these "building tenders" were basically in charge of cellblock activities. Staff members related how they, along with other guards they knew, were taught how to run a tank by the building tender and his assistants when they first took an assignment. Testimony received during the *Ruiz* trial, as well as evidence heard earlier in *Dreyer v. Jalet*, 349 F. Supp. 452 (S.D. Tex. 1972), left little room to doubt that these inmate guards had evolved an often violent system of control over those in their charge. When the court acted to end such practices and when such changes were implemented, a period of uncertainty ensued.

This uncertainty was accentuated by an increase in the

number of inexperienced guards. The *Ruiz* trial had shown that the TDC had one of the worst inmate-staff ratios in the nation, and ordered that officials submit a plan for hiring, training, and financing additional guards. In 1979 there were slightly over two thousand correctional officers. By the end of 1984 there were slightly under six thousand. While this increased the availability of manpower, the replacement of inmate guards with civilian personnel reduced the effective knowledge of inmate affairs in the day-to-day life of the cellblocks.

Changes mandated by the court in *Ruiz* led to the feeling among both inmates and staff that the balance of power within prison had shifted in the inmates' favor. This shift, coupled with greater uncertainty among the staff stemming from less experience and a new set of rules for applying disciplinary measures, led to an increased hesitancy on the part of staff to intervene in inmate-inmate confrontations. Once the reduced potency of the staff was established, the struggle for power and the reliance on self-help among inmates took on a new intensity. This sequence of events was first manifest in an increase in inmate disturbances then in more direct inmate-staff confrontations, and finally in a wave of very serious inmate-inmate violence as gangs attempted to establish dominance and inmates increasingly relied on self-protection in the face of what was perceived as the weakened position of the staff.

A. *Institutional Disturbances*

Some suggestion that inmates perceived increased support from the outside and the lessened power of the staff is available from the patterns of inmate disturbances classified as mutinies involving ten or more inmates over the life course of *Ruiz*.

Between 1972, the year the inmate petitions which were eventually consolidated into the class action suit *Ruiz v. Estelle* were filed, and October 1978, the month the trial actually began, major inmate disturbances were rare. During this six-year period, the TDC records revealed four such incidents. Two of these occurred in July and August of 1972. On October 2, 1978, Judge Justice began hearings in *Ruiz v. Estelle* in Houston. Three days later, a major work strike began at the Ellis Unit with slightly over four hundred inmates involved. Shortly after the strike began, the warden at Ellis was presented with an inmate petition that restated many of the issues being tried in Judge Justice's court.

At the same time the Ellis strike began, inmates on the

Darrington Unit refused to work in the fields and began to return to the prison. They were ordered back to the fields, and when they continued moving toward the prison three warning shots were fired from a shotgun and three inmates received minor wounds. The inmates were then returned to the prison cellblocks, and the strike continued. Over the next two days, the strike and demonstrations spread to four additional units. The most intense confrontation occurred in the Coffield Unit on October 10, when an estimated fifteen hundred inmates barricaded themselves in the cellblocks and began making weapons out of TV benches, mop and broom handles, and "anything available in the unit." When the riot was finally quelled, five officers were treated for minor injuries and one for a broken hand. Five inmates were transferred to the prison hospital for head wounds and broken bones. Approximately thirty inmates were treated in the unit infirmary for lacerations, broken fingers, and, in one case, a broken nose. (Martin and Ekland-Olson, forthcoming).

On October 11, 1978, a news blackout was imposed by the Director of TDC. The following Monday, October 16, lawyers for the state asked for a closed conference with Judge Justice in which they described the events of the previous two weeks as "very volatile" and potentially "another Attica." One of the state's attorneys concluded his remarks to Judge Justice with the observation, "It is the consensus of the wardens who have talked to the inmates on a continuing basis that the way to relieve the tension is to have something from the court saying it does not condone disobedience of orders and disruption of routine on the units and this sort of conduct is hazardous, volatile and not helping the case." (Transcribed proceedings in Judge Justice's Chambers, October 16, 1978, pp. 50-51, *Ruiz v. Estelle*.)

After hearing corroborating statements from justice department attorneys and attorneys for the plaintiffs, Judge Justice adjourned the closed conference and about an hour later reconvened the trial hearings. Before testimony continued Justice read the following statement.

The court is greatly concerned for the safety of both inmates and guards and what is described as a volatile situation in two of the units. At this time, the court is seeking to determine the issues in this litigation in a deliberate and impartial manner. Now, orderly progress of the trial could be impeded if violence and disruption continue. It is my hope that they cease. (Transcribed court proceedings, October 16, 1978, p. 62.)

This statement reportedly had a calming effect and the strike

was all but ended within the next few days (Martin and Ekland-Olson, forthcoming).

The trial phase of *Ruiz* ended in September, 1979. In December, 1980, Judge Justice issued a memorandum opinion and in April, 1981, the final decree establishing, among other things, a special master to oversee the mandated changes. The idea of a special master was particularly offensive to the formerly closed world of the TDC, in part because it put the administration and staff in a visibly less powerful position vis-à-vis the inmates. When it became apparent that subsequent disturbances were at least arguably associated with the presence of monitors from the special master's office, TDC commissioned a report that contrasted the low number of disturbances in the five-year period prior to the trial, averaging 568 days between occurrences, with the increasingly frequent incidents during the trial, and especially since the monitor visits began, averaging 16 days between occurrences (TDC, 1981).

In January 1982 attorneys for the State of Texas filed a motion requesting that the office of special master be abolished, claiming that the master and his staff were inciting violence and failing to report the possession of weapons. The special master countered by asking for additional assistance. Two weeks later Judge Justice refused to abolish the special master's position and issued a court order protecting the special master's records from subpoena.⁵

While these data do not unquestionably establish that the *Ruiz* trial, decision, and implementation caused a shift in perceived power balances, they are certainly suggestive. Additional evidence comes from detailed accounts of the disturbances such as that from the Darrington unit:

An interoffice communication (IOC) from the ranking major at the unit to the warden, dated October 29, 1981, read:

On the morning of 10-29-81, I received information to the effect that during his visit to this unit on 10-28-81, . . . [X; proper names have been deleted in this and other documents] told several inmates that inmates on Ellis unit had been rioting on 10-26 and 10-27-81. I have not yet been able to verify this information, as the inmate who told me requested that he remain anonymous since he said that he was afraid that if . . . [X] became aware of his identity, he would reveal it to other inmates on the unit and thus put his life in jeopardy. It is worth noting that each time . . . [X] visits the unit, shortly after his departure, rumors begin to

⁵ The events surrounding this exchange and the accompanying disturbances are discussed in detail in Martin and Ekland-Olson, forthcoming.

circulate concerning alleged protests, demonstrations, work strikes, and now riots on other units.

This IOC was accompanied by the following notice distributed by and among inmates:

To all fellow convicts of the Darrington Unit!
Let it be known that we have been pushed for too long by the officials of TDC.

As of November 1, 1981, there were to be no inmates sleeping on the runs, No Building Tenders, No Turn-keys.

As we all know, all three (3) still exist and will continue to exist until we show our support for Judge Justice and his rulings.

The whites, blacks, and chicanos are uniting on Monday, November 2, 1981, to protest the TDC's failure to comply with the Court rulings.

To make this work, WE ALL must stand firm together against the TDC's idle threats.

As of November 2, 1981, there will be no more work turn-out until they comply with the rulings.

Remember, as long as we stand together, there is nothing they can do. But to defeat them we must stand together.

On November 18, 1981, a disturbance developed at Darrington. In his account in an IOC dated November 23, 1981, an officer reported:

At approximately 9:30 p.m., . . . [X] and an unknown number of officers entered B-Line and began using gas and riot batons to put the inmates on B-Line Two Row back in their cells.

After this was accomplished, the inmates on C-Line began shouting, "Comply with the Order! Comply with the Order!" and "No work, No Work!"

After the incident an inmate related:

They fed us a funky peanut butter sandwich with an apple yesterday. One meal a day. Today it was another dry peanut butter sandwich, with an orange this time. That's the least of my thoughts right now. I need to fast for a couple of weeks anyway. As long as the end result is in accord with our needs, then we've won. We're through with our mission, unless the laws provoke another confrontation. It's all on the court now. Retrieve, Ellis, now Darrington. It makes me wonder who's next in line.

The presence of powerful outsiders, such as the monitors from the special master's office, meant a redistribution of power within the prison system. From all accounts there was the clear perception among inmates that "We won!" and, having won, that conditions would be different. Even when they weren't, prisoners felt that it was now possible to express more

Table 5. Rates of Charges of Striking an Officer or Other Prison Employee: TDC, 1973-84

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984*
Number of reports	37	41	53	71	53	91	91	119	189	404	505	1,426
Rate per 1,000 security staff	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	39.95	48.02	65.02	105.4	106.2	273.4
Rate per 1,000 inmates	2.29	2.40	3.05	3.64	2.53	3.97	3.66	4.35	6.24	12.46	13.71	40.03

* Figures are approximate, based on data through November 1984.

safely a sense of injustice and outrage for wrongs both past and present. This expression was not reserved for the rather impersonal mass disturbance, for it also became evident in direct one-on-one confrontations.

B. *Inmate-Staff Assaults*

Evidence for the more personal inmate-staff confrontations and the retributive nature of prison violence is available from reports of inmate assaults on TDC employees (Table 5). The data in Table 5 come from disciplinary reports of inmates striking an officer or other prison employee. These incidents ranged anywhere from scuffles involving fists, to throwing hot coffee, food trays, or urine and feces, to stabbings. While the general trend in this period has been for the rate of violence to rise, the table shows four noticeable inflection points, each corresponding to important stages in the *Ruiz* decision and implementation. The first occurred in 1978, when the trial began hearings in Houston; the second in 1981, when the final decree was published; the third in 1982, when the consent decree regarding the actual elimination of building tenders was signed. The fourth, and sharpest, occurred in 1984, when the new use-of-force standards were implemented and published in *Echo*, the prison newspaper, and when a new TDC director was appointed and a number of high-level officers and wardens were transferred, sanctioned, or fired.

It might be argued that the increase in inmate-staff assaults during the post-*Ruiz* period was due to the rapid expansion of the security force (there were simply more targets) rather than to changes in perceptions regarding the distribution of power between inmates and staff. While the presence of additional (inexperienced) targets might have been a contributing factor, two considerations suggest that the shift in the perceived balance of power was more important. First, it should be emphasized that the *rates* per thousand security staff were increasing. Second, monthly data indicate (see Table 6) that the greatest monthly increases occurred following the consent decree eliminating building tenders (in April and May 1982); publication of the new use-of-force standards (in February 1984); and top-level administrative turnover and sanctions (in May and June 1984), as opposed to the months when the largest number of new recruits were put on the job (in late 1982 and early 1983).

Another plausible alternative to the "shift in power" explanation for the rise in the assault rate is that staff simply re-

Table 6. Monthly Frequencies of Disciplinary Reports Filed for Striking an Officer or Other Prison Employee: TDC, 1982–84

Month	1982	1983	1984
January	17	34	37
February	28	46	79*
March	26	41	69
April	22	47	75
May	43*	43	106*
June	43	46	131
July	39	56	147
August	48	47	172
September	32	51	179
October	48	22	162
November	25	31	159
December	33	41	NA

* Noticeable new levels of incidents.

ported more inmate attacks to protect themselves from charges of abuse. Force is a legitimate response when the officer is in danger. As more attention was focused on the use of force through administrative concern and the possibility of a civil suit from an inmate, officers may have made sure that the “incident” involved some form of an inmate attack. While this explanation is certainly plausible for the increase in February and May of 1984, it is less convincing for the increase in 1982.

It is impossible with the data available to estimate how much of the increase was due to differential reporting practices. The fact that physical changes were made in the cellblocks (e.g., heavy screening was placed between the cells and the walks and protective cages were built around guard stations to reduce the staff’s chances of being grabbed or hit with objects thrown from upper tiers) suggests that at least part of the increase was real.

The following comments by security staff, taken from field notes jotted down after a visit to a high security unit in late 1984, offer further weight to the idea that the perceived balance of power had shifted:

A lot of guards are unsure of what is required now and hesitate to act because they are afraid they might lose their job. They are funny that way, they like to feed their families.

It used to be that inmates wouldn’t even think of cussing at an officer. They knew they would get “dusted.” Now they think they can get away with just about anything, including throwing urine or feces.

You go to break up a fight and one of the inmates files an abuse of force report and you end up having to justify yourself. Well, the next time you might say, "To hell with it, let them have at it."

C. *Violence among Inmates*

A strong argument can be made that much of the upsurge in inmate-inmate violence in the post-*Ruiz* years was due to the increased ineffectiveness of the staff to know about problems among inmates due at least in part to the removal of building tenders from cellblocks and dormitories and the rapid hiring of a large number of new correctional officers. It was also related to the staff's hesitancy to act either through their fear of losing their jobs or through a more subtle desire to demonstrate the negative impact of the court's decision. This ineffectiveness and hesitancy in turn led to an increased tendency among inmates to band together for protection, revenge, and the assertion of control over prison commodities.

This banding together of inmates took on a more formal and ordered quality than previously observed. By late 1983 the increase in the homicide rate had been noted. Prison officials, Judge Justice, and court appointed experts all began to comment on how the pernicious effects of gang activity were increasing and how, if unchecked, such activities threatened the order and security within TDC institutions.

Because prison gangs are in part secret organizations, reliable data on their prevalence and activities are difficult to obtain. However, several aspects of gang activities in the TDC over the past five years are widely agreed upon.⁶ First, the number of formally organized and officially recognized gangs has increased. Inmates have always banded together on the basis of common interests, race, location in cellblocks, and outside residence. In the post-*Ruiz* years the tendency to declare formal gang membership, to assume responsibility for mutual self-protection, to demand absolute loyalty, to organize into a paramilitary structure, to require formal admission criteria (such as a "hit"), and to recognize that membership is for life has increased.

⁶ I could find no member of the staff or inmate population who would disagree with the highlighted points in the following paragraphs. Figures on gang membership are from Buentello, 1984. This report is a compilation of reports from unit officials regarding identified gang members. Identification was made on the basis of information provided by inmate informants as well as by gang members, who for one reason or another (e.g., housing assignment) wanted their affiliation known. Given these lists I examined disciplinary reports and the more complete homicide profiles for evidence of gang involvement.

In the late 1970s the only important gang in the TDC with this type of formal organization was the Tejano Sindicato, or Texas Syndicate, which had its roots in the California prison system. By 1983 the number of such self-protective, predatory gangs in the TDC had increased to at least five major groups, with several smaller contingents. Taken together, they numbered somewhere between 450 and 500 inmates. While there is no way to know exactly how many inmates were actually associated with these groups, it is safe to say that no more than 2 percent of the total inmate population was directly involved. The Texas Syndicate had the largest membership, estimated at around two hundred inmates. The Aryan Brotherhood was next with around a hundred members, followed by the Aryan Nations, the Mandingo Warriors, or Seed Brothers, and the Texas Mafia, with perhaps fifty to seventy-five members each.

The second point about gang activity that seems fully defensible is that gang members were responsible for a disproportionate amount of serious prison violence. Whereas high estimates of their membership would place them at about only 2 percent to 3 percent of the inmate population in 1984, they were clearly implicated in fifteen of the twenty-five homicides during this year and suspected in three others.⁷ These homicides were not random. They were fashioned out of revenge or punishment for duties not performed, for passing information to the staff, or for participation in stabbings of fellow gang members.

Detailed information on the extent of gang involvement in nonfatal stabbings was not available, but members were clearly prominent participants in such assaults. The known "hit list" for the largest Mexican-American gang numbered forty-eight in late 1984. Twenty-eight inmates were identified as being on the dominant white gang's list. Figures were not available for the major black gang. These lists were compiled by prison officials through informal sources. While there are obvious problems with using these figures as accurate estimates, in all likelihood the number of inmates threatened by gangs would be higher. The point to be made is simply that gang members were overrepresented in nonfatal as well as fatal stabbings.

Both officers and inmates noted that for a period in 1983 and 1984 gang-related violence threatened to become more random when rival gangs made it known that if any of their mem-

⁷ This same pattern was present in 1985 when 17 of the 27 homicides were directly linked to gang members with evidence that gang members were probably involved in 2 others.

bers were stabbed they would retaliate by attacking inmates of the appropriate racial group, even though the victim may not have been directly involved in the initial assault. While these threats were not carried out to any great extent, the increase in the possibility of being randomly attacked, coupled with the hesitancy and perceived decreased effectiveness of the staff in dealing with violence, led to more reliance on self-protection. Self-protection meant you got yourself a "shank," or stabbing instrument, and if possible associated with persons you trusted. In some cases you might decide to join a gang that, while demanding, did offer protection. In this sense gang membership grew from, as well as contributed to, the increase in prison violence. Violence and prison gangs thus exhibited a classic symbiotic relationship during this period as they fed on one another.

A large portion of the increase in fatal violence among inmates in the post-*Ruiz* years can be attributed to the following factors: Staff were seen as less willing or able to control violence. Inmates increasingly relied on self-protection. For some this meant joining informal cliques or more formally organized gangs. The number and size of gangs, largely organized along racial lines, increased. These gangs developed a feudlike system of justice to deal with inter- as well as intragang disputes. There were few staff or inmates in a position to mediate or negotiate these disputes before they reached a violent resolution.

VIII. POLICY AND METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Some have argued that the prison reform movement has been in some sense responsible for a rise in prison violence. For example, Engel and Rothman conclude, "The overall effects of the reform movement have been the dissolution of the inmate social order and heightened violence" (1983: 105). Similarly, Marquart and Crouch state that

although court intervention has made Eastham's operations more consistent with constitutional requirements of fairness and due process, the fact remains that life for the inmates and guards at Eastham is far less orderly than it was before. Authority has eroded and the cell blocks and halls are clearly more dangerous. Our observations [and] . . . data . . . suggest that the push toward the bureaucratic-legal order, at least in the first few years after the decree, lessened control to the point that many are increasingly at risk behind the walls (1985: 584).

Such conclusions are not new, however. Instead they seem to surface whenever prisons are asked to come into line with evolving standards of decency. For example, a 1913 commis-

sion, set up to investigate conditions in Texas prisons, noted, "Should the committee follow the overwhelming weight of testimony of citizens as well as employees adduced at its hearings, it would unqualifiedly recommend that the order to suspend the use of the strap be revoked" (Penitentiary Investigating Committee, 1913: 29). Like the current concern over rising inmate violence in post-court-decree years, this conclusion was based in part on statistics that indicated that disciplinary problems had indeed increased following the abolition of the strap. Nevertheless the committee did not recommend the reinstatement of the strap: It was simply no longer acceptable.

In the case of Texas prisons in the post-*Ruiz* years, it is not possible to estimate precisely changes in the overall level of violence.⁸ Inmates are certainly more secure from the arbitrary actions of building tenders and staff. At the same time the level of fatal and near-fatal attacks from fellow inmates in the general prison population has increased. Whatever the change in the total level of violence, when assessing the causes it should be emphasized that the prison reform movement is socially complex. Thus, the temptation to single out court-ordered reforms per se as the sole cause of the rise in prison violence should be resisted. The way prison administrators, staff, and inmates react to such reforms may be equally important. I have already noted the hesitancy among some staff members to use what powers they retained in the months and years following the court orders.

In addition, there is evidence that the use of inmates in supervisory and disciplinary roles in the TDC dates at least to the 1920s (Martin and Ekland-Olson, forthcoming) and in all likelihood much earlier. In the 1970s complaints to legislators about building tender abuses led to legislation (Texas Prison Management Act, 1973) that prohibited the use of inmates in supervisory and disciplinary positions. Prison officials were among the advocates of this bill, arguing that it simply reflected existing policy and practice. This denial that the building-tender system existed eventually backed the administration into a corner as the *Ruiz* litigation took shape. They could hardly agree to abandon a practice that they denied existed. Nor did they begin a phase-out of the system. When the practice was finally ac-

⁸ Reliable information on the systemwide pattern of staff assaults on inmates is not available. The staff's use of violence as a control device is discussed in Marquart, 1984. Instances of abuse of force by guards is amply documented in Appendix A to Ninth Monitor's Report of Factual Observations to the Special Master—Report on Section II,C of the *Amended Decree: (Use of Force)* (September 13, 1983) (*Ruiz v. Estelle*). See also, Martin and Ekland-Olson, forthcoming).

knowledge and terminated, the transition was abrupt. This abrupt termination, coupled with the mandated changes in disciplinary procedures, the hesitancy to use available disciplinary powers, and the increase in the number of inexperienced guards, meant that the information flow between inmates and guards became less reliable. Sanctions thereby became less certain, a struggle for position in the new power structure ensued, and violence escalated.

Judge Justice, in what turned out to be a prophetic warning, was aware of this possibility and signaled the existing resistance to change and the potential consequences for violence in a hearing on November 5, 1982, approving a negotiated settlement on the use-of-force issue.

The elimination of these policies, procedures, and practices, without more, will create nothing more than a vacuum with respect to the control of TDC's institutions and prisoners. Such a vacuum, if it is allowed to occur, will remain unfilled only briefly. Aggressive and predatory prisoners, disorganized or otherwise, will seize the opportunity to achieve control. As the experiences of other states have demonstrated such illegal power structures, once they arise, take root quickly and defy the most vigorous efforts aimed at their elimination (Record of Hearing, November 5, 1982).

Courts attempting to bring prison systems within constitutional boundaries are faced with a dilemma. Change often implies a rearrangement of a precariously balanced system of control. The process of change is sometimes complicated by administrative resistance. Confronted with such resistance, courts are put in the position of forcing an abrupt realignment of power and influence. This may mean less violence of one kind (e.g., staff-inmate) yet more of another (e.g., inmate-inmate), as it surely did in the Texas prison system in the years immediately following *Ruiz*.

To better anticipate the possible as well as the most likely outcomes of court-ordered change, we would do well to pay closer attention to the social dynamics of violence. Studies that rely on individual characteristics to predict violence are notoriously ineffective (see, e.g., Monahan, 1981). As we have seen, institutional levels of population density are no more promising as indicators. If my argument is correct, more attention should be paid to the control structure and to dispute-resolution mechanisms in particular. Whereas indicators of individual inmate characteristics such as age and criminal history, along with institutional characteristics such as density and security level, are

relatively accessible, the prison's control structure is more subtle and flexible, less likely to become part of record-keeping practices, and therefore more elusive for empirical research.

The most promising approach to the study of prison violence would seem to be detailed ethnographic investigations, with particular emphasis on how the processes of negotiation, mediation, and adjudication operate in prison and how they do or do not link up with a reliance on violence. Marquart (1984) and Marquart and Crouch (1985) offer many useful insights using this approach. Summaries of the dispute-processing literature such as those provided by Nader and Todd (1978) and Roberts (1979) are also quite suggestive. These, along with numerous articles and chapters on topics such as "the social organization of vengeance" (Rieder, 1984), "litigation mindedness" (Galanter, 1975), "social control from below" (Baumgartner, 1984), and "the micro-politics of trouble" (Emerson and Messinger, 1977), offer ample suggestions for investigations of the social order of violence in prison.

It would be naive in the extreme to assume that even the most thorough understanding of prison violence would bring about its eventual elimination. As long as prisons manifest the contradictory goals of incapacitation, revenge, rehabilitation, and reintegration they are likely to be seen at one time or another as not fulfilling their assigned purpose, and therefore subject to reform. With reforms, especially those imposed with little attention to the existing social order, comes a realignment of power. A realignment of power often means a heightened possibility of violence. Such insights are not new. Recent events in Texas confirm many of Sykes's (1958) conclusions regarding the paradoxical cycle of crisis and equilibrium.

Such a view, emphasizing as it does the inevitable swing between crisis and equilibrium, may encourage a rather cynical view of prison life, along with a "do-nothing" strategy for action. Since this fact has been repeatedly brought to my attention, a closing word about the impact of *Ruiz* is in order. Many recent reforms have improved prison conditions in Texas. In all likelihood these reforms came about faster because of *Ruiz*. In this sense, the do-nothing implications of cynicism are denied. It is equally clear, at least to this observer, that court-imposed changes, coupled with administrative resistance, paved the way toward heightened levels of serious violence. Some of this unintended increase might have been avoided with closer attention to the organizational dynamics of social control in prison.

APPENDIX: A CASE STUDY

The following case study is offered not to prove the utility of the social control framework but simply to illustrate the characteristics of violent incidents that led me to my conclusion. The case involved two inmates of the same race. Both had very violent backgrounds. The victim was forty-two years old and was serving a 101-year sentence for murder with malice. The offender was twenty-eight years old and was sentenced to death for two homicides during a robbery. The dispute revolved around the offender's refusal to join the victim's efforts to organize other inmates and the subsequent harassment by the victim. The official account of the incident read: "At approximately 7:55 p.m., August 2, 1983, Inmate . . . [X] . . . entered the G-15 day room and stabbed Inmate . . . [Y] . . . approximately sixteen times, which resulted in the death of Inmate . . . [Y]." Three days later a disciplinary hearing was held and the proceedings tape recorded. The following comments are taken from a transcript of testimony given at the disciplinary hearing.

Inmate: Well sir, it started a long time ago down in J-23 that . . . [Y] had a bad habit of threatening people if they didn't sign petitions or raise Cain with officers or go along with his ah little ol' program. . . . He'd make it a point to grind you under by trying to make the rest of the inmates come down on you [saying] that you was not going to help them try to change the penitentiary or the State of Texas. . . . [Y] got moved eventually down to G-15 and he started the same thing down there of getting groups together. And as soon as . . . [X] hit, moved in the wing, a few months later, . . . [Y] started calling him dog ass nigger, he's sorry and this and that. He said if he ever got a chance he was going to kill him whether he was in front of him, behind him or any way he could get him.

He had been laying for him, and the other day I happened to be working on shelling peanuts in front of his [Y's] cell. [It was about time for the victim to shower, and after a bit of verbal exchange among the guards and inmates, victim left his cell to take his shower.] As he went by there [offender's cell] he stopped and shook his finger at . . . [X].

Officer: What did . . . [Y] say to . . . [X] when he was in his cell?

Inmate: I couldn't hear him. I could only say that "You sorry goddamn nigger." That's all that I could catch. He just kept on shaking his finger at him.

At this point in the hearing the witness began to state how a related group of inmates were out to get him and a couple of others:

Inmate: But it's one big clique that's all it is want's to run the penitentiary. That man [X] hadn't done a thing. They pushed the issue on, they forced him to do what he done or stand there and bend over one of them rails and let them fuck him. He done exactly what the man told him to his face. They goin' to kill him in front of him, or behind him. And the man didn't have no other choice.

The inmate went on to relate how the officers did not know a lot about what was going on and how this same group of inmates was trying to take advantage of increased freedom to use the law library to set up other inmates. At this point the hearing was concluded and the offender was given one to fifteen days in solitary.

There are a number of unanswered questions about this incident. How did the offender get the "shank" used in the killing? What would have been the testimony of the victim regarding the nature of the dispute? The only witness appeared at the request of the offender. Were there other inmates who could have provided an alternative picture of the events?

What is clear is that the dispute had a substantial history. It was rooted not only in alliances among inmates, but also in the implications these alliances had for relations with the staff and administration as well as outside reform efforts. The offender's status had been challenged repeatedly in front of other inmates. Violence, both threatened and actual, served as an important control mechanism. Alternative mechanisms for resolving the dispute were viewed as either unacceptable or ineffective. It is also quite clear that this killing did not end the dispute. The social roots of violence, at least in this case, ran very deep.

It is appropriate to question the representativeness of this case. An answer would require a thorough ethnographic study of prison disputes and the role played by violence. At this point we must rely on the basic statistical picture, which suggests that half of the single-offender homicides ($N = 36$) during the years between 1979 and 1983 were committed by persons with sentences similar to those in this dispute (sixty years or more). The rates of single-offender homicide were .50, 1.45, and 4.57 per thousand inmates in sentence categories of nineteen years and under, twenty years to fifty-nine years, and sixty years or more, respectively. Forty-four percent of the victims and 42 percent of the offenders in the single-offender homicides were

charged with some sort of serious personal offense (murder, attempted murder, or rape). On these bases there is reason to believe that the above dispute is not atypical. On the other hand, this homicide was intraracial, involving two black individuals. Only one-sixth (six out of thirty-six) of the single-offender homicides between 1979 and 1983 involved two blacks. We might expect differences between this case and cases involving victims and offenders from different racial-ethnic backgrounds.

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