

USA Prison System and HIV Infection

With focus on Vacaville, California

Incarceration in the United States of America is one of the main forms of punishment, rehabilitation (for those few lucky inmates who can receive it), for the commission of felony and other offenses. The United States has the highest documented incarceration rate in the world. Only China may have higher rate than the USA but reliable data is not available).

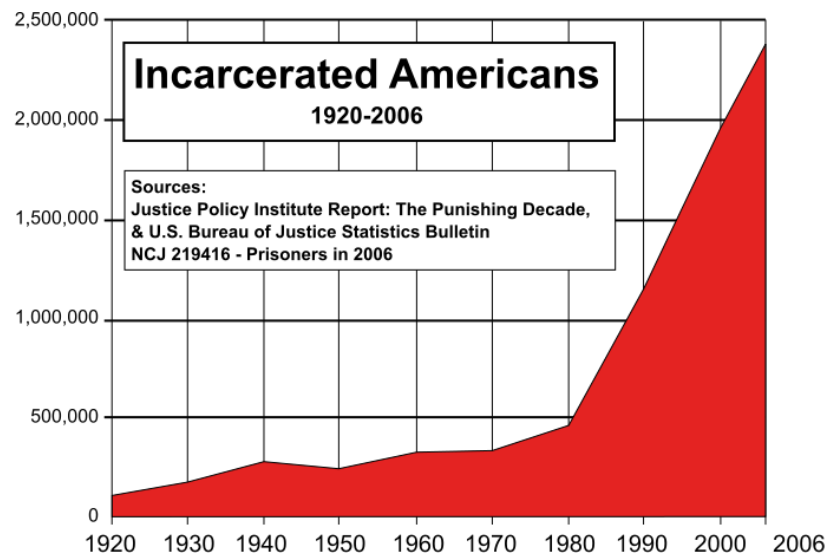
At end of the year of 2009, it was 743 adults incarcerated per 100,000 population.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), 2.266.800 adults were incarcerated in U.S. federal and state prisons, and county jails at the end of 2011 – about 0.94% of adults in the U.S. resident population. Additionally, 4.814.200 adults at year-end 2011 were on probation or on parole. In total, 6.977.700 adults were under correctional supervision (probation, parole, jail, or prison) in 2011 – about 3% of all adults in the U.S. resident population.

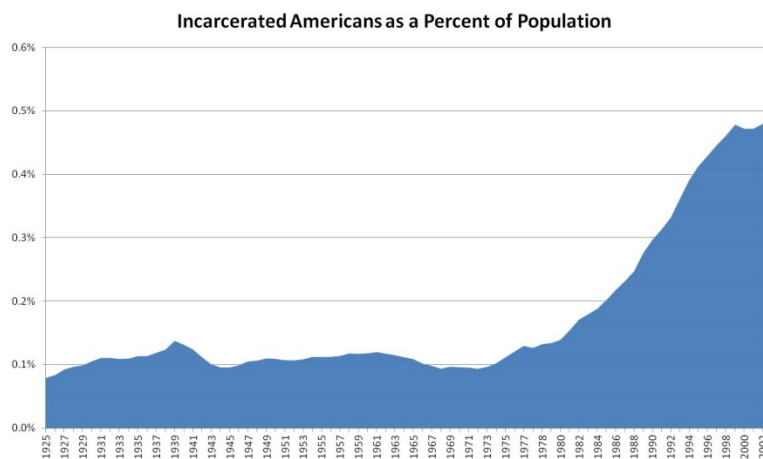
In addition, there were 70.792 juveniles in juvenile detention in 2010.

Although debtor's prisons no longer exist in the United States, residents of some U.S. states can still be incarcerated for debt as of 2014.

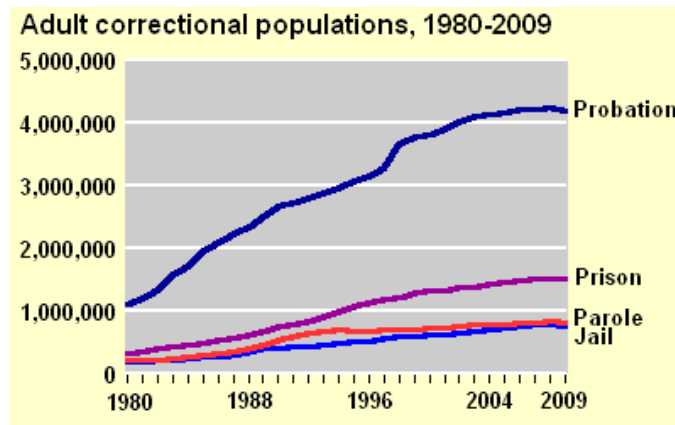
In contrast to all countries in the EU that have abonded the death penalty a long time ago as inhumane and inconsequent (100-150 years), most states in the USA still have capital punishment (death by electrical chair or poisons injected by a medical doctor !). One can hear the opinon in the USA that death penalty will keep people from committing horendous crimes. But the USA has the highest incarceration rate of all developed nations; thus there is something is wrong in this reasoning.



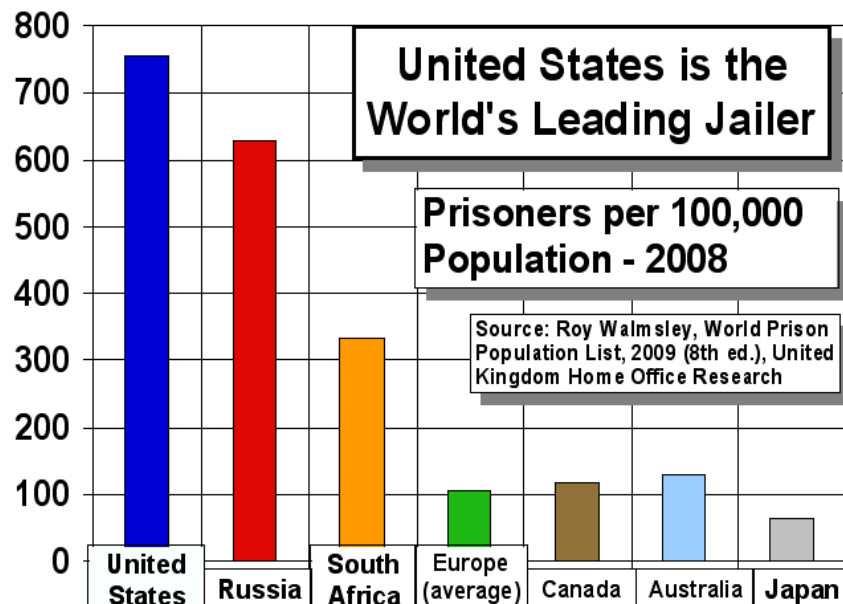
Number of inmates. 1920 to 2006 (absolute numbers). The general US population grew 2.8 times in the same period. The number of inmates increased more than 20 times



Sentenced USA prisoners under jurisdiction of State and Federal correctional authorities, as a Percent of Population. 1925–2003 (with the trend going up each year). Does not include prisoners held in the custody of local jails, inmates out to court, and those in transit.



6,977,700 adults were under correctional supervision (probation, parole, jail, or prison) in 2009



The source of these statistics is the World Prison Population List. 8th edition. Prisoners per 100,000 population

The United States has the highest documented incarceration rate in the world (743 per 100,000 population), Russia has the second highest rate (577 per 100,000), followed by Rwanda (561 per 100,000). As of year-end 2009, the USA rate was 743 adults incarcerated in prisons and jails per 100,000 population. At year-end 2007, the United States had less than 5% of the world's population and 23.4% of the world's prison and jail population (adult inmates). Incarceration rate in the USA for federal and state prisons in 2007 was probably the

highest in history of the country. It was 5.5 times greater than the sharp peak that occurred during the Great Depression at 137 per 100,000 in 1939.

By comparison the incarceration rate in England (UK) in October 2011 was 155 people imprisoned per 100,000 residents; the rate for Norway in May 2010 was 71 inmates per 100,000; Netherlands in April 2010 was 94 per 100,000; Australia in June 2010 was 133 per 100,000; and New Zealand in October 2010 was 203 per 100,000.



How inmates are housed (often for life-long)



Row of inmates walking to the cafeteria or another facility inside the building. Notice the yellow line: no inmate is allowed to cross the yellow line



Discussions among inmates.....



Each inmate has a mattress and a locker that can be locked



This inmate is relatively lucky to have a cell like this one but a single cell usually also means single confinement (isolation)



This prisoner had a relatively light sentence and got a few days leave for good conduct



Dogs sniffing for drugs: why?



At the dentist



Notice the yellow line that should not be crossed by inmates



Watching television as one way of killing time



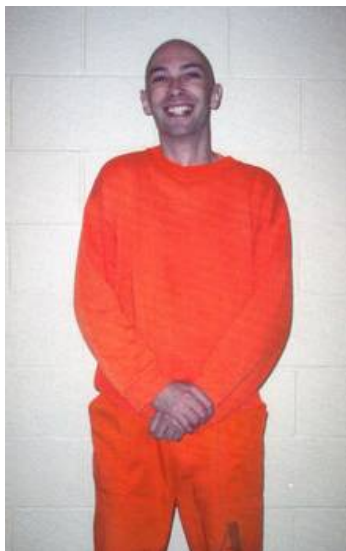
Gang rape and other abuses are daily practices to kill time and to set the picking order

Human Rights Watch estimated in 2010 that 140,000 US inmates per year have been raped. Shaun Attwood has written three books on life inside and his latest, *Prison Time*, details the sex – consensual or otherwise – the prostitution, the pimping and the equal, loving relationships behind bars.



Sexual abuse and rape and being forced to participate in special (sado-masochistic) role plays

Inmates testified: “The crook of another man's elbow is on my Adam's apple, pressing down, choking me. After just a couple of seconds, I panic and gasp.”



Shaun Attwood as photographed by a fellow inmate at Buckeye Prison, Arizona, 2004

Mr. Shaun Attwood, who spent more than five years in some of America's toughest prisons, including Arizona's infamous Maricopa Jail, has clearly and reliably documented how men in prison are raped and abused.

"Generally they put the victim to sleep with a choke hold – locking the windpipe like this," he says, rendering me unable to reply. "Within about 20 to 30 seconds you're unconscious."

Attacks don't always begin like this. Sometimes, "they'll lure them with drugs and get them really high – 90% of all prisoners shoot-up drugs". Sometimes they'll trick the victim into a debt and then make them repay it with sex (and not only inmates but also prison guards demand sex for privileges or ignore a violation of prison rules. Other times, it can start with a beating or stabbing.

Human Rights Watch estimated in 2010 – three years after Attwood left jail – that 140,000 US individual inmates have been raped: each inmate several to numerous times. Other studies have helped fill in the quantitative picture: 21 per cent of prisoners in the Midwest reported being forced into some form of sexual activity, according to Prison Journal. Young inmates are five times more likely to be sexually assaulted, says Just Detention International, an

organization devoted to ending prison rape. Similar statistics aren't available in the UK but in the year 2011 – there were 103 male and female prisoner-on-prisoner sexual assaults.

The statistics, then, we know. The jokes, of course, we know, too: "Don't drop the soap!" is repeated so often by so many as to become Britain and America's prison-rape refrain – a chorus of discomfort to muzzle the horror.

But the total picture of prison rape in America, the how and why and what happens next, is scarcely uttered because those who survive the system almost invariably have no voice. Attwood, however, a tall, skinny, somewhat geeky 43-year-old from Widnes, doesn't just have a voice, but has written three books on life inside. And his latest, *Prison Time*, details the sex – consensual or otherwise – the prostitution, the pimping and the equal, loving relationships behind bars.

The details of which cast fresh light not only on the culture, politics and dynamics in America's penitentiary system, but on the nature of male sexuality itself. Heterosexual? Bi? Gay? Transgender? Labels erode, irrelevant, in the absence of women and societal constraints, and then anything goes.

"I was constantly mentally preparing to fight to the death to stop it happening to me," he says. "I would leave pens out [in my cell] – I was getting ready to, you know..." his voice trails off. Pens can be a deadly weapon. They can also blind you. (A transgender inmate called She-Ra, whom Attwood became friends with, was so broken by gang rapes she finally stopped them by popping an eyeball out of one of her attackers.)

"I had a profound determination to stop it happening because once that's happened to you, everyone finds out and the whole prison society will treat you differently. From then on you are game for anyone to do anything to do you. Not only sexually, but in any way you will be taken advantage of."



Shaun Attwood after release from jail

It's not only young men who are more likely to be raped, but obviously gay ones, too. What are the chances, then, that a young-ish gay man such as myself would be raped? Attwood looks down.

"It is inevitable," he says quietly. "And no one on the outside is interested. Until someone's son is calling them from prison saying, 'I've got a cellmate with a padlock in a sock who is threatening to rape me,' they couldn't care less."

In 2003 – a year after Attwood's incarceration for dealing ecstasy on the Arizona rave scene – a federal law was passed, the Prison Rape Elimination Act, decreeing statistics must be compiled nationally and grants given to prisons to help reduce rape. This manifested in what Attwood calls "rape classes".

"It involved us being taught about rape and being told we have to report rape," he says with a snort of derision. "Everyone laughed throughout and said to the teacher, 'We are not going to report rape!'. If you report anything in prison you're deemed a snitch and it's KOS – kill on sight – for snitches. At the end of the class everyone was saying, 'They might as well give us rape kits' – a how-to."

Not that they needed it. Immediately after the class, "a mentally-ill prisoner was gang-raped. No one reported a thing".

Is there anything, then, that could be done to stop it?

"When you've got two guards watching hundreds of prisoners – to keep costs down – prisoners can do whatever they want. The US prison system cultivates rape. *If you treat people like animals, they behave like it.*"

Unsurprisingly, in such an epidemic, sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates are sky-high. Attwood says in one prison, he counted up the cons with hepatitis C: it came to two-thirds. Many had HIV. The only ones receiving treatment were those who had taken legal action. And thus, some prisoners had full-blown AIDS.

Without realizing, Attwood himself illustrates how normalized inmates become to rape and sexual assault, to the extent they don't even recognize it as such.

In his book "Prison Time", Attwood describes walking in on a young man being forced to fellate another prisoner, an act considered rape in several states and many countries. But when I ask if Attwood ever witnessed a rape, he says no. And when I ask if he felt he had been assaulted when another lag grabbed him, French-kissed him and groped him with hands moist with lubricant Attwood replies: "No, not at all. If I did that to a woman in a bar, that's sexual assault, but in prison the limits are completely different from society."

The man who grabbed him he had nicknamed Jeeves. This is because Jeeves was his "butler". Jeeves was sexually obsessed with Attwood and so offered to work for him cleaning his cell and looking after all domestic concerns – a dynamic from which he derived sexual kicks. There was no payment, just the thrill of it. He would make advances to Attwood fairly regularly, but was always rebuffed. To the English inmate, Jeeves was comparatively harmless – before being moved to this cell, Attwood would have to walk past another every day in which resided a prisoner called Booga. He documents their first meeting:

"I'm pulled into a cell reeking of backside sweat and masturbation, a cheese-tinted funk. 'I'm Booga. Let's fuck,' says a squat man in urine-stained boxers, with WHITE TRASH tattooed on his torso...I can't believe my eyes when he drops his boxers and waggles his penis... He grabs me. We scuffle... When I feel his penis rub against my leg, my adrenalin kicks in so forcefully I experience a burst of strength and wriggle free."

For Attwood, escaping rape, as well as "murder, or even having bones broken or teeth knocked out", for nearly six years was "freakishly" lucky, and thanks in part to his "English wit" and "people skills" as well his friendships with some of the gang leaders. Other prisoners avoid rape – or at least consider themselves to be avoiding it – by becoming a "punk".

This relates to the word's original meaning – the receptive male partner in anal sex – but in prison becomes a job, an identity. You are a receptacle, owned by another. If your main (rape-)partner is a macho man or a gang leader, you receive a certain protection and other inmates will not think of assaulting you in fear of the man who owns you: the gang leader.

"They tend to be the younger, prettier inmates – or the transsexual ones," explains Attwood. "If you're a big, bad gang member, who gives you the right to have a punk to use for sex, as long as you're the 'giver', it's not considered remotely gay."

The particulars of this relationship can vary. The higher up in the prison picking-order (which generally means the more violent) the gangster, the better looking his punk.

"But he's got to fight to maintain that punk. It's a warrior society."

The punk becomes their property. And as such, can either be kept for their sole use or pimped.

"Some will allow their punks to be unfaithful with other punks only, which is called 'bumping pussies'. It's all tied up in notions of property ownership, with sexual jealousy a secondary factor."

The rules of ownership are also governed by race. With most prisoners grouping socially on racial lines, so, too, must their punks.

"A punter – say a Mexican American – might rent a white punk from a white pimp, but a Mexican American wouldn't be running a white punk."

As Attwood utters these words in his rather resonant Cheshire tones – an excitable Gary Barlow if you will – he attracts several glances. We are in a vegetarian restaurant called The Beano, in Guildford, where he now lives. Tables of slate-haired women are seemingly unused to hearing about sexual slavery as they chow down on mushroom lasagna.

They look round again when he describes a prisoner regularly selling his semen to another who used it in ways perhaps unsuitable to describe in a newspaper. And again when he enthuses about the aforementioned She-Ra melting down bits of plastic to make dildos. Needs must.

The book by Shaun Attwood "Prison Time" is available now (Mainstream Publishing, £12.99).

**Robert Gorter tries to make a difference in the high security prison of Vacaville,
California**

(1984-1989)

By US law, inmates are not allowed to have sex. Thus, in the hay days of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) was rampant (and still pretty much is). Since any sexual activity inside the prison system is forbidden, no condoms or other tools for safe-sex practices could be provided. And, during the rapid spread of HIV in the USA, also education about routes of infection was taboo:

inmates should not have sex and thus, education on STDs were considered of being of no use and by some prison wardens even a felony

Together with **Dr. Jan Diamond**, a colleague of Robert Gorter who worked for the Contra-Costa Health Department as a family Practitioner, Robert Gorter started to visit the high security prison of Vacaville with the purpose to take care of inmates of this prison with HIV infection.



San Francisco Bay Bridge at that time in both directions

Usually, Robert Gorter would drive in his pick-up truck from his home in down town San Francisco across the Bay Bridge to Berkeley where Jan Diamond lived. Then they would travel together in one car to Vacaville.



The High Security Prison of Vacaville in California (between San Francisco and Sacramento)

Upon arrival, they were routinely checked three times: body and hand bag by hand; then through a metal detector (like at airports); and through a third gate for possible drugs and other substances.

One day, in the hand bag of Dr. Jan Diamond one condom was found (for sure not for in-prison use) but she was suspended for one week.

Robert Gorter and Jan Diamond did what they could and slowly on, they were more and more accepted by inmates and prison personnel alike.

Essentially, both Diamond and Gorter were left alone once they entered the prison itself. They were given two rooms to see patients with no guard supervision. Both received an iron whistle and were instructed to blow their whistles if they felt threatened. Through the years, Robert Gorter and Jan Diamond never felt (or were) threatened and thus, never needed to blow their whistles! It was a clear phenomenon that when Jan Diamond and Robert Gorter approached the inmates with respect as they would do with any other patient anywhere, all inmates treated them with respect as well.

The prison doctor at that time as a very nice and realistic and co-operative man and let Jan and Robert free to (half-secretly) educate about HIV transmission. But how can one effectively educate when (gang)-rape are daily events and distribution of condoms and written information was forbidden?

Also, half-a-year later, a special ward was set up for patients who had progressed to final stages of AIDS and needed round-the clock medical- and nursing care. Robert Gorter and Jan Diamond were allowed to prescribe anti-HIV medications *only* as the prison doctor condoned it.

Drugs Inside High Security Prisons in the USA

Robert Gorter and Jan Diamond were soon confronted with the availability of heroin and Cocain/Crack (and sometimes prescription drugs) among the prison population in Vacaville. Drugs were available and usually available more or less on a regular basis. This was the conclusion as Diamond and Gorter were never confronted with acute withdrawal symptoms among the inmates they saw.

Also in other prisons and High-Security Prisons, drugs are widely available. Therefore, Robert Gorter always said:

“How can one control illegal (intravenous) drug use in the streets

if one cannot control it in High-Security Prisons?”

Robert Gorter and Jan Diamond would never take a public stand but privately, they would express their doubts and could tell you stories how drugs were a commodity used both by inmates and prison personnel for bargaining, obtaining privileges, prevent punishments, sexual favors, etc.