

## PRISON

A place of confinement--typically with ugly, coercive discipline--the prison has many forms and many functions. In the modern world, the prison "embodies the largest power the state exercises over its citizens in time of peace."

In history, some celebrated prison inmates include Dante Alighieri, Thomas More, Miguel de Cervantes, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Oscar Wilde, O. Henry, Mahatma Gandhi, Eugene Debs, Bertrand Russell, Dashiell Hammett, Martin Luther King, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and Nelson Mandela.

One infamous prison was "The Pit," a cell deep in the foundations of the Tower of London. Built below the high-water mark of the Thames, as the river rose periodically hundreds of rats were driven upward into the pit. Prisoners had to fight the rodents in the dark.

The Tower of London also had a cell called the "Little Ease." Extremely small--it was only four square feet in size--it was impossible for an inmate to sit or lie down in the cell. (Sitting requires six square feet.)

In France, some prisoners were confined in the infamous cell called the "Mouse Hole." Used until the nineteenth century, this maddening and claustrophobic cell was three feet square.

The largest prison in history was Australia. Between 1787 and 1868 Australia was used as a vast penal colony, and approximately 160,000 convicts were sent there in chains.

The oddest prison in history was located in the Aztec Empire. Called Coacalco, it was a special house in the Aztec capital. Literally a prison for gods, the patron deities of defeated cities were held captive there.

In the United States (where the typical prison cell is seven by eleven feet), the most notorious prison was Alcatraz. Used as a Federal penitentiary between 1934 and 1963, Alcatraz had one guard for every three inmates. Men were confined in their cells fourteen hours each day. Talking was prohibited in the mess hall and the cell block. One 1930's study suggested that 60 per cent of all Alcatraz inmates lost their sanity while confined in the hellish place.

The most liberal prisons in history may be the "Open Prisons" in Denmark. Ninety per cent of all Danish inmates are kept in "Open Prisons." Only inmates viewed as security threats are kept in more traditional "Closed Prisons."

The only punishment in the Open Prisons is deprivation of liberty. Inmates have their own rooms, they may bring items from home, they are paid for work and school, and they are allowed home visits.

The Open Prisons are surrounded by a low fence. Every escapee who is caught is simply returned to the Open Prison to complete his sentence. There is no extra punishment.

## PRISON, ABOLITION OF

The prison abolition movement calls for the complete eradication of the prison system.

The movement is not interested in the amelioration of prison conditions or the reform of prison. The movement argues that we can no more reform prison--a basic violation of human rights--than we can reform slavery.

Does the idea of abolishing prison sound dangerously radical?

According to Angela Davis, slavery at one time seemed normal and ethical, and suggesting its abolition once seemed inflammatory.

## PRISON AND JAILS, BEHAVIOR IN

Guilty or innocent, there are basic rules for the prudent inmate:

1. Do not write down anything about the crime. Do not talk about the crime on a telephone. Do not speak about the crime to anyone--even a co-defendant. Cells could contain listening devices.
2. Do not speak to fellow prisoners. Jails contain desperate men. If you provide personal details, they may contact prosecutors and falsely claim you confessed. Prosecutors reward informants.
3. As a prisoner, do not be conspicuous, and do not give the impression you have something others want.
4. Understand that other prisoners may be undercover police. According to the law, undercover operatives are under no obligation to truthfully identify themselves. When questioned directly, they may legally lie.
5. If you are physically assaulted, do not name the attacker. Claim you fell accidentally. Other inmates respect that.
6. In prison, develop fake traits, such as a limp or a stutter. When you

escape, the limp or the stutter will be included in your description. Also, guards tend not to watch people with disabilities.

7. In prison, do not lend or borrow. If you lend to someone--and he does not pay you back--you will be seen as weak. If you borrow, a prison convict may claim you broke his possession, and he will demand compensation in the form of money or sexual favors.

8. Remember the prison rule: "If it is not worth killing for, it is not worth fighting for."

In summary, in prison keep to yourself and "see no evil, speak no evil, and hear no evil."

### PRISON, ENDURANCE OF

Jesse Pomeroy died in 1932, at the age of seventy-three, after a remarkable feat of endurance in the American penal system. Because he had murdered two children (a nine-year-old girl and a four-year-old boy) when he was fourteen years old, Pomeroy spent nearly sixty years in prison, of which forty of those years were in solitary confinement. He endured incarceration by reading books and writing.

How can living in a prison cell be described? According to one inmate, "imagine living for years in a public latrine with another man."

### PRISON, ESCAPE FROM

"Escape from controlled custody," a phrase borrowed from a classic text on the subject, is the ultimate human achievement. Cunning, intelligence, strength, and swiftness are required.

Regarding escape, a masterful fictional work is Jacques Futrelle's *The Problem of Cell 13*. Professor Augustus Van Dusen--the character known as "The Thinking Machine"--declares that he could escape from any cell on death row in one week. Entering with only his shirt, trousers, freshly polished shoes, stockings, tooth polish, one five-dollar bill and two ten-dollar bills--and knowing that "anything is dangerous in the hands of a man who knows how to use it"--the "Thinking Machine" uses his ingenuity to complete the escape.

In the real world, of course, escape is difficult. At Leavenworth Penitentiary, the walls are thirty-five feet high and twelve feet wide. To prevent tunneling, the walls extend thirty-five feet into the ground.

Security is so tight in prison that when a female inmate gives birth, she is

kept in handcuffs *throughout* the labor and delivery.

Even taking a hostage is ineffective in the real world. Since 1931 the Federal Bureau of Prisons has followed a rule that under no circumstances are guards to open a gate for a would-be escapee because he is holding a hostage. In other words, hostages are expendable.

Yet, in spite of the difficulties, a 1978 study shows that one out of every forty-three prisoners in the United States will escape at some point.

#### PRISON (ESCAPE), HAZARDS OF

When an inmate tries to escape from an American medium or maximum security prison, regulations allow guards to fire a warning shot.

If a prisoner fails to stop and is over the fence, a guard may shoot to injure.

If the guard's life is in danger, he may shoot to kill.

In contrast--in Nazi Germany--any inmate who stepped into the "neutral zone"--an area near the fence--was immediately murdered.

#### PRISON (ESCAPE), TECHNIQUES OF

When escaping from "controlled custody," never stage a mass escape. Mass escapes draw publicity and provoke the maximum effort by authorities.

Also, before making your escape, clean your bed and cell, leave another person's perspiration-soaked shirt on the floor, and rub the soles of your feet with turpentine or ammonia. These actions will help you evade the bloodhounds.

As for techniques, the following may be used:

- 1) Cutting the bars. To cut bars, you need an abrasive object harder than the steel. To reduce noise and preserve the cutting edge, always lubricate the blade with oil or soap.

To disguise cuts in the bar, fill the gaps with a mixture of bread, dirt, and water. In some high-security prisons the guards touch the bars daily, so leave enough metal to keep it strong. When you are ultimately ready to escape, kick out the weakened bar.

Remember that anything that can be used as a crowbar (like a bed frame) can save cutting time.

To slip through an especially tight spot, apply oil to the naked body. In 1986, one svelte female inmate, using oil and nudity, was able to slip through the seven-inch space between the bars of her cell.

2) Make acid. With only a cooking pot, a heat source, and your own urine, it is possible to make phosphoric acid! A powerful agent, phosphoric acid will degrade steel bars if applied several times daily. As the bars corrode, cover the area that has been eaten away with a dirt-toothpaste mixture.

3) Make bombs. Explosives may be manufactured from common ingredients. In 1926, nine hundred rioting prisoners at Walla Walla prison in Washington State used homemade explosives to blast open the main gates.

4) Tunnel or dig through the wall, the floor, or the ceiling. This method is especially useful for hostages who are locked in closets or rooms.

Many American prisons are built on granite or other rock, and tunneling is almost impossible. But in 1951 Joseph Holmes, using iron from the prison workshop, spent six months digging a tunnel (twenty-six feet long) under the main wall of the Maryland State Penitentiary. Holmes escaped into Baltimore and was never caught.

In 2003, eighty-four prisoners escaped a Brazilian prison by making a tunnel fifty meters long, one meter wide, and one meter high. The tunnel went under two buildings and beneath the wall.

5) Bribe the guards. The Knapp Commission of 1971, which studied police corruption in New York City, found that *half* of all street police accepted “payoffs.” These corrupt police were either “meat-eaters” (police who aggressively misused power for personal gain) or the more common “grass-eaters” (police who accepted any “payoffs” that had been offered).

If corruption is widespread among police, it will be common among guards.

6) Place a confederate inside the prison staff. Since “jailer” pay is low, prisons will hire almost anyone who has no criminal record.

American outlaw gangs--such as the “Bloods”--routinely order members who are “arrest-free” to apply for such jobs.

7) Secure the keys through force or trickery. A guard can be disabled temporarily by throwing pepper or ammonia into his eyes. Ammonia

can be made from old urine.

Basil Banghart escaped from an Illinois prison in 1932 by blowing pepper into a guard's face and seizing the guard's gun.

8) Use deception. A bogus gun can be made out of wood or soap. Shading with a lead pencil can give it a realistic metallic sheen.

John Dillinger reputedly escaped from Crown Point Jail (Indiana) in 1934 using a carved pistol made from a wooden washboard, which he had blackened with boot polish.

9) Stage a ghost escape. Create a diversion (cause an outbreak of diarrhea by using a kitchen job to mix rotten chicken into the inmates' food), and then hide in the prison during the chaos. Try to slip out later when the excitement dies down.

10) Make a rope and climb out.

A rope can be made out of anything. For example, a strand of dental floss holds twelve pounds. Twenty-seven strands--in a triple braid--will hold 324 pounds.

11) Use technology. In 1973, three Irish Republican Army men were rescued from a Dublin prison by helicopter.

This was the IRA plan: 1) an operative chartered a private helicopter and instructed the pilot to land at a certain spot. 2) When the pilot landed, armed and masked men emerged and forced the pilot to fly to the prison, pick up the three prisoners in the exercise yard, and fly them to a secure location. 3) At the secure location, getaway cars were waiting.

12) Use forgery. Willis Newton, one of the Newton gang of bank robbers, used a clever trick to escape from prison. Newton wrote letters to the sheriff who had arrested him and the judge who had sentenced him, and asked them to sign a petition favoring his parole. When they both wrote back to decline, he now had their signatures, and he used them to forge a petition to the governor. The forgery worked.

13) Use contraband smuggled into the prison by a confederate. In 1979, William Morales, a member of the "Armed Forces of National Liberation of Puerto Rico," escaped from the prison ward of Bellevue Hospital in New York, using smuggled wire cutters to cut open a metal widow grate.

14) Use pre-positioned contraband. Before committing any crimes, one French outlaw hid a weapon in the lavatory of a regional courthouse. He was careful to commit all his crimes in the district--so that he would be prosecuted in *that* courthouse. When he was eventually apprehended and put on trial, he was able to access the weapon and escape during his trial.

Finally--whatever method used--know what you will do when you are outside the walls. In the United States, 94 percent of escaped prisoners are recaptured because they plan the escape better than the evasion.

#### PRISON, IMPROVISED WEAPONS AND

Even in prison, clever humans can improvise weapons.

Perhaps the most ingenious improvised weapon ever made was the pipe bomb constructed by William Kogut, a death row inmate at San Quentin. Kogut constructed the bomb from an old-fashioned deck of cardboard playing cards and a length of metal from his cot.

Kogut knew that the spots on the red cards (diamonds and hearts) contained diazo dye, a material which acts with nitrogen. In effect, Kogut made a "poor man's" form of nitroglycerin. The prison was forced to consult chemists to determine how he had accomplished the feat!