Inside Prisons

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Your discussion will be assisted by your knowing some of the background to America’s current prison problems, including information about current crowding, the history of prisons, and the impact of prisoners’ rights litigation.
There are about 600 State and Federal prisons. Despite high construction costs (which run to $100,000 per cell) and high operating costs of $15,000 to $25,000 per prisoner per year, the number of prisoners is steadily increasing. The Federal Government, almost all of the States, and many counties have built prisons in recent years. Although the rates have leveled throughout the United States, including Texas (the nation's largest prison state), there were 567,866 prisoners at June 30, 1981. The series produced by WETACOM through a grant to the Institute of Justice, James K. Stewart, Director. In order to make the Federal prisons and State prisons for serious offenses as much like private businesses as possible, the Federal and State authorities are converting both into highly profitable enterprises, with law enforcement staffs making deductions from the budgets of all States.
created a healthier and more normal atmosphere in prison and has democratized the implementation of punishment. The establishment of first-rate prison law libraries guarantees that prisoners will never again be isolated and shut off from the larger society.

References
Morin, Terri. 1995. Should society be too slow to embrace alternatives to prison? National Institute of Justice, NCJRS. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850 or call 800-851-3420. (301) 251-4500 from Metropolitan Washington, D.C., and Maryland.

Discussion Questions
1. Would it be more inhumane to drag a violent offender and leave him in the community than to send him to prison for several years? Why is imprisonment widely regarded as more humane than corporal punishment?
2. Why does imprisonment play such a role in punishment in the United States?
3. Should prisoners be permitted to receive television, ice cream, conjugal visits?
4. Are there any realistic alternatives to the prison?
5. Is there any figure for the total number of prisoners in America that would be unacceptable?
6. In what respects can the presence of more women and minorities among prison staff be said to “democratize” the prison?