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CLASSIFICATION RECEPTION CENTERS

Edmund R. East

The author of this article will be remembered as the contributor of *Penal Classification* to this *Journal*, XXXV, 2. He is the Classification and Assignment Officer in the U. S. Naval Prison at Portsmouth, N. H. Prior to entering the Navy in 1943, he was Director of Classification in the Pennsylvania Industrial School at Camp Hill. The article is to stimulate general interest in the adoption of such an agency designed for more effective penal administration and treatment planning and, especially, in the author's own state of Pennsylvania where Camp Hill has been designated as such a Center following the recently approved reorganization of the penal and correctional system.—EDITOR.

"Opinions expressed herein are the responsibility of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Service to which he is attached."

Classification, as defined by the Federal Bureau of Prisons and generally used in modern penology, means the systematic study and individual treatment of all offenders committed to penal or correctional institutions. It has two distinct applications predicated, however, upon the same basic principles and objectives and interrelated in operation. There is, first, a classification of institutions within a given correctional system wherein each institution is designed by structure, program and personnel to treat a certain type offender; second, there is the classification, i.e. systematic study and individualized treatment, of offenders within each institution. With respect to the latter application, the term "treatment" is used to include every influence or action that is brought to bear upon an inmate as an individual. It includes his housing, feeding, discipline, work, recreation, and whatever is done for him in the fields of physical health, mental health, education, vocational training, religion and social service.

Generally, in any proposed State inter-institutional classification system, it is not possible to afford an institution for each of the possible segregational groupings recognized and developed by such an extensive agency as the Federal Bureau of Prisons. However, several of these groupings recognized by the Federal Bureau of Prisons and certain progressive states such as Pennsylvania, New York, Illinois, New Jersey and Michigan are of primary importance, and have been made the basis for the creation of separate institutions, while other groupings are secondary and can be met by classification within the institution. State institutions, as a whole, should be organized to meet many more of these primary classification needs. A proposal of this nature necessitates, however, a revision in the organization of existing penal and correctional systems in the majority of states to embrace a state-wide acceptance of, and adherence to, uniform policies for the treatment

of offenders and easy transfer procedures. With facilitation of transfers, there would be provided more appropriate placement by overcoming the inherent difficulties ensuing from separate institutional organizations, overlapping activities and objectives, and the usual lack of central administrative control.

Following this premise, an institution in the state penal and correctional system, where adequate facilities and personnel for complete classification now exist, can be designated as a Classification Reception Center to receive all offenders committed to penal custody by due process of law. Concomitant with the normal operation of a so designated institution, it can readily be understood that the existent administrative and professional staffs would serve a dual function with the additional service to the Classification Center. If no institution in operation was considered feasible for this general purpose, a structure specifically designed to meet this program and advantageously located at or near a focal point of transportation could be erected. The establishment of a central classification center thereby would provide invaluable services to all existing penal and correctional institutions and agencies under the code department having advisory or direct jurisdiction over the custody and treatment of criminal offenders. Irrespective of location, the following suggestions will pertain to the administration of the Classification Center alone.

Administration

The code department having advisory or direct jurisdiction over penal and correctional institutions can be represented through its titular head by the Superintendent of the Classification Reception Center and its Classification Committee which, designated by and under the general control of this departmental administrative head, would make the decisions as to the placement and general training program of all offenders of the laws of the State committed to its custody by due process of law.

This program relates only to the treatment of persons after conviction, and does not have any reference to the court functions of apprehension, prosecution, and adjudication of the offender, nor would it affect the jurisdiction and authority of existing juvenile courts. The purpose of this proposal, in keeping with the principles upon which these courts are predicated, is rehabilitation through institutional training which, by the appropriate segregation of offenders, will serve to protect the public and, at the same time, will reduce the probability of continued delinquency by the early application of adequate treatment program planning.

The Classification Reception Center would affect the institutions included in a state penal and correctional system only

through its diagnostic function, and the resulting recommendations for the treatment of the individual, and would have no relationship to their actual intra-institutional administrative organization. The action of the Center would conform to the general purposes of institutional training, and it would be the responsibility of the Center to transfer to a given institution only those offenders who are considered amenable to the program in operation at that institution. Thus, the admission summary, prepared by the professional staff during the initial quarantine period of each offender at the Center, when supplemented by data determined thereafter, would serve as the medium of interpretation and understanding of individual behavior and become a guide to intelligent treatment by an institutional administrative staff and other law enforcement and social agencies who may have later contact with the offender. The Classification Committee recommendations comprising the program, appended thereto, would govern, directly or indirectly, all the activities of an individual within an institution, serving to clarify the objectives of each professional service in the case. Thereafter, it would be the responsibility of the professional staff at the receiving institution to review the material assembled and the concluding general treatment recommendations and to formulate, within these limits, a program specifically applicable to the new institution.

Personnel of the Committee

The Classification Committee can consist of the Superintendent of the Classification Reception Center, acting on behalf of the administrative head of the code department of state concerned, and a Director of Classification, who will direct and coordinate all activities and functions of the Classification Committee, assisted by the following members:

- Senior Social Worker
- Chief Medical Officer
- Senior Psychologist
- Senior Neuro-Psychiatrist
- Educational Director

The members of the Classification Committee listed herein shall not be considered as limiting the general professional personnel of a Center necessary to place this plan into effective operation; rather, they shall be considered as senior members representing each contributing division of the Center. The Committee shall meet as frequently as is necessary to carry out its functions.

General Classification

The classification program to be placed into effect at a Classification Reception Center should divide itself into three main activities:

1. A comprehensive study of the individual at the time of admission.
2. The coordination of the findings of this study and the planning of a program.
3. Follow-up studies and changes in the program during the period of confinement. This latter activity includes automatic reclassification reported to the Center and conducted by the institution wherein the individual is confined, on dates^o stipulated at the time of admission classification as well as other recommended reclassification consideration necessitated by institutional or observed individual needs.

Procedural Classification

Within this recognized general schematic classification outline, the specific classification system pursued by the professional staff at a Classification Reception Center in the systematic study and treatment programming of each offender would, of course, vary somewhat in different locales, influenced and modified by existing physical structures, available facilities and penal philosophy. However, the basic principles and objectives underlying all modern classification systems are essentially the same. Elucidation of these specific procedural activities or the presentation of a typical, effective specific classification system is not considered necessary in the development of this premise.*

Advantages

The establishment of a Classification Reception Center would provide a more effective and flexible method of handling convicted juvenile and adult offenders than exists presently in the majority of states. Outstanding among the many advantages of this premise are the following:

1. There can be more adequate institutional classification placement of committed offenders to penal or correctional establishments designed in purpose, organization, training, facilities and personnel to cope with the special problem each offender presents.

2. In view of the altogether too frequently demonstrated misplacement of offenders by the Courts, occasioned by the lack of facilities for the assembling of verified data concerning them and a lack of knowledge of the available institutional programs most appropriate to meet their needs, many custodial problems early recognized by professional staffs can be avoided through

*Complete and detailed suggestions in this category, predicated upon a proved effective system instituted by the writer may be found in an article entitled "PENAL CLASSIFICATION" which appears in the July-August (1944) issue of this periodical.

the medium of a Classification Reception Center and the facilitation of transfer. Early segregation of mental cases for appropriate treatment can also be provided thereby.

3. The same facilitation of transfer, promoted by the establishment of a Center, can be of great assistance to an institution in contending with the custodial problems which arise as a result of the mal-placement and mal-adjustment of the offender during the period of confinement, and thereby removing administratively a detriment to the well-ordered operation of an institutional program.

4. There can be an improved and more productive coordination of the sentencing, institutional and parole functions in discharging their general purpose, i.e. the protection of society and the ultimate rehabilitation of the offender, through the resultant ability for constructive, cooperative, long-range program planning.

5. A recognized Center can serve as the main focal point for the reception, utilization, and distribution of material from community agencies concerned with the individual case. Moreover, the data obtained by a Center receiving a normal, uninterrupted, unselected flow of commitments would provide wealthy material for research projects to add further understanding of delinquency and associated problems and to add data for educating the state about its problems.

6. Through the establishment of a Center, there would be a natural conformity on the part of the institutions concerned toward a more uniform practice for the assembling and presentation of material concerning each offender and a consequent standardization of procedure in the use of the material assembled, thereby initiating more consistent institutional standards of dealing with individuals.

7. It is evident that the addition of a Classification Reception Center at an institution where adequate facilities for classification already exist would be far more economical, in initial establishment and subsequent operation, than the erection of a structure specifically designed for this purpose.

8. At a Center, there can be a more extensive concentration of professional staff concerned with the systematic study and treatment programming of each offender; thereby, fewer professional staff members would be required at each of the other receiving institutions presently needed to fulfill this same function.

It is logical to conclude that a possible decrease in a delinquency within a state may result from the reduction of contact between more or less experienced offenders, the increased opportunity for the individual to benefit himself during his period of confinement through his contact with an institutional

personnel able to devote more time to his problem, and his exposure to a highly intensified program designed to meet his particular needs. This should reduce the probability of his further participation in delinquent activities. When such individuals are released in the community, the cumulative influence of their behavior should be less hazardous to society as a result of the training initiated for them at a Classification Reception Center.