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## Media Construction and Level 6 Prisons: The Press and the Supermax Debate

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

MEDIA CONSTRUCTION AND LEVEL 6 PRISONS  
THE PRESS AND THE SUPERMAX DEBATE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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## INTRODUCTION

This study examines the debate over the proposal for a supermaximum prison in Illinois by examining the coverage of the debate in three different presses; the mainstream, small and activist presses. The study has a dual goal. First I want to understand the debate over the Supermax and I want to understand the media's ability to construct a "reality". Since the media is the arena from which most of the public receives its information about social issues, it is very influential. The opponents and the proponents have developed and articulated distinct positions regarding the debate over the proposal for the construction and implementation of a state supermaximum prison, termed the Supermax, in Illinois. Different presses have different stakes associated with this specific issue which have influenced the slant of coverage. This study will examine how different presses slant coverage of the Supermax debate and how this adds to our understanding of the debate.

This study begins by situating the reader in the Supermax debate in order to facilitate a better understanding of the anti and pro positions. The following section will introduce the reader to the role the media has and continues to play in constructing crime as a social problem and how this has influenced the actions of

politicians and criminal justice officials. The discussion will address issues of economics and racism in order to understand more fully the emergence of the level 6 prison and the debate that surrounds it.

### The Media and Crime Construction

Politicians and public officials have identified the 1990s as a time characterized by an increasing crime rate, particularly violent crime. The declaration of such an alarming trend has captured the attention and concern of the public. Public officials are now forced to not only address the issue but offer solutions if they have any expectation of gaining or even maintaining public support.

In addition to the purported increasing crime in communities there is said to be a similar trend inside prisons. Combined with the tensions of overcrowding it is proclaimed that increasingly violent offenders are becoming increasingly violent prisoners. The escalating incidence of prison guards and inmates being injured and killed has caused concern among policy makers, government officials and especially prison officials<sup>1</sup>

Charlette Ryan, the author of *Prime Time Activism* and co-director of the Boston College Media Research and Action Project which assists grassroots organizations with media research and training, claims that "society has become

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<sup>1</sup>See Illinois Task Force on Crime and Corrections Final Report 1993, 83.

increasingly media-driven: the media help set the social and political agenda by deciding what's news and who's news, and politicians often look to the media rather than to the public both as a source of issues and as a source of support" (Ryan 1991, 7). Picking up on the timely issues of public interest, newspapers and TV news programs have paid increasing attention to crime and the growing concern over its course. The media has overwhelmingly focused on incidents of random violence dwelling on isolated and more unusual acts of violence. Little attention is paid to the actual crime statistics or the context out of which crime arises. Some recent examples of this selective emphasis is the tremendous amount of worldwide media attention paid to the O.J. Simpson murder trial and locally with the Palatine murders in Illinois. This emphasis on the more bizarre and horrific crimes constructs the problem so that everyone feels like a potential victim. Everyone is affected and thus everyone will benefit from a solution.

This construction of crime coverage has intensified the public's belief that the situation is out of control. Crime is portrayed as a crisis therefore the public is demanding quick and severe intervention. This circle of influence was captured in the *New York Times* when it was stated that "the rising tide of public alarm--though not of actual reported crime--led to a flurry of tough amendments [to the federal constitution]" (*New York Times* 3/14/94). Steven Shermak, a

criminologist, conducted a content analysis and ethnographic research to demonstrate how the media distorts actual rates of crime (Shermak 1994).

As a result of increased media and public focus, crime has become a major political issue. In his State of the Union address in February 1994 President Clinton warned how, "Violent crime is destroying the fabric of our society." With statements like that, it is no surprise that the President's "Crime Bill" has receives so much media attention. A number of propositions have been introduced in an effort to combat this growing concern over crime, many focusing on the "law and order" end. Included in the Presidents "anti-crime" bill was the request for 100,000 more police officers needed to enforce the increasing number of acts that are deemed criminal and money for more prisons to be built. The need for increased enforcement and space to house those deemed guilty of crime is intensified by the fact that many of those acts already criminalized are now receiving stiffer penalties. A *New York Time* article sums up legislative response to the growing public panic:

Faced with a hawkish Senate bill and a public alarmed about violence, the House this week is to take up crime legislation that includes a number of provisions tougher than lawmakers were considering when they left the issue last fall. The House is now set to begin considering numerous measures to provide billions of dollars for new prisons and more police but also for preventive efforts like neighborhood youth programs. (*New York Times* 3/15/94)

One controversial law recently endorsed by President



Clinton is the "three strikes and you're out" law where three time convicted felons are locked away for life with no chance of parole. Another bill would add 64 misdeeds committed on Federal property or against Federal employees to those that would be punishable by death. (*New York Times* 3/14/94). Another gives states 3 million dollars to build more prisons. And yet another allows courts to treat as adults 13 year old who commit certain violent crimes. All the added and increased penalties exacerbate the already out of control problem of overcrowding by creating more prisoners who are to serve longer sentences. National Public Radio aired a show that illuminated the paradox in this trend in law enforcement ("Morning Addition" on National Public Radio WBEZ Chicago 7 March 1994). Because of the overcrowding problem, due in part to the recent surge in stiffer sentences and the increase in punishable offenses, correctional authorities are forced to release inmates early, countering the effect of the "tougher on crime" legislation. Of equal interest is the public's perception of this trend. The increased number of arrests and convictions only serve to increase the number of crimes that are included in crime statistics which then appears as an increasing crime rate. The paradoxical result is an infinite spiral of tougher sentences resulting in more documented and punishable crime which in turn leads to the belief in the need for tougher sentences.

### A Shift in Correctional Policy

Correctional policy has been guided by changing philosophies regarding the offender population. The 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s were characterized by an emphasis on rehabilitation. In the 1970s this perspective received extreme backlash and was consequently debunked. The offender was no longer considered rehabilitatable. Since reforming the offender was not feasible, punishing the offender became a focus. This philosophy was accepted in part because it satisfies the public's desire for retribution, certainly a key element in the overwhelming support of the current "tough on crime" philosophy.

This paradigm shift in correctional philosophy resulted in a corresponding change in correctional policy. The focus on rehabilitation corresponded to policies aimed at helping the offender. While the shift towards a retributive philosophy resulted in a change to policies aimed at punishing the offender and assisting the victim. Beginning with Ronald Reagan and continuing through the long line of Republican rule in the White House and now with the Clinton Presidency the advancement of a "get tough on crime" mentality has been prominent. The answer to the increasing crime problems and the increasing number of crime victims has become tougher sanctions for the offender. The crime problem has been constructed as emanating from the individual criminal. Therefore the solution is simple. The

individual is targeted without any attention paid to the larger institutional problems. The fundamental social, political, and economic structures in society are left unchallenged. This "get tough" philosophy has gained much public favor as is seen in the overwhelming support for more prisons and tougher prison sentences.

Not all groups are represented equally in the current "war on crime". The media has focused much attention on minority populations as the perpetrators of the increasing crime. The association of drugs to gangs is quite prevalent. Since gangs are associated with minority communities the increasing crime problem is accepted as emanating from drug and gang infested minority communities. In response a series of anti-drug legislation has been passed which mandates tougher sentences for drug related offenses. This has resulted in a large percentage of those incarcerated having been convicted of drug related charges. In Illinois nearly half of those incarcerated are done so for drug offenses. The media has played a large part in constructing the crime problem as an inner city problem. It is most often non-white individuals that are seen in the media as the criminal offenders. This has caused considerable public fear of minority communities resulting in ostracized and neglected segments of the population. Consequently the fact that the majority of those incarcerated are people of color is accepted as reality

without question.

### The Economy of Prisons

Along with addressing concerns over public safety, one can not rule out economic factors as contributing to the current "prison mania". Prisons are often considered a welcome site to a community because of the belief in their economic benefits, mainly through employment opportunities. However, not all investigation supports such optimistic results (See Smykla et al, 1984) some even claim this allegation is down right deceptive. (see CEML). Nevertheless, community officials still support the belief that prisons generate economic growth. Since community members often stand behind what their elected officials espouse there is also much community support behind this notion. The generation of jobs and revenue is top priority of any community. Philosophical reflection on imprisonment is removed from the discussion. The presumed benefits far outweigh the communities skepticism at having a correctional institution in their neighborhood. The media has played its role in perpetrating this belief in the association between economic benefits and prison construction. In a Chicago Tribune article Hardy Rauch of the American Correctional Association comments on the flood of enthusiasm from 31 communities to house the new Supermax prison in Illinois, "It has finally dawned on the city fathers that prisons bring a lot of jobs" (*Chicago Tribune* May 24, 1994).

## Emergence of the Level 6 Prison

All the above factors have contributed to the development and support of level 6 prisons, with the media as a main disseminator of information regarding the need for more prisons. Up until recently the Bureau of Prisons employed a scale of security measures ranging from level 2, minimum security prisons, to level 5, maximum security prisons. In 1983, when the high end of this security level scale was no longer considered sufficient by prison officials a level 6 was created and assigned to the United States Penitentiary (USP) Marion in Illinois. Prison officials introduced their solution to the problem of an increasingly violent prison system as this new level 6 prison. The Bureau of Prisons established Marion as the first level 6 prison designed for the "worst of the worst" prisoners. This higher security prison was to be run under the tightest of security; inmates are to be allowed few privileges and minimal human contact. Prison officials promote the harsh conditions of the strict security measures of these prisons as an effective deterrent.

Level 6 prisons are not only promoted as an effective deterrent the adoption of the level 6 prisons is promoted as a cost efficient instrument. The housing of the "worst" prisoners in one facility is claimed to allow the rest of the system to run at a lower security level. The lower the security level of an institution the less it costs to

operate. Since only one level 6 prison is needed in a state where the "worst" prisoners are housed the rest of the prison system could run at lower levels. This would allow managing of the prisoner population the most cost efficiently.

### What is a Level 6 Prison?<sup>2</sup>

Although individual level 6 prisons differ they all have certain common characteristics. All inmates remain in their cells 23 out of 24 hours a day. This means they eat, sleep, and defecate in their cells. There are no educational programs, no vocational programs, and recreation is limited to one hour a day, a few times a week. No contact is allowed between prisoners and no contact visits are allowed, even from family or attorneys. Although other conditions may vary between institutions, one definite characteristic of all level 6 prisons is they are the most restrictive prisons in the United States prison system.

While all prisons have at least one isolation cell, often referred to as "the hole", level 6 facilities

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<sup>2</sup>The Federal classification system has changed. There are only 4 ratings now; minimum, maximum and administrative segregation. The state classification is based on minimum, medium and maximum. These terms are very fluid. No concrete definition exists which is used to guide classifications. Even though security ratings have changed I will continue to refer to these prisons when referring to them in general as level 6 prisons. However when speaking of specific ones I will use the specific names. For example the Illinois level 6 prison will be referred to as the Supermax.

designate the entire prison or an entire unit within a prison to this restrictive regime. Placement in a level 6 prison is an administrative decision made by the DOC. Focus is on the individual prisoner defined as a "problem" prisoner who poses a threat to the running of the institution. Therefore he or she must be removed from the general population and housed separately in a higher security facility. In contrast placement in segregation or the "hole" is a disciplinary measure. In this case the prisoner is being punished for exhibiting some form of inappropriate behavior. While level 6 placement is indefinite, placement in segregation has a time limit whereupon the prisoner must be returned to the general population.

Most prisons have "lockdowns" that last anywhere from several days to several weeks, yet level 6 facilities remain in this state permanently. Lockdown refers to a security measure where prisoners are locked in closed cells for 23 to 24 hours a day. In most prisons this occurs when a violent event has occurred or officials believe there is the threat of one. In 1972 one unit of Marion was made a control unit, or put on permanent lockdown status following a violent incident.<sup>3</sup> In 1983 the whole prison was locked down. Marion was the first prison to operate under this high

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<sup>3</sup>Some say the movement towards a permanent level 6 security level was a deliberate and carefully staged move by the BOP. See CEML literature.

security level and all subsequent level 6 facilities are modeled after it. Marion is the only federal level 6 prison in the United States to date. However, a new federal level 6 prison in Florence, Colorado has been in operation since the beginning of 1995. Florence, Colorado. Although it was purported to be the new and improved "high-tech" replacement for Marion there is no indication that Marion will close any time soon (Thompson 1993). Many states have followed this Marion model and there are now 36 state run level 6 prisons or units within prisons.<sup>4</sup>

The term "Marionization" is increasingly being used to describe the current trend in the prison system (See Russ Immarigeon 1992 and Bonnie Kerness 1992). David Ward, a professor of sociology and criminal-justice studies at the University of Minnesota claims level 6 prisons are state power exercised to the highest degree (Ward 1992). Because level 6 prisons are the most restrictive they are often referred to as last resort or "end of the line" prisons.

#### The Illinois Solution

In February 1992, Governor Edgar of Illinois appointed

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<sup>4</sup>The exact number of control units is unknown as is there location, who is in them, and the actual rate of their proliferation. Members of CEML are calling for the formation of an anti-control unit in response to the lack of comprehensive tracking. The only known way to acquire information is by contacting each state government or Department of Corrections. The number 36 is a number used by CEML based on reports made by Human Rights Watch. See Human Rights Watch 1991.



In February 1992, Governor Edgar of Illinois appointed the Illinois Task Force on Crime and Corrections to develop recommendations to ease the problem of overcrowding and increasing violence in Illinois prisons. Among the recommendations was the building of a state level 6 prison in Illinois. The task force justified their support of a new level 6 prison because of the increasing prison violence which has placed prison guards in increasingly dangerous situations. The media reinforced this idea by including a number of articles detailing violent prison incidents. The Task Force claims "a maximum-security correctional officer's odds of being assaulted by an inmate during the course of a year are one in three -- one in eight for being assaulted with a weapon" (The Illinois Task Force on Crime and Corrections 1993, 83). They further cite statistics for disciplinary infractions and claim that over a 365 day period between July 1991 and June 1992 "four hundred ninety-three (493) institutional days were spent on lockdown throughout the prison system (449 of them in maximum-security institutions)--more than twice the number of four years earlier" (Illinois Task Force on Crime and Correction 1993, 84). A report in the *Southtown Economist*<sup>5</sup> substantiates this trend by citing further alarming

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<sup>5</sup>The paper's name has seen been changed to the *Daily Southtown*, however, I will continue to refer to the paper as the *Southtown Economist* since at the time of the debate that was the name used.

members by inmates, including 248 with weapons, during the 1992 fiscal year that ended in June. A total of 7,869 disciplinary reports were written" (*Southtown Economist* 3/31/93).

The Task Force attributes the increase in violence to the following factors: the prevalence of street gangs, the need to double-cell most inmates, the lack of space available in segregation units and the brevity of segregation stays. Two of these four explanations speak to the deficiency of segregation units. Level 6 prisons are promoted as addressing these problems by being prisons or units within prisons composed completely of segregation units.

Following this discussion of some of the factors involved in the emergence of the level 6 prison the reader is introduced to details of Supermax debate.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

My interest in level 6 prisons developed when I became affiliated with The Committee to End the Marion Lockdown (CEML) in May of 1992. At this time I was also a graduate student at Loyola University in the department of Sociology. My interest was in the prison system and in finding ways to actively address problems relating to incarceration. My academic training had not exposed me to literature that addressed these criminological issues from a critical perspective. I therefore felt the need to incorporate what I was encountering in the activist domain into the academic domain.

I discovered the existence of CEML in the summer of 1992 while at an outdoor concert. Some members of CEML were passing out flyers for their upcoming program in recognition of the anniversary of the Attica rebellion. I could not attend the program but I made personal contact with one of the members because I was interested in joining their "anti-level 6 prison" demonstration which was also advertised on the Attica flyer. Despite the fact that I was also unable to attend the demonstration I became interested in their position on prison issues and began to attend their bi-

monthly meetings.

My close connection and interest in the area of level 6 prisons could be interpreted by some as methodologically unsound because the bias involved in the researchers close relationship to the research question invalidates any claims. The research is not objective as objective is not possible. Although the objective observer, or value-free perspective, has largely been debunked and replaced by the acknowledged situated observer I was nevertheless concerned about legitimating my dual role in the project as researcher and as opponent. In overcoming this dilemma Gitlin's work *The Whole World is Watching* was especially useful (Gitlin 1980). In it Gitlin explores the complex relations between the New Left, represented by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and the mass media. Gitlin was himself an active member in the SDS which gave him a special relationship to his study. I am situated in a similar position due to my affiliation with CEML. The way in which Gitlin validates his position as the situated researcher and the way in which he pursues his research with this up front alleviated some of my concerns. He claims that affiliation with one side of a debate should not impede one from conducting research on an issue of concern and asserts how his association with the SDS in the mid-sixties was the catalyst that primed him "to ask questions about the movement-media relation, about the nature of media coverage,

and about its consequences for the movement" (Gitlin 1980, 294).

Gitlin does not see his situated position as a problem instead he claims his connection to the issue gave him a unique advantage. It was only through his experience as a member of the SDS that he was able to include information that had not been documented. Likewise my association with CEML exposed me to new issues and new perspectives which provided me with the initial familiarity and further motivation to pursue this research. Gitlin is also self-reflexive about his methodology and this type of retrospective data collecting often based on memory. Gitlin concludes "The only alternative to retrospective accounts is to write nothing, that is, to rely on the version written at the time" (Gitlin 1980, 295). This will only reinforce the construction of events promoted at the time, ignoring the possibility of other valid stories. Even though I rarely infuse data based on memory in this research an occasional comment will surface that is based on my memory of my time in CEML.

#### Making a Data and Site Decision

In order to investigate issues about level 6 prisons a decision regarding where to look and what to look at was necessary. Instead of solely using the perspectives of the players involved in the debate as data gathered through interviews or ethnographic study a decision was made to

examine the public debate through. In his book detailing aspects of the fluoridation debate Brian Martin illustrates how valuable and otherwise unattainable information can be gained from examining the sites of contestation, or the debates around issues (Martin, 1991). Applying Martin's position, this analysis will investigate the debate over the Illinois Supermax in order to uncover relevant aspects and implications of the slant in newspaper coverage concerning the Supermax debate in Illinois.

The next decision to be made was on a research site, where to look in order to gain valuable information on the Supermax debate. Given my exposure to some of the media coverage of the debate from CEML I decided to do an analysis of the written media (newspapers) as the source of data. What is made public is intentional in that it constructs an issue in a particular way for a particular reason. Coverage is slanted to serve different interests. The relevance and importance of this site of investigation can not be overstated. Through analysis of the debate in the press a dialogue will be observable which will help illuminate the particular viewpoint of the two sides in the debate. Examining the Supermax debate through the press will also reveal aspects about the press. The particular slant of each article can be attributed to a variety of factors related to the different press.

I have been unable to find any research that has

analyzed prisons using the public debate as it is presented in the media. Therefore the findings of this research will offer new insights and enlighten previous findings by suggesting new ways to think about level 6 prisons gained in a new context. The issues this research examines in order to expose some of the overlooked aspects of level 6 prisons are the press' representation of the opposing and supporting sides in the debate and their allies. The press is examined and suggestions are made as to what factors contribute to the slanting of coverage. These include the organizational structure of journalism, advertisers, and target audience. The analysis concludes by offering some alternative ways to think about level 6 incarceration.

#### How To Study

Gitlin's content analysis approach has guided the methodology of this research. His work involved an analysis of the New Left represented by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), an activist group in the 1960s. Gitlin's decision to use particular media was based in part on accessibility and part on suitability. One network (CBS) and one newspaper (*The New York Times*) were used in his analysis. CBS was chosen because it offered access to archived material that other networks would not. *The New York Times* was chosen not only because of its accessibility but also because of its reputation, "even the SDS took it seriously" (Gitlin 1980, 294). Although some may feel

shaping a research project around the availability of data is misleading, the opposite could also be argued. Lack of needed data could prove a serious obstacle which could destroy the validity of a research project. Securing the available data and then deciding on a research strategy will guard against the need to obliterate completed work.

As discussed in chapter II, my original research question focused on classification and placement in level 6 prisons. The question I wanted to pursue was, who gets sentenced to Level 6 prisons and why? However due to the inability to access the required information from the criminal justice system I decided to address the available information and restructure my research question. My membership in CEML enabled me to acquire a variety of activist literature as well as the press coverage on level 6 prisons. CEML members were extremely methodical in their collecting of articles written on level 6 prisons. At each meeting any articles found by any members was Xeroxed and distributed to the group. I began my collection of articles at this time not realizing this research would later ensue.

This research employs a qualitative as well as quantitative approach to content analysis because it is felt that the mere numbers, although important will not get at the complexity of the issue. An analysis of actual news documents focusing on terminology and structure as well as the larger political context of the debate is necessary in



order to capture a wider understanding. In his analysis, Gitlin advocates the use of qualitative content analysis, although not to the total exclusion of quantitative analysis. He "wanted to 'tease out' those determining but hidden assumptions which in their unique ordering remain opaque to quantitative content analysis" (Gitlin 1980, 300). He promotes qualitative analysis as being more flexible which "aspires to a level of complexity that remains true to the actual complexity and contradictories of media artifacts" (Gitlin 1980, 303). He avoids counting the instances of recurrent themes partly because of the unavailability of some network pieces and more importantly because this type of quantitative analysis would lose much of the subtlety that is of interest. Although much of my methodology is based on Gitlin's, I do not exclude counting instances. The ability to attribute level of importance the Supermax debate received in each press required a counting of the printed articles in each press. Part of determining slant of an article was based on how much space was given to each side. This involved counting paragraphs. The more qualitative description involved an analysis of positioning and content. Although numbers are important in certain circumstances the mere counting of occurrences would not reveal how those occurrences are constructed to tell a particular story.

When I began this research I had not clearly defined the parameters of the data I wished to collect. The theoretical subtitles had not yet been cultivated or refined enough to know where to draw specific boundaries. The research began as an analysis of any and all level 6 prisons that had been covered by the press. Any article on any level 6 prison in the United States from any newspaper was to be accepted into the sample. I began my data collection by conducting a library search of the periodical index, Indy, at the Loyola University library. I found articles from mainstream papers, The Chicago Tribune, The Chicago Sun-Times, The New York Times and The Washington Post.

As the content analysis proceeded, it became obvious that there was more than one debate over level 6 prisons. There was a debate around the underlying philosophical issues of level 6 prisons and a debate around specific level 6 prisons like Marion and Pelican Bay. I had to make a decision whether to research one specific level 6 prison or to look at many prisons with a particular focus.

At this time there was a local debate developing in Illinois revolving around the proposal for a state level 6 prison. Because I was located in Illinois and affiliated with a Chicago based activist group a decision was made to only cover the Illinois debate over the proposal for a state level 6 prison. This geographical decision reduced the universe significantly enabling a more specific question to

emerge.

### Choosing a Time Period

Once the site and focus were established it became necessary to define the distinct parameters regarding the time period of the debate to be researched in order to set boundaries for article inclusion. The Supermax debate centers around the proposal introduced by The Task Force on Crime and Corrections. The period of time after the introduction of the recommendation for the level 6 prison and before Governor Edgar's signing of the bill into law represents the heart of the debate. It is the time when both sides are trying to gain support since no decision has been made. It also represents the time when the issue was made the most public. Gitlin also chooses a time period based on media presence. His research of the SDS focused on one year, 1965, because this was the year the New Left went on the media agenda. I extend my coverage from the initial mention of a Supermax in Illinois to the actual signing into law. The subsequent debate over the sites of the prison or over construction and employment will not be covered.

The first mention of the possibility of a level 6 prison in Illinois in the media was on April 1, 1991. Another article appeared in 1992. These two articles are isolated instances in that they occur earlier than the majority of the articles. The majority of the articles appear after the forming of the Task Force in February 1993

and before the signing of the legislation which occurred on August 11, 1993. Two of the small press articles appeared after the August 12 date. The issues they cover relate to the debate over the building of the prison itself not the subsequent concerns regarding construction and employment. It is felt that inclusion is valid and in this case should be based on date as well as content.

### Choosing the Newspapers

Once a time period was narrowed down the range of press to include was decided. I had decided fairly early on to compare three different types of newspapers; the mainstream press, the small press and the activist press. I defined the mainstream press as those papers with circulation's in the 100,000's ( the distribution of the *Chicago Tribune* is 697,000 and the *Chicago Sun-Times* as 523,000)<sup>6</sup> and the small press as those papers with circulation in the 10,000's (the distribution of the *Chicago Defender* is 24,000 and the *All Chicago City News* is 20,000).<sup>7</sup> The activist press is defined as the literature produced by one activist group, CEML, that is intended for public distribution. The circulation can only be estimated by looking at the number of flyers produced for distribution. According to Erica

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<sup>6</sup>Circulation data was obtained from Editors and Publishers through a telephone conversation on May 20, 1993.

<sup>7</sup>Circulation data obtained from Hank Dezutter of Community Media Workshop during a telephone conversation in May of 1993.

Thompson, a CEML member, CEML distributed approximately 5000 flyers each time outreach was done. This number includes the mailing list mailing of approximately 1800 as well as those flyers that were hand distributed.

Since I was covering only the Illinois level 6 prison most of the coverage would be in Chicago based papers. I then decided the papers I would include in my sample would only be Illinois based papers. This decision left two mainstream papers in my sample, *The Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and many small press papers.

The most difficulty was encountered in locating small press articles. I knew there had been articles written on the Illinois debate in a number of small press (I had already collected some from CEML). However I knew my sample was not exhaustive. Therefore I attempted to find a comprehensive listing of small press in Illinois. The indexes I could find were not of much help. They were often too comprehensive and not organized in a convenient manner. For example the *International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Press* was overwhelming in the number of small press it included. This directory includes thousands of entries listed alphabetically, not by location. In order to find those press from the Chicago area I would have to look through all the listings. The scope of this research does not provide the amount of time and energy this would entail. Other indexes presented the same problem.

Because of the overwhelming number of small press in Illinois I made a decision to limit the sample of small press to dailies out of Chicago. There are many small press (mostly weeklies) from various Illinois suburbs. Pursuing those in the more distant suburbs would be time consuming, costly and most likely futile, since they often only cover local issues.

I was then referred to Hank Dezutter from the Community Media Workshop, whose organization compiles a directory of Chicago press. Since there are very few small Chicago press Mr. Dezutter read them to me over the phone. These included *The Daily Herald* (distribution 120,000) out of Arlington Heights, the *All Chicago City News* (distribution 20,000) out of Chicago, *The Reader* (distribution 120,000) out of Chicago, *The Southtown Economist* (distribution 53,000) out of Oak Lawn, and the *Chicago Defender* (distribution 24,000) out of Chicago. Both *The Reader* and the *Daily Herald* were eliminated because their distribution exceeds 100,000.

I then completed a search of "First Search", an on-line index which includes 33 newspapers from different states. Any paper that included articles on the Illinois debate was indexed. However, First Search only includes the bigger press in Chicago. The only smaller Chicago press it indexes is the *Chicago Defender*. I found a few articles in the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun-Times* and four from the *Chicago Defender*.

A representative from Loyola University library performed a search in Datatimes, a databased computer index of periodicals. All Illinois papers large and small were searched using specific key words (i.e., prison, Supermax, control unit). This resulted in a few more mainstream articles from the *Chicago Tribune*.

#### Further Indexing and Data Collection

The next step in data collection involved calling the small press whose had articles already included in the sample to determine if anymore were written. I called The *Chicago Defender*, The *Daily Southtown*, and *All Chicago City News*. My phone calls revealed the following:

Back issues of the *Chicago Defender* are stored but not indexed. Any searching of the back issues would have to be performed by hand. I already had four *Chicago Defender* articles. Because of this indexing problem further searching was not feasible and only the four articles already in the sample were included.

Through my conversation with office personnel I discovered that the *Southtown Economist* office does not store back issues. They have them sent to the Oak Lawn library. I called the library and was told they do have back issues on micro film, but it is difficult to index them. They have them indexed by subject. However the index is created through a process of selective indexing. This means only those subjects that have an impact on the local

area, Oak Lawn, and the surrounding communities are indexed. According to the reference librarian the proposal for a level 6 prison in Illinois would not be a subject that would be indexed. It is not a subject of local interest. The two CEML obtained articles conclude my sample.

All Chicago City News was called four times. Three times the editors were not in. The fourth time they were in but were too busy working on the paper to talk to me. I was told by the person who had answered the phone that no follow up had been done. The articles I had obtained from CEML were the only ones written.

At this point a methodological decision was made in order to ease the onerous task of searching all other small press. If the back publications could not be searched through an index the paper would not be pursued. Hand searching would entail looking through 210 issues of each daily paper (from February 1993 to August 1993, the parameters of the Illinois debate). For the scope of this research project, this is untenable.

A further decision was made utilizing area codes. Only those papers with telephone numbers in the 312 or the 708 area codes were considered and searched. Coverage was restricted to those areas that are geographically adjacent to Chicago. Since the 312 area code designates Chicago and the 708 area code is the immediate surrounding suburbs, this represents suitable parameters. Through this search four



new papers were discovered requiring additional telephone pursuits which resulted in the following information:

*The Times Newspaper* out of Lansing, Illinois (circulation 12,000). They included an Associated Press (AP) article on the Supermax in Illinois. They do have there back issues indexed by subject. However, only original articles are indexed. The printed article would have to be located through Springfield. Since Springfield is out of the 312/708 area code parameters this paper was dropped from the sample.

*The Kane County Chronicle* is published out of Geneva, Illinois (circulation 20,000). They also only include AP articles which can not be indexed. This paper was also dropped.

*The New Sun* out of Waukegan, Illinois (circulation 39,000). Three articles were located through a data base search. They were printed out and sent. Three of these articles were used. One was dropped because it did not fall within the time parameters of the debate.

*The Elgin Daily Courier News* is published out of Elgin, Illinois (circulation 35,316). I was told that if any article was included on the Supermax it would have been an AP article. They do not archive AP articles. The paper was also dropped from the sample.

The final attempt at finding small press articles was done through a search in *Bacon's Newspaper Directory*:

*Directory of Daily and Weekly Newspapers, News Services, and Syndicates.* Bacon's Newspaper Directory lists newspapers by distribution; dailies and weeklies and by special interest groups. It includes over 50 papers in Illinois. After those not in the 312 or 708 area code were eliminated no new small press were found.

### Establishing a Coding System

Noam Chomsky expresses how the context of a news story is important in terms of the framework of the analysis and the related facts that accompany and give it meaning (Chomsky 1988, xiv). He emphasizes the importance of examining the placement, tone, fullness of treatment, and context (Chomsky 1988, 33). I began forming my coding system by liberally applying Chomsky's four analytical categories to help guide my analysis. I defined placement as the positioning or structure of the article. The placement of the sides in the debate will reveal much about the slant on the issue. For example the side that is granted the first and the last word is often constructed as more legitimate. The tone of the article was assessed by looking at the interpretive aspects of the journalistic coverage. What statements does the journalist include that can be associated with one side in the debate? What is the overall slant of the article, pro or anti? Fullness of treatment was assessed by looking at how much space (in paragraphs) is granted to the two sides in the debate.

Finally the context of the article can be looked at from a number of different angles; for example, where the article is in the context of the whole publication or how the issue is put into a larger context within the text. I had decided to look at the later, what is the larger context surrounding the need for level 6 prisons.

After a decision was made regarding what aspects of the article to analyze I developed a coding sheet. Each article was coded on six areas in order to determine how positioning, tone, and fullness of treatment were utilized in coverage. First, all opponents and proponents included in each article were listed to determine if the press use the same representatives from the sides in the debate. Second, the total number of paragraphs were counted in each articles. Third, the number of paragraphs devoted to the opposition and the number devoted to the proponents were counted and recorded. Fifth, the location of the opposition and the advocates within the article was recorded focusing on first and last voice. Sixth it was indicated whether the article was pro or anti in slant. This was determined by amount of space given to each side, placement within the article, and the overall content of the coverage. Lastly, the context of the debate was also indicated. That is, what other issues are discussed in connection to Supermax debate. Once each of the articles was coding on these six variables the coding sheet was attached to the front of each article.

The articles were compared on the six areas by physically grouping them according to each area.

It quickly became apparent that an analysis of all the variables would be too time consuming. Because an analysis of the context of the debate was the most involved and required a more comprehensive analytical approach it was eliminated. An analysis of the players and the sides and their location within the coverage all relate to each other and are necessary for the analysis of the sides in the debate these categories remained. For example the amount of space dedicated to the opponents is virtually useless without the positioning of the sides. And the number of proponents included is also not very useful information without also knowing how much space was granted to them and where.

After analyzing all three press I compared them on two general areas:

- 1) Opponents and proponents--Does each press use the same proponents and opponents. If there are different players represented what does this indicate about the press' construction of the debate. How does the number of opponents and proponents differ among the three press.
- 2) Amount of coverage--Does each press give equal space to the opponents and the proponents. Which press favors which side and why would this be the case?

Do different press position the sides in the debate

differently and what does this indicate about their construction of the debate? Which side is represented as more legitimate in each press, through use of delegitimizing statements and rebuttals?

After assessment of the somewhat collapsed categories the slant of each article was determined. In order to determine this I looked at amount of space each side was granted and how the article was structured. I also looked at the content of the statements. Once the slant was determined a discussion ensued that detailed the relationship between what side the different press supports and the larger context of media production *as well as the larger political context*. I then discussed the possible reason why each press supports a particular side in the level 6 debate and what this reveals about the press. My discussion concluded with a call for action where everyone is a participant in the making and receiving of information.

## CHAPTER III

### A NEW LOOK AT LEVEL 6 PRISONS

To uncover some of the neglected issues on level 6 prisons this research approaches the topic of level 6 prisons from a new angle and in a different context. Prior literature has come almost solely from a criminal Justice perspective. Most often data is either gained directly from the prison environment or from theoretical literature which is almost exclusively criminological. The issues that are most often addressed are related to criminal justice goals such as effects on crime, economic benefits, or philosophical and theoretical notions of punishment such as deterrence, retribution and incapacitation. These arguments are premised on the acceptance of the fundamental definition and purpose of a level 6 prison. Neglected is any debate regarding the fundamental philosophical notions of this type of prison. This research begins to uncover the silenced stories regarding level 6 incarceration and questions why those stories have been silenced while others have been accepted without critical analysis.

#### A Wall of Silence

Despite the high profile of crime in the media issues

surrounding prisons are not made very public. What goes on behind the gray stone or steel doors is not easily accessible or readily available to the public. The media is not flooded with coverage on prison life. Because of the private nature of this area, investigating and researching the highest security prisons in the United States through primary and secondary documents is difficult. Not only is little first hand information accessible but little is written on them in general. The question this research was initially directed towards was what type of inmates are sent to level 6 prisons and why. Pursuing this question would have entailed an analysis of the diagnostic tool for placement in level 6 prisons as well as the relevant data on individual prisoners. However, my initial attempts at accessing this information were met with obstacles. I was unable to gain any tangible data from the Bureau of Prisons (BOP), the Department of Corrections (DOC), or those working in the field of corrections, including The Bureau of Justice Statistics. Since the sentencing or placement information was not available from the appropriate bodies, the available information was insufficient to pursue my initial research question.

The unavailability of criminal justice information is often claimed to be for security reasons and protection of prisoners' rights. The "high security" status of level 6 prisons further enables a low public profile to exist.

Information that is held under tight security and not readily disseminated to the public is never questioned. An impenetrable wall, not unlike the ones that physically surround prisons, has been erected around level 6 prisons that maintains information as private, not public. Private information remains unchallenged. The inability to access information is in itself valuable information. A closer analysis of the reasons why an obstacle was erected will provide valuable insights. What is at stake in making this information public? This research will offer some speculations and questions to ask regarding the stakes in the Supermax debate.

Not only is there little, if any, public information available from the Criminal Justice System, there is also very little academic literature available on level 6 institutions. The only known study is being conducted by David Ward a professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice studies at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Ward told me in a telephone conversation that he is in the process of a 12 year longitudinal study on those inmates who served time at Alcatraz and then at Marion and does not know of any other research being conducted on level 6 prisons in the United States (Ward 1992). In addition there is no complete book on level 6 institutions. The currently available literature is in anthologies that include some discussion of level 6



prisons (almost always about Marion).<sup>8</sup> Some of the literature on maximum security institutions and imprisonment in general addresses issues that are relevant to level 6 prisons (long-term confinement, isolation, psychological issues). Nevertheless there is a serious gap in the academic literature regarding level 6 prisons.

To address the range of issues inherent in Illinois' prison crowding crisis, Governor Edgar created the Illinois Task Force on Crime and Corrections in February 1992. A Bill was introduced March 10, 1993, when the Task force on Crime and Correction issued its final report documenting recommendations for the Illinois prison system, one being the building of a Supermax prison in Illinois with a capacity of 500 intended to hold the "most violent" prisoners. Governor Edgar signed the bill [Public act # 88-0311] on August 11, 1993 which was effective immediately. (Information from The John Howard Association 1993)

### Illinois: The State Debate

In 1993 the level 6 prison debate in Illinois surfaced on the state level with the proposal for a new state level 6 prison termed the Supermax. In mid-1993 Governor Edgar passed a bill to construct a state Supermax prison in Illinois. Armed with a new campaign the proponents and opponents engaged in a more focused debate. In addition to the philosophical debate engaged in by the opponents and proponents of level 6 prisons the debate also focused on the legal decision making process. When the proposal was signed by Governor Edgar various Illinois counties engaged in a

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<sup>8</sup>See Bottoms and Light 1987 and Ward and Schoen 1981.

fight to win the site of the new prison with the hopes of improving their economy. The media was now supplied with a set of timely issues and related concerns. At this time the state of Illinois was faced with a massive budget deficit and Chicago public schools were unable to open because of an unbalanced budget while 60 million dollars was being allocated to a new level 6 prison. During the time following the development of the proposal and the signing of the bill the debate began to be covered more attentively by the media which enabled the public insight into the debate around level 6 prisons in Illinois.

Even though the opposition was significantly under-represented, their slightest mention recognized an opposition and hence acknowledged the debate. Between the time the proposal was introduced and the bill was signed into law a debate began to take shape in the media coverage of the Supermax issue.

#### About the Debate

Although all debates have many angles that represent a spectrum of perspectives this analysis of the debate around level 6 prisons will be limited to the Illinois debate over the proposal for a state Supermax prison. Although binary distinctions are theoretical constructs the Illinois debate is further simplified by grouping the players into two sides, the advocates of level 6 prisons and those opposed to them, or the pro and anti sides. Although this

classification is itself a construction of reality it is necessary for the analysis. In order to expose the debate conflicting sides must be illuminated. Without this somewhat simplified distinction analysis would be unruly, if not impossible. This framework then allows a comparison of the constructions of the debate to be made between the mainstream press, smaller press, and activist press which will reveal the different ways in which each group (the players and the press) view level 6 prisons and how they interpret the proposal for one in Illinois.

### Who is Debating

#### The Advocates

The pro side, most strongly represented by the persons in the Criminal Justice System, or in the Department of Corrections (DOC), claims it is necessary to designate a prison to the level 6 high security level in order to house the "worst of the worst" prisoners. Prisoners from other prisons who have engaged in violent behavior or who have attempted escape and those that are claimed to pose a threat to the running of the prison, are sent to a level 6 facility. The law requires that no prisoner be sent directly from court to a level 6 prison. The prisoners must demonstrate threatening behavior while incarcerated elsewhere. The alleged outcome as offered by the advocates is that the level 6 prison is run under the tightest of security measures increasing the safety for guards and

inmates, while also enabling the rest of the prison system to remain "looser" and more managed.

The Criminal Justice system is the most vocal proponent in the level 6 prison debate. In Illinois the voice of the Criminal Justice System was made the most public during the 1993 campaign for the proposed level 6 prison. Governor Edgar had appointed a Task Force on Crime and Corrections to assess the present status of Illinois prisons and make recommendations regarding overcrowding and increasing violence. Most individuals on the Task force were connected to the Criminal Justice System in some way. Among the representatives on the Task Force were state prosecutors, state senators and representatives, criminal court judges, a representative from the Prisoner Review Board, as well as Howard Peters, the Director of the Illinois Department of Corrections. Although a loyal opposition emerged, the majority of the Task Force members supported the construction of a state level 6 prison in Illinois. This legislative process was a main target of the opposition who stood in at every stage. Their strategy involved written responses as well as physical presence. Because of the public presence of opposition a notable debate emerged around the Task force's recommendations and was subsequently covered by the media.

Political officials are also represented as advocates of the Illinois Supermax. Governor Edgar, in his capacity

as head of state, is an important player in the debate and a necessary supporter of the proposal if it is to become law. After deliberation over financial concerns the Governor signed the bill on August 11, 1993 casting his role as proponent. The Illinois Senate and House and the General Assembly voted and also passed the bill inscribing the Illinois legislative branch, as a whole, in favor of the Supermax.

Prison officials represent a group of powerful proponents. Their direct relationship to the issue situates them in a unique and genuine position. The concern amongst guards for safety in their extremely dangerous capacity as enforcers of rules within a correctional institution, results in their position holding much weight. The union that represents prison guards, AFSCME (American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees), is often included as a vehement advocate of the new prison.

Three main arguments are used by the proponents to support their claims: The concentration argument to support the "most violent" grouping, the use of isolation as an effective method of control, and the economic benefits to the State and the host community. Each of these positions will be addressed in their relation to the proponents position in the Supermax debate.

The Concentration Argument. One powerful justification the proponents in the debate have offered as to why level 6

prisons are needed supports the concentration side of the concentration-dispersal debate.<sup>9</sup> In the introduction to their book, *Problems of Long-Term Imprisonment*, Anthony Bottoms and Roy Light discuss the present state of this debate. The concentration argument claims that greater control will be achieved by housing "problem" prisoners in one facility while the dispersal argument favors the distribution of "problem" prisoners throughout the prison system. The authors illustrate how "the United States Federal Prison system has moved from former policies of concentration [represented by Alcatraz], through dispersal, and back to a form of concentration [represented by UPS Marion]" (Bottoms and Light 1987, 19). The proponents of level 6 institutions claim that the increasingly violent prison system mandates a separate high-security facility that will house (condense) "problem" prisoners. This will allow for a tighter and more focused security program while allowing the rest of the prison system to operate at a lower security level. The alleged benefits will be increased safety as well as decreased costs.

The concentration argument on which level 6 institutions are based is steadily gaining support, especially with the current trend to get "tough on crime". When discussing Marion penitentiary Gilbert Ingram, the

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<sup>9</sup>For origin of debate see Mountbatten, Home Office 1966 and Radzinowicz, Advisory Council 1968.

assistant Director for Correctional Programs, Federal Bureau of Prisons, USA and former Warden of two federal prisons, states, "[r]emoval of the most violent, escape-prone inmates to Marion has served to reduce disruptive behavior at other Federal facilities, and allows them to be operated as decentralized, relatively open environments" (Ward and Schoen 1981). However, Ingram does not back his claims up with any empirical evidence. Bottoms agrees with Ingram's assessment and also approaches the issue from a theoretical stance. He claims that "placement of those inmates in one location at Marion provides invaluable assistance to the entire Federal prison system" (Bottoms and Light 1987, 209). Referring again to level 6 facilities, also termed control units, Bottoms maintains that "although a few of these inmates have managed to continue their assaultive behavior, most of them have been effectively managed in this special control unit" (Bottoms and Light 1987, 212). Further because physical contact between staff and inmates is forbidden, Ingram claims there has been a "significant reduction in dangerous contraband and assaults weapons" also reducing violence (Bottoms and Light 1987, 210). There is much support from criminal justice officials as well as academics confirming the rationale that level 6 prisons increase control and decrease violence.

Much of the writing on the prison system attributes the increased violence to specific individuals, diverting

attention away from the system itself. This strategy is not unique to academic writing, and is commonly used in journalism. Martin A. Lee and Norman Solomon (1990) discuss how "[f]ragmentation is part and parcel of the news media game. Reports of negative trends focus much more on victims than on institutional villains" (Lee and Solomon 1990, 193). There is no attempt made to connect issues to the larger context.

W. Lance Bennett addresses how problems are individualized in the news when he delineates the numerous informational biases he ascribes to the process of news production one of which is the personalizing of issues. This strategic process removes any responsibility from the larger social institutions resulting in a system left unchallenged. In the criminological literature, Ingram utilizes this perspective when he argues for a separate high-security level 6 institution because of the inevitable presence of inmates who will pose special problems which requires them to be controlled more severely than others. He believes there is always a group of "recalcitrant and extraordinary inmates who must be handled with special techniques" (Bottoms and Light 1987, 208). Ingrams argument traces the problem to the individual prisoner not to any larger function of the criminal justice system.

In his discussion of the prison classification system, Ingram further espouses the individualizing perspective to



problem solving. He maintains that "[a] good classification system also identifies those inmates who cannot be housed in the open population of institutions because of the danger they present to others, and to the orderly running of the institution" (Bottoms and Light 1987, 213). Ingram promotes the establishment of a hierarchy of security levels with special monitoring of "problem" inmates as the highest level. He terms these "extraordinary security measures." He claims this system will reduce prison violence by creating a deterrent effect. Bottoms notes the effectiveness of such a monitoring system. "The use of special monitoring procedures for cases in the central inmate monitoring system has been successful in reducing violence against these individuals, and others..." (Bottoms and Light, 209). Most of the conclusions reached by academics target the origins of crime on the individual. Since the problem is focused on the individual prisoner the academic literature is effective in promoting the pro sides argument for isolation (a truly individualized punishment) and hence supermaximum prisons to solve the problem. However the lack of empirical evidence for the claims made by many academics in the field reduces much of their argument to mere theoretical speculation.

The Argument for Isolation. One of the universal characteristics of level 6 prisons is their use of isolation. The lack of human contact is intended to be a

very personalized experience of punishment. In level 6 prisons there is no general population to which a prisoner will return. All prisoners are isolated from each other within the level 6 facility. Historical precedents have advocated the use of isolation as a tool of control which serves as reinforcement for the pro-sides argument. As early as the late 1800s, The Auburn model utilized this technique of isolation. In this case the goal was to compel prisoners to reflect on their wrongdoings and hence correct their criminal ways. (For further discussion see Harry Elmer Barnes 1959 and Frank Schmullager 1986).

The advocates of level 6 prisons promote the use of isolation as a method also used to control the problem prisoners. The punishment for violent or disruptive behavior in the prison system has traditionally been time in isolation or "the hole". In 1939-40 an isolation wing was built at Alcatraz when a San Francisco judge declared the use of the current underground cells, aptly termed the dungeon, unconstitutional. This new wing was used for solitary confinement to control disruptive prisoners. In their book, *Confinement in Maximum Custody*, David A. Ward and Kenneth F. Schoen discuss how the staff at Alcatraz still "made use of isolation and segregation for disciplinary infraction" (Ward and Schoen 1981, 61). The staff often handled fights among inmates by "taking the combatants directly to the segregation unit and locking them

up" (Ward and Schoen 1981, 63). Isolation has long been favored in the field of corrections as a method of control as well as a means of punishment. This historical argument justifies the Supermax's use of continuous isolation and is hence a strong pro position in the debate.

A biographical book by Frank Heaney gives an inside story of life as a prison guard at Alcatraz (Heaney 1987). Heaney's argument strongly advocates the use of isolation and segregation for the "incurable" prisoners. Not only does his argument support these methods of control, it also personalizes the problem, ignoring institutional issues. Heaney's closing statement sums up his position. "I believe there is a definite need for a place like Alcatraz. It should be used only as a last resort, but always for that small group of violent and extreme offenders who violate and will continue to harm their fellow human beings...even while they are behind bars....It is my belief--and I was there--that our only solution, our only protection, is truly to isolate them" (Heaney 1987, 56). Despite the closing of Alcatraz due to the mental and physical deterioration suffered by the prisoners confined for long periods of time in isolation, Heaney vehemently supports its intent and purpose. He advocates Alcatraz's reputation as fully justified. The "lock 'em up and throw away the key" mentality is an integral part of Heaney's documentation. Because Heaney's account is from first hand experience his

argument has a distinct impact, increasing the scope and validity of the pro-side's argument.

In addition to the "problem prisoner" argument with its emphasis on isolation the proponents of the Illinois Supermax prison advocate a two-sided economic argument. On one hand the actual construction of the new prison is valued because of the creation of numerous jobs. A construction company must be hired to build the new prison, which will result in increased employment for the host community. In addition many prison officials will be hired to staff the high security prison, further increasing the level of employment. The other side of the economic argument involves operating costs. The advocates claim it is cost efficient to run one prison under tight security despite the increased cost because the rest of the prison system can operate at a lower security level ultimately decreasing costs.

Through analysis of the limited academic and public literature available on level 6 prisons, it is clear that the proponents have woven three arguments throughout their promotion of level 6 prisons. The concentration argument of housing "problem" prisoners in one facility is not only promoted as a way to increase safety in the entire prison system and as a punishment for "incurable" inmates, but is also useful rhetoric which serves to placate the public by having them believe that legislatures and correctional

officials are doing their job by getting "tough on crime." The economic benefits accruing to communities housing these prisons is ignored by focusing attention on the alleged economic benefits to the communities through employment revenue and to the DOC (or the state) due to more efficient fiscal spending. Because of the focus on the individual emphasized by the use of isolation much of the academic literature has been successful at diverting attention away from the Criminal Justice System and other social institutions by placing blame on individual "problem" prisoners.

#### The Opponents

The most vehement public opponents in the debate over level 6 prisons are activist groups. The debate over level 6 prisons in Illinois has been fairly prevalent since the mid eighties. The Committee to End the Marion Lockdown (CEML) is an activist group that formed in 1985 in opposition to the lockdown at Marion. Since Marion was the first level 6 prison and is the most restrictive federal prison in the United States the debaters in Illinois had a focal point of contestation. Although their initial focus was on Marion they work toward the abolition of all level 6 prisons. The proposal for a new Level 6 prison in Illinois gave CEML another local focus. CEML has spent considerable energy publicizing the Supermax debate.

In order to make their position more public CEML has

held demonstrations and sponsored programs. Whether these include speakers or films each documents an often silenced story regarding Supermax incarceration. Often the voice of the prisoner is a marginalized if not completely ignored story in the mainstream media. CEML has sponsored many events where ex-prisoners present their story of life inside level 6 prisons. In order to advertise their position in general as well as announce special events flyers are distributed in public places. CEML has introduced press releases in hopes of increased media coverage, especially immediately before a demonstrations. This study focuses on CEML as a representative activist group because of their locally situated position in Chicago and their local concerns over the Illinois Supermax.

Human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are also opponents in the Supermax debate. Most often they approach the issue from a legal perspective since their work as watch dog groups revolves around detecting and halting human rights violation of the law. Their association status recognizes them as an authority on human right's issues. For example, Amnesty International has consultation status with the UN and was granted the Nobel Prize for peace in 1977.<sup>10</sup> Through their achievements Amnesty has developed a credible reputation

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<sup>10</sup>Information obtained from *Encyclopedia of Associations*. 1995. Detroit: Gale Research Inc.

that is highly respected. These official statements of support are important for the legitimization of the opponent's position in the public debate.

The mainstream media rarely gives the opposition their desired voice. The inclusion of the opposition in a pro-side account would only serve to legitimate the opposition at the very least by making the public aware of its presence. This could result in unintended and undesired oppositional support. One consequence of this exclusion according to Charlotte Ryan who writes on activist groups and the media is "that challengers perspectives are not widely diffused [which] makes them inherently suspect.... Victory is seldom such that the challenger frame achieves equal status to the dominant frame, more commonly it is the challenger frame did not allow the dominant frame to hold sway uncontested" (Ryan 1991, 68, 70). The mainstream media's exclusion of the opposition is a systematic and intentional strategy used to preserve support of the dominant ideology.

The following section details the opponent's position. Much of the opponent's position focuses on delegitimizing the advocates. In this sense the opponents can be defined as more reactive as opposed to proactive. The following discussion will revolve around the opponent's attempt to delegitimize the proponents three main arguments: concentration, isolation, and economic benefits. It will

also raise some of the uniquely oppositional positions such as political incarceration and conditions of level 6 incarceration.

The opposition is fundamentally different from the proponents in belief regarding incarceration. They do not believe the answer to growing crime problems is more prisons. They ardently promote the idea that money should be spent on education and human services not on more prisons. They argue that education will reduce incidents of crime and hence alleviate the need for more prisons. In *The Broadside* CEML delineates what they see as the misallocation of resources:

In a state where the Chicago Public schools did not open at the beginning of this school year, where the department of Children and Family Services are court ordered to hire more staff but cannot afford to, and where infant mortality is worse than 45 other states the only financial investments these legislators can make is toward prison construction. (CEML *The Broadside* 1993)

In another article they use monetary figures to further their argument and to illustrate what could be a direct conversion of funds.

So, there you have it. \$100 million for the "Super-max," \$100 million for current prison construction, and almost \$100 million to run these prisons for one year. You need \$300 million to solve the fiscal crisis in the schools?? There it is. (CEML *How to end the Fiscal Crisis in the Schools* 1993)

CEML introduces the "obscene proposal to convert Assumption High School in virtually all-Black East St. Louis, into a minimum security prison" as an overt example



of the racist nature of the system (CEML *The Broadside* 1992). In essence the opposition refutes the "get tough on crime" mentality as a viable solution and sees the present "prison-mania" as a racist attack.

The "Concentration" Rebuttal. The opposition also disputes the proponent's justifications for their support of level 6 incarceration. They deny the validity of the concentration argument which weighs heavily in the proponent's argument. They point out the fact that there is no evidence supported by empirical results presented by the advocates that validate the concentration argument which makes it highly suspect. In their Illinois Supermax flyer they claim:

Super-max Prisons Don't Work. Proponents say that Edgar's 500 bed "Super-max" prison will get rid of the "baddest of the bad." However, last year 'there were 45,839 disciplinary reports written' in Illinois prisons, and 'on any given day more than 900 prisoners are in segregation.' Thus, it should be clear that the problem is much deeper than 500 'bad apples'....There is absolutely no evidence from any other state that Super-max prisons succeed. There is absolutely no evidence that the Super-max prisons deter crime or create safer prison systems. (CEML *Illinois Super-max not a solution* 1994)

In fact CEML uses the incident that allegedly lead to the continuing "lockdown" at Marion as proof of the ineffectiveness of level 6 "concentration" prisons. Prior to 1982, Marion had various security level units, only one of which was level 6, termed the control unit. In 1982 two guards were killed in the control unit which is the reason

the DOC presents for the "lockdown."<sup>11</sup> CEML claims that the fact that the killings occurred in the control unit proves their ineffectiveness in controlling violence. It is curious that there is a recognizable movement towards the "marionization" of the prison system despite this ironic contradiction.

In addition to refuting the effectiveness of the concentration argument the opponents reject the "Most violent" classification as a deceptive justification for selective high-security incarceration. Nancy Kurshan claims it is "not the 'most violent' who are sent to level 6 prisons. In fact, "[m]ost prisoners convicted of violent crimes are in state prisons, including the mass murders" (Kurshan 1992). In addition the opponents assert that some prisoners are sentenced directly from court which goes against correctional policy and exposes the BOP's lie that prisoners end up in Marion as a punishment for behavior in other prisons. Instead, Kurshan maintains that "Marion has jailhouse lawyers, leaders of prison protests, religious dissidents, and others who refuse to fit in at the prisons they came from" (Kurshan 1992). In effect, the opposition zealously argues that Marion contains a large number of political prisoners. According to this argument Level 6 incarceration is used as tool by the government to control

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<sup>11</sup>CEML claims this was a calculated strategy to move one whole prison into level 6 security level.

political dissidents, or those who threaten the status quo. Often included in CEML's literature is a quote from former warden of Marion, Ralph Arons whose federal court testimony included the admission that "[t]he purpose of Marion control unit is to control revolutionary attitudes in the prison system and in society at large" (CEML *The Broadside* 1992).

Racism. The opponents also assert how level 6 prisons reflect society's racist attitudes. According to Kurshan, a founding member of CEML, there is a strong correlation between liberation struggles and incarceration in level 6 prisons. "Marion's purpose is to suppress dissent in that system. Not surprisingly, over 75 percent of the men there [in Marion] are people of color" (Kurshan 1992). In fact CEML claims that "in Illinois a Black person is 14 times more likely to go to prison than a white person" (CEML *The Broadside* 1992). And in the nearby Maximum Control Complex in Westville, Indiana "[m]ore than 90% of the prisoners in this institution are Black" (CEML *No More Control Units* 1993).

An article in *All Chicago City News* titled "Pontiac Lockdowns Have Racial Overtones" takes an oppositional stance when it addresses the association between racism and "lockdowns" at a maximum security prison in Illinois. "ACCN sources report that many of the guards are members of two Klu Klux Klan styled organizations, 'The Brotherhood of the boat' and 'The Brotherhood of the Green'" (Etamni, 1992).

boat' and 'The Brotherhood of the Green'" (Etamni, 1992). According to the opposition in the Supermax debate the racism that inundates the larger society is only intensified in prisons since they are used as a tool to oppress and control people of color.

Through my association with CEML I discovered that one of their main goals was to obliterate racism, with a focus on the white community where racism was the most prevalent and most ignored. Racism is not a localized phenomenon, it manifests itself in many ways and in many social spaces. Because of its widespread presence, it is difficult to target and attack with an oppositional movement. CEML realized a focal point of contestation was necessary in order to designate a social place to direct opposition. They found that place to be the prison system. According to CEML's philosophy prisons represent the institutionalized pinnacle of racism and are the perfect focus of attack.

Conditions. A large component of the opposition's position revolves around conditions in level 6 prisons. They claim conditions of level 6 incarceration are abusive and are often in violation of human rights. The harsh environment is indented to produce conditions that are conducive for domination over the prisoner. They claim "the objective of Marion is absolute physical and psychological control over the prisoner" (Churchill and Vanderwall 1992 79). CEML maintains that these extreme conditions are a

conscious and systematic strategy influenced by the behavior modification techniques of Dr. Edward Schein, a psychologist with the school of Industrial Management at MIT. His theory introduced sensory deprivation (SD) and social isolation (SI) to induce mental and behavioral changes in the prisoners. Schein's ideas were presented at a conference with key representatives from the BOP and later published in *Corrective Psychiatry* and the *Journal of Social Therapy* in 1962.

The 1970s were a decade of experiments in behavioral modifications in US prisons. Various 'programs' were instituted. Some integrated the Persuasive Coercion techniques pinpointed by Schein. Others were based on the principles of SD, PD (perceptual deprivation) or SI. Still others relied heavily on drug "therapy. All of them had one thing in common: they sought to permanently eradicate undesirable behavior in particularly resistant individuals ... Perhaps the purest attempt to apply Schien's "Persuasive Coercion" was Dr. Martin Groder's Transactional Analysis Program, which began at Marion in 1968 (Ward and Churchill 1992, 96). The TA program is described by a group of Marion prisoners in a 1972 report to the United Nations Economic and Social Council. According to the NPC report, Groder's step-function psychology leads to mind control of the most insidious variety. First this entails segregation coupled with deprivation until the prisoner agrees to participate.

The prisoner is then attacked verbally by Groder's 'prisoner thought-reform team' "which probes the vulnerable points and exploits the emotional weaknesses to strip the 'patient' of his self-confidence and sense of autonomy" (Churchill and Vander Wall 1992, 96). This weakening and loss of self enable staff complete control over the prisoners mind and body.

Amnesty International has condemned the conditions at Marion and other level 6 prisons for their violation of human rights.

The U.S. prison at Marion, condemned by Amnesty International as violating virtually every one of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, holds more political prisoners and prisoners of war than any other prison in the United States [It has been conclusively shown that] prison officials [systematically and arbitrarily] place political prisoners at Marion and retain them there for years although they do not meet the stated criteria for assignment at that facility. ("Excerpts from, The Verdict of the International Tribunal on Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War in the United States" quoted in Ward and Churchill 1992, 411)

A Human Rights Watch report confirms Amnesty's allegations. After their visit to more than twenty institutions in the United States it was concluded that "[t]he increasing use of "prisons within prisons" leads to numerous human rights abuses and frequent violations of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners" (Human Rights Watch 1991).

The opponents not only condemns level 6 prisons for abusive treatment, they claim that their alleged

concerns is the effect of level 6 incarceration on prisoners upon their release from prison. There is great potential for increasing the level of aggression in those prisoners housed in these prisons. Prisoners themselves have admitted this effect. Bill Dunne, a prisoner at Marion writes, "Marion still poses a danger not only for the prisoners but for the communities upon which it feeds and into which debilitated and stressed out prisoners with impaired job and social skills will be released..." (Ward and Churchill 1992, 79).

Financial Deception. Although the proponents claim that level 6 prisons are cost effective the opponents dispute this. According to the opposition the proponents calculation of 60 million dollars for the Supermax is an extreme case of underestimation. In their "sign-on campaign" letter CEML says "[w]e feel that the true construction cost of this single "Super-Max" prison will be over \$100 million, totaling well over \$1 billion over the next decade when operating expenses are calculated" (CEML *Letter to Organizations* 1993).

In addition the opponents dispute the proponent's euphemistic rhetoric that the host community<sup>12</sup> will benefit

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<sup>12</sup>Near the signing of the Bill by Governor Edgar it was known that the host community would be a southern county in Illinois. The host town would most likely not be characterized as a large industrial area and would be geographically distant from any big city. This would require hiring from outside the community.

dramatically from the new prison. The proponents claim the prison will introduce a whole new set of employment opportunities including construction and staff personnel. Because of the massive scale of the project the construction company that the proponents claim will be drawn from the host community the opponents deny. Instead the opponents claim that the scale of the project will most likely require the hiring of a large construction company that would not be found in a small county area. The opponents also claim that the prison staff will be drawn from other high-security prisons not necessarily from the community. The high-security environment requires guards who are experienced in maximum security level prisons. These experienced guards are in other Maximum security prisons that would not be located in the host county. In a newsletter from Southern Illinois (the area considered for the Supermax) this point is well made. "The supermax prison will provide jobs to area residents, but far fewer permanent positions than the 300 claimed by the proponents. Many positions will be filled by people already in the prison work force transferring in and out of the area" (Hughes 1993). CEML claims the local unemployment rate in the host town will remain high. In a flyer passed out in Tamms, one of the Southern Illinois counties in the running for the Supermax, they stated that "[r]ecent surveys of prison towns

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hiring from outside the community.



local jobs, virtually all high level prison jobs, and most low-level jobs, will be filled by people coming from outside the community" (CEML 1993). It is clear the sides disagree on the possibility of economic benefit. The proponents have a stake in getting community support. Without a host community the Supermax idea is doomed for failure. The opposition's goal is to suppress community support, with the ultimate effect of Supermax extinction.

Much of the literature put out by the opposition is in activist circles. Unlike academic literature it is not part of an ongoing dialogue in a battle field of intellectual debate. There are not enough groups or individuals producing activist literature to develop this type of intricate intellectual dialogue. This limits the scope and influence of activist literature. However, there have been a number of academic books published on political incarceration in the U.S. (see Goodell 1973, Donner 1990, Shultz and Shultz 1989 which advance the position that the suppression of political dissidents has been a goal of the United States government). Other academic literature addresses the racist nature of imprisonment (see Atkins and Glick 1972 and Fox 1982). Activists have also published some of their own books (Yasutake 1993, Blunk and Luc Levasseur 1993).<sup>13</sup> All of these do not solely address

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<sup>13</sup>Michael Yasutake, the editor of *Can't Jail the Spirit*, is a founding member of Prisoners of Conscience, who helped published the book. This activist group's aim is to

political imprisonment in level 6 prisons, but they all do raise one or many of the opposition's arguments.

Because of the lack of public information regarding imprisonment in general, and specifically level 6 prisons an investigation of their purpose and use in society is crucial. A voice of opposition has developed around level 6 prisons, however, the media tends to ignore the critique. The reasons for the "Wall of Silence" may not be discovered through this preliminary analysis but many questions will be raised that address the media's silencing of the issue.

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"join together in challenging the U.S. government and society to eliminate injustice by siding with these prisoners, who have identified their plight with those who are powerless, oppressed, and colonized" (Yasutake 1992). Tim Blunk and Raymond Luc Levasseur are both prisoners, Blunk having served time in Marion. *Hauling up the Morning* is but one of their publications. In the introductory note it states the purpose of this book as "born of a desire to fight a lie: the US government's incredible assertion that it holds no political prisoners" (Blunk and Luc Levasseur 1990).

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PRESSES' CONSTRUCTION

The way in which the debate over the Illinois Supermax has been constructed in the media has a significant impact on how the public views the issue. It is overwhelming consensus among media theorists that the media does not necessarily influence how to think rather it controls what to think about (See Parenti (1986), Strentz (1989), Graber (1984) Lippman (1965)). Michael Parenti describes this as the media's ability to control "opinion visibility" (1986). Graber defines it as "the ability to effect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking" (Graber 1984, 66). More commonly it is defined as the agenda-setting function of the media (Strentz 1989, Stone 1987).

This analysis agrees with the theory that the media does have a significant impact on setting the public agenda regarding what to think about and that this is achieved in a number of strategic ways. Inclusion and exclusion play a key role in constructing the news. Editors not only choose what issues or events to cover they also make decisions regarding how the issue will be covered. Even if an issue is included in the media the frequency with which it is

presented effects the public's perception of its importance. McCombs and Shaw's research confirms there is a strong positive relationship between public perception and media presentation. The "increased salience of a topic or issue in the mass media influences (causes) the salience of that topic or issue among the public" (McCombs and Shaw 1977, 69). In short, "What the press emphasizes is in turn emphasized privately and publicly by the audiences of the press..." (McCombs and Shaw 1977, 66).

McCombs and Shaw's empirical study of the 1968 presidential election in Chapel Hill, North Carolina demonstrates the agenda setting function of the media. They found that "The voter's beliefs about what were the major issues facing the country reflected the composite of the press coverage, even though the three presidential contenders in 1968 placed widely divergent emphasis on the issues" (McCombs and Shaw 1977, 67).

The media not only provides a framework of what to think about it also constructs importance. More recent news illustrates this function. The amount of media time spent on the OJ Simpson case has constructed it as one of the most important murder cases. The media's focus on the problem of Haitian refugees and the need for Haitian democracy certainly helped justify President Clinton's 1994 decision to send American troops to the country "in need" (and adds backing for the subsequent anti-immigration bill in

California, proposition 187). Both issues were constructed as very serious which helps legitimate subsequent political action.

This research not only uses the press' coverage of the Illinois Supermax debate to look at the agenda-setting function of the press it also looks at the ways in which the press construct *how* to think about an issue or event. In a general sense this is achieved by presenting an issue or event from a particular angle or by constructing a particular story. There are two principle reasons why this occurs. The sheer process of journalistic reporting requires interpretation and selection. The journalist must make decisions about how to present an issue or event, deciding which "facts" will be included, and what angle to take when reporting the issue. Some of these decisions are intentional biases others are not. Nevertheless all these journalistic decisions result in a unique construction of an issue. Only one story is told. This is not to imply a conspiracy theory where the news is always intentionally altered. It merely recognizes the inescapable subjective nature of reporting. Tom Koch comments on how selectivity plays a key role in news construction: "[E]ven when the facts of a story can be shown to be reported, it may still be so slanted, so incomplete in its choice of fact or inaccurate in its manner of presentation as to be propaganda and not objective news" (Koch 1990, 13). In discussing news

as a mediated, synthetic product, Koch continues "[t]here in the narrative of specific stories are the traces of decisions, judgment, selections and battles" (Koch 1990, 23).

Beyond the interpretive process of documenting an account there is also the more intentional slanting of an issue or event. This may be influenced by the journalist's particular bias. More likely it is a function of organizational pressures that require conformity to a set ideology emanating from the culture of journalism. Shoemaker and Reese comment on the culture of journalism when they discuss how the "systematic, patterned regularities in context result from stable, underlying structural factors" (Shoemaker and Reese 1991, 185). The ideology that shapes these patterned regularities naturally supports the existing social order: "[S]imply by doing their jobs, journalists tend to serve the political and economic elite definitions of reality" (Gitlin 1980, 12). Schudson agrees that "the process of newsgathering itself constructs an image of reality which reinforces official viewpoints" (Schudson 1978, 185).

The journalist may not even recognize how conforming to a particular institutional demands results in the slanting of a story or in bias reporting. The process of socialization into the organizational structure of journalism may render these biases unnoticeable. Parenti

comments on some of the effects of socialization:

"Journalists may or may not endorse or even recognize the value parameters within which they work" And "[n]o matter how they see themselves, the fact remains that they do not and usually can not investigate questions that rub against the ideological limits of their employers" (Parenti 1986, 51). Newfield expounds on how news content rests on a set of imposed political assumptions: "So the men and women who control the technological giants of the mass media are not neutral, unbiased computers. They have a mind-set. They have definite life styles and political values concealed under a rhetoric of objectivity" (Newfield 1974, 56).

Shoemaker and Reese comment on the political slant of the written media. They claim there is an overarching agreement among newspapers to endorse Republicans (Shoemaker and Reese 1991, 138). This may be why the mainstream press and to a lesser degree the small press are pro-Supermax a stance that supports Republican Governor Edgar's endorsement of the proposal.

This slanting of an issue or event offers the public one interpretation or construction and therefore not only presents to the public what to think about but also how to think. Despite some disagreement there is now overwhelming recognition that "objective" reporting is inherently unattainable. Walter Lippman has "highlighted the difficulty of reporting objectively at low levels of factual

visibility, which was to become a basic concern regarding what was to become known as 'interpretive' journalism (Graber 1984, 18). This is in contrast to the ideology of Adolph S. Ochs, publisher of *the New York Times*, who has been referred to as the epitome of "objective" reporting. His goal was to remove from his newspaper's columns any sign of biases held by his reporters, his editors, or himself. In "interpretive" journalism the slant of the story is less intentionally camouflaged.

Mary Ann Weston comments on this current trend in journalism. Although others disagree (see Michael Schudson 1967) she explains the movement towards 'interpretive' journalism is a response to the newspapers' competition with broadcast news. It is an attempt to be more accessible and less distant from an audience (Weston 1993). This explanation is premised on a definition of objective-type reporting as creating a distance between the journalist and the audience while subjective-type reporting is seen as a more personal form of communication. In accordance with this theory newspapers are presenting a more subjective, more personal coverage in the hopes of creating more trust among the readers. Lee Bin from the *Chicago Sun Times* says the movement towards interpretive-style reporting is more a function of giving the public what they want which is pre-interpreted information. They would rather be told how to think about an issue or event than expend the energy to



interpret it themselves. According to Bin the news is spoon fed to the public in predigested bits. The public is presented with a ready made framework of how to think (Bin 1993).

These changes towards a more subjective or interpretive approach in journalism are evident in the way newspapers cover events and issues. Often articles are written from the perspective of the journalist with few quotes or statements by other players. The incorporation of quotes into an article is one way for the coverage to appear more objective. Information appears to be direct from the source with no alterations. On the other hand the lack of quotes appears more subjective. The inclusion of opposing sides in an article also models the coverage as more objective. It appears as if *all* sides are presented. In this study both of these strategies were used the least by the activist press the most by the small press and very rarely by the mainstream press. The activist press is the least concerned with appearing objective. And the mainstream press has less of a need to appear objective than does the small press.

Not only is the media accused for the unavoidable consequence of reporting one story out of the many possible ones, it has more seriously been attacked for consciously reporting inaccuracies. There are instances where the interpretation of an event from the perspective of those present has been in conflict with what is seen in the media.

Blatant untruths or missing truths have been detected in particular news coverage. *National Public Radio* aired an interview with Father Michael Flagger. He had worked on the west side of Chicago and had met many of the Black Panthers, including Angela Davis. He commented on how the media represented the Panthers differently than his own experience. Instead of the feared group of armed revolutionaries that the media has overwhelmingly portrayed them as Father Flagger claims they were actually an asset to the community providing services to those in need such as their development of food pantries (NPR 1994).

The potential for misrepresentation in foreign policy is great, in part due to the physical distance from the event. Many have commented on the media's inaccurate representation of the United States invasion of Panama. *The documentary The Panama Deception* discloses how the media silenced much about the event. When it was included in the media the coverage depicted Noreiga as an evil enemy further justifying the United States' intervention. News coverage never mentioned Noreiga's relationship to the United States government or the fact that he was on the CIA's payroll. Reports never included testimonies from individuals living in the bombed "lower" class neighborhood. It only included interviews of white middle-class Panamanians who backed the U.S. intervention.

In his study on the Student Democratic Society (SDS),

Todd Gitlin noticed sharp differences between his experience of the movement and the media account which provided research questions: "[t]he continuing experience of disjunctive gave me my agenda for research, it did not give me the answers" (Gitlin 1980, 17). Kurt and Gladys Lang analyzed the 1951 Mac Arthur parade in Chicago and found that observers of the event through TV had a much different view of the parade than those that were there. The Langs "concluded that the representation of the world provided by television differed in important ways from personal experience" (Shoemaker and Reese 1991, 33). Gitlin recognizes that journalism's more regular approach is to process social opposition, to control its image and to diffuse it at the same time, to absorb what can be absorbed into the dominant structures of definitions and images and to push the rest to the margins of social life" (Gitlin 1980, 5). When it is recognized that the media has presented an inaccurate depiction of an event the media's purpose to socialize the public to accept a particular political system is illuminated. This is when the media is accused of indoctrination.

#### The Structure of the Newspaper

There are a number of sections within a newspaper; feature and news stories, editorials, letters to the editor, classified advertisements, and sports. This analysis examines those articles that were found in either the

feature and news stories or in what has been termed "opinion pieces" which includes the press editorials as well as those pieces sent in by interested individuals. The paper's editorials written by a staff writer from the paper are directly related to the press' stance, or else they would have been edited out. The viewpoint is upheld by the paper, at least the viewpoint is an intentional inclusion. In contrast letters from outside personnel (any other opinion-type articles which are not associated with the institutional voice of the paper) may not conform to the papers perspective. Although they too are chosen by an editor of the paper to be included the viewpoint may challenge the institutional voice of the paper. This is intentional. These designated areas in the paper are a controlled arena for dissenting viewpoints. In order for the media to appear democratic (being self-reflexive and allowing a plurality of perspectives) it must include some views that do not correspond to the papers overall position. If dissenting positions are included, the public is more apt to accept what the paper promotes as unbiased fact. The bias is camouflaged. The coverage of an issue does not appear one-sided.

By attributing the dissenting views to isolated individuals the paper disassociates itself from any connection to these views which enables it to maintain its overall position. For this analysis those editorial-style

articles written by a staff writer as well as those sent in by interested parties will both be considered "opinion pieces" for the mere fact that they are presented as opinions, not "objective fact". However where a distinction is relevant it will be made. A structural difference between the press exists where the mainstream press has designated "opinion-pieces" sections. However, the small press and the activist press do not.

### The Constructions

This part of the analysis will be concerned with utilizing the results of the content analysis to illustrate how the three press construct a particular representation of the Supermax debate. It will illustrate how the press' coverage is slanted by focusing on amount of coverage, and the sides and players included in the coverage. Suggestions will be offered as to what similarities an/or differences exist between the three press that could help explain the constructions. This analysis will not look at placement of the articles within the larger publication, terminology, or the detailed content of quotes. Although these issues are relevant the scope of this work does not allow the addition analysis.

### Debate? What Debate? The One-Sided Construction

An immediate discovery was made following analysis of the articles. It became obvious that not every article

recognized a debate as having developed around the proposal for a level 6 prison in Illinois. This was revealed in the unanticipated number of one-sided articles where no opposition was represented and no debate was acknowledged. In the case of one-sided pro coverage events such as the introduction of the proposal by the Task Force or the signing of the bill by Governor Edgar were often the focus. These events remained isolated and were not linked to any other issues regarding the Supermax. In essence many of the issues raised by the opposition were ignored. The activist press presented coverage that was completely one-sided and anti in slant. The difference between the mainstream's one-sided pro coverage and the activist's one-sided anti coverage is that the opposition also had to recognize and represent the proponents. It is impossible for the opponents to ignore the proponents when commenting on the events surrounding the debate or even on the more general issues of Supermax prisons. The opposition must include what it is opposed to. Without the Task Force and Edgar there would be no Illinois Supermax proposal and no Illinois debate.

The proponents are in a different situation. They do not have to recognize sentiments that are in conflict with their position. This is why many of the pro articles do not include the opposition and why the anti articles include proponents. There are two exceptions, the anti- "opinion-

pieces" in the mainstream press did not include the proponents and one small press article did not. The proponents have a clear advantage. They can choose to ignore aspects of the Supermax issue that would lessen the impact of their position and threaten their validity. They have the option to include the opponents or not; to recognize the debate or not. In this sense the pro articles can present a monologue instead of a dialogue. The ignoring of the debate results in partial reporting. The issue is misrepresented through exclusion.

One of the most obvious ways media content structures a symbolic environment is simply by giving greater attention (more time, more space, greater prominence) to certain events, people, groups, and places than others (Shoemaker and Reese 1991, 33). It also gives more or less time to issues in order to construct their important or significance. The following section will look at how the newspaper coverage in the mainstream, small, and activist press utilize the technique of greater or lesser attention to structure the Illinois Supermax debate.

#### Amount of Coverage

The press can decide to include coverage of an issue or event or it can not report on an issue, rendering it invisible. Even when it is decided that an issue will be covered the amount of coverage also must be determined. This decision reflects the press' desire to construct an

issue or event as more important or less important.

Pounding an issue into the public's head by including daily coverage on it constructs the issue as very important and serious, prodding public concern. The opposite is true as well minimal coverage of an issues constructs it as unimportant which can divert attention away from issues the media and its allies do not want the public to dwell on.

The documentary, "Manufacturing Consent" details the work of Noam Chomsky which includes content analysis of mainstream newspaper coverage of certain events. He found that because of The United States' governments interest in keeping its involvement in the political revolution in East Timor covert, the issue was only minimally covered in the national press.

During political debates the media will increase their reporting on related issues that support the side they are promoting. For example, when the ban on handguns was passing through the legislature the daily metros covered many stories involving handgun violence. The issue was constructed as serious and in need of a serious solution. When The United States invaded Panama in 1989 the media covered the issue only enough to include coverage of Manuel Noreiga as an evil enemy which legitimated the United State's "humanitarian evasion to restore peace". When the debate over the Illinois Supermax was heated, articles primarily in the mainstream press addressed the increasing



violence in Illinois maximum security prison and the increasing incidents of guards getting attacked. The mainstream press constructed other problems to support and further legitimate the need for a Supermax prison in Illinois. A multifaceted problem was constructed and the development of an Illinois level 6 prison was introduced as the only solution.

A discrepancy is noted in the amount of coverage in the three press during the time the Supermax legislation was being passed through the legislature. Out of the two mainstream press (*The Chicago Tribune* and *The Chicago Sun Times*), the five small press (*The Chicago Defender*, *Illinois Issues*, *All Chicago City News*, *The South Town Economist* and *Illinois Times*), and the one activist press used in this analysis the mainstream press covered the issue the most. It included sixteen articles. The small press included twelve articles and the activist press included seven. On the surface, it appears that the mainstream press gave the Supermax issue the most importance followed by the small press and the activist press, consisting of any written material intended for public distribution. These preliminary results would lead one to conclude that the mainstream press has some higher stakes attached to reporting of this issue. However a conclusion based solely on these numbers could be very misleading therefore more of the analysis must proceed before any reliable conclusions

are drawn.

Not only does the mainstream press cover the issue more, the coverage spans over the largest time period. The mainstream press spans from April 1 1991 , which is the first mention of the possibility of a level 6 prison in Illinois in any press, to August 21 1993. The last article postdates the August 11 1993 signing of the bill however it covers the relevant aspect of the debate as defined by the parameters of the study. The small press' coverage spans from December 1992 to June 24 1994. Two of these appear following the August 11 signing date. They are also included because they cover the relevant aspect of the debate, not the subsequent concerns following its endorsement. It is interesting to note that while both the mainstream papers put out articles the day following Governor Edgar's signing of the legislation, the small press did not. In fact my sample does not include any articles between June 25 and August 11, 1993.

Assessment of the activist press regarding scope of coverage is a little more difficult. The exact dates of the activist press are difficult to determine since each article or flyer is distributed multiple times on multiple dates. Despite this all but one of their seven articles was produced between March and August 1993. Their coverage is not as expansive as the other press. This can be attributed to resources and focus. The blatant purpose of the activist

groups production and distribution of literature is to convince the public to join the opposition in its stance against the Illinois Supermax. The ultimate goal is to gain enough support and to voice a strong enough opposition to stop the bill from becoming law which would cease the prison from being built. It is not surprising, then, that the majority of the activist's press is produced and distributed during the most heated time of the debate which extends from March 1993 to August 1993, after the bill was introduced up to the date it was signed. At this point both sides are still in the race. The opposition has a real stake in the diffusion of their position and increasing of their numbers. Their literature is blatantly aimed at this end. In contrast the dailies, both mainstream and small press, are a more comprehensive information source reporting on many issues without the obvious bias and persuasive strategy of the activist press. They are expected to give daily updated coverage. These differences in focus may be one reason why the coverage in the dailies during the most headed time of the debate is less than in the activist press.

#### A Discussion of Difference

The degree to which each press is public can help explain the difference in the amount of coverage. A general difference between the three press is the degree to which they can be described as being privately or publicly

endorsed and supported. This will affect specific aspects of the press' organizational structure which can help explain some of the noticeable differences in amount of coverage. In this respect the activist press is characterized differently than both the mainstream and the small press. The activist press is privately funded and produced. It is not publicly endorsed and is not part of the mainstream. It is not an institutionalized public information forum like the other two press. Because the activist press is not a part of mainstream culture it is somewhat more inconspicuous and obscure rendering it more difficult to access. The mainstream press, and to a lesser degree, the small press are part of the mainstream culture. They are both more easily accessible and therefore more widely read. With this basic difference in mind the analysis will proceed with a more detailed discussion of the organizational structure focusing on production and distribution in order to further explain the differences in amount of coverage between the three press.

#### The Production Time-Table

One irrefutable factor effecting the amount of coverage is how often the publication is produced. While the mainstream and the small press used in this study are produced daily, the activist press is not. In fact its only regularity in production are the newsletters which are

produced quarterly.<sup>14</sup> In addition the mainstream and small press produce different articles for each publication, while activist press articles are often used more than once. Most activist groups do not have the resources or the need to produce as often as the other press. Therefore articles are produced in mass and distributed in a number of different contexts. The activist press is not intended to be a regular and exhaustive information source. The intention is to inform the public about very specific concerns when the need and ability arises. For example CEML uses the same flyer to distribute at a number of different events providing the focus of the literature remains relevant to the event. Their "IL SICK" flyer was distributed at a demonstration at the State of Illinois building and also outside a number of movies (*In the Name of the Father* and *Manufacturing Consent*) that were showing during the time of the debate and were more political in content. The mainstream papers would never reprint an article. Each paper consists of timely and updated news articles. In contrast to the mainstream and the small press it would be misleading to assume each activist article corresponds to one particular and distinct date. Their limited production of new articles is not as easily equated with less expose of

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<sup>14</sup>Through My experience in CEML I saw how deadlines were often not met due to time and/or financial restraints and thus the newsletters were often not as regular as purported.

the issue.

The differences in how often the press are produced effects the total number of possible articles on a given issue. Since the mainstream and the small press are produced daily the difference in numbers of articles eighteen to twelve is significant. There are reasons why the mainstream press produced more articles than the small press on the Supermax debate. However the smaller number of activist press articles is not easily comparable due to reproduction and multiple usage.

Another issue contributing to the activist press limited dates is they have less advantage than journalists in terms of accessing information. The stage when the Supermax was first recommended to the heated debate was slow in building momentum in the press. The beginning phase of a debate is always loose and not well defined, therefore not well publicized. The public is less aware until issues become full blown. Even though the members in CEML are dedicated to pursuing information from various avenues, they are not as knowledgeable as journalists in terms of accessing information. In addition although in theory journalists have no more privilege in terms of access to information in practice this may not always be true. Certain computerized data bases and selective high security bases, the accredited press (AP) for example may be exclusive to particular individuals (Weston 1994). Because

of these biases in accessing information the institutional presses are more comprehensive in their coverage. They get an issue immediately. This is possibly why the mainstream media was hinting at the notion of a level 6 in Illinois years before the proposal was made and why the activist press is more reactive, becoming prolific only during the heated and better publicized stage of the Supermax debate.

### Distribution.

There is no denying that the amount of coverage can have a significant impact on the scope of the audience that is reached. An unexposed story has no public impact. A large part of the difference in public accessibility to the different press has to do with the method of distribution. Because the method of distribution varies between press their level of outreach does as well. Because the activist press is privately endorsed it is not distributed in the same way as the mainstream and the small press. Through distribution the activist press is available at selected stores and cafes. It is also distributed on the streets or at particular events. The decisions are all made by those associated with the group in some way. There are no predetermined places of distribution or institutional networks in place. The more regular publications like newsletters and announcements of group events can also be gotten through the mail if a person is on the groups mailing list. However, the fact that everybody performs all

gotten through the mail if a person is on the groups mailing list. However, the fact that everybody performs all functions within the group limits available manpower at any given time, including distribution.

The metro dailies are different in terms of method of distribution. They have multi-layered circulation and distribution departments which are institutionalized departments within the organizational structure of the company. These papers are distributed to and made available by a network of employees in predetermined and set locations such as news stands, a variety of stores, newspaper boxes, and individual residences. Further it is not uncommon to find a discarded *Chicago Tribune* in a public place. Finding an activist flyer in the same way is less common. Distribution of the activist press differs from the dailies in significant ways which render its diffusion less extensive and less consistent than the institutional dailies.

#### Scope of Audience.

The different methods and levels of distribution will effect the scope of the audience. The mere number of articles produced is less important than the distribution of them. One article that reaches the largest group of interested individuals will be more effective than twenty articles that reach a limited or uninterested audience. The mainstream press will be exposed to the largest audience



since they have an institutionalized distribution department and a large circulation. The small press will reach a smaller audience due to its smaller circulation. The activist press will most likely reach the fewest people. Its unsystematic method of distribution, limited funds and small circulation will limit the amount of people it can reach.

The different levels of access to the three press will effect which story is heard the most which will help construct the public's understanding of issues. The activist press does have one advantage in this case. It specifically targets its audience based on the Supermax issue. The dailies do not base their target audience around specific issues. Therefore it may be that the activist press reaches a more interested audience. On the other hand for the activist group it is the unexposed, less interested and less informed audience that needs to be reached and converted in order to increase the oppositional coalition.

The structural differences between the three presses help explain how and to what degree the different constructions will be exposed to the public. Following the discussion of how effective each press may be in promoting its story the analysis proceeds by discussing the different constructions themselves.

#### The Slants

To take an observation made by Stuart Hall that even

reporting of "facts" involves bias we can further say that even the same "facts" can be reported differently resulting in different slants. Certain issues and events of the Supermax debate are common in each press; Jim Edgar's skepticism due to financial concerns; Edgar's final endorsement; and the Task Force's development of the proposal and the overwhelming support from prison guards. Despite that fact that many of the same "facts" are included in all three press, articles have different slants. Some of the techniques used to create the different slant are inclusion and exclusion of players, amount of space given to the players on each side and the location of the sides.

Analysis of newspaper articles in the mainstream press, the small press, and activist press regarding the debate over the Illinois Supermax prison uncovered a number of relevant findings. The main overarching discoveries regarding the different press and their allying with a side in the debate (or their slant) are that the mainstream press is the most strongly aligned with the pro side of the debate, the small press is the split in its alignment with the pro and the anti sides, and the activist press has the most extreme stance being completely and exclusively aligned with the opposition.

There are six anti and ten pro articles in the mainstream press' sample of sixteen. Of the six anti

articles five are editorials and one is a very weak anti. Of the ten mainstream pro articles only one is an editorial. There are five anti and six pro articles in the small press' sample of twelve. The seven activist articles are all anti. The discrepancies in the ratio of anti to pro coverage in the three presses is relevant and can be explained by looking at a number of factors. The variables this analysis will pursue in order to uncover some explanations for this disparity is the press' audience, focus, and owner of publication.

#### Advertisers and Audience: Doing the Advertiser Shuffle

Most newspapers are financed largely by advertisers who desire a particular audience. In order to retain the financial backing of the advertisers the press must appeal to an audience that is most likely to consume the advertised products. "Advertisers buy space or time from media that have the best target audience for their products" (Shoemaker and Reese 1991, 163). A press' audience plays a significant role in influencing coverage of an issue. Every press determines their target audience and slants coverage to appeal to that segment of the population.

Advertisers are not only a predominant influence in defining a press' target audience they also largely dictate the content of coverage. Given the financial power the advertisers hold, editors are careful to ensure the fact

the press is directly correlated with the interests of those who finance the press. The press is the piper, and the tune the piper plays is composed by those who pay the piper" (Shoemaker and Reese 1991, 162). This type of power relation is exemplified in a circumstance that involved Mother Jones magazine. "In 1980, tobacco companies pulled their ads from Mother Jones after that magazine ran a series of articles about cigarettes as a major cause of cancer and heart disease...The massive budgets of R.J. Reynolds, Philip Morris and other tobacco sellers provide a clue as to why a cigarette industry with an annual death toll of 390,000 Americans doesn't get more bad press" (Lee and Solomon 1990, 5). In this comment Shoemaker and Reese remind us that "media content is affected--both directly and indirectly--by both advertisers and audiences" (Shoemaker and Reese 1991, 162).

Due to a number of factors, including advertisers, the three presses in this study have different target audiences. The mainstream papers mostly target a white, upwardly mobile audience, that segment of the population most likely to spend money and most attractive to large corporate advertisers. Not only is this target audience appealing to corporate advertisers, since a large percentage of this segment of the population composes corporate America they have a direct interest in maintaining the status quo. News content is intentionally structured to attract a high-income

readership largely supporting the dominant ideology of corporate liberalism. Henry Kisor confirms this characteristic of the mainstream press. When discussing *The New York Times*, one of the most highly respected mainstream newspapers in the United States, he states, "[i]t appealed to the upper-middle-class, politically centrist reader"<sup>15</sup> (*The Chicago Sun Times*, 1/30/94). W. Lance Bennett affirms the larger press' interest in attracting a mainstream audience: "[t]he news is no mirror on the world. It is more like a finely tuned probe into the psyche of the stereotypical Middle-American--a mirror of the American mind" (Bennett 1988, 63). It is this segment of society that is the largest which will ensure a large readership. It is also this segment of society that holds values that concur with the dominant ideology which will ensure a readership that affirms the status quo. W. Lance Bennett notes: "[i]f maintaining power and privilege while limiting popular participation were the goal, the news should be given an award for "best supporting role" in the daily dramatic series 'Maintaining the Status Quo'" (Bennett 1988, xiii).

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<sup>15</sup>Due to the current political climate that requires a more conservative image the political spectrum has shifted; what used to be the politically centrist is now constructed as more liberal. An article in *EXTRA* notes how "the supposedly liberal press is, in reality, not so liberal in any partisan sense....The vast majority of journalists in the mainstream press either operate as they should--that is, with non-ideological 'objectivity'--or they demonstrate a center-right political orientation" (Parry, Robert 1985).

population the mainstream press is generally aligned with and supportive of the current social order, and therefore takes a more conservative stance, one that affirms major political bodies and their decisions. The mainstream press supports (and finds support in) the dominant institutions that greatly influence current social life by governing the organization and structure of social life. Since it is the proponents in the Supermax debate that uphold the dominant institutions and the dominant ideology the mainstream papers support the pro side of the debate most of the time. In the Supermax debate the mainstream press has allied with the Department of Corrections as well as the legislatures and political officials in Illinois illustrating its support of the current social order. It follows that since the activist press is in opposition to the current social order and focuses its attack on present social institutions it allies with the opposition.

The small press is more obscure in the audience it targets. Although it has some of the same pressures as the mainstream press, it functions differently. According to Lee Bin compared to the mainstream press the small press is less dependent on advertisers and more dependent on their readership for financial backing (Bin 1993). Depending on their target audience this may allow them more freedom of expression.

The small press targets its audience either by

The small press targets its audience either by geographic area or by a particular interest. If targeted by geographic boundaries the coverage may be more conservative in attempts to offend no one and maintain a high readership in order to support the press. However if targeted by special interest the coverage may be more liberal in its slant. It may include more voices of dissent. If the press is targeted to a more politically liberal audience such as the *All Chicago City News* this is the case. This may be why the small press is split in its slant of the Supermax debate. This point is elaborated on in the following chapter.

The activist press focuses most of its energy on targeting an audience that is politically minded. It is this segment of the population that is most likely to become active. Since they rely entirely on money gained from fundraising or donations they have the most latitude in terms of coverage. There are no advertisers to exert control over type of coverage. This is why the activist press is able to present a completely and blatantly biased construction that critiques the current social order, including blasphemizing political and government officials. Their publications are produced in order to critique the present social order, often focusing on one issue or event. The activist press also attempts to reach an audience that is unexposed to their issues. CEML spent many hours passing

is unexposed to their issues. CEML spent many hours passing out flyers in public areas such as crowded street corners or outdoor street fairs order to spread the oppositional word.

### Geographic Factors

The mainstream press is distributed throughout the state as well as throughout the nation. Some even reach international status. It targets an audience that is concerned with international and national news as well as local news. Hence the mainstream press appeals to an audience that wants fairly broad coverage; everything from the Chechnya to the OJ trial to local public housing issues. One local focus of the mainstream press is state political issues, whether this be coverage of a mayoral election or the passing of a new state law. This may be one reason the mainstream press printed the most articles over the greatest span of time on the state run Supermax prison.

The small press is a local, smaller publication that generally targets its audience based on geographic location. In some cases it targets according to specific interests. For example *The Chicago Defender* targets the African American population in the Chicago area. While a paper like the *Southtown Economist* out of Oak Lawn targets an audience situated in the surrounding geographic region. The two targeting focuses seem to influence slants in the small press. Those papers that target geographically tend to be more pro. Both the *Southtown Economist* articles in the



opposition.

The *All Chicago City News*, edited by Slim Coleman a strong community political figure with more "leftist" politics, targets that segment of the population in Chicago that is more politically progressive. Coverage is often critical of the current political institutions. Both of the *All Chicago City News* articles are anti in slant . The *Chicago Defender* which targets an audience based on a specific demographic, also favors the opposition and includes two anti-Supermax articles out of its total of three. However, *The SouthTown Economist* and *The News-Sun* which are both located in the surrounding suburbs of Chicago and targets its audience more by location than by ideology included more pro Supermax coverage. Both of the Southtown's articles were pro. Those small press publications that are targeted at a particular segment of the population situated outside of the dominant culture will include more sentiments that go against the dominant ideology and institutions than will the publications that target a geographic area. When a press targets an entire area it may want to appear more conservative in order to appeal to the widest audience. We therefore see less anti Supermax articles in the geographically based small press publications.

The activist press is the most specific in its target audience. Due to limited resources the activist press

audience. Due to limited resources the activist press targets those individuals and organizations it can reach. It focuses its resources on reaching a particular type of Chicagoan, one that is politically minded and open to critique of the dominant culture. Since CEML focuses primarily on level 6 prison issues, it targets those individuals that are interested in "leftist" political issues and those more specifically interested in prison issues. CEML distribute their publications in places or at events that will attract their target audience (i.e., other political events, political movies, more radical music events). Although the activist press connects the Illinois Supermax debate to other level 6 debates their focus is local. The activist press is not supported by advertisers so they do not have to dance to the advertiser's tune. In fact the overarching ideology in activist press is critical of the mainstream institutions and culture and their coverage reflects these beliefs. It is therefore not surprising to see all the activist press articles being anti Supermax in slant.

### Ownership and Its Effect

Many media theorists accuse the press of acting more like a corporation. Not only are newspapers slanted for the advertisers and audience but owners of the mainstream press are mostly large corporations, using the press to support

media companies are fully integrated into market" (Chomsky 1988, 15). They function more as profit making entities, than as public information providers. When profit becomes the motivating factor behind news production, the content of the news is subject to manipulations dictated by political intentions. This represents a significant difference between the mainstream press and activist press. The mainstream press is owned by corporations. *The Chicago Sun-Times* is owned by American Publishing Company and the Chicago Tribune's parent company is The Tribune Publishing Company. When commenting on the change to corporate ownership of the media Shoemaker and Reese say the change "clearly imposed a news policy with far-reaching effects. News was to be treated like other business, expected to support itself..."(Shoemaker and Reese 1991, 137). The small press has more private entrepreneurs or smaller companies as their owners who are also concerned with profit maximization. While the small press is more privately owned, or owned by smaller companies. For example, *The Chicago Defender* is privately owned by John Sengstacke and Frederick Brown. *The Southtown Economist* is owned by Pulitzer Company *All Chicago City News* by Justine Graphics and *News Sun* by Copley Press<sup>16</sup>.

Owners use their press to diffuse a particular

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<sup>16</sup>Information regarding ownership obtained from individual papers.

Owners use their press to diffuse a particular construction of "reality" and news content is constructed to compliment this ideology. Shoemaker and Reese confirm that "clearly, newspapers vary in slant with ownership" (Shoemaker and Reese 1991, 140). Since the owner has ultimate control over what gets printed their perspective will prevail. The owner of a newspaper has direct control over the publisher who has direct control over the editor. This string of commands enables the maintenance of an overarching philosophy which is infused into news coverage.

The different ownership helps explain the overwhelming pro coverage in the mainstream papers, where the small press is more split. The mainstream press are directly tied to large corporations and large corporate mentalities. Aligning themselves with the dominant social institutions and capitalist structure they support the Supermax prison. The small press' lack of large corporate ownership is more likely to support an ideology that counters the pro business, corporate mentality. This is why the small press is split in its position on the Supermax. Because activist press is less integrated into the market economy (it is often funded by donations and money from fundraising) it is less influenced by profit oriented objectives which in turn effects what and how issues are covered.

Keeping the structural differences between the three

press in mind the analysis will proceed with a content analysis of the articles. In the next chapter the inclusion and exclusion of players on both sides of the debate will be discussed first and then the location and positioning of the players within the article.

**CHAPTER V**  
**ANALYSIS OF THE THREE PRESS**

The Players

One of the key factors in shaping a debate are the players. Each side of the debate will unite an array of participants. The number of players, the credibility of the players, and the power of the players will help determine which side wins. Different constructions of the players will be evident in different media depending on the media's agenda. The way in which the players in the debate are constructed by those sources that publicize the issue will greatly affect the public's understanding and assessment of the issue. If the acceptance of the issue is contingent on public support this information medium is very efficacious and powerful.

Each press in this analysis represents the players in the Supermax debate differently. The extent of inclusion or exclusion and emphasis or de-emphasis of different players is one element contributing to distinctive constructions. By including more players from one side the debate is seen as lopsided in favor of the more represented side. Not only is the more represented position more widely diffused it also appears as a larger, stronger, and more significant force.

The common practice of excluding players silences voices which reduces the number of constructions of the debate to which the public is exposed, resulting in a fragmented understanding of the issues.

Some of the more common players in the Supermax debate are political officials and legislative officials, prison officials, activists, and human rights groups. Although most players are common to all three press, some of the players are exclusive to one. For example while the activist press floods their publications with statements by the opponents, the mainstream press allows them only brief comment, if any. It is not only important to look at who is represented but also how they are represented. The following section addresses both aspects of player representation.

### The Mainstream Press

#### The Proponents

The mainstream press represented the proponents fairly thoroughly. In the sixteen articles there are twenty-four proponents mentioned. At least one proponent appeared in eleven out of those sixteen articles (roughly 70% of the time). Only five articles did not include the proponents at all. They are all "opinion pieces".

#### Political Officials

The mainstream press includes elected political officials and those from legislative bodies as zealous

advocates in the Illinois Supermax debate. The legislative process involved in passing a bill into a law requires the vote and approval of the appropriate legislative bodies. The relevant players from these bodies have a considerable amount of power over the existence of the Supermax and are therefore important players in the debate. Because the building of the Supermax is contingent on Governor Edgar's final endorsement he is represented as the most important player in the debate. The Task Force on Crime and Corrections, the political body responsible for recommending the Supermax in Illinois, is another weighty player in the debate. It is for these reasons that Governor Jim Edgar and The Task Force are the proponents that the mainstream press includes most often.

Part of the legislative process involves the passage of the bill through the Senate as well as the House. This is necessary for the bill to go on to the Governor for his final endorsement or veto. Michael Madigan (The *Chicago Tribune* 6/6/93), Illinois house democrat, the Illinois Senate (The *Chicago Sun Times* 7/8/93), and the Illinois general assembly (The *Chicago Tribune* 7/15/93) are included as representatives of these governing bodies that have supported the Supermax legislation in the mainstream press. Local county legislative representatives are also included as interested parties. Cook County Commissioner Richard Phelan and Cook County sheriff Michael Sheahan (The *Chicago*



*Sun-Times* 8/12/93) voiced their support for the Supermax mainly because of its anticipated economic benefits.

It is not surprising that elected officials as well as legislative officials endorse level 6 prisons, and that they were represented often in the mainstream press. The representation of elected officials as strong supporters of severe criminal sanctions placates the public by depicting the elected officials as being hard on crime. State representative Tom Harding confirmed this influence the public has on the players in the debate: "[v]oter attitudes towards crime and punishment have also shaped the Supermax debate. Elected officials feel more capable of supporting a measure that appears 'tough on crime' than a complex array of sentence-restructuring proposals that election-year opponents might portray as "soft on crime" (*Illinois Times* 6/24/93). This results in a loop of influence fueled by the media. Public support is influenced by the publicized support of public officials which in turn is influenced by public opinion.

### Prison Officials

One of the primary pro arguments for the Supermax is increased safety within the prison system. Removing the most violent prisoners throughout the Illinois prison system and placing them in one facility is purported to increase the safety of guards while also improving conditions within the entire Illinois prison system. Proponents from the

criminal justice system advocating this aspect of the proposition were often included in the mainstream press, yet not as often as political officials. Representatives from the Illinois Department of Corrections (DOC) and Prison officials such as the warden of Marion, the superintendent and a spokesman for the Illinois DOC are all included as endorsers of the proposal for the new prison. One of the strongest group of supporters are Illinois prison guards who emphasized how they are affected the most by the violence in the prison system. AFSCME (American Federation of State and County Municipal Employees), the union that represents the prison guards, appeared in the mainstream press advocating the urgent need for the Supermax prison as a remedy for the increasingly dangerous prison environment. Since the Supermax is intended to increase safety while being cost efficient it is no surprise that those in the prison system were included as strong advocates of the Illinois Supermax prison.

The mainstream press included only political and prison officials as proponents in the debate. Since they represent two major social institutions that play a large role in the maintenance of the status quo it is not surprising that the mainstream press represents them as the most powerful advocates in the Supermax debate.

### The Opponents

The opponents are included only slightly less often

then the proponents in the mainstream press. In the sixteen mainstream articles fourteen were mentioned. Those fourteen opponents appeared in nine out of the sixteen articles (slightly more than 50% of the time).

The opponents in the Supermax debate can be separated into two camps the pragmatists and the moralists. This duality is clarified in an article by Thomas Atkins. Although Atkin's definitions imply mutually exclusive distinctions which rarely exist, his framework can be used as an explanatory tool not as a conclusive description. In Atkins' dichotomy pragmatist opponents are concerned with economics and moralist opponents are concerned with debating the philosophical issues of high-security incarceration. Because pragmatist opponents do not oppose level 6 prisons in all cases they appear as the weaker type of opponent. The moralist opponents are more thorough in their opposition. They are critical of the fundamental philosophical notion of Supermax prisons and are seen as more convicted and rigid. Although the opposition was sometimes included in the mainstream press more than half of the articles don't include any representatives of their position. And the opponents that were mentioned in the mainstream press were presented only briefly.

#### Political Officials

The only political official cited as an opponent is Governor Edgar. He is constructed as playing a dual role in the

mainstream press. In three articles he is characterized as a pragmatist opponent (The *Chicago Tribune* 11/27/92, The *Chicago Sun Times* 6/8/93, and The *Chicago Sun-Times* 3/11/93). As the political official heading the State Governor Edgar is understandably concerned with financial issues. In fact when he held off his support of the Supermax it was solely for economic reasons, not moral concerns. Although the Illinois Governor was skeptical of signing the proposal for the expensive sixty million dollar Supermax he eventually endorsed it as a package with the rest of the recommendations. Following Edgar's endorsement it was acknowledged that "prison officials and union leaders convinced him the new facility ultimately would save money" (The *Chicago Sun-Times* 6/8/93). Edgar is represented as a temporary pragmatic opponent who eventually allies himself with the advocates.

#### Prison Officials

No prison officials are included as opponents. They are represented as unified in their support of the Supermax prison. Since they represent the advocates that would be directly affected by the new Supermax their support is given unique status. It is also conceivable that any dissenting viewpoints would be stifled by the majority in support of the new prison, within the prison system itself as well as by the mainstream press, in order to present a more convicted pro stance.

## Activists and Human Rights Groups

CEML was included most often as representing the moral opposition in the mainstream press. They worked hard at getting themselves covered in the press through press releases, demonstrations, and their presence at political events. Despite the fact that any representation in the mainstream press is a victory for an oppositional group, CEML's position was granted marginal status through their limited inclusion.

One of the strongest points in the opposition's argument is the fact that level 6 prisons are inhumane and in violation of prisoner's human rights. Human rights groups serve as official sources who validate these kinds of abuses. Six Human rights groups are included as opponents somewhere in the mainstream press: Amnesty International, Human Right's Watch, The National Prison Project, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), The John Howard Association, and the National Interreligious Task Force. The condemnation of Supermax prisons by Human Rights Groups as official sources adds weight to the opponent's argument. However their minimal inclusion in the feature and news stories of the mainstream press weakens the opponent's position where it could have been strengthened.

## An Oppositional Aberration

Only one non news and feature article in the mainstream

paper included more than one opponent<sup>17</sup> (*The Chicago Tribune*, 4/1/91). In fact over 50% of the opponents (seven out of eleven) in the mainstream press were found in this one article. Why did the mainstream press allow the voice of the opposition to this degree in this article? Even though the opponents were included and given a fair amount of space in this article the oppositional statements were strategically constructed to minimize the impact of the opponent's position. A closer analysis of this article will illuminate some of the strategies utilized by the mainstream press.

The comments of Norval Morris, a professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Chicago, were included under the guise of opposition. He stated: "I have never seen the need for a greater security than at Statesville or Pontiac, but on the other hand when they are as gang-ridden and overcrowded as they are now, they are difficult to run....It has certainly made it easier to operate a prison when you take some of the worst inmates out" (*The Chicago Tribune* 4/1/91). Morris' double edged comments illustrate the strategy of including the voice of the opposition while also

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<sup>17</sup>A distinction is made among the mainstream press articles. There are those that are in the main news and feature stories and those in the editorial-type sections; including editorials, op-ed, and letters to the editor, which I term "opinion-pieces". This distinction is made to further illustrate the press' strategic inclusion of the opposition which occurs mainly in the opinion pieces section. This point will be illuminated further in the analysis.<sup>17</sup>

supporting the proponents. Despite his initial critique of the prisons, he immediately contradicted himself with the pro argument of increased control. The inclusion of the pro statement serves to diminish the impact of the initial oppositional statement.

Further explanation for the seemingly gross representation of the opposition in this 1991 article relates to time. The older date of this article removes it temporally from the current Illinois Supermax debate. It occurred two years before the introduction of the proposal for the Illinois Supermax and was written at a time when the stakes were not as high. The article's somewhat removed position from the 1993 debate renders it fairly innocuous. Its representation of the opposition hardly threatens the mainstream's pro slant during the time of the debate.

The mainstream press' strategic inclusion of the opposition in the news and feature stories results in a marginalized construction. One way this is done is through minimal inclusion. When the opposition is included in the mainstream press, it is usually minimized by its construction as one representative activist group, CEML. In comparison a wider range of proponents are included more often. The opposition is not only quantitatively minimized it is also substantively marginalized through definition. In one of the articles CEML is introduced as "a small human rights group" only later to be labeled specifically (The

*Chicago Tribune* 5/19/93). This labeling certainly depicts the group as inconsequential posing little, if any, threat.

### Opinion Pieces

The second deviation from minimizing the opposition in the mainstream press is their inclusion in the "opinion pieces" where greater voice and credibility is given to the opponents. Over 50% of the opponents (eight out of fourteen) included in the 16 mainstream press articles are found solely in the six "opinion pieces" articles. Unlike the news and feature stories which limits their inclusion three out of five "opinion pieces" in the mainstream press include more than one opponent. The "opinion pieces" are now discussed separately illuminating the differences between them and the main articles in their representation the opposition.

William Rentscheler wrote a compelling oppositional piece entitled "Does Illinois Need 'Super-Max' Prison?" (*Chicago Sun-Times* 8/21/93). He is seen as a pragmatist opponent. His opposition is guided by economic interests, not moralistic concern. The opponents that Rentscheler included speak to economic concerns regarding overcrowding and violent offenders. Michael Mahoney, the president of the John Howard Association, a prison watch dog group, also voiced his economic concerns. He claimed that instead of building a Supermax "the shortage of beds for violent offenders could be relieved at substantially less cost by



revising the classification system and replacing some antiquated cells" (The *Chicago Sun-times* 8/21/93).

Rentscheler included a statement by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency which questions the effectiveness of prisons in general. "prisons and the criminal justice system itself have very little positive impact on reducing crime" (The *Chicago Sun-Times* 8/21/93). Although these players do oppose the Supermax prison in Illinois, their opposition is the weakest among the "opinion pieces" in that it is guided by pragmatic concerns. They are concerned with fiscal efficiency and may not be opponents in other domains.

Nancy Kurshan (from CEML) wrote a powerful anti Supermax editorial in the Personal Views section of the *Chicago Tribune*. Her article was a response to a March 11 editorial that supported the Supermax. Kurshan referred to the prisons as "hellholes that engender more rage, anger and bitterness" (The *Chicago Tribune* 4/8/93). She further stated some of the conditions in level 6 prisons and commented on how they "contain African Americans in even more disproportionate numbers than the prison system overall" (4/8/93). She included Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch as official groups who support the opposition's condemnation of level 6 prisons. They are represented as allies whose oppositional position serve as backing for the opponents. She concluded with the advocating of a public debate regarding the "enormous costs

as well as moral and political implications" (The *Chicago Tribune* 4/8/93). Kurshan's moralist stance is quite strong, one that has been strategically filtered out of the mainstream news and feature articles.

Another editorial in the mainstream press by Kent Steiner of CEML began by condemning the Illinois General Assembly for being "on the verge of deciding to build a Supermax" (*Chicago Tribune* 7/15/93). Steiner's anti-Supermax position is reinforced by a number of other opponents. An Amnesty representative is quoted as stating how conditions in Supermax prisons are "cruel, inhumane and degrading" and said "[t]here is hardly a rule in the [UN] Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners that is not infringed in some way or other" (*Chicago Tribune* 7/15/93). A representative from The John Howard association was quoted as describing conditions as "sensory and psychological deprivation" (*Chicago Tribune* 7/15/93). And the National Inter-Religious Task Force on Criminal Justice claimed that Marion's conditions constitute "psychological pain and agony tantamount to torture" (The *Chicago Tribune* 7/15/93). Three Human rights groups were included in the editorial adding weight to the opponent's claim that these prisons are inhuman and in violation of human rights. This editorial concluded by blaming the *Chicago Tribune* for contributing to the silencing on this issue by editorializing about the Supermax without mentioning the

aspect of human rights. Not only did Steiner's strong moralistic opposition incorporate a number of opponents, he also attacked the very press that printed his article for ignoring a crucial issue in the debate over the Supermax.

The remaining two "opinion pieces" further attacked the proposal for the Supermax on grounds of financial misappropriation. They both stressed the need to advocate funds for education not prisons, and condemn the prisons system's racist nature (Dodge 1993 and Mandel 1993).

Out of the five "opinion pieces" four voiced a strong moralist opposition while only one represented a weak pragmatist opposition. By including the moralist opponents the mainstream press strategically constructed its coverage as "objective". It appears self-reflexive and democratic by allowing the voice of dissent to be heard. However, the less visible issues of strategic inclusion which render the dissenting viewpoints less effective are often overlooked. The subtle indoctrination of a pro-Supermax stance is visible only to the critical observer. Although the editorial section allowed more of the opponent's arguments to be heard the main feature and news articles minimized the voice of the opponents. Representation in the main and feature stories is more important since it is regarded as the more "serious" and is the more read section of the paper. It is worth noting that only CEML and Governor Edgar were included in the main feature and news articles in the

mainstream press as opponents. And that out of the fourteen opponents included in the mainstream press nine are solely included in the "opinion pieces".

It is not surprising that the proponents were favorably represented and that the opposition was under-represented in the mainstream press news and feature stories. Since the mainstream paper is aligned with government and state agencies it is supportive of the proponent's argument. If the opposition is given considerable time to voice its position, the proponent's position will be threatened. Therefore the advocates will not be as effective in gaining public support for the building of a Supermax prison in Illinois.

#### The Small Press

The small press is similar to the mainstream press in its organizational structure. It is also similar to the mainstream press in many ways relating to content. For one, it is akin to the mainstream press in its representation of the proponents. Slightly fewer yet many of the same advocates are included. There are eleven different proponents included in the twelve small press articles (compared to twenty-three in the sixteen mainstream articles) and they are included in a larger percentage of the articles. The proponents appeared in eleven out of the twelve articles. This represents approximately 99% of the time (compared to approximately 70% in the mainstream)

## The Proponents

### Political Officials

Political officials were consistent players in the coverage of the Supermax debate. As in the mainstream press Governor Edgar and the Task Force were portrayed as the most important proponents in the debate in the small press. They were included in the small press more than any other proponents. They were included in almost the same percentage of the articles as in the mainstream press. Both Edgar and the Task Force are included in roughly 60% of the articles in the mainstream press (ninetimes out of sixteen articles) and Edgar is included roughly 60% of the time in the small press (seven times out of twelve articles) and the Task Force approximately 40% of the time in the small press (five times out of twelve).

Legislative officials were included in the small press as proponents, yet in smaller numbers than in the mainstream press. Tom Homer, a democratic representative from Canton, voiced his support by saying "the Supermax may be grueling for its inmates, but could ease conditions for the rest of the prison population" (*Illinois Times* 1993). The unspecified term of lawmakers was used two times in the small press. In one *Southtown Economist* article it was stated that "[l]awmakers said they would push the prison proposal in senate this week" (*The Southtown Economist* 3/31/93). In another article Edgar said his support of the

bill "is linked to lawmakers supporting legislation designed to ease overcrowding" (*News-Sun* 6/19/93). Among other less mentioned political officials representing the proponents in the small press were the General Assembly and the Illinois DOC. Although lawmakers may appear as less significant proponents in the small press due to their limited and anonymous representation it was their support that helped pass the bill in the Senate and the House and sway Governor Edgar's decision to endorse the bill.

#### Prison Officials

Howard Peters, then Director of the Illinois DOC, prison guards, ASCME and other unnamed Prison officials appeared as significant players and staunch advocates in the Supermax debate in the small press. Peters expressed his concern for the "increasing danger to the Department of Corrections personnel.... which could be alleviated by the introduction of the new super-security prison" (*Illinois Times* 1993). Thomas Atkins, author of an *Illinois Times* article claims Peters is the most eloquent advocate for the Supermax prison who "sees Supermax as a badly needed tool to control those inmates hell-bent on disrupting the system" (*Illinois Times* 1993). He stated [n]ot building a Supermax keeps Illinois at the mercy of a few recalcitrant convicts and victimizes the remainder of the prison population" (*Illinois Times* 1993). Steven Culen executive director of ASCME, stated that his main reason for supporting the

proposal is " to protect officers working within the prison system" (*Illinois Issues* 1992). He continued by validating his position with statistics "12 officers have been killed in the last 10 years" (*Illinois Issues* 1992). Both statements by Peter's and Culen's reiterate the "increasingly violent prison system" argument used by the proponents to support their position.

The sentiments of concerned prison guards who are directly effected by the purported trend of increasing violence in the Illinois prison system were included in the small press as reinforcement for the proponent's claim that the increased violence is causing increased risk for guards, which demands a super security prison. James Atkins, an officer at Statesville Correctional Center claimed that the already present "segregation" units are not sufficient. Despite them "[a]n average of three prison employees are attacked every day" (*Southtown Economist* 3/31/93). Michael Bushue, an officer at Menard Correctional Center who was stabbed 17 times in the back by a prisoner in 1991 stated, "If we go there with the idea of super maximum security and we build this thing from the ground up, we should be able to control them [the violent inmates]" (*Southtown Economist* 3/31/93). Prison officials in a *Chicago Defender* article voiced their support by espousing how the "super Max" is needed to contain violent criminals" (*Chicago Defender* 9/29/93) The small press granted prison guards and the

union representing them added significance due to their role in convincing Governor Edgar to endorse the proposal. Edgar gave credit when he said "that the union representing prison guards convinced him the super max prison would be a good idea for the troublesome prisoners. His continues by revealing his ulterior motive behind the decision. "If you are a governor you don't necessarily want the union, which is part of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, angry with you, especially since an election year is around the corner" (*News-Sun* 6/19/93). It is not surprising to find that both the mainstream press and the small press included political and prison officials as the more powerful proponents in the Supermax debate. The mainstream press represented the proponents broader in scope, including a more extensive array of players. However, the small press included the proponents in a larger percentage of the articles.

### The Opponents

The small press represented the opposition in a broader scope. Out of twelve articles seven different opponents are represented. The opposition was also represented more often. They were included in seven of the twelve articles (slightly more than 50% of the time) In the news and feature section of the mainstream press the opposition only appeared in 25% of the articles (four out of sixteen articles). If the mainstream "opinion pieces" are included



in the analysis the opposition is seen as represented equally in both press. They appear a little more than 50% of the time, nine out of sixteen articles, in the mainstream including "opinion pieces". An important distinction can be made. In articles that included both the opposition and the proponents the mainstream press always gave the proponents equal or more space. However, when including both sides the small press gave the opposition more space in half of the articles.

#### Political Officials

The small press included two political opponents; Governor Edgar as a pragmatist opponent and Tommy Brewer, a political nominee for Cook County Sheriff, as a strong moralist opponent. While the mainstream press constructed political officials as more supportive of the proposal by including Edgar as the only political opponent the small press allowed one more to surface. Because of his blatant attack Brewer is the strongest voice of opposition from a political or legislative representative. The article states how Brewer blatantly "made it clear that he opposes the \$60 million "Super Max" prison, calling it a "bad idea" (*Chicago Defender* 9/29/93). The small press included Edgar three times as a weak pragmatic opponent. (*Southtown Economist* 3/26/93, and 3/31/93, and *News-Sun* 6/19/93). Consistent with the mainstream's press coverage Edgar was represented in the small press as being reluctant to endorse the proposal

because he is seeking lower cost alternatives (*Chicago Defender* 9/29/93).

#### Prison Officials.

No prison officials were included as oppositional players. The small press, consistent with the mainstream press, represented prison officials as unified in their support of the Supermax.

#### Activists and Human Rights Groups

CEML is by far the most represented opponent in the small press (*Chicago Defender* 2/2/94, *All Chicago City News* 1/24/93, *Illinois Times* 6/24/93). In a *Chicago Defender* article Steve Pick, a CEML member, strongly stated his opposition by not only accusing the prison system of inhumanity but by also claiming that the results of Supermax incarceration are counterproductive. He described the proposed Supermax prison as "an isolation chamber that would destroy minds and makes criminals more violent". (*Chicago Defender* 9/29/93). Erica Thompson, also a member of CEML, reiterated Pick's sentiments when she declared that "in addition to being ineffective in modifying the behavior of so called troublesome prisoners, Super-Max prisons generally degrade prisoners and violate their constitutional rights" (*All Chicago City News* 1/24/93).

Other activist groups included in the small press are the Prison Action Committee (PAC), 21st Century Vote, and

Probation Challenge. Ahmad Baker, of PAC has a general beef with the Task Force's recommendations. He claimed they do not go far enough. "The prison system needs a whole new philosophy in terms of how the officers and inmates relate and in terms of the direction of the Illinois Correctional system" (*All Chicago City News* April 1993). Tom Harris of 21st Century vote, an activist group allegedly composed of gang members from the Gangster Disciples, addressed systematic racism when he claimed the Supermax is a way for the state to control African Americans. He further described incarceration in these prisons as "inhumane and torturous treatment" (*Chicago Defender* 2/2/94). Rev. Harold E. Bailey, president of Probation Challenge, also attacked the new prison concept as racist and accused the Governor of ignoring educational needs while spending money on a prison whose racist motive is aimed at incarcerating and controlling African Americans (*Chicago Defender* 6/8/93).

The terms "dozens of protesters" (*Chicago Defender* 2/2/94), and "Activist" (*All Chicago City News* April 1993) were used more generally in the small press when referring to the opposition. In this case the nonspecific naming of the opposition assigns them less importance and credibility.

While the mainstream press only included one activist group as an opponent (CEML) the small press includes many more. Activists represent a unique segment of the opposition. Activists can be radical in their approach and

their agendas go counter to the mainstream. The small press goes out on a limb more than the mainstream press in giving activists a greater voice. In representing the opposition as more than one activist group or individual it is constructed as more of a coalition instead of one isolated voice of protest defined by one radical fringe group. It is constructed as bigger and more significant. While the mainstream press marginalizes the oppositional activist groups the small press constructs them as a sizable protest and a significant force.

#### The Activist Press

The activist press incorporated and utilized the two sides in the Supermax debate differently than the other two press. The activist press is not aimed at reporting events. It is less concerned with presenting a set of facts than it is with uncovering the untruths, disclaiming the mainstream construction. In doing this the activist press introduces a blatantly bias construction of the Supermax issue that is vehemently anti. Although the activist press did include a number of the same proponents as did the mainstream and the small press it used them differently. Instead of giving the proponents an arena to state their position as in the mainstream and the small press in the activist presses they were always included as examples of deceptive tactics or incorrect reasoning. The proponents that were included in the literature often represent those to who the opposition

the literature often represent those to who the opposition have directed their grievances. They are those that have some say in the existence of the Illinois Supermax. Included most often are political figure heads or legislative bodies whose passage of the bill will introduce the new prison, and prison officials who are not only strong advocates for the prison but will also be those who operate and maintain the prison if it is to open.

### The Proponents

There were nine different proponents included in the seven activist articles. Although the advocates were included in all the articles at least once they were never advancing their position. Instead they served as examples used to verify the opponent's position. The same key proponents, Governor Edgar and the Task Force, were included in the activist press most often. They were both included in six of the seven articles. Consistent with a negative construction of the proponents in the activist press these two key proponents were never constructed in a positive light but were always the focus of attack.

### Political Officials

In one flyer (*A Proposal for How to End the Fiscal Crisis in the Schools* 1993), CEML accused Governor Edgar of a blatant lie. Edgar introduced the implementation of a new program stressing "Kids not Concrete". However CEML said

that "since his "Kids not Concrete" statements, Edgar has failed at every step to help our children". In another flyer CEML called the Task Force's proposal "obscene and" a frontal, racist attack on Black people" (*No More Control Units* 1993). In the a larger publication, CEML accused the Task Force of ignorance. They exposed how "[t]he members of the Task Force had never heard of control unit prisons. The members had no knowledge regarding the history of human rights violations and the inherent repressive function of control units, and they did not bother to educate themselves" (*The Broadside* 1993). CEML claimed that despite their attempt to send the Task Force information they chose to remain ignorant.

Not only did CEML attack local government and state political officials, they also attacked the United States government, accusing it of racist tactics. CEML closed one of their flyers by saying "The Task Force along with the U.S. government would rather spend money imprisoning people of color than providing them with a decent education" (*No More Control Units* 1993).

### Prison Officials

The activist press contained very few proponents other than Edgar and the Task Force. The only specified prison official included is the former warden of Marion, Ralph Aron. Prison guards, representing one of the strongest advocates of the prison, were only granted a brief mention

for the same reason the mainstream press only included the prisoners voice once. Prison guards and prisoners represent very powerful players on each side of the debate because they are situated inside the prison system and they are directly effected by prison policy. The proponents do not want to diffuse the prisoners story, which is most likely anti-prison. Nor do the opponents want to include the voice of prison guards who are the most vehement advocates of the Supermax.

In one article CEML backed up its claim that " it is the true purpose of c.u.'s (Control Units, another name for Supermax often used by the opposition) to keep a lid on an unjust prison system..." (*The Broadside* 1993). They recount how in 1975 Ralph Aron told the federal court that "[t]he true purpose of the Marion Control Unit is to control revolutionary attitudes in the prison system and society at large" (*The Broadside* 1993). This statement by Mr. Aron, a proponent from the Department of Corrections, is used to verify one of the opposition's claims; that Supermax prisons are used to control political dissidents, not extremely violent offenders. The activist press included the political incarceration argument which were absent in the other press. It is not surprising to find this position absent from the mainstream and small press coverage since it is a serious allegation aimed at the US legal system.

AFSCME was included briefly because of its influence on

Edgar's final endorsement. CEML claimed that "Edgar began considering Supermax pressured largely by guards organized in AFSCME [American Federation of State and County and Municipal Employees]" (*No Illinois Supermax* 1993). All three press addressed the influence of prison guards on Edgar's decision to endorse the proposal. However, this information was relayed in different ways. The mainstream press and the small press stated it as the necessary and desired catalyst needed for Edgar's final endorsement. While the activist press constructed the union's influence as a negative factor facilitating an unjust decision.

The Task Force was flagrantly attacked by CEML on charges of misrepresentation when CEML accused them of not being "the independent panel of experts that the Governor and state officials claimed it to be" (*The Broadside* 1993). A related critique defines the task force as "Edgar's hand-picked gang of nearly all white men headed by former U.S. district attorney Anton Valukas" (*No Illinois Supermax* 1993). Some of CEML's members attended the open Task Force meetings and described how "the chair, Judge Anton Valukas, along with the Governor's aide and the Director of the Department of Corrections (both nonvoting members of the Task Force), drafted all the proposal" (*The Broadside* 1993). CEML claimed that the development of the proposal was taken over by a few heavies in the Task Force which addresses the undemocratic nature of what was supposed to be a democratic



legal process.

CEML was blatant in its attack on the proponents. Their literature is aimed at convincing the public that the proponents are wrong and the opposition is correct. CEML illustrated their contempt in the concluding comments of an article by saying: "[t]he governor, the chair of the Task Force, the Director of the Department of Corrections, and the General Assembly are ushering unprecedented brutality into the Illinois prison system. They must be stopped. We must fight it now" (*The Broadside* 1993). CEML's strong opposition was emphasized with an urgent call for action.

To de-emphasize the proponent's position fewer advocates of level 6 prisons were included in the activist press. When they were included they functioned differently than they did in the mainstream or the small press. They were not given the opportunity to state their position. The advocates position was only used as a focus of attack and statements were included only to legitimate the opponent's claims. In this respect the activist press was the least democratic in their representation of the proponents.

### The Opponents

The opposition in the activist press was also represented much differently than in the other two press. One significant difference is that they were included in every article.

## Political and Prison Officials

The activist literature did not include any political or prison officials as opponents. They were only included as proponents. Although the mainstream and the small press rarely include political or prison officials as opponents, they will allow the sides to overlap. Both Edgar and the Cook County sheriff candidate Tommy Brewster are seen as weak opponents (*Southtown Economist* 3/26/93 and *Chicago Defender* 9/29/93). In contrast CEML has constructed very distinct sides in the debate. By not allowing proponents to play dual roles the activist press is making a strong case against these groups of players. All political and prison officials are vehement supporters of the Supermax who are either wrongly informed or deceptive in their advocacy. They have constructed a rigid and static definition of the enemy, rendering their attack more focused.

## Activists and Human Rights Groups

While activist groups were down played in the mainstream press and included but not made the most important players in the small press, they were made the most significant and legitimate players in the activist literature. Aside from CEML, which was included most often, other groups that were included are The National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War, Illinois Coalition for the Homeless, Parents United for Responsible Education and the Public Welfare Coalition (*No*

*Illinois Supermax Prison* 1993). The opposition was constructed as mightier in numbers than it was in either the mainstream or the small press. In fact in a pamphlet titled "No Illinois Supermax Prison" CEML explained one of the steps they have taken in efforts to build a coalition around opposition to the Task Force's recommendation for an Illinois Supermax. They developed a statement that delineates reasons why the Supermax should not be endorsed. CEML then attempted to get other organizations to sign on to this statement, becoming allies in the struggle. They said "we started by taking it to our closest allies, but we want to go as broadly as possible among groups concerned about state spending priorities" (*No Illinois Supermax Prison* 1993). CEML has constructed the opposition as a sizable group moving towards expansion.

Statements of condemnation by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch were often included in the activist literature to add support and credibility to their position.

In two separate articles it was stated in reference to a Supermax prison opened in 1991 in Indiana called the MCC that "Amnesty [International] has already written two letters of condemnation to the Indiana Department of Corrections, warning that the conditions there violate the United Nations' Standard Minimum Rules for the treatment of Prisoners" (*Illinois Supermax is not a Solution* 1994 and *Letter to Organizations* 1993). Another article included how

Governor Edgar considered the Illinois Supermax" a year after Human Rights Watch condemned "Marionization" as the 'most troubling aspect of the human rights situation in U.S.prisons'" (*No Illinois Supermax Prison* 1993). As weighty allies these human rights groups represented one of the only official sources that back the opposition's position.

The mainstream press included the most players, both advocates and opponents. While the small and the activist press, close in numbers, included fewer. However, just because the mainstream press included the most players on both side of the debate does not make it less biased, or a better representation of the debate. Even though the mainstream press included more players overall, fewer players are included in each article and they are not quoted as often as they are in the small press. The small press gave the players more space to voice their position. They utilized more quotes from more players. Not only does this somewhat detach the institutional voice of the paper from the sentiments appearing more objective, yet imposing bias nonetheless, it recognizes and shapes the debate.

Of the two institutional papers the mainstream press was the least supportive of the opponents while the activist press exclusively promoted the opposition. One is tempted to conclude that because the activist press is the least supportive of the proponents; it is the least tied to the

dominant social institutions; that the small press is somewhat supportive of the proponents while somewhat affiliated with the dominant social institutions; and that the mainstream press is the most interrelated to the dominant social institutions because it is the most strongly supportive of the proponents. Before a conclusion is drawn too hastily a look at how the players are represented through spatiality and location is essential for a better assessment of the constructions.

#### Fullness of Treatment

Analysis thus far confirms the fact that all three press included many of the same representatives from both sides in the Supermax debate. However, each press employed them differently hence creating a difference in overall slant. More than just the mere inclusion of a voice it is also the location of that voice in the context of the article that creates a unique construction. The way in which the sides in the debate are incorporated into the article will reveal much about the slant of the article.

A one-sided construction blatantly favors one side of the issue or debate by excluding all others. The message to the public is there is only one way to interpret the issue. Essentially it appears as if there is no debate. On the other hand the recognition of the multi-faceted nature of an issue or the acknowledgment of a debate, seen in the representation of at least two sides does not equal

objective reporting. In this case the amount of space dedicated to each side and the positioning of those sides is the strategy used to create an overall slant. Although multi-perspective articles may appear more "objective" they are merely more insidiously biased.

### One-sided Coverage: The Monologue

#### The Mainstream Press

A look at one-sided coverage in each press helps to define further the different coverage that each accorded to the Supermax debate. The mainstream press is one-sided the majority of the time (twelve out of sixteen articles or 75% of the time). Seven of these are pro-slanted articles and five are anti-slanted articles. All of the anti-slanted and only one of the pro-slanted articles are "opinion pieces". It is further revealing to look at what type of "opinion pieces" are pro and what type are anti. The five one-sided anti "opinion pieces" are all letters to the editor, personal views, or commentaries written by individuals not connected with the paper. However, the only one-sided pro slanted article is written by a *Chicago Tribune* writer, representing the institutional voice of the mainstream paper. The mainstream paper only allowed one-sided oppositional commentary in the form of "opinion pieces" from isolated individuals disconnected from the institutional voice of the paper. They appear as eccentrics from the radical fringe having little credibility. Even more

important their critical perspectives are not associated with the perspective offered by the paper. The ideology of the paper is not threatened.

### The Small Press

The small press was one-sided 50% of the time (six out of twelve articles). Of these six articles five were pro-slanted. The one anti article was from the *Chicago Defender* and was written by Karen P. Nolen, a staff member.

Three of the five pro articles are from other news sources. Two are from the Copley News Service in Springfield (*News-Sun* 2/27/93 and 11/25/92) and one is from the Associated Press (*Southtown Economist* 3/26/93). The remaining two written by staff writers of the respective papers (*News-Sun* and *Illinois Issues* (12/92)) News sources tend to be more conservative in their coverage in order to sell their product to a wide spectrum of presses. It is recognized that the Associated press' uniform style enables it to sell its product to a diverse set of client papers. (Shoemaker and Reese 1991, 92). The fact that the majority of the small press one-sided articles are from news sources slants coverage towards the more pro position.

In terms of reader perception it is significant that the majority of the pro-slanted articles in the small press were one-sided. (only one includes both sides, *Chicago Defender* 6/8/93), while the majority of the anti articles included both sides. The pro articles appeared less

democratic because of the exclusion of the opposition whereas the anti-articles appeared more democratic because they included both sides of the debate. However, it can be argued that inclusion of both sides by the opposition is necessary and does not render it more democratic. There are some players in the debate that none of the press could omit without presenting an incomprehensible coverage of the debate. A few advocates are essential for the understanding of the proposal while none of the opponents are. In order to merely explain what the proposal is Governor Edgar and the Task Force are crucial. CEML, or any other opponent, may be crucial in terms of understanding the debate but not in terms of understanding the proposal. Further the proponent's position is a necessary component in the opponent's argument. Otherwise it would be like being in combat without a target. This helps explain why a discrepancy in inclusion is found where the pro articles are more often one-sided and the anti articles include both side. However, this does not erase the fact that the both-sided articles *appear* more democratic.

### Activist Press

The activist press is the least democratic in terms of inclusion. The proponent's position was never presented from their perspective. All seven articles were one-sided, only including the voice of the opposition. As previously mentioned the activist press' goal is not "objective" fact



reporting. It has no pretensions of being unbiased. The agenda of the activist press is to solely promote the activist's position, which consists in large part of delegitimizing the proponents. Giving the proponents space to present their argument would weaken the opponent's position just as significant inclusion of the opposition in the mainstream press (more or different coverage than what is necessary for effective strategic inclusion) would threaten the proponent's position. Since the activist press is not an official news source it has no need to construct any notion of "objective" reporting. Exclusion of other perspectives is acceptable and not questioned.

#### Both Sided Coverage: The Dialogue

The overall space dedicated to each side in each press is important and worth investigation. The total number of paragraphs each press grants each side is one indication of how important and legitimate the press wants to construct each side. The more space that is given to one side to delineate their position the more of that side's construction becomes part of the overall construction of the debate and the more the public is exposed to and trusting of that story.

The mainstream press dedicated almost twice as much space to the proponents. They were granted 117 paragraphs while the opponents were granted only 53. While the small press also favored the proponents, the discrepancy between

the sides is not as substantial. The proponents were given 81 paragraphs while the opponents were given 66, representing a 30-60 percent split. The activist press completely favored the opponents granting them all the paragraphs. An occasional quote by a proponent may be included within an otherwise anti paragraph only to make a oppositional point. A quantitative analysis of space reveals again that both the institutional papers, the mainstream more strongly, are more closely aligned with the proponents. While the activist press is in the oppositional position.

#### Content of the Dialogue

Although the amount of space is an important variable to assess, that space does not come unfilled. The content of the space is even more important, and a key component in the overall construction. The different statements included by the sides will help to further explain the overall construction. For example if one side is granted a number of paragraphs to state their position but the other side is given space to refute what was previously stated the original statements are put into question, delegitimated without a fair trail. And the side that is given the space to refute statements is constructed as more credible. This strategy is often utilized to maintain an overall slant while still including the voice of dissent.

An example from a small press paper, the *All Chicago*

*City News*, illustrates the above point nicely. The opposition and the proponents were granted equal space of three paragraphs. Two of the three paragraphs granted to the proponents were rebuttals to the opponent's accusations. First the opponents accused the Task Force of denying them access to public meetings. The proponent's responded, "[i]n answer to the charges that the Illinois Task Force on Crime and Correction prevented CEML from attending meetings, Kevin Morrison of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority stated that the Task Force meetings are not used as a public forum" (*All Chicago City News* 6/24/93). Because the proponents were seen as disclaiming the opponent's accusations the opponent's position was weakened and put into question.

An example in an activist press article illustrates the opponents discrediting the proponents. In the activist flyer *How to End the Fiscal Crisis in the Schools* (1993), the proponents monetary figure for construction of the Supermax was immediately refuted by the opponents. "The cost to build the "Super-Max" is alleged by Edgar to be \$66 million, although realistic estimates suggest that the real cost will be over \$100 million". Even though the proponent's voice was included it was only used as a demonstrative device illustrating their deceptive wording. The opponent's choice of words very dramatically constructed the proponents as less than truthful while the opposition

was constructed as the honest purveyor of information. The term [alleged] was used to describe Edgar's [estimated] cost while the opponent's gave the [real] [cost]. Again the opposition discredited the proponents and their position was weakened.

#### Location: A Spatial Analysis

Another variable in the spatial dynamic is location. The manipulating of information in a news article helps construct the overall slant. An article including both sides of a debate will position those sides strategically to construct the issue to serve a particular interest. For example the side that is granted the opening paragraph is often constructed as the more legitimate. The reader's interpretation is immediately influenced by the opening position. The last voice of an article is also significant. The reader's encounter with the issue concludes with one position which represents the last word or the final judgment.

There are exceptions to the last word being the more legitimated word. This occurs when the position taken in the last paragraph is included as a "by the way" comment and is not indicative of the overall slant of the article. For example in a *Chicago Tribune* article CEML was granted the final paragraph. They did not appear anywhere else in the article which is strongly pro. The opposition was not given any space to justify or expand on their position. The one

paragraph inclusion at the end appeared as a "by the way" comment of little significance (*Chicago Tribune* 6/6/93). A more detailed analysis of the first and last paragraph positioning technique in the three press follows in order to shed more light on to the slanting of each press.

### The Mainstream Press

The mainstream press expressed its pro leaning by granting the proponents the first voice most of the time. The opposition was introduced in the first paragraph in only one of the twelve articles. However, the first sentence of this otherwise oppositional paragraph diminished the opposition's impact by beginning with the phrase "[d]espite widespread support for a supermaximum-security penitentiary in Illinois..." (*Chicago Tribune* 5/19/93). Subsequent comments by the opposition will be obscured by this delegitimizing preface. The paragraph continued by briefly summarizing the opposition's position, "...a small human rights group is warning that the facility would be too expensive and would actually cause more prison violence." (*Chicago Tribune* 5/19/93). Not only was the opposition's statement preempted by an invalidating comment they were insignificantly and obliquely referred to as "a small human rights groups" (*Chicago Tribune* 5/19/93). The groups impact was obscured by their anonymity and their depiction as inconsequential in number. Despite the opposition's three paragraph delineation of their position the final statement

of the article was dedicated to a quote by James Atkins, a prison officer at Statesville maximum-security prison in Joliet, and a strong advocate of the Supermax. "If we don't get the worst of the worst out of there and away from those who want to come and do their time and pay their debt to society....It's a powder keg" (*Chicago Tribune* 5/19/93). Despite the opposition's inclusion, through positioning, this article constructed a position that clearly favors the proponents.

The other three articles that included both sides of the debate in the mainstream press all open with statements by the proponents. In one article following a powerful and lengthy pro argument, CEML, representing the opposition, appeared in the final paragraph described anonymously as a human rights group (*Chicago Tribune* 6/6/93). Only one sentence was used to sum up their position, simplifying its magnitude. CEML "...has contended that a super-maximum-security prison would lead to racism and human rights abuses." Not only was this not a very in-depth statement of their position, the proponents were granted the final sentence for a rebuttal stating "[s]tate prison officials have denied the allegations" (*Chicago Tribune* 6/6/93). The inclusion of the opposition was again represented as a last minute addition acknowledging the fact that an opposition does exist, while minimizing their significance.

The first article that appeared in the mainstream press

regarding the Illinois Supermax, appears anti from the title "State Puts Low Priority on High Security Prison" (*Chicago Tribune* 4/1/91). However, upon closer inspection this is not the case. This lengthy article (forty-three paragraphs) allowed both the opponents and the proponents space to advance their position. A detailed dissection of this article will clearly illustrate how significant inclusion does not necessarily translate into positive representation.

The first four paragraphs of the article were constructed as neutral. They merely described the "Marion model of incarceration", representing neither the opposition nor the advocates. Marion was described as "the country's most tightly controlled federal prison" (*Chicago Tribune* 4/1/91). The inmates rarely leave their cells. If they do "they are handcuffed, shackled in leg irons, and escorted by guards armed with metal-tipped, "rib-spreader" billy clubs" (*Chicago Tribune* 4/1/91). Although this description sounds more like an opponent's arguments in its harsh description the notion of total and complete control is one strongly supported by the proponents. This descriptive introduction to the issue can be interpreted as supporting either side.

In this article, the proponents were granted the first and the last voice. Following the descriptive opening the article proceeded to express the proliferation of the 'Marion model', "hard time for the hardest-core" (*Chicago Tribune* 4/1/91), emphasizing its success and popularity. In

a survey conducted by Marion prison staff thirty-six states were found to have adopted some form of the super-maximum concept. States bordering Illinois have opened one, but Illinois, with the fastest growing prison population in the nation has not. Commenting on Illinois' antiquated maximum security institutions the article claims "Illinois is weakest where it should be strongest" (*Chicago Tribune* 4/1/91). Although supermaximum prisons are expensive, \$65,000 per cell to build, "proponents say they are cost-effective overall because they reduce violence system-wide and as a result, lawsuits and injury claims diminish" (*Chicago Tribune* 4/1/91). The positioning and conviction of these initial pro statements that assert the success of Supermax prisons in other states established a pro leaning by adding precedent and credibility to the pro argument.

The next several paragraphs were dedicated to specific proponents who served as reinforcements through their advocacy of the need to reassert control over the states most dangerous inmates. Among them were the guard union's president, Dan Jarrett and Livingston counties state's attorney, Don Bernardi, who both recognized the need for a super-maximum prison in Illinois. Bernardi placed a Supermax prison for Illinois at the top of his wish list, claiming it would function as an effective deterrent. Jarrett emphasized the need to punish offenders by claiming "[w]e should go back to a prison system instead of a



corrections system" (*Chicago Tribune* 4/1/91).

The opponents, represented by corrections experts, were "deeply divided on whether the last resort prisons are humane or effective" (*Chicago Tribune* 4/1/91). Norval Morris, a University of Chicago criminologist and consultant to prison systems was not convinced they act as a deterrent. However his questioning of their effectiveness as a deterrent was immediately contradicted by a pro-slanted line. Morris began with an oppositional statement claiming "[h]uman motivation at that level of despair is not controlled by threat..." and continues "...however..it has certainly made it easier to operate a prison when you take some of the worst inmates out" (*Chicago Tribune* 4/1/91). Another dual positioned statement by Morris follows. He was quoted as stating he has never seen the need for a higher security prison than Illinois Maximum security prison, "but on the other hand when they are as gang ridden and overcrowded as they are now, they are difficult to run" (*Chicago Tribune* 4/1/91). Despite Morris' alleged alliance with the opposition he was portrayed as oscillating between both sides. The opposition's position is put into question by their weakly convicted representative. This strategic inclusion of a wishy-washy opponent serves to weaken the conviction of the opposition which in turn strengthen the advocate's position.

Following Morris' weakly constructed anti position was

a statement from Warden John L. Clark, a proponent of the Supermax. He commented on the inmates at Marion, referring to them as "predators" and described how they can progressively earn their way out of Marion. By constructing the inmates as "predators" Warden Clark advanced the proponent's positions of defining the problem as the individual with the appropriate solution, a not too harsh, but harsh enough Supermax. He concluded by promoting the regime's effectiveness by pointing out the low recidivism rate "only about 13 percent have been sent back for causing trouble elsewhere" (*Chicago Tribune* 4/1/91).

Human right's groups, representing the opposition, took center stage for the next three paragraphs. A representative from The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) described Marion as 'psychological torture.' Benjamin Wolf a representative from the ACLU furthered the critique by exposing the circular reasoning and self-fulfilling nature, of the "most violent argument." He claimed "through misguided social and criminal justice policies, we've created these monsters---overcrowded, violent prisons--and then we say we have to get more repressive because they are such monsters" (*Chicago Tribune* 4/1/91). Wolfe concluded with a double edged attack by asserting how these prisons are "incredibly expensive and needlessly harsh" (*Chicago Tribune* 4/1/91).

This rather lengthy article illustrated the strategy of

including both positions while maintaining an overall slant. Although the title of the article appears anti the content of the article proves pro. It illustrates how the opposition can be delegitimated by the proponent's comments. It also illustrates how amount of inclusion and placement are influential in creating a slant. The article granted the opposition much less space than the proponents. And the space they were granted was used to weakly advance an anti stance. This weak inclusion of the opposition increases the proponent's impact. A debate is recognized. But the opponents are constructed as impotent and sure to be beaten by the more powerful proponents.

#### The Small Press

By granting the opposition more initial statements the small press legitimated their position more than the mainstream. The opposition was represented in the opening paragraph in four out of the twelve articles. The *Illinois Times* article opened with the most dramatic statement by the opposition. The initial construction of a disturbing image regarding a protest by inmates at Indiana's Supermax the MCC increased the opposition's impact. The article begins, "[i]t was a convincing if bloody way to get attention. To protest conditions...a prisoner cut off his finger and mailed it to the ACLU" (*Illinois Times* 6/24/93). The article continued by detailing the proponent's position and the opponent's position which is divided into pragmatic and

moralistic opponents. The opposition not only opened the article they also ended it with a quote from Erica Thompson, a CEML member and lawyer. "I would think that people would be out in the streets, this run away prison policy is so obscene...At some point you just have to say this is crazy" (*Illinois Times* 6/24/93). Again the inclusion of both sides was slanted through space and positioning. The opponents were granted more space (twenty-eight paragraphs compared to thirteen by the proponents). And what they say was constructed as valid testimony rather than questionable statements. The article concluded with an anti slant.

One *All Chicago City News* (3/93) article granted the opposition the first and last statements creating an anti slant. The first two paragraphs set the stage by explaining the Task Force's proposal. The opposition came in on the third paragraph, representing the first voice in the debate. Ahmed Baker of the Prison Action Committee expressed how the Task Force's proposals are insufficient because "[t]he prison system needs a whole new philosophy" (*All Chicago City News* 3/93). The last two oppositional paragraphs identified the opposition as "Activists [who] say that the building of a super max would just be the perpetuation of the same philosophy which the Task Force itself condemned" (*All Chicago City News* 3/93). The pluralizing of the term activist constructed the opposition as more than one individual, making them appear more important and

significant in number.

The final small press article that included both sides also grants the opposition the first and last voice (*Chicago Defender* 9/29/93). This article focused on Tommy Brewer, a candidate for Cook County Sheriff. It detailed his opposition to the Supermax. The first paragraph stated how he "made it clear that he opposes the \$60 million "Super Max" prison, calling it a 'bad idea'." The proponents, generally referred to as "some prison officials" were granted one paragraph to promote their argument that "[t]he "Super max" is needed to contain violent criminals." (*Chicago Defender* 9/29/93). The unspecific reference to the proponents lessened their impact and credibility. Reasserting his oppositional position Tommy Brewer was given the chance to immediately refute the proponent's claim. He continued to explain the new breed of criminal for which prisons are just not effective. The fact that the opposition immediately disclaimed the proponent's one statement as well as their positioning as openers and closers of the article clearly places this article in the anti camp.

### Activist Press

In its exclusive representation of the opposition the activist press always granted the opposition the first and last voice. In one flyer the opening line reads *What if you lived in a state that was so IL. That headlines like these*

appeared? (1993). The article continued to list three headlines that describe the state cuts for social service programs. The article used social service cuts as a antecedent to the fact that state is proposing to spend over \$100 million dollars on a new 500 bed super-maximum security prison. The final lines read "The proposals of the Task Force are obscene! We hope that all concerned individuals will join us as we confront state legislatures and the Governor in their efforts to turn Illinois into a fortress of prisons. Voice you protest. Write Governor Edgar today!" (*What if You Lived in a State That was so Il?* (1993). All space in this flyer was granted to the opposition with the first and last statements as the most powerful. The strategic enclosing of the body of the article around extremely potent anti statements constructs a very powerful anti stance.

The activist article *A Proposal for How to End the Fiscal Crisis in the Schools* (1993). began with a cogent oppositional statement, "Stop the Insane Prison Building Spree in the State". The article continued by explaining the ineffectiveness of prisons and how building out of the overcrowded problem is impossible and the wrong fiscal strategy. The amount of money needed to implement the Task Force's proposal, \$300 million dollars, could be used to end the Chicago public school crisis. The last paragraph ended by again calling for oppositional action. "Don't let Edgar

use our money to build still more useless prisons. Demand that the money be used to open the schools-today! Demand that Illinois not spend \$40,000 a year to cage a prisoner in the Super-Max prison and only \$3,600 to educate a child in Chicago" (*A Proposal for How to End the Fiscal Crisis in the Schools* 1993). In this case the potent opening and closing comments by the opposition call for action in attempts to build a larger oppositional front.

An analysis of positioning of the sides in the debate reaffirms previous findings that the mainstream press is the most aligned with the proponents and grants them the first and last voice the most often. The small press is slightly more supportive of the opponents and grants them first voice 25% of the time. The activist press again surpasses the institutional presses in terms of strategic positioning of the opposition. They not only open and close with oppositional statements (all articles only represent the opposition) they open and close with the most powerful statements constructing the most powerful anti argument.

The above conclusions have been the consistent conclusions found in this analysis. The mainstream press is the most firmly aligned with the proponents. The small press, although somewhat split, favors the pro side the majority of the time. The small press does give the opposition significant representation, something the mainstream press neglects. The activist press is the

strongest in its intensity on the issue and a vehement supporter of the opposition. In fact diffusing the oppositional stance is the reason CEML exists. Their literature reflects their dedicated and vehement sentiments as an activist group. Because the two institutional papers are controlled by advertisers and are owned by either corporations, other businesses, or individuals with business-minded objectives a main function of the press is to support their financial backers. Almost always this entails supporting the dominant culture and its institutions which translates into supporting the proponents in the Supermax debate. Because the activist press is supported by fund raising money, donations or by those in the group, they are free to use their press to completely serve their interest of promoting the oppositional stance which involves blatant discrediting of the proponents.



## CHAPTER 6

### THE CONSTRUCTION OF IMPLICATIONS

They name the world's parts, they certify reality as reality and when their certifications are doubted and opposed, as they surely are, it is those same certifications that limit the terms of effective opposition. To put simply; the mass media have become core systems for the distribution of ideology...That is to say, everyday, directly or indirectly, by statement of omission, in pictures or words, in entertainment and news and advertisement, the mass media produce fields of definition and association, symbol and rhetoric, through which ideology becomes manifest and concrete. One important task for ideology is to define--and also define away--its opposition. (Gitlin 1980, 2)

Following examination of the representations of the Supermax debate in Illinois in the mainstream, the small and the activist press it became evident that the opponent's construction of the Supermax debate is de-emphasized, if not completely ignored in both the mainstream and the small press. Even the limited inclusion of the opposition is strategically manipulated in order to construct a representation of the debate that conforms to the desired slant. This is most often pro in the mainstream press and split in the small press. It is only in the activist press that the opposition's position is significantly and thoroughly constructed as vehemently anti. This study proceeds by discussing how the institutional presses use

different strategies to portray the opposition as "uncredible". It will conclude by offering alternative ways to utilize the mainstream media as well as alternative media to use in order to get more and better information.

Repetition: Pounding it in

Information about the world is received in large part through the media. Therefore the amount and type of coverage of an issue greatly influences the public's conception of "reality." Among other variables the presentation of consistency through repetition of information increases a press' credibility: "[w]hat we hear over and over again shapes our language and guides our thoughts....In the long run, what's repeated endlessly becomes social 'reality'" (Lee and Solomon 1990, 10). According to Charlette Ryan there is a direct correlation where "[t]ruth is measured by the extend of media coverage.." (Ryan 1991, 68). This effect has significant consequences for oppositional voices that are only marginally included, if at all: "[m]ainstream audiences assume if challengers contentions were true they would be more broadly disseminated. In short, the fact that challenger perspectives are not widely diffused makes them inherently suspect" (Ryan 1991, 68).

The representation of the debate has especially significant consequences in the mainstream press. Not only do these larger press reach the widest audience but due to

their wide exposure and credible reputation they are in a more powerful position to influence public perception. Because the opponent's presence is rarely revealed in the mainstream and small press their sporadic comments are not interpreted as credible "truths" by the public. Their construction of the Supermax debate is less widely diffused, less widely known and therefore less widely adopted as the official story. The fact that the proponent's story is consistently and thoroughly presented makes their version of the Supermax debate more readily adopted.

#### Strategic Inclusion

The power over media construction has significant advantages for those possessing political or economic power and considerable disadvantages for those representing oppositional forces. The media "can attract and direct our attention to problems, solutions or people in ways which can favor those with power and correlatively divert attention from rival individuals or groups" (Graber 1984, 50). In short, inclusion of the opposition does not necessarily mean favorable representation. One strategy used to discredit oppositional stories is to give the dominant frame representatives more importance by portraying them frequently and in powerful positions, and marginalizing the oppositional or challenger representatives by ignoring them or presenting them less advantageously and outside the mainstream (see Ryan 1991, 41). When included in the

mainstream press' news and feature stories the opposition is overwhelmingly portrayed as one oppositional group which appears small and insignificant. Even though the opposition is included in the mainstream editorials their disproportionately generous appearance is constructed as emanating from isolated individuals, insignificant in number and aberrations in sentiment. Their stories represent the deviant voices that in their contrast help to define appropriate social behavior which will successfully maintain the status quo.

One outcome of the mainstream media's "individualizing" or "minimizing" strategy is that the opposition is not perceived as being composed of multiple groups working together as a critical force against the dominant frame. They are constructed as one group, small in numbers, and of limited impact in their capacity as a threat to the dominant frame. It is only in the activist press that the opposition is constructed more as a coalition, with the potential to induce change. This is especially illustrated in CEML's "sign on" campaign where they document their attempt at building a coalition with other groups and organizations in order to increase their scope of impact.

In the mainstream press the advocates are the players who are constructed as powerful and in powerful positions. The mainstream press and many of the small press articles include a number of important proponents. Because the

proponents are represented as mighty in numbers they are constructed as a strong force with little threat of oppositional attack. Every mainstream article includes at least two proponents and most include four or five. All proponents are either political or prison officials whose name is accompanied by an important title: *Governor Edgar*, and then *Director of the DOC Howard Peters*, *Warden John Clark*, and then *House Democrat speaker Michael Madigan*. The two proponents included in every article, *Governor Edgar* and *The Task Force*, are strong political forces and are represented as the most powerful and influential players in the Supermax debate. Many of the same important proponents are included in the small press although with less frequency. The representation of the proponents as powerful players in powerful positions constructs their position as more credible and is therefore more unquestionably accepted as the "truth".

Ryan notes how the media's decision to include mostly familiar players aids in diverting attention from institutional explanations. She asserts how the "famous face criterion also suits the media's tendency to personalize news" (Ryan 1991, 33). In his discussion regarding inclusion and exclusion in news coverage, Herbert Gans illustrates how the news is dominated by the "knows", who are represented 3/4 of the time while the "unknowns" are only represented 1/5 of the time (Gans 1979, 12). In

the Supermax debate it is CEML that has limited recognition; generally known only in activist circles. The proponents are represented by familiar players that the public often encounters in media stories such as political officials and representatives from various institutions. Because it is the "knowns" and their affiliates who have the power and resources to set the limits of the debate this often involves exclusion of the "unknowns" which often represent an oppositional voice. The continual representation of the "knowns" reinforces their perspective as the "truth" and their identities as familiar. The perpetual lack of representation of the "unknowns" sustains their perspectives and their identities as unknown which continues to keep them out of the press. The "catch 22" of exclusion from the press is that inclusion is never questioned: "[v]iews that are never heard are never missed" (Ryan 1991, 119). The majority of the public does not question the missing opposition. They believe there is no opposition.

The lack of representation of oppositional groups in the media is also a function of media accessibility. Ryan states how "mass media opportunities are very limited for those of us not representing powerful political, social, and economic groups or institutions" (Ryan 1991, 11). Michael Parenti notes how financial backing from advertisers is virtually nonexistent in activist literature which "renders it difficult for progressive publications to build up"

(Parenti 1991, 48). These groups generally have fewer resources (operating largely on donations and fund raising monies) and power (the "unknowns" are generally not in positions of power and they network less with those in dominant positions of power). CEML does not have the resources to increase their representation in the mainstream and small press, or to increase the distribution of their own publications therefore the diffusion of their story remains limited.

### Selective Inclusion

Selectivity plays a key role in the mainstream media's ability to include the voice of critique while still upholding the media's agenda to support the dominant ideology. The inclusion of the opposition, or the voice of critique, in the mainstream media is a strategy that Chomsky discusses as effective deception. Chomsky claims that a well functioning system is constructed to appear as if it has a liberal bias. If critical voices are strategically included much of the public is pacified into catatonia. There is no need to challenge the system since it is already being done. The status quo remains unchallenged (Chomsky 1980).

In the Supermax debate, when the opposition is included, the mainstream press selects particular aspects of their story, and ignores others. Even when the opposition is included their statements are general and never

elaborately articulated. It is only those aspects of the opposition's position that are less threatening that are included in the press. The activist's comments about racism and human rights are often included. Racism and human rights are fairly broad subjects that are components in the coverage of many other issues. They are themes in mainstream coverage that are by no means exclusive to the Supermax debate. A discussion of the racial connotations has certainly been an integral aspect of recent events such as the L.A. riots or the O.J. Simpson trial.

In contrast the issue of political incarceration is not a common theme and could be significantly stifled in the mainstream press if this aspect of CEML's positions was eliminated from the debate. In fact no where in the mainstream or the small press is the issue of political incarceration mentioned. It could be reasoned, then, that the opposition's position on political incarceration is the most threatening to the status quo. It is this theme, which is a very strong aspect of the opponent's position, that is completely ignored by the mainstream news and feature stories and the small press. By focusing on events, such as the progress of the legislation, not issues, such as political incarceration, the mainstream press and the small press are able to evade the more threatening issues surrounding the debate.

It is only the activist press that delineates in detail



the negative aspects of high security incarceration, including political incarceration. This is suspect. While the opponents do not have anything to lose by uncovering these atrocities, legally or otherwise, monetarily or morally, the proponents have a lot to lose by admitting to them. Not only could they suffer moral persecution they would most likely encounter legal repercussions as well. The U.S. upholds the claim that it incarcerates no one for political reasons. If the opponent's story on political incarceration were accepted as "truth" the U.S. government would be caught in a blatant lie calling into question larger issues of credibility.

The opponent's allegations of inhuman treatment occurring in level 6 prisons, verified by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have serious legal repercussions. If the opponent's accusations are true, the authorities are in violation of the 8th Amendment banning cruel and inhumane punishment. Also what if the opponent's claim was true that Supermax style incarceration results in increased aggression among the prisoners leaving them more aggressive and dangerous upon release. The fact that Supermax prisons are deemed ineffective, even harmful, by the opponents not only puts into question the spending of millions of tax dollars on a counterproductive solution it also raises questions regarding the criminal justice system's ability to effectively manage criminals. If in

fact Supermax incarceration was proven ineffective what justification would there be for this type of high-security punishment? Would results like this eliminate an ultimate control mechanism? Why have no empirical results been introduced in the coverage of level 6 prisons? And why is there only one known study being conducted? Because of the potential for abuse in these high security, low profile prisons which are out of the public view and rarely reported on, these findings and related questions raise a number of concerns that demand additional inquiry.

#### A Medium of Social Control

The prevailing social order in America is described as corporate liberalism. Capitalism prevails and powerful corporations and political heads run the country. In order to maintain the status quo the interest of these institutions must be upheld. For some of the aforementioned reasons (organizational structure, advertisers and audience) the mainstream press' interest is in maintaining the dominant institutions which entails promoting the accompanying ideology that will reinforce their existence.

Shoemaker and Reese aptly explain how "the media function as extensions of powerful interests in society, how the routines, values, and organizational structure combine to maintain a system of control and reproduction of the dominant ideology" (Shoemaker and Reese 1991, 185). Doris Graber addresses this insidious indoctrination by the media.

She asserts how "the general impact of the mass media is to socialize people into accepting the legitimacy of their country's political system;...lead them to acquiesce in America's prevailing social values;...direct their opinions in ways which do not undermine and often support the domestic and foreign objectives of elites;...and deter them from active, meaningful participation in politics-rendering them quiescent before the powerful..." (Graber 1984, 81).

In the Supermax debate it is those players on the pro-side that represent institutions of the dominant culture which have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo such as corporations, government and the Criminal Justice System. This is why mainstream coverage of the debate is overwhelmingly pro Supermax.

In its capacity as an agent of social control the media must first identify threats to the status quo. As Gitlin recognized once that threat is identified it is either constructed to fit into the media's agenda or filtered out completely. Chomsky highlights how one of the media's functions is to define away its opposition. Chomsky claims that "The secret of the unidirectionality of politics of media propaganda campaign is [a] multiple filter system" (Chomsky 1980, 60).

One way in which oppositional voices are utilized to support the dominant agenda is described by Shoemaker and Reese. They claim "one way the media tell us what is normal

is by showing us what is deviant. In constructing threats to the status quo as deviant the media is proclaiming what not to do or be (Shoemaker and Reese 1991, 193). The term "activist group" which is attached to CEML fulfills this function. It immediately constructs the opposition as a radical political group working against some prevailing order. The term is often associated with a revolutionary agenda, and is interpreted by some as not far from terrorism. Not only does the term "activist group" construct CEML's political nature it also places them in a particular social location outside the mainstream. This construction of CEML inevitability influences the public's perception by promoting an interpretation of the opposition as a group on the radical fringe whose aim is to revolutionize the present social order "by any means necessary."

The media's ability to carefully construct and diffuse one definition of "reality" is achieved in two ways. One, editors play the role of gatekeepers and filter out oppositional views that counter this ideology. Two, issues and events are portrayed in such a way as to support the dominant culture. Two, Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien note that "it is not unusual to find editors and reporters highly critical, if not hostile, toward committee activity and organizational procedure which are at the core of social action in both public and private sectors" (Tichenor,

Donohue, and Olien in Graber 1984, 91). According to Gitlin "journalism's more regular approach is to process social opposition, to control its image and to diffuse it at the same time, to absorb what can be absorbed into the dominant structures of definitions and images and to push the rest to the margins of social life" (Gitlin 1980, 5). Gitlin examined the case of a 1965 documentary, "The Berkely Rebels." Prior to its airing and noticed that substantial moderations were made be CBS chairman Paley and president Stanton. The voices of critique were constructed in a way most favorable to the dominant ideology. Gitlin noticed discrepancies and argued that "the media elite enforce their standards, 'even-if necessary- against the normal workings of journalistic routines" (located in Shoemaker and Reese 1991, 132).

CEML's activist group status and agenda render it uneasily absorbed into the dominant structures of definition and images which resulted in their marginalization and delegitimation in the mainstream press and to a lesser extent in the small press. Because CEML is constructed as a deviant group their perspective is rarely included in the Supermax dialogue. When it is included it is discredited due to deviant construction. The mainstream media's coverage functions more often like a monologue, bolstering a one-sided interpretation. A debate is not acknowledged and the public's ability to critically think is thwarted.

### What Does All This Mean?

The findings of this study not only reaffirm the media's agenda setting function they also illustrate how the media constructs and diffuses a "reality", or a way to think. Inclusion and exclusion allow the media to present only those issues it chooses to make public. And the way in which that story is constructed transmits to the public an already processed set of information, a prepackaged way to think about the world. That which is not included in news coverage is absent from the construction of the world the public receives. If we can presuppose that the abstract state of "objectivity" is defined as "all perspectives" then the more perspectives or stories one hears, the closer to some ultimate understanding one can get. Due to the unidimensional construction of "reality" offered by the mainstream press the ability to achieve this more comprehensive understanding is eliminated. It is not enough to acknowledge this obvious limitation we must attempt to move beyond it, to get as many stories as possible. Passively accepting the media's interest-serving construction of "reality" has serious and real political implications. Who is silenced? Those that espouse ideas that go against the moral and political fabric of this country. What does this say about freedom of speech? What does this say about the government and its ability to hide scandal and silence those whose story counters the status

quo? What does this imply about accountability? What does this say about a system that institutionalizes inequality and difference and remains unchallenged?

### Becoming Active

Beyond a conceptual understanding of the media and its indoctrinating techniques is a more active stance. What can we do as receivers of news? Since most of us are far removed from many world events how do we best utilize the information we receive to get a better picture of the world we live in? And how do we get more and better information? This is especially relevant now when "the forces that rule our lives are more international than ever. International trade is coming to dominate our economy; the distinctions between local cultures and a world culture are disappearing" (*Columbia Journal Review* 1995, 4). Because of this movement it has become increasingly important to get a more extensive set of information. The ever expanding superhighway connect the world such that increasing amounts of information are diffused at accelerated rates. If the public remains limited in its access to this ever growing globalized information network they are forced either to accept a predefined vision of "reality" or to self-define "reality" with limited information.

Not only is the quantity of information received important but the way in which it is utilized is crucial. The public's ability and desire to critically think about

the news that is received is imperative if the systems that produce the news are to be contested and held accountable. The institutionalized information networks must become responsible to the general public, more so than to the advertisers whose economic agenda dictates coverage. If this does not happen the institutional framework of this society will go unchallenged and the dominant culture will define the rest of the world. Society will remain effective in its hegemonic maintenance of the dominant culture which benefits the few at the expense of the many.

#### How to Better Use the Media

Those who espouse alternative views virtually ignore the mainstream media because of its alliance with the dominant culture. Instead of dismissing mainstream avenues, their massive exposure can be utilized to uncover often silenced stories in a large public arena. Charlotte Ryan has proposed a defensive theory that offers strategies for activist groups with an alternative agenda to gain access to the mainstream media. Even though "[i]t focuses primarily on getting access to the mainstream media as they currently exist rather than on gaining more control of the media," at the very least the existence of another voice is acknowledged (Ryan 1991, 227). Ryan further suggests the possibility that this type of inclusion will result in oppositional perspectives being absorbed, diffused, and otherwise co-opted by the mainstream media. This may be the



case, however, minimal inclusion is better than total exclusion. The public is at least aware that an oppositional perspective exists. This could provoke alternative ways to think about an issue and the desire to pursue other information routes. The more perspectives the public is exposed to, the more people will begin to question the dominant one.

The alternative press is a less diffuse avenue available for oppositional viewpoints. Publications such as *The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, *Z magazine* and *EXTRA* are dedicated to offering an alternative news source, one often in opposition to the mainstream press. EXTRA is a magazine produced and distributed by FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) described as the national media watch group offering well-documented criticism in an effort to correct bias and imbalance. FAIR focuses public awareness on the narrow corporate ownership of the press, the media's allegiance to official agendas and their insensitivity to women, labor, minorities and other public interest constituencies. FAIR seeks to invigorate the First Amendment by advocating for greater media pluralism and the inclusion of public interest voices in national debates.

Exposure to the stories offered by activist groups working around specific issues introduces perspectives on issues that are often not heard in the mainstream media. Activist groups produce their own literature in order to

self-construct their story. Not only can activists work to get more inclusion in the mainstream press, they can make their own publications more accessible to a wider audience. Even though the activist press is itself guilty of some of the same methods of biasing, it is situated in a different position than the institutional presses. Large corporations with large corporate mentalities that help define the status quo do not control the activist press. In fact exposing the contradictions in the mainstream media is part and parcel of the activist press' agenda. Activist publications offer another interpretation, one the mainstream media would rather stifle. It is crucial that oppositional perspectives get exposed in order to thrust a larger percentage of the public into critically processing the channels of the ever-growing information superhighway, challenging the dominant perspective and becoming actively involved in political issues that effect their everyday lives.

Not only is it important to critically challenge the information that is out there already, more information channels need to be opened up. A leveling of the playing field of media accessibility and credibility is in order if we are to have an information system that allows and spawns multiple interpretations of "reality."

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Sociology.

3/25/55  
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