The US prison model has for so many years come under scrutiny for its inconsistencies given that there are three types of prisons. It can be stated that an ideal prison model for the United States’ criminal justice system should be one in which the inmates will be treated as human beings with rights and freedoms. It should be the one where they are not abused and violated or left at the mercy of the more powerful inmates while the wardens are looking at the other way. The ideal prison model should be the one where the sentencing and allocation is fairly done, without any dubious intentions like profit or favors with prison owners. It must also be stated that it should be fair in terms of the kind of inmates, their sentences, and their hopes for rehabilitation once their corrections is complete. Currently, federal prisons are most efficient in the United States because they are properly equipped. They emphasize on reforming rather than punishing inmates.

**Background Information**

There have been numerous complaints about the criminal justice system in the US with respect to the relevance of this to the criminal justice system. When an individual is convicted and sentenced for a crime, it is expected that they are headed for corrections and not punishments (Sellers, 2010). In order to enforce the corrections, the prisons are set up around various ground rules that include basic human rights and rehabilitation programs. There should be the eventuality of getting back into the society after serving the one’s correction term (Clear, Reisig, & Cole, 2012). There are three levels of prisons in the US, each with a unique set of characteristics. Thus, a
unique contribution towards the effectiveness of the US criminal justice system.

Federal Prisons

These are the prison units that are meant for federal criminals. They are determined for the individuals who have broken federal laws. Such ones include political and white collar criminals as well as drug peddlers and bank robbers. Primarily, there are three levels of federal prisons where there are those of low, medium, and high security (Sellers, 2010). It has been debated amongst various circles that these prisons are more comfortable. They are very safe compared to other prisons, possibly due to the nature of crime that gets these prisoners there as well as the limited number of inmates for each prison. While the other penitentiaries could claim overcrowding, the federal prisons are centrally managed; and, thus, overcrowding is not allowed. The prisoners here have a better chance for rehabilitation given that they are not exposed to more crimes while locked up. Due to the present efficiency and relevance of this prison model, it is clear as follows. It is the best option for the American criminal justice system as will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

State Prisons

These ones are rather different from the federal prisons. Criminals sent to state prisons are often more violent, often charged with rape, murder and other gun related offences being primarily against state laws. Each state is responsible for their state prisons. The security level is much lower than in federal prisons, thus, making them unsafe (Sellers, 2010). Moreover, there are quite a number of cases where these state prisons are reported to have more inmates than they have been
originally designed to hold. It is related to the fact that the number of people being incarcerated in the US is growing consistently. With long sentences, it is also becoming very common in the absence of other severe penalties for serious crimes. These prisons are, thus, not only inefficient but also very poorly funded. They depend on the state budgets. They are, thus, inconsistent in their management.

**Private Prisons**

This is an entire industry in the US, with people raking in millions from the incarceration of criminals. Owing to the ever increasing number of sentenced criminals, companies have come up with an idea of building and running prisons. It is where the government pays to keep prisoners until their sentence is up or they can be transferred to a federal or state incarceration facility (Sellers, 2010). The concept of the private prison is about profiting from the high number of incarcerated criminals in the society. It seems rather suspicious. However, it is also practical given that the governments are currently overwhelmed with more than 2 million prisoners in the US (Dolovich, 2005). In the criminal justice system, this model is seen as a compromise. There the management is keen on making profits rather than ensuring the safety and security of inmates and the society. Thus, it is being less efficient than the federal prisons.

**Why Federal Prisons Are better than State and Private Ones**

The federal prisons have many advantages over other prisons due to a funding pool. It is available from the federal government. It implies that they can afford the maximum security status with respect to their
infrastructural development. It must be noted that the lives of these criminals are more or less just as important as the lives of other civilians in the country. They should be protected within the walls of the prison as much as possible. A poor infrastructure exposes prisoners to a temptation of a jail break, where most of them end up being shot or having the longer sentences once recaptured. The federal prison with its extremely detailed security system is usually difficult to escape from. In addition, they have a system of checks. It would require a network of collaborators in case the prison break is to be successful. It is often very hard to create.

Another advantage would be the level of training offered to the staff and the security personnel. Unlike other prison systems, the federal prisons are managed by the federal government. Thus, they are able to offer the best kind of competency training for their staff members. It ensures that the prisoners are dealt in a very professional manner. It keeps them safe. They are, thus, safe from the things like inmate violence, poor nutrition, inadequate medical attention, and failing rehabilitation programs. It must, thus, be noted that the inmates in federal prisons have a much better chance of surviving their sentences and later on becoming stable members of the society. It is due to the effectiveness of their incarceration as the correction program and not just a punishment.

Another advantage here is the cost effectiveness of incarceration for the federal government. Supporters of the prison industry insinuate that private prisons are more cost effective. However, it should be noted that the needs of an inmate in a federal prison are largely the same as those of an inmate in the private or state one (Clear, Reisig, & Cole, 2012). The difference is that the federal prison invests more in the inmates’ wellbeing and security than the private operators. These ones care more about their profit margins, thus, prioritizing their cut
over the rights and freedoms of the inmate. The end result is a compromised infrastructure and operational structure being aimed at saving as much as they can have from the fees charged per inmate. The staff is rather poorly equipped. The security system in the facility is bad as well. In addition, things like healthcare and nutrition are of the rather low quality, thus, making incarceration more as the punishment. The federal prisons are expensive in a way that it is both practical and acceptable. In the end, they offer corrections and rehabilitations rather than lining the pockets of the prison industry players.

These prisons are centrally run, thus, implying a bureaucratic system of administration. There decisions are made by top officials and then implemented by those on the ground. On one hand, it is effective for the risk avoidance through the evidence based practice by the book. It, however, makes prisons predictable and often unreliable when handling special cases of inmates. Any problematic situations take too long to be resolved. The approval of the top brass is mandatory in every decision. In the end, the federal prison becomes rather rigid in the face of the ever increasing prisoner numbers. In addition, the centrality in their management affects their capacity, thus, limiting the number to the present 11 (Nicholson-Crotty & Theobald, 2011). It would be quite tricky to increase the amount of federal prisons and expect them to be managed as they currently are.

State prisons are largely similar to the federal prisons in their setting and structure except the following thing. These ones have more violent criminals and, thus, the security is rather riskier. The first advantage here is the dedication to corrections rather than the punishment. Meanwhile state budgets may be limited with respect to their corrections departments. The state considers the needs of inmates just as much as the federal government does. They, however, require more funding if they are to match the security to the level of risk created by
the kind of inmates they receive. It can be seen that the motivation here is present. The only shortcoming is the funding.

Another advantage is the interconnectedness of the state as a level of the government where they can borrow the staff from the federal community. They can even request for a training session that will raise their standards of service to that of the federal institution (Nicholson-Cotty & Theobald, 2011). The ability of prison to provide quality incarceration services is, thus, more practical than that of private jails. The latter ones are too focused on cost cutting and limit the abilities of their staff members. The state prisons are like the federal ones except that they have fewer resources. They are, thus, unable to match the security and safety of federal jails.

As a disadvantage, it should be noted that these prisons are often very violent. The criminals here often turn to the crime by the end of their sentences. In a federal prison setting, this violence is curbed by implementing high level security measures. They could ensure the prisoners are not given enough time to get violent with one another (Reid, 2011). The state prisons are, however, limited in their resources. It makes it rather impossible for them to monitor and control their prisoners effectively. In addition, due to the limited resources the corrections aspect is lost. The rehabilitation programs are rather expensive. Only the few states have been able to implement them effectively. Their federal counterparts are though being fully funded. As a result, they are able to implement rehabilitation programs for their inmates. The state prisons have been built on a good foundation. However, they have to deal with budgetary limitations. It makes it difficult for them to be the best in the system in as far as corrections and rehabilitation is concerned.

Private prisons have a number of challenges. The first and possibly the
only advantage as noted by Nichoison-Crotty and Theobald (2011) is the following one. The management of inmates’ incarceration is transferred to an organization specialized in security. It is opposed to federal prisons where penitentiaries are managed by the federal government. The companies managing these facilities are, however, mainly interested in profits. Meanwhile the government would like to instill corrections in prisoners without compromising on their rights as the citizens of a sovereign nation (Reid, 2011). It makes private jails the least effective option for the criminal justice system if to compare with state and federal prisons.

**Conclusion**

Each type of prison presents a set of pros and cons that make them rather unique. They contribute to the American criminal justice system. It should, however, be noted that the type of jail that best implements the objectives of the criminal justice system would be the federal one. It is based on the consideration and emphasis on corrections rather than a simple punishment. Their impressive security level not only keeps inmates locked in. However, it also ensures that they do not harm themselves or one another. The private jails have the wrong motivation in the industry. Meanwhile the state ones are highly underfunded. It makes them both unable to match the efficiency of federal prisons. However, even the federal jail must be reformed in order to suit the needs of the American society. The number of inmates should be considered within such prisons. It would be wise for this model to undergo some changes in the administrative structure. It should provide more facilities and more decentralized decision making amongst various prisons.
References


