

Chapter 8

The Legacy of Women's Prison Reform: An Epilogue and Evaluation

If the reformatory could speak for itself . . . It would tell you of how inadequately it had handled the purely reformatory problems without the necessary classification, of humiliating punishments meted out because of inadequate quarters and tools, of the nervous and physical strain on officers . . . of their lack of restful or encouraging living quarters, and their wretched pay,—it would bare its heart to you and ask you to put an end to such a farce as “Sherborn” has long been and not force upon her a further destructive step without giving her assistance.

Jessie Hodder, 1918¹

Women prison reformers of the Progressive era had been prepared to reject the separate sexual spheres, both in their own lives and in their approach to women inmates. Their theories of crime questioned female uniqueness and their ideal of diversified training implied that the workplace should be sexually integrated. The failures of the women's reformatories to implement these visions testifies to the resistance to changes in sexual ideology in the early twentieth century. Although women were in fact entering a formerly male world, as students, workers, and, after 1920, as voting citizens as well, they were at the same time bounded by new versions of old ideas. So too in the prisons, domestic science replaced domesticity and outdoor work supplemented the nursery, but these institutions could not transcend their legacy of “separate but equal.” Despite the new life brought by Progressive reformers, women's prisons, like other American institutions, would continue to reinforce sexual difference and sexual inequality.

The Triumph of Differential Treatment, 1915–30

By the end of the Progressive era, women's prisons were becoming a standard feature of the American criminal justice system. De-

spite the problems of the nineteenth-century institutions and the failures acknowledged by Progressives like Jessie Hodder, most reformers still believed that the separation of women prisoners would improve correctional treatment. After 1915 a host of organizations called for more women's prisons. The National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor, the New York Prison Survey, and the Chicago Crime Commission all advocated women's prisons, as did individuals ranging from radical Kate Richards O'Hare to prison reformer Thomas Mott Osborne.² A dozen state reformatories for women opened over the next decades. By 1940 a total of twenty-three states had established separate women's prisons, and by 1975 only sixteen states lacked them (table 6). In the meantime, the first federal women's prison opened in 1927.

TABLE 6. State and Federal Correctional Institutions for Women, 1873-1975

| State | Title at Opening | Date of Opening |
|---------------|--|-----------------|
| Indiana | Woman's Prison | 1873 |
| Massachusetts | Reformatory Prison for Women | 1877 |
| New York | House of Refuge for Women, Hudson | 1887 |
| New York | House of Refuge for Women, Albion | 1893 |
| New York | Reformatory Prison for Women, Bedford Hills | 1902 |
| New Jersey | State Reformatory for Women | 1913 |
| Maine | Reformatory for Women | 1916 |
| Ohio | Reformatory for Women | 1916 |
| Kansas | State Industrial Farm for Women | 1917 |
| Michigan | State Training School for Women | 1917 |
| Connecticut | State Farm for Women | 1918 |
| Iowa | Women's Reformatory | 1918 |
| Arkansas | State Farm for Women | 1920 |
| California | Industrial Farm for Women | 1920 |
| Minnesota | State Reformatory for Women | 1920 |
| Nebraska | State Reformatory for Women | 1920 |
| Pennsylvania | State Industrial Home for Women | 1920 |
| Wisconsin | Industrial Home for Women | 1921 |
| United States | Industrial Institution for Women (now Federal Reformatory for Women) | 1927 |
| Delaware | Correctional Institution for Women | 1929 |

TABLE 6 —Continued

| State | Title at Opening | Date of Opening |
|----------------|---|-----------------|
| Connecticut | Correctional Institution for Women | 1930 |
| Illinois | State Reformatory for Women | 1930 |
| Virginia | State Industrial Farm for Women | 1932 |
| North Carolina | Correctional Center for Women | 1934 |
| California | California Institution for Women | 1936 |
| Kentucky | Correctional Institution for Women | 1938 |
| South Carolina | Harbison Correctional Institution for Women | 1938 |
| Maryland | Correctional Institution for Women | 1940 |
| Alabama | Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women | 1942 |
| West Virginia | State Prison for Women | 1948 |
| Puerto Rico | Industrial School for Women | 1954 |
| Georgia | Rehabilitation Center for Women | 1957 |
| Missouri | State Correctional Center for Women | 1960 |
| Louisiana | Correctional Institute for Women | 1961 |
| Ohio | Women's Correctional Institution | 1963 |
| Nevada | Women's Correctional Center | 1964 |
| Oregon | Women's Correctional Center | 1965 |
| Tennessee | Prison for Women | 1966 |
| Colorado | Women's Correctional Institute | 1968 |
| Washington | Purdy Treatment Center for Women | 1970 |
| Oklahoma | Women's Treatment Facility | 1973 |
| South Carolina | Women's Correctional Center | 1973 |

Sources: Helen W. Rogers, "A Digest of Laws Establishing Reformatories for Women in the United States," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 13 (November 1922): 382-437; and American Correctional Association, *Directory 1977: Juvenile and Adult Correctional Institutions and Agencies* (Washington, D.C.: American Correctional Association, 1977).

Note: Women's divisions of mixed prisons are not included.

The initial impetus for a federal institution came in the years immediately after World War I, when the number of women imprisoned for federal offenses more than doubled as a result of the Harrison Act (1914), which outlawed narcotics; the Volstead Act (1919), which implemented prohibition; and the Jones-Miller Act (1922), which made automobile theft a federal offense. The state prisons that had previously housed these women began to refuse them or to raise their boarding rates. With the support of Assistant

U.S. Attorney General Mabel Walker Willebrandt, Congress began hearings on the establishment of a women's reformatory. In 1923 representatives from almost every major national women's organization convened in Washington and issued a set of recommendations for the new institution. Congress approved legislation based on their plan in 1924. In 1927 the cottage-style reformatory opened on a 500-acre campus in rural Alderson, West Virginia. Women managers and staff supervised domestic, industrial, and outdoor work. In a fitting tribute to a half-century of women's prison reform, buildings were named for Elizabeth Fry, Katharine Davis, Jane Addams, and other prison and social reformers.³

Women's prisons continued to appeal to reformers, despite the inability of the first institutions to live up to their founders' ideals, in large part because there were so few alternatives. Those who opposed women's prisons entirely favored more punitive measures in traditional penal institutions.⁴ Other critics, such as Jessie Hodder, asked for assistance to improve the reformatory, but not to abolish it.⁵ Even former prisoner and socialist organizer Kate Richards O'Hare, who concluded in 1920 that "Every existing prison should be abandoned as soon as possible," merely proposed that they be "replaced with hospitals and prison farms and small industries." Every women's prison department, she wrote, "should be separated from the men" and placed on farms according to the cottage system.⁶ O'Hare and others believed that, when compared to sexually mixed jails or men's penitentiaries, the women's institutions were relatively successful. Their rural settings, cottages, and private rooms seemed much more palatable than the stone walls, iron gates, gun towers, and cell blocks typical of men's prisons.

Besides having continued support from reformers, women's prisons gained acceptance because they began to perform a new function, one very different from the individual regeneration intended by the earliest reformers. If Progressivism had two spirits, one of uplift and one of social control, it was the latter that lived on in the years after the Armistice in new efforts to repress vice by isolating and punishing its victims. During and after World War I, for instance, women's prisons incarcerated prostitutes rounded up under the auspices of the Committee on Training Camp Activities. In the 1920s and 1930s the reformatories received women convicted for alcohol and narcotics offenses under the Volstead and Harrison Acts.⁷ The purpose of imprisoning these women, one reformer noted in 1922, "emphasized the old conception of the self-

preservation of society" rather than the reformation of the individual.⁸

The treatment of prostitutes during the war illustrates this shift. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the concept of woman as victim had inspired sympathetic treatment of prostitutes. After 1917, however, a resurgence of antiprostitution activity unleashed deeply held fears of the harlot as a threat to society. The wartime program did not seek to regenerate the fallen woman as had women prison reformers; its goal was rather the protection of American men from venereal disease. Patriotism motivated this national campaign, as an officer of the Sanitary Corps explained: "The struggle for the principles of democracy demands . . . man-power, and woman-power. The greatest destroyer of man-power . . . is venereal disease. The greatest source of venereal disease has been prostitution. . . . For military efficiency,—and for social welfare,—prostitution must go."⁹

Strict enforcement of antiprostitution laws during the war included closing red-light districts and hiring vice agents to arrest potential carriers of venereal disease. As a result, courts sent thousands of women to local jails and state reformatories. This new inmate population necessitated a program to build and expand women's prisons. Between 1918 and 1920, the United States government appropriated over \$400,000 for "construction, enlargement, repair, or equipment of reformatories . . . for . . . delinquent women and girls." Of the forty-three institutions thus aided, at least sixteen remained in operation after 1920.¹⁰

Although usually operated by women, these new institutions abandoned most of the benevolent features of earlier women's reform. Sympathy for the fallen woman as victim declined as even some women reformers, such as program director Martha Falconer, justified their work as a way to "protect our men against prostitutes."¹¹ The government's official report calculated the cost benefits in terms of soldiers' health, not women's: detention cost only eleven cents per prevented sexual encounter (and potential venereal exposure), compared to an estimated seven dollars to treat an infected soldier.¹² Unlike Progressive-era reformers, the government administrators also found it necessary to "erect barbed-wire fences around the premises, to employ guards or watchmen, or resort to both expedients."¹³

The incarceration of prostitutes during the war, and of both alcoholics and narcotics addicts in the next decade, continued to transform the reformatory populations, a process which had

begun well before the Progressive era. Instead of young and first offenders, women with serious medical and social problems now filled the institutions. In addition, the racial balance of the once predominantly white reformatories shifted due to the postwar acceleration of the black migration north. Black female prisoners usually lived in segregated cottages under the control of white staff. For this group, too, incarceration was used to control rather than restore. Thus the reformatories increasingly housed those women perceived by the society as the most dangerous, not the most hopeful, cases.

To some extent, then, the women's institutions became a standard feature of American penology by adopting the same practices that characterized the rest of the system in the twentieth century: incarcerating "hard-core" criminals and blacks as a means of isolating deviants and deterring crime. But at the same time the reformatories tried to maintain the distinctive feminine treatment which had justified their establishment in the nineteenth century. The women's prisons built after World War I incorporated the concept of feminine reform in their designs and the training they offered, creating what has been called a "dual system"¹⁴ of corrections, one male and one female.

The legal sanction for the two systems emerged by 1920, notably in a 1919 Kansas decision, *State v. Heitman*, which permitted separate sentencing policies for each sex. Women, the judges argued, were the more reformable sex and could legally receive maximum indeterminate sentences at a state industrial farm, while comparable male offenders served shorter terms in local jails. The justification that male and female criminality presented two different problems was reminiscent of the United States Supreme Court's 1908 decision in *Muller v. Oregon*, which permitted state protective legislation for women workers. In 1920 the Kansas court declared, for instance, that: "Woman enters spheres of sensation, perception, emotion, desire, knowledge and experience, of an intensity and of a kind which men cannot know . . . the result is a feminine type radically different from the masculine type, which demands special consideration in the study and treatment of non-conformity to law."¹⁵ Longer sentences that allowed more time for rehabilitation fell into the category of "special consideration," as did separate, less austere, institutions, like state farms, industrial schools, or reformatories.

The states that established women's prisons in the twentieth century perpetuated the ideal of a feminine institutional environ-

ment. Cottage systems and large, rural campuses predominated. The Federal Industrial Institution for Women adopted this plan in order to meet the special needs of female inmates, as its first superintendent, Mary Belle Harris, explained: "In women's institutions this breaking up of the large group into smaller housekeeping units we believe is the ideal, affording as it does greater opportunity for training in homemaking."¹⁶ Other unique features that differentiated the women's prisons included less-stringent security provisions; private rooms rather than cell blocks; the right of prisoners to decorate their surroundings; less rigid clothing rules; and higher staff-inmate ratios.¹⁷

The most important remnants of differential treatment were the training programs offered to women inmates. Periodically, official reports called for the rejection of domestic chores and the adoption of industrial programs. The 1920 New York Prison Survey, for instance, termed the domestic training in women's prisons mere "busy work" and recommended "dual training" for homemaking and vocations. "We are likely to ignore the fact that women have vocational careers," the report admitted. "The State has no more right to exploit the time, energy, and latent ability of women prisoners than it has of male inmates."¹⁸ Therefore they suggested that "Bedford and Albion be made strong industrial training centers and expand beyond the present conception of training women for duties related to the household."¹⁹

As in the past, such pleas had little effect. Training for employable skills in women's prisons remained "wholly inadequate," according to a 1927 survey made by the National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor. It, too, recommended that the reformatories adopt new programs "to provide a woman with the skill which will find her a job when she leaves the institution." But the authors of this report revealed deep-seated sexual stereotyping of vocations when they rejected skill after skill for inclusion in women's prison workshops. Of industries in which women already constituted over half of the work force, they rejected 85 percent for "the most obvious" reasons. For example: ammunition was "psychologically wrong"; "printing is a man's industry"; dental goods require "too much skill and application"; pottery required too many men; tobacco was "inadvisable for women's institutions." Instead they relied on the traditional standbys of household work, power sewing, laundering, and farming because, they explained, "before the industrial revolution, women carried [these activities] on in the home and on the home farm."²⁰

Official reports and reformers' private writings repeatedly called for more useful training and repeatedly met resistance.²¹ When in 1923 a congressional committee suggested industrial training for the new federal women's reformatory, the United States superintendent of prisons responded by defending differential treatment:

I have never known of the building of factories for women offenders, and the care you give to women prisoners is vastly different from the care you give the men and the kind of training you give them is different. You have to train them as individuals in a sense that you do not deal with men prisoners. We will never have factories for women offenders. You would object to them and all of the women of the country would object to them.²²

Not surprisingly, the Federal Industrial Institution for Women, despite its name, concentrated on traditional women's work. Home-hygiene classes offered by the Red Cross, office work, and farming predominated. ("The care of helpless animals is work that appeals particularly to women," prison superintendent Harris once wrote.) Alderson originally offered only one factory skill, power sewing.²³

This retreat from Progressives' efforts to reinvigorate women's prisons with diversified training occurred during a period of reaction to reform in general and to feminism in particular. Progressivism diminished in the face of postwar "normalcy" and the repression of radicalism. Furthermore, the women's movement, weakened by external pressures and internal conflicts over political strategies, could not provide a supportive climate for women's reform activities. Like the young women coming of age in the postsuffrage period, the inmates of women's prisons suffered from the societal pressure for conformity to a new stereotype of femininity.²⁴

The prison reformers, too, faced opposition to their roles as new women. After several decades of expanding public authority for women, the 1920s witnessed a leveling off of professional opportunities.²⁵ Although women continued to work in separate prisons and to study female criminals, their influence on the prison system, outside of the field of juvenile justice, was minimal.²⁶ Jessie Hodder, who remained at Framingham until her death in 1931, could not implement her Progressive reforms. In New York and Indiana no outstanding reformers or administrators even attempted to revitalize women's prisons.

The fate of Ann Vickers, a fictional prison reformer created by Sinclair Lewis in 1933, suggests the cultural forces at work during

the 1920s. A suffragist, social worker, superintendent of a model women's prison, and author of a book on vocational training in women's reformatories, Vickers is the prototype of the Progressive female penologist. Her first marriage disintegrates as a result of her conflicts between career and womanhood. But Lewis resolves this dilemma by having Vickers sacrifice her work in order to marry a judge, move to a suburban cottage, and bear a child. Glowing with maternal and conjugal pride, Ann tells her husband in the concluding passage that "You, you and Mat," their son, "have brought me out of the prison, . . . the prison of ambition, the prison of desire for praise, the prison of myself. We're out of prison!"²⁷

By the 1930s separate women's prisons had become acceptable to American penology by conforming to the values of both traditional prisons and contemporary sexual stereotypes. Although Progressive criminologists had attempted to drop sexual distinctions and diversify training, the backlash of the postwar era, along with the inherent contradictions of feminine prisons, combined to defeat their efforts. Like the suffrage victory of 1920, the success of the women's prison movement testified to the ability of American institutions to accommodate reform for conservative ends much more than it signaled a triumph for women's progress.

The Impact on Women Prisoners

For a century, small groups of middle-class American women sought to improve the treatment of female prisoners. Their major contribution, the separate women's prisons, has influenced inmates' lives from the 1870s to the present. In many ways, prisoners benefited from reformers' efforts to change attitudes toward fallen women and to provide more humane penal environments. At the same time, however, the differential treatment that originally justified the establishment of women's prisons perpetuated sexual inequalities. An evaluation of contemporary women's prisons illustrates this dual legacy.

The most widely adopted theory of women's prison reform was that female inmates should be housed separately from men, both to prevent sexual abuse and to alleviate overcrowding in inadequate women's quarters. This stipulation was met not only by the separate women's prisons but also by new departments for women at older state institutions and in city and county jails.

Sexual segregation has made incarceration less oppressive in many ways. With few exceptions, separate prisons prevent men's

abuse of female prisoners, while in mixed institutions, rape and harassment continue to the present, as the case of Joann Little brought to public attention.²⁸ Separating women under female guards has not only eliminated the fear of attack; it has also lifted many of the constraints imposed on women to deter heterosexual contact between prisoners. Formerly in mixed prisons women could not circulate where men might view them. When Kate Richards O'Hare served time at the Missouri state penitentiary during World War I, the windows had been covered over with gray paint, excluding all natural light, "to prevent the women flirting with the men on the other side of the wall."²⁹ Women's prisons require no such barriers and allow more freedom of movement within and between buildings.

Sexually segregated prisons have freed women from some exploitation of their labor. In mixed prisons, Jessie Hodder once wrote, "It is not humanly possible to avoid making women subservient to men so it results that women prisoners treated on this principle major in mending, washing, ironing and sewing for men prisoners."³⁰ The domestic work women prisoners continue to engage in is at least for themselves, not for male inmates. Furthermore, the absence of men requires that women perform a variety of tasks, including farming, carpentry, and painting.

Finally, the centralization of several hundred women from throughout a state into one institution has created some social and economic benefits. Inmates can enjoy the companionship of other women to a degree impossible when only a handful of women served at each predominantly male prison. Equally important for the large number of prisoners who are mothers has been the availability of nurseries, or of cottages for women with infants, at some women's prisons. In mixed institutions, female inmates continue to suffer the additional punishment of being separated from their young children. Centralization also has allowed a greater range of vocational training, for at men's prisons all women must do whatever single task is assigned to their small group.

Women's prisons, then, can potentially improve the treatment of female inmates. The reforms which grew from sexual segregation, particularly the elimination of constant sexual vulnerability, were impossible within male-dominated institutions. That many of the shortcomings of the separate prisons were due to lack of cooperation or funding from state officials suggests that these prisons could have come closer to fulfilling reformers' goals. Moreover, many of the worst features in the historical record can be attrib-

uted to the contradiction inherent in "prison reform"—a term that implies that an institution designed to deny individual liberty can be made more palatable.

Nevertheless, sexually segregated prisons have left unresolved many of the problems reformers identified in the past and have never addressed many others. Sexual segregation has not necessarily alleviated the sexual tensions of prison life. Until very recently, neither male nor female inmates had access to heterosexual partners and officials diligently suppressed homosexual relationships between women inmates. The original women prison reformers, Victorians who were eager to uplift the fallen from sexual degradation, could not conceive of women prisoners having legitimate sexual needs. In the twentieth century a few reformers recognized the problem. Katharine Bement Davis seems to have tolerated lesbian relations at Bedford Hills, although subsequent officials reversed her policy. Kate Richards O'Hare recommended in 1923 that inmates be permitted to meet with their spouses, but her unique suggestion rested upon a condemnation of all homosexual activity.³¹

Women's prisons haven't eliminated the problem of overcrowding that has plagued mixed institutions as well. At some time in the history of each prison, overcommitment from the courts or underappropriation from the legislatures has created population pressures that have undermined prison functioning. Judges have tended to sentence female offenders to the few "good places" available, without considering which women were the best subjects for reformatory treatment. Thus the women's prisons often became "dumping grounds" for the courts, which forced them to provide custodial care from which few inmates could benefit.³²

The difficulties of classifying inmates have also plagued women's prisons. Because sex is the primary criterion for commitment, it has been difficult to provide specialized treatment on other grounds. Almost every state maintains a variety of institutions for men, depending on age, offense, and previous record. A young male misdemeanant could serve in an institution with similar offenders. A young woman, though, must enter a reformatory which houses all types of women offenders. She is treated there as a woman, not as a misdemeanant, youth, or recidivist.

The legacy of differential, feminine care has placed other limitations on female prisoners. On the one hand, the rural settings, less-stringent security provisions, and the private rooms and cottages of women's reformatories have allowed female inmates to

enjoy more comfortable surroundings than male prisoners. But at the same time, differential treatment has narrowed the opportunities for women prisoners by channeling all inmates into sexually stereotyped programs for character development or job training. The training programs available to women prisoners from the founding of the institutions to the present have reinforced the economic disadvantages that some reformers blamed for causing female criminality. In spite of Progressives' effort to deemphasize domesticity, it has remained the core of reformatory training during most of the twentieth century. Eventually some new skills were introduced, and by 1970 women inmates could learn clerical work, beauty care, and key punching—all sexually segregated, low-status, poorly paid women's jobs. While men's prisons offer training for the higher-paying, male-stereotyped skills—auto mechanics, electronics, welding, and machine repair—two industrial jobs have predominated at the women's prisons—garment making and laundry.³³

Differential treatment has also resulted in other, less-tangible forms of discrimination, including the imposition of demeaning stereotypes of feminine behavior. From the founding of the first homes for discharged prisoners, through the family-style reformatory systems, to present-day correctional institutions, women prisoners have been forced to play the parts of children. Just as some superintendents in the past called their charges "the girls," so later prison personnel have continued to view inmates "as being weak, like children," and have treated them accordingly. In all of the early institutions staff used first names in addressing prisoners, who had to use the officers' appropriate titles. The Progressives tried to modify these and other older practices, for example by introducing inmate self-government and allowing prisoners more responsibility and freedom of movement. But the older attitudes have persisted. As one inmate told an interviewer in the 1970s, "They think we're four years old. They think we can't think for ourselves."³⁴

The historical link between juvenile reformatories and women's prisons no doubt has encouraged similar attitudes. Women's institutions were modeled on the same domestic structures as became popular for juvenile offenders in the mid-nineteenth century. The similarity in names (house of refuge, industrial school, state farm) has further cemented the parallel. But beneath all of these circumstances has lain the paternalistic view that women and children

are inherently dependent, while men, even when incarcerated, retain a degree of adult status.³⁵

When nineteenth-century women first crossed the boundary between the pure and the fallen, they revealed their strong identification as a sexual class. In the separate prisons they established, however, the boundary between keepers and prisoners, one based on both class and power relations, revealed the tensions in the ideology of sisterhood. After the 1920s, the women who administered prisons had neither the belief in a common womanhood nor the critical approach to men's prisons that characterized earlier reformers. The separate prisons, though run by women, no longer existed to serve women. Rather, they supported the male-dominated prison system and adopted its values.

This history of accommodation to the larger penal system may help to explain why the nineteenth-century separate-but-equal ideology has proved to be so resilient. Granting women authority over institutions that housed their sex gave only limited power to a few women. Separate but equal thus helped maintain both the sexual status quo and the legitimacy of the prison system as a whole. The risk that women would transform the institutions was slight, for prisons had as much influence over reformers as reformers had over institutions. Thus, despite feminine training programs and rural environments, women's reformatories always reverted to traditional methods of prison discipline. Even during the Progressive experiments with less-feminine or authoritarian treatment, the underlying purposes of the prison—the isolation and control of criminals—reasserted themselves. Separate women's institutions that did not question the nature of the prison system proved to be equal to men's institutions primarily in their usefulness in maintaining that system.

The feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s launched an ideological and political attack on the principle of separate but equal. As a result, for the first time in almost a century, the legitimacy of separate women's prisons has been called into question. Feminists have exposed the inequalities of feminine training and of longer sentences for women prisoners. New advocates of equality, however, do not seek to extend the hardships of men's prisons to women. Rather, radical feminists of the late twentieth century prefer to end the imprisonment of women.³⁶

As in the past, women's ideas about female crime influence their

models of treatment. Earlier reformers had either an individualist or environmental approach to criminality. Thus, they wanted to uplift the individual fallen woman and make the prison environment more conducive to her rehabilitation. Progressive reformers favored social services to prevent women from entering a life of crime. Contemporary feminists have extended the Progressives' social analysis to its logical, political conclusion: eliminate societal racism and sexism, allow economic and sexual autonomy for all women, and women's prisons will no longer be necessary.³⁷

Short of these long-range goals, contemporary reformers seek to minimize the incarceration of women and to expose abuses in women's as well as men's institutions. Both women and men have called for the decriminalization of victimless crimes, such as prostitution and drug use, for which many women serve in prison. Feminists have rediscovered the traditional problems faced by women prisoners and added new concerns to those of the nineteenth-century reformers. As one group explains its focus on women in prison:

there are problems special to women in prison, as distinguished from the oppression faced by all those in prison: the presence and physical threat of male guards, the overall sexism of the prison system, the lack of specialized training which leads to fewer available jobs, the tragedy of mothers separated from their children, the assault on the women's reproductive organs, and much more.³⁸

In response to these problems, feminists have attempted to open new lines of communication with "sisters inside." Through the feminist media and innovative legal projects, women outside the prison system serve as advocates for inmates in their legal appeals, child custody conflicts, parole hearings, and disciplinary complaints.³⁹

At the same time that feminists have initiated these new, noninstitutional reforms, the prison system has offered its own reform measures. In response to criticisms of both women's and men's institutions, several states have begun to reverse the century-long trend of separate women's prisons. In 1973, the Framingham, Massachusetts, women's reformatory admitted its first male inmates, and other institutions have since joined in the reintegration of the dual prison system. Moreover, gender is ceasing to be a qualification for prison staff. Despite resistance from male guards, women have become guards and wardens at men's prisons. By the same process, men have become superintendents of the Framingham

and Alderson women's reformatories and male guards have been working at Bedford Hills.⁴⁰

Sexual reintegration has yet to prove of great benefit to women inmates. At Bedford Hills, for instance, prisoners brought suit to protest the invasion of their privacy by male guards.⁴¹ Their complaints echo those of nineteenth-century reformers, but significantly, it is now inmates themselves who are demanding an end to male surveillance. Reintegration has not necessarily ended discriminatory training programs, although some traditionally male skills, such as auto mechanics, have been introduced for a small number of women. Thus far, "coed prisons" seem most useful in maintaining discipline in men's institutions, for the promise of transfer to a women's prison offers an incentive to good behavior. Furthermore, coeducation as a reform may only divert attention away from the serious problems that were exposed by prisoner rebellions during the 1970s, rebellions that occurred not only at Attica, but at Alderson as well.⁴²

Whatever the shortcomings of the institutions they created, earlier women's prison reformers had clear insight into the dangers of male-dominated institutions. Many of the hostile attitudes toward female criminals that they identified a hundred years ago persist today throughout the society. The stigma of woman's fall may be less critical, but the fact that most women prisoners are now not only poor but also non-white compounds their powerlessness. The old reformist concern for women's victimization has new foundations that necessitate continued scrutiny of the criminal justice system.

As long as police harass prostitutes and ignore their customers; as long as courts administer sexist justice to third-world women and women who defend themselves from sexual violence; and as long as mixed prisons continue to foster the sexual exploitation of women, then so long should women's prison reform continue. Feminist monitoring of police and court practices, and even the maintenance of single-sex prisons, may continue to serve the best interests of women inmates. Only when women have achieved full equality under the law will the movement begun by Elizabeth Fry become obsolete. At that time, "their sisters' keepers" can cease their watch.