

IELTS Academic Reading Sample Paper 7

Read the passage and then complete Parts 1, 2 and 3.

The gangs behind bars - prison gangs

Part 1

Prison gangs are flourishing across the country. Organized, stealthy and deadly, they are reaching out from their cells to organize and control crime in America's streets.

Prison gangs are flourishing from California to Massachusetts. In 1996, the Federal Bureau of Prisons found that prison disturbances soared by about 400 percent in the early nineties, which authorities say indicated that gangs were becoming more active. In states such as Illinois, as much as 60 percent of the prison population belong to gangs, Godwin says. The Florida DC has identified 240 street gangs operating in their prisons. Street gangs, as opposed to gangs originating in prisons, are emerging as a larger problem on the East Coast.

Of the 143,000 inmates Texas houses in state pens, 5,000 have been identified as gang members and another 10,000 are under suspicion. Texas prison-gang expert Sammy Buentello says the state's prisons are not infested with gangs, but those that have set up shop are highly organized. "They have a paramilitary type structure," he says. "A majority of the people that come in have had experience with street-gang membership and have been brought up in that environment accepting it as the norm. But some join for survival."

After James Byrd Jr. was dragged to death in Jasper last June, rumors spread throughout Texas linking two of the suspected assailants to racially charged prison gangs. While authorities and inmates dismiss these rumors, the Jasper murder occurred only weeks after a San Antonio grand jury indicted 16 members of the Mexican Mafia, one of the state's largest and most lethal prison gangs, for ordering the deaths of five people in San Antonio from within prison walls.

Part 2

Section A

As they are being released into the community on parole, these people are becoming involved in actions related to prison-gang business. Consequently, it is no longer just a corrections problem--it is also a community problem. It is a misnomer that when you lock a gang member up they cease criminal activity. It has only been in the last five years that law enforcement has realized that what happens on the inside can affect what happens on the outside and vice versa.

Section B

According to gang investigators, the gang leaders communicate orders through letters. Where mail is monitored they may use a code--for instance, making every 12th word of a

seemingly benign letter significant. They use visits, they put messages into their artwork and in some states they use the telephone.

Section C

Of the two kinds of gangs, prison gangs and street gangs, the prison gangs are better organized, according to gang investigators. They are low-key, discreet--even stealthy. They monitor members and dictate how they behave and treat each other. A serious violation means death, say investigators.

Section D

The street gangs are more flagrant. "Their members are going into the prisons and realizing that one of the reasons they are in prison is that they kept such a high profile" making it easier for the police to catch them, says Buentello. "So, they are coming out more sophisticated and more dangerous because they aren't as easily detected. They also network and keep track of who is out and so forth."

Section E

According to gang investigators and prisoners, the prison gangs were formed for protection against predatory inmates, but racketeering, black markets and racism became factors. They developed within the prison system in California, Texas and Illinois in the 1940s.

Part 3

Godwin says Texas should never have outlawed smoking in the prisons, adding cigarettes as trade-goods contraband to the prohibited list. "If you go back to the Civil War era, to Andersonville prison," Godwin says of the prisoner-of-war facility for Union soldiers, "you will see that the first thing that developed was a gang because someone had to control the contraband--that is power. I'm convinced that if you put three people on an island somewhere, two would clique up and become predatory against the other at some point."

But protection remains an important factor. When a new inmate enters the prison system he is challenged to a fight, according to a Texas state-pen prisoner. The outcome determines who can fight, who will be extorted for protection money and who will become a servant to other prisoners. Those who can't join a gang or afford to spend \$5 a week in commissary items for protection are destined to be servants. Godwin explains: "The environment is set up so that when you put that many people with antisocial behavior and criminal history together, someone is going to be the predator and someone the prey, and that is reality."

The Texas inmate describes a system in which gangs often recruit like fraternities, targeting short-term inmates because they can help the gang--pay them back, so to speak--when they leave prison for the free world. Most of the groups thrive on lifelong membership, according to the Florida DC, with "blood in, blood out" oaths extending leadership and membership beyond the prison into the lucrative drug trade, extortion and pressure rackets.

Prison gangs operating in Texas and Florida include Neta, the Texas Syndicate, the Aztecs, the Mexican Mafia, the New Black Panthers, the Black Guerrilla Family, Mandingo Warriors, Aryan Brotherhood, La Nuestra Familia, the Aryan Circle and the White Knights. Some of these gangs have alliances, and some are mortal enemies. Many on this list originated in California over the decades, some of them (such as the Texas Syndicate) to protect members from the other gangs. In addition, street gangs such as the Crips and Bloods and traditional racial-hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan also operate in the prisons.

What prisoners may not realize is that because the gangs are monitored by prison authorities the law-enforcement community is becoming very sophisticated about the gangs. "Sixty percent of what we learn about what is going on in the city streets of Florida" is garnered in prison and not from observing the streets, says Godwin.

Prison officials say they concentrate on inmate behavior to identify gang members. They do not single out gang leaders to strike any deals because acknowledging the gang as anything other than a "security-threat group" gives them too much credibility. This has been a particular problem in Puerto Rico with the native and political Neta gang.

Recognizing groups during the 1970s, in a system in which prisoners have the right to vote, has led to a tendency among politicians to award clemency to some inmates.

For Part 1, questions 1 – 5, complete each sentence with the correct ending.

1. The rising number of criminal gangs ...

2. Prisoners organized in gangs ...

3. Most prisoners ...

4. Some Texan state prisoners ...

5. The outcome of fights ...

For Part 2, questions 6 – 10, choose the correct heading for Sections labelled A to E in the passage.

6. Section A

7. Section B

8. Section C

9. Section D

10. Section E

Read Part 3 of the text and answer the questions.

**11 According to Godwin,
making smoking illegal aided prison management.
gangs develop when there is contraband.
three people on an island would kill each other.
prohibitions do not favour the development of power.**

**12 He believes
antisocial behaviour is an innate human feature.
criminals in prison decide their own fate.
the prison environment encourages good behaviour.
gangs need protection**

**13 The prison system in Texas
measures members of the gangs in terms of friendship.
helps develop disinterested relationships.
thrives on the “an-eye-for-an-eye” concept.
sustains friendship with violence and power.**

**14 Gangs in these prisons
have different modus operandi.
had their origin in California.
originated as street gangs.
are either friends or foes.**

**15 Prisoners are unaware that
the monitoring system has been modified.
street gangs copy their behaviour.
they provide information which helps fight crime.
the community knows a lot about their activities.**

