

Documenting Detention: Records of Segregation in Two U.S. Prisons

JARRETT M. DRAKE

Abstract: Records are essential for judicial bodies, truth commissions, and accountability forums to investigate possible human rights violations. Numerous cases show that when widespread government-sanctioned abuses come to light, records emerge as a nexus of accountability. In the United States, prisons are among the prime venues in which human rights breaches have been documented and adjudicated. As such, this master's thesis research explores a fundamental question: How do American prisons demonstrate accountability through recordkeeping?

The investigation of this question reveals implications for records and information managers, in addition to legal and other professionals who are called into accountability forums. The research evaluates the extent to which two U.S. prisons—the Indiana State Prison and the Mississippi State Penitentiary—operate within their states' respective accountability environment to meet statutory and regulatory requirements for documenting inmate segregation, including but not limited to solitary confinement.

Using a holistic multiple-case studies design, primary data were gathered through state administrative codes as well as several in-depth, on-site, semi-structured interviews with prison personnel 1) knowledgeable of segregation as an inmate management tactic and 2) responsible for the creation, usage, or management of the records created as evidence thereof. The research finds that the two prisons face competing accountability frameworks, and, consequently, their segregation records meet varied standards of availability, accessibility, and authenticity. The research contributes to archival and information science conversations on accountability, records management, and the public

About the author:

Jarrett M. Drake currently serves as a University Library Associate at the University of Michigan Special Collections Library. His prior work experience includes the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the Maryland State Archives, and the Bentley Historical Library. He holds a B.A. in History from Yale College and an M.S.I. from the University of Michigan School of Information.