

## PREFACE

THE CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM HAS A DIFFICULT JOB TO DO. It must provide monitoring, supervision, punishment, and treatment for the range of offenders who are convicted of violations of the law. This range of offenders is tremendous. It spans those whose only violations of the law include relatively minor traffic crimes such as speeding, driving with an expired license, or driving with expired registration to those convicted of predatory crimes such as murder, kidnapping, and rape. The correctional system imposes punishments including diversion and deferred sentences where there is effectively no sentence to situations where the state lawfully kills the offender. Correctional clients range from upstanding citizens with strong ties to the community to the most disadvantaged and pathological of our fellow citizens. Across these variations, the correctional system must perform its functions with the ideal of balanced justice in mind.

While there are problems and negative aspects of the correctional system, the American correctional system does an admirable job of providing appropriate justice to the correctional clients that it serves. The logic of *American Corrections: Theory, Research, Policy, and Practice* is consistent with the triage system used in the medical community: the most serious cases demand the most immediate and serious treatment and the less serious cases must wait.

*American Corrections: Theory, Research, Policy, and Practice* is divided into four parts. Part I, The Foundation of Corrections, provides a general overview of the correctional system and its place in the criminal justice system, the philosophy and history of the correctional system in the United States, and the laws that govern the ability of the state to correct criminal offenders. As you will see, there are many philosophies about the best way to supervise criminal offenders and some of these are conflicting and even difficult to reconcile.

Part II, Corrections: The Management of Offender Risk, delves into the triage approach beginning with the various sentences that the criminal courts impose on offenders and the ways that the correctional system classifies offenders according to the various risks they exemplify. From there, a continuum of sentences is used to meet the diverse risks and needs of the offenders. In severity, the continuum of sentences is generally representative of the continuum of offenders.

Part III, Prison and Offender Reentry, explores one of the most serious parts of the correctional system: prison. In this section, the journey of prisoners as they navigate prison, parole, and ultimate reentry into society is examined.

Part IV, Special Topics in Corrections, examines three somewhat special populations of offenders: juveniles, women, and the small portion of offenders who receive the most severe treatment by the system—namely capital punishment and civil commitment.

*American Corrections: Theory, Research, Policy, and Practice* offers 15 chapters of useful information based on scholarship from the social and behavioral sciences. It is a comprehensive, student-friendly text for introductory corrections courses at the community

college and university levels. It does not stray into material that is more suitable for other courses (e.g., criminal justice, corrections management, etc.) and it does not present a point of view. *American Corrections: Theory, Research, Policy, and Practice* does not lionize the criminal offender and malign the system and it does not pretend that the correctional system is beyond reproach. Instead, in a fun, scholarly, and student-friendly way, *American Corrections: Theory, Research, Policy, and Practice* explores the correctional system in the United States. We hope you enjoy it.