



PHOTOS BY BILL GENTILE—SIPA

'Yesterday's enthusiasm'? Inmate at Manatee County, Fla., facility sits in his cell

The Bust in Boot Camps

Crime: A hot trend is less promising than it sounds

THE DAYS BEGIN BEFORE DAWN, WHEN the 25-year-old cocaine dealer from Atlanta makes his bed to Marine Corps specifications. After the quick-march to breakfast and a pulse-pounding calisthenics session, he goes to work clearing rubbish from an expressway median. Has a stint in Georgia's Stone Mountain boot camp changed his life? He smiles, flashing the gold caps that decorate his four front teeth. "I already know right from wrong," he says. "Some good things come out of selling dope. You help a lot of folks."

Boot camps sounded like a great idea. Stick young, nonviolent first offenders into a rigorous, military-style setting and teach them self-discipline, respect for the law and the value of work. Consigning them to overcrowded prisons, proponents argued, only increased their chances of becoming career criminals. Taxpayers would benefit from the camps, too, since they promised a lower-cost alternative to expensive prison cells. Over the last decade, "shock incarceration" has become the penal reform of choice for both liberals and conservatives. Thirty states have opened 57 boot camps with about 7,000 beds. But a growing body of evidence suggests that boot camps don't work. Camp graduates are just as likely as prison parolees to end up back

in trouble with the law. In a study of inmates released from Louisiana boot camps in 1991, University of Maryland psychologist Doris MacKenzie found that 37 percent were arrested at least once during their first year of freedom, compared with only 25.7 percent of parolees. Results from other states are not much more promising. "Boot camps are rapidly becoming yesterday's enthusiasm," says Prof. Franklin Zimring, a criminologist at the University of California, Berkeley.

Yet politicians are reluctant to relinquish the idea. Why? For elected officials scrambling to appear tough on crime, boot camps are a cheap and easy way of placating angry constituents. News footage of panting,

shaven-headed young men in khaki jumpsuits, doing push-ups at the foot of a snarling drill instructor, satisfies the deep public appetite for seeing some civility pounded into thugs who terrorize their neighborhoods. Georgia has nine boot camps, with two more under construction. "Self-reliance!" the men of Stone Mountain yell on the downward stroke of their push-ups. "Discipline!" is their chant on the way back up.

The crime bill pending in Congress may ultimately include more than \$1 billion for boot camps—enough for 66,000 new inmates. Despite the questionable results, the White House remains enthusiastic. "Boot camps done right can reduce prison overcrowding and, more important, ensure that young offenders don't get off scot-free," says Bruce Reed, a Clinton aide who specializes in criminal-justice issues.

Beyond reform: But it turns out that boot camps may actually *increase* demand for prison beds. Critics say that to ease overcrowding, camps would have to include those headed for prison. Yet the majority of shock-incarceration programs (both juvenile and adult) are designed for offenders who would otherwise be on probation. Many ex-boot-campers end up in jail for minor infractions of their own strict, post-camp probation—further swelling penitentiaries. Some young offenders may already be beyond reform by the time they reach camp. Here is Manatee County, Fla., camp director Lee Vallier talking to a 15-year-old:

"What are you in for?"

"Armed burglary, grand theft/firearm."

"How many crimes you committed?"

"About 400 felonies—robbery and burglary."

"How old were you when you started committing crimes?"

"I was like 6."

Boot-camp proponents argue that many programs overlook an element critical for

success: after-care and reintroduction into community life. In Denver, graduates of a 90-day boot camp get a year's intensive education and vocational training. It's cheaper than incarceration—the graduates live at home—but they are bolstered by a support system of other successful camp veterans. "You can't just intervene for a short time and then cut people loose," says associate deputy attorney general Shay Bilchik. Effective boot camps will require more of a commitment from lawmakers all too eager to exploit the crime issue. After-care doesn't play as vividly on the tube as push-ups.



Push-ups and politics: Campers at Stone Mountain hit the deck

PETER KATEL with MELINDA LIU and BOB COHN in Washington