

# **ALIEN DETENTION CENTER HELD INADEQUATE**

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## **Body**

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The center where aliens are detained in New York City before being deported is plagued by escapes and is not equipped to handle drug dealers or others convicted of serious crimes who are awaiting deportation, a Federal study says.

The center, at 201 Varick Street, at King Street, in Manhattan, which houses between 170 and 180 aliens from the New York area, had 25 escapes between June 1985 and June 1986, the report said. The majority of the escapees were convicted criminals and 18 are still at large.

Most of the escapes were through unsecured fourth-floor windows of the building, which houses other Federal offices. Many of the staff members are private security guards, who have no training as correction officers.

"It is not a prison, was not meant to be a prison, but it is being operated as a prison," said Allan Stapleton, an audit manager for the General Accounting Office, the investigative arm of Congress, which did the study. "Why should the community around that facility and the whole city be jeopardized by the detaining of criminals there?"

A spokesman for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Scott Blackman, assistant district director for deportation, said he had not seen the report and could not respond to specific charges. But he acknowledged that the center was not designed to handle dangerous criminals and that its security guards were not trained as correction officers.

"The nature of detained aliens has changed over the years and many now do have criminal records," he said. "As the population has changed in nature, we have tried to change as well."

In recent weeks, he said, the agency has put wire mesh on windows and has attempted to find a new guard service to increase security precautions.

The New York office of the immigration service has come under growing criticism recently from public officials who have accused the agency of not trying to deport most aliens convicted of drug violations. Aliens make up a large proportion of the people arrested for dealing crack, a potent form of cocaine, law-enforcement officials say.

### 'A Lack of Adequate Space'

Senator Alfonse M. D'Amato, Republican of New York, said that as long as the immigration service was unable to detain and properly house dangerous criminal aliens, it would be highly limited in its ability to arrest and deport aliens found dealing drugs and committing other serious crimes in the city.

"One of the reasons they don't go after most of the real criminals is there is a lack of adequate space," he said.

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The report, one of three being prepared for Senator D'Amato by the General Accounting Office about the immigration service in New York, has not yet been released to the public. But the Senator and workers involved in compiling the study disclosed some of its main findings yesterday.

Opened in 1984

According to the report, an environmental impact statement in 1980 describing plans for opening the **center** in the Varick Street building said the average detainee would not be a violent or serious criminal. The **center** opened in 1984. But the report said that of its 173 prisoners on April 29, 116 had criminal backgrounds, including 77 who had been convicted of violent crimes.

The report said the staff included 40 security guards hired on contract from Citywide Security Services, a private concern. The guards, who work with unarmed employees from the immigration service, were not trained to handle dangerous prisoners, it said.

The study found that in June 1986 guns were stored in a cabinet secured by a combination lock and that the combination was written out and kept nearby.

During one review of security equipment, the report said, 17 of the 23 television monitors used for watching prisoners were not working.

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