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The New York Times  
January 8, 1996, Monday, Late Edition - Final  
**SECTION:** Section 1; Page 54; Column 1; Cultural Desk

**LENGTH:** 588 words

**HEADLINE:** TELEVISION REVIEW;  
Following Drug Dealers Through the Prison Gates

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**BODY:**

In one respect life in prison these days is pretty much like life on the streets: a contest between drug sellers and users on one side and the law on the other. Such is the message of "Prison Life: Prisoners of the **War on Drugs.**"

The first and most pungent segment of this verite-style "American Undercover" documentary visits East Jersey State Prison in Rahway, N.J., where professed dealers tell, no expletive deleted, how drugs are smuggled in, hidden in body cavities and sold for three times the street price or for sexual favors. Even if the man who says he makes as much as \$4,000 a week catering to 75 percent of the prisoners is exaggerating, business seems to be brisk.

Prison officials describe how they try to contain the trade (they have no hope of stopping it), and the camera dwells on strip searches and urine tests. One seller makes the point that the drugs are a benign pastime for men who have little else to do when they are not lifting weights. The correction officers, he says, are "lucky there are people like us in the penitentiary," since their recreation would otherwise take more violent forms.

At Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, a New York State prison for women, nonviolent first-timers tell of having been sent up for many years for drug offenses under much-criticized mandatory sentencing requirements. They find comfort in prison friendships, as do the white-power inmates at the Oklahoma State Reformatory, who display their swastika tattoos and talk tough about a race war.

The only cheering note in an hour of fast-and-fuzzy or slow-and-fuzzy effects and a prevailing beat of rap and rock comes from Jack Cowley, an unusually candid Oklahoma official. He notes that packing people

into cells has had little effect on the drug trade but has had some benefits, for instance giving jobs to people like himself who run the prisons.

Wardens have recently taken to banning face-to-face interviews with prisoners in the hope of discouraging shows that make celebrities out of murderers. But like a random victim of a drive-by shooting, this kind of gritty documentary would also be a casualty. And that would be a loss.

'21st Century Jet: The Building of the 777'

PBS, tonight at 8 P.M.  
(Channel 13 in New York)

Herewith a five-hour account of the development of the Boeing 777, hailed as the first airliner of the next century, a very risky proposition for a company that seemed to be heading toward financial disaster. It is evidently a success story, but I can't be sure because I parachuted during the first episode. It was like being trapped in an in-flight promotion.

Viewers fascinated with aeronautics or those who have stock in Boeing may be more receptive. If you bear with "21st Century Jet" for five Monday evenings, the press release promises, you will learn the nuts and bolts of designing a new plane and testing it.

The series was made by a British company and is being presented by KCTS, the Seattle public station. Seattle is Boeing's headquarters. Five hours of hometown boosterism?

PRISON LIFE

Prisoners of the **War on Drugs**  
HBO, tonight at 10 P.M.

Produced by Alan **Levin**, Marc **Levin** and Daphne Pinkerson; edited by Alison Ellwood; Mark Benjamin, director of photography; directed by Marc **Levin**; Shane McConnell, original music. For "Prison Life" magazine: Richard **Stratton**, editor and publisher; Chris Cozzone, executive editor; Kim Wozencraft, editor at large; Jennifer Wynn, managing editor. A production of Blowback Productions.

**LOAD-DATE:** January 9, 1996