



# First Available Cell

*Chad R. Trulson, James W. Marquart*

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Decades after the U.S. Supreme Court and certain governmental actions struck down racial segregation in the larger society, American prison administrators still boldly adhered to discriminatory practices. Not until 1975 did legislation prohibit racial segregation and discrimination in Texas prisons. However, vestiges of this practice endured behind prison walls. Charting the transformation from segregation to desegregation in Texas prisons—which resulted in Texas prisons becoming one of the most desegregated places in America—*First Available Cell* chronicles the pivotal steps in the process, including prison director George J. Beto's 1965 decision to allow inmates of different races to co-exist in the same prison setting, defying Southern norms. The authors also clarify the significant impetus for change that emerged in 1972, when a Texas inmate filed a lawsuit alleging racial segregation and discrimination in the Texas Department of Corrections. Perhaps surprisingly, a multiracial group of prisoners sided with the TDC, fearing that desegregated housing would unleash racial violence. Members of the security staff also feared and predicted severe racial violence. Nearly two decades after the 1972 lawsuit, one vestige of segregation remained in place: the double cell. Revealing the aftermath of racial desegregation within that 9 x 5 foot space, *First Available Cell* tells the story of one of the greatest social experiments with racial desegregation in American history.

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