

Explorer Surviving Maximum Security

Written by Keith ID1032

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Some rap and hip-hop artist glorify gang life and give the impression that jail is not a big deal. On Sunday, April 10th at 8 p.m. ET/PT on the National Geographic Channel, host Lisa Ling is given rare access to the California Sacramento State Prison, a world on the fringes of American society. Watch and then you decide for yourself.

National Geographic Channel is known for turning its lens on cultures and closed societies around the world. Now, "Explorer: Surviving Maximum Security" enters a hidden and harsh culture in our own society, with its own government, rules and form of punishment.

What Lisa Ling finds is a culture unto itself: divided by race, controlled by force and always on the edge of chaos. "We give a view into a violent, dark underbelly of the prison system and I think it is a haunting journey that will surprise viewers," said Ling. "Our cameras capture the daily tensions out in the yard, where everyday there is a risk it will explode into violence, and we see unique inmate rituals rarely caught on film."

The most violent male convicts -- murderers, sex offenders and armed robbers -- are sent to California Sacramento State Prison. One of the highest security prisons in the nation, a third of the prison's inmates are serving life sentences in a world where violence, rape and gang warfare are part of everyday life.

Ling chronicles the extreme challenges for the guards, investigative officers and inmates. In interviews with both newcomers and lifers, she reports how they survive the dangerous world of gangs and predators.

We meet Oliver, who has been in and out of prison for seventeen years and is back in, serving 60 days on a minor parole violation. Kevin, a first-timer facing 17 years for armed robbery, will have to learn the rules. For both men, their future depends largely on where they are assigned -- the prison is divided by sections, and placement can sometimes mean life or death. There is the notorious B facility, where gangland violence is a common occurrence, the less threatening C facility, and A-block, for those in need of protection.

Ling also talks with J-Dawg, a convicted murderer who has a contract on his life and has been

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sent to A-Block for protection. J-Dawg tells Ling, "It's a shark tank out there. All sharks and no fish," he says. "One wrong move and you're dead." He estimates that 40 percent of the inmates are raped. "If you show one second of weakness," he says, "then it's over."

To maintain control, guards screen prisoners with metal detectors and conduct regular full body searches in an effort to keep drugs, weapons and other contraband out of the population. Almost anything hard can be sharpened and made into a dangerous weapon -- a lighter, a pen or even a toothbrush. "There are a lot of stabbings over here," says Zapp Zumudio, a guard at California Sacramento State Prison. "We had one recently over by the latrines where the inmate was stabbed 37 times."

The mind-numbing routine of a prison day can almost be as difficult as the ever present threat of violence. In California prisons, suicide is the leading cause of death for inmates. "I think of the people hanging themselves or cutting their wrists," says Herc, another prisoner. "They couldn't get used to the routine."

In the U.S. today, more than two million people are incarcerated; in California alone, more than 200 new felons enter the system each day. "Explorer: Surviving Maximum Security" gives viewers a rare inside look at this world hidden within our society.

For more information vist National Geographic Channel Web Site [HERE](#) .