**Inmate Subcultures**

Inmate subcultures originally developed out of the pains of imprisonment. Subcultures can help us understand the socialization of inmates, can help us determine how inmates are adapting to the prison environment, and can provide insight for correctional officers to control the prison environment. Before the prisoners’ rights movement, prisons were more homogenous and every inmate suffered the same deprivations (Sykes 1958). After the prisoners’ rights movement, many deprivations were weakened. For example, inmates are able to move around facilities more freely, and this liberty can lead to more cohesiveness among inmates. In the mid-1970s, life within the prison walls began to look like life on the outside: racially, politically, and religiously divided (Carroll 1974; Irwin 1980).

The traditional subculture of inmates versus correctional officers became inmates versus inmates. The black population became politically and religiously centered around the rally of white oppression and racism, often divided across racial and ethnic identities. Whites, on the other hand, only looked out for number one when it came to surviving in prison (Carroll 1974). These events broke the solidarity-in-numbers factor inherent in the traditional inmate subculture. In addition, gangs began to enter prisons, which made it easier for new inmates to adapt to prison life when their gangs were already established within a facility (Irwin 1980). See Table 5.3 to learn the characteristics of the six major prison gangs affecting U.S. prisons today. Further, inmates from the mentally ill population led to more problems and more stratification of the inmate population (Irwin 1980).

**[Insert Table 5.3 here]**

Even though the inmate subculture is often considered a phenomenon of the past, pockets of unified groups and gangs exist behind prison walls; they are essentially the same gangs found outside of prison (Jacobs 1976). The mere existence of unified groups in prison can undermine rehabilitation because some pockets are more cohesive than others, which places non-gang members in the path of victimization. The constant worry of being harassed and maltreated is counterproductive to meeting individual treatment goals. It is also difficult to meet the goal of deterrence because offenders who are members of a gang or group may not be deterred from prison if their group is in a position of power in the facility. Retribution can be weakened much in the same way for inmates whose gang or group is in prison, because their time will be more easily spent. Therefore, no two sentences will be proportional. Finally, incapacitation goals may be impossible to achieve because there will be crime within the prison due to the tension between rival gangs or between inmates who belong and those who do not.