

## Worksheet 3. Chillicothe Federal Reformatory Study Background Information

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Albert B. Sabin, a scientist at the University of Cincinnati, developed a vaccine to help prevent the spread of poliomyelitis, a disease that causes fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, stiffness, and can lead to paralysis.<sup>1</sup> In the early 1950's, approximately 60,000 cases of polio were reported in the United States, and almost 3,000 deaths occurred each year.<sup>2</sup>

During the mid-1950's, Dr. Sabin began testing attenuated (weakened) virus strains of the poliovirus on prisoners in the federal reformatory in Chillicothe, Ohio.<sup>3</sup> Volunteers for this experiment were given \$25 and promised free days.<sup>4</sup> A total of 30 men, all consenting adults, were chosen for this study.<sup>5</sup>

### The Federal Reformatory, Chillicothe, Ohio<sup>6</sup>

"The Federal Reformatory at Chillicothe, Ohio is the outgrowth of a dawning recognition on the part of those concerned with the treatment of criminals that imprisonment should reform as well as punish. [...] [T]he reformatory plan reflected a further awakening of social conscience and a practical acknowledgment that young offenders might be prevented from becoming habitual criminals if an effort were made to improve their attitudes and train them in useful occupations."<sup>7</sup>

#### Prison Statistics/ Information

- Average age when entering – 19 years old
- Between 1100 and 1200 male inmates
- Live in dormitory style quarters
- Average grade level – 5.9 (majority left school at 9th or 10th grade)
- Have opportunities to become better educated, learn "earning skills," and earn wages and "good time credits"
- Prisoners have access to 70 bed hospital
- Research projects carried out at prison by United States Public Health Service. Prisoners can volunteer to participate in experiments and studies
- Prisoners are rarely religious when entering the prison, but have access to chaplains
- Between 3000 and 4000 meals are prepared every day

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization, "Poliomyelitis Fact Sheet," <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs114/en/>.

<sup>2</sup> Nemours Foundation, "Polio," [http://kidshealth.org/parent/infections/bacterial\\_viral/polio.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/infections/bacterial_viral/polio.html).

<sup>3</sup> David M. Oshinsky, *Polio: An American Story* (New York: Oxford University Press), 245.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Sabin, Albert B. to MacKay, Dewey C. dated 1956-05-04. Albert B. Sabin Archives. <http://drc.libraries.uc.edu/handle/2374.UC/701501>.

<sup>5</sup> Sydney A. Halpern, *Lesser Harms: The Morality of Risk in Medical Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 78.

<sup>6</sup> Prison statistics were taken from the pamphlet: United States. Bureau of Prisons. *The Federal Reformatory, Chillicothe, Ohio*. Washington: Bureau of Prisons, Department of Justice, [1954]. The Albert B. Sabin Archives has a copy of this pamphlet in Series — Oral Poliovirus Vaccine, Subseries — Studies, Box 17, Folder 8 — Chillicothe (Ohio) Tests, 1954. Please contact [chhp@uc.edu](mailto:chhp@uc.edu) for more information about pamphlet.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.