Reviews

Book Review

Prison: A Survival Guide

By Carl Cattermole

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Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Prime Minister Boris Johnson promoted a "serious about fighting crime" narrative, and simultaneously the expansion of the penal system.[1] Calls to expand the carceral web have since intensified during the pandemic.[2] These approaches often appeal to those who have been programmed to uncritically accept the penal equation "crime plus responsibility equals punishment".[3] However, as Carl Cattermole illustrates in his book, Prison: A Survival Guide, these accounts often erase the multi-layered suffering endured by people within these institutional settings and lack any practical guidance for anyone faced with a "stretch" (p. 181).

Prison: A Survival Guide is a raw, comprehensive, and accessible four-part guide to navigating and surviving one of the core symbols of the carceral nation: the prison. The author, Carl Cattermole who was formerly incarcerated, re-positions lived experience to the centre of contemporary penal discourse. His text responds to the need to equip those currently inhabiting the penal system in Britain with a practical and critical account of incarceration that is formed in light of his lived knowledge of incarceration, which presents as a kind of penal literacy. These insights are interspersed with a range of perspectives from the experts such as formerly and presently incarcerated people, combined with reflections from family members whose loved ones are currently incarcerated. Cattermole resists the parameters of more traditional penal discourse by injecting reality back into the centre of the conversation. In doing so, he unceremoniously unveils "what the prison really is: a mix of technical legal systematic bullshit mixed with emotions that are really hard to understand" (p. 12). This is a sombre, yet witty account of penal survival. Fundamental to Cattermole's book, is his appeal to the reader to progress the conversation beyond sorrow and dismay and into "proactive action" (p. 176).

In Part 1 of the book, titled "The Basics", Cattermole provides the reader with a 101 on the day-to-day; covering areas such as day one, relationships with cellmates, staff, race, and religion, food, and the Incentive Earned Privileges system (IEP). In this section, the author details "nicking"– the process whereby insiders are subject to the internal penal adjudication process for minor charges (p. 39). Importantly, he highlights incarcerated people's lack of access to legal aid to support them in manoeuvring this process. This scarce access to justice arises despite the detrimental impact of a potential guilty verdict on people's liberty, and as Cattermole highlights earlier on in the text, the reality that the collective literacy age of around half of all incarcerated people is 11 years old (p. 40, p. 10). Cattermole sheds important light on many of the underdiscussed fundamentals of life in the penal system in Britain.

In Part 2 of the book, "Taking Care of Yourself", Cattermole discusses health, sex, drugs, alcohol, art, education, and even tattoos within the prison. Here, Cattermole passes the mic to his friends— Julia Howard, Lisa Selby, Darcey Hartley, Jon Gulliver, Sarah Jane Baker— to provide a multidimensional insight into incarceration in terms of sexual intimacy, parenthood in prison, having a partner in prison, being an incarcerated child, and gender identity on the inside. Sarah Jane Baker's account on being LGBTQ+ in prison is particularly effective in highlighting both the increased contemporary focus on incarcerated transgender women and the comparative neglect of transgender men in the penal system. Meanwhile, Julia Howard discusses the difficulties of caring for children in prison and the strength she derived from regular contact with her children (p. 120-125). She highlights the work by Birth Companions who support pregnant women and new mothers who are incarcerated. All of these rich insights enhance the diverse and universal reach of this book.

In Part 3 of the book, "What's Next?", Cattermole looks to the future and "returning to the real world" post-incarceration. As part of his suggestions to transform the mainstream acceptance of incarceration, he compels the reader to examine the underlying meaning of the language used by the Ministry of Justice, the media and MPs on all sides of politics. He questions "what is a 'reform' if it really means building a USA-style private 'super prison' over the hills and far away" (p. 176). As part of these smaller steps to proactive action, Cattermole also emphasises the importance of establishing community and for us all to be engaging with a variety of networks on the pathway to transformative change (p.178). By

1. "PM to create 10,000 new prison places and extend stop-and-search", BBC News, last modified August 19th, 2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-49309112.
2. See: Adams, Felicity and Emmerich, Fabienne. 2021.'Caring, not carceral expansion!' Punishment, Prisons and Detention EG Working Group Newsletter, European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control, March 2021 Issue 13, pp1-4.
3. Norrie, Alan. 1996. The Finding of Fault in the Criminal Law. The Modern Law Review. 59: 540-556.

urging the reader to interrogate seemingly progressive "reformist" approaches and by reinforcing the value of community in the context of the prison estate in Britain, Cattermole develops the abolitionist terrain established by the likes of Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson-Gilmore.

Subsequently, in Part 4 of the book: "Resources" Cattermole shifts his focus to actualising these smaller, yet transformative future steps. Initially he does this by sharing a valuable set of contacts to support currently and formerly incarcerated people who are engaged with the criminal legal system at various stages. These include (to name but a few) the Bent Bars Project, a letter-writing project which provides support to LGBTQ+ incarcerated people; The Empty Cages Collective, a small anarchist group dedicated to ending oppression in all forms who have engaged with the prison system in varying capacities; and Community Action on Prison Expansion (CAPE), a collective of grassroots coalitions opposing prison expansion across England, Wales and Scotland.

The author contributes to a growing and diverse body of scholarship within the criminological and socio-legal research terrain by centring lived-experience accounts of incarceration. Cattermole and the recent additions by scholars such as Baker (2017) and Sanchez (2019) aim to "bring readers into the lived reality of our prison system – its effects, its contradictions, and its failure to rehabilitate offenders or promote public safety".[4] By bringing together a range of traditionally marginalised discourses about incarceration, Prison: A Survival Guide constitutes a rich and distinct addition to this contemporary research landscape. Cattermole provides a valuable critique of the penal system in Britain that is underpinned by an abolitionist spirit in tandem with a penal survival praxis, which is primarily designed to support presently and formerly incarcerated people in navigating the penal system. As such, the book constitutes a refreshing, trustworthy and supportive ally for those faced with a prison sentence, or for those with loved ones who are engaged with the penal system.

By setting the record straight on the multitude of reductive and click-bait media narratives of incarceration, Cattermole ensures that the value of the text extends beyond those directly engaged with the criminal legal system. Within his account, he turns his attention to a different, but an interconnected cog in the carceral system – the court system. He persuasively advocates an avenue for further research: Court: A Survival Guide (p. 3). Fundamentally, Cattermole's considered combination of varying forms of knowledge equips the reader with a deeper appreciation of the complexity of incarceration, and as such the text is a vital source for all. Simultaneously, the book prompts readers from all backgrounds to confront the violence of the carceral state and to search for alternatives in an increasingly punitive age punctuated by loss, suffering, and violence.

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The Prison Doctor

By Angela Brown
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For many years, literature on prison health care was relatively sparse and under former Home Office policy, was generally shrouded in secrecy and discouraged. An exception was the pseudonymous Dr Theodore Dalrymple whose unhelpful, jaundiced view of prisoners frequently appeared in sections of the press. Vivien Stern, in *Bricks of Shame*[1], records a prison doctor being rebuked for writing about prison hygiene in *The Times*. External access to the then *Prison Medical Journal* was denied. When Professor Joe Sim published his *Medical Power in Prisons*[2] he noted that research in this area had often led to litigation against individuals and he had needed to pass his drafts to lawyers as a safeguard.

Secrecy led to suspicion of poor quality medical provision in prisons and indeed, there was evidence to support this. There were, of course, doctors, nurses and hospital officers (roughly the equivalent to medical orderlies in the military) who were models of professional practice. It was Dr Shan Biswas who, in the 1990s, advocated the founding of a College of Prison Medicine to recognise the unique nature of medical practice within prisons and to share best practice with colleagues. Thankfully matters are different today and the Royal College of General Practitioners Secure Environment Group has taken Biswas's aspirations perhaps further than he could have hoped. Since the abolition of the inward-looking, self-protecting Prison Medical Service, there has been the opportunity for prison doctors and nurses to contribute to the public debate. Dr Angela Brown's book is a welcome addition to the field.

Not being an academic text, nor pretending to be, she charts her career from being a GP in a comfortable Buckinghamshire practice through prison doctoring at HMP Huntercombe, Wormwood Scrubs and Bronzefield. She left 20

4. Sanchez, Angel E. 2019. In Spite of Prison: Developments in the Law. Harvard Law Review 132: 1650-1683
1. Stern, V. (1993) *Bricks of shame: Britain's prisons* London: Penguin
2. Sim, J. (1990) *Medical power in prisons: Prison medical service in England 1774-1988* London: McGraw Hill