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The Prisoner Society: Power, Adaptation and Social Life in an English Prison (Clarendon Studies in Criminology)

By Ben Crewe



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While the use of imprisonment continues to rise in developed nations, we have little sociological knowledge of the prison's inner world. Based on extensive fieldwork in a medium-security prison, *The Prisoner Society: Power, Adaptation and Social Life in an English Prison* provides an in-depth analysis of the prison's social anatomy. It explains how power is exercised by the institution, individualizing the prisoner community and demanding particular forms of compliance and engagement. Drawing on prisoners' life stories, it supplies a detailed typology of adaptive styles, showing how different prisoners experience and respond to the new range of penal practices and frustrations. It then explains how the prisoner society - its norms, hierarchy and social relationships - is shaped both by these conditions of confinement and by the different backgrounds, values and identities that prisoners bring into the prison environment.

Through this analysis, this meticulously researched book aims to revive and update the dormant tradition of prison ethnography. It provides an empirical snapshot of a modern prison, documenting the aims and techniques of contemporary imprisonment and illuminating the social structures and behaviors that they generate. Through a penetrating account of power relations throughout the institution, the author documents the pains of modern imprisonment, the new techniques of survival, and the prison's distinctive forms of trade, friendship and everyday culture.

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Editorial Review

Review

"I have no doubt that The Prisoner Society will come to be seen as a classic text in the international canon of prison studies. Meanwhile, it should be read by everyone concerned with penal justice" --Pat Carlen, British Journal of Criminology

"An engaging and beautifully-drawn account of the prison's social and cultural 'innards' which are normally hidden from view. The book is rich in texture and detail, theoretically sophisticated and - perhaps unusually for such a lenghthy book - never dull. This impressive volume in the highly regarded Clarendon Studies in Criminology series represents a major contribution to the tradition of sociological studies of the prison ...a significant investment ...it will not disappoint." --Gwen Robinson, The Howard Journal

"The Prisoner Society is a triumph of prisons sociology. In this thoroughly researched, elegantly written, immensely rewarding book, Ben Crewe achieves his stated ambition of revisiting and renewing the tradition of prison ethnography, It will surely swiftly attain the status of a modern classic, and confirm Crewe's reputation as an outstanding prisons scholar." --Alisa Stevens, The Sociological Review

"This book is highly recommended and deserves to be read widely by prison professionals and will also undoubtedly be a source of reference for academics for years to come." --Jamie Bennett, Govenor of HMP Morton Hall, Prison Service Journal

About the Author

Dr Ben Crewe is a Senior Research Associate at the Institute of Criminology, Cambridge, and is a Nuffield Foundation New Career Development Fellow in social sciences. He is also a Research Fellow at Robinson College, Cambridge. He has published widely on prison life and media culture.

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