



Prison and Social Death (Critical Issues in Crime and Society)

Joshua M. Price

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The United States imprisons more of its citizens than any other nation in the world. To be sentenced to prison is to face systematic violence, humiliation, and, perhaps worst of all, separation from family and community. It is, to borrow Orlando Patterson's term for the utter isolation of slavery, to suffer "social death." In *Prison and Social Death*, Joshua Price exposes the unexamined cost that prisoners pay while incarcerated and after release, drawing upon hundreds of often harrowing interviews conducted with people in prison, parolees, and their families.

Price argues that the prison separates prisoners from desperately needed communities of support from parents, spouses, and children. Moreover, this isolation of people in prison renders them highly vulnerable to other forms of violence, including sexual violence. Price stresses that the violence they face goes beyond physical abuse by prison guards and it involves institutionalized forms of mistreatment, ranging from abysmally poor health care to routine practices that are arguably abusive, such as pat-downs, cavity searches, and the shackling of pregnant women. And social death does not end with prison. The condition is permanent, following people after they are released from prison. Finding housing, employment, receiving social welfare benefits, and regaining voting rights are all hindered by various legal and other hurdles. The mechanisms of social death, Price shows, are also informal and cultural. Ex-prisoners face numerous forms of distrust and are permanently stigmatized by other citizens around them.

A compelling blend of solidarity, civil rights activism, and social research, *Prison and Social Death* offers a unique look at the American prison and the excessive and unnecessary damage it inflicts on prisoners and parolees.

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