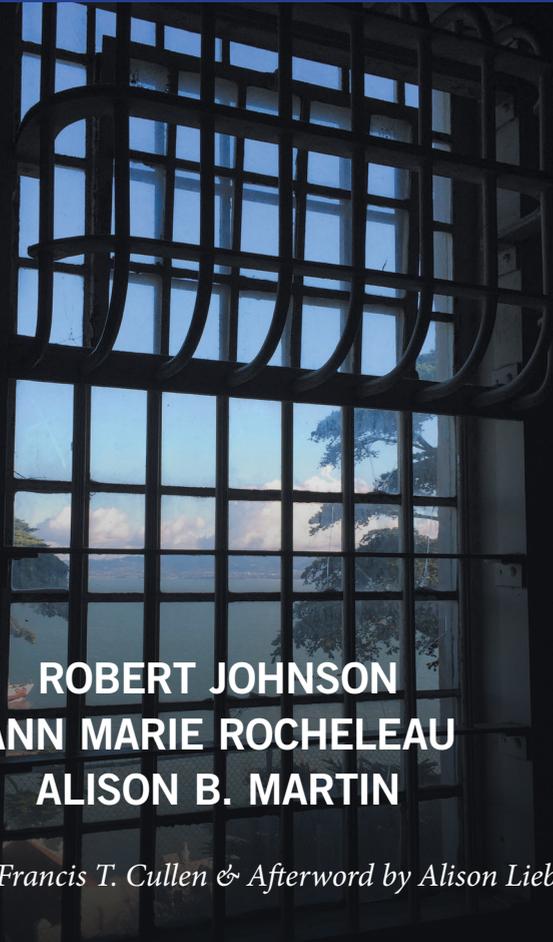


Fourth Edition

HARD TIME

Featuring numerous updates reflecting the latest research, the new 4th Edition

A FRESH LOOK AT UNDERSTANDING
AND REFORMING THE PRISON



**ROBERT JOHNSON
ANN MARIE ROCHELEAU
ALISON B. MARTIN**

Foreword by Francis T. Cullen & Afterword by Alison Liebling

WILEY Blackwell

Praise for
***Hard Time: A Fresh Look at Understanding
and Reforming the Prison***

Robert Johnson, with his collaborators Ann Marie Rocheleau and Alison B. Martin, has done a service in ensuring that this correctional classic remains available to us, offering in this edition, as *Hard Time's* subtitle promises, "a fresh look at understanding and reforming the prison." With the authors as their tour guides and individual chapters as important points of destination, readers are about to embark on an exciting correctional adventure. It is a trip worth taking. Indeed, those emerging from this excursion will be rewarded with a sober but ultimately encouraging view of what the American prison can become. I know that I did.

Francis T. Cullen, *University of Cincinnati*

This book is both a fine and scholarly introduction to prisons in America and a warning to those outside the United States about the tragic consequences of a lack of compassion or fairness in criminal justice. The authors are following in the fine tradition established by Hans Toch and others when they draw on individual and scholarly empirical accounts of prison life to make us think again about the meaning and effects of hard time.

Alison Liebling, *University of Cambridge*

When *Hard Time* first came out, it was the best book on the market about prison life for people who live and work there. It still is. This edition, with new data and new insights, is the best place to start for anyone who wants an understanding of the prison experience today.

Todd Clear, *Rutgers University*

Hard Time

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and Reforming the Prison**

Fourth Edition

**Robert Johnson,
Ann Marie Rocheleau and
Alison B. Martin**

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For Hans Toch

Original thinker, gifted writer, enduring humanist,
an inspiration to us all.

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Foreword

The growth in incarceration in the United States has been so sustained and long-lasting that virtually all readers have spent their entire academic lives, if not their entire lives, in the era of mass imprisonment. During this time, the count of inmates behind bars rolled forward much like the odometer on an automobile – clicking upward relentlessly toward the next round number: a few hundred thousand in the 1970s eventually surpassed the 2 million mark and then moved beyond 2.4 million in 2008. In the past 5 years or so, it is as though policymakers have finally come to their senses, awakening to the reality that this mindless embrace of locking up fellow Americans was an astounding policy failure that has created a correctional nightmare. As Travis Pratt noted, the nation had become “addicted to incarceration.” The recovery process will not be easy.

In this context, it is perhaps understandable that scholars have focused an inordinate amount of attention on the sources, scope, and impact of mass imprisonment. We have learned much about the “culture of control,” “governing through crime,” “the punitive imperative,” “the prison experiment,” and similar concepts that have illuminated the nature of the incarceration movement. Indeed, criminologists did their best to form a collective Dear Abby, advising all who would listen that using imprisonment to deal with crime was expensive, of limited effectiveness, and often racially unjust. For a long time, nobody seemed to listen; fortunately, many policymakers from both ends of the political spectrum now are.

In short, it was difficult, if not impossible, for scholars to ignore the elephant in the correctional room – mass incarceration. But doing so came at a price: they gave far less attention to what was going on inside the nation’s prisons and, with a few notable exceptions, remained silent on how to improve the experience of those who, day in and day out, resided within the society of captives. This neglect was to a degree inadvertent. Time spent focusing on one issue – the policy issue of mass

imprisonment – is time not spent focusing on another issue – in this case, how to reform the internal quality of correctional facilities. But this neglect – this turning a blind eye to the plight of the incarcerated – also was a conscious choice rooted in criminologists' professional ideology.

A core belief, held explicitly or implicitly, by most criminologists is that prisons are inherently inhumane and thus beyond reform. There can be no such thing as a "good prison." This idea can be traced to the first part of the 1970s. In 1971, Philip Zimbardo and colleagues conducted the famous Stanford Prison Experiment in which psychologically normal undergraduate students placed within a mock prison quickly were transformed into oppositional inmates and coercive custodians. The fact that the experiment had to be halted to prevent further harm to the participants sent a powerful message that prisons, by their nature, had a brutalizing effect on all inside. Shortly thereafter, in 1974, Robert Martinson published a famous essay in *The Public Interest* claiming that prison rehabilitation programs were, by and large, ineffective – a conclusion soon known by the shorthand phrase "nothing works." Taken together, there seemed to be incontrovertible scientific evidence that the total institution of the prison was inhumane and that even the most well-intentioned efforts to help reform inmates could not work within its walls. Other events of the day lent credence to this view, including the lethal suppression of the Attica prison riot (which occurred in the month following the Stanford Prison Experiment), revelations of inhumanity in other total institutions (especially mental hospitals), and the broader abuse of state power within criminal justice and in other domains (e.g., foreign policy).

This conception encouraged many criminologists to abandon the social world of the prison as a valued object of investigation. Why study correctional institutions if it was an established truth that they were hopelessly coercive and brutal? Those scholars who still bothered to examine prisons did not question this truth; instead, their project was to document the ways in which institutions were violent, victimizing, disorderly, dehumanizing, and otherwise deleterious. They also held out little hope that this disquieting social order could ever be otherwise. Efforts to improve prison life were thus seen as a fool's errand – destined to fail. Worse, trying to make prisons less brutalizing would achieve, at best, minor incremental improvements that would come at the high price of lending legitimacy to the prison enterprise. Scholars who dared to align themselves with prison officials risked being labeled "administrative criminologists" and as "tools of the state." Wishing to avoid such stigmatizing labels, most correctional scholars rejected a reform agenda and settled instead for a different policy: oppose putting all but the most violent, predatory offenders behind bars.

This anti-prison stance – with the prescription to divert as many people from incarceration as possible – was ideologically comforting but ultimately foolhardy, for two reasons. First, policymakers did not listen to criminologists or read their books. Instead, they continued to embrace get-tough rhetoric and to lock up massive numbers of Americans – as the Pew Charitable Trusts calculated, a figure that by 2008 reached 1 in 100 of us. Second, it placed these scholars in a position of having nothing to say about the internal regimen of prison. Their lack of involvement simply opened the way for different voices to be heard – those who favored mean-spirited

corrections in which increasing prison austerity was trumpeted as a way of exacting retribution and of teaching offenders that crime does not pay.

In 1987, John DiIulio sought to counteract this dominant view in his controversial book *Governing Prisons*. A political scientist by training, DiIulio argued that, similar to other organizations, how prisons were managed shaped the quality of institutional life. Wardens and other correctional staff were not pawns who reacted in predetermined ways to the prison's structural arrangements. Rather, they were managers whose decisions and treatment of inmates produced either orderly, safe, and reformatory prisons or disorderly, unsafe, and criminogenic prisons – or something in between. It is not clear, however, why DiIulio's thesis was so controversial. To be sure, his particular ideas about how best to govern prisons were speculative and clearly deserving of further empirical scrutiny. But objection in many quarters occurred simply because DiIulio challenged criminological orthodoxy in suggesting that prisons could be made more decent.

It is within this context that *Hard Time* was initially published, also in 1987. When I read the first edition, I was struck by Robert Johnson's intellectual courage to reject the reigning professional ideology that prisons were unredeemable institutions. He detailed meticulously the harsh realities that made prisons as bad as the critics claimed them to be. But he also unearthed the promising sides of this social world and articulated pathways to make prisons more decent places – issues I return to shortly. I was so taken by this analysis that I immediately assigned the book as required reading in my course titled "Prisons and Jails." Indeed, I believed that *Hard Time* was a contemporary classic. Now, three decades later and entering its fourth edition, I can attest that, like fine wine, the book has improved with age. In part, I suspect this is because Professor Johnson has had the wisdom of adding quite capable coauthors, Ann Marie Rocheleau and Alison B. Martin. This scholarly trinity has succeeded in creating a volume that is wonderfully written and deeply researched (with 1775 endnotes!). But its pages are infused with something more: an abiding belief that prisons can be made more humane and effective – and that the people within them are not beyond redemption and do not have to live in immiserating conditions.

Hard Time is replete with a lengthy roster of special insights, each of which enriches our understanding of prison life. Accordingly, it is difficult to identify core themes that necessarily supersede in importance others on this list. Still, I can share the two key ideas in the volume that have long had a major impact on my thinking about corrections.

First, Johnson and colleagues document the public cultures that flourish in prison – one held by the inmates and the other by correctional officers. In many ways, these beliefs and actions – often involving violence, hypermasculinity, coercion, and demeaning rhetoric – are precisely what infuse the orthodox view within criminology that prisons are inherently inhumane and beyond genuine reform. These public cultures are real and affect the unhealthy choices that prisoners and their keepers make. But Johnson, Rocheleau, and Martin also unmask another set of cultures – the private cultures of inmates and correctional officers – that are rarely identified

