



Mean Lives, Mean Laws: Oklahoma's Women Prisoners (Critical Issues in Crime and Society)

Susan F. Sharp

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Oklahoma has long held the dubious honor of having the highest female incarceration rate in the country, nearly twice the national average. In this compelling new book, sociologist Susan Sharp sets out to discover just what has gone so wrong in the state of Oklahoma—and what that might tell us about trends in female incarceration nationwide.

The culmination of over a decade of original research, *Mean Lives, Mean Laws* exposes a Kafkaesque criminal justice system, one that has no problem with treating women as collateral damage in the War on Drugs or with stripping female prisoners of their parental rights. Yet it also reveals the individual histories of women who were jailed in Oklahoma, providing intimate portraits of their lives before, during, and after their imprisonment. We witness the impoverished and abusive conditions in which many of these women were raised; we get a vivid portrait of their everyday lives behind bars; and we glimpse the struggles that lead many ex-convicts to fall back into the penal system.

Through an innovative methodology that combines statistical rigor with extensive personal interviews, Sharp shows how female incarceration affects not only individuals, but also families and communities. Putting a human face on a growing social problem, *Mean Lives, Mean Laws* raises important questions about both the state of Oklahoma and the state of the nation.

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