

## The Modern Prison Paradox

In *The Modern Prison Paradox*, Amy E. Lerman examines the shift from rehabilitation to punitivism that has taken place in the politics of American corrections and explores its consequences for both crime control and community life. Professor Lerman's research shows that spending time in more violent and castigatory prisons strengthens inmates' criminal networks and fosters social norms that increase the likelihood of criminal activity following parole. Additionally, Professor Lerman assesses whether harsher prisons similarly shape the attitudes of correctional staff. Her analysis reveals that working in more punitive prisons causes officers to develop an "us against them" mentality while on the job, affecting their orientations toward inmates and support for rehabilitation. Moreover, the wariness and stress officers develop at work carry over into their personal lives, straining relationships with partners, children, and friends. These results make clear that time spent within the confines of a correctional institution is not a deep freeze, during which individuals remain unchanged. Rather, prisons are small communities unto themselves, and the context of life inside them determines the kinds of people they produce.

Amy E. Lerman is Assistant Professor of Politics and Public Affairs at Princeton University. She previously served as Vice President of Policy Studies for the consulting firm Attention America, worked as a freelance political speechwriter, and was a faculty member of the college program at San Quentin State Prison.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-04145-5 — The Modern Prison Paradox  
Amy E. Lerman  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)



Administrative segregation prisoners take part in a group therapy session at San Quentin State Prison, June 8, 2012.  
Photo by Lucy Nicholson for Reuters. Reprinted with permission.

# The Modern Prison Paradox

*Politics, Punishment, and Social Community*

AMY E. LERMAN

*Assistant Professor of Politics and Public Affairs  
Princeton University*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-04145-5 — The Modern Prison Paradox  
Amy E. Lerman  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107613850](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107613850)

© Amy E. Lerman 2013

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2013

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data*

Lerman, Amy E., 1978–

The modern prison paradox : politics, punishment, and social community / Amy E.

Lerman, Assistant Professor of Politics and Public Affairs, Princeton University.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-04145-5 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-107-61385-0 (pbk.)

1. Prisons – United States. 2. Prisoners – United States – Social conditions. 3. Corrections – United States. 4. Criminal justice, Administration of – United States. I. Title.

HV9471.L439 2014

365'.973 – dc23 2013006875

ISBN 978-1-107-04145-5 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-61385-0 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

*He thought that in the history of the world it might even be that there was more punishment than crime but he took small comfort from it.*

Cormack McCarthy, *The Road* (2006)

## Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page ix</i>
1. The Modern Prison Paradox	I
2. Politics and the Punitive Turn	24
3. Public Policy and the Creation of Community	44
4. The Culture and Consequence of Prison	68
5. The Social Effects of Incarceration	94
6. The Social Effects of Prison Work	123
7. From Individuals to Communities	150
8. The Road to Reform	167
9. Epilogue (Or: How I Went to Berkeley and Wound Up in Prison)	190
<i>Appendixes</i>	205
<i>Notes</i>	235
<i>Index</i>	285

## Acknowledgments

It is a truism that books are not written by the author alone. This has certainly been my experience.

First, a million thanks to the following organizations for their financial support of this project: the Survey Research Center, Institute of Governmental Studies, Goldman School of Public Policy, and Graduate Division at the University of California, Berkeley; the Center for Evidence-Based Corrections at the University of California, Irvine; the Fox Leadership Center at the University of Pennsylvania; the Bobst Center for Peace and Justice at Princeton University; and the National Science Foundation. Thanks also to the wonderful people at Cambridge University Press, particularly Robert Dreesen, who saw promise in this project, and Jayashree Prabhu, who expertly helped usher this book toward publication.

In addition, I could not have completed this project without a series of truly excellent research assistants. Thanks to Matt Incantalupo, Katherine McCabe, Jennifer Onofrio, Meredith Sadin, Lisa Steacy, Matt Tokeshi, and Natalie Torres. Thanks also to the fabulous Michele Epstein and Helene Wood for their tremendous administrative (and emotional) support.

Thanks to the many people at the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation for their patience, advice, and assistance in helping me put together the data for this project. Special thanks to Jay Atkinson, Daniel Johnson, and Carrie Davies, who all went above and beyond. Thanks also to Joan Petersilia, a formidable

expert on the California prison system and a truly lovely person, for her very early comments on this project.

Appreciation is also due to the many people who have supported and guided this work throughout, especially the respective faculties of the UC Berkeley Political Science Department and the Department of Politics and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. Special gratitude to Chris Achen, Doug Arnold, Paul Frymer, Marty Gilens, Doug Massey, Tali Mendelberg, Devah Pager, Paul Pierson, Markus Prior, Steve Raphael, Matt Salganik, Jasjeet Sekhon, Jonathan Simon, Laura Stoker, Rocio Titunik, and Ali Valenzuela for their thoughts and comments on various drafts of this book. Much gratitude is also due to Mary Katzenstein, Lisa Miller, and Bruce Western for their incredible generosity with their time and willingness to provide me with valuable input on the manuscript.

I am extremely grateful to the California Correctional Peace Officers Association for agreeing to assist with the 2006 California Correctional Officer Survey and for allowing me the opportunity to dialogue with members at various state board meetings and conventions. Thanks especially to Mike Jimenez, Chuck Alexander, and Joe Baumann. You are remarkable human beings who continue to surprise and educate me. And, of course, thank you to the thousands of men and women who work each day in California's prisons, for participating in the survey and sharing your thoughts and experiences.

To the students of the Prison University Project's college program at San Quentin State Prison: I am forever indebted to you for your willingness to let me teach you and learn with you, and for telling me your stories. I hope I have done them justice.

To Jack Citrin, who gave me a chance to see firsthand how good research is done, and who remains the first person (other than my mother) who thought I could become a "real" political scientist.

To Henry Brady, who believed that this project was important enough to write, and who believed that I could write it: I could not have completed this book, my degree, or my first few years of professional life without your moral support and continued professional guidance.

To my friends and colleagues from Berkeley, Princeton, NYU, WHS, and scattered to the wind (you know who you are): More than you could possibly be aware – particularly since I too often fail to pick up

*Acknowledgments*

xi

the phone to tell you – I appreciate all the times you listened to me talk about this project, even when I didn't know where it was going or how to get there. Your advice and support have gotten me through the darker times. Thanks especially to the good folks of the CAPER, CAPER Reloaded, and Builders and Beer (aka the Vice Club) for keeping me in and out of trouble at (mostly) the appropriate times.

To Jody Lewen, the Patron Saint of Lost Souls and Complicated Lives, who taught me by example that literally anyone can be won over – from the most hardened inmate to the most cynical officer – if you just listen carefully enough to find out where their real fears are rooted: You constantly challenge me to be a better teacher, scholar, and human being.

To my parents, Lori and Steve; my siblings, Deb, Scott, and Dave; my grandparents, Gladys, Jerry, Rima, and Bern; and the many extended family members and family members-in-law who have loved and supported me through the sundry twists and turns: There are no words for how lucky I am to have you all as my booster club, teachers, and friends.

And to my Britt Boys, the Dukes of Trenton: You are my Haven, my two-man cheerleading team, and the loves of my life. This book is for you.