

*Fourth City: Essays from the Prison in America.* By Doran Larson (ed.). East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2014. 338 pp. \$34.95 paper.

Reviewed by Miriam L. Wallace, Division of Humanities and Queen Meccasia Zabriskie, Division of Social Sciences, New College of Florida

Doran Larson's collection, *Fourth City*, represents the first collection of essays written entirely by authors incarcerated within the U.S. prison system at the time of writing. The title indicates its ambition—to represent the frequently unheard voices of those from a population exceeding that of Houston, Texas. Organized into two large sections, "Part One: Life on the Streets of Prison City" and "Part Two: The Rules of Law, Policy, and Practice in Prison City," essays in this collection discuss individual experiences, interpersonal relationships, and institutional-level problems within prisons. Smaller subsections address issues such as "Coping with Life in Prison City," "Family Life in and from Prison City," "Civil Dysfunction and Its Critics," or "Mental and Physical Health Care." In Part One, each of these subsections is followed by a short "Ticket In" essay detailing the route that led to the writer's imprisonment. Part Two subsections are followed by a "Kite Out," prison slang for a note passed between prisoners, but here addressed to young people outside prison "to help them towards better paths" (p. 5). The collection opens with Larson's introduction discussing the concept of "Prison City" and mass incarceration, and each subsection is introduced by a short overview highlighting issues raised by essays in the section. The book closes with suggestions for further reading (other prison writing and responses to American mass incarceration), a glossary of prison jargon, short notes on contributors, and an index.

Some of the world's great writings witness the carceral experience: Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Letters*, and Miné Okubo's *Citizen 13660*. Larson's introduction argues for the value and power of these writers' witness as well, claiming "Prison City may best be understood as the city of violent longing" (p. 5). In this collection, each writer bears witness, as each seeks to humanize a population that is often stereotyped and subjected to symbolic violence by media and the popular imagination.

A few of these essays (Danner Darcleight's "Concrete Carnival" and Running Water's "Prison or Kids: It's Not a Joke" for example) have seen print in other venues, but most are new in print. These essays are not a representative sampling of

America's incarcerated, but selected responses to a call for essays. Writers are mostly male, serving long-term or life sentences and many have participated in educational programs and workshops inside correctional facilities. Many have experienced multiple encounters with the law and prisons, and thus represent a range of institutional settings. Some essays by incarcerated women and transgender (MtF) prisoners add important perspectives although, scattered throughout the volume, their voices are somewhat muted.

This collection is aimed squarely at an ordinary citizen reader who knows little about the details of prison life. With each essay, the reader gains familiarity with prison terminology and social dynamics; later essays make specific recommendations for institutional reform and effective rehabilitation. Sensitive to their audience, many authors emphasize responsibility and self-discipline, education (formal and informal), and personal transformation even as they critique the prison industrial complex, the criminalization of addictions and certain populations, public policies like the War on Drugs, and inadequate mental health care both inside and outside prisons. Some writers offer narratives of redemption and personal epiphanies, but are cautious in their critique of the institutions they inhabit; others are more pointed. Kenneth E. Hartman calls for "immersion criminologists" (p. 251), while Ricky Pendleton II in "My Voice through the Prison Wall" recommends avoiding "self-hating inmates," self-discipline, patience with disrespectful, or corrupt guards, and personal rehabilitation as psychological strategies for survival in prison, which he calls "the most inhumane place to be in" (p. 170). In "Real Life in Prison," Royal Gene Dominigo Jones, Sr. urges inmates to help themselves succeed inside prison and beyond by changing their behavior and learning the system, while also indicting the actions of individual power-holders who collectively corrupt the criminal justice system.

Larson's organizational scheme risks flattening some of the specificities of gender, race, and local legalities in the interest of a larger "prison city" narrative. Contributors' critiques often respond to particular circumstances: using special prosecutors to adjudicate infractions inside and "stacking" penalties onto a prisoner's sentence; lack of access to waged labor, rehabilitation, or higher education; substandard health care including mental health care; racism, harassment and bullying by prison guards; condoned prisoner on prisoner violence. While Larson is right that these issues are ubiquitous, they are also often locally varied or demographically disparate. Reading essays selectively by geographic location, for gendered topics, or for particular intersections of race, different narratives rise to the surface, from the

lack in Virginia women's prisons of job training offered in men's prisons, to the ubiquity of coercive sex and assault for transgender and born women, to the differential weight of imprisonment on mothers and fathers under varied family visitation policies. Tellingly, Larson received no essays from private for-profit prisons. This absence is alarming, raising questions about conditions inside institutions that are even more restrictive, less subject to public oversight, and that dominate the treatment of juvenile offenders.

In short, this collection is provocative and highly topical. It will be useful for those working on prison abolition and reform, those seeking to ameliorate or completely overhaul our justice system, and those with a general or personal interest in the actual experience and textured voices of those incarcerated in American prisons. For legal studies scholars, these accounts may be particularly interesting—both because they offer detailed situated-knowledge-based recommendations for rethinking our vast prison architecture, and because many exemplify legal autodidacticism. For scholars of social inequality, these essays offer personal accounts of the impact on individual experiences and interpersonal relationships of increasingly large institutions, public policy shifts, and institutionalized oppression. Finally, this collection will be especially valuable for teaching across many fields, from law and literature to social inequality and social justice. Larson has done us a service in making these accounts accessible in this affordable and riveting edition.

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*Moral Time*. By Donald Black. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 288 pp. \$29.95 cloth.

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In Donald Black's *Moral Time* (2011), the key concept—social time—is akin to the holy grail of conflict theory. Social time explains all conflict, causes all conflict, and is ever-present. The concept of social time, as the dynamic dimension of social space is formulated in terms of fluctuations in/of relational, vertical, and cultural dimensions. Although Black's analysis of conflict is confined to a micro realm, as his examples focus on conflict