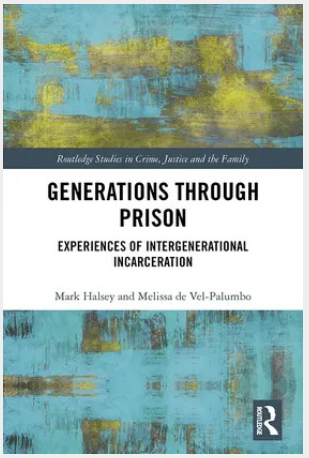
Halsey / Vel-Palumbo

Generations Through Prison

Experiences of Intergenerational Incarceration



Around one in five prisoners report the previous or current incarceration of a parent. Many such prisoners attest to the long-term negative effects of parental incarceration on one's own sense of self and on the range and quality of opportunities for building a conventional life. And yet, the problem of intergenerational incarceration has received only passing attention from academics, and virtually little if any consideration from policy makers and correctional officials. This book – the first of its kind – offers an in-depth examination of the causes, experiences and consequences of intergenerational incarceration. It draws extensively from surveys and interviews with second-, third-, fourth- and fifth-generation prisoners to explicate the personal, familial and socio-economic contexts typically associated with incarceration across generations. The book examines 1) the emergence of the prison as a dominant if not life-defining institution for some families, 2) the link between intergenerational trauma, crime and intergenerational incarceration, 3) the role of police, courts, and corrections in amplifying or ameliorating such problems, and 4) the possible means for preventing intergenerational incarceration. This is undeniably a book that bears witness to many tragic and traumatic stories. But it is also a work premised on the idea that knowing these stories – knowing that they often resist alignment with pre-conceived ideas about who prisoners are or who they might become – is part and parcel of advancing critical debate and, more importantly, of creating real change. Written in a clear and direct style, this book will appeal to students and scholars in criminology, sociology, cultural studies, social theory and those interested in learning about more about families in prison.

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