

BOOK REVIEWS

James B. Jacobs, *New Perspectives on Prisons and Imprisonment*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983. 241 pp. \$10.95 (paper).

Prisons, according to James Jacobs, cannot be separated from the societies they serve: "They are part of a political, social, economic, and moral order" (17) and, as such, assume a greater significance than has previously been acknowledged by most participants in the current prison debate. However, the time may be fast approaching when a survey of all literature in which the term "prison" appears in the title may represent a respectable area in itself for Ph.D. research. In short, any author who produces an interdisciplinary work on prisons now must justify a need for it since many are of questionable utility for social science. *New Perspectives on Prisons and Imprisonment* covers ground harrowed before with rather disappointing fruits.

In the preface, Jacobs explains that the contents of this book reflect two basic concerns: first, the socio-legal history of American prisons since 1960 and second, an "integrative social analysis" of its transformation (9). The volume is organized around ten previously published essays that contain several flaws in their organization. The book is difficult to summarize in a brief review because of the absence of a clear argument in several chapters and numerous digressions.

The first chapter, "Macrosociology and Imprisonment" expands the views of de Beaumont/de Toqueville and Rusche/Kirchheimer that prisons are not isolated from changes in the outside community. External events—legal, political, and economic—play a crucial part in shaping the internal structure of penal institutions. According to Jacobs, the status of prisons in comparison with other bureaucracies is determined by the social and occupational origins of prison staff. Jacobs is to be commended for using a cross national comparison to focus on the issue of whether the egalitarianism of American society is responsible for an absence of class privileges inside prisons (18). He offers a refreshing antidote to all the cross-cultural studies that purport to show why other societies are not as modern or as democratic as the United States. Yet, while acknowledging that prisons control only a small unimportant sector of society, he fails to mention the institutional mechanisms (based solely on class) that filter out segments of

society from imprisonment. This obscures a tenable thesis that imprisonment stems from the class structure of modern society.

The analyses of de Beaumont and Rusche are central to Jacobs' argument on the relationship between prison and civil rights. But the book neither incorporates nor transcends their arguments. When examined in the context of earlier studies, *New Perspectives on Prison and Imprisonment* loses some of its novelty and applicability. Jacobs could have placed his analysis of the prison in a broader social perspective if he had incorporated the total relationship between man and modern institutions. For example, his discourse on the political rights of citizenship is far from being a comprehensive exegesis of legal or sociological theory; nor does he explicate the macro-level approach that exercise students of sociology. What he does provide, however, is an empiricist approach built on legal case studies that assumes that a description of facts are independent of and precede concept formation and theory construction.

In the next three chapters Jacobs discusses several current issues in penal philosophy, race relations, and integration within the prison. He notes that reformist strategies to change conditions of deprivation prior to the 1960s rarely involved the prisoners themselves (35). Since then the latter have played a major role through the courts, aided by the emergence of prisoner rights activists. Jacobs documents this development with an array of legal decisions ranging from religious freedom for Black Muslims to procedural safeguards in disciplinary hearings. This crucial development, however, marked a status shift from prisoner to plaintiff, which brought about a corresponding transformation of the correctional official from custodian to defendant. Nevertheless, while court decisions granted various rights and reduced brutality and degradation, Jacobs concludes that "legal reform does not alter the reality of imprisonment" (60).

In chapter five, "Race Relations and the Prisoner Subculture," Jacobs demonstrates that the structure of social relationships within prisons increasingly took on the character of race relations of society as a whole as the result of social changes and movements that facilitated solidarity among Blacks. In short, outside racial-ethnic social movements permeated prisons. According to the author the "Black Muslim" movement, which spearheaded prison reform, was the most important. In this discussion Jacobs bridges the micro and macro levels of analysis and provides a more adequate explanation of race as an important determinant of the prison experience. For example, he contends that

Black prisoners have a greater solidarity than whites because they define themselves in terms of their racial identity (73). "Whiteness," according to Jacobs, "possesses no ideological or cultural significance in American society;" therefore, the hegemony of Black prisoners—even when the dominant group is a majority—is due to their greater solidarity (73).

The following chapter, "The Limits of Racial Integration" is largely focused on several court decisions that, after some initial conflict, assert that racial segregation of prisons is unconstitutional under the principle of the Supreme Court's school desegregation decision (*Brown v. The Topeka Board of Education*). And, with the exception of the following two chapters, "Female Guards in Men's Prisons" and "The Implications of National Service for Corrections," the remainder of the book is neither novel nor daring. Jacobs focuses on the politics of corrections, i.e., prison construction, the guard role, and the emergence of unionization. He also examines the impact of social and cultural changes and the politicization of social issues as they affect the prison during an era of crises. Jacobs presents the kind of interdisciplinary tour of which correctional personnel are so fond, focusing on the political, economic, and social ramifications of prisonization rather than the shortcomings of American society which exacerbate conditions for the prisoner, the guards, and the community.

The chapter on female guards is particularly noteworthy and thought provoking. Jacobs examines the policy issues and legal problems associated with the sexual integration of the guard force. First, he gives a descriptive account of court decisions upholding an employer's claim that a job should be limited to members of one sex (180). Second, he raises questions about privacy and the numerous changes in prison routine which have been mandated so that male correctional officers can serve in all capacities within women's prisons, while the same does not hold true for women officers working in men's prisons. As a lawyer, he points out that women's statutory right to equal employment opportunity should not be abridged. But as a social scientist, he fails to explain that, while individuals may believe they possess only individual attributes, the social consequences of those attributes may constitute great social privileges or great social disadvantages.

In "The Implications of National Service for Corrections," Jacobs proposes to send youths (right out of high school) into voluntary correctional service. He suggests that young men and women would inject corrections with a sense of idealism (207) and provide a

“vital link” between prisons and society. The remaining discussion focuses on prototype legislation [McCloskey: H.R. 1730, 97th Congress] that would require all 17 year old males and females to register under “pain of criminal penalty” with a national service system (207).

While Jacobs' argument is based on voluntary service, he has stumbled upon troubled terrain. First, he fails to consider the role prisons play in promoting adherence to prevailing cultural norms, which, in my opinion, would quash the notion of idealism these young people would bring with them. Second, he has proposed a program that would have a drastic impact on Blacks and other minorities because (1) in the event of conscription (as the McCloskey bill proposes), they would be required to either serve in the military or “volunteer” for correctional service, thus (2) relegating them to the lower strata of societal opportunity. To my dismay, this program would suggest a pre-determined form of control, under which certain groups would be routed into the criminal justice apparatus with minimal opportunity to develop skills useful once this “voluntary” service was completed.

Regretably, *New Perspectives on Prison and Imprisonment* does not take the prison or its outside components to task for encouraging the type of behavior it is supposed to discourage. Nor does the book accomplish a comprehensive and integrative social analysis of prisons as Jacobs promises in the preface. Nevertheless, the book will lead its readers through several interesting essays that contribute to our knowledge of the historical transformation of American prisons brought about by our legal system.

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Anita Chan, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Unger, *Chen Village: The Recent History of a Peasant Community in Mao's China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. 284 pp. \$19.95 (cloth).

There are several factors that make Chinese society immensely interesting as a field of study for sociologists. First of all, it is the oldest continuous civilization in the world. It is therefore fascinating to those interested in studying continuity of social organization, structure and culture over time (which is measured in millenia in the case of Chinese society). Second, the size of the population of China raises perplexing questions about how it is even possible to organize and coordinate political, economic and social policies for a single society which contains over one billion people who represent over fifty diverse ethnic cultures and are scattered over a vast geographic region. The fact that eighty percent of that population lives in isolated rural areas further complicates the problems of social coordination and control. A third feature of Chinese society of interest to many sociologists is that it is a revolutionary society undergoing purposive and rapid social change from a traditional, rural and impoverished country to a modern, industrialized and prosperous nation. Interest in China is further intensified by the fact that it declares itself a socialist society striving to become Communist. As such, it piques our interest as an example of a successful or unsuccessful attempt to become egalitarian as well as prosperous. The world watches its economic, political and social experiments as its leaders attempt to engineer both structural and ideological change.

Unfortunately, China watchers were severely limited during the first three decades of the existence of the revolutionary society due to a lack of access to the country. It is really only now that researchers are beginning to collect evidence in a more systematic fashion that will enable us to understand the events and changes that have occurred in China during these decades. *Chen Village* is a brilliantly planned and executed study of a single farming village in rural Guangdong (Kwangtung) Province in southern China. All of the factors which make China so intriguing—the continuity, the large and ethnically diverse population, the purposive attempts to engineer rapid social change, the problems of conducting an on-going revolution and the mysteries—are all illuminated by this careful study.