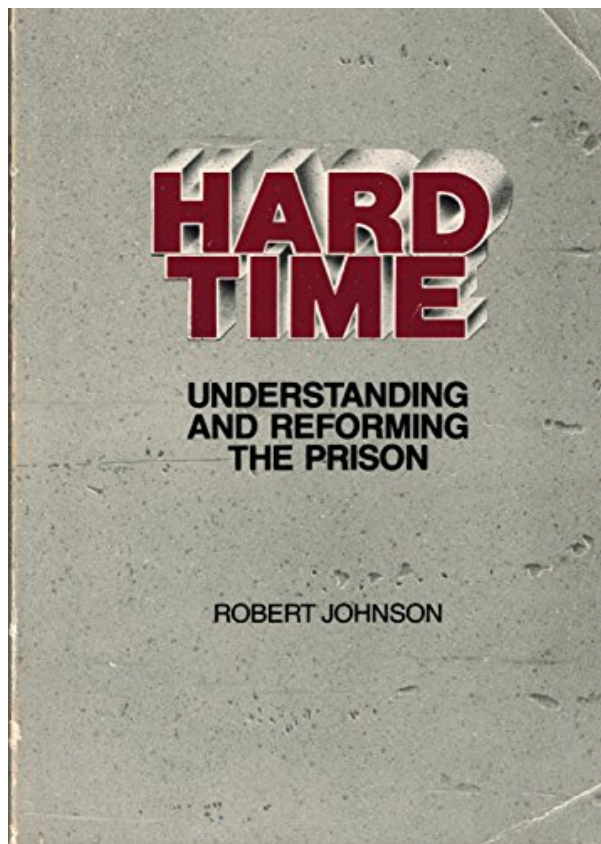
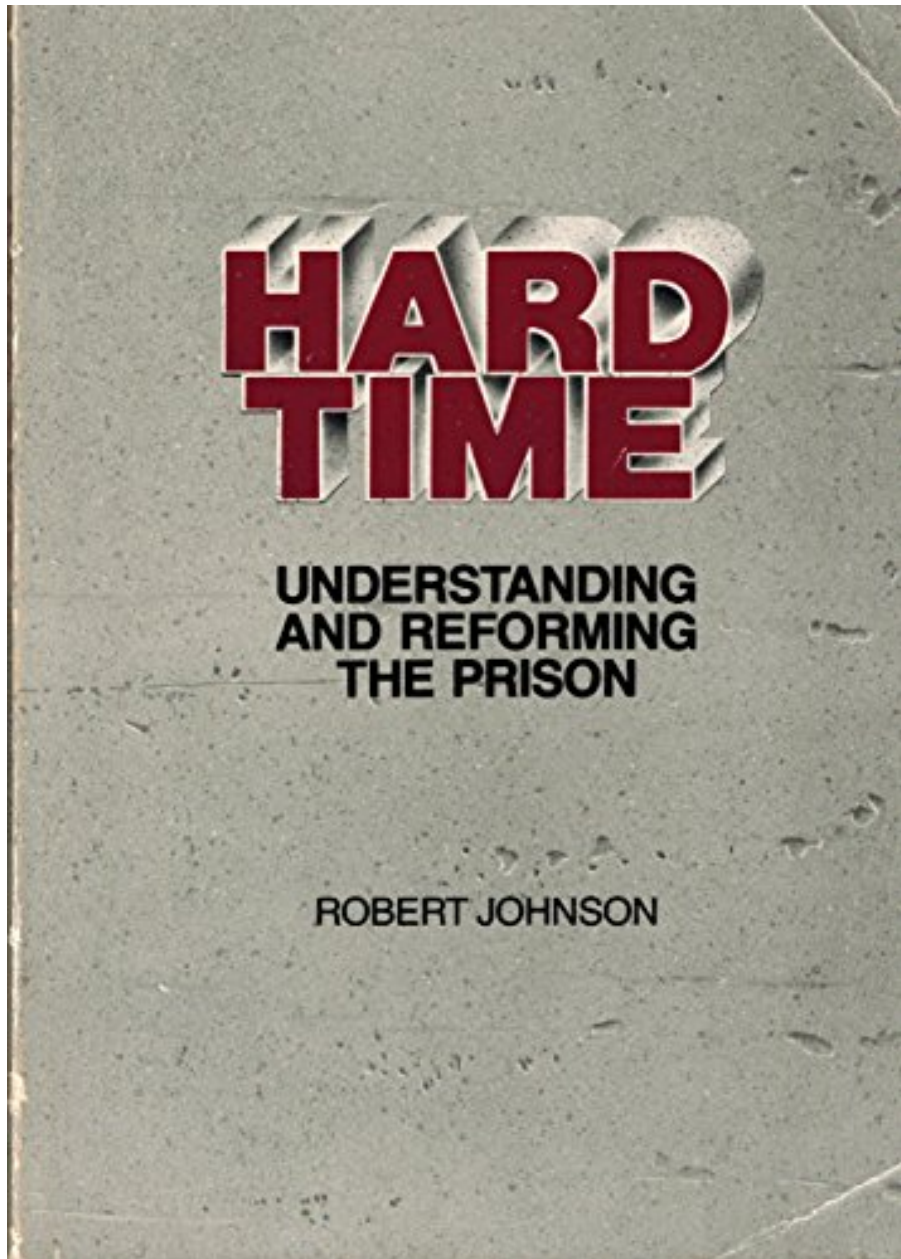


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A seminal work, this text provides a realistic and poignant look at what life is like as a prisoner.

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comprehensive, balanced, sophisticated and compact

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Hard Time is a thoughtful and well written examination of issues necessary to understand and reform prison. Johnson discusses prison history, the pains of imprisonment, guards, and some directions for reform. He feels that prison, as punishment, must be painful; it must also (following Plato) make the offender 'less of a wretch.' The author has written extensively about prison and the death penalty. His book, Death Work: A Study of the Modern Execution Process won the book of the year from the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, and parts of it have been reprinted in freshman composition textbooks.

Unlike books by Mauer or Parenti, this book is not about the incarceration binge, the prison industrial complex, etc. Johnson is aware of these issues, but Hard Time is a broader look at imprisonment. The first chapters discuss the history of prison, borrowing from a wide ranging assortment of writing by inmates (and Wardens) to bring to life Johnson's points about institutions in various time periods. He also examines the role of correctional officers, who are imprisoned themselves, and how reforming the prison needs to be done in conjunction with ensuring a guard's job is meaningful work rather than an alienating, high-burnout 'turnkey.' Johnson's reform ideas are influenced by Hans Toch, who has written extensively on violence and human breakdown. Johnson argues for ecological niches where inmates can use the pains of imprisonment to learn to deal with problems without deceit or violence.

I have used this book in an introductory corrections class, and I would recommend it both for that purpose and for an interested reader looking for something comprehensive, balanced, sophisticated and compact. Johnson is not on the side of inmate or guard, but desires to see our prison system be more than an expensive exercise in warehousing violence. His reform agenda is not based on unrealistically romantic views of people or prison, but grows out of extensive study grounded in academic work and countless hours in many prisons throughout the US.

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