



The Funhouse Mirror: Reflections on Prison

Robert Ellis Gordon

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"Prisons are hard places to get into and harder yet to get out of," writes Robert Ellis Gordon as he takes you on a remarkable eight-year journey into the Washington State corrections system.

As a writing teacher, Gordon had the unique experience of gaining access to the darkest realms of Washington prisons while still being free to walk away from penitentiary confines at the end of the day. His account is aided by essays and stories contributed by six extraordinary prison students - works that give this book an unforgettable edge. Together, Gordon and his students provide revealing glimpses of this vast secret-laden subculture of incarcerated individuals, which nationwide comprises more than two million U.S. citizens.

Here is a gallery of portraits of prison life, from the female guard who tantalizes male inmates with her sexuality to the terrified young fish trying to stave off other prisoners. These stories are jarring, harsh, compelling. The Funhouse Mirror provides an inside look at the prison system we often ignore, yet only at society's peril. This uncommon book is a significant addition to the literature on American penitentiaries. It is destined to help alter the terms of the debate about one of the great national problems of our time.

"In this memoir about teaching writing in prisons, we get a strong whiff of the fear, degradation, and violence that characterize daily life inside these institutions. What sneaks up on us is the character of Robert Gordon. The author's sustained act of charity, his years' long act of hope, is as striking as the honesty and bravery behind his report." --Barry Lopez, National Book Award Winner

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