

Parole and Prison Stories

P. Jablon

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A seasoned parole officer talks crime, poverty, and politics—and calls it like he sees it.

There are plenty of books that take a close look at criminals: how they operate, how they get caught, and what life is like for them behind bars. But what of those who make parole and return to the streets, and the men and women in law enforcement who keep track of them? In *Parole and Prison Stories*, veteran parole officer P. Jablon gives his firsthand account of the dangers, frustrations, challenges, and victories he faced in his twenty years of public service amid inner-city and rural crime and poverty.

Jablon's unquestionable expertise comes through in every page. The stories are much more parole than prison, focusing on Jablon's encounters with three basic categories of people who've been released: those trying honestly to change; the ex-cons who just can't do right when they get out; and those who, for one reason or another, are failed by the system. The rehabilitation system, according to Jablon, often fails to adequately address the needs of many people.

In addition to the stories, Jablon exposes the many flaws of the parole and prison systems. Above all, he praises hard work and hates unnecessary bureaucracy. He does not shy away from presenting unabashedly conservative political views. He repeatedly rails against what he sees as an overly soft, permissive, and liberal system that seems to him highly likely to let criminals go loose simply so politicians can brag about their support of minorities, rather than taking a hard-line stance against crime. His political statements—for example, that people on welfare should not be allowed to vote—could make for uncomfortable reading at times, if the reader is not of a similar mind.

The general structure of the book could be more clearly organized. It jumps around from one time period and subject to another, with various editorial asides inserted at random.

Competently written despite occasional inflammatory statements, Jablon knows how to keep a story going and frequently adds elements of humor to what might otherwise be unfunny subject matter. His own illustrations are on the volume's cover and sprinkled throughout the text. While art isn't Jablon's primary focus, it does show another side of his personality. The layout of the book, however, contains distracting peculiarities, most notably irregular paragraph spacing.

Jablon is at his best when he details legal procedure. When, for example, he discusses what does and doesn't qualify as reasonable use of lethal self-defense, his writing takes on an authoritative clarity it doesn't have elsewhere. The direct political statements, though certainly sincere, often derail the narratives. This author is most interesting off the soapbox.

JASON HENNINGER (April 14, 2014)

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