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Fatherhood Arrested: Parenting from Within the Juvenile Justice System

Anne M. Nurse

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Crime and young fatherhood have generally been viewed as separate social problems. Increasingly, researchers are finding that these problems are closely related and highly concentrated in low-income communities. *Fatherhood Arrested* is an in-depth study of these issues and the difficulties of parenting while in prison and on parole.

By taking us inside the prison system, Nurse shows how its structure actively shapes an inmate's relationship with his children. For example, visitation is sometimes restricted to blood relatives and wives. Because relationships between unmarried men and the mothers of their children are often strained, some mothers are unwilling to allow their children to go to the prison with the inmate's family. Or the father may be allowed to receive visits from only one "girlfriend," which forces a man with multiple relationships, or with children by different women, to make impossible choices. Special attention is paid to the gendered nature of prison, its patriarchal and punitive structure, and its high-stress environment. The book then follows newly paroled men as they are released and return to their children.

The author spent four years doing research at the California Youth Authority, during which time she surveyed 258 paroled fathers. The group included young white, black, and Latino men, ages sixteen to twenty-five. She conducted in-depth interviews with men selected from this group, participated in forty parenting class sessions, and observed visiting hours at three different institutions. The data provide fascinating information about the characteristics of the men, their attitudes toward fatherhood, and the ways they are involved with their children. The diversity of the fathers allows for an analysis of racial and ethnic variation in their attitudes and involvement. The study concludes with a series of policy suggestions, especially important in light of the large number of fathers now living under the care and control of the juvenile justice system.

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