



Sing Sing

Denis Brian

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This book vividly presents the gripping history of one of America's most notorious prisons. Based on extensive research with original sources, the author's narrative covers every period of the prison's checkered history, from the awful conditions of the 19th century to the relative improvements of the 20th century to today. For most of the 19th century Sing Sing was a bastion of inhumane treatment, where guards made every effort to break the spirit of inmates by a fanatic rule of silence enforced by shockingly brutal punishments and tortures. In 1920, a dramatic turnaround occurred, when one of criminology's most progressive wardens, Lewis Lawes, took over. In command for twenty-one years, Lawes—who believed in reforming prisoners, not just punishing them—brought almost miraculous changes for the better.

During the 20th century Sing Sing held such infamous prisoners as members of Murder Incorporated, the Lonely Hearts Killers, Albert "the cannibal" Fish, Lucky Luciano, Louis Lepke, and Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. Brian recounts their stories and throws in "cameos" of such diverse visiting luminaries as Harry Houdini, Arthur Conan Doyle, Johnny Cash, John Cheever, and Mother Teresa. Sing Sing has witnessed it all: from daring, ingenious escapes and the first blood donations by prisoners to inmates volunteering to be injected with syphilis in the interest of medical science.

Brian's story ends with a glimpse of Sing Sing in the recent past and today, based on his interviews with the present warden, Brian Fischer; prison guards; a prison psychiatrist; and the daughter of Sing Sing's last executioner.

A must for fans of true crime, criminology, and urban American history, Brian's powerfully told story is both a dramatic page-turner and a definitive history.

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