



REVIEWS

THE AMERICAN PRISON BUSINESS by Jessica Mitford
Published by Allen & Unwin \$13.60c

With the same wit and pungency that made *The American Way of Death* so explosive and so funny, Jessica Mitford studies the lunacies, the delusions, and the bizarre inner workings of the American prison business, or, in the current jargon, 'correctional facilities'.

From the first demonstration that the penitentiary is an American invention that was initiated by late eighteenth-century reformers, to the startling revelations, in the chapter called 'Cheaper than Chimpanzees', of how pharmaceutical companies lease prisoners as human guinea pigs, every page stimulates and surprises the reader as Jessica Mitford describes, *inter alia*

- * the chemical surgical and psychiatric techniques used to help 'violent' prisoners to be 'reborn'
- * the Special Isolation Diet which tastes like inferior dog food and was devised (according to an official regulation) to be 'monotonous and lacking in taste'

- * why businessmen tend to be more enthusiastic than the prisoners they employ in what some people refer to as the 'rent-a-con' plan
- * the new 'pastel prisons' where psychological degradation is more appalling than the old brutality
- * why it costs as much to keep a man in San Quentin as to send him to university
- * the professional jargon of 'adjustment center' 'movement processing' and 'therapeutic segregation' not to mention the use of 'aversion therapy' to 'modify' behaviour.

Jessica Mitford's financial analysis of the prison business is a scoop. Her hard-eyed examination of how parole really works is a revelation. She writes with both feeling and wit about her own 'workshop' experience as an inmate in a women's jail, indeed her laser-look at the whole American way of rehabilitation through -incarceration has not only caused a furore on its first publication in the United States it will provide food for thought for our own legislators and officials as well as fascinating and unexpected information for thousands of readers of Jessica Mitford's equally sword-sharp expose of The American Way of Death.

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