



Burning Down the House: The End of Juvenile Prison

Nell Bernstein

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When teenagers scuffle during a basketball game, they are typically benched. But when Will got into it on the court, he and his rival were sprayed in the face at close range by a chemical similar to Mace, denied a shower for twenty-four hours, and then locked in solitary confinement for a month.

One in three American children will be arrested by the time they are twenty-three, and many will spend time locked inside horrific detention centers that defy everything we know about how to rehabilitate young offenders. In a clear-eyed indictment of the juvenile justice system run amok, award-winning journalist Nell Bernstein shows that there is no right way to lock up a child. The very act of isolation denies delinquent children the thing that is most essential to their growth and rehabilitation: positive relationships with caring adults.

Bernstein introduces us to youth across the nation who have suffered violence and psychological torture at the hands of the state. She presents these youths all as fully realized people, not victims. As they describe in their own voices their fight to maintain their humanity and protect their individuality in environments that would deny both, these young people offer a hopeful alternative to the doomed effort to reform a system that should only be dismantled.

Burning Down the House is a clarion call to shut down our nation's brutal and counterproductive juvenile prisons and bring our children home.

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