



Chicana Lives and Criminal Justice: Voices from El Barrio

Juanita Díaz-Cotto

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This first comprehensive study of Chicanas encountering the U.S. criminal justice system is set within the context of the international war on drugs as witnessed at street level in Chicana/o barrios. *Chicana Lives and Criminal Justice* uses oral history to chronicle the lives of twenty-four Chicana *pintas* (prisoners/former prisoners) repeatedly arrested and incarcerated for non-violent, low-level economic and drug-related crimes. It also provides the first documentation of the thirty-four-year history of Sybil Brand Institute, Los Angeles' former women's jail.

In a time and place where drug war policies target people of color and their communities, drug-addicted Chicanas are caught up in an endless cycle of police abuse, arrest, and incarceration. They feel the impact of mandatory sentencing laws, failing social services and endemic poverty, violence, racism, and gender discrimination. The women in this book frankly discuss not only their jail experiences, but also their family histories, involvement with gangs, addiction to drugs, encounters with the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems, and their successful and unsuccessful attempts to recover from addiction and reconstitute fractured families. The Chicanas' stories underscore the amazing resilience and determination that have allowed many of the women to break the cycle of abuse. Díaz-Cotto also makes policy recommendations for those who come in contact with Chicanas/Latinas caught in the criminal justice system.

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