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The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison (Princeton Classic Editions)

Gresham M. Sykes

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Gresham M. Sykes : The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison (Princeton Classic Editions) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison (Princeton Classic Editions)*:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Beautifully written By MapacheBeautiful, gorgeous, clear sociological writing. FEELS like a classic. Makes you feel nostalgic for a moment in the social sciences when people just theorized all kinds of high-level things about power and humanity without any apparent self-consciousness or "Limits of This Study" notes--and made you believe them. Also a must-read for anyone interested in the modern prison system. The author of one of the introductions or forewords talks about teaching this book in a prison classroom and talking about what's changed and what hasn't--That would be a dream. 9 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Important Precursor to Goffman and Foucault By S. Pactor No reviews for this book? Hard to believe given the number of used copies available. Surely many have read "Society of Captives"? Sykes uses the sociological framework of Talcott Parsons to analyze the "life of prison" in terms of its effects on the inmates. Sykes was obviously a key reference point for Goffman's work in "Asylums". Sykes works around the idea of describing a maximum security prison as a "total institution", but fails to really nail the concept down. He makes some interesting observations about the conflicting motives of guards on the front line of the prison. I found troubling his conclusion that the level of control sought to be imposed upon the prisoners was ever elusive. This seemed, to me, to be a justification for the behavior that goes on behind prison walls. His interesting discussion of prison riot and rebellion prefigures some of Foucault's analysis in "Discipline and Punish". In fact, I picked up my copy of *Discipline and Punish* immediately after (and during) reading this book and found the effect to be akin to a light bulb going on in my head. While Sykes lacks the conclusions of Foucault, his simplified analysis of the structure of prison makes reading Foucault's "Discipline and Punish" about 100% easier. Here is not the place for a more detailed comparison between the two books. None the less, any committed reader of *Discipline and Punish* should feel compelled to digest this book: After all, it only costs a buck and can be read in a single afternoon! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. *Society of Captives* By jbrown_14105 Yes I am using it with teaching a prison ministry course

The Society of Captives, first published in 1958, is a classic of modern criminology and one of the most important books ever written about prison. Gresham Sykes wrote the book at the height of the Cold War, motivated by the world's experience of fascism and communism to study the closest thing to a totalitarian system in American life: a maximum security prison. His analysis calls into question the extent to which prisons can succeed in their attempts to control every facet of life--or whether the strong bonds between prisoners make it impossible to run a prison without finding ways of "accommodating" the prisoners. Re-released now with a new introduction by Bruce Western and a new epilogue by the author, *The Society of Captives* will continue to serve as an indispensable text for coming to terms with the nature of modern power.

Praise for Princeton's original edition: "[A] remarkable study by a scrupulously honest, non-captive observer of the real meaning of captivity."--C. H. Rolph, *New Statesman* "Sykes's perspective simultaneously on all parties in the prison's social system is unique, and his interpretation is profound."--Daniel Galaser, *American Journal of Sociology* "The book should be read by all who are interested in, or dealing with, those convicted of crimes. No ready solution is offered, but the problems are brought forth forcefully."--*Psychiatric Quarterly* About the Author Gresham M. Sykes is Professor of Sociology Emeritus at the University of Virginia. He is the author of many books, including *Social Problems in America* and *Crime and Society*, and the coauthor of *Criminology*.