

rikers an oral history

Rikers: An Oral History

rikers an oral history is a captivating journey through one of the most notorious and complex correctional facilities in the United States. Nestled in the East River between Queens and the Bronx, Rikers Island has been a focal point of New York City's criminal justice system for over 80 years. But beyond the headlines, the statistics, and the controversies, lies a deeply human story told through the voices of those who lived, worked, and struggled within its walls. This oral history sheds light on the lived experiences, challenges, and transformations that have shaped Rikers Island, offering an intimate perspective on a place that is often misunderstood.

The Origins of Rikers Island

The story of Rikers Island begins long before it became synonymous with incarceration. Originally a small island named after Abraham Rycken, a Dutch settler, it was largely uninhabited and used for farming and fishing in the 17th and 18th centuries. It wasn't until the 1930s that the city of New York decided to transform the island into a jail complex, motivated by overcrowding in Manhattan's prisons. The first inmates arrived in 1932, marking the start of Rikers as a central hub for detaining pretrial detainees and convicted individuals.

The Early Years: Construction and Challenges

Building a prison on an island presented unique logistical challenges. The construction was a massive undertaking, with workers contending with marshy land and limited accessibility. Early accounts from guards and workers describe the island as isolated, with a bleak atmosphere that foreshadowed the difficult conditions inmates would later face. Despite its remote location, the facility quickly became overcrowded as crime rates increased during the mid-20th century, setting the stage for decades of systemic issues.

Voices from Inside: Life on Rikers Island

A key aspect of any oral history is the firsthand testimony that brings the narrative to life. Former inmates, correctional officers, medical staff, and advocates have all contributed to the collective memory of Rikers. Their stories reveal a complex ecosystem marked by tension, resilience, and the enduring human spirit.

Inmate Experiences

Many inmates describe Rikers Island as a place where survival often depended on navigating a rigid social hierarchy and coping with harsh conditions. Stories frequently mention overcrowded cells,

sporadic access to basic services, and the constant threat of violence. However, some also reflect on moments of solidarity and hope—whether through educational programs, art projects, or simply forging friendships amid adversity.

Correction Officers' Perspectives

Correction officers' oral histories provide an essential viewpoint on the operational realities of Rikers. Many recount the emotional and physical toll of working in an environment prone to unrest and conflict. Over the years, officers have faced criticism for the use of force and alleged misconduct, but their testimonies also highlight efforts to maintain order and support rehabilitation within the facility's constraints.

Systemic Issues and Reform Efforts

The oral histories related to Rikers Island cannot be separated from the broader context of the American criminal justice system. The stories shared by individuals connected to Rikers often touch on larger themes such as racial disparities, mental health crises, and the challenges of incarceration reform.

Overcrowding and Conditions

One recurring theme in the oral accounts is the detrimental impact of overcrowding. With a capacity originally designed for around 10,000 inmates, Rikers has frequently housed more than that number, leading to deteriorated living conditions and increased violence. These conditions have been widely criticized by human rights organizations and have sparked calls for decarceration and facility improvements.

The Push for Closure and Alternatives

In recent years, advocacy efforts and political leadership have converged around plans to close Rikers Island altogether. Oral testimonies from reform advocates, former inmates, and policymakers reveal a shared vision for replacing the sprawling jail complex with smaller, community-based detention centers that emphasize rehabilitation and restorative justice. These narratives emphasize the importance of addressing the root causes of incarceration, such as poverty and lack of access to mental health care.

The Role of Mental Health and Social Services

Rikers Island has long struggled with providing adequate mental health care, a critical aspect highlighted in many oral histories. A significant portion of the inmate population suffers from mental illness, often exacerbated by the stress and isolation of incarceration.

Challenges in Mental Health Care

Interviews with medical staff and mental health professionals working on Rikers reveal the difficulties in managing psychiatric conditions within the jail's environment. Limited resources, understaffing, and the stigma surrounding mental illness create barriers to effective treatment. Many former inmates recount experiences of neglect or insufficient support during crises.

Innovative Programs and Support Networks

Despite these challenges, various programs have been implemented to improve mental health services and provide support networks for inmates. Oral histories often highlight the work of social workers, chaplains, and nonprofit organizations who strive to offer counseling, education, and reintegration planning. These initiatives underscore the potential for positive change, even within a troubled system.

Rikers Island in Popular Culture and Public Perception

The stories of Rikers Island have permeated popular culture, shaping how the public views the facility and its role in the justice system. From documentaries and books to films and television shows, Rikers has been depicted as a symbol of the complexities and failings of incarceration.

Documentaries and Memoirs

Several notable documentaries and memoirs have contributed to the oral history of Rikers by capturing the voices of those inside. These works offer unfiltered looks at daily life, systemic issues, and personal transformations, helping to humanize a place often reduced to statistics.

Media's Role in Advocacy

Media coverage based on firsthand accounts has been instrumental in raising awareness about conditions at Rikers and fueling reform movements. By amplifying the stories of inmates, families, and staff, journalists and filmmakers have helped to push the conversation beyond sensational headlines and into meaningful dialogue about justice and humanity.

Lessons from Rikers: Reflections on Justice and Humanity

Examining Rikers through an oral history lens allows us to confront uncomfortable truths about incarceration and consider the possibilities for a more just system. The voices collected from Rikers

Island remind us that behind every statistic is a human life affected by policies, environments, and social structures.

The ongoing discussions around the future of Rikers Island encourage us to think critically about punishment, rehabilitation, and community safety. As the city moves toward closing the complex and reimagining detention, the experiences preserved in these oral histories serve as vital guides to ensuring that change is informed, compassionate, and effective.

Ultimately, the story of Rikers is not just about a jail but about the people whose lives intersect there—people whose voices deserve to be heard and whose experiences compel us to envision a better path forward.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is 'Rikers: An Oral History' about?

'Rikers: An Oral History' is a detailed account of the history, culture, and conditions of Rikers Island, one of the largest jail complexes in the United States, told through the voices of former inmates, guards, and officials.

Who authored 'Rikers: An Oral History'?

The oral history was compiled and authored by journalists and researchers who conducted extensive interviews with people connected to Rikers Island, though specific author names vary by publication or documentary format.

Why is 'Rikers: An Oral History' significant?

'Rikers: An Oral History' provides a unique, firsthand perspective on the challenges, abuses, and systemic issues within the Rikers Island jail system, shedding light on the human impact often overlooked in official reports.

How does 'Rikers: An Oral History' contribute to criminal justice reform?

By documenting personal stories and systemic problems at Rikers, the oral history raises public awareness and supports calls for reform, including jail closures, improved conditions, and alternatives to incarceration.

What themes are explored in 'Rikers: An Oral History'?

The oral history explores themes such as incarceration, violence, corruption, mental health, racial disparities, and the struggle for dignity within the prison system.

Where can I access 'Rikers: An Oral History'?

It can be accessed through various platforms such as books, documentaries, podcasts, and articles

published by media outlets focusing on criminal justice and social issues.

Has 'Rikers: An Oral History' influenced policy changes?

Yes, the insights and public attention generated by the oral history have contributed to policy discussions and initiatives aimed at reforming or closing Rikers Island.

What makes oral history a powerful method for telling the story of Rikers?

Oral history captures personal experiences and emotions directly from those affected, providing a nuanced and humanized account that traditional reports and statistics often fail to convey.

Additional Resources

Rikers: An Oral History

rikers an oral history offers a compelling and multifaceted look into one of the most notorious jail complexes in the United States. Situated on an island in the East River between Queens and the Bronx, Rikers Island has long been emblematic of the challenges facing the American criminal justice system. Through firsthand accounts, interviews with former inmates, correction officers, policymakers, and activists, this oral history reveals the human stories behind the headlines, illuminating the complex realities of incarceration, systemic issues, and ongoing efforts for reform.

Understanding the Legacy of Rikers Island

Rikers Island, operated by the New York City Department of Correction, has served as the city's primary jail facility since the 1930s. It encompasses multiple jails and houses thousands of detainees awaiting trial or sentencing, as well as those serving short sentences. Over the decades, the facility has attracted intense scrutiny due to reports of violence, overcrowding, inadequate healthcare, and human rights abuses.

The oral history of Rikers Island is not just a chronological recounting of events but a layered narrative that exposes the intersection of race, poverty, law enforcement policies, and urban development. It underscores how institutional practices have often perpetuated cycles of incarceration, especially among marginalized communities.

The Voices Behind Bars: Personal Narratives

Central to the oral history are the voices of those who lived through Rikers firsthand. Former inmates share stories that range from moments of despair and violence to resilience and hope. These narratives often highlight the psychological toll of prolonged detention and the pervasive sense of vulnerability within the jail's walls.

Correction officers contribute perspectives on operational challenges, safety concerns, and the moral complexities of working in such an environment. Their testimonies reveal systemic shortcomings, such as understaffing and insufficient training, which affect both staff and detainee welfare.

Systemic Issues Exposed Through Oral Testimonies

The oral history also delves into systemic issues that contribute to Rikers' notoriety. Many interviewees describe how policies such as cash bail disproportionately impact low-income defendants, leading to prolonged pretrial detention. The use of solitary confinement and its psychological effects are recurrent themes, with some accounts linking extended isolation to mental health deterioration.

Moreover, racial disparities emerge as a critical issue. The majority of Rikers' population comprises Black and Latino individuals, reflecting broader inequities in policing and sentencing. The oral history emphasizes how these disparities are not coincidental but rooted in structural biases.

Rikers Island in the Broader Context of Criminal Justice Reform

In recent years, Rikers has become a focal point for reform advocates seeking to overhaul New York's jail system. The oral history captures the momentum behind initiatives aimed at decarceration, improved conditions, and ultimately the closure of the facility.

Key Reform Efforts Documented in the Oral History

Several reforms have been implemented or proposed in response to the documented issues at Rikers:

- **Closure Plans:** The city's plan to close Rikers Island by 2026 reflects a major shift toward smaller, community-based jails.
- **Bail Reform:** Efforts to eliminate cash bail for nonviolent offenses aim to reduce unnecessary pretrial detention.
- **Alternatives to Incarceration:** Programs focusing on mental health, substance abuse treatment, and restorative justice are gaining traction.

The oral history provides insight into the challenges of implementing these reforms, including bureaucratic resistance, funding limitations, and community concerns.

Comparative Perspectives: Rikers and Other Jail Systems

When compared to other urban jail systems across the United States, Rikers stands out due to its size, geographic isolation, and entrenched problems. Oral histories from other jurisdictions often reveal similar issues—overcrowding, violence, and racial disparities—but Rikers' scale and public profile make it a particularly vivid case study.

This comparative lens helps contextualize Rikers within national debates on mass incarceration and criminal justice reform, highlighting both unique challenges and common patterns.

The Role of Oral History in Criminal Justice Discourse

The decision to frame Rikers' story as an oral history is significant. Unlike traditional reports or statistical analyses, oral histories humanize the data and policy discussions. They provide nuance, emotion, and complexity to a topic often reduced to numbers and headlines.

By preserving diverse voices, oral histories foster empathy and understanding, which are critical for informed public discourse and effective policy-making. In the case of Rikers, these narratives challenge simplistic portrayals and encourage a more holistic approach to reform.

Challenges in Collecting and Presenting Oral Histories

Documenting oral histories from a penal institution involves unique challenges:

- **Access and Trust:** Gaining access to inmates and staff willing to share candid experiences requires building trust.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Interviewers must navigate confidentiality, trauma, and potential repercussions for participants.
- **Representation:** Ensuring a diverse range of voices, including those often marginalized, is essential for a comprehensive account.

Despite these obstacles, the resulting oral history of Rikers provides an invaluable resource for scholars, advocates, and the public.

Future Directions: What the Oral History Reveals About Rikers' Path Forward

As New York City moves toward the planned closure of Rikers Island, the oral history serves as both a warning and a guide. It warns against repeating past mistakes, such as neglecting mental health

needs or ignoring systemic racism. Simultaneously, it highlights the importance of community engagement, transparency, and sustained investment in alternatives to incarceration.

The stories captured in the oral history underscore the necessity of human-centered policies that prioritize dignity, rehabilitation, and justice. They advocate for a criminal justice system that recognizes the humanity of every individual, whether behind bars or serving the community.

The legacy of Rikers, as revealed through this oral history, is a testament to the resilience of those who endured its conditions and a call to action for meaningful reform. As dialogue continues around criminal justice in America, such narratives remain essential to shaping a more just and equitable future.

[Rikers An Oral History](#)

rikers an oral history: Rikers Graham Rayman, Reuven Blau, 2023-01-17 NEW YORK TIMES EDITORS' CHOICE • A shocking, groundbreaking oral history of the infamous Rikers jail complex and an unflinching portrait of injustice and resilience told by the people whose lives have been forever altered by it "This mesmerizing and gut-wrenching book shows the brutal realities that tens of thousands of people have been forced to navigate, and survive, in America's most notorious jail."—Piper Kerman, New York Times bestselling author of *Orange Is the New Black* A KIRKUS REVIEWS BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR What happens when you pack almost a dozen jails, bulging at the seams with society's cast-offs, onto a spit of landfill purposefully hidden from public view? Prize-winning journalists Graham Rayman and Reuven Blau have spent two years interviewing more than 130 people comprising a broad cross section of lives touched by New York City's Rikers Island prison complex—from incarcerated people and their relatives, to officers, lawyers, and commissioners, with stories spanning the 1970s to the present day. The portrait that emerges calls into question the very nature of justice in America. Offering a 360-degree view inside the country's largest detention complex, the deeply personal accounts—featured here for the first time—take readers on a harrowing journey into every corner of Rikers, a failed society unto itself that reflects society's failings as a whole. Dr. Homer Venters was shocked by the screams on his first day working at Rikers: "They're in solitary, just yelling . . . the yelling literally never stops." After a few months, though, Dr. Venters notes, one's ears adjust to the sounds. Nestor Eversley recalls how detainees made weapons from bones. Barry Campbell recalls hiding a razor blade in his mouth—"just in case". These are visceral stories of despair, brutality, resilience, humor, and hope, told by the people who were marooned on the island over the course of decades. As calls to shutter jails and reduce the number of incarcerated people grow louder across the country, with the movement to close the island complex itself at the forefront, *Rikers* is a resounding lesson about the human consequences of the incarceration industry.

rikers an oral history: Public History for a Post-Truth Era Liz Sevcenko, 2022-07-25 Public History for a Post-Truth Era explores how to combat historical denial when faith in facts is at an all-time low. Moving beyond memorial museums or documentaries, the book shares on-the-ground stories of participatory public memory movements that brought people together to grapple with the deep roots and current truths of human rights abuses. It gives an inside look at Sites of Conscience around the world, and the memory activists unearthing their hidden histories, from the Soviet Gulag to the slave trade in Senegal. It then follows hundreds of people joining forces across dozens of US cities to fight denial of Guantánamo, mass incarceration, and climate change. As reparations proposals proliferate in the US, the book is a resource for anyone seeking to confront historical injustices and redress their harms. Written in accessible, non-academic language, it will appeal to

students, educators, or supportive citizens interested in public history, museums, or movement organizing.

rikers an oral history: City Time David Campbell, Jarrod Shanahan, 2025-01-07 A unique insider perspective of daily life in New York City's most notorious house of correction While most people behind bars at Rikers Island are detainees awaiting the settlement of their cases, a smaller population have already been convicted and are serving sentences deemed too short for the state prison system. These stints are called "city time." The sentences range from a few days to a year, and are generally served within large, open dormitories lacking in privacy and sanitation. Within these spaces, incarcerated people reproduce an elaborate set of rules, rituals, and relationships, as a means both of survival and of giving meaning to the time taken from them. Written by David Campbell and Jarrod Shanahan, who both served sentences at Rikers, *City Time* reflects its authors' personal experiences and observations of short-stay incarceration to present a nuanced and vivid account of a social world kept locked away from the public eye. The authors reconstruct the daily realities of sanitation, nourishment, recreation, work, and other necessary activities, and emphasize the complex interpersonal relationships that emerge in response to city time. Simultaneously, they paint a grim and urgent picture of structural racism, class violence, and the disastrous lack of mental health and substance abuse resources for poor New Yorkers, who are shuttled in and out of city time sentences as "frequent flyers." Beginning with the authors' own processes of intake, and ending with the ritual of late-night release, *City Time* takes readers behind the splashy headlines to depict, in intimately human terms, the rich and variegated social world unfolding, at this very moment, on Rikers Island.

rikers an oral history: Grace and Social Ethics Angela Carpenter, 2024-12-17 *Grace and Social Ethics* demonstrates why the doctrine of grace has significant implications for social ethics and for Christian engagement with culture. The book reframes Christian social ethics by illuminating how grace shapes human identity and community. Angela Carpenter integrates theology and social science to articulate a vision of human persons as constituted by gift rather than merit. This graced anthropology compellingly bridges theology and contemporary research on human dependence and mutuality. Carpenter insightfully applies this graced identity to pressing issues in social ethics such as criminal justice, labor practices, and gun violence. Scholars and students of theological ethics as well as pastors seeking resources for moral formation will find illuminating perspectives in this integrative work, which situates social justice imperatives within God's gracious purposes.

rikers an oral history: Still Waiting Student Press Initiative, 2009-05

rikers an oral history: Legal Plunder Joshua Page, Joe Soss, 2025-08-12 A searing, historically rich account of how US policing and punishment have been retrofitted over the last four decades to extract public and private revenues from America's poorest and most vulnerable communities. Alongside the rise of mass incarceration, a second profound and equally disturbing development has transpired. Since the 1980s, US policing and punishment have been remade into tools for stripping resources from the nation's most oppressed communities and turning them into public and private revenues. *Legal Plunder* analyzes this development's origins, operations, consequences, and the political struggles that it has created. Drawing on historical and contemporary evidence, including original ethnographic research, Joshua Page and Joe Soss examine the predatory dimensions of criminal legal governance to show how practices that criminalize, police, and punish have been retrofitted to siphon resources from subordinated groups, subsidize governments, and generate corporate profits. As tax burdens have declined for the affluent, this financial extraction—now a core function of the country's sprawling criminal legal apparatus—further compounds race, class, and gender inequalities and injustices. *Legal Plunder* shows that we can no longer afford to overlook legal plunder or the efforts to dismantle it.

rikers an oral history: Captives Jarrod Shanahan, 2022-05-17 The definitive history of America's most notorious jail and the violent rise of New York City's law-and-order movement *Captives* combines a thrilling account of Rikers Island's descent into infamy with a dramatic retelling of the last seventy years of New York politics from the vantage point of the city's jails. It is the story

of a crowded field of contending powers—city bureaucrats and unions, black power activists and guards, crooked cops and elected leaders—struggling for power and influence, a tale culminating in mass incarceration and the triumph of neoliberalism. It is a riveting chronicle of how the Rikers Island of today—and the social order it represents—came to be. Conjuring sweeping cinematic vistas, *Captives* records how the tempo of history was set by bloody and bruising clashes between guards and prisoners, between rank and filers and union bosses, between reformers and reactionaries, and between police officers and virtually everyone else. Written by a one-time Rikers prisoner, *Captives* draws on extensive archival research, decades of journalism, interviews, prisoner testimonials, and firsthand experience to deliver an urgent intervention into our national discussion about the future of mass incarceration and the call to abolish prisons. The contentious debate about the future of the Rikers Island penal colony rolls onward, and *Captives* is a must-read for anyone interested in the island and what it represents.

rikers an oral history: *The Routledge Handbook of Africana Criminologies* Biko Agozino, Emmanuel Onyeozili, Nontyatyambo Dastile, Viviane Saleh-Hanna, 2020-12-29 The Routledge Handbook on Africana Criminologies plugs a gaping hole in criminological literature, which remains dominated by work on Europe and settler-colonial locations at the expense of neocolonial locations and at a huge cost to the discipline that remains relatively underdeveloped. It is well known that criminology is thriving in Europe and settler-colonial locations while people of African descent remain marginalized in the discipline. This handbook therefore defines and explores this field within criminology, moving away from the colonialist approach of offering administrative criminology about policing, courts, and prisons and making a case for decolonizing the wider discipline. Arranged in five parts, it outlines Africana criminologies, maps its emergence, and addresses key themes such as slavery, colonialism, and apartheid as crimes against humanity; critiques of imperialist reason; Africana cultural criminology; and theories of law enforcement and Africana people. Coalescing a diverse range of voices from Africa and the diaspora, the handbook explores outside Eurocentric canons in order to learn from the experiences, struggles, and contributions of people of African descent. Offering innovative ways of theorizing and explaining the criminological crises that face Africa and the entire world with the view of contributing to a more humane world, this groundbreaking handbook is essential reading for criminologists and sociologists worldwide, as well as scholars of Africana studies and African studies.

rikers an oral history: Catalogue of Memoirs of the William E. Wiener Oral History Library William E. Wiener Oral History Library, 1978

rikers an oral history: *The Fifty-Year Mission: The Next 25 Years: From The Next Generation to J. J. Abrams* Edward Gross, Mark A. Altman, 2016-08-30 Volume two of a fifty-year oral history of Star Trek by the people who were there sharing never-before-told stories.

rikers an oral history: Youth Cultures, Language, and Literacy Stanton Wortham, 2011-03-15 Drawing upon international research, *Review of Research in Education*, Volume 35 examines the interplay between youth cultures and educational practices. Although the articles describe youth practices across a range of settings, a central theme is how gender, class, race, and national identity mediate both adult perceptions of youth and youths' experiences of schooling.

rikers an oral history: Rebel Speak Bryonn Rolly Bain, 2022-04-19 A literary mixtape of transformative dialogues on justice with a cast of visionary rebel activists, organizers, artists, culture workers, thought leaders, and movement builders. *Rebel Speak* sounds the alarm for a global movement to end systemic injustice led by people doing the day-to-day rebel work in the prison capital of the world. Prison activist, artist, and scholar Bryonn Rolly Bain brings us transformative oral history ciphers, rooted in the tradition of call-and-response, to lay bare the struggle and sacrifice on the front lines of the fight to abolish the prison industrial complex. *Rebel Speak* investigates the motives that inspire and sustain movements for visionary change. Sparked by a life-changing interview with working-class heroes Dolores Huerta and Harry Belafonte, Bryonn invites us to join conversations with change-makers whose diverse critical perspectives and firsthand accounts expose the crisis of prisons and policing in our communities. Through dialogues with

activists including Albert Woodfox, founder of the first Black Panther Party prison chapter, and Susan Burton, founder of Los Angeles's A New Way of Life Reentry Project; a conversation with a warden pushing beyond traditions at Sing Sing Correctional Facility; and an intimate exchange with his brother returning from prison, Bryonn reveals countless unseen spaces of the movement to end human caging. Sampling his provocative sessions with influential artists and culture workers, like Public Enemy leader Chuck D and radical feminist MC Maya Jupiter, Bryonn opens up and guides discussions about the power of art and activism to build solidarity across disciplines and demand justice. With raw insight and radical introspection, *Rebel Speak* embodies the growing call for credible messengers on prisons, policing, racial justice, abolitionist politics, and transformative organizing. Reimagining the role of the writer and scholar as a DJ and MC, Bryonn moves the crowd with this unforgettable mix of those working within the belly of the beast to change the world. This is a new century's sound of movement-building and *Rebel Speak*.

rikers an oral history: *Black Panther Woman* Mary Frances Phillips, 2025-01-07 The first biography of Ericka Huggins, a queer Black woman who brought spiritual self-care practices to the Black Panther Party. In this groundbreaking biography, Mary Frances Phillips immerses readers in the life and legacy of Ericka Huggins, a revered Black Panther Party member, as well as a mother, widow, educator, poet, and former political prisoner. In 1969, the police arrested Ericka Huggins along with Bobby Seale and fellow Black Panther Party members, who were accused of murdering Alex Rackley. This marked the beginning of her ordeal, as she became the subject of political persecution and a well-planned FBI COINTELPRO plot. Drawing on never-before-seen archival sources, including prison records, unpublished letters, photographs, FBI records, and oral histories, Phillips foregrounds the paramount role of self-care and community care in Huggins's political journey, shedding light on Ericka's use of spiritual wellness practices she developed during her incarceration. In prison, Huggins was able to survive the repression and terror she faced while navigating motherhood through her unwavering commitment to spiritual practices. In showcasing this history, Phillips reveals the significance of spiritual wellness in the Black Panther Party and Black Power movement. Transcending the traditional male-centric study of the Black Panther Party, *Black Panther Woman* offers an innovative analysis of Black political life at the intersections of gender, motherhood, and mass incarceration. This book serves as an invaluable toolkit for contemporary activists, underscoring the power of radical acts of care as well as vital strategies to thrive in the world.

rikers an oral history: *Changes* Sheldon Pearce, 2022-06-14 Told through interviews with both celebrities and less-well known people who knew the late artist, a music writer and editor for *The New Yorker* tells the story of Shakur's life and legacy.

rikers an oral history: *Rattling the Cages* Josh Davidson, Eric King, 2023-12-05 Dispatches from behind bars. Political prisoners speak out. The official story is that the United States has no political prisoners. The reality is that there are hundreds of people rounded up, placed behind bars, and kept there for inordinately long sentences because of their political beliefs and activities. A project of abolitionist Josh Davidson and political prisoner Eric King, this book is filled with the experience and wisdom of over thirty current and former North American political prisoners. It provides first-hand details of prison life and the political commitments that continue to lead prisoners into direct confrontation with state authorities and institutions. The people Josh Davidson has interviewed include former radicals and Black liberation militants from the sixties and seventies, current antifascists, nonviolent Catholic peace activists, Animal and Earth Liberation Front saboteurs, and more. Their stories are moving, often tragic, yet deeply inspiring. Collectively, these people have spent hundreds of years behind bars, and their experiences speak directly to the cruelty and immorality of our prison and so-called criminal justice systems. Although their sentences and the conditions they have endured vary dramatically, this wide range of voices come together to embody what bell hooks called "a legacy of defiance." It is this legacy—of tirelessly struggling to right today's wrongs and create a better tomorrow—that the prison system tries, yet fails, to extinguish. Contributors include: Donna Willmott, James Kilgore, Mark Cook, Rebecca Rubin, Hanif

Shabazz Bey, Chelsea Manning, Oso Blanco, Ann Hansen, Sean Swain, Martha Hennessy, Jalil Muntaqim, Jeremy Hammond, Kojo Bomani Sababu, Laura Whitehorn, Eric King, Rattler, Ray Luc Levasseur, Elizabeth McAlister, Malik Smith, David Campbell, Xinachtli, David Gilbert, Susan Rosenberg, Daniel McGowan, Linda Evans, Herman Bell, Jennifer Rose, Ed Mead, Jerry Koch, Michael Kimble, Bill Harris, Jaan Laaman, Jake Conroy, Marius Mason, Bill Dunne, Oscar López Rivera

rikers an oral history: East Harlem Remembered Christopher Bell, 2013-01-01 The community of East Harlem in New York City lays claim to a rich and culturally diverse history. Once home to 35 ethnicities and 27 languages, the neighborhood attracted Irish, Jewish, and Italian immigrants in the early 20th century and later saw an influx of Puerto Rican immigrants and African Americans. In this oral history, former and current residents recount the early days, the post-World War II rise of public housing, the departure of Eastern European inhabitants, the growth of Latino and African American populations, the spirited 1960s, the urban blight of the 1980s, and the more recent resurgence and gentrification. This story of strength and struggle provides a vivid portrait of a fascinating community and the many resilient people who have called it home.

rikers an oral history: A People's Guide to New York City Carolina Bank Muñoz, Penny Lewis, Emily Tumpson Molina, 2022-01-25 This alternative guidebook for one of the world's most popular tourist destinations explores all five boroughs to reveal a people's New York City. The sites and stories of A People's Guide to New York City shift our perception of what defines New York, placing the passion, determination, defeats, and victories of its people at the core. Delving into the histories of New York's five boroughs, you will encounter enslaved Africans in revolt, women marching for equality, workers on strike, musicians and performers claiming streets for their art, and neighbors organizing against landfills and industrial toxins and in support of affordable housing and public schools. The streetscapes that emerge from these groups' struggles bear the traces, and this book shows you where to look to find them. New York City is a preeminent global city, serving as the headquarters for hundreds of multinational firms and a world-renowned cultural hub for fashion, art, and music. It is among the most multicultural cities in the world and also one of the most segregated cities in the United States. The people that make this global city function—immigrants, people of color, and the working classes—reside largely in the so-called outer boroughs, outside the corporations, neon, and skyscrapers of Manhattan. A People's Guide to New York City expands the scope and scale of traditional guidebooks, providing an equitable exploration of the diverse communities throughout the city. Through the stories of over 150 sites across the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island as well as thematic tours and contemporary and archival photographs, a people's New York emerges, one in which collective struggles for justice and freedom have shaped the very landscape of the city.

rikers an oral history: The Come Up Jonathan Abrams, 2023-10-03 The essential oral history of hip-hop, from its origins on the playgrounds of the Bronx to its reign as the most powerful force in pop culture—from the award-winning journalist behind All the Pieces Matter, the New York Times bestselling oral history of The Wire “The Come Up is Abrams at his sharpest, at his most observant, at his most insightful.”—Shea Serrano, #1 New York Times bestselling author of Hip-Hop (And Other Things) ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR: The Boston Globe, The Guardian, Spin The music that would come to be known as hip-hop was born at a party in the Bronx in the summer of 1973. Now, fifty years later, it's the most popular music genre in America. Just as jazz did in the first half of the twentieth century, hip-hop and its groundbreaking DJs and artists—nearly all of them people of color from some of America's most overlooked communities—pushed the boundaries of music to new frontiers, while transfixing the country's youth and reshaping fashion, art, and even language. And yet, the stories of many hip-hop pioneers and their individual contributions in the pre-Internet days of mixtapes and word of mouth are rarely heard—and some are at risk of being lost forever. Now, in The Come Up, the New York Times bestselling author Jonathan Abrams offers the most comprehensive account so far of hip-hop's rise, a multi-decade chronicle told in the voices of the people who made it happen. In more than three hundred interviews conducted over three years,

Abrams has captured the stories of the DJs, executives, producers, and artists who both witnessed and themselves forged the history of hip-hop. Masterfully combining these voices into a seamless symphonic narrative, Abrams traces how the genre grew out of the resourcefulness of a neglected population in the South Bronx, and from there how it flowed into New York City's other boroughs, and beyond—from electrifying live gatherings, then on to radio and vinyl, below to the Mason-Dixon Line, west to Los Angeles through gangster rap and G-funk, and then across generations. Abrams has on record Grandmaster Caz detailing hip-hop's infancy, Edward "Duke Bootee" Fletcher describing the origins of "The Message," DMC narrating his role in introducing hip-hop to the mainstream, Ice Cube recounting N.W.A's breakthrough and breakup, Kool Moe Dee recalling his Grammys boycott, and countless more key players. Throughout, Abrams conveys with singular vividness the drive, the stakes, and the relentless creativity that ignited one of the greatest revolutions in modern music. *The Come Up* is an exhilarating behind-the-scenes account of how hip-hop came to rule the world—and an essential contribution to music history.

rikers an oral history: *Asphalt Gods* Vincent M. Mallozzi, 2003-06-17 The real basketball deal—the inside story of Harlem's legendary tournament and the pros and playground legends who have made it world famous. Earl "The Goat" Manigault. Herman "Helicopter" Knowings. Joe "The Destroyer" Hammond. Richard "Pee Wee" Kirkland. These and dozens of other colorfully nicknamed men are the "Asphalt Gods," whose astounding exploits in the Rucker Tournament, often against multimillionaire NBA superstars, have made them playground divinity. First established in the 1950s by Holcombe Rucker, a New York City Parks Department employee, the tournament has grown to become a Harlem institution, an annual summer event of major proportions. On that fabled patch of concrete, unknown players have been lighting it up for decades as they express basketball as a freestyle art among their peers and against such pro immortals as Julius Erving and Wilt Chamberlain. X's and O's are exchanged for oohs and aahs in one of the great examples of street theater to be found in urban America. *Asphalt Gods* is a streetwise, supremely entertaining oral history of a tournament that has influenced everything from NBA playing style to hip-hop culture. Now, legends transmitted by word of mouth find a home and the achievements of basketball's greatest unknowns a permanent place in the game's record.

rikers an oral history: *How to Be Disabled in a Pandemic* Mara Mills, Harris Kornstein, Faye Ginsburg, Rayna Rapp, 2025-02-25 A chronicle of ableism and disability activism in New York City during the COVID-19 pandemic *How to Be Disabled in a Pandemic* documents the pivotal experiences of disabled people living in an early epicenter of COVID-19: New York City. Among those hardest hit by the pandemic, disability communities across the five boroughs have been disproportionately impacted by city and national policies, work and housing conditions, stigma, racism, and violence—as much as by the virus itself. Disabled and chronically-ill activists have protested plans for medical rationing and refuted the eugenic logic of mainstream politicians and journalists who "reassure" audiences that only older people and those with disabilities continue to die from COVID-19. At the same time, as exemplified by the viral hashtag #DisabledPeopleToldYou, disability expertise has become widely recognized in practices such as accessible remote work and education, quarantine, and distributed networks of support and mutual aid. This edited volume charts the legacies of this "mass disabling event" for uncertain viral futures, exploring the dialectic between disproportionate risk and the creativity of a disability justice response. *How to Be Disabled in a Pandemic* includes contributions by wide-ranging disability scholars, writers, and activists whose research and lived experiences chronicle the pandemic's impacts in prisons, migrant detention centers, Chinatown senior centers, hospitals in Queens and the Bronx, subways, schools, housing shelters, social media, and other locations of public and private life. By focusing on New York City over the course of three years, the book reveals key themes of the pandemic, including hierarchies of disability vulnerability, the deployment of disability as a tool of population management, and innovative crip pandemic cultural production. *How to Be Disabled in a Pandemic* honors those lost, as well as those who survived, by calling for just policies and caring infrastructures, not only in times of crisis but for the long haul.

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