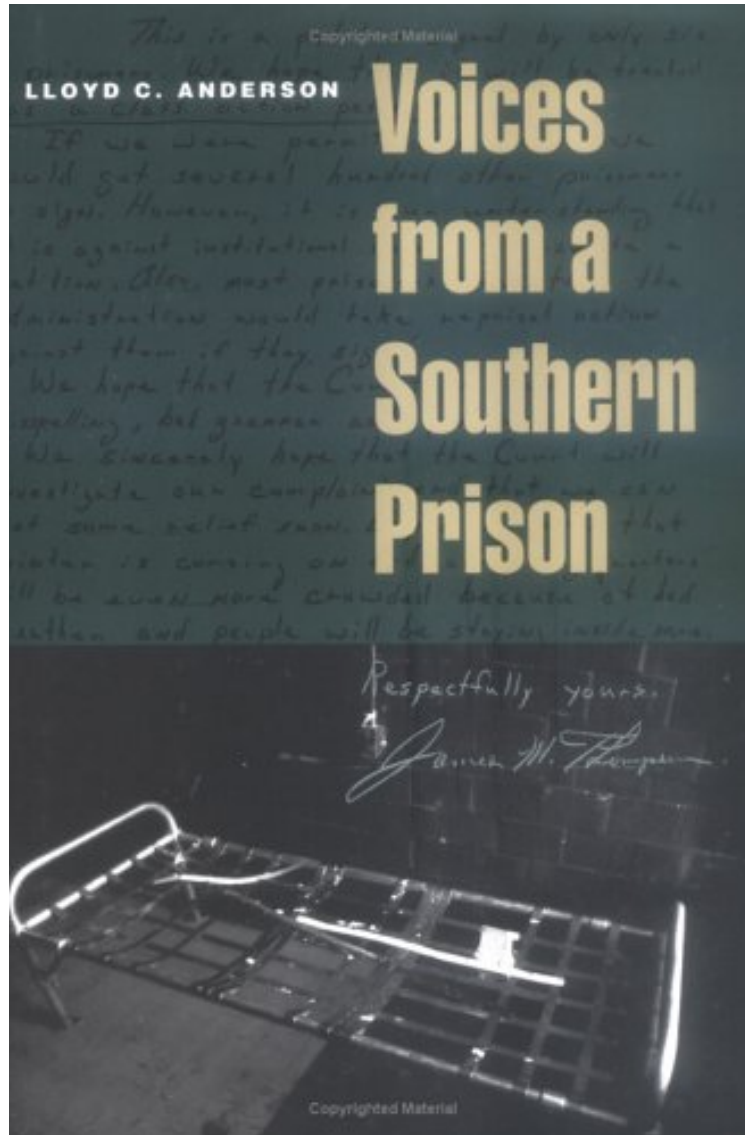


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Voices from a Southern Prison

Lloyd C. Anderson

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Lloyd C. Anderson : Voices from a Southern Prison before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Voices from a Southern Prison:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy freerscholargood read2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Captivating journey from horror to reformBy A CustomerA small group of men find themselves in a position with no choice but to challenge the conditions of the Kentucky prison system, even though the risks of an open challenge are not minimal. Oral histories introduce the characters of this legal battle, creating empathy for the

prisoners, the administration, the court, and the counsel. The author skillfully introduces legal maneuvering from the point of view of the participants in an easy-to-understand manner. The lives of the men, the legal maneuvering, and the stark conditions of the prisons, all flow together in a manner that will keep one from putting down this one.

Rats, tainted food, leaky sewage pipes: they only began to hint at the anarchy inside the Kentucky State Reformatory in La Grange. A barracks-style warehouse prison straight out of an old mobster film, KSR was three-quarters over its intended capacity by 1978. It had become a sickening, dangerous place, where an inmate could get his hands on a sawed-off shotgun more easily than a clean towel. That year a handful of KSR prisoners managed to send a plea for help to the federal court in Louisville. The petitioners expected reprisals or, maybe worse, silence. But the letter reached a caring judge, and the prisoners had spoken up at a crucial moment in Kentucky reform politics. The signs seemed right to take on the old-boy network whose byword on prison conditions was aint no riots, aint no problems. The suit was settled in the KSR prisoners favor in 1981, paving the way for controversial, protracted, and expensive reforms. Written by Lloyd C. Anderson, the head of the KSR prisoners legal team, *Voices from a Southern Prison* quotes extensively from recollections of many players in the case, from the judge who presided over it to the journalist who put it in the headlines. Most important, we hear from three inmates who emerged as leaders among their fellow plaintiffs: James Shorty Thompson, Wilgus Haddix, and Walter Harris. As our nations penal system expands on an unprecedented scale, the KSR scandal offers timely lessons about entrenched attitudes toward prisons. Thus far, says Anderson, they seem lost on the strategists of our War on Crime.

From Booklist Anderson chronicles the 20-year legal struggle by inmates in the Kentucky prison system to correct intolerable prison conditions and mistreatment by prison guards. His book is based on interviews with three prison inmates who were the primary litigants, the judge, Kentucky's top prison official, and a newspaper reporter who covered the lawsuit. The lawsuit was filed in 1978 when James "Shorty" Thompson, an inmate, had had it with the overcrowded conditions where prisoners were "stacked like cordwood." Through interviews with Thompson, Wilgus Haddix, and Walter Harris, Anderson conveys the failings of the prison system in Kentucky as symptomatic of problems throughout the nation's prison systems. He also examines the history of legal contests to improve prison conditions even in the face of increased prison construction and incarceration. Part of the lawsuit reached the U.S. Supreme Court and eventually resulted in Kentucky spending more than \$200 million on much-needed prison reform. This is a revealing look at the U.S. prison system and prison reform. Vanessa Bush Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved This interesting and important account sheds new light on prison reform litigation and on the way inmates influence and are affected by that process. Susette M. Talarico, University of Georgia