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# Liberty's Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America

By Jen Manion. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. x, 278 pp. \$45.00.)

[Gwenda Morgan](#)

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Jen Manion's book examines how, in the wake of the American Revolution,

the new American states, rejecting the “bloody code” of the mother country, addressed the issue of reforming their systems of punishment in accordance with enlightenment thinking and liberal reform. What they achieved, however, argues Manion, was a harsh regime of punishment centered on the penitentiary and a system of incarceration for minor offenders driven (though not explicitly) by “ideas about race, gender and sexuality” and intended to shore up the social order threatened by a growing underclass (p. 5). The purpose of the penitentiary was to reform the criminal by means of lengthy sentences, during which time inmates were expected to contemplate their situation, repent the errors of their ways, turn to...

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