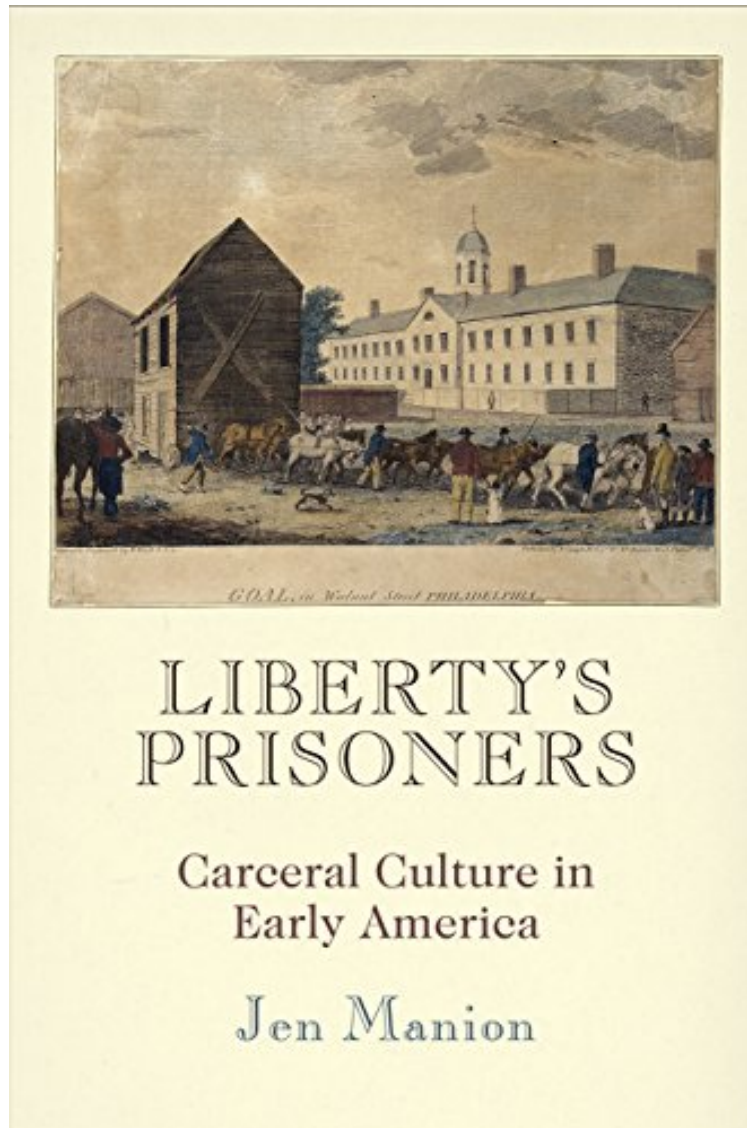


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Liberty's Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America (Early American Studies)

Jen Manion

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Jen Manion : Liberty's Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America (Early American Studies) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Liberty's Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America (Early American Studies):

Liberty's Prisoners examines how changing attitudes about work, freedom, property, and family shaped the creation of the penitentiary system in the United States. The first penitentiary was founded in Philadelphia in 1790, a period of great optimism and turmoil in the Revolution's wake. Those who were previously dependents with no legal standing—women, enslaved people, and indentured servants—increasingly claimed their own right to life, liberty, and happiness. A diverse cast of women and men, including immigrants, African Americans, and the Irish and Anglo-American poor, struggled to make a living. Vagrancy laws were used to crack down on those who visibly challenged longstanding social hierarchies while criminal convictions carried severe sentences for even the most trivial property crimes. The penitentiary was designed to reestablish order, both behind its walls and in society at large, but the promise of reformatory incarceration failed from its earliest years. Within this system, women served a vital function, and Liberty's Prisoners is the first book to bring to life the experience of African American, immigrant, and poor white women imprisoned in early America. Always a minority of prisoners, women provided domestic labor within the institution and served as model inmates, more likely to submit to the authority of guards, inspectors, and reformers. White men, the primary targets of reformatory incarceration, challenged authorities at every turn while African American men were increasingly segregated and denied access to reform. Liberty's Prisoners chronicles how the penitentiary, though initially designed as an alternative to corporal punishment for the most egregious of offenders, quickly became a repository for those who attempted to lay claim to the new nation's promise of liberty.

Winner of the 2016 Mary Kelley Prize from the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic
About the Author
Jen Manion is Associate Professor of History at Amherst College.