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Getting the Runaround

Formerly Incarcerated Men and the Bureaucratic Barriers to Reentry

JOHN M. HALUSHKA

"A compelling portrait of the bureaucratic tangle that ensnares returning citizens. John Halushka illuminates how the runaround enmeshes people in temporal and spatial circuits by chronicling how men learn to navigate the system as they struggle to survive."—Spencer Headworth, author of *Policing Welfare: Punitive Adversarialism in Public Assistance*

"*Getting the Runaround* expertly brings us along on a journey with formerly incarcerated men as they navigate their way through halfway houses, reentry programs, and welfare offices to chart life after prison. Unlike many other reentry studies that focus only on the period immediately after release and challenges with parole, Halushka's work includes men who have been on the outside for years and yet are still struggling to create lives rich with meaning and dignity. Blocking their path is not simply a meager social welfare state but a bureaucratic maze that makes accessing services close to impossible and transforms returning citizens into the professionally poor. Halushka shows how these reentry barriers affect not only recidivism but social integration more broadly (including housing and neighborhood safety, food insecurity, and health and well-being). A must-read text for understanding the long shadow cast by mass incarceration."—Michelle Phelps, coauthor of *Breaking the Pendulum: The Long Struggle Over Criminal Justice*

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"In this cogent study of men returning home from prison, Halushka details how the agencies and programs ostensibly meant to help the formerly incarcerated instead conspire—through their competing expectations—to keep them on the margins of society. An important contribution to research on reentry, masculinity, and poverty governance, this book is essential reading for scholars and policymakers alike."—Matthew Clair, author of *Privilege and Punishment: How Race and Class Matter in Criminal Court*

"Halushka combines rich portraits of everyday life with incisive social critique to expose the disruptive impact of institutions that are supposed to uplift formerly incarcerated people. The book animates the very human frustration of getting the runaround and makes a crucial contribution to scholarship on prisoner reentry and poverty governance in the United States."—Liam Martin, author of *Halfway House: Prisoner Reentry and the Shadow of Carceral Care*

"Through years of fieldwork with varying age cohorts of men returning from prison, Halushka provides a powerful illustration of how the institutional circuits of prisoner reentry trap returning citizens in the self-denying maze of the runaround. Masculine resistance among younger men results in swift punishment that the system is designed to execute, while masculine compliance channels older men into the 'successful' straits of lifelong poverty and personal vulnerability. *Getting the Runaround* lays bare the systemic links between prisoner reentry and poverty governance."—Timothy Black, coauthor of *It's a Setup: Fathering from the Social and Economic Margins*

Getting the Runaround takes readers into the bureaucratic spaces of prisoner reentry, examining how returning citizens navigate the "institutional circuit" of parole offices, public assistance programs, rehabilitation facilities, shelters, and family courts. Drawing on three years of ethnographic fieldwork and forty-five in-depth interviews with formerly incarcerated men returning to New York City, John M. Halushka argues that the very institutions charged with facilitating the transition from incarceration to community life perversely undermine reintegration by imposing a litany of bureaucratic obstacles. This "runaround" is not merely a series of inconveniences but rather an extension of state punishment that exacerbates material poverty and diminishes citizenship rights. By telling the stories of men caught in vicious cycles of poverty, bureaucratic processing, and social



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control, Halushka demonstrates the urgent need to shift reentry away from an austerity-driven, compliance-based framework and toward a vision of social justice and inclusion.

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