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Discipline and Punish

THE BIRTH OF THE PRISON

MICHEL FOUCAULT

Michel Foucault

DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH

Michel Foucault was born in Poitiers, France, in 1926. He lectured in universities throughout the world; served as the director at the Institut Français in Hamburg, Germany, and at the Institute de Philosophie at the Faculté des Lettres in the University of Clermont-Ferrand, France; and wrote frequently for French newspapers and reviews. At the time of his death in 1984, he held a chair at France's most prestigious institution, the Collège de France.

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The Birth of the Prison

Translated from the French
by Alan Sheridan



VINTAGE BOOKS

A DIVISION OF RANDOM HOUSE, INC. NEW YORK

SECOND VINTAGE BOOKS EDITION, MAY 1995

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Published in the United States by Random House, Inc., New York, and in Canada by Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto. Originally published in France as *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la prison* by Editions Gallimard, Paris. Copyright © 1975 by Editions Gallimard. English translation originally published in Great Britain by Penguin Books, Ltd. First American edition published by Pantheon Books in January 1978.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Foucault, Michel. Translation of *Surveiller et punir*. Bibliography : p.

1. Prisons. 2. Prison discipline.

3. Punishment. I. Title.

HV8666.F6813 1979 365 78-11257

eISBN: 978-0-307-81929-1

v3.1

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Translator's Note

Any closer translation of the French title of this book, *Surveiller et punir*, has proved unsatisfactory on various counts. To begin with, Foucault uses the infinitive, which, as here, may have the effect of an 'impersonal imperative'. Such a nuance is denied us in English. More seriously the verb '*surveiller*' has no adequate English equivalent. Our noun 'surveillance' has an altogether too restricted and technical use. Jeremy Bentham used the term 'inspect' – which Foucault translates as '*surveiller*' – but the range of connotations does not correspond. 'Supervise' is perhaps closest of all, but again the word has different associations. 'Observe' is rather too neutral, though Foucault is aware of the aggression involved in any one-sided observation. In the end Foucault himself suggested *Discipline and Punish*, which relates closely to the book's structure.

Another problem was posed by the French word '*supplice*', which heads the first part of the book. For the sake of brevity I have entitled this first part 'Torture', but no single English word will cover the full range of the French. Here '*supplice*' refers specifically to the public torture and execution of criminals that provided one of the most popular spectacles of eighteenth-century France. By extension the word can also refer to any prolonged torture, mental as well as physical. Depending on the context, I have translated the word by 'torture', 'public execution' or 'scaffold'. The author also refers to another form of torture, '*la question*', the extraction of confessions by interrogation and the systematic application of pain. Here I have followed the accepted translation, 'judicial torture'.

References to other works are usually given not in footnotes but in an abbreviated form in the text itself. These references, in brackets, consist of the author's name and a page number; dates of

publication are used to distinguish more than one work by an author, and roman numerals refer to volume numbers. Full references are to be found in the Bibliography.

PART ONE
Torture