Breaking Barriers

Author sheds light on female prisoners fighting back.

July 1, 2009 By Kat Noel

Inspired by the appalling conditions many American women face in correctional facilities, including one HIV-positive inmate being kept from seeing an HIV specialist for several months, writer Victoria Law penned *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women* (PM Press, $20). Law found that instead of waiting for the prison administration to make changes, these inmates took matters in their own hands. “They rebelled against the oppressive top-down prison model,” Law says.

In addition to discussing sexual assault, hazardous work conditions and a lack of prenatal care, Law gives HIV a crucial role in her book. She explains: “[Incarcerated women] created peer education groups to inform one another about the epidemic, provide information on how the disease is contracted and what steps to take if they test positive.”

Currently, 2.4 percent of women in state and federal prisons are living with HIV, and many are receiving inadequate treatment. Law emphasizes that prisoners must organize themselves as a means of survival and hope. “If they can mobilize under their conditions and not have their spirits broken,” she says, “it makes me wonder what we on the outside can do.”

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