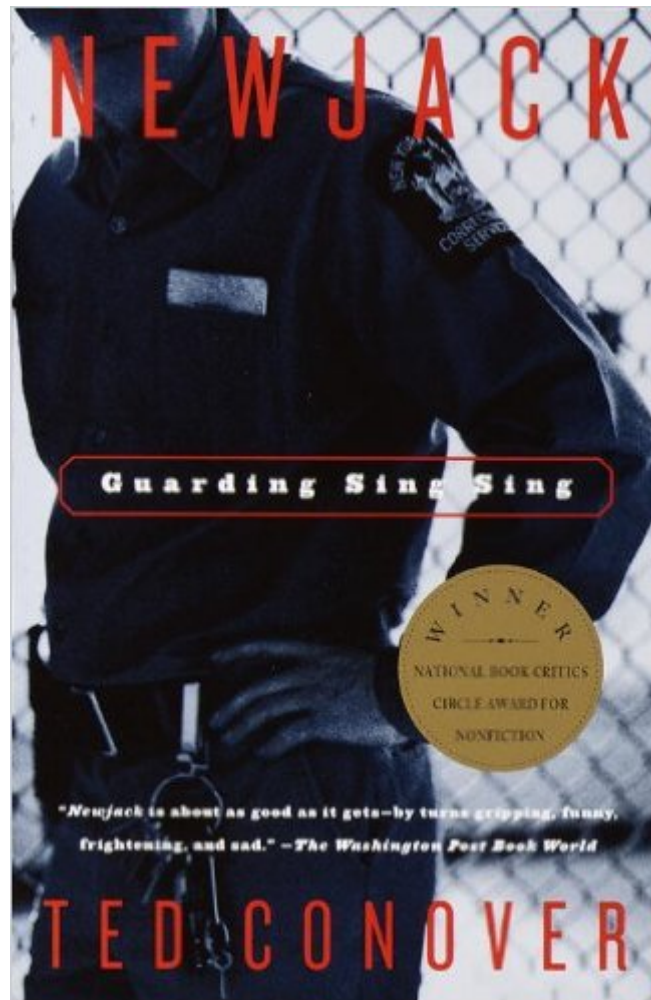


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# Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing



## Synopsis

Acclaimed journalist Ted Conover sets a new standard for bold, in-depth reporting in this first-hand account of life inside the penal system. When Conover's request to shadow a recruit at the New York State Corrections Officer Academy was denied, he decided to apply for a job as a prison officer. So begins his odyssey at Sing Sing, once a model prison but now the state's most troubled maximum-security facility. The result of his year there is this remarkable look at one of America's most dangerous prisons, where drugs, gang wars, and sex are rampant, and where the line between violator and violated is often unclear. As sobering as it is suspenseful, *Newjack* is an indispensable contribution to the urgent debate about our country's criminal justice system, and a consistently fascinating read.

## Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Vintage Books ed edition (June 12, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375726624

ISBN-13: 978-0375726620

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (210 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #31,731 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #22 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Regional U.S. > Mid Atlantic](#) #35 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Law Enforcement](#) #36 in [Books > Law > Criminal Law > Law Enforcement](#)

## Customer Reviews

As someone who spent 4 years working in Sing Sing, I believe I knew Mr. Conover while he was at Sing Sing and while I was not an Officer, I think I remember our paths crossing several times. I observed many of the same situations, emotions and observations as the author. In addition to his dead on portrayal of life behind bars, it was good to read about how the environment can have negative emotional effects on those who work there. It's about time someone told the truth about what goes on inside Sing Sing and how it can demoralize those who are simply good people trying to do job and earn a paycheck. The NYS Department of Corrections as a whole is in need of total reformation and Sing Sing is a prime example of why. I was skeptical when I picked up the book, as

every account of prison life which I had previously read or seen seemed inaccurate to me or slanted by inmate or administrative/political bias. After the first couple of chapters it was clear to me that this was a book written by someone with no agenda other than to tell the truth about life behind the walls at Sing Sing.

A person needs to have a certain determination to do what author Ted Conover did: take a year out from one's life to go undercover and put one's neck on the line, literally. Investigative journalist Conover took a big risk - his career, his family life, and even his life - to get the scoop on what life is like inside New York State's infamous Sing-Sing Prison... from a Correctional Officer's point of view. It makes for a most fascinating read. Ted had tried the traditional route to get inside and have a look at life from behind bars, his target being the notorious Sing-Sing Penitentiary. However, he soon discovered that the media is not a welcome bunch and the stalwart institution (like all other max-security prisons throughout the country) makes sure that the press never get inside to have a peek. Not one to give up easily (and smelling a real story), Conover came up with the plan to go in undercover, as it were, as a legitimate, bona-fide, State-trained Correctional Officer. And that is just what he did. He went the route of CO training - a boot camp of sorts, a rough ride indeed - finding it very demanding and obtuse. Still, he persevered to the end, graduated, and waited for his call-up. He didn't have to wait long. The turnover rate of COs is high, and the inaugural training ground for almost all COs in the State of New York is the infamous prison he was targeting. The book, *NewJack: Guarding Sing Sing* is the chronicle of Conover's year (he dedicated an entire year to experience the fulness of the prison experience) as a CO at the institution. The contents of the book are, in many ways, not surprising. Life is hard behind bars, for inmates and COs alike. There is a palpable aggression, a frustration at the procedures, and the interaction between inmate and prison guard (errrr, sorry, correctional officer), inmate and inmate, and CO and CO is perpetually tense and suspicious. Those who are crime or psychology buffs will dig their teeth into this read and come away satisfied. Conover has done an outstanding job of revealing what everyday life - on the job and in the cell - is all about at Sing Sing. He gives wonderful description of the compound itself and what living conditions are really like inside. His historical account of the raising and implementing of the prison is, in itself, worth buying the book. As well, he's done a great job on revealing the personality of Sing Sing - from the inception of the place right up to present day. It's an institution that has a rich and varied history, if not pristine and stellar. Sing Sing is a bastion of punishment, not all of it good or right or noble, and Conover has documented and presented such with a pretty fair stroke of the pen. Though I found his commentary on the prison population a little heavy-handed and

hyperbolic on occasion, I'm sure that couldn't be helped when the man was laying his life on the line everyday, going in to control the masses. He did, however, paint a fair picture of the life of a CO on the inside and outside. It's a hard job, and it has hard men and women occupying it. And Conover made it to the end of the year. He survived the job, in all its quirks, and has given the rest of us on the outside a very rare glimpse at what life is like on the inside. And what a unique perspective it is, too. I recommend this book to one and all who want to explore penology from a more relaxed, less academic, view and accounting. Great read, start to finish.

As a correctional officer I am always looking for a good book written by someone on the right side of the bars. Ted Conover hit it right on the button. It does not matter what prison you work in, you will find this book fits your institution in some way. Ted Conover went through the ins and outs of being an officer and depicted the stress C/O's go through on a daily basis. He starts out with the stress of being in this awful place where they house the worst of humanity. This is a scary idea for anyone to deal with. Then he realized that they are human and that some of them, even though they are inmates, are not that bad to talk to. After working a year with inmates every day, Conover goes through emotions that most C/O's go through. This would include the stress that it puts on the family situation. I am not a book reviewer but I am a correctional officer and I would recommend this book for anyone who is a C/O or thinking of becoming one. This is an excellent read!!

Conover does what few authors would dare try. He becomes the subject of his book and the result is the best nonfiction work I have ever read. There are many authors who try to write prison accounts and fail because of their inability to relate to the subject. There are also correctional officers who think that they can write and publish less than interesting books as a result. Conover is an established author who became a New York State Correctional Officer and worked in Sing Sing for a year. That is the perfect example of in depth reporting. Newjack not only gives you the typical prison stories, but in it Conover relays the subtle things that escape the attention of those who have never worked inside a prison. Conover address the different assignments given to COs often causing them to be outnumbered in massive amounts. He covers overcrowding, prison violence, dirty guards, and even the emotional tolls of the job. This book holds interest like no other work of nonfiction before it. Conover should be applauded for this book. It is a hallmark of investigative journalism. As a result I have picked up a copy of his book COYOTES and cant wait to start it. A solid five star book that is a must read for nonfiction and true crime fans.

Having worked in the same capacity for 15 and half years I can say this is a very accurate account of what goes on in SSCF. It brought me back to when i was a 19 year old rookie. But with time and experience i had pleasure sharing that while training new officers.I also know what its like to be on the other side having served 4 months of a six month jail sentence. The accounts of Sgt Wickersham(i know who it really is) were accurate..I look forward to reading Conovers other books, and i would have liked to have worked with you in your short time there..

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