

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910463938803321
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Titolo	Inferno : an anatomy of American punishment // Robert A. Ferguson
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Cambridge, Massachusetts ; ; London, England : , : Harvard University Press, , 2014 ©2014
ISBN	0-674-36993-9
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (352 p.)
Disciplina	364.601
Soggetti	Punishment - Philosophy Punishment - United States Electronic books.
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Description based upon print version of record.
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references and index.
Nota di contenuto	Front matter -- Contents -- Acknowledgments -- Introduction The Intractable Problem -- 1. Punishment Misunderstood -- 2. The Rachet Effect in Theory -- 3. The Mixed Signs in Suffering -- 4. The Legal Punishers -- 5. The Legally Punished -- 6. The Punitive Impulse in American Society -- 7. The Law against Itself -- Coda The Psychology of Punishment -- Notes -- Cases Cited -- Further Reading -- Credits -- Index
Sommario/riassunto	America's criminal justice system is broken. The United States punishes at a higher per capita rate than any other country in the world. In the last twenty years, incarceration rates have risen 500 percent. Sentences are harsh, prisons are overcrowded, life inside is dangerous, and rehabilitation programs are ineffective. Police and prosecutors operate in the dark shadows of the legal process--sometimes resigning themselves to the status quo, sometimes turning a profit from it. The courts define punishment as "time served," but that hardly begins to explain the suffering of prisoners. Looking not only to court records but to works of philosophy, history, and literature for illumination, Robert Ferguson, a distinguished law professor, diagnoses all parts of a now massive, out-of-control punishment regime. He reveals the veiled pleasure behind the impulse to punish (which confuses our thinking

about the purpose of punishment), explains why over time all punishment regimes impose greater levels of punishment than originally intended, and traces a disturbing gap between our ability to quantify pain and the precision with which penalties are handed down. Ferguson turns the spotlight from the debate over legal issues to the real plight of prisoners, addressing not law professionals but the American people. Do we want our prisons to be this way? Or are we unaware, or confused, or indifferent, or misinformed about what is happening? Acknowledging the suffering of prisoners and understanding what punishers do when they punish are the first steps toward a better, more just system.
