



# The Spectacular Few: Prisoner Radicalization and the Evolving Terrorist Threat (Alternative Criminology)

*Mark S. Hamm*

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The Madrid train bombers, shoe-bomber Richard Reid, al-Qaeda in Iraq, and the 9/11 attacks—all were led by men radicalized behind bars. By their very nature, prisons are intended to induce transformative experiences among inmates, but today's prisons are hotbeds for personal transformation toward terrorist beliefs and actions due to the increasingly chaotic nature of prison life caused by mass incarceration. In *The Spectacular Few*, Mark Hamm demonstrates how prisoners use criminal cunning, collective resistance and nihilism to incite terrorism against Western targets. A former prison guard himself, Hamm knows the realities of day-to-day prison life and understands how prisoners socialize, especially the inner-workings and power of prison gangs—be they the Aryan Brotherhood or radical Islam. He shows that while Islam is mainly a positive influence in prison, certain forces within the prison Muslim movement are aligned with the efforts of al-Qaeda and its associates to inspire convicts in the United States and Europe to conduct terrorist attacks on their own.

Drawing from a wide range of sources—including historical case studies of prisoner radicalization reaching from Gandhi and Hitler to Malcolm X, Bobby Sands and the detainees of Guantanamo; a database of cases linking prisoner radicalization with evolving terrorist threats ranging from police shootouts to suicide bombings; interviews with intelligence officers, prisoners affiliated with terrorist groups and those disciplined for conducting radicalizing campaigns in prison—*The Spectacular Few* imagines the texture of prisoners' lives: their criminal thinking styles, the social networks that influenced them, and personal “turning points” that set them on the pathway to violent extremism. Hamm provides a broad understanding of how prisoners can be radicalized, arguing that in order to understand the contemporary landscape of terrorism, we must come to terms with how prisoners are treated behind bars.

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