About the Book:
For nearly forty years, the United States has been gripped by policies that have placed more than 2.5 million Americans in jails and prisons designed to hold a fraction of that number of inmates. Our prisons are not only vast and overcrowded, they are degrading—relying on racist gangs, lockdowns, and Supermax-style segregation units to maintain a tenuous order. In short, mass incarceration has proven to be a fiscal and penological disaster. A landmark 2011 Supreme Court decision, Brown v. Plata, has opened an unexpected escape route from this trap of “tough on crime” politics and points toward values that could restore legitimate order to American prisons and ultimately lead to the dismantling of “mass incarceration.” Berkeley law professor Jonathan Simon—an internationally renowned critic of mass incarceration and the war on crime—argues that, much like the epic school segregation cases of the last century, this new case represents a major breakthrough in jurisprudence. Exposing the priority of politics over rational penal policy—and debunking the premise that these policies are necessary for public safety—this perceptive and groundbreaking book urges us to seize the opportunity to replace mass incarceration with a system anchored in the preservation of human dignity.

About the Author:
Jonathan Simon is Adrian A. Kragen Professor of Law, and Director of the Center for the Study of Law and Society at UC Berkeley Law. Before joining UC Berkeley, professor Simon has been an assistant professor at the University of Michigan and a professor at the University of Miami. His research interests include criminology, penology, sociology, law and society, risk and the law, the origins and consequences of the California prison “crisis”; prisons; capital punishment; immigration detention; and the warehousing of inmates. He is the author of Poor Discipline: Parole and the Social Control of the Underclass, 1890-1990 (1993), Governing Through Crime: How the War on Crime Transformed American Democracy and Created a Culture of Fear (2007) and Mass Incarceration on Trial: A Remarkable Court Decision and the Future of Prisons in America (2014).