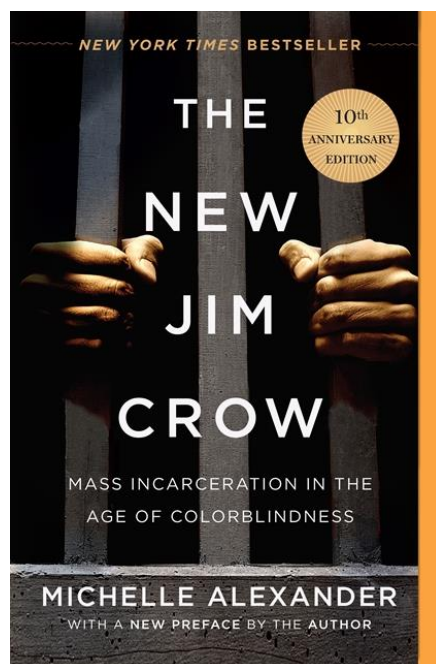


Becoming Antiracist



March/April 2022: Mass Incarceration

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:15 See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Micah 6:8 He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love.

History: Human Rights Watch reported in 2000 that, in seven states, African Americans constitute 80 to 90 percent of all drug offenders sent to prison. In at least 15 states, Black men are admitted to prison on drug charges at a rate from twenty to fifty-seven times greater than that of white men. Nationwide, the rate of incarceration for African American drug offenders dwarfs the rate of whites. Although the majority of illegal drug users and dealers nationwide are white, three-fourths of all people imprisoned for drug offenses have been black or Latino. African Americans are incarcerated at grossly disproportionate rates throughout the United States. From *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander, 2012

Today, a criminal freed from prison has scarcely more rights, and arguable less respect, than a freed slave or a Black person living “free” in Mississippi at the height of Jim Crow. Those released from prison can be stopped and searched by the police for any reason - or no reason at all - and returned to prison for the most minor infractions, such as failing to attend a meeting with a parole officer. Police supervision, monitoring, and harassment are facts of life not only for all those labeled as criminals, but for all those who “look like” criminals. Lynch mobs may be long gone, but the threat of police violence is ever-present. A criminal record today also

authorizes precisely the forms of discrimination we supposedly left behind - discrimination in employment, housing, education, public benefits, and jury service. Those labeled criminals can be denied the right to vote. People convicted of crimes are the one social group in America we have permission to hate. Hundreds of years ago, our nation put those considered “less than” human in shackles; less than one hundred years ago, we relegated them to the other side of town; today we put them in cages. From *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander, 2012

There are approximately 2.2 million men, women, and youth incarcerated in America. The United States leads the world in the number of people that it incarcerates, with a 500% increase over the last 40 years. What caused the drastic increase in rates of incarceration? The increase is a reflection of the changes in sentencing and not in the rate of crimes committed. Drug offenses and the implementation of harsh mandatory sentencing laws explain a large proportion of the increase. African Americans and people of color are disproportionately represented in incarceration due to drug offenses. While blacks make up 13% of the population, they account for nearly 36% of state and federal prisons. We have a long way to go to be treated equally by the law. From *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, by Dr. Joy Degruy, 2017



Mass incarceration and criminal justice reform have become priorities for thousands of Americans. The entrance to the Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, which opened in 2018 in Montgomery, Alabama, has the words “slavery evolved” at the beginning of the exhibit showing how slavery morphed into modern-day mass incarceration. Spurred by police-related shootings of unarmed black people, more citizens have become aware of the skyrocketing levels of incarceration among black and brown people. New scholarships, organizations, and movements have cropped up to combat overcriminalization. Many Christians today say they would have been active participants in the civil rights movement fifty years ago. Now, in the midst of a new civil rights movement, is their chance to prove it. From *The Color of Compromise* by Dr. Jemar Tisby 2019

For further reading: Restorative Justice vs. Retributive Justice chart: from Just Faith Ministries 2021-see the differences in these two justice system frameworks here: [Retributive vs. Restorative Justice \(cscsb.org\)](https://www.cscsb.org/retributive-vs-restorative-justice)

Video: Watch Megan Ming Francis' TED Talk "Let's Get to the Root of Racial Injustice" here: [Let's get to the root of racial injustice | Megan Ming Francis | TEDxRainier - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kd8e8e8e8e8)

There Is a Balm in Gilead, a hymn sung by Mahalia Jackson, is referenced by James Cone in 1972 in *The Spiritual and the Blues*, "Hope, in the Black spirituals, is not a denial of history...It is a belief that things can be radically otherwise than they are: that reality is not fixed but is moving in the direction of human liberation." From Just Faith Ministries, 2021

There is a balm in Gilead, To make the wounded whole

There is a balm in Gilead, To save a sin-sick soul.

If you cannot preach like Peter

If you cannot preach like Paul,

Oh, you can tell the love of Jesus

You can say he died for us all

Sometimes I fell discouraged

You know and I feel like I can't go on

Oh, but then the Holy Spirit

Revives my soul again.