

**Mass Incarceration Debates**

**Media List**

**Debatable Issue**

**Is mass incarceration of African-Americans in the U.S. the moral equivalent of slavery?**

Background/Both Sides (General)

<http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2016/10/ava_duvernay_s_netflix_documentary_13th_reviewed.html>

The Wikipedia entry on Mass Incarceration. It summarizes the phenomenon in the United States over the past 50 years, with the centerpiece definition: Mass Incarceration is "the criminal justice system but also to the larger web of laws, rules, policies, and customs that control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison.”

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/military-police-and-arms/police-and-human-rights/mass-incarceration-in-the-usa>

Basic facts – and the human rights implications of those facts – produced by Amnesty International.

Mass Incarceration = Slavery

<https://www.netflix.com/watch/80091741?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C0%2C375d0dc946f343db4aa55353015c0d474f886c68%3A3730488433930f72d27ce6c4953fb14735871341>

Ava DuVernay’s 2016 documentary “13th,” takes a fact-based and close look at the American prison system and makes a historical argument that it has its racist roots in the Exceptions Clause of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

<http://www.vogue.com/article/13th-ava-duvernay-review>

An accessible, concise, and accurate summary of the documentary “13th”.

<http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2016/10/ava_duvernay_s_netflix_documentary_13th_reviewed.html>

A strong defense of the impact of the documentary “13th”.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4e_djVSag4>

[Video, 6 mins] Video from the Equal Justice Initiative connecting the history of slavery in the United States and mass incarceration today.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISFTFoGSRjE>

[Video, 4 mins] Federal mandatory minimum sentencing laws were harsh and racist and exploded the prison population.

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-evolution-slavery-to-mass-incarceration_us_57f66820e4b087a29a54880f>

Aristotle Jones, a civil rights lobbyist in Washington D.C., provides a short synopsis of the history of African-Americans, from 1619 to the present. He believes that the criminal justice system has re-institutionalized oppressive control over black people in this country.

<http://www.aaihs.org/slavery-the-13th-amendment-and-mass-incarceration-a-response-to-patrick-rael/>

Detailed analysis of the way that distinctions between chattel slavery and “prison slavery” break down – historically, legally, and currently – by Dennis Childs, Associate Professor at the University of California, San Diego.

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/angela-f-chan/america-never-abolished-slavery_b_6777420.html>

The United States never abolished slavery. The 13th Amendment merely moved African-Americans from one institution – slavery – to another – the prison-industrial complex.

<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/king-13th-amendment-didn-abolish-slavery-article-1.2801218>

Mass incarceration is “slavery by another name.”

<http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/gilmoreprisonslavery.html>

An examination of the historical connections between the Abolitionist movement and the “abolish prisons” movement in the U.S.

<https://www.democracynow.org/2015/3/4/michelle_alexander_roots_of_todays_crisis>

[Video, 27 mins, with full transcript] Ohio State University law professor and author of *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander, fills out an analysis of the way that the criminal justice system has become a force of racial oppression in the U.S.

Mass Incarceration ≠ Slavery

<http://www.aaihs.org/demystifying-the-13th-amendment-and-its-impact-on-mass-incarceration/>

A professor of history at Bowdoin College argues that finding an equation between slavery and incarceration in the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is a misreading of history. The 13th Amendment was intended – and was understood at the time – to outlaw slavery, and to distinguish slavery from imprisonment of African-Americans, which it wanted explicitly not to deem illegal.

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/10/how-we-misunderstand-mass-incarceration>

Mass incarceration is not purely a product of the Drug War or of racism against black people. Rather, it is a function of a conservative shift in the U.S. against violent crime, one that has over-empowered prosecutors.

<http://reason.com/blog/2017/02/25/locked-in-john-pfaff-interview>

The data, according to John Pfaff, Fordham University law professor, contradict “13th” and Michelle Alexander’s work on the criminal justice system. There isn’t a monolithic effort being made to imprison African-American men in this country.

<http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4599&context=fss_papers>

Yale law professor James Forman gives a thorough-going rebuttal to Michelle Alexander’s thesis that the American prison system is enforcing “the New Jim Crow.”

<http://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2017/02/09/problem-mass-incarceration-more-complicated-we-thought>

The DuVernay/Alexander narrative leave out the high rate of violent offenders in American prisons, and the fact that African-Americans themselves have been at the forefront of wanting to remove violent criminals from their streets.

<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/440727/13th-documentary-politically-correct-dull-cowardly>

The documentary “13th” omits important data about the improvement in conditions for African-Americans in the U.S. since the mid-19th century, and falsely implies an equivalency between figures like Trayvon Martin and civil rights icons such as Emit Till.

<https://medium.com/@xenocryptsite/ava-duvernays-13th-and-documentary-as-advocacy-some-factual-issues-92e50b250d0>

A critique of the factual basis for the several of the conclusions drawn in Ava DuVernay’s “13th.”

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/04/ending-mass-incarceration/475563/>

A review of the fact-based arguments against the Alexander/DuVernay account of mass incarceration – in particular, causes of mass incarceration other than systemic racism.

<http://www.npr.org/2017/04/18/524569143/locking-up-our-own-details-the-mass-incarceration-of-black-men>

NPR interview with James Forman, author of the 2017 book *Locking Up Our Own*, about the role that African-American law enforcement officials have played in the War on Drugs and, indirectly, in mass incarceration.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_m_qXMpLFo>

[Video, 5 mins] History.org depicts the dehumanization of slave auctions.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9ieTEHCow4>

[Video, 2 mins] Brief look at the horrific life of slaves in the 18th and 19th centuries.