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How the PIC Structures Our World...

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[Essential Reading](#)

I got an e-mail in September from a young college student named Maggie who asked me to share a list of the essential readings for someone who is trying to better understand the prison industrial complex and how it works.

I thought that it was a terrific question and so I got back to her with a list of some books that I would suggest. This is my essential reading book list in alphabetical order by author. A warning: these texts are weighted toward sociology since that is my own orientation and training. This is by no means an exhaustive list. There are hundreds of other text that could be included. In fact, I look forward to hearing from others about their essential reading lists.

Below I have now included a list of useful articles/essays about mass incarceration.

Alexander, Michelle (2010). [The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness](#)

Ayers, William (1998). [A Kind and Just Parent: The Children of Juvenile Court](#)

Davis, Angela (2003). [Are Prisons Obsolete?](#)

Davis, Angela (2005). [Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture](#)

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson (2007). [Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California](#)

Herivel, Tara & Wright, Paul (2002). [Prison Nation: The Warehousing of America's Poor](#)

James, Joy, ed (2005). [The New Abolitionists: \(Neo\) slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings](#)

Law, Victoria (2009). [Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women](#)

Pager, Devah (2009) [Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in An Era of Mass Incarceration](#)

Parenti, Christian (2008, new edition). [Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis](#)

Perkinson, Robert (2010). [Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire](#)

Sudbury, Julia (2005). [Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison Industrial Complex](#)

Wacquant, Loic (2009). [Prisons of Poverty](#)

Western, Bruce (2006) [Punishment and Inequality in America](#)

There are a couple books that I have recently read that I really enjoyed and were really quick reads. I would like to offer a shout out for them here as well.

Aherns, Lois (2008). [The Real Cost of Prisons Comix](#)

Humes, Edward (1997). [No Matter How Loud I Shout: A Year in the Life of Juvenile Court](#)

Kerman, Piper (2010). [Orange is the New Black: My Year in A Women's Prison](#)

Finally, I am currently making my way through one of the most fascinating books about prisons that I have ever read. It is called [Dress Behind Bars: Prison Clothing as Criminality](#) by Juliet Ash. I would not say that this is an essential reading book but I would suggest that those who already have a good foundation in understanding the PIC will find it engrossing and well-worth reading. The book is an examination of state control of prisoner's bodies. It examines the origins behind various forms of prison dress styles from 1800 to the present. It unpacks the messages inscribed in these clothes and also underscores how the state seeks to control, humiliate, and exert its power through clothing. The book also speaks to the way that prisoners themselves try to exert their own forms of resistance through their dress and how prison clothing has affected the broader public. It is really a fascinating book and so I thought I would put in a plug for it here. I hope to blog more specifically about the book in the coming weeks.

Update: My friend Lois Aherns of the Real Cost of Prisons recommends the following book as a good addition to this list of essential readings.

[The Prison & the Gallows: the Politics of Mass Incarceration in America by Marie Gottschalk](#)

Articles or Essays about Mass Incarceration

For my decent and respectful readers, here is a list of some useful articles and essays for better understanding mass/hyper-incarceration. Please keep in mind that this list is severely limited by the fact that I only included pieces that I already had access to or could find copies of online. In addition, I only included articles or essays that provide a theoretical basis for understanding mass incarceration. Still I think that the list is a good start for those who want an introductory survey of mass incarceration (without reading any books).

[Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex by Angela Davis](#)

[Racialized Punishment and Prison Abolition by Angela Davis](#)

[The New Jim Crow "Introduction" by Michelle Alexander](#)

[The Racialization of Crime and Punishment: Criminal Justice, Color-Blind Racism, and the Political Economy of the Prison Industrial Complex by Rose Brewer and Nancy Heitzeg](#)

[The New 'Peculiar Institution': On the Prison as Surrogate Ghetto by Loic Wacquant](#)

[Globalisation and US prison growth: from military Keynesianism to post-Keynesian militarism by Ruth Wilson Gilmore](#)

P.S. Please do not write to me to point out that there are no articles about this or that topic (I really mean it...resist the urge). The list is by no means exhaustive and is not intended to be. I hope that others will take the time to put together a list of the definitive texts about mass incarceration (yes I am looking at you Jules :)).

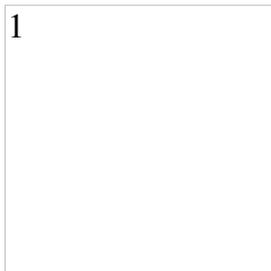
Update (2014)

Melanie Newport compiled an excellent reading list for those interested in learning about the history of American prisons. You can read it [HERE](#)

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• **Prison Culture**



If you would like to contact me, e-mail jjinjustice1@gmail.com

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