



# **Race, Incarceration, and American Values (Boston Review Books)**

*Glenn C. Loury*

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# Race, Incarceration, and American Values (Boston Review Books)

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## **Race, Incarceration, and American Values (Boston Review Books) Glenn C. Loury**

The United States, home to five percent of the world's population, now houses twenty-five percent of the world's prison inmates. Our incarceration rate -- at 714 per 100,000 residents and rising -- is almost forty percent greater than our nearest competitors (the Bahamas, Belarus, and Russia). More pointedly, it is 6.2 times the Canadian rate and 12.3 times the rate in Japan. Economist Glenn Loury argues that this extraordinary mass incarceration is not a response to rising crime rates or a proud success of social policy. Instead, it is the product of a generation-old collective decision to become a more punitive society. He connects this policy to our history of racial oppression, showing that the punitive turn in American politics and culture emerged in the post-civil rights years and has today become the main vehicle for the reproduction of racial hierarchies. Whatever the explanation, Loury argues, the uncontroversial fact is that changes in our criminal justice system since the 1970s have created a nether class of Americans -- vastly disproportionately black and brown -- with severely restricted rights and life chances. Moreover, conservatives and liberals agree that the growth in our prison population has long passed the point of diminishing returns. Stigmatizing and confining of a large segment of our population should be unacceptable to Americans. Loury's call to action makes all of us now responsible for ensuring that the policy changes.

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