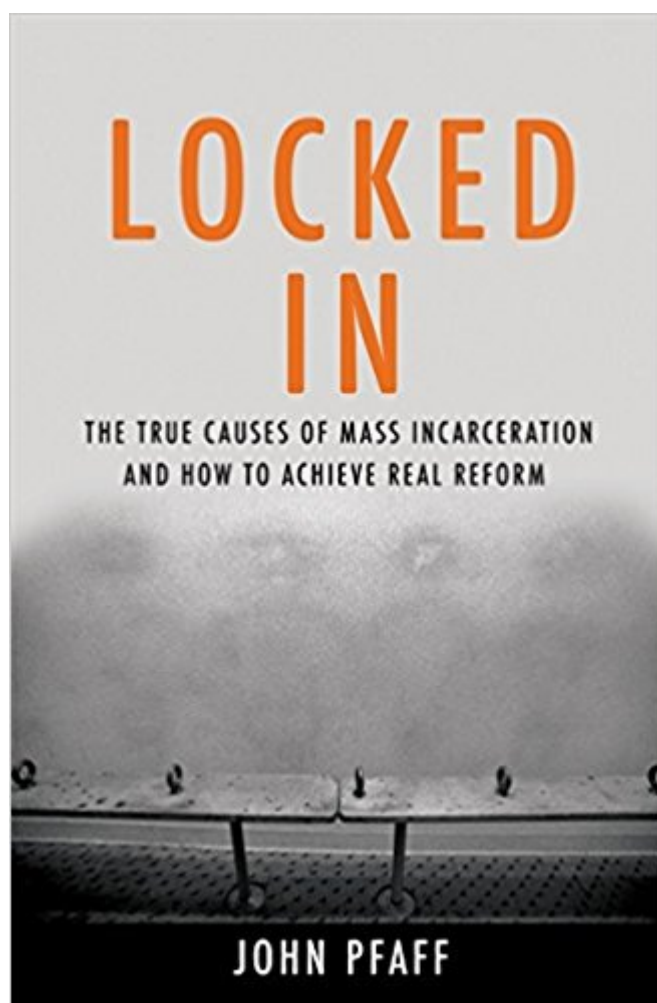


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# Locked In: The True Causes Of Mass Incarceration&#151;and How To Achieve Real Reform



## Synopsis

"Pfaff, let there be no doubt, is a reformer...Nonetheless, he believes that the standard story--popularized in particular by Michelle Alexander, in her influential book, *The New Jim Crow*--is false. We are desperately in need of reform, he insists, but we must reform the right things, and address the true problem."--Adam Gopnik, *The New Yorker*

A groundbreaking examination of our system of imprisonment, revealing the true causes of mass incarceration as well as the best path to reform. In the 1970s, the United States had an incarceration rate comparable to those of other liberal democracies--and that rate had held steady for over 100 years. Yet today, though the US is home to only about 5 percent of the world's population, we hold nearly one quarter of its prisoners. Mass incarceration is now widely considered one of the biggest social and political crises of our age. How did we get to this point? *Locked In* is a revelatory investigation into the root causes of mass incarceration by one of the most exciting scholars in the country. Having spent fifteen years studying the data on imprisonment, John Pfaff takes apart the reigning consensus created by Michelle Alexander and other reformers, revealing that the most widely accepted explanations--the failed War on Drugs, draconian sentencing laws, an increasing reliance on private prisons--tell us much less than we think. Pfaff urges us to look at other factors instead, including a major shift in prosecutor behavior that occurred in the mid-1990s, when prosecutors began bringing felony charges against arrestees about twice as often as they had before. He describes a fractured criminal justice system, in which counties don't pay for the people they send to state prisons, and in which white suburbs set law and order agendas for more-heavily minority cities. And he shows that if we hope to significantly reduce prison populations, we have no choice but to think differently about how to deal with people convicted of violent crimes--and why some people are violent in the first place. An authoritative, clear-eyed account of a national catastrophe, *Locked In* transforms our understanding of what ails the American system of punishment and ultimately forces us to reconsider how we can build a more equitable and humane society.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Pfaff, let there be no doubt, is a reformer...Nonetheless, he believes that the standard story-popularized in particular by Michelle Alexander, in her influential book, *The New Jim Crow*-is false. We are desperately in need of reform, he insists, but we must reform the right things, and address the true problem."--Adam Gopnik, *The New Yorker*"In the extremely important book, *Locked In: The True Causes of Mass Incarceration and How to Achieve Real Reform*, John F. Pfaff analyzes why America incarcerates more people than ever even as crime rates continue to fall... [he] also makes a compelling case that incarceration disrupts the lives of the incarcerated and their families long after they have served their time." --Wall Street Journal"[Pfaff] makes a powerful case that the war on drugs has had very little effect on incarceration rates overall, or racial disparities in prison more specifically."--New York Review of Books "To those asking why the United States imprisons so many of its people, the answers and hints of possible reform are here." --Los Angeles Review of Books"With rigor and specificity, John Pfaff sifts through the data to mount a convincing case about the causes of mass incarceration and the levers by which we can undo it. A must-read for anyone who dreams of an America that is not the world's most imprisoned nation."--Chris Hayes, host of *All In with Chris Hayes* and author of *A Colony in a Nation*"The significant political and practical challenges of transforming society's response to violence may help explain why voters and politicians cling to the myth that prisons will empty out if we simply reduce penalties for nonviolent drug crimes. The road of reform laid out by Pfaff and Forman is a relatively harder one to walk. But if the desired destination is an end to mass incarceration, it's the only way to get there."--Washington Post (Wonkblog)"A succinct, powerful explanation of why much of what we think about the incarceration boom is probably wrong." --Bloomberg View "Pfaff offers a trove of evidence that [the 'standard story' of mass incarceration] is by and large wrong or, at the very least, misses much of the real story." --Vox"An important new book." --Washington Monthly "A valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion about justice reform... Packed with charts and figures, it's candy to the numbers-loving brain, but even those who weary of statistics are sure to find some interesting

tidbits... Peppered throughout are fascinating details about our justice system that you probably won't find elsewhere... Maybe it's time to stop arguing about who broke America. LOCKED IN gives us some ideas for how we might fix it." --National Review "Provocative... Pfaff challenges readers to consider the trade-offs between safety and enforcement and the real costs and benefits to incarcerating the 2 million people we do in the United States today. Packed with information and statistics, with criticisms and solutions, Locked In is a fresh, welcome contribution to the criminal-justice debate." --National Review Online "[Pfaff's] exacting prose meticulously explores every data set and perspective... [he] constructs a new narrative, focusing attention on four dimensions of criminal justice too frequently overlooked: local criminal justice systems, the role of prosecutors, the failed politics of punitive punishment and violent offenders... required reading for students, citizens, activists and policy reformers interested in excavating how our system of hyper-incarceration was constructed incrementally over decades." --America Magazine "An excellent overview of where America stands in regard to its prisons, and Pfaff's proposed reforms deserve serious consideration across the political spectrum." --American Conservative "Provocative and packed with data, Locked In will change how you think about what's wrong with the criminal justice system and how to fix it. A book that will be instantly integral to solving one of the country's most important challenges." --Emily Bazelon, Senior Research Scholar in Law, Yale University, and author of Sticks and Stones "A refreshing look at the causes of mass incarceration, and is a must-read for anyone involved in the criminal justice reform movement. You may not agree with everything that Pfaff argues, but you will finish the book with a better understanding of the complexity of the problem and the need for solutions." --New York Journal of Books "In Locked In, Pfaff plays a Socrates of criminal justice reform, interrogating all the main tenets of the Standard Story and eviscerating them with scores of data." --Pacific Standard "Timely and authoritative, Pfaff's discussion of mass incarceration provides a valuable and accessible addition to the prison reform narrative and an excellent analysis of the U.S. criminal justice system." --Library Journal "A thorough and demanding examination of a problem that has no easy solutions and a challenge to policymakers to discard prior notions about the nature of the problem and the needed reforms." --Kirkus Reviews "In Locked In, John Pfaff delivers a brilliant lesson in myth-busting that anyone interested in reform of our criminal justice system must heed. Our mass incarceration crisis is not chiefly due to an unholy alliance of legislatures and police in carrying out the War on Drugs, nor is it true that a massive share of American prisoners are 'nonviolent drug offenders.' Combining his lawyer's understanding of institutional practice with an economist's cold-eyed commitment to empirical fact, Pfaff points us to other causes, and the key one is a nationwide phenomenon of

prosecutors filing felony charges and seeking longer sentences, often de facto life sentences, for violent crimes that were once treated more sensibly. The powerful lesson is that rational cost-benefit analysis can be a partner to human decency in redeeming lives that still hold promise, and in ending our status as an embarrassing international anomaly."--Professor Robert Weisberg, co-director of the Stanford Criminal Justice Center"Locked In is a game changer for those who care about the crisis of mass incarceration. John Pfaff's virtuosic effort explodes what he calls the 'Standard Story,' showing us that the morally satisfying answers to questions about mass incarceration are usually wrong and that the solutions are almost always more banal-making them harder to accomplish. Most importantly, Locked In is not satisfied with providing this new and compelling framework for understanding why America locks up more people than any other nation in history. It goes further to provide concrete solutions that should be part of any roadmap for reform. If you want to change how we imprison people, you have to read this book!"--Phillip Atiba Goff, President of the Center for Policing Equity and Professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice

John F. Pfaff is a Professor of Law at Fordham Law School. His work on mass incarceration, prosecutors, and criminal justice reform has been covered in *The Economist*, *The New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *National Review*, *Slate*, and *Vox*, among many others. He has a JD and a PhD in Economics from the University of Chicago. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

When we talk about prison growth most advocates and reformist point to the failed War on Drugs, mandatory minimums, and the private prison industrial complex as the causes of mass incarceration. These are all factors and not irrelevant, but are they really what drove us to hold one quarter of the world's incarcerated population? John Pfaff, with compelling data and evidence, has made me think twice about the standard story promoted by Michelle Alexander and documentaries like *13th*. Pfaff points to admissions not time served, not drugs but violence, not the private industrial complex but the public industrial complex, and prosecutor behavior as the real culprits for such high numbers of people behind bars. Anybody who is interested in reforming the criminal justice system or has been impacted by this broken system NEEDS to read this book. I am finishing it off with a new understanding of the criminal justice system and possible solutions as we move forward. Highly recommend this book!

An outstanding synthesis of Pfaff's important, original research on the causes of mass

incarceration--that prosecution policies play a bigger role than harsh sentencing policies--with a comprehensive, elegantly presented survey of the state of American criminal justice and the many possible routes for reform. A terrific book for students and lay readers as well as scholars and policy specialists.

Anyone interested in criminal justice reform should read this book. Pfaff dispels common beliefs about criminal justice reform with a rigorous data-heavy analysis. If you read Michelle Alexander's book and thought it was a compelling story of mass incarceration, you owe it to yourself to read Pfaff's criticism and analysis.

Arrived in great shape. Very thought provoking. A book which should be widely read.

Excellent book with excellent stats to back up its thesis - that we need to seriously rethink how we treat violent offenders and how prosecutors operate if we want to substantially impact mass incarceration. Lots of food for thought for policy and practitioners in the criminal justice world.

Very good. There is not 1 system, nor 51 systems, but 3000+ county systems. Until we better understand what is happening it is hard to offer solutions beyond county by county.

A must-read by all, to understand who and what drives the mass incarceration of men, women and children in America "land of the free" (a myth?). John Pfaff's empirical study casts the bright light on the prosecutors, who drive the felony charges, the laws -- turning misdemeanors into felonies and the convictions, which has exploded our prison growth. Prosecutors, judges, sheriffs and politicians are elected officials, who ramp up "tough on crime" rhetoric to get elected, which has been self-destructing our society, communities and tearing apart families. This politicized justice system profiting off human misery, has failed the people and our nation, except those who use it for political and financial gain. It's time to restore fair justice, presumption of innocence and due process.

Alongside Michelle Alexander's, "The New Jim Crow", this book rounds out the discussion of the mess that is our criminal justice system. Pfaff examines ALL the arguments and advances some innovative research to make a compelling argument about how to fix what's not working. Highly recommended.

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