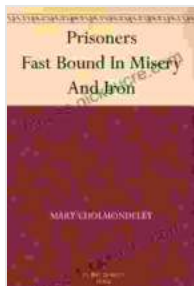


# Prisoners Fast Bound in Misery and Iron: A History of Incarceration in the United States

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, with over 2 million people behind bars. This is a staggering number, and it represents a dramatic increase in the size of the prison population over the past few decades. In 1972, there were just over 200,000 people in prison in the United States. By 2000, that number had grown to over 1 million. And today, it stands at over 2 million.



## Prisoners Fast Bound In Misery And Iron

by Mary Cholmondeley

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

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This increase in the prison population has been driven by a number of factors, including the War on Drugs, the rise of mass incarceration, and the increasing use of mandatory minimum sentences. The War on Drugs has led to the arrest and imprisonment of millions of people, mostly for nonviolent drug offenses. Mass incarceration is the practice of incarcerating large numbers of people, often for minor offenses. And mandatory

minimum sentences require judges to impose a minimum sentence on convicted criminals, even if they believe that a shorter sentence would be more appropriate.

The result of these policies has been a prison system that is overcrowded, underfunded, and ineffective. Prisons are often violent and dangerous places, and they do little to rehabilitate prisoners or prepare them for a successful reentry into society. In fact, many prisoners are released from prison only to commit new crimes.

The United States' mass incarceration problem is a national disgrace. It is a waste of money, it is a violation of human rights, and it is a threat to public safety. We need to rethink our approach to crime and punishment, and we need to find ways to reduce the size of the prison population.

## **The Colonial Era**

The history of incarceration in the United States begins in the colonial era. The first prisons in the United States were built in the 17th century, and they were used to house debtors, criminals, and political prisoners. These prisons were often overcrowded and unsanitary, and they provided little opportunity for rehabilitation.

In the 18th century, the American Revolution led to a change in the way that prisoners were treated. The new American government adopted the principle of "penitence and reformation," which held that the purpose of imprisonment was to punish criminals and to help them to reform their lives. This principle led to the development of new prisons that were designed to be more humane and rehabilitative.

## **The 19th Century**

The 19th century saw a number of important changes in the American prison system. The most significant of these changes was the rise of the penitentiary. Penitentiaries were large, state-run prisons that were designed to hold long-term prisoners. Penitentiaries were based on the principle of solitary confinement, which was believed to be the most effective way to rehabilitate criminals.

Solitary confinement was a harsh and brutal punishment. Prisoners were kept in small, dark cells for long periods of time, and they were only allowed out for brief periods of exercise. This type of confinement had a devastating effect on prisoners, both physically and mentally. Many prisoners went insane or died in solitary confinement.

The use of solitary confinement declined in the late 19th century, but it was not completely abolished until the 20th century. Today, solitary confinement is still used in some prisons, but it is generally recognized as a cruel and unusual punishment.

## **The 20th Century**

The 20th century saw a number of further changes in the American prison system. The most significant of these changes was the rise of parole. Parole is a system that allows prisoners to be released from prison before they have completed their full sentence. Parole is granted to prisoners who are believed to be rehabilitated and who are not likely to commit new crimes.

The use of parole has increased dramatically in the 20th century. In 1900, only about 10% of prisoners were released on parole. By 1970, that

number had grown to over 50%. Today, over 80% of prisoners are released on parole.

The increase in the use of parole has helped to reduce the size of the prison population. However, it has also led to some problems. One problem is that parolees are more likely to commit new crimes than prisoners who are released at the end of their full sentence. Another problem is that parolees often have difficulty finding jobs and housing, which can make it difficult for them to successfully reintegrate into society.

## **The 21st Century**

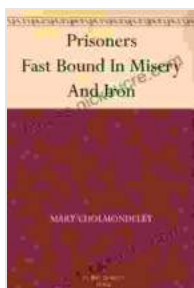
The 21st century has seen a number of new challenges to the American prison system. One of the most significant of these challenges is the War on Drugs. The War on Drugs has led to the arrest and imprisonment of millions of people, mostly for nonviolent drug offenses. This has caused the prison population to grow dramatically, and it has also led to a number of human rights concerns.

Another challenge to the American prison system is the rise of mass incarceration. Mass incarceration is the practice of incarcerating large numbers of people, often for minor offenses. This has led to a prison system that is overcrowded, underfunded, and ineffective. Prisons are often violent and dangerous places, and they do little to rehabilitate prisoners or prepare them for a successful reentry into society.

The United States' mass incarceration problem is a national disgrace. It is a waste of money, it is a violation of human rights, and it is a threat to public safety. We need to rethink our approach to crime and punishment, and we need to find ways to reduce the size of the prison population.

The history of incarceration in the United States is a long and complex one. It is a history of violence, abuse, and neglect. It is also a history of hope and redemption. Despite the challenges that the American prison system faces, there are many people who are working to make it a more humane and effective institution.

We need to continue to work to improve the American prison system. We need to find ways to reduce the size of the prison population, to provide prisoners with better opportunities for rehabilitation, and to help them to successfully reintegrate into society. We need to remember that prisoners are people, and that they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.



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