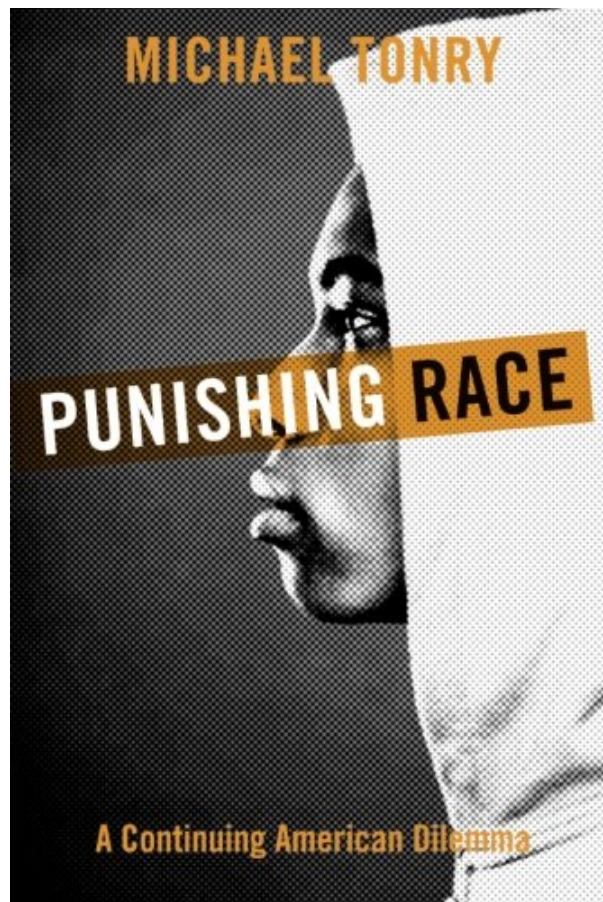
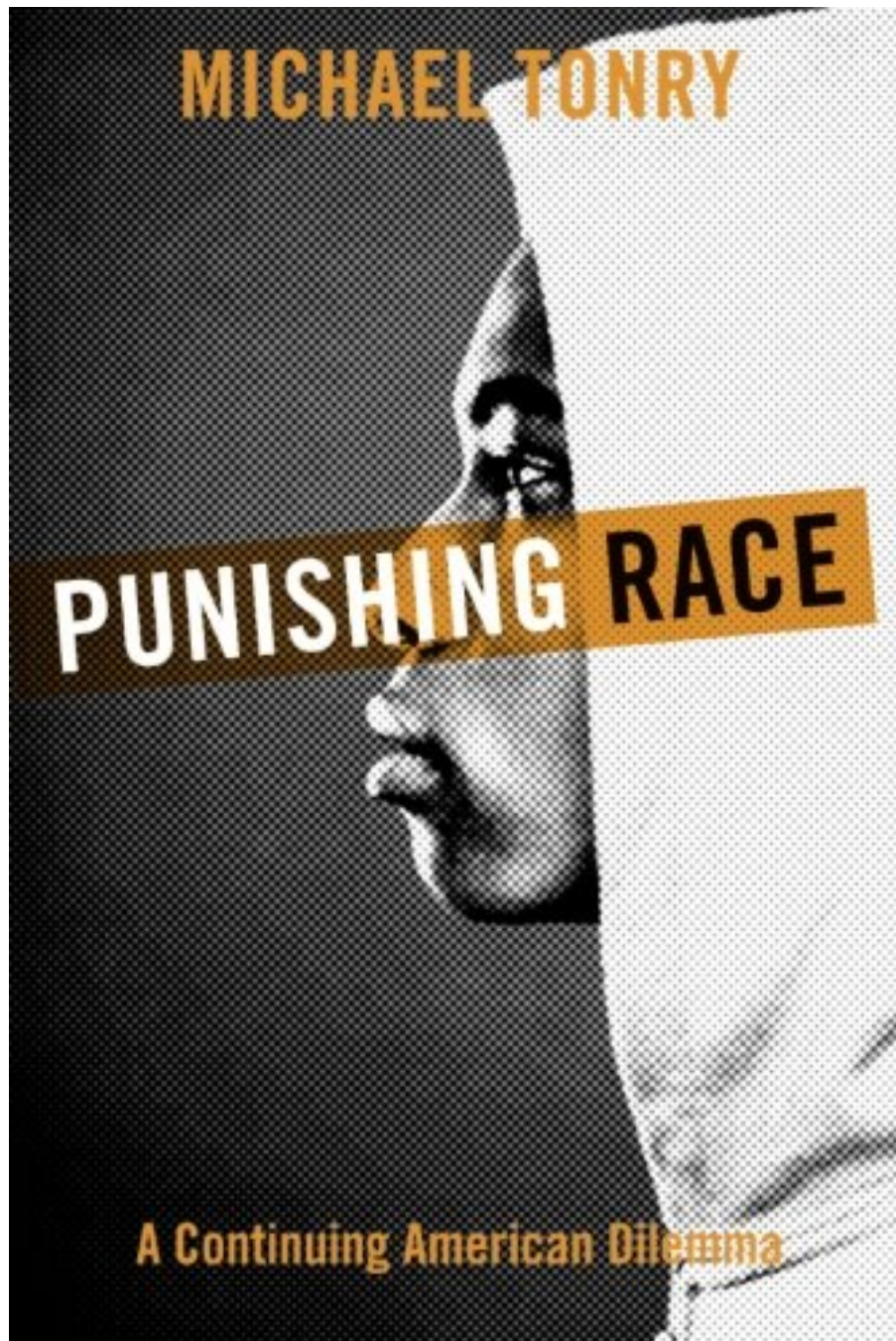


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## Review

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"All in all, Michael Tonry's Punishing Race is a great book for those interested in ongoing racial discrimination within the criminal justice system, the history and legacy of this discrimination, and what can be done about it." --Contemporary Sociology

#### About the Author

Michael Tonry is Professor of Law and Public Policy at the University of Minnesota Law School, and Senior Fellow at the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement at Free University in Amsterdam.

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How can it be, in a nation that elected Barack Obama, that one third of African American males born in 2001 will spend time in a state or federal prison, and that black men are seven times likelier than white men to be in prison? Blacks are much more likely than whites to be stopped by the police, arrested, prosecuted, convicted, and imprisoned, and are much less likely to have confidence in justice system officials, especially the police.

In *Punishing Race*, Michael Tonry demonstrates in lucid, accessible language that these patterns result not from racial differences in crime or drug use but primarily from drug and crime control policies that disproportionately affect black Americans. These policies in turn stem from a lack of white empathy for black people, and from racial stereotypes and resentments provoked partly by the Republican Southern Strategy of using coded "law and order" appeals to race to gain support from white voters. White Americans, Tonry observes, have a remarkable capacity to endure the suffering of disadvantaged black and, increasingly, Hispanic men. Crime policies are among a set of social policies enacted since the 1960s that have maintained white dominance over black people despite the end of legal discrimination. To redress these injustices, Tonry offers a number of proposals: stop racial profiling by the police, shift the emphasis of drug law enforcement to treatment and prevention, eliminate mandatory sentencing laws, and change sentencing guidelines to allow judges discretion to take account of offenders' life circumstances. Those proposals are all attainable and would all reduce unjustifiable racial disparities and the collateral human and social harms they cause.

A damning indictment of decades of misguided criminal justice policy, *Punishing Race* takes a crucial look at persisting racial injustice in America.

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Thorough and Provocative

By Traci Schlesinger

Tonry's situates Punishing Race within the emerging consensus in criminal legal research that declares first, that the scale of imprisonment practiced in the contemporary US cannot be justified with reference to any crime control or public safety goal and, second, that policing strategies and sentencing policies are responsible for both the severity of and the disparities within incarceration. He argues that these policies and practices endure because "white empathy for blacks who are affected [is] weak and uncommon" (p. 8) and racial disparities in incarceration "help white Americans maintain social, economic, and political dominance

over blacks" (p. 4). Some of the claims upon which the book rest are well supported by social science research. Other claims that the book makes seem interesting hypotheses that get some support from a number of historical and sociological analyses but which feel more assumed than demonstrated within the book itself. These limitations, however, neither dismantle nor severely weaken the main arguments of the book: That we, as Americans, have a moral obligation to dramatically decrease the scale of imprisonment within our country.

Tonry demonstrates a mastery of several inter-related literatures and a keen analytic sense. The book is a must read for anyone concerned about the mass racialized incarceration and, perhaps even more so, for anyone who is not.

2 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Disappointing

By Clio

I ordered this work to consider assigning it in an upper division history course on the Prison Industrial Complex. The work looked promising but fell far short of the mark. There are persistent ideas about American attitudes and intellectual history that need historicizing and more familiarity with American history. For instance, early on the author claims that one of the reasons that the US has such an intractable problem with imprisonment is due to "the influence of Evangelical Protestantism" (page 9). This was not supported with any sort of statistical evidence from say the Pew Research Center. Nor was there any development about what the author meant by Evangelical Protestantism--there are a number of strands that have emerged over the past century and their ideas have evolved over time and the author offers no clarity for the reader as to whom he is writing about or when.

Throughout the work there are places where assertions are either thinly supported or not at all and this carried over to background details he wants to use to make his argument. More careful footnoting would have helped to give substance to his claims.

The book's reading level is certainly accessible, and I am not surprised that it has been assigned as an introductory book. There are terrific texts that elucidate the nexus of race and imprisonment in the US, this is not one.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Five Stars

By KatP

used for a college course great informational book

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