



Big Prisons, Big Dreams: Crime and the Failure of America's Penal System (Critical Issues in Crime and Society)

Professor Michael Lynch

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The American prison system has grown tenfold since the 1970s, but crime rates in the United States have not decreased. This doesn't surprise Michael J. Lynch, a critical criminologist, who argues that our oversized prison system is a product of our consumer culture, the public's inaccurate beliefs about controlling crime, and the government's criminalizing of the poor.

While deterrence and incapacitation theories suggest that imprisoning more criminals and punishing them leads to a reduction in crime, case studies, such as one focusing on the New York City jail system between 1993 and 2003, show that a reduction in crime is unrelated to the size of jail populations. Although we are locking away more people, Lynch explains that we are not targeting the worst offenders. Prison populations are comprised of the poor, and many are incarcerated for relatively minor robberies and violence. America's prison expansion focused on this group to the exclusion of corporate and white collar offenders who create hazardous workplace and environmental conditions that lead to deaths and injuries, and enormous economic crimes. If America truly wants to reduce crime, Lynch urges readers to rethink cultural values that equate bigger with better.

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