



American Furies: Crime, Punishment, and Vengeance in the Age of Mass Imprisonment

Sasha Abramsky

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In this dramatic exposé of U.S. penitentiaries and the communities around them, Sasha Abramsky finds that prisons have dumped their age-old goal of rehabilitation, often for political reasons. The new “ideal,” unknown to most Americans, is a punitive mandate marked by a drive toward vengeance.

Surveying this state of affairs—life sentences for nonviolent crimes, appalling conditions, the growth of private prisons, the treatment of juveniles—Abramsky asks: Does the vengeful impulse ennoble our culture or demean it? What can become of people who are quarantined for years in a violent subculture? California’s Three Strikes law typifies the politics that exploit the grief of victims’ families and our fears of violent crime. Brilliantly researched and compellingly told, *American Furies* shows that the ethos of “lock ’em up and throw away the key” has enormous social costs.

“The most urgent book of the season. Sasha Abramsky provides us with an invaluable, if harrowing, audit of the cataclysmic damage inflicted upon American values by American prisons. The lack of compassion in our national life and the gangrened hearts of our politicians pose greater threats to our childrens’ futures than any overseas terrorist conspiracy.” —Mike Davis, professor of history at University of California–Irvine and author of seven books including *Planet of Slums* and *The Monster At Our Door*

“A smart, compassionate and tough-minded look at the rise and impact of the tough-on-crime culture that has made America the world’s foremost jailer. By showing us how we got into this mess, this revelatory book also holds out hope that we might find our way out.” —Nell Bernstein, former Soros Justice Media Fellow and author of *All Alone in the World: Children of the Incarcerated*

“This is by far the most intelligent and haunting indictment of the American prison system that I have ever read. Sasha Abramsky has shone an incandescent lamp on a shadowy underground universe that holds and in all too many cases brutalizes the lives of more than two million Americans. He should be commended for doing so, and his book made required reading for every legislator in the land, bar none.” —Simon Winchester, author of *A Crack in the Edge of the World* and *The Professor and the Madman*

“It is with an exemplary and multifaceted grasp of the history and modern-day reality of incarceration that Abramsky is able to grasp the full context of why callous negligence and brutality so abound in the American prison system . . . *American Furies* is a brilliantly crafted piece of creative non-fiction replete with non-dogmatic, accessible, and lyrical prose . . . In the difficult realm of prison reporting, Abramsky is unquestionably among the best and brightest, and *American Furies* is clear evidence of such.” —The American Prospect

Praise for *Conned*:

“Timely and important. Instead of preaching democracy to the world, the United States should start practicing it at home.” —Eric Schlosser

“The war on drugs, the disenfranchisement of convicted felons, a series of dodgy electoral Republican victories . . . someone had to connect the dots, and Sasha Abramsky has done so with passion, precision, and artistry.” —Barbara Ehrenreich

Sasha Abramsky has written for The Atlantic, The Nation, and Rolling Stone. The author of *Conned: How Millions Went to Prison, Lost the Vote, and Helped Send George W. Bush to the White House* and *Hard Time Blues: How Politics Built a Prison Nation*, he has also reported on U.S. prisons for Human Rights Watch. He lives in Sacramento, California.

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