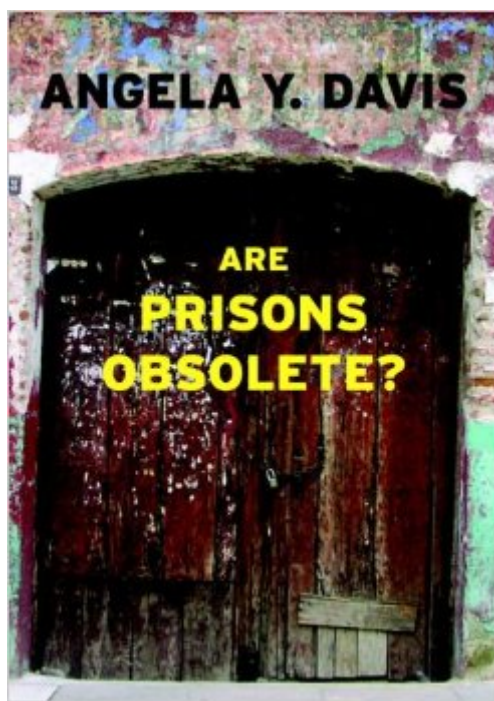


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# Are Prisons Obsolete?



## Synopsis

With her characteristic brilliance, grace and radical audacity, Angela Y. Davis has put the case for the latest abolition movement in American life: the abolition of the prison. As she quite correctly notes, American life is replete with abolition movements, and when they were engaged in these struggles, their chances of success seemed almost unthinkable. For generations of Americans, the abolition of slavery was sheerest illusion. Similarly, the entrenched system of racial segregation seemed to last forever, and generations lived in the midst of the practice, with few predicting its passage from custom. The brutal, exploitative (dare one say lucrative?) convict-lease system that succeeded formal slavery reaped millions to southern jurisdictions (and untold miseries for tens of thousands of men, and women). Few predicted its passing from the American penal landscape. Davis expertly argues how social movements transformed these social, political and cultural institutions, and made such practices untenable. In *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Professor Davis seeks to illustrate that the time for the prison is approaching an end. She argues forthrightly for "decarceration", and argues for the transformation of the society as a whole.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Following the over throw of reconstruction, the re-empowered white ruling class in the South needed a large pool of cheap labor. The Thirteenth Amendment, which outlawed slavery, contained one glaring exception--slavery was still completely legal for those who had been convicted of a crime.

Suddenly, new legislation was enacted which criminalized a wide variety of behaviors not previously considered criminal--having no job, vagrancy, no visible means of support, etc. Once these "Black Codes" were in place, prisons in the South were rapidly filled with Blacks. Prior to the Civil War, prisoners in the South were overwhelmingly White. After Reconstruction, they were overwhelmingly Black. These new prisoners were "leased" to White plantation owners, at a flat fee. With no capital invested in these new slaves, many were simply worked to death. The economic incentive to ensure that the prisons were full was inescapable. In this short, but powerful, book, Angela Davis makes the case that this pattern of incarcerating Blacks, set during the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, carries through to the present. Today the economics of incarceration are more subtle. Money is not primarily made through the labor of prisoners (although that still happens). Today, the real money is made by the underwriters who sell the bonds to finance prison construction, the myriad of industries which supply the country's 2 million prisoners with everything from soap to light bulbs, and by rural America, where the last three decades of de-industrialization has left prison as one of the very few decent paying union jobs available to formerly blue collar workers. Ms.

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