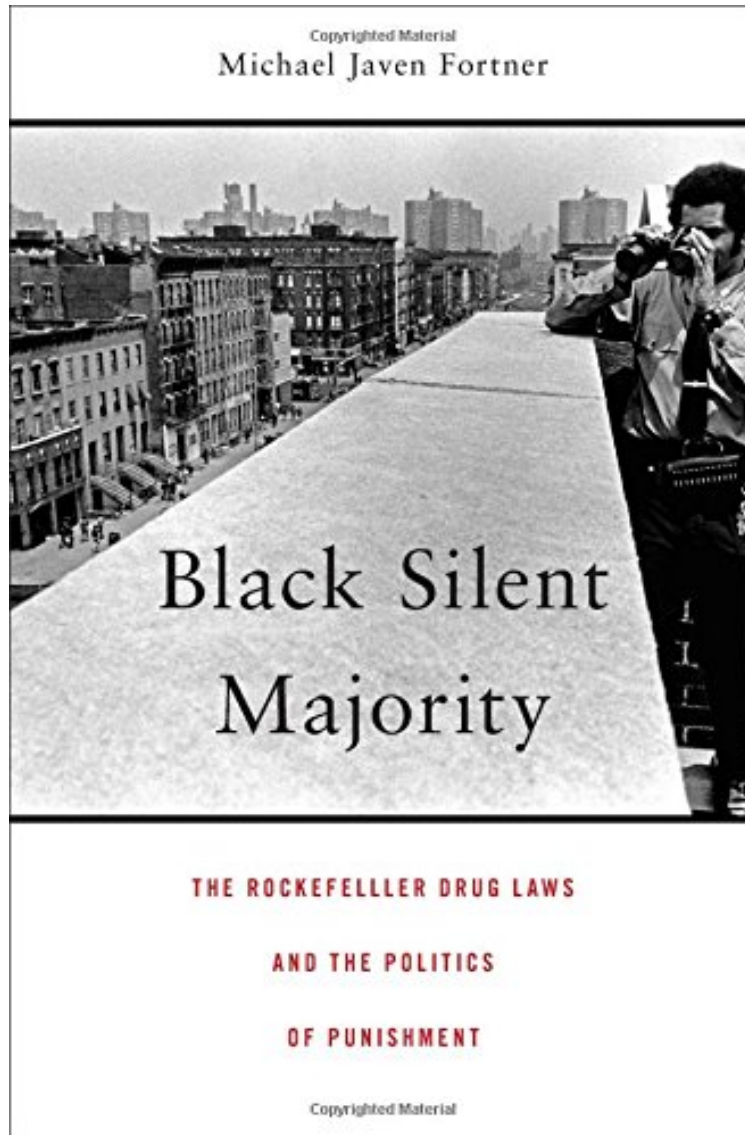


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Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment

Michael Javen Fortner

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#157293 in Books Michael Javen Fortner 2015-09-28 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.50 x 1.10 x 5.80l, .0 #File Name: 0674743997368 pages Black Silent Majority The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment | File size: 76.Mb

Michael Javen Fortner : Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. poop book great sellerBy CustomerThe seller did a great job but the book was terrible0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Noah PainterBalanced and meticulous research.19 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Timely, balanced, and informativeBy L. M. CraneBalanced, well researched, and informative, The Black Silent Majority provides a timely review of how drugs, crime, and racism intersected to affect the black middle class and lead to harsher drug laws. Currently we hear much about "mass incarceration" and its racial implications. Before we can address the subject, we need to understand it. Why did we start increasing drug and violent crime sentence length? When did first occur? Is it all secondary to racism? If not, what other factors led to increasing incarceration of individuals, primarily those of color? Fortner's book stands out for its reasoned approach in explaining a complex history and helps us understand similar problems today. His book covers the time period from the Civil War up to Governor Rockefeller's enactment of harsh drug crime laws in New York in 1973. This information is timely for today's discussion because everything that happened up to 1973 has just repeated itself. Every issue we discuss today was discussed then. Every solution presented today, was also presented previously. What worked and what didn't? Contrast Fortner's book with Michelle Alexander's "The New Jim Crow" Like Fortner, she does considerable research and outlines our racist legal history very well. Unfortunately, Alexander cites many of the facts selectively, highlighting those that superficially seem to make her point, mainly that white racists, in an attempt to control blacks when Jim Crow laws seemed to be fading, made laws that unfairly singled out blacks and increased their sentences in order to get them off the streets. She specifically cites Nixon, Reagan, and Clinton as leaders in this effort. Her main solution would be to erase drug laws from the books and release 50% of the prison population to return to prison population levels 40 years ago. Even though her book has achieved critical acclaim, it suffers tremendously from cognitive bias when she attempts to assign "guilt" to whites for all evils and mass schemes worthy of Machiavelli. Ta-Nehisi Coates, a long time critic of racism in America, in his recent Atlantic magazine articles on the subject of black incarceration, is more even tempered, allowing that family dissolution and excess drug usage, combined with racism, led to the abnormally high incarceration of blacks. He also questions the role that welfare laws have played in regards to the poor black family. Coates notes the high number of federal prisoners in for drug violations, but notes that very few of them were non-violent offenders, making early release problematic. Fortner's book lays out all the facts impartially. He notes when politics came into play and when it did not as national attitudes about how to control drug related crime developed. Many black artistic and business advancements occurred during the Jim Crow era of the early 20th century. After WW II, however, heroin usage became more prevalent in the US, especially in the black inner city. As drug usage grew, so did the crime that accompanied it. Middle and upper class blacks, confined to certain housing regions by racist red-lining and other real estate practices, were prevented from leaving these communities where crime affected everyone. As a result, they bore the brunt of the increasing crime wave due to drugs. It was this middle class, represented by Adam Clayton Powell and Charles Rangel among many others, that steadily demanded removal of drug criminals from the neighborhood "for life in prison" or, as some demanded, be "put to death." They also demanded an increased police presence in their communities, despite their aversion to some racist police. This middle class pressure, applied from 1950-1975, finally caused Nelson Rockefeller to reverse his prior moderate views on drug crime and enact harsher penalties for drug crimes in 1973. National politicians would soon follow for many of the same reasons. Fortner's book reminds us that there was (and is) a large silent black majority that constitute the main victims of drug crime. Whites, usually from communities removed from drug crime, concentrated on the drug criminals (treatment, racist structure of society, poverty, etc.) and seemingly ignored the victims of drug crime that were predominantly black. Fortner doesn't shirk descriptions of racism and its effects on the black community. He lists them in great detail. He does, however, point out that the burgeoning black middle class was making great strides forward in the 1940-1970's, while at the same time black community drug crime was rising rapidly, so simple poverty and structural racism weren't the only etiology of drug usage. This book is timely and informative, especially as we are currently considering the role of drugs and crime in our society (increasingly involving whites, both poor and not). What is being discussed today (treatment or incarceration of addicts, level of incarceration of drug dealers who may be addicts themselves, unequal treatment under the law of powdered versus crack cocaine, role of police in neighborhoods, etc.) was also discussed before. Every one of these same issues and a variety of approaches were either tried or talked about several decades ago. Fortner's book provides the historical facts so that we don't just repeat the same mistakes or that we don't simply view these issues through biased political ideologies. I would suggest this book and Coate's Atlantic article for anyone seriously wanting to learn more about the subject of prison incarceration and racial implications. For a conservative counterpoint, read Heather McDonald's article on the subject [http://www.city-journal.org/2015/25_4_decriminalization.html]. After reading all three you will have a much better understanding of this important issue.

Often seen as a political sop to the racial fears of white voters, aggressive policing and draconian sentencing for illegal drug possession and related crimes have led to the imprisonment of millions of African Americans far in excess of their representation in the population as a whole. Michael Javen Fortner shows in this eye-opening account that these

punitive policies also enjoyed the support of many working-class and middle-class blacks, who were angry about decline and disorder in their communities. *Black Silent Majority* uncovers the role African Americans played in creating today's system of mass incarceration. Current anti-drug policies are based on a set of controversial laws first adopted in New York in the early 1970s and championed by the state's Republican governor, Nelson Rockefeller. Fortner traces how many blacks in New York came to believe that the rehabilitation-focused liberal policies of the 1960s had failed. Faced with economic malaise and rising rates of addiction and crime, they blamed addicts and pushers. By 1973, the outcry from grassroots activists and civic leaders in Harlem calling for drastic measures presented Rockefeller with a welcome opportunity to crack down on crime and boost his political career. New York became the first state to mandate long prison sentences for selling or possessing narcotics. *Black Silent Majority* lays bare the tangled roots of a pernicious system. America's drug policies, while in part a manifestation of the conservative movement, are also a product of black America's confrontation with crime and chaos in its own neighborhoods.

Provocative As Fortner's book makes clear, no political movement can afford to ignore the kind of cruel disorder that we euphemistically call common crime. A police force that kills black citizens is adding to America's history of racial violence; so is a police force that fails to keep them safe. (Kelefa Sanneh *New Yorker* 2015-09-14) Seeks to reverse the conventional wisdom about not only the Rockefeller laws themselves, but also the broader history of the war on drugs. After *Black Silent Majority*, historians can no longer reduce the 60s and 70s politics of crime to the delusional fantasies of racists or to statistical artifacts of modern police record-keeping (although those factors surely played a role as well). Fortner marshals an array of poll data showing that black city dwellers were and not without reason far more fearful of violence in the late 1960s than white suburbanites were. (Sara Mayeux Reason 2015-09-30) This provocative history alerts a rising generation of would-be reformers, the young masses that have recently filled the streets of New York and other cities to protest after each new tragedy, to how a well-intentioned proposal can lead to something unintended and disastrous, like mass incarceration. This lesson should resound, given the political clout the criminal-justice-reform movement continues to acquire. (Jack Dickey *Time* 2015-10-12) A fresh, bold, powerful book that shakes up a pressing contemporary debate. Fortner insists on listening to the black voices that supported the rise of our terrible incarceration policies. Through careful research, he describes a deeply conflicted community confronting crime, groping for respectability, challenging the white gaze, and reaching for social justice. *Black Silent Majority* is forcefully argued, beautifully written, and profoundly moving. (James A. Morone, author of *Hellfire Nation* and *The Devils We Know*) Meticulously researched, engagingly written, and rigorously argued, this important and long-overdue work will be essential reading for anyone concerned with the hidden complexities of African American life. Fortner illuminates the problems that the majority of working- and middle-class blacks face from criminal elements within their communities; the sometimes patronizing indifference of white and black liberals toward them, compounded by the manipulation of their concerns by conservatives; and the tragic, unintended consequences of a flawed drug and penal policy they were driven, out of despair and fury, to support. This is a major contribution to our understanding of the interaction of class, race, and public policy in America. (Orlando Patterson, Harvard University) About the Author Michael Javen Fortner is Assistant Professor and Academic Director of Urban Studies at the CUNY School of Professional Studies, Murphy Institute.