

Imprisonment of women a growing concern, panel says

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A panel of experts on the growing problem of incarceration of women gathered at Tulane University on Wednesday (Nov. 6) for a [discussion](#) moderated by Tulane political science professor and MSNBC host Melissa Harris-Perry.



Panelists discussing the issues of gender and incarceration are, from left, Melissa Harris-Perry, Susan Barton, Deon Haywood, Tina Reynolds and Beth Ritchie. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

A diverse audience gathered in the Lavin-Bernick Center's Kendall Cram Lecture Hall for the presentation, which centered on the theme that nearly all literature related to mass incarceration in the U.S., including Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow*, focuses on the incarceration of men, when it is a very relevant problem for women as well.

The book by Alexander is this year's [Reading Project](#) for first-year Tulane students.

Harris-Perry's first question referenced the intersection of violence, race and gender. Panelist Deon Haywood, executive director of the New Orleans social justice organization Women With a Vision, responded by countering the widespread belief that racial profiling only happens to black and brown men.

She cited several personal stories from her organization to prove that women, particularly members of the LGBTQ community, “have to be conscious of every move they make” due to extreme profiling by police under Louisiana's [Crime Against Nature law](#).

The Crime Against Nature statute criminalizes certain sexual conduct, and has been criticized by social justice activists not only for targeting the LGBTQ and African American communities but also for requiring those convicted to register as sex offenders, which Haywood said contributes to the “cyclical nature of incarceration.”

The panel concluded with a call to action for a “moral shift in which every human being is as valuable as the last” in order to abolish what they described as a system of oppression through mass incarceration.

Also participating in the panel were Tina Reynolds, founder of Women on the Rise Telling Her Story; author Beth Richie, director of the Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy at the University of Illinois at Chicago; and Susan Burton of A New Way of Life Reentry Project.

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