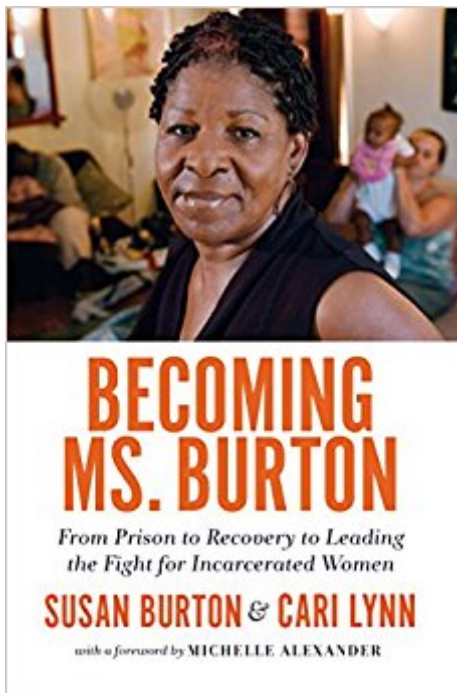




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Becoming Ms. Burton: From Prison To Recovery To Leading The Fight For Incarcerated Women



Synopsis

One woman's remarkable odyssey from tragedy to prison to recovery; and recognition as a leading figure in the national justice reform movement Susan Burton's world changed in an instant when her five-year-old son was killed by a van driving down their street. Consumed by grief and without access to professional help, Susan self-medicated, becoming addicted first to cocaine, then crack. As a resident of South Los Angeles, a black community under siege in the War on Drugs, it was but a matter of time before Susan was arrested. She cycled in and out of prison for over fifteen years; never was she offered therapy or treatment for addiction. On her own, she eventually found a private drug rehabilitation facility. Once clean, Susan dedicated her life to supporting women facing similar struggles. Her organization, A New Way of Life, operates five safe homes in Los Angeles that supply a lifeline to hundreds of formerly incarcerated women and their children—setting them on the track to education and employment rather than returns to prison. Becoming Ms. Burton not only humanizes the deleterious impact of mass incarceration, it also points the way to the kind of structural and policy changes that will offer formerly incarcerated people the possibility of a life of meaning and dignity.

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Customer Reviews

Praise for *Becoming Ms. Burton*: Valuable . . . [like Michelle] Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, Nell Bernstein's *Burning Down the House*, and Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*. But rarely has such a powerful, personal perspective been made

available to us. . . . Our understanding of the criminal justice system is immeasurably strengthened by Susan Burton's fierce, compassionate, and expressive voice."#151;Los Angeles Review of Books "Susan Burton is a national treasure . . . her life story is testimony to the human capacity for resilience and recovery . . . [Becoming Ms. Burton is] a stunning memoir."#151;Nicholas Kristof, in The New York Times "Susan Burton is an angel among us. Her journey is a story of courage, compassion, and conviction. At turns harrowing and inspiring, Becoming Ms. Burton provides a valuable new perspective on the consequences of mass incarceration."#151;Howard Schultz, executive chairman, Starbucks Coffee Company "Susan Burton's life and work are a testament to the power of second chances and the impact one person can have on the lives of others. Her book is a stirring and moving tour-de-force; a beautiful inspiration for all of us to continue to fight for justice."#151;John Legend, actor, singer, and songwriter "More than just a memoir, this account provides an intimate glimpse into the problems that plague the U.S. prison system."#151;Library Journal "Burton has helped thousands of formerly incarcerated and homeless individuals, and now, by telling her story, she continues to advocate for a more humane justice system guided by compassion and dignity."#151;Booklist (starred) "The book documents Burton's tireless efforts to effect change - first helping individual women, released from prison with few resources, to make a new start, and then snowballing advocacy efforts at the state and national level to reshape how the United States treats those with criminal records."#151; Publishers Weekly "A dramatic, honest, moving narrative of how hard life can get and how one can still overcome seemingly insurmountable adversity to do good in the world."#151;Kirkus Reviews "Susan Burton is someone who inspires while she educates. Her powerful and compelling memoir is an unforgettable journey and also an extraordinary light for all who are looking for answers on how we must recover, restore, and redeem those who have been incarcerated. This is a must-read."#151;Bryan Stevenson, executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative and author of Just Mercy "Becoming Ms. Burton eloquently shows why the voices of formerly incarcerated women must be at the center of efforts to reconstruct the criminal legal system. Too often this nation criminalizes the trauma of black women; Susan Burton exposes this terrible truth by sharing her astounding story of redemption. This is critical reading for champions of justice everywhere."#151;Monique W. Morris, author of Pushout "For almost two decades Susan Burton has been a trailblazing advocate for ending mass incarceration, especially as it relates to poor women of color. Becoming Ms. Burton details her remarkable personal transformation as well as the larger structural changes this country must make in order to achieve racial and economic justice. It is essential reading for anyone who cares about these

issues."#151;Daryl V. Atkinson, civil and human rights advocate, lawyer, and member of the Leadership Council of the Formerly Incarcerated Convicted People and Families Movement

"Susan's life story is one our nation desperately needs to hear and understand. This is a story about personal transformation and collective power. It is about one woman's journey to freedom, and in the process helping to free us all."#151;Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow*

Susan Burton is the founder and executive director of A New Way of Life, a nonprofit that provides sober housing and other support to formerly incarcerated women. She is nationally known as an advocate for restoring basic civil and human rights to those who have served time. Burton was a winner of AARP's prestigious Purpose Prize and has been a Starbucks® "Upstander," a CNN Top 10 Hero, a Soros Justice Fellow, and a Women's Policy Institute Fellow at the California Wellness Foundation, and she is the co-author, with Cari Lynn, of *Becoming Ms. Burton* (The New Press). She lives in Los Angeles.

I am so thrilled with this book. Susan Burton's story about her childhood, the death of her son, her descent into addiction, and her emergence as one of the country's leading voices for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people is inspirational, painful, and enlightening. It's a must-read for anyone concerned about women, prisons, poverty, addiction, and sexual abuse -- issues that intersected for the author and intersect for many women who end up in America's jails and prisons.

Nikolas Kristoff recommended this in the *NYTimes*, and no wonder. Gosh, where to start. It's the story of a remarkable woman who overcame sexual abuse as a young girl, drugs, and multiple incarcerations to create an organization called A New Way of Life that helps women leaving prison get their life back together. Even that description doesn't cover the depth of the book. Underlying all of this is a vicious cycle of drugs and prison that is extremely difficult to escape. Somehow Sue Burton managed it. It's a very engaging read. Well written, although the subject matter is tough in places. I gained an understanding of what many young girls are subjected to and from which there is little hope of escaping. I learned of the inequities of the judicial system and the prison system. Sometimes it was mindboggling how unjust politicians were, but fortunately in several cases Mrs. Burton prevailed. She is an astonishing woman. Thank you for opening my eyes.

A remarkable story -- and a book you will never forget. *Becoming Ms. Burton* is an ideal companion

to Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* and every American should read it in order to understand the terrible human cost that the war on drugs and mass incarceration have had on our society -- a cost felt way, way disproportionately by people of color -- and to appreciate the nearly impossible odds people face when they get out of prison after ostensibly having paid their dues. Susan Burton got lucky by getting treatment and help but there are thousands upon thousands like her whose lives have effectively been destroyed. The book is particularly good at describing how children whose parents get caught up in the criminal justice system (often for minor drug offenses for which middle-class white parents would get community service or probation) are treated like criminals themselves and how insanely unfair and inhumane our criminal justice system is. Some of the statistics in the book are really shocking but despite the subject matter, there is nothing dreary about the book: in the first half Burton chronicles her difficult childhood but in the second half the book soars as Burton describes developing an understanding of what happened to her and her family and points the way toward what can be done. It is also a thrilling recovery story that people will find enthralling and inspiring. This is one of the most moving books I have ever read.

A subzero non fiction book that keeps readers engaged and rooting for Sue. Very educational as to so many aspects of our criminal justice system and how broken it is. I

I am in awe of the courage it took for Ms. Burton to write this book. Her story displays all the elements that capture the imagination of those interested in violence, loss, trauma, drug addiction, prison and redemption. However, this is not fiction birthed of an author's imagination; her story is real. It was painful for me to read; my heart was pinched at every loss, yet my soul was moved. Ms. Burton was able to transform trauma and loss into understanding, then movement building to shift societal structures blocking basic human rights and racial equity. Her message has mobilized my consciousness to a greater universal truth - national policies that seem reasonable on paper may play out to the devastation of vulnerable populations living at ground zero. I am paying attention. ~ Claire S. Arceneaux

Terrific true story by and about a courageous African American woman. Tells how one amazing woman overcame the odds of poverty, addiction and tragedy to able to help other woman in similar misfortune. A hero.

Truly inspirational. An amazing woman, an amazing story. This book should be read by everyone

fortunate enough to grow up away from the vicious cycle of poverty/substance abuse/prison. It's not about just "pulling up by your bootstraps" -- sometimes a hand needs to be extended.

Very enlightening, I'd rather read this than watch the sensationalism of OITNB any day. Ms. Burton had tough experiences and is using her life and story to make a difference. Very inspiring.

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