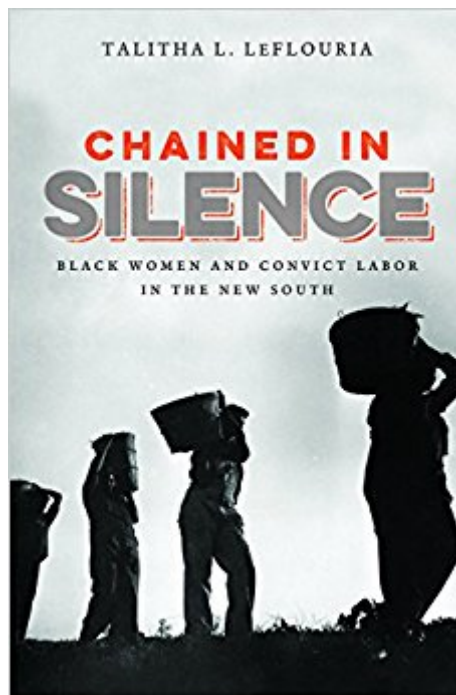




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# Chained In Silence: Black Women And Convict Labor In The New South (Justice, Power, And Politics)



## Synopsis

In 1868, the state of Georgia began to make its rapidly growing population of prisoners available for hire. The resulting convict leasing system ensnared not only men but also African American women, who were forced to labor in camps and factories to make profits for private investors. In this vivid work of history, Talitha L. LeFlouria draws from a rich array of primary sources to piece together the stories of these women, recounting what they endured in Georgia's prison system and what their labor accomplished. LeFlouria argues that African American women's presence within the convict lease and chain-gang systems of Georgia helped to modernize the South by creating a new and dynamic set of skills for black women. At the same time, female inmates struggled to resist physical and sexual exploitation and to preserve their human dignity within a hostile climate of terror. This revealing history redefines the social context of black women's lives and labor in the New South and allows their stories to be told for the first time.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A meticulously researched, and immensely illustrative record of the understudied labor efforts made by thousands of black female convicts in the post-Civil War South.--Punishment and SocietyA much-needed and distinctly gendered perspective on carceral roots of both antiblack racism and resistance to it, a history that can be silenced no longer.--Journal of American HistoryShows how attention to the experiences of incarcerated women--nearly all of them African American--casts new light on a neglected corner of the New South's cruel penal system.--Social HistoryA deeply

researched and carefully crafted mouthpiece for black female convict laborers.--American Historical ReviewLeaves us with a radically new understanding of the historical dimensions of racism, gender, and state violence.--Elizabeth Hinton, *The Nation*Reads as a tour de force--a gripping history that insists on speaking the names and remembering the lives of long-forgotten working-class black women caught up in the violent, exploitative system of convict labor in post-emancipation Georgia. . . . Painstakingly researched, beautifully written, and certain to become a classic in the literature on labor, race and the criminal justice system, as well as black women's history. --Social Service ReviewHighly recommended.--ChoiceAn indispensable reference point.--Journal of Southern HistoryA well-written, accessible, provocative study of black women's lives in Georgia's convict-labor system at the dawn on the New South. . . . Surely one of the best books out on southern women's history in years.--Register of the Kentucky Historical SocietyThis beautifully written book leads its readers on the journey from Emancipation to the devastating convict-leasing system in Georgia. . . . [and] examines the exploitation of black women's bodies, the beginnings of mass incarceration, and the rise of the modern New South.--Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *The Nation*Centers black women's incarceration and more profoundly their forced labor and lives during [Reconstruction] as a way to imagine the possibility of black history in the face of the prison, in the face of history.--Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory

Every page of *Chained in Silence* is a revelation. The author connects the hideous conditions that black female convicts endured with the emergence of white business supremacy and the modernization of the South. LeFlouria skillfully illuminates the ties between gender, racism, and labor exploitation in the making of the New South. This book is destined to play an integral role in contemporary debates on mass incarceration and prison reform.--Paul Ortiz, University of FloridaThis bold, brilliant, beautifully written book--a significant contribution to the fields of prison history, southern history, African American history, and gender studies--shows why charting the struggles in convict women's lives matters for understanding the emergence of modernity in the New South. Talitha L. LeFlouria rejects a recent and popular thesis that convict labor was simply slavery that persisted, while also illuminating how beliefs about race and sex forged in slavery carried on to shape modernity and the prison system.--Mary Ellen Curtin, American University*Chained in Silence* is a pathbreaking addition to the growing body of historical research on black women and the U.S. justice system. Dr. LeFlouria's riveting work powerfully unearths the experiences of Georgia's exploited and often overlooked labor force, namely black female convicts. Through painstaking, exhaustive research, she maps black women as sentient beings (humans who

had lives, loves, triumphs, and sorrows) and as prison laborers brutalized by the vicissitudes of convict leasing. Moreover, by historicizing the evolution of convict leasing and black women's plight therein, LeFlouria ultimately provides a much-needed raced and gendered context for the agro-industrial penal complex operating in parts of the South today.--Kali Gross, University of Texas at Austin

Grandson needed it for college course and found it excellent. He feels it is a "must" read for people studying 19th Century America.

An awesome book with detailed narratives that will capture your heart. Awesome job Talitha.

Everyone should read this amazing account about Black Women

Using a variety of personal narratives, Talitha L. LeFlouria pieces together the stories of incarcerated black women during the mid-1850's. This book is straightforward and easy to follow, and really allows the reader to see the world through the eyes of these women. LeFlouria gives a different perspective on the utility of convict labor and "chain gangs" by arguing that they did at least succeed in teaching concrete skill to inmates, as well as serving to modernize the South. This is a valuable book for everyone to read because it sheds light on a little-examined area of history: the experiences of black women in prisons. The writing style is also more accessible than many history books, making it a good introduction into the topic of African American history.

Talitha L. LeFlouria provides an excellent and honest account of the nature of the post-Emanicipation South, specifically focused on the treatment of black women in the convict labor system. She seeks (and succeeds in doing so) to tell each cruel aspect of black women's experience trapped in the convict labor system, finally giving a voice to these women who have been left unheard for far too long. LeFlouria is honest in both her historical recount, sparing no harsh detail, and in her own research process. She admits places in which very little historical data exists, but makes up for the lack of solid information by providing her own analysis of each situation. LeFlouria told these stories through both wide-scale analyses and data, like the general work black women were expected to do as a part of chain gangs and labor camps, and by telling individual stories of imprisonment, like specific accounts sexual violence women suffered throughout their imprisonment. Her usage of both methods of storytelling kept her book extremely interesting. While

Chained in Silence, like many other books focused on this period of history, is difficult to read at times, it is crucial to understand the true history of the American South, and how horrific prison systems in the past have set the nation up for today's issue of mass incarceration.

I read this book for a college class, in which we explore the different meanings and exhibitions of terror and violence for Black descendants of slaves in the United States, Europe, the Caribbean, and Latin America. This book was a fascinating read, because although I knew some things about the way that chain gangs and convict labor reproduced the violent tactics of slavery for Black men, I did not know and had never even thought about how that would work for Black women. LeFlouria is very thorough in her analysis of female convict labor, describing the factors that lead to Black women's committing crimes, the terror and violence they faced as convicts as they performed different types of physical labor, and their responses to that violence. Throughout the book, LeFlouria gives these women a voice and a sense of agency. She never tries to put words into their mouths. Where information is lacking (like on the mortality of infants born to these female convicts), LeFlouria presents the little information she has and attempts to analyze it, all the while emphasizing that her analysis is hers alone and in the face of more information, could be subject to change. It's not an easy book to read, as these women's lives truly were filled with horror and violence, both at the hands of the convict leasing system and at the hands of the society of post-slavery Georgia. But if you are interested in reading a book that sheds light on the lives of a group of people often forgotten even in narratives of racism and violence in the post-slavery South, Chained in Silence is a must-read.

Via primary sources, this text chronicles the lives and economic contributions made by black women convict laborers in late-19th century Georgia. By taking on race, gender, biological notions of criminality, rehabilitation rhetoric, law, local economics, and the prison industrial complex, the author provides readers with a nuanced perspective on how the state of Georgia deployed formal mechanisms to re-enslave black women in the effort to rebuild a devastated southern economic base. In addition to the contributions made by LeFlouria's impeccably researched exploration, the book's contemporary implications are remarkably fertile and reveal links that highlight the motivations behind a racialized, gendered penal regime and the larger economic pursuits that this agenda seeks to advance. The relevance of this book is particularly pronounced during this current historical moment where women inmate populations continue to swell and the inconspicuous privatization of American corrections affects longstanding impacts on state budgets

and public conscience.

LeFlouria did a fantastic job at shedding light on a subject that is rarely taught in the American public school educational system. *Chained in Silence* shares the individual and personal stories of black women convict laborers within Southern penitentiary systems. The chapters are accessible to a general audience (any jargon is explained and the tone is conversational) yet the information embedded within the chapters is complex, multidimensional, and incredibly important. Through developing a broader historical background and interweaving individual stories, LeFlouria calls attention different forms of convict labor. Within these systems, black women faced physical, sexual, and psychological violence. LeFlouria builds the argument that these systems helped to create modern Southern identity.

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