http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/jailed-s5.jpg 

Monopolized political speech, mass incarceration and voter suppression together pack an enormous discriminatory wallop. Overcoming the new Jim Crow starts with recognizing it and seeing through the false justifications.

ALTOONA, WI - There was a time when efforts to keep people in their place were easily recognizable. Bondage is hard to miss. Women were chattel and blacks were slaves. The nation's royals eventually lost their moral and legal justification for employing such crude and brutal means to keep people down, but not their desire for race, class and gender superiority. So slavery was out, Jim Crow was in. Poll taxes and literacy tests and other such tactics were put to use. Give them rights, but make sure they are not equal rights.

The civil rights legislation of the 1960s and early 1970s ended the old Jim Crow but not the royals' discriminatory impulses. The ink was barely dry on the series of laws addressing race and sex discrimination, and a new Jim Crow was promptly fashioned that makes discrimination more disguised than ever.

The new Jim Crow stands on three legs. First, longstanding restrictions on money in politics were legally challenged. The U.S. Supreme Court's money-equals-speech ruling in 1976 gave the mightiest in America new ways to thwart the will of the masses even while allowing the exercise of largely equal rights. Campaign donations became the drone strikes of the race and class wars. The beauty of political donations as tools of social and economic control is that they don't appear discriminatory because, in theory at least, anyone can make them. But the difference between theory and practice in campaign giving is as distinct as the divisions of race and class. Almost all of the money flowing to elected officials comes from an elite cadre of individuals who are wealthy and white . Control over the levers of power is preserved by making

political expression and participation prohibitively expensive for all but a few.

Monopolizing political speech has been done in the name of protecting the First Amendment. The barely visible hand of organized money has robbed voters in most parts of the state of their ability to control their own political destiny. Long before voters ever cast a ballot, whoever is most successful in attracting money wins what amounts to a wealth primary that weeds out any meaningful competition, leaving the people with a vote but little if any choice. The wealth primary works hand in hand with the practice of gerrymandering political boundaries to strip elections of competitiveness and render them pale imitations of democratic contests.

Having secured the means to keep people down by allowing them to freely vote in elections whose results are preordained, America's royalty nevertheless took no chances. Discriminatory drug policies and the practice of racial profiling by law enforcement authorities and the resulting mass incarceration of African American males became the second key feature of the new Jim Crow. This was largely done in the name of fighting the scourge of drug abuse in America. The War on Drugs has never put much of a dent in drug use, but it has been a remarkably efficient tool of discrimination.

The third leg the new Jim Crow stands on is voter suppression. Since the 2010 election, nearly half of the states made laws restricting the right to vote in one way or another. These laws have been sold as election integrity measures. The public has been repeatedly told such laws are needed to prevent rampant voter fraud. In reality, voter fraud in the U.S. is nearly non-existent. But in Wisconsin and elsewhere in the country, new laws restricting voting in the name of preventing fraud have proven remarkably effective in preventing racial minorities, the poor and the young from casting ballots.

Monopolized political speech, mass incarceration and voter suppression together pack an enormous discriminatory wallop. Overcoming the new Jim Crow starts with recognizing it and calling it what it is, and seeing through the false justifications. Then its legs need to be taken out from under it.

— *Mike McCabe*