

MASS INCARCERATION IN AMERICA

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FORMERLY INCARCERATED WOMEN



IT'S AN AMERICAN ISSUE

- **The United States is the world's leader in incarceration.**
- There are 2.2 million people in the nation's prisons and jails—a 500% increase over the last 40 plus years. Changes in law and policy, not changes in crime rates, explain most of this increase. The results are overcrowding in prisons and fiscal burdens on states, despite increasing evidence that large-scale incarceration is not an effective means of achieving public safety (based on 2015 National Institute of Justice (NIJ) data).



INCARCERATION STATS

- The number of people incarcerated in state and federal prisons increased by 9.7% from 1,391,261 to 1,526,792 between 2000 and 2015. In addition to the nearly 1.5 million people in state and federal prisons, there were 721,300 people in local jails in 2015, yielding a total incarcerated population of 2.2 million. (NIJ)



CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE IN PRISON

93% of people in prison are men and 7 percent are women. 104,968 women were in state or federal prison in 2015. One in 17 black men aged 30-34 was in prison in 2015, as were 1 in 42 Hispanic males and 1 in 91 white males in the same age group.

In 2015, the rate of prison incarceration for black women was double the rate for white women; the rate for Hispanic women was 1.2 times higher than the rate for white women (NIJ)



MANY INCARCERATED PEOPLE ARE NOT VIOLENT

- Nearly half (46%) of people incarcerated in state prisons in 2015 were convicted of nonviolent drug, property or public order crimes (NIJ)



INCARCERATION AND POVERTY

- The findings are as predictable as they are disturbing. The American prison system is bursting at the seams with people who have been shut out of the economy and who had neither a quality education nor access to good jobs. We found that, in 2014 dollars, incarcerated people had a median annual income of \$19,185 prior to their incarceration, which is **41% less than non-incarcerated people of similar ages.**
- The gap in income is not solely the product of the well-documented disproportionate incarceration of Blacks and Hispanics, who generally earn less than Whites. We (statisticians) found that incarcerated people in all gender, race, and ethnicity groups earned substantially less prior to their incarceration than their non-incarcerated counterparts of similar ages.



INCARCERATION AND MENTAL HEALTH

- In state prisons nationwide, females have a higher rate of mental health problems, 73 percent, as compared with 55 percent among males. Only about one-third of those female prisoners receive treatment. Of those with mental illness, 68 percent reported that they had been physically or sexually abused in the past compared to 36 percent among those without mental illness. Of the mentally ill female prisoners, nearly three-quarters met the criteria for substance dependency or abuse and almost 64 percent had used drugs in the month before their arrest.”
- 2015 (Prison Policy Initiative)



MENTAL HEALTH, INCARCERATION, RECIDIVISM

- Within three years of being released, 37 percent of inmates who leave state prisons with mental illnesses are locked up again, compared with 30 percent of those who do not have mental health problems, according to a Department of Correction analysis of 2015 releases. Inmates battling addiction fare worse: About half are convicted of a new crime within three years. And inmates with a “dual diagnosis” of addiction and mental illness...do the worst of all, national studies show.



JAIL AND MENTAL HEALTH

- Cook County houses an average of 9,000 inmates daily, of which 25 percent to 35 percent suffer from mental illness, according to a Cook County data. That number “has grown in recent years as the number of mental health facilities fell, jail officials said.” (2015 Data)



CASH BAIL

- Every year, approximately 626,000 people walk out of *prison* gates, but people go to *jail* 10.6 million times each year. Jail churn is particularly high because most people in jails have not been convicted. Some have just been arrested and will make bail in the next few hours or days, and others are too poor to make bail and must remain behind bars until their trial. Only a small number (150,000 on any given day) have been convicted, generally serving misdemeanors sentences under a year (County Jails Data)



INCARCERATION AND ADDICTION

- We know that almost half a million people are locked up because of a **drug offense**. The data confirms that nonviolent drug convictions are a defining characteristic of the federal prison system, but play only a supporting role at the state and local levels. While most people in state and local facilities are not locked up for drug offenses, most states' continued practice of arresting people for drug possession destabilizes individual lives and communities. Drug arrests give residents of over-policed communities criminal records, which then reduce employment prospects and increase the likelihood of longer sentences for any future offenses.
- 2018 data



EVOLVING RESEARCH AGENDAS

- Presidents and national politicians and their role in signaling the political productivity of crime have been the focus of many of the first studies (Beckett 1997 ; Gottschalk 2006). Later accounts often add a focus on the state level, and the role of governors and legislatures, law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and correctional unions in shaping the legislation that actually authorizes greater numbers of prisoners to be held for longer terms (Simon 2007 ; Lynch 2009b ; Schoenfeld 2010 ; Page 2011). Other accounts have stressed the importance of local actors, especially county-level prosecutors who have seen an unrelenting expansion of their authority over the last several decades (Simon 2007 ; Weiman and Weiss 2009).



FACTORS TO CONSIDER

- The war on drugs, correctional Keynesianism and a correctional industrial complex, a backlash to the victories of the civil rights movement, a response to the increasing sense of moral fragmentation in society, fear of crime, and crisis of legitimacy and trust in government.



MORE FACTORS TO CONSIDER CONCERNING MASS INCARCERATION

- Knowledge and Power in Penal Decision Making
- Right-wing Party Domination and Party Competition
- Proximity of Government to the Reality of Crime
- Prosecutorial Discretion
- Sentencing and Parole
- High Anxiety Societies
- Racialized Threat and Animus
- The Politics of Crime Control



HEALTH CARE PROVIDED “INSIDE”

- Health Care prior to incarceration
- During incarceration
- After incarceration



OPPORTUNITIES FOR INMATE REFORMATION IN PRISONS AND JAILS

- Programing
- Literacy
- Formal Education
- Job Training
- Re-entry classes
- Work



DISCREPANCIES

- Large discrepancy in what is available to prisons and what is available in jails
- Also discrepancies in offerings for incarcerated men versus offerings for incarcerated women



NUTRITION AND EXERCISE IN PRISON

- Uniformity of food service
- Poor quality food
- Lack of exercise opportunities

