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The Challenges of Mass Incarceration in America
Does Locking Up More People Reduce Crime?

CAMBRIDGE, MA – More Americans are serving time in prison or jail than at any point in the nation's history, reflecting an incarceration rate that greatly exceeds those found in other advanced democracies.

The growth of the nation's penal population during the past three decades has produced "a new group of social outcasts, defined by the shared experience of incarceration, crime, poverty, racial minority, and low education," according to Harvard University sociologist Bruce Western.

Bruce Western and Brown University economist Glenn C. Loury are guest editors of the new issue of *Daedalus*, the journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, which examines the social, political, and economic implications of the largely invisible phenomenon of "mass incarceration" in America.

The volume resulted from a multidisciplinary task force of scholars convened by the American Academy in 2008 to examine the unprecedented levels of incarceration in the United States, weighing concerns about crime control, rehabilitation, and more fundamental issues of social justice. Essays in the volume explain the following issues:

> "Incarceration and Social Inequality" by Bruce Western and coauthor Becky Pettit (University of Washington, Seattle) explores the profound effects of the prison boom on social and economic inequality in America. The essay documents how the negative effects of time behind bars are cumulative and intergenerational. Mass incarceration, the authors suggest, exacerbates the social problems the prison system is designed to control.
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> "Crime, Inequality and Social Justice" by Glenn C. Loury examines the tenuous relationship between crime and incarceration. "For two generations crime rates have fluctuated with no apparent relationship to a steady climb in the extent of imprisonment," Loury observes. He argues that for the hundreds of thousands of ex-offenders released each year, "time behind bars will have *diminished*, not enhanced, their odds of living crime-free lives."
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> "Toward Fewer Prisoners and Less Crime" by Mark A.R. Kleiman (University of California, Los Angeles) explores a new model of "outpatient incarceration," a tightly monitored supervision system for parolees that could promote public safety and improve the prospects of offenders.

"The Dangers of Pyrrhic Victories Against Mass Incarceration" by Robert Weisberg and Joan Petersilia (both of Stanford University) suggests that the policy debate may benefit from a redefinition of terms: "Rather than speaking of mass incarceration, we should…focus on curtailing *unnecessary* incarceration." Reducing prison populations will require a significant investment in effective reentry programs, they argue, cautioning that if such programs are not well designed and carefully implemented, reforms may backfire and lead to new waves of imprisonment.

"The Contradictions of Juvenile Crime and Punishment" by Jeffrey Fagan (Columbia University) contrasts society's fear of child criminals and its desire to punish them harshly with the nation's "transcendent philosophy of child saving." He explains how incarceration at a young age increases the risk of future imprisonment, and diminishes for young males the chances of marriage, employment, and social stability over a lifetime.

"Punishment's Place: The Local Concentration of Mass Incarceration" by Robert J. Sampson and Charles Loeffler (both of Harvard University) examines how the geographic concentration of incarceration produces a negative feedback loop that has destabilizing effects on poor urban neighborhoods.

Additional authors in the volume include:

Marie Gottschalk (University of Pennsylvania) on "Cell Blocks and Red Ink: Mass Incarceration, the Financial Crisis, and Penal Reform."

Candace Kruttschnitt (University of Toronto) on "The Paradox of Women's Imprisonment."

Nicola Lacey (London School of Economics) on "American Imprisonment in Comparative Perspective."

Jonathan Simon (University of California, Berkeley) on "Clearing the 'Troubled Assets' of America's Punishment Bubble."

Loïc Wacquant (University of California, Berkeley; Centre de Sociologie Européenne, Paris) on "Class, Race, and Hyperincarceration in Revanchist America."

"The authors in this volume have contributed valuable scholarly research that can help inform corrections and criminal justice policy at the state and federal levels," said Leslie Berlowitz, Chief Executive Officer of the American Academy. "Building on a long tradition of Academy work on social policy, these experts provide critical analysis and pragmatic approaches for addressing what may be the most important civil rights issue of our time."

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