

THE UNINTENDED  
CONSEQUENCES  
OF INCARCERATION

Papers from a conference organized  
by the Vera Institute of Justice

January 1996

## Foreword

As a country, we are locking up more adults and juveniles than ever before. In 1980, state and federal prison populations combined totaled under 400,000; one in every 453 U.S. residents was incarcerated at the end of that year. By the end of 1993, that figure had increased to one in every 189 U.S. residents, and in 1994, the number of inmates in state and federal prisons had grown to over one million people.<sup>1</sup> In addition, on any given day in 1993, more than 93,000 juveniles were living in public and private juvenile correctional facilities.<sup>2</sup>

Every public policy creates winners and losers—intended and unintended. In this case, the general public is supposed to win; the criminals are supposed to lose. But what about the unintended consequences for the communities from which large numbers of inmates are removed, and to which they return? In what ways are the residents of these communities losers in this process?

Debates about our increased use of incarceration have focused principally on its value in reducing crime rates. These discussions have, by and large, ignored the ways in which our heavy use of incarceration affects individuals, families, and communities across prison walls. Far larger numbers of people have a grounded knowledge of prison experience today than even 15 years ago. Also, the imprisoned are coming from and returning to low-income communities that are beset with other problems. For example, 80 percent of Rikers Island inmates come from and return to just seven New York City communities.<sup>3</sup> Given that the prison experience is becoming more normalized and concentrated in certain communities, it is highly likely that the effects of incarceration extend well beyond the individuals who are incarcerated.

The following working papers were commissioned by the Vera Institute of Justice in conjunction with a residential conference entitled "The Unintended Consequences of Incarceration" held at Arden House in Harriman, New York in June 1995. A list of conference participants is included at back of this volume.

The purpose of the conference was to initiate a conversation between social science researchers, private sector funders, justice system administrators, and legislators on how increasing rates of incarceration may affect individuals—especially children and youth,

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<sup>1</sup> The preceding information on the growth in U.S. prison populations comes from Allen J. Beck and Darrell K. Gilliard, *Prisoners in 1994*, a Bureau of Justice Statistics bulletin, August 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

<sup>3</sup> "Ex-Inmates Urge Return to Areas of Crime to Help," the *New York Times*, December 23, 1992. This statistic has been highly publicized by the Fortune Society, a New York City nonprofit organization for ex-offenders. See also Lola Odubekun, *The Vera Institute Atlas of Crime and Justice in New York City* (New York: the Vera Institute of Justice, 1993), 42.

families, and communities. In each case, the authors review the literature on the subject, raise compelling questions that move the debate in new directions, and propose ambitious research projects. It is our hope that the conference and this volume will encourage further exploration and investment in understanding the far-reaching consequences of America's incarceration policies.

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## Backfire: When Incarceration Increases Crime

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*This paper examines various ways in which prison may have inadvertently affected crime rates. The question is important because, even though levels of imprisonment increased fivefold since 1973, crime rates have not dropped proportionately during this period. I argue that the crime-reducing aspects of imprisonment are considerably negated by the crime-enhancing ones.*

*The paper focuses on three crime-enhancing effects of imprisonment. First, replacement of co-offenders may account for the failure of prisons to reduce crime. Replacement also results in an earlier and more sustained recruitment of young people into criminal careers. Second, as more people acquire a grounded knowledge of prison life, the power of prison to deter crime through fear of the unknown is diminished. Extensive reality-based experience of prisons in certain communities exponentially increases the significance of this problem. Finally, social factors known to contribute to criminality such as broken families, inequality, and social disorder increase with high rates of imprisonment, especially in certain communities.*

### Introduction

In the popular point of view, prisons are thought of as crime fighting-devices: Exposing offenders to prison reduces crime. This viewpoint began governing penal policy in the early 1970s; since then, we have increased the size of our prison population fivefold.

However, the expansion of the penal system has not been accompanied by an equivalent decrease in crime. The failure of this extraordinary increase in incarceration to produce a meaningful reduction in crime needs explanation. The purpose of this paper is to argue that the common view of the prison is simplistic because it fails to account for the unintended consequences of imprisonment. These unforeseen effects are subtle and, in some ways, modest, but over time they combine to counteract the positive effects of prison. A broader, more complete understanding of the effects of incarceration would enable us to understand the limits of using prison as a crime-prevention strategy.

The debate about incarceration policy has been dominated by an atomistic view of crime—that individuals who engage in crime are influenced by personal motivations, independent of the contexts in which they live. The sole exception to this view is that the

threat of incarceration prevents people from carrying out their illicit desires. Consequently, decisions to engage in crime are seen as products of the likelihood and degree of punishment if caught, and little else.

An alternative view of criminal behavior employs a more holistic perception of the potential offender—as a person who lives in places, interacts with fellow citizens, and responds to various life circumstances with choices based on a grounded understanding of the consequences of those choices. The use of prison might affect all of these contextual elements: the places people live, the social interactions occurring there, the choices people have available to them, and their understanding of those choices.

#### The Atomistic Model: Crime as a Phenomenon of Individuals

Throughout this century, conversation about crime policy has been dominated by the idea that individual offenders require reform or rehabilitation. The belief now in vogue is that they require control.<sup>1</sup> Of course, these approaches differ in several important respects, but they share a common analytic foundation: Crime and its control are best understood in regard to the thoughts and emotions of specific individuals who commit crimes or want to commit crimes.

These views might all be termed "atomistic"<sup>2</sup> because offenders are seen as individual actors who behave largely in isolation from their environments. Therefore, rehabilitation models have always treated the offender as the unit of analysis, to be diagnosed or classified for correctional interventions based on his or her individual characteristics. Similarly, the groundbreaking criminal career model (Blumstein, Cohen, Roth and Visher, 1986) describes the offender's life as though it were a self-contained system, bounded by age of onset, duration, rates of behavior, and dates of desistance.<sup>3</sup> The tendency to view crime as a phenomenon defined by wayward individuals and their desires is not only ingrained in penology, it is reinforced in public consciousness by the popular media's focus on individual criminal events as news stories.

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief period in the 1970s, a "reintegrative" ideal, which took into account not only offenders but the communities in which they lived, was prominently debated (O'Leary and Duffee, 1971). The ascendance of the theory of reintegration was short-lived.

<sup>2</sup> According to Webster's, an "atomistic" view is one which sees a phenomenon as being "made up of a number of unrelated elements"; the faith in "atomism" is the belief in a "theory that the Universe is made up of tiny, simple, indivisible particles that cannot be destroyed."

<sup>3</sup> Both the rehabilitation and control models consider the affects of various individual characteristics, but both focus on understanding individual offenders as the key to knowing about crime at large.

The dominant viewpoint is atomistic in another sense: Incarcerating specific offenders is considered to be a self-contained process—affecting that offender and almost nobody else. The walls of the prison stand symbolically as a black box into which citizens disappear for a time and later emerge, changed or not. The number of black boxes in existence and the frequency of experiences within them are therefore important only for the individuals who go through the process. This perspective ignores the potential impact of incarceration upon families, communities, economics, and politics.<sup>4</sup>

A full-scale review of the individualistic model is not necessary here (see Hudson, 1987), except to say that the flow of ideas about criminals led, in the 1970s, to speculations about the nature and impact of the individual criminal career. The initial development of the individual criminal career paradigm (Shinnar and Shinnar, 1975) was broadly coterminous with the growing use of imprisonment, which started its upward trend in 1973 (Clear, 1994). The notion that criminal careers could be controlled through incapacitation surely contributed to the acceptability of the unprecedented growth in prison populations.

The Central Quandary: Punishment and the Criminal Career Model

A profound penological paradox of the twentieth century is this: Between 1973 and 1995, prison populations quintupled in size and incarceration rates quadrupled, yet crime rates have remained high.

**Crime rates.** There is disagreement about what exactly has happened to crime rates over the last 25 years. According to the Uniform Crime Reports compiled by the FBI, index crime is up about one-third since 1970. FBI data show that between 1970 and 1980, there were two periods of steep increases, bounded by short periods of slight decline. A period of gradual decline in the first half of the 1980s was followed by a longer gradual increase in crime. After 1991, FBI data demonstrate another period of declining crime.

By contrast, the National Crime Victimization Survey, which gathers reports of crime from a sample of citizens, reported stable victimization rates for violent crimes since 1973. Property crime was seen to be stable during the 1970s, but dropped by about one-third in the 1980s.

Depending on how one does the counting, crime has either gone up, stayed stable, or declined during the period of booming prison populations. Thus, firm conclusions are difficult to reach. Many criminologists believe that the drop in property crime shown in the NCVS

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<sup>4</sup> There is an important, and ironic, exception to this general rule: From the atomistic point of view, deterrence means that when the state punishes person X, other persons are unaffected by that punishment in every way except in calculations of the desirability of engaging in crime.



data is due to the three forces: The decline in the number of citizens in crime-prone age groups (Steffensmeier and Harer, 1991), increased use of crime prevention devices in homes (Felson, 1995), and the replacement of property crime by more lucrative drug trade (Blumstein, 1993). Despite what is not yet known, it must be conceded that more than twenty years of prison growth have not been accompanied by a consistent, complementary drop in crime.

How could this happen? If crime is a result of the aggregate actions of a large number of active criminals, then locking up more of them should reduce crime; locking up a lot more of them should reduce crime dramatically.

Numerous researchers have advanced this argument. A lengthy review of these studies is not needed,<sup>5</sup> but a description of a few of them is instructive. Petersilia, Greenwood, and Lavin's (1977) study of the self-reported criminal histories of serious felons led them to conclude that the average offender committed more than 200 crimes per year. Greenwood (1982) estimates that an incapacitation policy could reduce robbery rates in California by up to 20 percent. Zedlewski's (1987) analysis of imprisonment indicates that locking up more offenders would not only reduce crime but would save money as well. DiIulio and Piehl (1991) argue similarly that active offenders commit so many crimes that, on balance, imprisonment pays for itself in cost savings.

These studies illustrate the atomistic tradition of modeling crime. Each assumes that an individual's propensity for criminal behavior is detached from any social context, such as politics or the economy, and is merely a function of the possible or likely punishment.

The external validity of this approach is easily tested. As Zimring and Hawkins (1991) point out, if these models are sound, then the stupendous growth in prison populations since the 1970s should have reduced crime so much that today we would have a negative crime rate. Since a negative crime rate is obviously impossible, it follows that something is wrong with the atomistic models.

**The crime-age curve.** A central problem with the incapacitation paradigm is the fact that crime is largely a youthful act, especially of male adolescents (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990), and prison is reserved for adult men in their 20s and 30s.<sup>6</sup> Proponents of incarceration respond in two ways: This fact justifies using incarceration earlier in an offender's career, and older

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<sup>5</sup> Zimring and Hawkins (1995) have provided an excellent review of the literature in support of the incapacitative ideal.

<sup>6</sup> In the United States, the peak arrest age is mid to late teens, whereas the peak age for entering confinement is early to mid 20s.

criminals are the high-rate offenders, who would be committing a large number of crimes if they were free. Each argument deserves exploration.

**Earlier incarceration.** There are two problems with incarcerating youthful offenders. First, it is exceedingly difficult to target those who will become persistent offenders (Monahan, 1981; Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1986). While arrest rates are high for late-adolescent males, their desistance rates are also high. This means that a broad policy of incarceration for youthful offenders will inevitably incarcerate a large number of offenders who, without imprisonment, would quickly outgrow criminal behavior patterns.

The second problem is that incarcerating low-risk youth would probably have detrimental effects. Exposing young males to the threats and indignities of prison may make it less likely for them to outgrow their criminal behavior at the usual pace. Indeed, Golub's (1990) research suggests that normal patterns of desistance from crime are interrupted and perhaps delayed by typical terms of incarceration. If this is true, the acceleration of criminal careers caused by imprisonment would wash out at least some of the crime-prevention effects of prison.

**High-rate offenders.** One of the most consistent findings in criminological literature is that a small percentage of offenders commit the greatest percentage of crime. When we hear the common litany that 7 percent of offenders commit 70 percent of the crimes, it reflects patterns that are well established by research (Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin, 1972; Farrington, 1986; Greenwood, 1987) and generates what might be called a 7-70 theory of the prison.<sup>7</sup> By the time offenders reach prison, they have passed a series of examinations by the justice system, meaning that they are probably the worst of the bad—high-rate, serious offenders. Thus, locking them up prevents disproportionately more crime.

However, policies of incarceration growth are not arguments in favor of incarceration instead of its absence; they are arguments for more incarceration than at present—either incarcerating a higher proportion of offenders than we do now, or locking the current ones up for a longer period of time, or both. If the former strategy—lock more people up—is chosen, increasingly prison will be used for lower-rate offenders because, according to the argument, the higher-rate offenders are already being apprehended and imprisoned. The

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that some commentators have thought the "7-70 rule" refers only to active offenders, meaning that 7 percent of criminals commit 70 percent of all crime. This is not the case. Dr. Marvin Wolfgang's studies found that 7 percent of boys born in Philadelphia in 1958 were responsible for 70 percent of the crimes committed by the entire group.

latter tactic implies that people will be incarcerated into their years of natural desistence from crime.<sup>8</sup>

We already lock up a million offenders. Do we have all the wrong ones? Since 1973, we have increased the prison population by 800,000 offenders. When we remove active offenders from society, crime rates do not drop nearly as much as we would expect. This suggests that street criminals are being replaced, that increases in imprisonment lead to increases in crime, or some combination of the two.

#### Replacement

Albert Reiss (1988) was the first scholar to consider how replacement of criminals may affect crime rates during periods of high incarceration. He coined the term co-offending to refer to the fact that a large percentage of crime is committed by offenders behaving in groups. This is particularly characteristic of drug crimes and violent street crimes, such as robbery. The question is the degree to which the apprehension and incarceration of one member of a co-offending group ends the criminality of the group or merely causes the group to recruit a new member. A related question is the degree to which the recruitment process enlists persons who otherwise would not have been involved in criminal behavior.<sup>9</sup>

Ekland-Olson, et al. (1993) have used the term vacancy-chains to refer to the process by which replacement may cancel out the crime-prevention benefits of incapacitation. This is particularly pertinent to drug markets. The incarceration of drug offenders, in the face of a stable demand for drugs, creates job openings in the drug delivery enterprise and allows for an ever-broadening recruitment of citizens into the illegal trade. This has led to speculation that policing and incarcerating drug offenders results in greater involvement of younger males as workers in the drug market. Replacement theories are especially applicable to street gangs. When one or two gang members is arrested, the criminality of the remaining gang members is unaffected. Gang researchers find that up to a certain threshold, arrests do not have much impact on gang criminality.

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<sup>8</sup> It may be argued, as some have done (DiIulio and Piehl, 1991; Zedlewski, 1987) that even though the crime prevention benefits diminish with expanded prison growth, they still remain substantial. This claim is based on accepting that current policies are, in fact, as beneficial as some have asserted. I will consider this question in more detail later in this paper. My point here is that even if current claims are reasonable—and I do not agree that they are—it does not follow that expanding the current policy of high rates of imprisonment will produce proportionately greater benefits in crime reduction.

<sup>9</sup> The recruitment of a replacement offender can be a double loss for crime control. Not only do the crimes continue unabated, but a novice who might never have entered the criminal lifestyle (or who would have been delayed entry) is exposed to patterns of offending, and educated as an offender.

In the end, however, replacement cannot fully explain the imperviousness of crime to increases in imprisonment. The stability of crime rates at high levels despite vast increases in the use of the prison is simply too profound to be a product of a single social process.

This fact has led some to speculate that prison itself has criminogenic properties. On the surface, the idea that the use of incarceration exacerbates crime seems implausible. Americans are so accustomed to thinking of prison as a last-ditch means of controlling crime, the proposal that it may increase crime strikes us as almost absurd.

Yet there is a powerful sociological tradition supporting this type of inquiry. Critical social theorists such as Michel Foucault (1977) have argued that prison invented delinquency, in the sense that the intellectual language underlying the concept of the individual criminal was one of the products of the formation of the prison. Foucault went on to explain that prison needs to fail in its task of controlling criminality if it is to survive as a prominent social function.<sup>10</sup>

One need not adopt Foucault's perspective, though, to confront the paradox of the prison. A growing interest among sociologists in reflexive analysis (Bourdieu, 1992) provides a platform for thinking about the social location of the prison and its growth. This analytical point of view situates prison within human experience and within social life in the United States. One therefore expects prison to have various effects on individuals inside and outside its walls, and that these effects change the way people on the outside understand the social significance of prison. In short, one sees prison as influencing groups other than prisoners. Perhaps these effects are contextual constraints on prison as a crime control device.

The advantage of this framework is that it avoids the errors of atomistic thinking. Prisons and the citizens housed there are no longer seen as isolated from other aspects of society. Therefore, dramatic changes in the extent of imprisonment, which occurred in the United States in the last 25 years, can be interpreted both as a product of shifting social forces and as a provocation of social change.

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<sup>10</sup> Non-Marxist analysis has also allowed social scientists to take critical account of social institutions. Interactionists such as Mauss (1975) and Erikson (1966) describe social problems such as crime in functional terms, and in so doing borrow heavily from the Durkheimian tradition of analyzing the social functions of deviance.

Prison use can affect crime directly, by influencing current prisoners and potential offenders, or indirectly, by altering the structures and functions that in turn affect such individuals. And while some effects will be positive, others will be negative. Indeed prisons are complex in their impacts; some benefits are canceled out by other deficits.

Most research on prison focuses on the direct ways that incarceration reduces crime; this work is mostly contained within the tradition of crime control studies. (Zimring and Hawkins, 1995; Farrington, Langan, and Wikstrom, 1994). It is fair to say that for some offenders, the prison experience almost certainly deters future criminal behavior.

However, the important consideration is the extent of the direct crime-prevention effects of imprisonment. There is considerable debate on this issue. Prison enthusiasts have argued for average incapacitation effects that are substantial. For instance, Shinnar and Shinnar (1975) propose that an increased use of incarceration would produce a 20 percent reduction in crime in New York. Zedlewski (1987) asserts that for each newly imprisoned offender, 187 crimes are averted each year. DiIulio and Piehl estimate that as many as 100 crimes are avoided for each additional year of imprisonment. We have already seen the limited external validity of these estimates. The flaws in these studies have to do with their failure to account for replacement and their use of mathematical averages rather than medians in determining offending rates.<sup>11</sup>

Researchers who have tried to account for replacement and for overestimates of crime rates among imprisoned populations arrive at much more modest crime-prevention estimates. Cohen and Canelo-Cacho (1994) estimate that the reduction in violent crime due to increases in imprisonment of violent offenders since 1975 has been no more than 10 percent. Spelman (1994), who reanalyzed the original RAND data and methods used by Zedlewski and DiIulio, indicates that current incarceration rates avert perhaps no more than 8 percent of crimes. Both studies estimate that further increases in the use of imprisonment would yield diminishing returns.

The complexity of the modeling appears to influence the results. Those studies which make more complicated calculations and factor in more contingencies consistently estimate lesser effects, overall. That is, the more simplistic the study, the more optimistic its claims.

Unfortunately, few research studies have considered the way that prison use might indirectly reduce crime. Studies on indirect effects might posit a socialization effect, so that when offenders are removed from the streets, the people who remain become less likely to commit offenses. In a parallel situation, it is plausible that removing a child abuser from the home decreases the criminogenic consequences of the abuse experiences (Widom, 1994).

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<sup>11</sup> By using averages, the estimates assume that the extremely high-rate offenders are as frequent among active offenders in the general population as they are in samples of imprisoned offenders. This is not a plausible assumption.

There are other indirect ways imprisonment could reduce crime. For example, if citizens feel safer because prison populations are larger, they might be more likely to walk the streets; their presence as guardians would then reduce crime (Felson, 1994).

The remainder of this paper is devoted to an analysis of the ways in which prison use might increase crime, either directly or indirectly. Few studies have considered this question, and so the discussion proceeds largely by conjecture.

#### The Prison as Directly Self-Defeating

In theory, prison suppresses crime because prison is an authentically unpleasant and stigmatizing experience that people seek to avoid. These effects are dependent on images of prison—how people understand the prison experience personally and socially. People think of imprisonment and imagine what it would be like to be there, what it would mean to have a record. These images inform the person's view of the pain and stigma that would result from being imprisoned.

There are two ways people form impressions of a social experience such as prison—personal experience and secondhand knowledge. If the nature of these two sources were to change, perhaps the images and, consequently, their impacts would also change.

It is certainly the case that public debate projects a changed view of prison's unpleasantness. A national movement to strip prisons of television sets and weightlifting privileges is motivated by what appears to be a conviction that prisons are simply not tough enough. The belief that prison time is easy compared to life on the streets is widely shared. It has been voiced by politicians such as Governor William Weld and Senator Phil Gramm, researcher Joan Petersilia (1990), and even civil rights advocate Jesse Jackson. While each commentator would suggest a different course of action in response to this observation, it is interesting nonetheless that they agree our prisons are "not so bad."<sup>12</sup>

This is an important issue because, if peoples' images of the prison are less severe, then the associated desire to avoid the experience can be expected to diminish. Where did the remarkable idea that our prisons are places of comfort originate?

There are several sources. Two decades of prisoner rights litigation created a public belief that prisoners can effectively resist arbitrary or brutal treatment. New prisons do not resemble menacing, dungeon-like structures with unscaleable walls; instead, they are attractive brick edifices surrounded by fences. Popular media portrayals of prison life may also contribute to a growing public conviction that prisons are not harsh.

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<sup>12</sup> Weld and Gramm would clearly prefer an increase in penal severity while Petersilia and Jackson surely would not agree. In using the phrase "not so bad," I want to emphasize that it is a perception of reality reported here, not actual experience.

But there is another possibility: The increased use of prison over the last 20 years may have reduced the negative view of prison. The more often the sanction of imprisonment is employed, the less it deters.

It is plausible that deterrence is linked to mystery. People imagine a harsh and forbidding environment in which brutal and victimizing experience is commonplace. They also imagine the shame and humiliation that follows others learning of their prison history. These are vivid images, but the reality of prison experience, more widely distributed among the populace, may soften this mental portrait.

James Finkenauer's (1982) study of Rahway Prison's "Scared Straight" program illustrates this idea. The program involved sending first-time juvenile offenders to meet with a group of lifers, who would regale them with terrifying stories about prison and threatening behavior about "what I am gonna do to you if you end up here." The theory behind the program was that these juveniles, dabbling in delinquency, would be so frightened by the crusty lifers' tales that they would be "scared straight"—frightened into obedience with the law in order to avert the inevitably horrifying prison experience.

Finckenauer found that the kids who went through the program actually did worse than a comparison group not exposed to the program. The kids in his study were exposed to the most hostile version of prison life imaginable, and yet far from being scared straight, they were likely to keep offending. Several explanations of this finding are possible, but the most obvious is that exposure to the brutalizing nature of prison normalizes the experience and provides images of survival to replace pre-existing images of doom. The youth now have a grounded experience of prison at its most brutal, and of tough men not only surviving the experience but thriving within it. Finally, that the youth themselves survived their prison experience diminishes the mystery of prison life. Popular American images of the prison were dominated by the "big house" myth and Edward G. Robinson tough-guy characters. Real-life experience replaces popular ideation with grounded reality.

In 1973, when there were only 200,000 prisoners nationwide, true-life prison images were comparatively rare. Today, with a million prisoners, far larger numbers of people have real-life knowledge of the prison experience. In counting the grounded knowledgeable, it is important to go beyond those incarcerated, as the "scared straight" story illustrates. The real-life experience of each prisoner grounds an understanding of the prison for each parent, child, and loved-one known to that prisoner. If each prisoner's personal experience reaches ten others, then the 1973 prison population reflected two million knowledgeable consumers on any given day, while today's figures indicate ten million.

Of course, this growth in grounded understanding of prison is concentrated in certain communities. It has been estimated that 80 percent of all Rikers Island inmates come from seven neighborhoods in New York City (The Fortune Society, 1992).<sup>13</sup> The children, mothers, brothers, and sisters of prisoners in these neighborhoods are some of the nation's most well-informed consumers of the "scared straight" prison lecture. They know that men who go to prison eventually come out and begin their lives again. They know and can repeat the stories of prison technique—what to do in prison in order to survive the experience. They know that the people in prison include some brutal and repulsive types as well as people like their father or brother. Instead of a dark fear of prison, they have a grounded image of what day-to-day life there entails. This is almost certainly not a pleasant image, but it is reality-based. They have an expectation of survival of the physical and emotional aspects of prison life.<sup>14</sup>

Just as the fear of physical deprivation may be lessened by knowledge, so is the prison's stigmatizing capacity. If nearly everyone has a brother, father, or uncle who has gone to prison, the mortification one feels at the experience is less powerful. The implications of this fact are ominous once the differential influence of the penal system is recognized: Some estimate that one in three of all African-American males aged 20 to 29 are currently under control of the criminal justice system (Mauer, 1995). In general, negative reinforcement, used frequently, loses some of its sting. The more prison is used, the more real are the images people have of prison. As these images are normalized, their mythological potency is diminished and so is the prison's power to deter criminal behavior.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Rikers Island is a large correctional facility serving New York City.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to emphasize that normalization of prison life is only one of the emotional responses people will have to knowing someone who is incarcerated. The reactions to an incarcerated loved one are likely to include anger at the system, personal shame, loving support, and rejection.

<sup>15</sup> At first blush, this point seems to directly contradict the reliance of deterrence theory on certainty of punishment, but I think that is a wrong interpretation. The deterrence argument is based on the perceived certainty of a punishment given an offense. My comments have to do with the perceived onerousness of



Some who have commented that today's prison life is "not so bad" have in turn argued for making the conditions more brutal. If my analysis is correct, they are fighting a losing battle. It is not the actual brutality of prison life that deters, it is imagining the prison experience. No matter how brutal—and today's prisons can be undeniably cruel places—the widespread use of prison will continue to create growing numbers of informed consumers who know people who have survived and count them among friends and family.

#### Indirect Ways in Which the Prison May Increase Crime

Outside an atomistic perspective, we can question whether the expanded use of incarceration may exacerbate the social conditions of crime, thus contributing indirectly to increases in crime. Broadly, three sets of social forces may be negatively affected by prison: families and children, neighborhood order, and social inequality.

**Families and children.** It is well established that family dissolution can adversely affect children. Therefore, the incarceration of a parent will predict child difficulties. The few studies of this phenomenon document the theoretical and practical significance of the problem (see, for example, Gabel, 1992; Koban, 1993; Lowstein, 1986) and the fact that it differentially affects families of color (King, 1993).

The effects of incarceration on children and families are emotional and material. Material effects include problems that result from the loss of child care and financial support. In the process of responding to the disruption, secondary changes may also occur such as address or school changes, changes in the composition of the family unit, and reductions in financial security.

The emotional consequences are less obvious but potentially more significant. Depending on the age of the child, removal of a parent to prison may promote acting out, especially in school. Children may feel shame, humiliation, and a loss of social status. They may come to distrust or even despise the symbols of authority (laws and the state) that have removed their parent. The chances of new parenting combinations increase, and this may mean more inconsistent or fractious relationships and disciplinary practices with children.

Some might argue that removing a criminal parent likely removes an abusive or abusing influence from the home. The net gain of removing such a parent may outweigh the net loss, but it may not. Nevertheless, a child will respond in a variety of ways, some of which are negative. Specifically, the future criminality by children of incarcerated parents is worth exploring. Certainly, poor school performance, unsupervised free time, financial strain,

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the punishment, considering that personal experience with the punishment, which can vary quite independently (or inversely) with the perception of certainty.

decreased contact with adults, and suppressed anger are precursors of delinquency (Wright and Wright, 1995).

**Neighborhood order.** Felson (1994) has repeatedly pointed to the link between capable guardians and delinquency prevention. A number of variables influence the availability of capable guardians, including: the availability of people, especially adults; the degree of social interaction in public settings; and the size and nature of housing. These are some of the factors referred to as "social capital" (Wilson, 1978, 1987).

Expanded use of the prison negatively influences the availability of guardians and the level of social capital. Incarceration removes persons who could provide surveillance value in neighborhoods. And fewer adults means less social interaction. The entry and exit of adults from families means that the economic circumstances of those families change—this in turn promotes relocation, which creates transitory populations and often less integrated neighborhoods.

The neighborhoods from which people (especially young men) are removed to prison are the places they return upon their release from prison. These ex-offenders are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed, adding to the local unemployment rate and the chronic difficulties exconvicts face in finding and retaining work. In short, the more the prison system grows, the more it contributes to the decay of neighborhoods outside its walls—inner-city locations already struggling with the strains of economic and social disorder.

**Economic inequality.** America is a nation in which the distance between the wealthy and the poor has been rapidly increasing for nearly 20 years<sup>16</sup> (Bradsher, 1995). The role of inequality in crime is well-established (Braithwaite, 1979), as is its role in punishment (Box, 1987). Expanding the prison system aggravates socioeconomic inequalities in two main ways: Imprisonment narrows the life-chances of persons exposed to it and indirectly results in shifts of economic resources from urban settings to other locations.

It is well-known that imprisonment damages employment possibilities, though the degree of damage is disputed. Studying arrests, Freeman (1992) found large and lasting reductions in earning potential; Grogger (forthcoming) on the other hand, found moderate, short-lived effects. Hagan (1993) argues that the relationship between crime and unemployment is embedded in elements of the larger social structure. He suggests that the impact of a prison sentence on a person's earning power has to be understood in terms of the way it situates the former prisoner in economic and social networks. Crutchfield (1995) has found that the

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<sup>16</sup> According to a study by economist Edward N. Wolff, "We are the most unequal industrialized country in terms of income and wealth, and we are growing more unequal faster than any of the other industrialized countries." (Bradsher, 1995)

greater involvement of minorities in marginal employment makes them more susceptible to criminal behavior and more subject to the damage that occurs from fluctuations in labor markets. Whatever the perspective, the fact remains that once a person has been imprisoned, that person's economic potential is, on average, diminished.

These effects of incarceration are probably small compared to the economic relocation of resources. Each prisoner represents an economic asset that has been removed from that community and placed elsewhere. As an economic being, the person would spend money at or near his or her area of residence—typically, an inner city. Imprisonment displaces that economic activity: Instead of buying cigarettes and snacks in a local deli, the prisoner makes those purchases in a prison commissary.

The removal of the prisoner may represent a moderate loss of economic value to the home community, but it is a boon to the prison community. Each prisoner represents as much as \$25,000 in income for the community in which the prison is located (McDonald, 1989), not to mention the value of constructing the prison facility in the first place. This can be a massive transfer of value: A young male worth a few thousand dollars of support to children and local purchases is transformed into a \$25,000 financial asset to a rural prison community. The economy of the rural community is artificially amplified, the local city economy artificially deflated.

Of course, there are other ways that the prison may increase relative disadvantage. Financial loss suffered by children and partners of the imprisoned, long-term damage caused by interruptions in the normal life cycles of these families, and effects on the social status of ex-convicts also contribute to a legacy of economic inequality. The fact that prison experiences are concentrated in a handful of neighborhoods targets those places as especially harmed by the expanded use of incarceration. Thus, it is not surprising to discover that the place a person goes to when released from prison is a good predictor of the likelihood that the person will remain arrest free (Gottfredson and Taylor, 1986).

Prospectus for a Research Agenda

This analysis has raised questions about the ability to reduce crime merely by increasing our use of imprisonment. The argument has two general thrusts: first, the nature of crime poses structural limits to the crime prevention effects of prison; second, as imprisonment is used more widely, it begins to backfire by directly and indirectly enhancing the forces that promote criminal behavior. Each of these two themes deserves research inquiry.

**The structural limits of incarceration.** Although replacement and the age-crime curve have received considerable attention from researchers as ways of modeling criminal behavior, less attention has been paid to how these effects can illuminate the limits of incapacitation. Spelman (1994) has shown how important these dynamics are for estimating incapacitation effects—minor changes in the assumed magnitude of these effects result in profoundly different estimates of incapacitation outcomes. Better knowledge of the true dimensions of these effects will increase our understanding of the limits of incarceration.

It is now becoming clear that different types of crime have different patterns of replacement and age-rate deterioration. What further complicates this problem is that most offenders, especially the most active ones, do not specialize in certain offenses (Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1992). Replacement effects are best studied through ethnographic approaches that follow youth groups over time and record the coming and going of criminally active group members. The National Institute of Justice is currently sponsoring studies that question what happens to a group's overall level of criminality and its recruitment practices when a member is incarcerated.

Once these studies have fleshed out the dynamics of replacement in youth crime, the next step is to estimate how replacement affects overall crime. For example, if 80 percent of youth burglary is subject to replacement and 60 percent of burglaries are by youth, then nearly half of all burglaries that would otherwise be prevented by incarceration are replaced. Additionally, the lifetime contributions to crime over the newly recruited offenders need to be included in the estimates.

The age-crime curve as a limit on incarceration can also be modeled, and indeed a number of criminal career researchers have tried to do just that with varying success (Blumstein, Cohen, Roth, and Visher, 1986). These models need to become more complex. They should factor in how time in prison may enhance criminal careers, and retard ordinary aging out rates for some offenders.

**The indirect effects of incarceration.** A second set of studies should focus on how the prison promotes conditions in families and communities that are thought to foster criminal behavior. Such a study might take the following form.

Within a single city, two neighborhoods with high incarceration rates would be selected: one with a large concentration of people of color and the other with a more racially integrated population. Two comparison low-rate neighborhoods would also be chosen. The study would be designed to compare the neighborhoods in terms of several variables:

- Among a sample of elementary school children, what proportion experience parental absence due to incarceration? How are the experiences interpreted and explained? What is the impact on parental supervision during off-school hours?

- Among a sample of middle school children, how accurate is their knowledge of prison life? How do youth, especially males, describe time in prison? On what do they base their description?
- Among a sample of high school youth, how many have reality-based experiences of imprisonment—from close family members or others? How do they describe prison; how much fear of imprisonment do they report?
- Within a sample of households, what is the experience of incarceration? What is the average financial impact of imprisonment on a family and aggregate effect on neighborhood finances?

Together, these questions should provide a rough measure of the effect of living in a high-incarceration neighborhood. This measure could then be used to estimate the magnitude of the negative effects of incarceration growth—in other words, the backfire.

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# The Next Generation: Children of Prisoners

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*This paper is concerned with the unintended consequences of the incarceration of parents on children. These consequences may include problems with separation, caretaking, schooling, antisocial behavior during childhood, educational failure, precocious sexuality, premature departures from home, early childbearing and marriage, and idleness and joblessness during adolescence and early adulthood. I propose a longitudinal study to examine the dimensions and causes of these problems among children of parents sentenced in the federal district courts of New York. A major premise of this proposal is that the withdrawal or loss of a parent can result in the loss not only of economic capital, but also of social capital involving relationships among family members and the organization of family life toward the maintenance and improvement of life chances of children.*

## Introduction

The presence of parents in United States prison populations is growing with the increasing reliance on incarceration as a criminal sanction, for women as well as men. A recent survey by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (1991) revealed that about two-thirds of incarcerated women and more than one-half of incarcerated men are parents of children under 18 years of age. Current estimates show that more than one and one-half million children have a parent who is incarcerated in the United States (Bloom, 1993), and many more children will have a parent incarcerated during a period of their lives. This grim reality should be a major policy concern, because the imprisonment of parents can severely diminish the economic and social capital on which families and communities depend to successfully raise children (see, Sampson, 1992; Hagan, 1994).

Although relatively little attention has been given to the consequences of criminal sanctioning for families and children, much research has focused on recidivism rates among those who have been incarcerated (see, for example, Clear et al., 1988) and on issues of deterrence and incapacitation more generally (see, for example, Blumstein et al., 1978). The results of this research are not encouraging. Criminal violence in America has not declined with the rising use of imprisonment (Reis and Roth, 1993). The research literature reveals that offenders

defy as often as they defer to criminal sanctions (Sherman, 1993), and criminal violence continues unabated.

Disappointing findings about the effects of penal sanctioning should be evaluated in the broader context of the unintended consequences of these sanctions. A father or mother's imprisonment can be the final, lethal blow to an already weakened family structure (Women's Prison Association, 1995). The fact that a large number of parents are being imprisoned (McGowan and Blumenthal, 1978) implies that there is a neglected class of young people whose lives are disrupted as well as damaged by their separation from imprisoned mothers and fathers (Bloom, 1993). As a family disintegrates, children experience prolonged and intensified periods of instability and uncertainty. These children's problems are the largely hidden and uncalculated costs of imprisonment.

#### Crime and Families

To the extent that attention is given to the children of imprisoned parents, it primarily is focused on whether criminal behavior is inherited (see Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985). The most influential studies of the genetic transmission of crime are of adopted boys (e.g., Boman, 1982). These studies reveal modest statistically significant associations between criminal convictions of biological parents and convictions of their children placed in nonrelative adopted families. However, these studies have not unraveled the causal processes, genetic or otherwise, that lead to the reproduction of criminal behavior.

In a recent review of research on genetics and crime, Christopher Jencks (1992: Chapter 3) emphasizes how primitive our knowledge of the heritability of crime is. Nearly all these studies are of males. He concludes that,

While adoption studies certainly suggest that a man's genes have some influence on the number of crimes he will commit, they do not tell us why this is the case. In this respect they are logically analogous to studies showing that gender or skin color influences criminal behavior. The existence of such a statistical association is intriguing, but it does not have any practical meaning unless we know why it arises. At present, we don't (102).

Jencks goes on to make the point that to whatever extent, if any, genetic predispositions influence criminal behavior, they likely do so in combination with the societal responses crime elicits, including the state's resort to penal sanctions. So, regardless of whether assumptions of nature or nurture form the background of concerns about crime among parents and children, there is a recognition that understanding the role of penal sanctions in this association is vital.

#### Prior Studies

Very little is actually known about the causal role that the penal sanctioning of parents plays in children's lives, alone or in combination with other experiences and events in the lives of these children (Gabel, 1992). For example, little is known about how this causal influence may vary with the prior and continuing relationship between the parents, the race and gender of the parents, the prior and continuing relationships of parents with their children, the gender or age of the children, and the class and community circumstances from which the imprisoned parents and children come. Nonetheless, there is speculation that the consequences of imprisoning parents can be substantial, especially when mothers are involved:

The children of women in prison have a greater tendency to exhibit many of the problems that generally accompany parental absence including: low self-esteem, impaired achievement motivation and poor peer relations. In addition, these children contend with feelings like anxiety, shame, sadness, grief, social isolation and guilt. The children will often withdraw and regress developmentally, exhibiting behaviors of younger children, like bedwetting.... As the children reach adolescence, they may begin to act out in anti-social ways. Searching for attention, pre-teens and teens are at high risk for delinquency, drug addiction and gang involvement (Women's Prison Association, 1995:9).

However, there have been relatively few studies of prisoners' families. The first of these studies focused on the financial troubles and adjustments of these families, which were found to be severe (Bloodgood, 1928; Sacks, 1938; see also Morris, 1965; Ferraro, 1983). Gabel (1992) identifies several other themes in the evolution of this research literature as it relates to children, including the deception and trauma surrounding the separation, caretaking problems, stigma, and antisocial behavior. Perhaps the best known of this work is done by Sack and colleagues, who have studied clinical and nonclinical samples of the children of incarcerated parents (Sack, 1977; Sack, Seidler and Thomas, 1976; Sack and Thomas, 1976). These studies report that families sometimes deceive their children about the whereabouts of the incarcerated parent and that issues of social stigma and isolation are prominent. Sack and others also note the connection between incarceration of parents and antisocial behavior of children (Morris, 1965; Wilmer et al., 1966; Bakker et al., 1978; Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981; Swan, 1981; Lowenstein, 1986).

Gabel (1992) is critical of this research literature, noting that the existing work tends to be "... heavily descriptive and anecdotal, with few empirical studies and significant

methodological limitations" (307). Gabel is concerned that these studies have introduced few controls for differences among families prior to imprisonment, and that there are no longitudinal studies of the children of incarcerated parents observing changes that may occur during imprisonment. He writes that, "Important preexisting behavioral, family, social, and legal data for the most part have been omitted from the descriptions of the children and families," and he further observes that,

There are no longitudinal studies that have assessed these children and families over time or even at any two points, such as the periods prior to arrest, during the legal procedures leading to incarceration, during incarceration itself, or after release. This lack of longitudinal data, associated with a lack of appropriate control groups, makes it impossible to say if behavioral change relates to incarceration itself, reactions around legal procedures, release and re-entry of the incarcerated parent into the family, or none of the above (307).

Gabel concludes his review of this research literature by emphasizing the urgent need for new and better designed studies focused on the children of incarcerated parents, noting that "children of incarcerated parents merit additional mental health studies and public policy attention because they are an extremely high-risk group for later juvenile delinquency and substance abuse, a group that is increasing in number" (313).

Variation in the well-being of the children of imprisoned parents is likely to become especially apparent during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, in ways that include not only involvement in delinquency and crime, but also educational failure, precocious sexuality, premature departures from home, early childbearing and marriage, and idleness linked to joblessness. The signs of such impending problems are likely to be visible in early childhood. A number of theories offer reasons as to how and why this might be the case.

I begin this theoretical discussion by noting that there must obviously be cases involving the incarceration of negligent, violent, and abusive parents where the imprisonment of the parents benefits children by removing serious risks of current and future harm. Yet I do not know how often this is the case. My suspicion is that imprisonment of parents is more often a traumatic life event that initiates or intensifies rather than reduces the problems of the involved children.

Imprisonment of a parent can alter the prospects of the family in a number of significant ways, described in the literature on single parenthood (see McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994), as well as in the more limited literature on the familial effects of imprisonment considered briefly above. This combined work suggests that the trauma of parental imprisonment may have economic, social, and emotional dimensions. Associated sociological and criminological theories point to three prominent ways in which the effects of parental imprisonment on children might be understood. These involve the strains of economic deprivation; the loss of parental socialization through role modeling, support, and supervision; and the stigma and shame of societal labeling. For ease of reference, I will call these the strain, socialization, and stigmatization perspectives.

As formulated, the three perspectives all involve assumptions about the ways in which the withdrawal or removal of parents from the home depletes family resources. However, I will also consider an alternative version of the strain perspective which assumes that the presence of a parent who engages in criminal activity poses a drain or threat to the resources of the family. And I will introduce a selection perspective that considers predispositions that may lead children of incarcerated parents to adopt criminal behavior and other threats to their social well-being. As noted above and in the alternative version of the strain perspective outlined below, if these selection processes are sufficiently problematic, they may actually be mitigated by the removal of troublesome parents. However, I hypothesize that imprisonment more often intensifies the problems associated with a dysfunctional parent. Knowing if and when either of these possible outcomes prevails is obviously important for policy as well as research reasons.

**The Strain Perspective.** If an imprisoned parent has previously contributed positively to the family, that imprisonment may result in economic deprivation and other strains that affect children. Note that the preceding contributions may not always involve the parents maintaining an intact household. Many nonresident parents, even many never-married and absent parents, maintain frequent contact with their children, and much of the variation in the nature of the parental contribution may have to do with the form and quality of family relationships rather than with the legal and residential nature of the relationship. The quantity and quality of these relationships need to be measured separately.

Direct effects of economic deprivation on children are emphasized in the classical opportunity and strain theories of crime and deviance (Merton, 1937; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Messner and Rosenfeld, 1993). However, the effects of parental deprivation can be indirect as well as direct, involving the loss of income that the imprisoned parent may have provided and the less tangible but vital contributions that parents make to family life more generally (McLanahan and Bumpass, 1988). Remaining single parents simply may have less time as well as money to invest in their children socially as well as economically (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). It is important to recognize, therefore, that the withdrawal or loss of a parent can result in the reduction not only of economic capital, but also of the social capital of relationships among family members and the organization of family life toward the maintenance and improvement of life chances. These relationships have emotional and everyday practical implications. For example, older children may have to assume unexpected role responsibilities, such as caring for younger children. They may also be diverted from school and into early jobs to reduce demands on or to supplement household income. Alternatively, these youth may be pushed toward the underground economy and its criminal activity or early marriage and parenthood as means of escaping their disrupted family.

However, as noted above, there is another possible strain theory of the effects of parental imprisonment on children, and this theory makes opposite predictions from the perspective just described. This version of strain theory begins from the awareness that imprisonment is sometimes a means by which the court can remove a parent who has "burned through" the supportive capacity of the family, either through idleness and negligence or violence and abuse (see Simon, 1993). Such a parent is a drain or threat rather than an asset to the family, and in this case, imprisonment is a potential source of relief. This version of strain theory underlines the importance of knowing the relationship between an offender and the offender's family that predates imprisonment.

Possibly both versions of strain theory operate, sometimes even neutralizing one another's effects. However, more likely, imprisonment harms children even in dysfunctional families because this specific loss of a parent compounds rather than mitigates preexisting family problems.

**The Socialization Perspective.** Again, assuming the imprisoned parent has contributed positively to the life of the family, imprisonment can deprive the family of an important resource for the socialization of the child. Sociological and criminological theories commonly emphasize the importance of parental supervision, role modeling, and support. This perspective is reflected most prominently in control theories of crime and deviance. The most prominent version of control theory maintains that even parents and siblings who are oriented to criminal activities can often steer younger family members in prosocial directions (Hirschi, 1969:94-97). An important contemporary application of control theory in the study of crime is the longitudinal

research of Sampson and Laub (1993), which emphasizes that the social control of children by parents is an important source of social capital that persists in its influence throughout the life course (see also Hagan, 1991; Hagan et al., 1995).

The removal of a parent from the family can influence children in a variety of ways. Children lose whatever supervision, support, and role modeling the incarcerated parent provided; the salience of the remaining parent may increase; and the role of peer group may expand (McLanahan and Bumpass, 1988). Control and socialization theories tend to see children as situated in a struggle of allegiances between family and peers, with the absence of a parent shifting the balance of this struggle in the favor of antisocial peers. That the parent is absent for crime-related reasons may reasonably intensify this concern, although, as noted above, it remains an unresolved question as to how different kinds of parents actually influence their children.

**The Stigmatization Perspective.** Criminologists have paid particular attention to imprisonment as stigma that attaches to individuals and the groups to which they belong, in this case, their families. The stigma of criminalization is another way children lose out (Hagan and Palloni, 1990; Hagan, 1991). Braithwaite (1989) draws an important distinction between the kind of stigma imposed by imprisonment and alternative processes of "reintegrative shaming," which are intended to bring the person back into the group after being punished. The stigma of imprisonment is intended to result in exclusion from the social group, while reintegrative shaming includes rituals of reacceptance and reabsorption that are designed to encourage a return to group membership. Well-functioning families are prominent sites of reintegrative shaming, but Braithwaite's point is that this kind of response to antisocial behaviors can be adopted in broader societal settings as well.

Historically, the development of probation and parole were intended to offer the prospect of reintegration to criminal offenders as alternatives to the stigma of imprisonment (Rothman, 1980), but this use of probation and parole is less common today (Simon, 1993). In the absence of efforts to encourage reacceptance and reabsorption, the stigma of imprisonment risks not only making parents into outlaws, but their children as well. The processes by which this may occur are only beginning to be understood.



Scheff and Retzinger (Scheff, 1988; Scheff and Retzinger, 1991) suggest that the stigmatization experience that Braithwaite associates with imprisonment can cause angry and defiant expressions of unacknowledged shame and rejection. These feelings and responses to stigmatization may affect not only the parents who are imprisoned, but their children as well. Scheff and Retzinger explain that schools, parents, employers, and fellow citizens increasingly recognize large numbers of explosively angry young people ready to punish any available target in response to perceived insults of the past, which may include the stigmatization experienced as children of incarcerated parents (1991:65). In developing a defiance theory of criminal sanctions, Sherman (1993) says that "a great deal of evidence suggests that the best name for this proud and angry emotion—and the retaliation it causes against vicarious victims—is defiance" (459).

The emotions that surround a traumatic experience such as the imprisonment of a parent can become a turning point initiating a pattern of unfavorable life choices. (Hagan and Palloni, 1990). The imprisonment of a parent represents one kind of event that can combine with other adverse life experiences to influence life outcomes. For example, Rutter (1989) discusses chains of adversity in the life cycle (see also Caspi and Elder, 1988) and suggests that "... the impact of some factor in childhood may lie less in the immediate behavioral change it brings about than in the fact that it sets in motion a chain reaction in which one 'bad' thing leads to another ...." (27). Rutter further observes that "antisocial behavior ... will influence later environments through the societal responses it induces—such as custodial or correctional actions that may serve both to 'label' and to strengthen antisocial peer group influences ...." (42).

Peggy Thoits (1983) similarly observes that "a person who has experienced one event may react with even more distress to a second ...; to the person, life might seem to be spiraling out of control. This would produce [an] ... interaction between event occurrences; two or more events would result in more distress than would be expected from the simple sum of their singular effects" (69). Thoits goes on to describe a vulnerability model in which early stressful events lay the foundation for adverse reactions to subsequent events. In this model, "predispositions are remote, enduring physiological and psychological characteristics that ... enhance ... the impacts of current life experiences" (80). The stigma of having a parent incarcerated is a likely candidate for inclusion in such a vulnerability model.

**The Selection Perspective.** Finally, it is crucial that the above perspectives be assessed in relation to what we have called the selection perspective. This perspective assumes that imprisoned parents and their children are already different from parents and their children who are not imprisoned, prior to the imposition of a prison sentence. Differences that predate parental incarceration may derive from a mixture of factors that accumulate up to the point of parental imprisonment. These factors may include patterns of negligence, violence, and

abuse. It is crucial that these predetermining differences be taken into account in assessing effects of parental imprisonment. As noted at earlier points in our discussion, these differences may often interact with responses to them, such as imprisonment.

It is fair to say that we know little about the additive or multiplicative ways in which parental imprisonment may cause changes in the well-being of children. We lack definitive answers to even the basic question of whether, in the aggregate, the children of imprisoned parents are less well off than children of parents who do not experience imprisonment. Assuming this is the case, we should ask: Are the children of imprisoned parents also less well off than children of parents who do not experience imprisonment and who have similar background characteristics, including prior family relationships, race, gender, income, and education? And if so, would children of imprisoned parents do better if their parents were given a noncustodial sentence? Finally, can we specify circumstances that combine with imprisonment to produce the most and least harmful effects on children? These questions become progressively more challenging to answer, yet they are questions that judges regularly confront in making sentencing decisions involving parents.

Many judges openly acknowledge that they reach conclusions about such issues in deciding to sentence mothers and fathers of children to prison (see Nagel and Hagan, 1982; Mann and Wheeler, 1980). The concern is that they currently must do so without empirical knowledge of the consequences of parental imprisonment for children. This fact obviously adds to the urgency of the questions I address in this proposal.

#### Requirements of a Meaningful Research Design

In answering these questions, one might ideally imagine a research design in which parents were randomly assigned to prison and noncustodial sentences in a social experiment that allowed a clear indication of the causal effects of incarceration on the children of the incarcerated parents. However, criminal statutes, sentencing guidelines, and ethical standards make this kind of social experiment unlikely. The moral and policy imperatives of the criminal justice system prohibit randomly sending some convicted offenders to prison, while randomly selecting others for more lenient noncustodial treatment.

In place of a randomized experimental design, the research that can establish effects of parental imprisonment on children will need to address a number of concerns, some of which go beyond the requirements associated with nonexperimental designs.

First, this research must involve children of various ages, from childhood through adolescence. This is a challenging requirement, since the majority of children of incarcerated parents are young. Also, because children confront quite different problems at different ages and stages, it is more difficult to design a common measurement strategy. Second, the research will need to include guardians and step-parents as well as biological parents, since many birth parents, especially if they are male, may not accept responsibility for their children. Third, the research should include parents who receive noncustodial as well as prison sentences, so that it is possible to compare outcomes with parents who differ only in terms of the incarceration experience. Fourth, the research needs to incorporate comprehensive, detailed, and precise measurements of background differences prior to incarceration. Fifth, the research will be more useful if it includes the possibility of measurement before and after the imprisonment of a parent to determine longer-term outcomes, especially during the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

#### Formulating a Research Design

I propose a nonexperimental panel study, in which the sentenced offenders who are parents of children from six to sixteen years of age are questioned at several different times. I propose to interview the unsentenced parents, step-parents, or guardians of these children as soon as possible after arrest and charging, in conjunction with the initial contact of the defendant with a pretrial service agent prior to arraignment. This parent or guardian will be interviewed again after the determination of guilt and prior to the sentencing hearing. Finally, the parent or guardian will be interviewed one year after sentencing. These three interviews will form a panel of longitudinal data on parents and their children, providing unique and comprehensive information on the family circumstances of children of varying ages and backgrounds and their well-being prior to trial or plea, at the time of conviction, and after sentencing—which in about half the cases will involve incarceration.

More specifically, I propose to conduct this research in New York's Southern (located in Manhattan) and Eastern (located in Brooklyn) Federal District Courts. I propose these courts: (i) because they sentence large numbers of criminal offenders within a single geopolitical setting that holds substantive and procedural rules of law constant; (ii) because the offenders represent diverse social and economic backgrounds; (iii) because about one-half of the offenders in these courts receive prison sentences; and (iv) because nearly all of the offenders are subject to pretrial and presentence investigations which provide invaluable information about parents and their children.

The range of criminal offenders tried and sentenced in federal district courts is the result of a federal criminal code and a criminal prosecution agenda that emphasizes national priorities and concerns. The resulting cases range from political corruption, embezzlement, securities violations, and other forms of white-collar crime, to more standard street crimes involving assaults on federal employees, drug dealing, and bank robbery (see Hagan et al., 1980; Wheeler et al., 1982). While past work indicates that about three-quarters of the cases tried in these courts involve offenders with high-school or less education who are charged with common law crimes, the remaining one-quarter have some college education or are charged with white-collar crimes (see Hagan, Nagel and Albonetti, 1980). It is desirable to overweight the latter white-collar group in the research, as well as women and minority offenders, in order to better balance types of offenders for analysis.

As previously noted, nearly all convicted offenders in the federal courts are subjects of investigations in advance of decisions about pretrial detention and bail. These investigations provide an early and unique source of information on the backgrounds of offenders, with special attention to family and employment histories. These reports can be used prior to trial or plea to identify and sample defendants who are parents of children of specified ages and to collect information on the nature of the family relationships.

#### Some Key Concerns

Designing this study involves developing the capacity to control for prior background differences in family circumstances associated with the imprisonment of parents. Parents who are imprisoned may be more likely to have previously left their families and to have difficulties with the remaining parent and children in these families, including problems of violence and conflict; these families may also be more likely to have added social and economic problems prior to imprisonment. Several features of the proposed research design can address this issue.

First, I can statistically control for differences prior to conviction and sentencing between children of parents sentenced to prison and to noncustodial sentences. This information will be available both from the pretrial and presentence investigations and interviews with the unsentenced parent, in many cases offering useful opportunities for cross-validation and multiple measurement. Differences in the well-being of children of imprisoned parents that withstand these statistical controls for preexisting differences are more likely to be attributable to the effects of imprisonment.

Second, statistical models that combine information on the decision about which offenders are sent to prison with outcome measures of the well-being of involved children can establish further information on the boundaries of the possible added influence of unmeasured differences between the families of parents who do and do not experience imprisonment (Manski et al.,

1992). These estimates can help confirm the possible range of impact of parental imprisonment on the well-being of involved children.

Third, measures of childrens' well-being gathered after sentencing can be analyzed in relation to those taken before sentencing to assess change over time and in response to the sentence imposed.

Fourth, information gathered in the third wave of interviews with the unincarcerated parents, one year after sentencing, can be used to explore the sources of change in family circumstances and childhood experiences that might explain the differences that persist in the above models. For example, the economic strain perspective outlined above proposes that changes in the financial resources of families who have had a parent imprisoned will explain declines in the well-being of children. Such changes in financial resources can be measured over time in the panel interviews, and these changes can be introduced into the analyses to determine whether this variation accounts for differences in child well-being.

Fifth, we propose to include added data on pairs of siblings with the same parents in the research design. This simply involves asking the interviewed parents to provide data on more than one of their children. Since siblings of the same parents can vary, for example, in gender and age, while sharing a common family history, differences in their well-being after sentencing can be attributed to causes other than genetic selection (see Hauser and Mossel, 1985). That is, we can be more certain that the differences are attributable to social and environmental factors.

#### Measuring the Antisocial Behavior of Children and Adolescents

One of the challenges in this research is to find a unified measurement scheme for identifying problems that parental imprisonment may cause in children of different ages. We expect these problems will become especially apparent as youth make the transition to adulthood, as they fail and withdraw from school, abandon their families of origin, enter into early parenthood and marriage, and encounter problems of joblessness. However, the antecedents of these problematic outcomes should be apparent earlier in the life cycle, and research on the effects of parental imprisonment will be more compelling if we can identify the precursors of these later outcomes. Parents living with these children are an important source of information about their early problems, especially as approaching difficulties are signaled in childhood problem behaviors.

We propose to tap this source of information by using an adapted version of the Child Behavior Checklist introduced by Achenbach and Edelbrock (1979). Achenbach et al. (1989) have noted that, "Because of a long standing lack of satisfactory diagnostic criteria for child and adolescent disorders, researchers have turned to statistical methods for identifying syndromes of problems that tend to co-occur among children and adolescents" (300). Our own recent

experience indicates parents can complete an adapted version from this list (see Lizotte et al., 1992) for sibling pairs in five to ten minutes. As one of the more prominent quantitative efforts at psychiatric classification, the Achenbach Checklist has been subject to considerable empirical study. The parent form is standardized with normative data available by gender and age categories.

The checklist items refer to specific syndromes of problem behaviors that a child may exhibit, including "acts too young," "argues a lot," and "clings to parents." Lizotte et al. (1992) indicate that the range of reported behaviors fall into nine narrow-band behavior problem scales, which in turn are divided into three broad categories: externalizing scales—aggressive, delinquent, and hyperactive; (2) internalizing scales—immature, obsessive-compulsive, schizoid, somatic complaints, and uncommunicative; and (3) a mixed scale—hostile-withdrawal. The checklist is often used as a diagnostic tool to identify children who fall at the behavioral extremes on these scales and are of clinical concern. The externalizing scales noted above recently have been demonstrated by Lizotte et al. (1992) to be highly predictive of future delinquent behavior.

Because the checklist measures externalizing and internalizing behaviors, it is more likely to capture the possibly different responses of girls and boys to the imprisonment of a parent. There is a tendency in the kind of research we are proposing to concentrate on the effect of "fatherless families" and "fatherless boys," implicitly adopting a psychoanalytic perspective that assumes the importance of fathers and male role models in the psychosocial development of boys. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) note the predominance of this view in research on the effects of single parenthood on children. They emphasize that the effects are often just as significant for girls, although differently manifested. "Boys tend to express their feelings by acting out, whereas girls tend to hide their feelings inside" (56). The Achenbach Checklist can provide a test of this possibility.

#### Elaborating the Research Design

The design we have outlined in this proposal obviously does not exhaust the possibilities for assessing the effects of parental imprisonment on children. For example, given sufficient funds, it would be desirable to collect additional information on the primary and secondary school age children of these parents. Self-report instruments could be used in telephone interviews with the secondary school age children themselves, and teachers could be asked to complete instruments focused on children in primary school. In addition to providing an added check on the validity of the parents' responses to the Achenbach Checklist, these instruments could also be used to collect information about performance in school, self-image, and feelings of self-efficacy, variables that should be highly predictive of later success and failure during the transition to adulthood. Additional funds would support the tracking of

sample youth through childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood. In the longer term, this research could establish an important base for the collection of invaluable data on the life trajectories of the children of imprisoned parents. As Gabel (1992) has noted, "A close relationship between mental [health] and judicial systems would be of enormous value in identifying children and families that would participate in longitudinal research and potentially would benefit from individual and family therapy intervention when parental incarceration occurs" (313).

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# Growing Up Behind Bars: Confinement, Youth Development, and Crime

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*Child development and juvenile justice experts agree that, in theory, youth should not be treated in the criminal justice system in the same manner as adults. Juvenile corrections facilities should provide a setting for establishing positive relationships that influence the healthy development of young offenders. However, rehabilitation does not often enter into the current juvenile justice process in the manner that theory suggests. This paper presents an exploration of the net impact of confinement on youth age 16 and younger and proposes a research plan to examine this issue.*

## Introduction

It was hard. It was okay. I hated being in there 'cause I wanted my freedom. I figure, hey, I can do it. It ain't shit. But when 'dem motherfuckin' doors closed, oh, it wasn't all 'dat 'cause I cried like a motherfucker. I was real hurt. I wanted to be out there in the world. And I seen, you know, what time it was. I was like, "Damn, I can't believe this shit. How the fuck I get caught up..."

These are the words of a 14-year-old girl about her feelings of getting caught selling drugs in Detroit, Michigan. Her anguish continues as she tells of how going to the Wayne County Youth Home affected her life.

And all the time I was there, I kept on saying, "Oh. God, please help me, God. Please give me one more chance, God. I swear I ain't 'gonna do it no more. I ain't 'gonna try to sell drugs. I know it's wrong. Please, God, please, God." 'Dat's all I was saying. 'Cause 'dat's the first person anybody holler for, when 'dey get in trouble, is God.

The staff, 'dey was fucked up. 'Dey ain't give a fuck. Only thing 'dey do was sit there and watch us. You ask them a question, 'dey look at you like 'dey crazy or like 'dey don't know shit. The teachers was fucked up, too,

'Dey didn't give a fuck, anyway. 'Dey figure like, ya'll motherfuckin' criminals. I don't give a fuck, you know, if you learn or not. I'm just here to get paid. And 'dat was real sad. You know, we know we was in there for wrong things. I was in there for drugs; people was in there for killing people, people was in there for running away, people was in there for all type of little dumb shit. But no matter what we was in there for, we was human beings, and we deserved to be treated like it.

Genda, now 21 years old, vividly recalls her stay in the youth home (*The World and Diary of a Girl Gangster*, Taylor, 1993). This glimpse into her life depicts the horrors that many youngsters experience daily in American prisons and detention centers.

And when I used to talk to the staff and stuff, I used to go by the desk in a little office, she used to be like, 'don't come pass 'dat line.' I'm like, "what you mean, don't come pass 'dat line?" "Like I said, don't come pass 'dat." I said, "why; you think we some kind of disease or somethin'?"

And she used to be there at night, so when nighttime, you know, when you go all in your room, 'dey lock the doors and shit. So, I used to be knockin' on the door at night, 'cause I used to have to use the bathroom 'cause I had a bad bladder infection. And I used to be bam, bam, bam, "Ms. Doe, Ms. Doe." Bam, bam, bam. The bitch ain't never answered the door. And so I was like, fuck it. She didn't give a fuck, so I didn't give a fuck. So I pulled my motherfuckin' shorts down and I pissed on the motherfuckin' floor. And I know I was a criminal, and I know what I had done was wrong by sellin' drugs, but I do got my motherfuckin' rights, and I know 'dat bitch is supposed to open the door and let me piss. I know 'dat motherfuckin' much.

The American criminal justice system historically has treated juveniles differently from adult offenders, believing that their judgment and sense of responsibility are less developed and that their potential for rehabilitation is greater. In theory, fostering positive mental, emotional, and physical development is an integral part of the juvenile corrections process. However, contemporary circumstances have shifted the focus from children in trouble to menacing youth whom the public should fear. Young people committing serious offenses have captured headlines and media attention, fueling feelings that detention centers and correctional institutions for juveniles have become soft and that America needs to crack down on juvenile offenders. Policymakers have reacted by legislating more severe punishments for violent or habitual offenders. Many states have made it easier to sentence serious juvenile offenders as adults—in effect, scrapping efforts to rehabilitate juvenile offenders in favor of purely punitive

actions. However, there is no empirical evidence that long sentences reduce youth crime (Schneider, 1984; Singer & McDowall, 1987).

In fact, the literature tells us that juvenile incarceration has not been particularly successful in producing better young citizens (Fagan, 1990; Krisberg, 1992). The contrast between youth development theory, which defines and supports the quest of all adolescents to become healthy adults, and the realities of juvenile incarceration is extreme and disturbing. Youth development theory emphasizes growth and expansion, and symbolizes society's positive expectations. In turn, juvenile justice is too often characterized by inconsistent laws, policies, and enforcement rates, and the systematic oppression of young people.

In some communities, juvenile detention facilities are simply the anticipated first stop on a road leading directly to the "big league": adult prison (Scott, 1993). Confinement in juvenile facilities may fail to deter criminal behavior because the experience has become normalized within many youngsters' lives—forming an outlaw subculture (Taylor, 1989). Not only do these youth expect to spend time in detention, some think of it as a rite of passage (Scott, 1993). The localized belief that going away to prison is normal is a direct consequence of certain groups being disproportionately incarcerated over the decades (Mann, 1993; Taylor, 1989, 1993a, 1993b).

This paper explores what crime rates, juvenile corrections data, and youth development theory suggest about the cumulative impact of America's confinement of youth sixteen years old and younger.

#### Magnitude of the Problem

Between 1984 and 1992, the arrest rates (per 100,000 inhabitants) of youth under eighteen years of age increased from 1,176 to 1,306 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1994). More recently in 1993, 2,014,472 juveniles under age 18 were arrested, 77 percent of whom were sixteen years and younger (Department of Justice, 1994). Most members of this younger group, 55 percent, were between the ages of 13 and 16, and were arrested for committing property crimes (84 percent).

Admissions to juvenile facilities rose after 1984 and reached an all-time high of nearly 690,000 in 1990. The largest increase was in detention, where admissions rose from just over 400,000 in 1984 to about 570,000 in 1990 (*Conditions of Confinement*, 1994; hereafter cited as *Confinement*). And Children in Custody (CIC) census counts



reveal that on any one day in 1991 about 65,000 youth were confined, 56 percent in medium or maximum security facilities.

In 1991, most confined youth (88 percent) were male. Between 1987 and 1991, the proportion of minorities among confined juveniles rose from 53 to 63 percent. Specifically, the proportion of African-Americans increased from 37 to 44 percent (*Confinement*).

In 1988, Congress directed the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to assess conditions of confinement for juveniles, to determine the extent to which detention facilities conform to recognized national and professional standards, and to recommend ways to improve conditions.<sup>17</sup> The study, known as *Conditions of Confinement*, surveyed all 984 public and private juvenile detentions centers, reception centers, training schools, ranches, camps, and farms. (The study excluded police lockups, adult jails, and facilities that hold juveniles tried and convicted as adults; as well as halfway houses, shelters, group homes, and psychiatric and drug treatment programs.) The study was commissioned in part to help remedy the serious problem of overcrowding in juvenile facilities. In 1987, 36 percent of confined youth were jailed in facilities whose populations exceeded their design limits. In 1991, overcrowding had increased to 47 percent; one-third were living in sections with 26 or more people; one-third were sleeping in rooms too small to meet national standards (*Confinement*). Overcrowding has significant effects. For example, large dormitory facilities reported more youth-on-youth incidents when the population exceeds capacity (*Confinement*).

Beyond these numbers, fundamental human needs are not being met in some youth centers. The OJJDP study revealed that the most alarming and prevalent problems in juvenile facilities involved living space, security, control of suicidal behavior, and health care—four areas that directly impact positive youth development. Alarming, in 1991, more than 11,000 juveniles engaged in more than 17,000 incidents of suicidal behavior while confined in juvenile facilities (*Confinement*). Clearly, rehabilitation is stymied because it is difficult to address self-esteem, education, or training when individuals are lacking the basics: safe living conditions and high-quality mental and physical health services.

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<sup>17</sup> The study measured twelve areas: (1) living space; (2) health care; (3) food, clothing, and hygiene; (4) living accommodations; (5) security; (6) controlling suicidal behavior; (7) inspections and emergency preparedness; (8) education; (9) recreation; (10) treatment services; (11) access to community; and (12) limits on staff discretion.

#### The Case of Wayne County

The Wayne County Youth Detention Facility, based in Detroit, Michigan, is symbolic of what plagues other urban centers. Wayne County was cited by the Justice Department for its poor treatment of juveniles in December of 1994.<sup>18</sup> This facility has been poorly run for the past three decades. The physical edifice is shameful. The outer grounds are dirty and unkempt. The building is in desperate need of painting, cleaning, and repair. Upon entering the front vestibule, this author was unnerved by the stench of urine. Youth are constantly being shuffled into overcrowded rooms. Staff morale is low, caused in particular by a rapid succession of executive directors and a lack of in-service training. Parents of children in the facility described mistreatment and abuse. The youth complained about poor hygiene and health services. A physician who receives patients from the Wayne County Detention Facility confirmed their complaints. The doctor was especially concerned about the lax health care in the face of serious public health issues such as AIDS. What these youth encounter upon entering and endure throughout their stay at this facility is captured in Genda's profane, yet richly descriptive words.

#### Developmental Systems Theory

Over the past two decades, human development has increasingly come to be understood as a function of the relationship between the maturing individual and his or her changing environment (Lerner, 1991, 1995; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Magnusson, 1988; Riegel, 1975; Gottlieb, 1992; Thelen & Smith, 1994; and Sameroff, 1983). This basic model is known as developmental systems theory (Ford & Lerner, 1992) because development is viewed as occurring on many levels simultaneously: biological, psychological, interpersonal, familial, societal, cultural, physical ecological, and historical.

In the field of adolescent development, developmental systems models constitute the predominant theoretical approach. However, almost no information about links between youth development and the experience of incarceration exists. This void is perplexing given that nationally the juvenile violent crime arrest rate has risen by 50 percent in just five years (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1994). Indeed, I have uncovered only one paper, currently under preparation, that attempts to frame the incarceration

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<sup>18</sup> Los Angeles County; Essex County, New Jersey; and youth detention centers in Denver and San Francisco are other serious violators.

experience within the context of developmental theory (Walters-Chapman & Walters-Chapman).<sup>19</sup>

Accordingly, if developmental theory is to become relevant to the experiences of a broad range of adolescents, researchers must address how burgeoning rates of youth violence, arrests, and incarceration affect development. Key issues include:

- the aspects of the incarceration context that influence development, the features of development that are affected (e.g., emotional, cognitive, social, moral/ethical) and in what ways; and
- how the development of incarcerated youth compares to nonincarcerated youth.

Because most youth in detention come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, are African-American or Hispanic, and grew up in troubled homes, it is necessary to consider how these contextual variables influence their development, apart from the experience of incarceration. However, very little is known about the typical developmental pathways of these youth. Developmental theory is largely based on studies of white, middle-class, male, nonincarcerated youth. The lack of knowledge in this area is especially problematic for African-American adolescent males, who experience the greatest likelihood of being involved in the juvenile justice system. Without adequate norms, it is impossible to gauge the effects of incarceration on development. How can we know if incarceration slows down, arrests, maintains, or promotes particular developments if we do not have baseline and normative data against which to compare the effects of incarceration? It is equally impossible to understand how the incarceration experience may remediate behavioral or developmental problems, prevent the burgeoning of such problems, or promote the future positive development of youth. Absent information on disadvantaged youth, we must reflect on those developmental issues which are thought to apply to all adolescents in American society.

Developmental Tasks of Adolescents and the  
Unique Struggles of Poor and Minority Youth

There are at least seven developmental tasks American adolescents confront (See table 1.): establishing identity, cultivating symbiotic relationships, defining physical attractiveness, investing in a value system, obtaining an education, separating from family and achieving independence, and obtaining and maintaining gainful employment

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<sup>19</sup> In this paper, the authors examine attachment and identity among youth confined in boot camps.

(Lerner, 1993). Because these are each culturally loaded issues, youth are confronted with many obstacles, or risks, in their attempts to achieve them.

For instance, Dryfoos (1990) notes that 50 percent of the 28 million American youth between the ages of 10 and 17 engage in two or more of the following four categories of high-risk behaviors: drug and alcohol use, unsafe sex, school failure and dropout, and delinquency and crime. Moreover, 10 percent of American youth in this age range engage in all four of these types of risk. Dryfoos notes, then, that engaging in one type of risky behavior increases the likelihood of becoming involved in another type of risky behavior. And when multiple types of risk are involved, the magnitude of intervention needed to promote positive development is substantially increased (Lerner, 1984).

**Table 1** Seven developmental tasks of adolescence  
And possible measures of these pursuits

<b>Task</b>	<b>Measure and Source</b>
1. Identity	A. Grotevant and Adams (1984) Ego Identity Scale B. Marcia (1966) Ego Identity Status Interview
2. Relationships	A. Harter (1983) Social Network Scale B. J.V. Lerner (1988) Adolescent Life Satisfaction Survey
3. Physical Attractiveness and Health	A. Lerner and Lerner (1977) Physical Attractiveness Rating Scale B. Lerner, Padin, and Spriro (1981) Physical Attractiveness and Physical Effectiveness Self-Rating Scales C. Medical exam and Tanner Stage Ratings D. Health records
4. Value Systems	A. Allport, Vernon, and Lindzey (1960) Study of Values Scale B. Grotevant and Cooper (1981) Interview
5. Education	A. Grade point average (school records) B. Standardized scores (e.g., Stanford Achievement Test, California Achievement Test)

C. Attendance

6. Familial Separation & Individuation      A. Grotevant and Cooper (1981) Interview

7. Employment      A. Grotevant and Cooper (1981) Interview

Accordingly, the accumulation of risk factors—especially when they are combined with poverty (Huston, 1991; Schorr, 1988)—makes engagement in criminal activity and confinement more likely. In turn, the presence of multiple risks makes any positive effects of detention more difficult to produce.

For those of a low socioeconomic status and for minorities, establishing an identity within the mainstream culture can mean abandoning ties to their subculture. Unfortunately, within particular segments of the black community, for example, some pursuits of identity have been labeled nonblack. These include acknowledging any respect for authority, pursuing an education, or holding a minimum wage job in hopes of climbing the ladder. In such communities, youth face rejection from kin and peers if they choose these pursuits. If they persevere in spite of this rejection, they may be haunted by the feeling of having betrayed their race.<sup>20</sup>

In this case, the conflict between positive development—as defined by mainstream developmental theory—and environmental demands becomes obvious. The situation is complicated because disadvantaged or minority communities lack quality resources. The schools are often inadequate and inaccessible; there are few legitimate employment opportunities, and those that are available offer limited incentives or potential for growth.

Detention Studies

There is limited evidence that corrections programs employing developmental approaches produce positive results. For example, Vogel and Brown (1982) concluded that correctional programs oriented toward increasing the self-esteem of youth may be more successful than programs that do not address this issue. However, Fischer and Bersani (1979) found that for some adolescents, particularly youth lacking conventional social ties, self-esteem remains high despite acts of delinquency. Martin and Osgood's research (1987) supports increasing the

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<sup>20</sup> Much confusion has resulted from confounding black with low socioeconomic status (SES). Being Black and of low SES does have profound implications for development, as Ogbu (1985) states. If we hold social and economic status constant, many of the observed differences across ethnic groups seem to vanish. However, Spencer and Dornbush (1990) contend that even if we hold SES constant, race does have a unique impact on youth development.

autonomy of incarcerated youth. Their study found that autonomy led to increased prosocial values and indirectly enhanced acceptance of treatment goals. Leschied, Jaff and Stone (1985) found that more mature youth tended to perform optimally in less structured environments, while less mature individuals performed extremely well in both low and high structured environments.

Having briefly summarized developmental systems theory and reviewed some current research findings, I will now look at the contextual variables within the detention environment that most directly affect the developmental tasks of American adolescents.

#### Contextual Variables of the Detention Center

**Staff attitudes.** Juvenile corrections staff often respond to the conditions of their work with hopelessness and resentment, and these negative attitudes are too frequently expressed through the inhumane and inconsistent treatment of the youth under their care. Consequently, many confined youth lose all respect for authority figures. This particular effect of the detention center environment may negatively impact the adolescent's education, employability, identity, physical attractiveness, relationships, and value systems.

For example, educational and employment settings require that the individual respect those in positions of authority. If past abuse has left an individual resentful of authority, it will be difficult for him or her to excel in these arenas. Problems with authority figures may result in suspension or expulsion from school. Later in life, the individual may face the same difficulty at work, resulting in transient employment and/or long periods of unemployment.

In *The New Jack Roller* (Taylor, 1992), Tukkie Jones (33 years old), a warlord in a territorial gang, Ray (31), and Pepper (36), talk about their experiences as former inmates in the state prisons and their initial encounters with the juvenile justice system.

Tukkie, speaking slowly while drinking a Pepsi in an auto repair shop on the east side of Detroit:

I got put out of school so much that I knew they just wanted me out, me and Ray met outside the school, Mr. Moreland expelled us for being with ole Pepper. We was just some fellas smoking in the bathroom. Old man Moreland said we was bums, didn't belong in school. He rode my ass all the time. The teachers used to put me out of class for not knowing the answer, man the teachers all hated us, or they was scared of us. Then they send us to the Youth Home for hanging out after they had expelled us. Yeah, the first place you learn about jails is the old Youth Home, next stop is the big house...You learn real fast that the man is watching you and got Black tom-ass niggahs to ride your ass (Taylor, 1992).

Rettig, in his 1980 article, "Considering the Use and Usefulness of Juvenile Detention: Operationalizing Social Theory," found that many practitioners resort to detention as a matter of convenience rather than as an attempt to meet the needs of the youth involved. Rettig states that confinement is not the most viable means of correction for many who are currently detained in juvenile centers, but there is a lack of selectivity in determining which youth would benefit from detention and which would respond better to alternative treatment. He further explains that detaining a youth in an attempt to punish transgression ignores Lemert's warning that punished youth will often respond with continued deviance. Furthermore, Carbone and Lynch (1983) found that the inconsistent behavior of staff when enforcing detention center rules increased undesirable behavior in the youth and actually reduced their compliance rate. And Monster (Kody Scott, a Los Angeles gang leader), tells in *Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member* how he went deeper into gang culture after being punished in the juvenile system in California. A mentality of retaliation against corrupt or abusive authority is evident in *Monster* and *The Diary of A Gangster Girl* (Scott, 1993; Taylor, 1993b).

In "Life in a Children's Detention Center: Strategies of Survival," Fisher poignantly demonstrates how easy it is for staff to abuse their authority. Youth can be isolated in lockdown for up to eight hours without anyone knowing, except other staff on the shift. Employees frequently fail to file the legally mandated reports detailing the reasons for putting a youth in isolation. Fisher determined that staff "often use children to discharge complex, unacknowledged impulses." For instance, she found counselors who stood and observed but failed to intervene while fighting or sexual exploitation was occurring. Fisher (1972) points to several transgressions of privacy which include counselors encouraging explicitly sexual conversations and occasionally participating in sexual activity with the youth in detention. This corruption encourages youth to resent and manipulate authority figures.

Interviews with a young female gang member who had been incarcerated revealed her pessimistic attitude toward authority figures:

They fake, all those lying ass muthafuckas in there, they talk shit about rules and they always breaking rules. They talk 'bout do this and half of them is sleeping on the job at night, creeping off getting with each other, getting high, the whole place is out cold. And if you say something, they will beat you down, it's messed up, real bad. When a fella want to grind you, you know...if they nice it's cuz they up to some shit. Sometimes they'll set you up for the shit, let some older niggahs beat you down. They be cursing us out, then say we can't curse or they'll write us up. They treat us like we some dogs, it's messed up in this place, sometimes they wan't even give us toilet paper when you asked. (Mitchell & Taylor, 1994)

Staff morale does not have to be negative and abusive. Bazemore, Dicker, and Nyhan (1994) found that training to enhance staff-client relations had positive effects on employee attitudes and resulted in an overall reduction in problem situations, such as staff-client conflict, fighting among clients, use of isolation, and abuse reports against staff. Unfortunately, some youth center staff complain that they receive little or no training at all (Jones & Krisberg, 1994).

Detained youth have a market value. They provide case workers, probation officers, detention staff, and others with employment. When youth realize that they are being used as a commodity, they begin to question both their value as human beings and the legitimacy of a mainstream culture that allows and encourages employees to treat individuals in this way. Decreased self-value, distrust of society's structure, and feelings of helplessness prevail. Tukkie explained why many youth feel that the system takes advantage of them in their incarceration:

Crime is good for America, without it whole lots of folks wouldn't have jobs...I realized when I was fourteen in the Youth Home that I was just an excuse for the White man to get paid. That's what one of those long-hair White boy lawyers told me. He said America depended on me to keep prison guards, social workers and all the po-lice working. (Taylor, 1992)

**Impact on the family unit.** It is most commonly a male youth from a troubled home who lands in a juvenile detention facility, and often this person is the primary breadwinner for his family. Therefore, the economic strain and psychological duress family members experience are comparable to those felt when an adult father or husband is incarcerated. In *The Impact of Incarceration on African American Families: Implications for Practice*, King (1993) describes the role of single African-American men in their communities and families as multifaceted, and says the results of incarceration are far-reaching. Eugene, a skilled car thief, spoke of his family responsibility:



It's tight out here, if you're in the joint you can't help your people. If I get those airbags it's change in the bank, my family is happy and everything is straight. Me and Tukkie work out some straight paper for those JLB radios, now my momma is happy until I got busted for some stupid shit, she so mad she don't even come and see me. (Taylor, 1992)

Jorgensen, Hernandez, and Warren (1986) stress the need to address issues within families of incarcerated individuals. Their research can be extended to families who have lost a youth due to juvenile detention.

*Effects of labeling.* Once a youth has been categorized as a delinquent, often a self-fulfilling prophecy is set in motion. Unable to break free of the stigma, he may begin to structure his identity around this label. The effect is frequently future criminal behavior, diminished employment and educational opportunities, and the receipt of a new label—one of society's "undesirables." Tukkie talks of his early days in the Flynn's and how he became closer to his gang:

No doubt about it, the school said I was bad, the po-lice knew I was bad, so I was bad, I had to be, everybody told me so....at the Youth Home you were reminded that you was bad and they made sure they treated you real bad everyday in there." (Taylor, 1992)

Tukkie considered his experience early in the Youth Home as part of the die in the cast of his life:

I was always good with cars, loved fixing and messing with 'em. I was alright in math. But, in school and at the Youth Home they always told me I couldn't learn anything, said I was stupid, you know they called it some Special Ed thing. Anyway I just didn't say shit, why talk? Nobody was paying me attention or saying shit to me, they was telling me I was in Special Ed, that meant I was stupid...

Once labeled a juvenile delinquent, an individual is more likely to view his or her life chances negatively. Thomas (1977) found that those who view their future negatively and feel powerless tend to have a high level of criminal identification. Several ethnographic studies support these findings. For instance, Taylor found in female and male juveniles a strong connection between youth feelings of powerlessness and increased activity in outlaw culture (Taylor, 1989, 1993a, 1993b).

**Poor educational programs.** Simply put, the educational programming in detention facilities often fails, causing youth to experience lasting setbacks. They may lose interest in finishing school and are sometimes incorrectly labeled learning disabled. These realities have profound consequences for social interaction, employment opportunities, and life chances in general. Tukkie, again:

Teachers in there didn't even try to teach me anything. We just sat in the classroom and played around or the teacher would be pissed off and make us sit there without talking. (Taylor, 1992)

Juvenile detention facilities should be a place where troubled youth gain education; however, Genda protested about her schooling inside the Wayne County Detention Facility:

School, they didn't teach us nothing, the teachers didn't give a damn. You didn't learn shit, my girl went to the place ran by Vista Marie, now their teachers were real, they cared. The Youth Home teachers are like everything else in there, totally fucked...." (Taylor, 1992)

There is a strong inverse relationship between education and criminality. Sixty-eight percent of those arrested in 1989 were functionally illiterate (McGeady, 1991). In fact, there is a complex web of interaction where education is concerned. Also functionally illiterate are 85 percent of unmarried mothers, 79 percent of those on welfare, and 72 percent of those without a job (McGeady, 1991). Since a reciprocal relationship exists between education and poverty, uneducated youth are more likely to be poor. Therefore, their children will be less likely to receive adequate schooling—perpetuating the cycle of poverty, illiteracy, and crime. The intergenerational attitude toward education is a key to breaking this vicious cycle. In *The New Jack Roller*, Tukkie advocates positive changes for his children's education:

I know how no schooling means instant death in this world. I don't want my kids in the junior prison (Youth Home) because that's the first big step in becoming a lifetime loser, people in the courts and everywhere think you're a

convict right then and it's all over...and you're a teenager, it's all over."  
(Taylor, 1992)

Karen Johnson Pittman provided a framework for an assessment of youth development in her testimony to the House Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families in September 1991. She underscored the need to educate all youth, especially those in marginalized high-risk areas, and showed that investment in youth as human capital instead of the punitive Draconian thinking, with a negative return on the investment, is more sensible (Pittman & Fleming, 1991).

In "An Effective Bridge Between the Correctional Institution and the Community" (1980), Wolford asserts that receiving solid educational experiences while institutionalized enhances an individual's opportunities on the outside. However, for those youth who have been incarcerated in inadequate facilities, the future is bleak and hopeless (McCall, 1994).

Some practitioners in the juvenile corrections field have advocated for building educational programs informed by developmental concepts. In "Content and Process of Detention Education" (1983), Roush provides a potentially successful framework for education programs in detention centers. In order to be effective, programming must be implemented by educators trained to handle special populations. Furthermore, it is essential that the teachers and detention staff utilize a team approach. Roush contends that cooperative relationships between the two types of staff lead to more effective programming for the youth and increased job satisfaction for the staff.

**Physical and emotional detachment.** When a youth becomes incarcerated, she becomes physically detached from her family and others in her social environment. This physical separation can lead to emotional detachment and decreased societal, familial, and peer ties. This disinvestment in others may lead to decreased social skills and, eventually, isolation, loneliness, and depression (Rettig, 1980).

In her biography quoted earlier, Genda speaks of her depression while incarcerated in the youth home early in her adolescence. She passed on her fears to her sisters, who had become delinquents with their own gang activities. Saddein, Genda's younger sister, talked about her stay in the state's training school for females in *SBC: A Territorial Female Youth Gang* (Mitchell & Taylor, 1994):

I was mad all the time, and sad as hell. I hated everybody, first I was taken away from my younger sister. Me and her was the leaders of our crew, then my momma couldn't see me up at this place. Then this fat White bitch was talking smack about I was sexually abused that's why I was so violent. Right!

This fat bitch don't know shit, she's guessing what's wrong, I am violent cuz I am living in a place where everybody is trying to kick my ass.

These feelings, as well as those expressed by other young girls in *SBC*, support Thomas (1977), who found that the deprivation model of punishment often leads to high levels of alienation, powerlessness, and hopelessness. Genda commented on a visit to see her sisters in their respective detention facilities:

It's the same old shit, they treat 'em like prison. It's just little prison. When they get out they gonna go right back to fucking up...They won't tell you it's scary in there, or that you get so depressed. They'll just say its okay or try and act out how hard they is...but trust me, it's depressing as hell, I hated it. Nobody should have to go to that place. (Mitchell & Taylor, 1994)

Rettig (1980) contends that, "The dynamics of separation can be traumatic to anyone in the client system.... For the youngster himself, separation creates untold anxiety and uncertainty. It can cause residual feelings of rejection that will, in turn, contribute to his future behavioral pattern."

**Socialization within a criminal subculture.** The environment within a juvenile facility may actually foster criminality. Juveniles exchange information, criminal skills, and the values and beliefs of a criminal subculture. This point is reinforced in the autobiography of Los Angeles gang member Monster Kody Scott (1993). Scott describes how he adapted to juvenile incarceration in its different forms and mastered the adult system later. Scott's story parallels Genda's and Tukkie's. Tukkie confirmed this fact in his view of youth detention:

The Youth Home is where you learn the basics, it's like basic training before you become a full-time gangster. They'll teach you in the Home, plenty of shit to make you street smart, make you hard...yeah that's the first place to learn 'bout what the rest of your life is gonna be, it ain't so bad when you learning something, better than sitting in the classroom and having some teacher just staring at you, thinking you ain't shit. Your boys teach you how to survive in there, and then you get out and try to survive out there. Either way you gonna catch hell. (Taylor, 1992)

Although the extent to which a detention facility's program design explicitly incorporates developmental concepts varies from place to place, there is little evidence that the functioning of most programs reflects these concepts. In other words, overall, there seems to be a gap between theory and practice. This gap raises questions about the aggregate impact of detention on youth development. That is, one may wonder if detention itself actually increases recidivism or other indices of negative youth development, such as poor school achievement or dropout rates, at levels beyond those associated with community-based or alternative sentencing programs. There are, in fact, data indicating that alternative forms of treatment are more likely to produce positive developmental outcomes (Barton & Butts, 1988; Greenwood & Turner, 1987; Krisberg et al., 1987, 1989 & 1989a; Murray & Cox, 1979; and NCCD, 1992). However, data from delinquency treatment studies are mixed. Mark Lipsey pinpoints the complexity of juvenile correction research:

While it was demonstrated that the grand mean of those effects is positive, indicating at least modest overall treatment effects, the primary focus of this phase of the investigation has been upon the variability of effects...While not so close as to justify the "nothing works" rhetoric of the 1970s, convincing positive effects would be difficult to discern in any sample from this literature...Moreover, the wide variability in effect found in this literature means that different reviews that sampled different portions of it could come, quite honestly, to rather different conclusions." (Lipsey, 1991)

It is my hypothesis that, despite their stated commitment, the structure and function of traditional detention programs may actually preclude positive growth experiences. I believe that one would find a considerable gap between theory and practice if one evaluated:

- the theoretical vision of youth development found in a range of detention programs;
- the specific outcomes for youth development expected to be derived from this vision;
- the indicators that program personnel *and* youth believed would mark the successful development of these outcomes;
- the descriptions, made by program personnel and youth, of the day-to-day activities in detention facilities; and
- the degree to which personnel-defined and youth-defined indicators are being developed among detained youth.

To be certain, the size of this gap would vary from site to site.

I also believe that, if asked, personnel and youth could generate reasons for the difference between theory and practice. Based on existing data about the nature of confinement, especially in large urban settings, I would expect staff and youth to focus on overcrowding; lack of effective education; health screening and health care; financial pressures; and the diversity of the racial, ethnic, cultural, and behavioral backgrounds of detained youth. Moreover, I would expect that if asked how they envision changing their program's activities to narrow the gap, staff would raise ideas consistent with concepts in the applied youth development literature (Fisher & Lerner, 1994).

For instance, personnel might talk about lowering staff-client ratios to increase individualized attention to the specific problems and developmental potential of each youth (e.g., see Dryfoos, 1990). And they would probably focus on developing more diverse and culturally sensitive programming (Dryfoos, 1990; Schorr, 1988). Moreover, I would expect that better detention programs would be created if one explored:

- the human assets that personnel and youth believed could be brought to bear to align theory and practice;
- the programmatic actions they would introduce to use these assets;
- the indicators they would assess to ascertain if their actions are succeeding; and
- the steps they would take to monitor and correct their actions.

#### Research Plan

The first step in the research plan is to use existing evaluation research to answer the question, What programs have worked in promoting positive youth development? I will use these reports (e.g., Dryfoos, 1990; Hamburg, 1992; Schorr, 1988) to understand the features of past or current programs that most closely parallel accepted best practice in youth development. I will try to identify programs that promote one or more of the five qualities that the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989, pp. 15-17) suggests characterize a youth who has developed well through the middle school years. Specifically, such an individual would be: intellectually reflective, en route to a lifetime of meaningful work, a good citizen, caring and ethical, and healthy.

Youth programs, especially community-based ones, can make several potential contributions to positive youth development. As noted by the Carnegie Corporation report (1992), as well as Lerner, 1995, and Villarruel & Lerner, 1994, these contributions include:

- providing opportunities for youth to engage in positive social relationships with peers and adults;
- teaching youth important life skills;
- offering youth opportunities to make contributions to their communities;
- providing youth with a sense of being part of a positive group experience; and
- facilitating the sense of self-competence among youth.

Following this review, I will collect new data using a participatory approach (Lerner, Ostrom, & Freel, in press; Ostrom, Lerner, & Freel, in press; Weiss and Greene, 1992).

**A participatory-normative approach to evaluation.** The arguments for a participatory-normative approach to evaluation have been championed by numerous evaluators (MacDonald, 1994; Miller, 1993; Weiss, 1987a, 1987b; Weiss & Hite, 1986; Weiss & Greene, 1992; Weiss & Jacobs, 1988). Such an approach:

- builds on the values and meaning system of the youth, families, and other stakeholder groups in the community;
- enlists members of the community as active research partners; and
- enhances the capacity of the community to identify, organize, and utilize their assets to attain goals they value (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1993).

**The development-in-context evaluation (DICE) model.** Promoting positive development at the individual and community levels through the use of participatory evaluation is commonly referred to as the development-in-context evaluation (DICE) model (Lerner, et al., in press; Ostrom, et al., in press). Evaluators following the DICE model work with community members to identify problems or issues and plan the evaluation process; they also collaborate with the community in utilizing the information derived from the evaluation. Evaluations of this kind create a feedback loop with the community throughout the research process.

In the proposed research, I will focus on a set of existing detention programs—ones representing a range of commitments to connecting youth development theory to practice—and I will use the DICE approach to test the hypotheses discussed previously. Accordingly, I will ask program personnel and youth to identify desired outcomes and indicators of these outcomes.

I will work with the stakeholders in each program to review the seven domains of adolescent development and the qualities of positive youth development discussed above, and review the features of programs that are associated with positive youth outcomes. Finally, I

will discuss the range of quantitative indicators (e.g., achievement test scores) and qualitative indicators (e.g., identity status) that are available. However, both these indicators *and* the indicators of successful program revisions will be generated through collaboration involving the stakeholders and me.

The evaluation will involve collecting primary data through interviews, focus groups, and observations of youth and their caretakers, and examining secondary data collected by program and probation staff. The material will be used to assess the youths' achievement in the seven developmental issues pertinent to adolescence (measured prior to and after the program). Table 1 presents a list of these seven developmental issues and examples of measures that may be used to provide scores. Additionally, the secondary data will be broadly compared to corresponding information from NIJ/OJJDP and Uniform Crime Reports. These data will be used to test the hypothesis that a juvenile corrections program that incorporates best practice principles of youth development will enhance the positive development of confined youth, as compared to what occurs among youth confined in typical detention settings.

In sum, a participatory approach to evaluation and program enhancement will be used to identify:

- the role of youth development theory in the vision of existing programs;
- the role of youth development theory in program practice;
- gaps between theory and practice;
- the vision among program personnel and detained youth for narrowing the gap;
- plans of action for narrowing the gap and the efficacy of these plans; and
- the youth outcomes associated with these program changes.

#### Possible Research Limitations

Unfortunately, few juvenile justice agencies routinely collect any data on outcomes. And generally, there is very little information on recidivism. Therefore, the research sites need to be carefully chosen. Additionally, this research design requires intensive collaboration with stakeholders at every stage and a multiyear commitment to study, implement, and evaluate changes in at least three sites.

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## Bearing the Burden: How Incarceration Weakens Inner-City Communities

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*The majority of prison inmates come from and return to disadvantaged, minority communities. This paper explores how high rates of incarceration may weaken already fragile inner-city neighborhoods. At low levels, the experience of incarceration is largely an individual and family matter. However, at high levels of incarceration, communities must support increasing numbers of economically and socially impaired men, women, and children. This burden may exacerbate existing strains within the community, such as unemployment and crime. Ways to measure the discrete effects of incarceration on community destabilization are discussed near the end of the paper.*

In the past two decades, the rate at which the United States puts people into prison has risen sharply, with close to a million people now behind bars. Several observers believe that this rate will increase even more rapidly in the future.<sup>21</sup> Most of the rise is attributable to tougher drug laws. The impact falls most heavily on minorities—particularly African-Americans. In 1989, 8 percent of black males aged 20 to 29 were locked up in prisons and jails, and an additional 15 percent were under correctional or court supervision (Mauer, 1990.)<sup>22</sup> Latinos show a lower rate, with 3 percent locked up, and 7 percent under supervision, but the youthful age structure and high poverty rates of Latino communities foreshadow higher incarceration rates in the future.

Michael Tonry (1995:1-51) asserts that the effect of these "recent punishment policies [has been] to destabilize inner-city communities." At low levels of incarceration what happens to felons, both in prison and when they are released, is largely an individual and family matter. Whatever happens to them is not terribly important to their communities: there aren't enough

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<sup>21</sup> For example, Irwin and Austin (1994) project that a ten-fold increase would result from policies promoted by President Bush's Attorney General Barr. The policies include increasing conviction rates, incarcerating more of those convicted, and extending sentences.

<sup>22</sup> A study of outmigration of adult black males from Los Angeles County (using PUMS data) found that 25 percent of those who left the county between 1985 and 1990 for other California locations were living in institutions in 1990 (Grant, Oliver, and James, 1994:36). The authors comment that "the criminal justice system plays an important role in the redistribution of poor blacks."



of them to matter. However, at higher levels of incarceration, what happens to them *is* important to their communities. Antidrug laws have resulted in a dramatic increase in the imprisonment rates in inner-city communities. There are more men and women from such communities in prison, more ex-offenders on their streets—not just isolated individuals, and more of their families are affected. In turn, people who have not been directly involved with the criminal justice system begin to be affected. Existing strains within the community are exacerbated. This is the scenario I follow.

What is the research evidence for this line of argument, and how can we test it? There is virtually no direct evidence on this topic, and it is difficult to acquire for a number of reasons. Interviews with inmates, no matter how extensive, do not help us understand the communities they leave behind. And community researchers are likely to overlook the effects of imprisonment because they study people who remain in the community, not those who leave or are removed. Finally, increased incarceration rates rarely operate alone at the community level: they add to, rather than solely generate, local problems. Inner-city communities vary considerably in the extent to which they have a capacity for containing their problems, and written reports rarely give us enough information to tell where the community stands.<sup>23</sup>

In what follows, then, there is considerable extrapolation from information that is only partially relevant. I will concentrate on the effects of prison. This choice ignores the impact of jail incarceration and of parole and probation supervision: Short-term incarceration and alternatives to incarceration pose different issues for communities. First, I will discuss the weakened condition of inner-city communities in the 1990s. Then I will discuss the direct impact of increased rates of imprisonment on communities: Specifically, what does it mean that those communities now house more families disrupted by a member's imprisonment and more former inmates than when imprisonment rates were lower? Other central questions include: What is the indirect impact on inner-city communities? What is the effect on the larger national community? What kind of research can be done?

The Setting: Inner-City Communities in the 1990s

The increased rate of imprisonment in the past two decades has coincided with a number of deleterious changes. For the past decade, the rise of an urban underclass and the decline of inner-city minority communities have been major research issues: that is the literature I draw on here. There is considerable variation in the extent to which those communities have deteriorated, but in general, they have been severely weakened by the combined impact of economic restructuring and the decline of many welfare state resources. Deindustrialization, in particular, has ravaged job opportunities for

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<sup>23</sup> See Bowser (1992) and Furstenberg (1993) for taxonomies of inner-city communities.

poorly educated men and women of color. Many are unemployed or have dropped out of the labor market altogether. To take up the slack, we have seen the expansion of a poor-paying service economy and a lively informal economy that features illicit as well as legal jobs.

One important new aspect of inner-city communities is that a significant segment of their economy has become criminalized, with an emphasis on drug marketing (cf. Hagedorn, 1994). In this economic climate, the risk of imprisonment is almost "a form of business license tax" (Bullock, 1973:113).<sup>24</sup> At the same time, many of their communities have been hard-hit by drug abuse and the violence that is often associated with drug dealing. Increased imprisonment of local dealers has rarely helped.

The resources—external and internal—to deal with these problems and those caused by widespread unemployment have been shrinking. Government funds and services have dwindled. Welfare has been harder to get and has not kept up with inflation. Drug treatment programs have a low priority in the so-called war on drugs. And government-funded community-based organizations have been disappearing since the late 1970s. Though most inner-city communities exhibit vigorous self-help efforts—through churches and ethnic organizations—bootstrapping is very difficult for them (cf. Moore and Pinderhughes, 1993). Internal resources are stretched very thin. Meanwhile, a steady flow of political demagoguery stigmatizes the poorest African-Americans and Latinos, groups with little capacity for political influence.

But, paradoxically, these very changes make the neighborhood a more salient feature of life for inner-city residents. High unemployment means that people remain at home, living with their families, and on the streets of the neighborhood much of their time. The gradual informalization of the labor market places more emphasis on friendship and kinship networks. Increased neediness means that these same networks are more active than ever. The rise in racist rhetoric from the larger society combines with economic deprivation to revitalize and deepen the defensive coping strategies that people of color have developed over the centuries. This is the context in which increased imprisonment operates.

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<sup>24</sup> Incarceration (except with highly concentrated neighborhood arrests) does not eliminate drug markets. Lower-level drug dealers rapidly replace those who are incarcerated (Blumstein, 1993), and localized drug markets may also be reorganized into "supermarkets" (Curtis, 1994).

## Direct Effects

Who in the community is most directly affected by the experience of imprisonment? First, the families of imprisoned men and women; second, the men and women who return from prison to the community, and third, the families of those ex-inmates. Traffic in and out of prison sets up a complex dynamic (Fagan, 1995) that is the focus of this section.<sup>25</sup> Earlier research identifies sources of strain for these people, and by extrapolation we can argue that inner-city communities now have many more weakened families and individuals who have been directly affected by the prison experience. The stated goals of imprisonment have been to incapacitate problem-causing individuals and—at least in the past—to rehabilitate them. Rehabilitation has been largely abandoned as a goal, and whether incapacitation has had the desired effect is debatable.<sup>26</sup>

*Effects on inmates' families.* Most research on prisoners' families is only partially relevant to my topic, because it focuses on white male inmates, and assumes—or selects—a nuclear family structure, with wives or stable girlfriends and children (e.g., Brodsky, 1975; Carlson and Cervera, 1992; Fishman, 1990).<sup>27</sup> In such a nuclear family, imprisonment of the husband/father creates serious strains, whether the family is living the "fast" or the "square" life, and whether the relationship was good or bad (Fishman, 1990). Finances have to be shifted; roles have to be reorganized, and existing spousal conflicts are exacerbated. The longer the sentence, the greater the difficulties when the inmate is released (Carlson and Cervera, 1992).

But for many African-American and Latino inmates, family life is much more complex, and the effects, while just as serious, are more difficult to trace. For example, even though most male inmates have dependent children (Carlson and Cervera, citing Hairston, 1990), an inmate may have been living with different children and a different mate at the time of the arrest. Or he may have been living with his parents and contributing significantly to their

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<sup>25</sup> Curtis (1995) finds that this traffic also has epidemiological consequences for the spread of HIV. Drug users share needles in jails and spread the virus. When they return to the community after short terms, they lack the means to buy their own equipment and, again, share needles with friends—spreading the virus.

<sup>26</sup> For a minority of prisoners, the nationalist, ethnic, and religious organizations, which flourished in prisons during an earlier era, have had transformative effects (Moore, 1978; Wilkinson, 1995). The Black Muslims are the most notable.

<sup>27</sup> One exception, Swan's (1981) survey of wives of black prisoners, taps into a different subculture than is at issue in this paper—that of the South in the 1970s. Swan cites Schneller's (1976) study to the effect that "poor black families...tend to view imprisonment as part of the overall system of discrimination with which they always have had to cope." (p. 45)

household income. The point is that several households may be affected by a single imprisonment.

In poor African-American and Latino communities, spousal unions may be fragile and extended kin more important (see, for example, Jarrett, 1992; Stack, 1974). The sequence of events from arrest through imprisonment often involves the inmate's extended family, especially when the inmate is young (Brodsky, 1975; Moore and Long, 1981). For an older male inmate, it is more often his wife and her family that fills the financial and social gaps. For all members of the family, the experience can be extremely stressful—financially and emotionally. In particular, in recent years many more grandmothers have been recruited as caregivers for the children of imprisoned parents. Grandparent caregivers face special problems—both personal and with bureaucratic regulations (Minkler and Roe, 1993).<sup>28</sup> Though grandparental foster care is traditional in African-American and Latino communities, an element of coercion has been added to what is historically an economic and social expedient. What happens when grandparents cannot care for the children of prisoners may become increasingly important in the future.

For male inmates, no matter who takes what role in his family, the data leave little doubt that the influence of his wife's family is strengthened. Resentment from her family is usually strong enough to weaken the influence of his family. This contributes to the long-standing devaluation of males, and to the enhancement of the all-male peer group. For children, all social bonds, inside and outside the family, are attenuated (Sampson and Laub, 1993).

Does the arrest stigmatize the family? Neighbors may define the arrest-imprisonment sequence as a crisis that commands support or, by contrast, it may be highly stigmatizing. If parents are seen as having done their best, the family may receive support (Jarrett, 1995). Several studies find that the degree of stigmatization also depends to some extent on the incarceration rate in the local community. Working-class and inner-city neighborhoods, where arrests are more commonplace, are likely to be less censorious of an inmate's family, unless the family as a whole is defined locally as "bad" (Achor, 197; Fishman, 1990; Moore and Long, 1981; Schneller, 1976).

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<sup>28</sup> Grandparents may not be eligible for AFDC support, for example, unless the child is placed with them by court order. Nonrelative caregivers receive more benefits, more easily (Minkler and Roe, 1993: 92ff). In 1990, approximately a million children lived in households in which a grandparent was the sole caregiver, and many more grandparents supplement maternal care. Although many of these grandparents are conventional, grandparental care still raises questions about the replication of parenting patterns that contributed to the inmate-parent's problems.

The increasing number of female inmates poses different problems for inner-city communities. Contemporary drug laws have sent large numbers of women to prison.<sup>29</sup> Most of them are mothers and, unlike male inmates, most were primary caregivers prior to imprisonment (Krisberg, 1995; Schaenman, 1995). One of the few studies of the families of jailed mothers (who were predominantly Chicana and African-American) paints a picture of severe disruption during the mother's jail term (Stanton, 1980). In addition, the usual problems faced by an inmate upon release—finding money, a job, and a place to live—are exacerbated for women with children. Children of inmate mothers suffer even more displacement than when an imprisoned father returns home. In this study, children of mothers on probation did better than those who were incarcerated, but the probation mothers were also less deviant to begin with.<sup>30</sup>

**Post-prison marginalization.** After family, getting work is the most pressing concern for men and women released from prison (Moore 1978), and they are rarely successful. In 1991, only 21 percent of California's parolees were working full time (Irwin and Austin, 1994). The prison experience is profoundly destructive of work habits. Most time in prison is idle, and most of the relatively rare prison work is characterized by a slowdown that represents resistance to authority (Correctional Association of New York, 1984; Vigil, 1989). Inmates rarely come out of prison with enhanced job skills, and they often acquire very dysfunctional work habits and attitudes. The ordinary strains of a civilian workplace are difficult for them. In general, the earlier the prison experience, the more dysfunctional the work habits (Fagan, 1995).

A prison record presents an obstacle to finding a job, and so does the intense postrelease parole surveillance, which often interferes with work. Parolees return to prison more often for technical violations than for new crimes (Irwin and Austin, 1994). Immediate postrelease difficulties in obtaining work lead many former prisoners to adopt lifestyles, vis-a-vis both peers and mates, that are based on idle time and preprison associations.<sup>31</sup> They *hang out*, and their wives continue to bear the burden of supporting the family financially and

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<sup>29</sup> In New York, for example, the number of women under custody grew 333 percent between 1982 and 1994, according to the Correctional Association of New York. Between 1988 and 1991, almost three-quarters of the women committed to prison were drug offenders.

<sup>30</sup> The samples were not matched on offenses, and the incarcerated mothers were less likely to have committed property crimes. They were more likely to have been drug users, to have had another family member incarcerated, to have had a juvenile record or previous adult arrest or incarceration, or to have had friends incarcerated (Stanton, 1980:30-31).

<sup>31</sup> Chicano prisoners surveyed in the 1970s expected their Los Angeles-based families and friends to help them find jobs when they were released (Moore, 1978). While those networks may have functioned in the 1970s, they tend to have collapsed in the post-industrial era.

emotionally (Fishman, 1990). These lifestyles impede adaptation to work, even under the most supportive working conditions (as in Padfield and Williams, 1973). Marginalized men and women become more marginalized (cf Glasgow, 1981). Ex-inmates' joblessness may have the most significant effect on their communities: If released inmates went immediately into full-time jobs, this paper would be very different.

Marginalization is also enhanced because prison erodes inmates' sexual, social, and coping skills. In particular, prison erodes marriages, and newly released inmates have difficulty in re-establishing old relationships or forming new ones that extend beyond casual sex. Men often lack money, a car, and other resources necessary for dating. Once in a domestic setting, former inmates may be prone to greater domestic violence. It is particularly difficult for women to form relationships after prison (cf. Moore and Mata, 1981). Increased rates of imprisonment mean there will be greater numbers of such economically and socially impaired men and women on the streets.

**Prisonization and the strengthening of gang and neighborhood peer groups.** Most of the extensive literature on prison subcultures lies outside the scope of this paper. However, the literature on prisonization is relevant because it is concerned with the "negative effects of institutionalization on prisoners' commitment to prosocial norms, values, and beliefs" (Bowker, 1977)—in other words, what the inmate carries out of prison. These subcultural effects are more serious for younger inmates and are exacerbated by longer sentences. And in recent years, sentences have been lengthening (Glaser, 1964; Tonry 1995).<sup>32</sup>

I am also concerned with some narrower social aftereffects of the prison experience. Most prisons are violent and dangerous, and new inmates search for protection and connections. Many find both in gangs. There is substantial literature on the importation of street gangs into prison and the processes through which gang membership is reinforced or developed (Hamid, 1994; Hunt, et al., 1992; Moore, 1978; Vigil, 1989). Inevitably, these gang loyalties are again exported to the neighborhoods. The revolving door strengthens street gang ties. One researcher commented, "In California, ... frankly I don't think the gangs would continue existing as they are without the prison scene" (Bourgois 1995). Of course, many of these gangs are crime oriented (Davidson, 1974).

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<sup>32</sup> However, state prisoners still tend to return fairly quickly to the streets. Felons sent to state prison in 1990 serve 2 and half years; those sent to federal prison serve more time—5 and a half years (Langan, Perkins and Chaiken, 1994). Austin and Jones (1993) argue that such official figures understate the time actually served by roughly 40 percent. The official statistics usually omit data on jail time served and on time served for technical parole violations

Other neighborhood ties are also reinforced in prison: One researcher remarked that concentrated neighborhood-based law enforcement strategies (like New York's Tactical Narcotics Teams) have turned Rikers Island, a New York City jail, "into a [neighborhood] block party!" (Curtis, 1994). All of the drug dealers in the neighborhood, gang and nongang alike, are swept into jail at the same time. Prisons and jails are ideal institutions for strengthening peer-group relationships that have later repercussions on the streets.<sup>33</sup>

However, not all inmates come to prison with strong ties to the outside world. State-raised youth—whose adolescence involves frequent probation supervision and trips to juvenile detention facilities and whose young adult years are spent in and out of prison—have only the most fragile ties to family and friends in the community.<sup>34</sup> These youth are the most fully prisonized. In California, they have been held responsible for the development of the more violent prison gangs, such as the Mexican Mafia and Nuestra Familia (Moore, 1978). Although these gangs developed in prison, they were exported to the streets and by now are established criminal organizations. In several states, law enforcement and media allege that criminal street gangs are controlled by prison inmates. Increased imprisonment, at younger ages, enlarges the numbers of state-raised young men.

The export of prison criminality is not the only negative aspect of street networks that include high numbers of ex-offenders. Prisons are single-sex, very racist, and often very violent. Researchers and practitioners speculate that the increased violence in street networks may be affected by the export of violent prison interpersonal styles. A similar speculation may be appropriate for racism. There is some evidence that ex-inmates hang around with younger men, who are impressed by these "veteranos". These are "dinosaurs, roaming the streets long after their time is gone," according to one former gang member (Moore, 1991:123). Often these younger street groups are the only people from whom ex-inmates can command deference.

Such street networks may be relatively impervious to sanctions—formal *or* informal. Their members become inured to criminal justice sanctions, and their friends don't stigmatize them if they do wind up in prison. The prisoner subculture is intensely hostile to established authority, and these attitudes, too, are exported to the streets. In the early 1980s, surveys attempting to measure criminal employment were conducted among inner-city African-American youth in several cities. Among those who admitted committing a crime, approximately three-quarters felt that they faced very little chance of going to prison, and even if they did, the vast

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<sup>33</sup> An earlier literature on prisonization argued that inmates become receptive to the crime enhancing aspects of prison culture because their conventional identities are stripped from them (Clemmer, 1940). Clearly, this does not happen in quite the same way to contemporary inmates from the inner city.

<sup>34</sup> The concept of state-raised youth is developed in Irwin (1970) and expanded in Johnson (1987).

majority—92 percent—felt that they would not lose friends (Viscusi, 1986, but see also Brodsky, 1975).<sup>35</sup>

The tendency of prison experiences to increase crime in the community is the topic of another conference paper (Clear), but the processes outlined above may help explain some of the statistical relationships (e.g. Grogger, 1991).

**Dereliction.** For a significant fraction of ex-offenders, the obstacles to obtaining jobs and establishing stable families become insuperable. Anecdotal data from several field researchers supply substantial evidence of what Irwin and Austin (1994) call dereliction. After they exhaust family resources, many ex-offenders wind up on the streets, homeless.<sup>36</sup> Merging the findings of 12 studies of the homeless, Rossi (1989) found that an average of 21.3 percent had served prison sentences.<sup>37</sup> Many die on the streets.

Increased numbers of derelict ex-offenders means that in some inner-city communities, like East Los Angeles, homeless men appeared on the neighborhood streets in the 1980s for the first time in residents' memory. These are neighborhood men, who may migrate between the downtown Skid Row and their home neighborhoods where they feel safer and where they can occasionally panhandle from more fortunate associates.

Indirect Effects: Depletion, Routinization, and Distortion of Gender Roles

The higher the rate of imprisonment, the greater the number of socially and economically handicapped ex-inmates and their strained families in a community. But prison indirectly affects other people in the community as well, and these effects are the topic of this section.

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<sup>35</sup> The reality may be otherwise: a study in a major Illinois prison, done in the early 1970s, showed that friendships deteriorated for a third of the inmates (Brodsky, 1971).

<sup>36</sup> The meager and shrinking resources provided by General Assistance are usually not enough to provide shelter and food. GA recipients often rely on family or friends to help support them, and friends and family frequently become disenchanted and withdraw the support.

<sup>37</sup> A higher proportion (34.7 percent) had served time in jail, but since jails traditionally have been used by police as repositories for the homeless, this figure is hard to interpret.



**Marriage: Is it the imprisonment rate, or records, or both?** It has been argued that the mere fact of taking a community's men away to prison has strong negative consequences for family formation. Perhaps the most widely discussed impact of the so-called depletion effect is that it contributes to the shortage of "marriageable males." Wilson (1987) framed this discussion by noting the sharp decline among African-Americans in the ratio of men with jobs to every 100 women of the same age. To determine whether imprisonment contributes significantly to this decline, one must first know what proportion of young males from inner-city communities are absent and in prison at any given point in time. Unfortunately, we don't have such data (cf. Lynch, 1995).<sup>38</sup> The 1989 imprisonment rates cited at the beginning of this paper may already have created a significant depletion effect: Those rates have been increasing more than 6 percent a year (Blumstein 1995), and are projected to increase even more (Irwin and Austin 1994). Thus whatever the depletion effect is now, it may well become even more significant in the future.

However, Bowser (1995) argues that if one is concerned with the effect of the criminal justice system on marriageability, the depletion effect—that is, the absence of men—is less important than the fact that having a prison or jail record lowers employment chances and thus lowers marriageability (cf also Sampson and Laub, 1995, who follow similar reasoning). This broadens the concern: Instead of focusing only on those who are in prison, we must look at men living in the community who have criminal records of any sort and at the ways in which short-term incarceration affects work. Though data are not firm, conservative estimates suggest that as many as a quarter to a third of young African-American males have records.<sup>39</sup> Field studies of low-income communities leave no doubt that in some neighborhoods and in some networks there are even higher percentages (Bourgois, 1995; Bowser, 1995; Jarrett, 1995; Moore, 1978).

Taking records into consideration makes the impact of the criminal justice system on marriageability stronger. And it's not only a matter of employment: ethnographic data also show that women take the risk of imprisonment into account in calculating marriageability: Many women are reluctant to get permanently involved with men who are likely to wind up in prison (Jarrett, 1995; Williams and Kornblum, 1994:129). This, in turn, reduces the chances that such men will marry conventional women.

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<sup>38</sup> The Fortune Society cites an estimate that 80 percent of Rikers Island inmates come from just 7 neighborhoods, but "neighborhoods" in this statement are very large areas, like Harlem and the South Bronx.

<sup>39</sup> Higher figures for justice-system contact are cited for young black male high-school dropouts. In some studies, the figures are as high as 60 percent. See Mincy, 1994.

**Routinization.** For many families, the criminal justice system, including prison, is a painfully familiar bureaucracy, bordering on the routine.<sup>40</sup> For others, there may be an omnipresent threat of imprisonment, since many inner-city families that are basically conventional are also involved in petty hustling (Valentine, 1978).<sup>41</sup> The pervasiveness of prison in these communities means that parents and spouses of inmates can expect to receive support from extended kin, neighbors, members of their churches, and friends, as I have discussed earlier. Does this fact relate to the much-discussed—but also little-studied—issue of whether inner-city communities are more tolerant of deviance?<sup>42</sup> It is doubtful; although the answer probably involves variation both in inner-city community composition and also in what is meant by deviance.

However, routinization of prison may have a different effect on inner-city youth: They may become presocialized to prison. Every additional inmate released to the community increases the chances that community youth will learn directly about prison and become yet more persuaded that prison lies in their own futures. For inner-city youth, anticipatory socialization to prison is exacerbated by the fact that prison permeates the national youth culture, well beyond the ghettos and barrios (Krisberg, 1995). Prison-oriented ghetto items (for example, prison-style clothing, celebrity "gangsta rappers," and images of prison on MTV) pervade middle-class white youth culture. For at-risk ghetto and barrio youngsters, this commodification of prison glamorizes the prison experience. What is trendy play for the children of the middle classes is all too real for those in the inner city. Finally, going to prison enhances one's status in the subculture; whether a neophyte can withstand the rigors of prison social life is often a topic of intense discussion (Bourgois, 1995). Routinization, then, does not mean that the prison experience is taken casually, but rather that it is a pervasive feature of life. And coping with it is an issue for adults and youth alike.

**Gender role modeling.** Ample literature on poor black males (e.g. Hannerz, Schulz in Wilkinson and Taylor, 1977; Anderson, 1990) argues that street subculture plays a major role. Its

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<sup>40</sup> Moore (1978) considered the presence and threat of prison to be a discernible feature of life in poor Chicano communities in Los Angeles; Bourgois (1994) comments that jail and prison are "a definite major backdrop" in his study of El Barrio in New York, "constantly weaved into the ethnographic conversations."

<sup>41</sup> The distinction between conventional and criminal may be overdrawn. See also Moore (1978) for a discussion of the three-part barrio economy. If hustling is indeed pervasive, then so is the threat of arrest.

<sup>42</sup> Vigil (1995) argues that many families don't tolerate deviance, but rather are forced to accommodate to the presence of obnoxious street behavior by going inside the house early in the evening. This pattern is reminiscent of Rainwater's (1967) concept of the "house as haven."

importance is inversely proportional to the men's weakened job chances, and perhaps, to their vulnerability to arrest and imprisonment—although the latter is rarely mentioned. Street subcultures are substantially influenced by the presence of ex-offenders, and by the expectation of many members that they, too, will wind up doing time.

Street subcultures have many aspects, but I am primarily concerned here with what Majors and Billson (1992:8) call the cool pose, a stance adopted by many inner-city men to cope with the many threats to their self-respect. This facade of aloofness and control, according to the authors, "counters the ...damaged pride, [and] shattered confidence...that come from living on the edge of society." The cool pose is particularly well suited to the inmate role—the prison norm that one should "hold one's mud"—and in this respect the pose transcends racial subcultures. The prison experience and the post-prison adaptations of inner-city men contribute to the all-male street orientation and reinforce the cool pose—with all of its ramifications.

The cool pose also inhibits the formation of nurturant relationships, according to Majors and Billson. Young black fathers who cannot find jobs experience severe strains. They lose power in relationships with their children and girlfriends and, as a result, depreciate the institution of marriage altogether (Laseter, 1991). Their scorn for marriage is part of the cool pose. Anderson (1989) paints an even bleaker picture of the deleterious effect of male peer group influences on the willingness of young African-American men to marry. Disparaging references to women in rap music have at least one source in "older 'underground' oral traditions such as men's prison poetry," and "a recurrent fear of being 'pussy-whipped'" (Williams and Kornblum, 1994:108, 109).

Jarrett (1994) analyzes the female counterpart. Poor African-American women in her studies idealize marriage, but are dubious about their chances of finding a reliable husband. There is a continuing yearning for "normal" marriages, and there are enough two-parent families in most poor communities to provide models. But among many women, there is deep skepticism. Marriage has become "a little white girl's dream."

#### Tertiary Effects: Related Concerns About Inner-City Communities

Beyond direct and indirect effects of increasing rates of imprisonment, there are what might be called tertiary effects, which impinge on a community's capacity to control its own problems. These effects occur largely because increased imprisonment intensifies male street activities. The male peer group is pivotal to this argument. Street networks become broader and deeper. The enhanced influence of ex-inmates operates at every age level. In youth, the peer group competes with adult authority, both at home and in school (Vigil, 1988); in adulthood, the peer group occupies substantial blocs of time, discouraging work, deterring family formation, and competing with the family once it is formed. Street activity causes

problems at the private level of control, which is based in family and friendship networks and at the community and broader public levels. (See Bursik and Grasmick, 1993, and Hunter, 1985, for useful analyses of these three levels of community social control.) Intensified male street activity also evokes concerns about police. Both heavy policing and underpolicing can reinforce feelings of alienation. These are the topics of this section.

**The private level: problems for parents.** There is a voluminous body of literature on the perils of child-rearing in communities with high levels of street activity. Parents in high-risk neighborhoods expend an enormous amount of effort sheltering and protecting their children (Williams and Kornblum, 1994). Constructive neighborhood networks become very important for effective parenting. In their absence, parents "must be supermotivated, that is, exceptionally adept at working the system and unusually diligent in monitoring their offspring....avoiding the omnipresent dangers [rather] than cultivating scarce opportunities" (Furstenberg, 1993: 255). Effective parenting is quite different in such communities compared with low-risk neighborhoods.

**The parochial level: tolerance and community social control.** Just as effective local networks are important for family control, family strength is a key to making community controls possible. Families can provide critical supervision of youth peer groups (Sampson, 1993; Sullivan, 1989). In addition, local friendships, acquaintanceships, and voluntary organizations help to control local problems.

How such networks attempt to control problems caused by intensified street activity is a favorite topic of journalists. But there is another side to the story. Limited research indicates that in some neighborhoods with high imprisonment rates, residents are tolerant of and willing to relate to ex-convicts (Moore, 1978). What does this mean? Jarrett (1995) suggests several possibilities: "Is there a belief that former inmates can be rehabilitated? Is there a folk understanding that the system disproportionately targets minorities? Does the fact that former inmates are family members or the children of neighbors and friends allow community residents to still see them as people 'just like us'? Or is there an element of fear of retaliation by former inmates which would discourage efforts toward social control?"

**The police: overpolicing or underpolicing?** At the very least, intensified street activity creates problems of public order and of crime. In turn, these generate ambivalence toward the police—the public level of control. Vigil's study of a gang and drug-plagued Los Angeles housing project epitomizes the dilemma that residents face in relation to the police. He remarks (1995) that most of the time the community is like a free crime zone, with wide-open drug dealing and no police presence whatsoever, while at other times it is like a war zone, with intense and violent police activity. There is no middle ground, and residents are upset by

both extremes--neglect and overpolicing. Mark Moore has analyzed the complex interaction between the police and the minority communities that are experiencing waves of youth violence. "The police could make two responses that would be racist and perceived as such. One is to ignore the problem because neither victims nor offenders are judged worth saving. The other is to use broad fears in the wider community as an occasion for cracking down." (1991:19)

Distrust of the police among African-Americans is common. In a 1992 national poll conducted for the Anti-Defamation League, 74 percent of African-Americans, compared with 49 percent of the total sample, felt that police treat black citizens less fairly than white citizens of the same class level. However, as Moore comments, no matter how critical they are of police, "the black community as a whole yearns for an effective police response more strongly than ever." (14)

**Alienation and racial polarization.** In many African-American and Latino communities there is strong suspicion that the sudden burgeoning of the drug market and the resulting wave of incarcerations are no accident. They are seen by many as a deliberate plan on the part of the white establishment to weaken communities that might offer a political threat (Edsall and Edsall, 1991). Right or wrong, this view contends that the drug epidemic was designed to remove men from the community to prison and thereby depress the birth rate and the political potential of the population, and also to corrupt the lives of those remaining in the community. This alienation reinforces the social and political isolation of inner-city communities. As Glasgow (1995) remarks, "policies that destroy the connectedness of people with each other and the community drive people away from socialization with community institutions, and they destroy the vitality of the future."

#### Concerns Beyond Inner-City Communities

The increased rates of imprisonment of inner-city minorities has a ripple effect throughout the society, well beyond the inmates' neighborhoods. A major effect is to exacerbate racial tensions. Increasingly, the larger society thinks of minority neighborhoods in terms of crime and welfare. Inner-city African Americans blame a misty "white establishment."

The analysis in this paper implies that increased imprisonment rates have further weakened already vulnerable inner-city communities. Changes in the inner-city economies that led to a growing drug trade and its attendant tangle of social ills go largely unaddressed. What Scheingold (1981) calls the "symbolic politics of street crime" has been substituted for the amelioration of underlying problems. Those politics mean that for the general public, "structural problems [are reframed] as matters of crime control. ... Here are people we are entitled to hate—but only so long as we think of them as victimizers rather than as victims"

(Scheingold, 1981:173). More directly to the point of this paper, Tonry (1995) argues that the so-called color-blind decision to concentrate resources on a drug policy that emphasizes increased imprisonment (rather than prevention and treatment) was consciously racist; the differential impact on inner-city communities was anticipated.<sup>43</sup>

In some respects, this discussion—about alienation in the minority communities and racial scapegoating in the larger society—echoes the analyses that followed the racial conflicts of the 1960s. A flurry of commission reports of that period warned about the prospects for increasing societal division based on the combination of race and poverty. In the general absence of regional strategies that would spread resources more evenly, the "chocolate-city—vanilla-suburbs" pattern that the Kerner Commission foresaw also presages the development of "garrison cities...where order is achieved by force rather than by consent" (Skolnick, 1995:1). In the thirty years since the Watts riots, many believe that this society has moved closer to that apocalyptic scenario. An ominous pattern can be found in the California state budget, where prison building and maintenance mean reduced expenditures on health, welfare, and educational benefits (Skolnick, 1995). The *New York Times* cites figures on shifting expenditures in California: in 1986, 12.6 percent of the budget was allocated for higher education and 2 percent for prisons. In 1994, both were 9 percent. By 2002, the projected allocations are 1 percent and 18 percent. This kind of shift in a state's priorities has deep implications.

#### Research Possibilities

Because the effects of increased imprisonment rates are so intertwined with other problems in the inner cities, it is extremely difficult to devise research that would definitively address the issues raised in this paper. The line of argument that I have developed carries a logical research agenda. The ideal design would be longitudinal. It would use a combination of different methods to examine one or more inner-city neighborhoods over the past twenty years during which imprisonment rates have been increasing and would use a variety of measures of what I have called direct, indirect, and tertiary effects. Surveys can be used to assess some of these effects, but qualitative research is necessary for others. The guiding hypothesis would be that as the number of inmate families and ex-inmates increases in each neighborhood, the neighborhood subculture and the neighborhood social networks would change in the ways discussed in this paper. Obviously, that ideal is not attainable, and even if we had relevant data from the 1970s and 1980s to compare with current data, the results

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<sup>43</sup> Recent Rand Corporation research modelled the relative cost effectiveness of treatment as compared with domestic enforcement for the reduction of cocaine use. The findings strongly support treatment (Rydell and Everingham, 1994).

would be difficult to interpret. Since we cannot study the topic over time, we must search for a strategy that would give us some roundabout evidence of the effects of an increase in imprisonment. Basically, this means finding communities that are similar in all respects except one: The crucial difference is that one has a high rate of imprisonment and the other one a low rate. All of the effects should be more obvious in the community with a high rate of incarceration.

The first task, then, is to find such communities that are similar in all respects (e.g. ethnicity, employment patterns, crime rates, family structure, age composition, etc) but their rate of imprisonment. The second is to devise appropriate measures and methodologies to test for the hypothesized effects.

**Sampling: Finding communities that vary in imprisonment level.** There are substantial differences between the states in the levels and rates of increase in imprisonment (Baird, 1993). Three states represent a range:

Table 1. Incarceration rates

	<u>1979</u>	<u>1990</u>
<b>California</b>	<b>93/100,000</b>	<b>311/100,000</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>73/100,000</b>	<b>149/100,000</b>
<b>Minnesota</b>	<b>51/100,000</b>	<b>72/100,000</b>

Wisconsin's imprisonment rate in 1990 was twice that of Minnesota's, and California's was twice that of Wisconsin's; the rates of increase also differ substantially. Thus, one possibility is to study comparable neighborhoods in major cities in the three states.

A second possibility is to compare neighborhoods within one city that are similar in all respects except for imprisonment experiences. Preliminary explorations in Wisconsin indicate that it would be possible to map, by zip code or census tract, the home addresses of inmates and the home addresses of parolees from the city of Milwaukee. Preliminary discussions also indicate that most parolees are, in fact, concentrated in the inner cities. The neighborhoods with the highest concentrations may be uniquely disadvantaged, so that it may not be possible to find matching neighborhoods that have lower imprisonment rates. But that seems implausible. The most effective sampling design would be a combination of the two approaches.

**Measuring direct effects.** Measurement of the direct effects of varying rates of imprisonment on inmates' families is not the charge of this paper. Nonetheless, since these affect other aspects of neighborhood functioning, they should be kept in mind. To trace the status of ex-inmates (e.g. whether they are living with families, working, involved in street networks) is a substantial research undertaking in itself. It entails either original ethnographic research or collaboration with ex-offender researchers who are trusted within their communities. It is most important to measure the extent to which neighborhood male peer groups, including gangs, form a significant feature of the neighborhood and to assess the influence of ex-offenders within them. This topic is discussed below.

**Measuring indirect effects.** For some of the indirect effects, surveys—the easiest and quickest technique—are inappropriate unless there are extraordinary relationships between the researcher and the community. For example, the absence of family members in prison and the presence of ex-offenders in the household cannot reliably be measured in impersonal surveys. (However, this particular problem could be partially averted by the intra-city and the combined sample designs: Neighborhoods with many inmates could be contrasted with neighborhoods with few, and sensitive questions need not be asked of household members.) In this kind of community, local groups should be involved wherever possible, and local residents should administer surveys face-to-face.

The routinization of imprisonment and certain aspects of the modeling of gender roles and of cool pose might be measured partially by neighborhood surveys, although survey data must be supplemented by focus groups or ethnographic studies.

Bowser and Wingood (1992) have developed a useful typology of variations in peer groups, ranging from groups based on the street to those rooted in extended kin; from those which are highly neighborhood bound to those which are not. Survey data can



provide a rough picture of a peer group, but the actual functioning of the groups can be assessed only through working with the group members themselves.

**Measuring tertiary effects.** Most of the tertiary effects discussed in this paper (for example, attitudes toward police, attitudes toward neighborhood problems, and feelings of alienation) can be measured satisfactorily through neighborhood surveys. However, they should be supplemented with focus group interviews or ethnographic techniques.

**Methodological Note.** Neighborhood research on this set of topics is extremely sensitive. It can readily conjure stigmatizing and racist stereotypes in communities whose political capital is meager. Thus, even though some variables can effectively be measured by survey techniques, this does not mean that impersonal survey firms can be turned loose in a community. It is critically important that research be collaborative and involve community members at every stage, from the design of instruments through the interpretation of findings. Collaboration greatly enhances the validity of the research, and moreover, it permits the findings to be put to immediate use. A number of researchers throughout the nation have established procedures for studying sensitive issues in stigmatized communities, and their expertise should be utilized.

**Summary.** This research design follows the chain of logic developed throughout this paper, and it is indeed complex. If only one element of the design were to be undertaken, I would place top priority on understanding the extent to which inner-city male street subcultures have been influenced by ex-inmates. Ex-offender joblessness is critical to the entire scenario, and ex-offenders' influence in their peer groups is pivotal. Policy solutions are obvious: finding alternatives to incarceration for lower-level drug dealers and finding jobs for ex-offenders would, in my view, prevent many of the negative consequences I have outlined. And, in my view, evidence about what actually happens would demonstrate the need for such policies.

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# Adding It Up: The Economic Impact of Incarceration On Individuals, Families, and Communities

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*Much has been written on the causes and negative consequences of arrest and incarceration on the employment and earnings of individuals. Research has documented the social and psychological effects of crime on families and children. But the impact of incarceration on communities has received little attention, other than to document the positive economic benefits of prison building and administration.*

*This paper seeks to begin to fill this gap by developing a conceptual framework for examining the economic impact of incarceration on human capital, and by extension, on families and communities. Hopefully, our framework and suggestions for further exploration will help shape federal, state, and local policies that will minimize the loss of human potential to crime and its consequences.*

## Economic Implications of Incarceration for Working-Age Persons

The vast majority of inmates and persons under supervision by the justice system are males of prime working age. Freeman (1991) estimates that about 25 percent of all young men 16 to 34 years old committed crimes in 1988 and that 14 percent of all young men were arrested in that year. The rates are disproportionately higher for African-American males. Although African-Americans make up about 12 percent of the population, African-American males account for one-third of arrests and one-half of all incarcerations. According to Freeman's estimates, 20 to 30 percent of young African-American males were incarcerated or under supervision in 1988. Many more have a criminal record.

Adults in jail or prison are out of the regular workforce, and once released, they are viewed less positively by employers than persons without a criminal record. However, the research evidence on whether incarceration has a negative effect on future employment is inconclusive. Ethnographic studies indicate that after release from prison individuals have difficulty finding and keeping a job. (Good, Pirog-Good, and Sickles, 1986; Majors and Billson, 1992) Economic analyses using micro or individual data generally confirm links



between incarceration and employment, although the strength of the relationships and the direction of causality varies.

Unemployed individuals are more likely to be arrested and incarcerated. About 30 percent of inmates, for example, were not working at all in the regular labor market at the time of arrest (a very high rate of unemployment), although some of these individuals presumably had earnings from informal labor or illicit activities. But that means 60 percent of inmates were employed full time prior to incarceration (Myers and Simms, 1988).

Furthermore, Freeman (1991) estimates that incarceration reduces the number of weeks worked for men by about 20 to 25 percent and parole/probation by about 10 to 15 percent. Survey data indicate that one year after release, as many as 60 percent of former inmates are not employed in the regular labor market. Other research suggests that former prisoners are able to find jobs at the same rate as other adults but that these jobs are less desirable because they are lower paying and have high turnover rates. (Schmidt and Wirte, 1984)

Similarly, microdata provide important information about the social, demographic, and psychological causes and effects of incarceration on individuals. But they do not adequately incorporate relevant environmental factors to determine the separate effects of incarceration and socioeconomic conditions. Although some micro-economic studies include an unemployment rate variable, more refined quantitative measures of local socioeconomic conditions are rarely included.<sup>44</sup>

The effect of local socioeconomic conditions on crime also remains unclear. Areas with high poverty concentrations tend to have high crime rates. Some research suggests that high unemployment areas have high crime rates, and there is some evidence of a macroeconomic incentive effect on crime. Periods of high unemployment, for instance, are associated with high crime rates—although the size of the effect may be small, and the process by which these effects occur has not been fully explored. A careful study by Lee (1993), as cited by Freeman (1994), estimates that a one point increase in the unemployment rate raises property crimes by 1.1 to 1.4 percent. However, other studies have found no such relationship (Freeman, 1994). One explanation for the apparent inconsistency is that crimes, as distinct from potential offenders, are not necessarily concentrated in depressed areas. Better opportunities, at least for property crimes, may be found in areas of higher economic growth and prosperity.

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<sup>44</sup> Many of these studies are reviewed in Freeman (1994).

The net effect of prosperous economic conditions on crime is also unclear. According to human capital analyses, increasing economic opportunities, declining unemployment rates, and increasing wages tend to decrease some types of crime committed for economic reasons (e.g., street robberies) because individuals rationally choose employment rather than crime as a source of income. But several studies suggest that rising incomes and economic growth in a community may result in increased crime as the opportunities for criminals increase, or the demand for certain illegal goods (e.g., drugs) increases as the incomes of potential customers rise. Overall, however, the inverse relationship between prosperity and crime seems to dominate.

Some categories of crime (e.g., prostitution, drug dealing) are more clearly market-oriented—the market responds rationally to supply and demand forces. Other crimes have no clear economic rationale (violence, rape) and have only indirect relationships to economic conditions, resulting from increased stress and dysfunction caused by poor economic situations. In any particular community, both market and nonmarket factors are relevant when analyzing employment, crime, and incarceration.

Despite the difficulty in disentangling the link between crime and the economy, most ethnographic and sociological analyses over the years suggest that economic and neighborhood conditions strongly affect crime and incarceration. At a minimum, individuals' perceptions of economic opportunities—whether or not they reflect real conditions—can influence the choice between crime and employment (Currie, 1985). And recent studies emphasize that the nature of crime, especially in many inner cities, increasingly involves group, rather than individual activity, bolstering the importance of community or neighborhood factors.

What about longer-term impacts? Research indicates that the negative effects of crime on subsequent employment varies along several dimensions. Not all individuals are similarly affected. Hagan (1991), for example, found that delinquency and arrest had a more serious negative effect on future employment for low-income youth compared to youth from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Clearly, there are cultural, family, and community effects that intervene between crime and employment outcomes, at least at very young ages.

The relationship between poverty and crime is well-documented. Research on the urban "underclass" even defines underclass neighborhoods based on an index of social and economic distress that includes crime (Sawhill, Mincy, and Wolf, 1990). Seminal work by Wilson (1987) postulates that the deteriorating employment and economic systems in inner cities contributed to the increase in crime and other social problems. Wilson's work has stimulated substantial controversy—strong evidence that the relationship between individual and community factors in inner cities is very complex and that the direction of causality is unclear.

Regardless of causality, public policies that treat crime, poverty, and community conditions independently may inadvertently make these problems worse, precisely because they are so interrelated. Currie (1985) suggests that there are unintended consequences of economic and social policies and trends on crime. Tight money policies, reduced spending on education and training, economic recessions, and business closures or relocations exacerbate problems in poor communities. Moreover, high rates of crime and incarceration tend to make a poor economic situation worse, which may contribute, as Wilson explains, to a cycle of continuous deterioration and blight.

Thus, there are some fairly obvious economic implications of high rates of criminality and incarceration. Much research has focused on the economic consequences of criminal behavior on individual labor market activity, employment, and earnings. Similarly, research has attempted to clarify the relationship between crime, incarceration, and employment at the community level. Ethnographic and sociological research has examined the interaction of various social and economic factors, including crime and incarceration, at the community level. But few empirical studies have focused on relationships among crime, employment, and communities. The research that has been done presents mixed findings. To fully understand the role of crime and incarceration on local economies, we need to better identify both the independent relationship between incarceration and the economy and the interactive effects of incarceration with other factors. Adopting a more complex model is vital to the development of strategies to reverse or mitigate negative effects. Partial explanations may encourage policies that result in unintended and possibly detrimental results.

#### Conceptual Framework

Incarceration affects the individuals confined, their family and other close associates, and, by aggregation, the economic and social conditions in their local community. Effects on communities depend on: the extent of crime and incarceration in the community (both the numbers of persons and the proportion of the total population), the relative effects (negative versus positive) on individuals and families, and the extent of economic development related to criminal justice operations in a community. While some research has focused on the individual effects of incarceration and some has focused on the community effects, little analysis has attempted to examine how they work together.

Most of the economic effects of incarceration can be considered negative if for no other reason than prison wastes human capital. But there are some neutral and even positive effects that must not be ignored. For example, some communities will benefit from employment and income generated by justice system facilities and activities that accompany high and growing levels of incarceration.

For a given community, the overall effect will depend on the sum total and interaction of the effects along each of these dimensions. Communities experiencing the greatest adverse economic effects, then, are likely to be those with high crime rates, high numbers and proportions of adults incarcerated, and negative secondary effects outweighing the positive ones.

The framework for examining the economic consequences of incarceration on communities consists of four components (human development, employment and income, cost of crime, and community development) operating at three levels (incarcerated individual, his/her family, entire community). These measures are discussed in the following sections.

**Consequences for human development.** Incarceration represents an involuntary interruption of normal life for the offender and therefore brings different physical and psychological developmental influences to bear on the person during the period of confinement. For example, for some individuals, isolation from familiar places, friends, and family members results in depression, anxiety, and emotional withdrawal. In others, it strengthens their will toward self-improvement. How confinement affects human capital depends on the influences that lead to changes, which figure into subsequent labor force participation.

Economic theory suggests that human capital could improve during incarceration if prisoners: complete high-school equivalency programs, earn college credits or degrees, develop occupational skills through formal training programs or work assignments, improve their physical and mental health by receiving regular health services, practice good nutrition, exercise, and abstain from alcohol and drug use.

However, there may be factors that detract from these benefits to human capital. And human capital may be increased in socially undesirable ways. For example, some individuals strengthen and/or expand their skills related to criminal activity and develop personal networks with established criminals inside and outside the confines of the institution. There may be negative psychological effects of incarceration (low self-esteem, distrust, defensiveness, aggressive mannerisms) that form barriers to seeking employment and performing on the job.

The length of incarceration may also influence the intensity of the effects. It may be that both the positive and negative effects are magnified the longer one is incarcerated. For recidivists, there may be fewer positive effects and more significant negative ones. Mincy (1994) suggests that for many men, especially young African-American males, the first real opportunity for developing their human capital occurs through the criminal justice system. If so, there may be justification for increased investments that enhance the positive development of incarcerated individuals and decrease recidivism.

Just as there are possible negative and positive effects on the individuals incarcerated, there are mixed implications for the human capital of their family members and significant

others, especially children and the other parent. The personal behavior of individuals before they are incarcerated obviously mediates the impact of their incarceration on their families and friends. Some will have been abusive and negligent in their intimate relationships. Others will have been responsible, caring spouses and parents.

For example, removing a negative influence from the home could yield positive effects. If a person who has been disruptive, offensive, or irresponsible at home is incarcerated, remaining family members may stabilize. Adults may feel more able to pursue education, employment, and other productive activity that could improve their own human capital. Similarly, children may improve psychologically and perform better in school, which should, in the long run, increase their human capital. The opposite effects might occur after such a person is released from prison. There is at least anecdotal information from a study of teen parent programs that some young mothers making noticeable progress in education, training, and employment experience a setback when their male partners are released from the justice system. (Cohen, 1992 )

However, if an otherwise responsible adult is removed from the home and incarcerated, the household would lose economic resources, and social and emotional capital. The effects on children may be particularly negative if a caring, nurturing parent or other supportive adult is removed from their lives.

In any situation, families and children of offenders are likely to experience some negative effects during the period of incarceration and after release. Attitudes that develop in childhood and adolescence influence choices individuals make as they transition into adulthood. For example, having a negative adult role model may hinder the children from developing positive attitudes about work and responsibility. And if criminality is perceived as acceptable adult behavior, some children may routinely enter the illicit market rather than the legitimate labor market.

Even if the parent had been a negative psychological force in the family, and had not been legitimately employed, he or she might have provided important financial support to the family, with income from informal and/or illicit activities. And even if there were no significant financial contributions before incarceration, during incarceration there is no opportunity for contribution. Secondary, poverty-related effects on the family and society may result when the remaining parent cannot fully support the household financially and public assistance receipt increases. Moreover, disadvantage in the labor market, as discussed below, is likely to limit an ex-offender's financial contributions to family and children.

**Consequences for employment and income.** Incarceration affects the documented, undocumented, and illicit labor markets. When people are removed from a community to jail or prison, they are no longer available to supply services and talents to any of these markets. The income

from any job they held is lost. They will remain out of the regular labor force for the period of confinement.

Several factors need to be sorted out here. Was the offender employed in an illicit income-producing activity—drug selling, thievery, prostitution—or acts that do not involve material gain—rape, murder, vandalism? Illicit employment may have been full-time or combined with a legitimate job. Was the offender self-supporting, and were others partly or fully dependent on her or his income? Or was the offender dependent on family, public, or charitable sources? Alternatives to incarceration that permit continuation of licit income-producing activities (or even offer them) along with supervision to monitor and minimize any return to the illicit ones have obvious advantages for offenders who have useful work experience and responsibilities to provide support to others.

The end of any spell of incarceration raises another set of issues having to do with re-entry into the labor market. First, the ex-con label blocks entry to many jobs. Some former licit employers may be willing to re-employ an offender who has a good job record, but that depends on the chance that an appropriate job opening exists. Parole or other postrelease obligations may also hinder re-entry into the labor market. Resuming previous illicit work may be the only readily available alternative given the substantial pressure to regain an income, particularly if the person has family responsibilities and wants to regain lost authority within the family. Alternatives to incarceration may be less stigmatizing in the labor market and could prevent the interruption of otherwise viable employment, income, and support arrangements. Such alternative would also prevent the acquisition of crime-oriented human capital that can occur in prison. Considerations such as these do not necessarily outweigh the arguments for incarceration in every case, but they should be carefully weighed, especially for first offenders and nonviolent offenders.

There are two effects of incarceration on community employment and income. The first is the sum of the individual effects. Incarceration of a person who holds a job—licit or illicit—creates an opening for someone else. If there is substantial unemployment or underemployment in the area, such openings will be filled and unemployment will be that much less. In such a transaction, community income is not affected—only who gets it. If the incarcerated person had been dependent on public or private benefits (unemployment compensation or family support), those costs will decrease during the period of incarceration.

High rates of incarceration in a community also deplete the supply of labor. In a stable market, employers could have difficulty hiring. But communities with high incarceration rates generally have substantial unemployment. When the offender is returned to the community, the difficulties and handicaps in finding steady licit work add to the level of joblessness. The process of incarceration and release almost certainly has an overall effect of increasing community unemployment, as well as placing more of the jobless in the hard to employ

category. The offender's return to illicit sources of income and eventual return to prison are very likely outcomes.

The second way that incarceration affects local income and employment is through the administration of the criminal justice system. The high and rapidly growing rates of incarceration carry with them growing rates of employment for prison staff, parole and probation officers, and construction workers. However, these jobs are not usually held by community residents, and the accompanying income rarely benefits the community from which the offenders originate. Nevertheless, they may be counted in a local community's economic base, and they represent substantial sources of income and political interest.

**Consequences for crime-related costs.** Do high rates of incarceration reduce the costs of crime in the community? Is there evidence that communities that have placed a larger fraction of their population in prison have less crime, or less serious crime? Aside from the costs of incarceration itself, is the policy effective either in terms of deterrence or incapacitation? Freeman's (1994) analysis of the gross disparity between the observed trends in crime and victimization and the consequences that ought to follow from even modest incapacitation effects is persuasive evidence that something else is increasing the crime rates, even though we are incarcerating more people. Clearly the deterrent effect of higher incarceration rates has not reduced crime. But this does not allow us to infer that crime would not have been much more prevalent with a lower rate of incarceration.

Perhaps jail and prison crowding, produced by incarceration rates outrunning prison construction, have induced increases in early release or shortened sentences and therefore diminished both the deterrent and the incapacitation effects. Shorter stays represent less of a penalty in terms of freedom. They also mean that the reduction in criminal propensity that usually follows maturation will not proceed as far as it would with longer sentences—we get more crime from released offenders than we used to. A more subtle effect comes from the possibility that higher incarceration rates bring in

more persons with relatively low propensities to commit crimes, and incapacitating them does not have as big a payoff.

But whatever might have happened in response to a less vigorous incarceration policy, Freeman (1994, p. 27) concludes that we have "... developed a large relatively permanent group of young male offenders and ex-offenders, who for the most part are unlikely to be productive members of the work force in the foreseeable future." The chances of this labor force contributing to future crime statistics seem particularly high.

In considering the effect on community crime rates, it may be useful to distinguish criminal activity that is demand driven, such as drug selling, from those that are entirely initiated by the criminal, such as rape. If the demand for drugs remains stable, incarcerating drug sellers will not reduce the level of such crime. It merely opens the door for a new recruit. In the meantime, the incarcerated seller can improve his skills and contacts and will probably be released early to make room for the seller who replaced him on the street. In this way, an active and efficient system of incarceration could increase a community's supply of competent drug sellers, who might even find some way to increase demand for their wares. While this process may involve heavy costs for society—both in terms of running prisons and the consequences of drug abuse—it is not clear that the local community has any better opportunities for external trade.

**Consequences for community development .** An obvious question is: Which community? Communities that receive the new investment in correctional facilities to handle the growing prison population will gain jobs and new business. An added source of primary employment increases secondary and tertiary business activity. It is hard to find a community that is eager to close down an existing prison facility.

But what about communities that supply disproportionate shares of the added prisoners? If high incarceration rates derive from strict enforcement and prompt sentencing, they may offer a sense of safety and security that will encourage new investment. This is most likely if evidence of reduced crime leads to lower insurance and security service expenditures. But the most likely beneficiaries of this effect are not the communities most depleted by the incarceration policies, but those less blighted adjoining ones. For communities that bear the main burden of high incarceration rates, there is little reason to expect developmental benefits. As discussed above, the human capital in the community is generally depleted, or in the case of the ex-offenders developed in undesirable ways. Illicit businesses may find a ready labor supply, but these do not provide incomes that are either steady or high enough to support a thriving community. As mentioned, much of the work involved in supervising parolees or



probationers, or providing other rehabilitative services will be done by outsiders. Such communities might be described as outdoor asylums.

Even the benefits that might be expected from reduced crime appear doubtful given the persistence of high crime rates despite drastic increases in incarceration. We must expect that high rates of incarceration as currently practiced damage the human development on which a community's economic vitality ultimately depends. The damage affects the persons incarcerated, those family members and others directly associated with them, and finally all young persons who are regularly exposed to a social norm that includes criminal activity and incarceration as standard operating procedure.

#### Implications for Policy and Research

From a research perspective, there is a need to better define and measure the employment, income, and human development effects of incarceration. Much of the research on the linkage between criminality and economic activity has focused on understanding the causes of criminal behavior, the economic and social factors related to individual decisions that result in criminal activity, the separate and interactive effects of age and maturation in both employment and criminality, and the employment consequences of having a criminal record. Analysis using large longitudinal data bases such as the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) contributes to the growing base of knowledge about the economic and labor market effects of criminality and the social and economic factors that may cause criminality.

The previous discussion suggests several issues for continued research necessary to better understand the economic effects of criminality and incarceration on communities. Ideally, one would identify control groups of individuals, families, and communities immune from incarceration to analyze the net effect of incarceration at each of these levels. This is clearly not feasible in a real world setting. At a minimum, though, we must fully understand the pre-incarceration situation at the community and family levels. Gathering baseline information about family life and parenting are especially important; for example:

- sources and amounts of individuals' licit and illicit income and the percent of the family's total income;
- amount and regularity of financial support, including cash, rent, formal child support payments;

- amount and regularity of in-kind material support, such as food, clothing, equipment, and supplies;
- amount and regularity of parenting in terms of physical custody;
- amount and regularity of positive parent/child interaction; and
- history of domestic violence/abuse.

This information would then form a comparison against which to measure changes in family life and parenting practices during and following incarceration. Other factors— type of crime, kind of community, shifts in crime patterns or incarceration practices— related to the changes observed and the variations within and across communities would also be defined. Significant measures would include:

- type of community: inner-city, urban, suburban, non-metropolitan, small town, rural;
- percent of population incarcerated, by age group;
- recidivism rates;
- crime rates, by types of crime; and
- socio-economic conditions: employment growth or decline, unemployment rate, poverty rate, average income.

Statistical multivariate analysis could measure the net effects, controlling for what would have happened in the absence of large increases in incarceration rates. In all analysis it is important to differentiate between demand versus opportunity-driven crime and income-producing crime versus crime that apparently satisfies other needs or urges.

Important analytic questions include:

- What is the relationship between the effects of incarceration on the human capital of individual prisoners and the effects of incarceration on the economic status of families and the development of children? This interaction is a critical component of measuring community effects.
- What are the economic effects of incarceration for demand-driven crime (drug dealing or black-market sales) versus supply or opportunity-driven crime (assault, murder, embezzlement), and by length of time incarcerated (including recidivism)—for offenders, families, and communities?

- What current programs and services minimize the negative human capital effects of criminality and incarceration, such as dysfunctional work habits? How do sentencing alternatives to incarceration (probation, residential supervision, community service) affect the employment and income of ex-offenders?
- What current programs and services for inmates develop human capital in positive ways (improve education, occupational skills, mental and physical health), and how do these interventions affect subsequent employment?
- What current programs and services for inmates focus on improving parenting skills and family relationships? Are they effective?

Such research agenda would greatly expand knowledge about the relationships among incarceration rates, family impacts, and community conditions and would help refine the conceptual model. New data collection would be needed to fully address the issues and might include:

- survey interviews with inmates and ex-offenders and with their families in various community environments to determine factors that affect pre and post-incarceration situations;
- longitudinal samples of court records, crime, education, and other vital community statistics;
- interviews with community leaders and service providers, local employers, educators, and criminal justice administrators; and
- a time series on social indicators for communities relating to crime, incarceration, employment, domestic violence, educational attainment of youth, and teenage parenthood.

From a policy perspective, the results of such research should help to identify promising interventions and services that would alleviate negative economic effects of incarceration and maximize potentially positive effects. This includes policies aimed at preventing crime and incarceration in the first place, alternatives to incarceration, interventions during periods of incarceration, and postrelease economic and social services.

It is also important to accumulate better evidence on the full cost of current policies, including the heavy burden on the families and communities to which former prisoners return, as well as the actual budgetary costs of replacing earnings and supplying other ameliorative services. When this total is added up, we believe the costs of "knee-jerk" incarceration will far outweigh the benefits. Careful analysis of the impacts on different kinds of criminal activity

may inspire more imaginative approaches to crime reduction than the "one size fits all" prescription for greater safety and rectitude that dominates the current debate. Building a more effective and affordable justice system depends on carefully verified experience.

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