

Mass Incarceration

The United States has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. The results are overcrowding in prisons and fiscal burdens on states, despite increasing evidence that large-scale incarceration is not an effective means of achieving public safety.

A series of law enforcement and sentencing policy changes of the “tough on crime” era resulted in dramatic growth in incarceration. Since the official beginning of the War on Drugs in the 1980s, the number of people incarcerated for drug offenses in the U.S. skyrocketed from 40,900 in 1980 to 452,964 in 2017.

<https://ejournal.org/news/united-states-still-has-highest-incarceration-rate-world/>

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/>

The War on Drugs

Myth: The war on Drugs did not lead to the arrest and convictions of “king-pins” or big-time dealers. Most are not high-level actors in the drug trade, and most have no prior criminal record for a violent offense.

At the federal level, people incarcerated on a drug conviction make up nearly half the prison population. At the state level, the number of people in prison for drug offenses has increased nine-fold since 1980.

Sentencing policies, implicit racial bias, and socioeconomic inequity contribute to racial disparities at every level of the criminal justice system. Overall, African Americans are more likely than white Americans to be arrested; once arrested, they are more likely to be convicted; and once convicted, they are more likely to face stiff sentences. Black men are six times as likely to be incarcerated as white men.

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In 48 states, a felony conviction can result in the loss of an individual’s voting rights. As a result of the dramatic expansion of the criminal justice system in the last 40 years, felony disenfranchisement has affected the political voice of many communities. As of 2016, 6.1 million Americans were unable to vote due to state felony disenfranchisement policies.

People with arrest and conviction records are routinely blocked from getting jobs, housing, and educational opportunities by federal, state, and local legal restrictions because of these records. They drive re-arrest and significantly contribute to high rates of re-arrest and re-incarceration of people who have been released from prison.

<https://www.aclu.org/issues/smart-justice/re-entry>

<https://drugpolicy.org/issues/brief-history-drug-war>

Videos:

[Jay Z - The War on Drugs: From Prohibition to Gold Rush Re-entry Shouldn't Last A Lifetime](#)

Charts:

[Trends in US Corrections-The Sentencing Project](#)

[Retributive Versus Restorative Justice](#)

Books:

The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander

Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson (Also a 2019 movie available on Amazon Prime)