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A Look Into Mass Incarceration: Cause, Effect, And Solution

Recently President Obama visited a federal prison to speak with men about the mass incarceration epidemic. He is the first president to do so while currently in office. His purpose of the visit was to call for a slowdown of incarceration. The president is not only doing this because of the unfairness of political policies that has made incarceration an institution for the underprivileged, but also because of the global outcry over the politically incorrect policies that justified the mass incarceration of millions of the American population. Currently America holds 25 % of all prisoners world wide while having only 5% of the global population (Louis, Daily News, Sept.29, 20015, p.25). Over 7 million American people are presently being managed by the Department of Corrections. The eighty billion dollar annual invoice spawned from this prodigious incarceration is being shouldered by taxpayer's.

The outcry is not just from outside of the U.S. Many politicians are realizing the errors of this beloved policy due to the public's uproar against the mass incarceration epidemic. Some argue that the cost to tax payers is excessive and takes away from critically needed programs like education, housing for homeless and job production. Many citizens are tired of feeling neglected by not having access to needed programs they feel are more necessary than the prison system. With these nudging from tax payers, politicians are reviewing the matter with much zeal. Many politicians that once supported the idea of being tough on crime are now changing their stance and language on crime

and punishment. Some elected officials see it as a waste of taxpayer's money, while some would rather see the money go elsewhere. Others want to see the punitive policies stopped, but many see the tough on crime practice as unjust.

Sociologists, criminologists, and researchers are looking at causes for and solutions to end this blight on society. The theories for the causes of mass incarceration are broad in range. One researcher believes that tough on crime policies are a partial explanation. Alfred Blumstein shows that the incarceration rate exploded as the age of baby boomer reached the age of crime participation. There is a study of crime that shows statistics on age and crime participation, the age crime curve. Blumstein says that baby boomers reaching the age of participation played a part in mass incarceration. The criminal justice system's imposition into the political arena in the 1960's helped to set in motion this trend. Judges began to hand out indeterminate sentences, which gave parole boards the power to keep offenders incarcerated until their maximum dates of release. The years 1973-1975 had a dramatic increase in incarceration. With this new political atmosphere the "tough on crime" policies became widely accepted. Politicians were appointed to office because of their hard stance on crime. The rational view of crime and punishment was looked at as being soft on crime and politicians were not elected to office with rational punishment ideologies. This trend occurred although the crime rate was steady from the 1920s to the 1970s. The steady decline of crime rates from a 1993 peak to a plateau in 2000 resulted in crime rates not seen since the middle of the 1960s (Blumstein, A. p.62,63, 70).

The incarceration rate has quadrupled in the past twenty five years. This occurred while the crime rate has remained steady or on a decline. The declination and steadiness

of the crime rate has many baffled as to how and why so many are immured to-date. How can the crime rate remain stable while at the same time we are heavily incarcerating citizens? The political factor is predominant in this scenario. The politicians that used the tough on crime scheme never informed the masses about the constant and declining crime rate. The public, believing that crime was rampant, appealed to their elected officials for rigid sentencing for those who were convicted of breaking the law. The cry for harsher punishment from the public would not go unnoticed. The ruse politicians employed, making crime more sensational than what it was, caused people to fear and set aside their own rational thinking. The tactic used is called moral panic. A moral panic is defined as:

a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes... in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself (Cohen, 2004, p.1).

With this tactical agenda the tough on crime stance would be a catalyst for the implementation of policies that have validated the mass incarceration of millions.

As public fear grew so did the demand for tougher sanction policies for convicted criminals. The public fell in line with the political agendas of their elected officials, almost like sheep being led to slaughter. Their fear of crime was only heightened by the new drug trends. The widespread use and selling of drugs put people further into a panicked state. This caused the public to call for even harsher and elongated sentences with the hopes of aspirating the drug sensation. These fears led to new mandatory minimum penal laws. A new 500 to 1 powdered cocaine to crack law, meaning a person

caught with 5 grams of crack cocaine receives the same amount of time as someone caught with 500 grams of powdered cocaine. This is a federal statute that has affected thousands, the majority of them poor people who could not bear the cost of powdered cocaine. This has led to minority communities losing the very people that held together families and supported neighborhoods. People, who instilled the importance of education, help to show the benefits of having strong communal ties with neighbors and how to respect themselves, to the youths within the community.

Criminologist Michael Tonry's research shows the effects of moral panics and the fact that the majority of the masses are being misled. His writings show that most citizens receive their information about crime from the mass media. Citizens regard hateful crimes and preposterous sentencing as frequently occurring, leading the majority to assume that sentences are much softer than they really are. Citizens have ideas of rising crime rates that are actually waning. They have notions of judges as soft with sentences, but when citizens are asked to recommend a sentence for an individual case they propose a shorter sentence that was imposed on the individual. His research also shows that tax payers would like to have offenders punished and rehabilitated. Tax payers would also accept an increase in taxes for the implementation of treatment programs but not for constructing additional prisons. This shows that the masses of the U.S. population has been brainwashed into believing that crime was rampant while it was actually on a decline or unchanging.

The politicians responsible for reporting spurious statistics should be held accountable for their deceitful interpretations and the insidious products they produced. Considering that the public was being blatantly lied to, is there a way to have those

policies that led to mass incarceration reversed or nullified altogether? Is the public, which was duped into craving the policies which has America looked upon as the vilest country on the earth, willing to rectify the problem or to expedite a solution? The sentiments of the voters and the understanding of what they would have preferred were placed by the wayside along with other trash to be disposed of.

It seems that the elected officials at the time had their own agenda, knowingly deceiving the voters and causing a state of panic to manipulate their actions. This points to deliberate and wanton actions by elected officials. Just as a conductor synchronizes his orchestra to induce profound melodious symphonies, politicians played the citizens into doing their biddings. Now that their surreptitious prevarications have caused a firestorm of global proportions, they want to refashion their thoughts and have us believe their new intents are attributed to morals. Should we begin to restructure the entire process of electing officials? Should we continue to be strung along like puppets with our movements calculated for purposes unknown? If we the people are to make decisions about what is wanted and needed for us then it should be decided by us. Being the majority of citizens wish to have offenders punished and rehabilitated, politicians should be subservient to the wishes of the voters.

Studies have shown that the costs to tax payers are considerably less to train or educate offenders than to keep offenders incarcerated (Blumstein, A. 2004, p.74). The programs presently offered in the penal system are not that productive for newly released offenders because the demands for employment in the fields are not high. Even if the demand were greater many still would not be hired because of the criminal record of the offender. This also happens with housing people with criminal records. The steady stream

of stigmas that newly freed offenders face is what causes many to re offend. Faced with bleak employment opportunities and unfavorable housing circumstances, many are left homeless and desperate. If the offender has maxed out on his or her sentence the offender may face greater obstacles having no eligibility assistance from Department of Corrections opposed to offenders that are released on parole.

Politicians have statistics about recidivism. They understand that rehabilitation and training increases the chance for offenders' successful reentry into society. Statistics politicians have emphatically illustrate the success offenders have when rehabilitated. The recidivism rate declines expeditiously in the majority of analysis. Texas has had success with reformation programs. Texas lowered its recidivism rate by twenty five percent when its state implemented different therapeutic policies. This decrease in the rate of recidivism occurred in only two years after the initial implementation of rational policies. Not only has the recidivism rate dropped twenty five percent but the parole revocations declined by forty nine percent in the same two year period. The dramatic drop caused the state to close three prisons. The closures were due to nine thousand offenders' desistance from crime. The state saved four hundred and forty three million dollars in a two year period. The revenue was recouped from the redundant policies that were halted for rational policy implementations. Reformation has shown that most offenders will continue with pro-social values if given the opportunities to do so. Substance abuse programs, mental health treatments, and education are the dominant establishments that Texas offered to offenders instead of housing them in prison. It has worked so well for Texas that Georgia and Kentucky have begun reformation programs as well. Mayor Ras Baraka for Newark, New Jersey, and Mayor Mark Luttrell for Shelby

County, Tennessee, have started productive initiatives serving as models for the criminal justice reform in their counties(Amsterdam News, Nov.5th 2015).

Criminal justice reforms are currently being implemented due to politicians adhering to the desires of the masses. But there has been a time in America when incarceration was perpetrated based on political feasibility. After the first peculiar institution was abolished and slaves were freed, America initiated a second peculiar institution. It was called Jim Crow. Former slaves were incarcerated on a mass scale to continue the back breaking labor that was relished throughout slavery. New statutes were implemented and vagrancy laws created and enforced to capture freed slaves and commit them the perilous labors they were recently relieved from. The economic opportunities of African Americans were severely restricted not only in the cotton fields but also in the emerging mining and industrial towns of the uplands by limiting their employment to the most dirty and dangerous ‘nigger work’(Waquant,p.101). In many cases the work exceeded human capabilities, and many died as a result. America’s hatred for the African man has been evident since before slavery. This hatred has manifested itself into a contagious betrayal to mankind. Humane treatment for African descendants is not in the hearts of those in power. This also contributes to the present state of incarceration rates. The powers that be have systematically moved those of color out of the residing areas in which they exist. All throughout the history of this country the blacks have been cast as subhuman and unworthy. That is why there is a community of undesirables called the ghetto, a place where society has pushed those they deem dregs of humanity. The ones that can not be educated, civilized, or reformed from monstrous deeds are sent to live there. Ghetto dwellers find themselves in the lower reaches of the employment ladder,

concentrated in manual and servant work; have no choice but to live in these insufferable ghettos. This was America's third peculiar institution. This peculiar institution is the fishing hole in which the most incarcerated are hooked for commitments within the penal system.

Tax payers are footing an enormous bill, eighty billion dollars annually, causing contemptuous views towards politicians. They prefer paying taxes for rehabilitation and treatment for offenders, so offenders can begin correcting their lifestyles and become pro-social and start life anew. Living without having to circumvent societal norms and be fairly treated is all any person in society desires. There seems to be a deliberate miscommunication between the taxpayer and the politician on this topic. This miscalculation is causing much angst between the communities of America. The feeling of subversion amongst the communities is great and kindling what could create an explosion the likes of which the U.S. has never seen.

When America demonstrates that "all people are created equal" it will truly become the greatest country on the planet. Until then civil demonstrations and inequality will continue to ensue. The continuation of unequal and separated will only perpetuate the hostilities in this country. The government can implement policies to unite this country's dissolution. We have seen why mass incarceration was created, the disunity it has caused, the tax implications that have occurred, and the remedies that are induced from rational punishment and treatment. It is said that all great things must come to an end and this country is going to prove that aphorism true if we stay divided and continue to fall. The sources have shown, through there thorough research, that the government produced mass incarceration for the sole purpose of personifying the demoniac

representation of the black race to continue the peculiar institutions the founding fathers
birthed centuries ago.

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