

Critical Criminology

by

Guest Editor

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This critical criminological special issue of *The Journal of Pan African Studies* focuses on a critical critique of the process of mass incarceration and its impact on peoples of African descent in the United States and throughout the Diaspora. The included papers specifically delve into how mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex have exacerbated concerns such as: racism/sexism, the weakening of families, social inequality, Black masculinity, and imprisonment.

Over 2.3 million people are locked up in American prisons (Rios, 2011). The nation with the next largest prison population, China, has 1.6 million persons in prison, but comparatively, China has a population of 1.3 billion persons and the U.S. has approximately 300 million residents (Greenwald, 2011). African Americans comprise nearly one million of the approximately 2.3 million people in prisons, up from 744,000 in 1985 (Butler, 2009; Rios, 2011). Further, 50% of all incarcerated Americans are African-American men and 1.2 million African-American men are currently incarcerated or under correctional control (Smith & Hattery, 2010). Black men are incarcerated at a rate of 4,919 per 100,000 compared to white men who are incarcerated at a rate of 393 per 100,000. Additionally, African-American women are adversely impacted by mass incarceration, the prison-industrial complex, and the war on drugs via increasing rates of incarceration, loss of eligible marriage partners, and the economic and emotional challenges associated with having children who will have to be raised by someone other than their biological mother. Finally, when we consider the police killings of unarmed men and women of African descent such as Eric Garner, Rekia Boyd, Yvette Smith, Michael Brown, Ezell Ford, Miriam Carey, John Crawford, and Pearlie Golden, persons of African descent are under siege (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/22/ferguson-black-america_n_5694364.html).

This special issue of *The Journal of Pan African Studies* focusing on critical criminology contains six scholarly works and an interview with renowned psychologist Dr. Raymond Winbush -- all of which address the impact of mass incarceration on Africans in America.. The diversity of the scholarly papers elucidate the need for an increased critical criminology focus on ~~has~~ mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex's impact on peoples of African descent in the United States and across the Diaspora.

Two papers examine the impact of mass incarceration on families. Dorothy Smith-Ruiz and Albert Kopak examine the domino-effect of incarceration on African -American families leading up to and following the point at which mothers become incarcerated. Specifically, the authors look at how children who experience maternal separation due to incarceration experience a heightened risk for many negative outcomes, including mental health issues, delinquency, and victimization. Further, the papers examine grandparent caregivers and how they encounter and negotiate significant hardships as they try their best to care for children in the presence of significant economic strain and health problems.

The other paper by sociologists Angela J. Hattery and Earl Smith examines how the combination of "Rockefeller" drug laws, disparities in sentencing, mandatory minimum sentences, and inability to pay for counsel all contribute to high rates of incarceration and sentences that are disproportionately long for the crimes committed. Additionally, they confront the impact on the families on incarcerated men, including their wives, girlfriends, significant others and their children.

The lives of African American men are situated in and are a product of demographic, historical, social, institutional, and cultural sentiments and changes. In his paper Le Brian Patrick outlines the historical context for thinking about Black masculinity today. He reviews major historical eras that have had significant impacts on Black men and the African-American community, such as enslavement, reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, and the contemporary war on drugs. He also deconstructs how incarceration has continued to play a normative role in the lives of many African-American men while discussing issues that formerly incarcerated Black men face and the potential impact of these factors have on constructs of masculinity.

Researchers recognize that voting bans placed upon individuals with felony convictions are troubling for any democratic society, particularly the United States. Kamesha Spates and Carlton Mathes explore the extension of voting rights to incarcerated individuals in South Africa and revisit the issue of voting rights for incarcerated individuals in the US. This paper provides a critical analysis of the process of mass incarceration, its impact on peoples of African descent in the United States and throughout the Diaspora, and its exacerbation of inequality.

Rebecca S. Katz tells the stories of African American men's lives across urban areas economically abandoned by the racist, post-capitalist state. These deprived neighborhoods traumatize Black and other similarly situated minority men leading to involvement in survival masculinity as exhibited through drug and alcohol use, promiscuity, drug dealing and survival related violence. Finally, she explores how these men still suffer from pathological bereavement and are unable to appropriately grieve the loss of their own childhoods to primary and secondary violence, sexual victimization as well as conditions of economic deprivation and dehumanizing racism. These men tell their stories and make policy and individual living suggestions that could change the social fabric of both their communities and the larger American society.

Lori L. Martin, Kenneth Fasching-Varner, Molly Quinn, and Melinda Jackson tackle contentious issues inside the notorious Angola prison in Louisiana. The authors deconstruct ideas associated with virtuous whiteness; negative stereotyping of people of color; and counter-framing by communities of color; which are central components of the white racial frame to enhance our understanding of the relationship between racism, rodeos, and misery industries of Louisiana.

The articles that comprise this special issue of *The Journal of Pan African Studies* presents an amalgam of perspectives on "mass incarceration" which are at the heart of critical criminology. All of the papers and the interview present a radical critique of mass incarceration, the prison industrial complex, and their impact on peoples of African descent across the diaspora. Moreover, what effects one of us really effects all of us. Ase!

References

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