Race, Ethnicity, and Criminal Justice Contact: Reflections for Future Research

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Abstract

Since the 1980s, the number of individuals in the U.S. criminal justice system has more than quadrupled and, as a result, incarcerates more people per capita than any other industrialized nation. The dramatic surge in incarceration can in part be attributed to the four decades of punitive crime policies that have produced large racial and ethnic disparities. While prior research has consistently demonstrated these sizable disparities, the purpose of the current research is 3-fold. First, we explore the current state of race–justice research with regard to offending/victimization, policing, and sentencing. We then explore the consequences of employment/earnings, families, and communities. We conclude by offering directions for future research.

Keywords

race and sentencing, race and courts, racial profiling, race and policing, race and incarceration, citizen satisfaction, driving while Black (DWB)

In 1903, DuBois predicted that the problem of the "color line" will be a paramount concern of the 20th century. DuBois' words remain true today as the problem of the "color line" continues to be a central issue in American life. This is most notably present in the criminal justice system where there are long-standing racial and ethnic disparities. Since the early part of the 1900s, lynchings, discriminatory sentencing laws, and prosecutorial and judicial bias were all historical forces that contributed to the overrepresentation of Blacks in the justice system. While these overt

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discriminatory practices have diminished over time, significant racial and ethnic disparities persist. For example, between 2003 and 2006, Blacks were arrested at approximately 3 times the rate of Whites (Snyder & Mulako-Wangota, 2014). Similar disparities have also been observed among new prison admissions. Blacks and Hispanics were 6 and 2 times as likely as Whites to be admitted to prison (Snyder & Mulako-Wangota, 2014). Mauer (2001) notes that if these trends continue, one out of every three Black and one out of every six Hispanic males can expect to be incarcerated at least once in their lifetime.

The explanations that undergird disparities in the criminal justice system are quite complex. Nevertheless, identifying the processes that give rise to the disproportionate number of racial and ethnic minorities under control of the criminal justice system has garnered a substantial amount of scholarly attention (Britt, 2000; Mauer & King, 2007; Ridgeway, 2007). For instance, several studies have concluded that a considerable portion of the disparities observed in the arrest, sentencing, and incarceration decisions do not reflect a systematic discriminatory process, but instead highlight differences in offending patterns and criminal histories (Blumstein, 1982; Cohen & Kluegel, 1978; Hindelang, 1978; Kleck, 1981). Additionally, Austin and Allen (2000) noted that disproportionality varies by offense type with more serious offenses explaining a larger percentage of the differences. In 1983, the National Research Council's Panel on Sentencing concluded that racial discrimination played an insignificant role in accounting for the number of racial minorities in U.S. prisons compared to offense severity and criminal history (Blumstein, Cohen, Martin, & Tonry, 1983).

Conversely, other scholars maintain that the residual race effects that remain after accounting for legal factors suggest that other bias processes might be at work (Greene, 2000; Hawkins, 1986; Russell-Brown, 1998; Spohn, 2014; Tonry & Melewski, 2008; Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011). In their comprehensive review of the race and criminal justice literature, Sampson and Lauritsen (1997) note that the cumulative disadvantages that minorities experience across the life course are likely to be amplified in the criminal justice system.

Alexander (2012) notes that the observed disparities in crime and justice outcomes reflect the punitive crime control policies that emerged during the "War on Drugs." Many of these policies, including the three strikes, and the federal 100-to-1 laws, were enacted to get tough on crime by guaranteeing that drug and violent offenders would receive more punitive criminal sanctions (see also Kennedy, 1997; Provine, 2006). These policies were most often enforced in areas with higher concentrations of racial and ethnic minorities.

Relatedly, scholars have recently explored the consequences of disparate criminal justice contact, especially incarceration (Frost & Clear, 2012; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Peterson, Krivo, & Hagan, 2006; Piquero, West, Fagan, & Holland, 2006; Turanovic, Rodriguez, & Pratt, 2012). Sampson and Lauritsen (1997) note that scholars must be particularly attentive to "... the consequences of disproportionate detention and imprisonment (p. 364)" because the social isolation and economic disadvantage often experienced by racial and ethnic minorities are likely to be consequential for a range of economic and social outcomes.

The purpose of this review is 3-fold. First, we explore the current state of research on race and crime. The goal of this section is to provide a general overview of racial and ethnic disparities in victimization/offending, policing, and sentencing. Next, we turn our attention to exploring how disparate criminal justice outcomes, particularly incarceration influences the life chances of those who get entangled in the justice system. Thus, we focus on the consequences that incarceration has on three broad areas: (1) employment/earnings, (2) families, and (3) communities. We highlight the importance of employment/earnings because incarceration can substantially limit long-term economic trajectories (Western, 2006). Next, parental incarceration can have detrimental effects on family functioning (Mears & Siennick, 2016). In particular, incarceration reduces marriageability among ex-offenders and increases both divorce rates and child malfunctioning. Communities are also important because high incarceration rates within a given area can weaken informal social control. Furthermore, moving a large number of individuals from communities to prison fosters residential instability, resulting in socially disorganized communities (Rose & Clear, 1998). Finally, we conclude by offering directions for future research exploring connections between race and crime.

Current State of Research

Victimization and Offending

Racial and ethnic minorities are generally overrespresented in the criminal justice system both as offenders and as victims of violent crime (Hartney & Vuong, 2009; Rennison, 2002; Truman & Planty, 2012). The National Crime Victimization Survey demonstrates that victimization rates have significantly declined across time. For example, in 1993, the violent victimization rate was 80 per 1,000 for persons age 12 or older. By 2011, that number declined to 22.5, representing a 72% decrease (Truman & Planty, 2012). Despite this reduction, Blacks and Hispanics remain disproportionately involved in violent victimization.¹

In 2002, the rate of violent victimization was 27.1 for Whites, 35.3 for Blacks, and 28.4 for Hispanics.² By 2011, these patterns had declined to 21.6 for Whites and 23.9 for Hispanics. The most dramatic decline, however, was observed among Blacks with a rate of 26.6, representing an approximate 40 percent decrease. Similar patterns of decline were observed among American Indians/Alaska Natives and Asian/Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islander. In 2002, the rate of victimization for American Indian/ Alaska Natives was 63. By 2011, the rate decreased to 46 per 1,000 people. Asian/ Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders had a much smaller decline. In 2002, their rate of victimization was 11.7; by 2011, it declined to 11.2.

There has also been a substantial drop in offending across the last several decades. According to the Uniform Crime Report, between 1980 and 2009 rates for murder, forcible rape/sexual assault, aggravated assault, and burglary declined by more than 30% (Snyder, 2011). Despite these downward trends, there are large disparities in arrest across crime type. For example, the arrest rate among Blacks for forcible rape

between 1980 and 2009, declined by 70%. This is approximately 2 times the decline observed among Whites (31%). During the same period, the murder/nonnegligent homicide rate fell by 58%. The Black arrest rate for murder/nonnegligent homicide averaged 7 times the White rate in 1980. However, by 2009, the Black rate dropped by 58%. Across the same 30-year-period, the American Indian murder arrest rate was twice the rate of Whites, while the Asian/Pacific Islander homicide arrest rate was half that of Whites.³

Additionally, in 1980, the number of arrests for rape/sexual assault among Whites and Blacks was almost equivalent—51% and 47%. By 2011, arrests among Whites for rape/sexual assault declined by 31%, while the Black arrest rate decreased by 70%. The Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander homicide rate also declined by more than 55%. In general, the arrest trends for burglary, robbery, and aggravated assault all witnessed comparable declines.

The "great crime decline" that occurred across the last several decades in the United States has garnered considerable scholarly attention (Blumstein & Wallman, 2006; Goldberger & Rosenfeld, 2008; Zimring, 2007). Most notably, researchers have attributed the decline in crime and victimization to aggressive and more efficient policing, increased use of incarceration, and an aging population which reduces the number of youthful offenders (Baumer & Wolff, 2014; Goldberger & Rosenfeld, 2008; Zimring, 2007). Nevertheless, Blacks and Hispanics are 2 to 3 times as likely as Whites to be perpetrators and victims of violent crime. These persistent disparities raise important questions about the long-term effects the disparate outcomes will have on their life chances across their life course.

Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Policing

There is a long history of research documenting the roles that race and ethnicity play in shaping the nature of police–citizen encounters (Travis et al. 2014; Reiss, 1971). For example, it has been well noted that racial and ethnic minority groups report less satisfaction with—and more distrust of—the police; perceive greater levels of injustice and racial bias in law enforcement practices; and are more likely to report negative personal experiences including aggressive and discriminatory treatment at the hands of police (Alpert, MacDonald, & Dunham, 2005; Brunson, 2007; Hagan & Albonetti, 1982; Hagan, Shedd, & Payne, 2005; Lundman & Kaufman, 2003; Smith, 1986; Terrill & Reisig, 2003; Warren, Tomaskovic-Devey, Smith, Zingraff, & Mason, 2006; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002, 2005). Indeed, national survey estimates reveal that more than 40% of Blacks in the United States report having been treated unfairly or discriminated against by the police at some point in their lives because of their race (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005).

Several studies have documented that negative experiences with the police are common for Blacks and Hispanics (e.g., Brunson, 2007; Brunson & Miller, 2006; Martinez & Stowell, 2012; Stowell, Martinez, & Cancino, 2012). Indeed, Blacks and Hispanics are consistently stopped, searched, frisked, and arrested at significantly higher rates than their baseline populations. Gaines (2002) found that Blacks were 25% more likely than Whites to be stopped. Similarly, Gelman, Fagan, and Kiss (2007) demonstrated that Blacks and Hispanics were 23% and 39%, respectively, more likely than Whites to be stopped and frisked by the police. Engel and Calnon (2004) found that Blacks were 1.5 times more likely to be searched, arrested, and have force used against them compared to Whites. As Brunson and Miller (2006, p. 634) observed in their study, minority males "... believed that their treatment by the police was multifaceted, and intimately tied to their status as young men in disadvantaged communities, but nonetheless inescapably, about race."

Moreover, police–citizen interactions are likely to vary across ecological contexts (Bayley & Mendelsohn, 1969; Black, 1976; Klinger, 1997; Reiss & Bordua, 1967; Werthman & Piliavin, 1967; Whyte, 1943). Neighborhoods characterized by high crime rates and concentrated disadvantage shape the level of citizen crime reporting and cooperation with the legal process, the likelihood of arrest, the use of coercive, and aggressive tactics applied by the police even after controlling for individual and situational factors (Baumer, 2002; MacDonald & Stokes, 2006; MacDonald, Stokes, Ridgeway, & Riley, 2007; Mastrofski, Reisig, & McCluskey, 2002; Reisig & Parks, 2000; Smith, 1986). Scholars have hypothesized that the police tend to be more aggressive and punitive in neighborhoods with high levels of crime and socioeconomic disadvantage because officers often view these ecological contexts as "bad areas" with a disproportionate amount of dangerous and/or suspicious people (Kane, 2005; Werthman & Piliavin, 1967). Thus, these conditions may prime officers to react more aggressively, even preemptively, as a defense mechanism (Sherman, 1986).

The inequalities reflected in these race differences are at odds with the widely supported principle of equal justice in the United States (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). A high prevalence of perceived mistreatment by the police may undermine confidence and trust in the law and agents of the criminal justice system (Tyler & Huo, 2002). The aggressive and abusive policing tactics which in part result from a more militarized police organization have contributed to tenuous relations between minority neighborhoods and the police (Kraska, 2001). Police–minority citizen relations have been so undermined that even when officers are not unfairly targeting people of color, their legitimacy is questioned (Sampson & Bartusch, 1998).

Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Sentencing and Incarceration

Research on the role of race and ethnicity in sentencing has generated considerable interest from scholars and policy-makers (Kim et al. 2015; Kramer & Ulmer, 2009; Mitchell, 2005; Peterson & Hagan, 1984; Spohn, 2015; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2001; Zatz, 1987). In general, this vast body of scholarship has found that net of legal factors, Black and Hispanic defendants remain 6.7 and 2.4 times as likely as Whites to be sentenced to prison (West et al. 2010). While differential involvement in crime by Blacks and Hispanics may account for some of the observed disparities in incarceration rates, research has consistently demonstrated that sentencing

outcomes, especially those involving the decision to incarcerate, disadvantages racial and ethnic minorities (Carson, 2014; Spohn & Holleran, 2000; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2006). In their study of disparities across multiple decision points, Kutateladze, Andiloro, Johnson, and Spohn (2014) found that Black and Hispanic defendants are cumulatively disadvantaged throughout the justice system. They were more likely than White defendants to be detained and incarcerated. Similarly, Crawford et al. (1998) found that Black defendants were sentenced more harshly than Whites defendants. More specifically, Blacks were more likely to be sentenced as a "habitual" offender than were Whites even after controlling for prior record and crime seriousness.

While legal factors such as offense severity, prior criminal history, and impact on the victim are among the strongest predictors of punishment outcomes, studies have also highlighted that racial and ethnic disparities in incarceration reflect, in part, the perceptual shorthand that judges use when making sentencing decisions. Albonetti (1991) notes that when judges are making assessments about the likelihood of future offending, they generally have incomplete information and therefore rely on attributional stereotypes that are linked to offender characteristics. In a review of presentence reports in the state of Washington, Bridges, and Steen concluded that minority offenders are often sanctioned more harshly because of the perception that they are "… threatening and therefore more deserving of punishment and control" (1988, p. 556). Similarly, interviews with Pennsylvania judges demonstrated that young Black and Hispanic men "are more likely to be perceived as dangerous, committed to street life, and less reformable than women and older offenders" (Steffensmeier, Ulmer, & Kramer, 1998, p. 787).

In recent years, scholars have also explored the way in which racial and ethnic disparities are shaped by broader community contexts. This research examines whether minority defendants receive more severe criminal sanctions in places where they represent a large share of the population and are perceived as threats to Whites in positions of power. In order to defuse these perceived threats, in places with larger Black populations, criminal justice personnel may subject them to harsher social controls such as increased incarceration, sentence lengths, arrests and voting restrictions (Eitle, D'Alessio, & Stolzenberg, 2002; Feldmeyer, Warren, Siennick, & Neptune, 2015; Jacobs, Carmichael, & Kent, 2005; Quillian, 1995; Ulmer & Johnson, 2004).

Some research has found that larger Black populations are linked to increased racial/ethnic disparities in imprisonment (Myers & Talarico, 1987; Wang & Mears, 2010; Weidner, Frase, & Schultz, 2005), sentence lengths (Ulmer & Johnson, 2004), and departure decisions (Johnson, 2005). Other research, however, yields mixed and/ or null findings. For example, Ulmer and Johnson (2004) demonstrated that county-level Black and Latino populations are positively related to racial disparities in sentence lengths but not the decision to incarcerate. In their recent assessment of racial threat in federal court, Feldmeyer and Ulmer (2011) found that the relative size of the Black population had no impact on Black sentence lengths and that the size of the Hispanic population significantly reduced Hispanic sentences. Similarly, Omori

(2017) found that racial and ethnic composition significantly influenced the decision to incarcerate for drug offenses but not the sentence length decision. These results potentially highlight that there is greater county-level variation in the type of sentence but not the length of the sanction.

Current research also emphasizes the importance of courtroom workgroups and how they not only influence the cultural norms of the courtroom but may also shape punishment decisions (Delaney, 1996; Johnson, 2005). This issue has most often been explored by assessing the role of judicial race on sentencing outcomes. The empirical evidence has yielded mixed results. Some studies have found that minority judges do not treat minority defendants differently than White judges (Steffensmeier & Britt, 2001; Walker & Barrow, 1985) and that minority and White judges both sentence racial and ethnic defendants more severely than White defendants. Other studies have found that minority judges punish White defendants more severely (Welch, Combs, & Gruhl, 1988). The inconsistency of these findings reflects limitations in the conceptualization and measurement of the courtroom workgroup. Moreover, Farrell, McDevitt, Bailey, Andresen, and Pierce (2004) emphasize that it is also important to measure the racial composition of multiple courtroom decisionmakers in order to better understand whether diversity among court personnel influences punishment outcomes.

Consequences of Racial and Ethnic Disparities

The unprecedented increase in the U.S. imprisonment rates over recent decades has generated much academic and public interest (Rosich, 2007). Since the 1980s, the number of incarcerated citizens in the United States has more than quadrupled. The rise in incarceration can in part be attributed to the four decades of zero-tolerance crime policies. The result of these policies has produced large racial and ethnic disparities. Ten percent of U.S. Black men aged 18–24 are incarcerated. Western and Pettit (2010) note that young Black and Latino men without a high-school diploma are more likely to be incarcerated than they are to be employed.

In this section, we highlight how disparities in incarceration have consequences for employment/economic opportunities, families, and communities. We emphasize the salience of employment/economic opportunities because ex-offenders often face insurmountable challenges when seeking viable employment upon return to their communities. This is especially true for racial and ethnic minority males whose likelihood of finding employment postincarceration are significantly lower than White males with similar criminal records (Pager, 2003). Edin, Nelson, and Paranal (2004) note that understanding how incarceration affects families is important because incarceration erodes and sometimes completely severs intimate partner relationships as well as those with children. Finally, the social fabric of communities is adversely impacted by increases in incarceration for minority families. It destabilizes families and reduces the informal networks in communities that can reduce crime and incivilities.

The Criminal Justice System and Economic Consequences

Incarceration serves as a major turning point in the life course and this is especially true for racial and ethnic minorities as they are substantially more likely than Whites to be sentenced to prison during their lifetime (Crawford, Chiricos, & Kleck, 1998; Demuth & Steffensmeier, 2004; Johnson, Ulmer, & Kramer, 2008). The consequences of these disparities are far-reaching because of the social and economic costs ex-offenders are often confronted with when they reenter their communities. For instance, scholars assert that the employment chances as well as the earnings potential of convicted offenders are substantially limited postincarceration (Apel & Sweeten, 2010; Pettit & Lyons, 2009; Western, 2006; Western, Kling, & Weiman, 2001).

Prior to incarceration, economic hardship is common among those who are at a greatest risk of being imprisoned. These individuals typically lack formal education and cognitive skills; and as a result, their economic trajectory is significantly restricted in comparison to the general population (Harlow, 2003). According to the National Institute of Literacy (2001), 70% of incarcerated offenders are unable to complete daily reading- and numbers-based tasks because they are functioning at the lowest levels of literacy. Furthermore, ex-offenders typically report lower monthly income and higher rates of unemployment, and these disparities are even more pronounced for Black and Hispanic offenders (Freeman, 1991; Travis, 2005). Because these disparities are most pronounced among Black and Hispanic prior offenders, incarceration amplifies the pre-existing economic disadvantage.

Scholars offer several potential explanations for the negative impact that incarceration has on one's employment and earnings outlook. First, the stigma of incarceration leaves potential employers reluctant or unwilling to view ex-offenders as viable, trustworthy employees (Pager, 2003). Second, incarceration is expected to erode the job and interpersonal skills necessary to find and maintain quality employment. Moreover, ex-offenders typically lack the social contacts and referral networks that often aid job applicants in obtaining employment.

Western (2006) notes that the stigma of "a criminal conviction signals to prospective employers that a man is untrustworthy and perhaps dangerous" (p. 112). Nagin (1998) compares the stigma experienced by ex-offenders to a "scarlet letter." Indeed, Pager and colleagues found that a criminal record reduces job applicants' success by about 50% for Whites and approximately 65% for Black offenders (Pager & Quillian, 2005). Similarly, Holzer's (1996) findings suggest that potential employers are more willing to hire welfare recipients or less qualified applicants than ex-offenders.

In addition, federal and state laws can also magnify the stigmatization of exoffenders (Olivares, Burton, & Cullen, 1996; Petersilia, 2003). Most states in the United States allow employers full access to applicants' criminal histories (Western, 2006) and certain criminal convictions preclude ex-offenders from employment in professional and/or licensed occupations (Burton, Cullen, & Travis, 1987; Petersilia, 2001). Employment opportunities for convicted offenders are not only inhibited by the stigma that comes with criminal sanctions but also by the erosion of skills that are essential for gainful, long-term employment. Incarceration removes individuals from the labor market where they would otherwise acquire experiences and skills necessary to compete for better jobs (Kling, 2006). Moreover, incarceration places individuals in a mentally and physically taxing environment, where the behaviors essential to navigating prison life become detrimental to job prospects postrelease (Irwin & Austin, 1997). This institutionalization effect serves to further the prevailing economic disadvantage experienced by ex-offenders.

Incarceration can also weaken the referral networks of prior offenders, especially in instances of longer prison sentences. Longer prison sentences, separate ex-offenders from the general population, and groups them with other offending populations. Consequently, they have weaker ties to conventional society, and stronger links to those involved in crime (Bales & Mears, 2008). As a result, the referral networks and social contacts that many individuals utilize when searching for employment are either unavailable to ex-offenders or significantly depleted.

Assessment of Empirical Research

Research has found considerable support for the notion that incarceration is a disruptive life event that significantly reduces not only employment opportunities but also wage mobility (Irwin & Austin, 1994; Pettit & Lyons, 2009; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Western, 2002; Western & Pettit, 2002). Ex-offenders typically experience lower hourly wages, and work and earn less annually in comparison to nonoffenders. In fact, incarceration generally reduces hourly wages by approximately 15% and annual earnings by up to 40% (Grogger, 1995). These disparities are even more pronounced across race and ethnic groups, as Black and Hispanic offenders earn less hourly and annually and are typically employed for 6 months or less per year (Western, 2006).

In addition to reductions in wages and higher rates of unemployment, ex-offenders experience barriers to legitimate employment opportunities. For the formerly imprisoned who do find employment, job prospects in the primary labor market—characterized by full-time work, wage growth opportunities, and pension and health benefits—are rare. Incarceration pushes ex-offenders toward the secondary labor market where employment is much more unstable, union protections are scarce, wages grow at a slower rate, and opportunities for career advancement are scarce. This instability in the secondary job market is especially consequential for minority offenders. According to Western (2006), compared to their nonincarcerated counterparts, formerly incarcerated Blacks and Hispanics worked approximately 14 and 12 weeks less a year, respectively. In addition, wage growth among all ex-offenders is virtually stagnant between the ages of 25 and 35, a period when nonoffenders experience steady wage growth and secure employment. Although wage growth is stifled for all formerly incarcerated, the earnings ceiling for Blacks and Hispanics is significantly lower than that of Whites.

Research suggests that the costs of incarceration for one's employment and earnings outlook are far-reaching. Compared to nonoffenders, ex-offenders earn less hourly, annually, and over their lifetime. Wage growth is also significantly constrained for the formerly incarcerated, who work significantly less per year than nonoffenders. Nevertheless, Black and Hispanic offenders tend to fare worse in the job market than not only nonoffenders but also White offenders. These postincarceration disparities deepen the cumulative disadvantage faced by minority offenders in the criminal justice system. Moreover, because Blacks and Hispanics on average are more economically disadvantaged than are Whites, the systemic fines associated with criminal justice contact further destabilize their social and economic situations (Harris, 2016). Although the costs paid by young Black and Hispanic offenders in sentencing decisions are extensive, the continued costs postincarceration—particularly, in finding steady employment—undermine the potential of minority exoffenders to successfully reintegrate into society.

The Criminal Justice System and Consequences for Families

The costs of incarceration for ex-offenders are not limited to depressed wages and inadequate employment opportunities. In addition to these economic challenges, incarceration is also a significant turning point for families of criminal offenders. As the incarcerated population in jails and prisons has increased over the last 40 years, reaching approximately 2.3 million people in 2009, the number of families affected by the U.S. criminal justice system has grown substantially as well (West, Sabol, & Greenman (2010)). This era of mass incarceration in America, along with declining marriage rates and a dramatic rise in single-parent households, suggests that imprisonment is not only consequential for offenders but also their children, spouses, and romantic partners (Wilson, 1987).

In 1980, 350,000 children reported having an incarcerated father; by 2000, this number had increased to 2.1 million, representing approximately 3% of all U.S. children (Western & Wildeman, 2009). In 2007, Black and Hispanic children were 7.5 and 2.7 times more likely than White children to have an incarcerated parent (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Therefore, although parental incarceration is a significant life event for all children who experience it, racial and ethnic disparities in incarceration rates leave minority children much more vulnerable to the negative consequences associated with parental imprisonment.

The consequences of parental incarceration have been found to be largely dependent on the lifestyle of the parent prior to incarceration. In instances where an incarcerated parent has not actively participated in their child's life, has been involved in criminal enterprises, or has suffered from substance abuse issues, incarceration can be beneficial for both child and parent (Giordano, 2010). That is, the parent's incarceration may facilitate the building or rebuilding of bonds between the parent and child while reducing the likelihood that a parent's negative life choices adversely affect his or her children. Conversely, parental incarceration is typically detrimental for children who had frequent contact or lived with their parent prior to imprisonment

(Travis et al. 2014). For those parents, the physical separation of imprisonment can strain parent–child bonds, reduce effective co-parenting, and hinder financial support (Geller & Garfinkel, 2012; Turney & Wildeman, 2013; Waller & Swisher, 2006). Incarceration generally means that parents are largely absent from significant events and moments that would otherwise help build parental and emotional bonds (Edin, Nelson, & Paranal, 2004).

In addition to incarceration reducing parental involvement, parental incarceration has been found to have negative implications for the well-being of children. Parents report that following a father's incarceration, children are more likely to suffer from numerous difficulties, including behavioral and academic problems in school, aggression, delinquency, depression, anxiety, and other emotional strains (Foster and Hagan 2009; Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003; Braman, 2004; Martin, 2001; Mears & Siennick, 2016; Wildeman, 2010). For example, Wakefield and Wildeman (2011) conclude that fathers' incarceration significantly increases aggression across all age groups. Similarly, fathers' incarceration has also been found to be positively associated with increased delinquency, risk of arrest, and marijuana use among children (Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012; Roettger & Swisher, 2011). Moreover, children whose father has been incarcerated are significantly more likely to be convicted of a crime than children whose father has never been imprisoned (van de Rakt, Murray, & Nieuwbeerta, 2012). Parental incarceration has also been associated with a higher risk of early infant mortality, higher body mass index among young adult women, and increased risk of neglect and abuse among daughters (Foster & Hagan, 2007; Roettger & Boardman, 2012; Wildeman, 2012). When parents reenter family life postincarceration, kids often suffer from a range of problems as parents struggle to readjust.

Assessment of the Empirical Research

Marriage is generally unlikely among those who are on a trajectory that leads to prison. In most instances, these individuals are either unemployed or struggling to maintain work in the secondary labor market even prior to incarceration. Incarceration only further reduces marriageability for these disadvantaged men. For instance, Western (2006) finds that by age 26, over 50% of men who have never been incarcerated are married; on the other hand, by age 26, approximately 25% of men who have been imprisoned are married. Furthermore, by age forty, 40% of formerly incarcerated men are still unmarried.

In addition to reducing marriageability among ex-offenders, incarceration is considerably more detrimental to the marriage prospects of racial and ethnic minorities. According to Western (2006), approximately 95% of Whites who had been incarcerated were married by age 40, essentially the same percentage of nonincarcerated Whites who were married by the same age. Conversely, 84% of formerly incarcerated Hispanics were eventually married, while almost 90% of nonincarcerated Hispanics married. Western (2006) finds that Blacks were further disadvantaged in terms of their likelihood of being married. Only 43% of formerly incarcerated Blacks were married by age 40, while 54% of nonincarcerated Blacks were married by the same age. Even after controlling for employment, the odds of Black ex-offenders getting married are significantly less likely compared to nonincarcerated Blacks (Western, 2006).

Incarceration reduces not only the likelihood of getting married but also the likelihood that a marriage will remain intact. In addition to the economic costs of incarceration which make providing for a family more difficult after release, incarceration can also place considerable stress on romantic relationships. It stigmatizes individuals as deceitful and untrustworthy, which diminishes trust and respect for the formerly incarcerated partner (Siennick, Stewart, & Staff, 2014; Western, 2002). The social disapproval and stigma that comes with incarceration may also ease any reluctance to divorce or separation. In addition, the physical separation caused by incarceration may result in both spouses developing romantic attachments to other people (Western, 2006). Massoglia, Remster, & King (2011) argue that incarceration is responsible for severing ties that are necessary for a successful marriage.

Research has consistently found support for the notion that incarceration is detrimental to the survival of marriage. Western (2006) concludes that incarceration increases the likelihood of divorce for all formerly incarcerated men. For White men, the likelihood of marriage dissolution is doubled for those who have been incarcerated. Similarly, the marriage failure rate among Hispanics increases by approximately 20% for those who have been incarcerated. For Black men, who already experience lower marriage rates, incarceration increases the likelihood of separation by an additional 15%. Moreover, these effects remain after adjusting for employment. Western (2006) finds that in general, incarceration is expected to reduce marriage rates and increase the likelihood of separation by 10% to 25%.

Several additional studies have reported similar findings highlighting the negative effect of incarceration on separation and divorce (Lopoo & Western, 2005). Siennick, Stewart, and Staff (2014) conclude that incarceration, particularly during a marriage, is associated with a higher likelihood of divorce, an increased likelihood of extramarital sex, less marital love, and more relationship violence. Similarly, Massoglia, Remster, and King (2011) find that marital dissolution is positively associated with longer sentence length. Also, Apel, Blokland, Nieuwbeerta, and van Schellen (2010) conclude that the effect of incarceration on divorce intensifies over a 10-year period postrelease. These findings suggest that incarceration is detrimental to maintaining a marriage not only in the short term but also in the long term.

In sum, research has consistently found incarceration to be a disruptive life event not only for offenders but also their children, spouses, and romantic partners. Numerous negative outcomes are experienced by the children of incarcerated parents who were actively involved in the child's life prior to incarceration. Incarceration, which often serves as a barrier to legitimate economic opportunities, also reduces the marriageability of ex-offenders and increases the likelihood of divorce and separation among the formerly incarcerated. These findings suggest that incarceration severely reduces the life chances available to the formerly incarcerated, furthering the overall disadvantage facing ex-offenders. Because Blacks and Hispanics are significantly more likely to be

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incarcerated the familial consequences associated with incarceration are most pronounced on them, their children and intimate partners.

The Criminal Justice System and Consequences for Communities

A long history of research has recognized the role of community social context in structuring social interactions with the criminal justice system (Bayley & Mendelsohn, 1969; Black, 1976; Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Reiss & Bordua, 1967). Scholars have argued that the criminal justice system can serve as a stratifying institution, that can increase inequality in disadvantaged neighborhoods by aggravating crime and other social problems that are detrimental to social life (Burch, 2014; Travis et al. 2014; Rose & Clear, 1998). Indeed, those most likely to come into contact with the criminal justice system are racial and ethnic minorities, particularly young Black and Hispanic men with low levels of education who are concentrated in impoverished urban ecological contexts (Harding, Morenoff, & Herbert, 2013; Rose & Clear, 1998; Wacquant, 2001).

Spatial Concentration Effects

It has been well-documented that neighborhoods are stratified by race, place, and social and economic inequality (Massey, Gross, & Shibuya, 1994; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002). Massey and Denton (1993) have argued that such segregation confines the greater economic deprivation found among non-White populations, particularly Blacks, to separate neighborhoods of color. Wilson's (1987) work on the "truly disadvantaged" focused on the "concentration effects" of neighborhood economic disadvantage and racial isolation that can result in a number of social problems. Wilson (1987) argued that structural changes in the American economy have weakened the employment base in many Black, inner-city urban neighborhoods. As jobs become increasingly scarce in inner-city neighborhoods, many residents lose access to the formal labor market resulting in the depopulation of working- and middle-class families from predominantly Black neighborhoods. The sense of isolation that results from living within these neighborhoods can have deleterious consequences and lead to higher levels of crime and violence (Anderson, 2000; Sampson, 2012).

These conditions also lead to an overreliance on agents of formal social control to regulate behavior which results in disproportionate contact with the criminal justice system for residents in these neighborhoods (Clear, 2007; Clear & Frost, 2013). As incarceration has increased, it has been geographically concentrated in neighborhoods characterized by high rates of poverty, unemployment, and racial segregation (Drakulich, Crutchfield, Matsueda, & Rose, 2012; Kubrin & Stewart, 2006). The spatial distribution of incarceration is contingent on race and poverty, with poor Black neighborhoods bearing a disproportionate share of high imprisonment rates (Pew Center on the States,

2008). This kind of geographic concentration has led some scholars to label these areas as "million dollar blocks," when residents of these areas have high incarceration rates which cost the government more than 1 million dollars a year to incarcerate (Cadora, Swartz, & Gordon 2003; Columbia Spatial Information Design Lab, 2006; Harding et al., 2013). Thus, the spatial inequality of punishment is so prevalent in disadvantaged neighborhoods it has become a normal life event that severely limits the life chances of residents (Clear, 2007; Pettit & Western, 2004).

Indeed, research has shown that more than half of Black men go to prison at some point in their lives (Pettit & Western, 2004). The Pew Center on the States (2008) estimates that one in nine Black men aged 20–34 is incarcerated on any given day, or one in three for those with less than a high school degree. As Morenoff and Harding (2014, p. 414) note, "the criminal justice system now touches nearly as many people in poor communities as the education system or the labor market." Across the United States, the geographic inequality in punishment is the norm, with Black and poor neighborhoods being disproportionately impacted resulting in compounded disadvantages (Travis et al. 2014; Rose & Clear, 1998).

To explain how disparities in incarceration can impact communities, scholars have relied on two theoretical perspectives: the incapacitation and deterrence perspective and the coercive mobility perspective (Levitt, 2004; Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Travis et al. 2014). The traditional view of the incapacitation and deterrence perspective suggests that incarceration should enhance public safety because once active offenders are removed from neighborhoods and incapacitated they cannot commit crime (for a review, see Nagin, Cullen, & Johnson, 2009; Piquero & Blumstein, 2007). The reduction in crime that results from incarceration is known as the incapacitation effect which removes individuals from the community who may have remained criminally active if they had not been incarcerated. Similarly, high levels of concentrated incarceration in an area could reduce crime by functioning as a deterrent where the increased threat of punishment serves as a warning to potential offenders not to commit crimes.

In contrast, Clear and colleagues (Clear, 2007; Clear & Frost, 2013) proposed the coercive mobility perspective where they argued that forcibly removing individuals from neighborhoods through arrest and imprisonment fosters criminality by undermining the informal social control process of order maintenance through population instability. In some high-punishment neighborhoods, as many as 15% of the adult males are cycling back and forth to prison (Clear, 2007; Petersilia, 2003). Rose and Clear (1998) argue that the regular turnover of a segment of the population for the purpose of imprisonment would have important consequences for the human and social capital of neighborhoods and would serve as a major source of destabilization of informal social control mechanisms. Moreover, coercive mobility in neighborhoods disrupts already tenuous social ties and networks where trust in neighbors decline and collective action becomes less likely (Bursik & Grasmik, 1993; Drakulich et al., 2012; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

Assessment of the Empirical Research

Scholarship that directly tests the incapacitation and deterrent perspective and the coercive mobility perspective at the neighborhood level is sparse (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Travis et al. 2014). While scholars have found some support for increased incarceration and crime reduction at the aggregate level (Levitt, 2004; Marvell & Moody, 1994, 1998), the empirical literature in terms of the neighborhood level is mixed (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Travis et al. 2014). Empirical tests of the coercive mobility perspective find some support for the social costs to neighborhoods associated with concentrated imprisonment (Clear, Rose, Waring, & Scully, 2003; Lynch & Sabol, 2004a).

In a study of 80 neighborhoods in Tallahassee, Florida, Clear, Rose, Waring, and Scully (2003) examined the relationship between incarceration and crime. They observed that the incarceration of offenders appeared to decrease crime rates. However, once a threshold effect was observed, additional increases in the incarceration level were associated with higher crime rates (Clear, 2007). In another assessment of the coercive mobility thesis, Lynch and Sabol (2004a) examined the relationship between incarceration and crime across neighborhoods in Baltimore, Maryland. They found that incarceration was associated with lower crime rates, which is consistent with the incapacitation and deterrence perspective. However, when the instrumental variable was removed from the models, incarceration increased crime rates in certain neighborhoods (Lynch & Sabol, 2004b).

Additionally, Fagan and colleagues (Fagan & West, 2013) found no overall effect of incarceration on homicide at the neighborhood level. In 2006, Renauer, Cunningham, Feyerherm, O'Connor, and Bellatty also attempted to reproduce evidence of a curvilinear relationship between incarceration and crime rates from 95 neighborhoods in Portland, Oregon. Using three estimation techniques, they found that at moderate levels of incarceration, violent crime rates were reduced. However, in neighborhoods with high levels of incarceration, violent crime rates increased. Although the results varied by estimation type, these findings are consistent with the coercive mobility thesis.

Research has also examined prisoner reentry and the collateral consequences of the ongoing process of admission to and release from imprisonment for offending populations. Prisoner reentry is geographically concentrated where most returning prisoners move to a relatively small number of communities with high levels of disadvantage (LaVigne and Parthasarathy, 2005; Pew Center on the States, 2009; Sampson & Loeffler, 2010). Indeed, using data on all Michigan prisoners paroled in 2003, Harding, Morenoff, and Herbert (2013) observed that half of all returning parolees were concentrated in 12% of Michigan's census tracts across three counties. Furthermore, one-quarter of the parolees were concentrated in 2% of the tracts (Harding et al., 2013).

The concentration of returning prisoners can overtax neighborhoods and strain existing resources in disadvantaged areas (Hipp and Yates 2009; Drakulich et al., 2012; Visher & Travis, 2003; Wallace & Papachristos, 2014). Former prisoners tend

to have very unstable living situations, making it more difficult for them to build local social networks and participate in local organizations which can increase crime (Clear, 2007; Clear & Frost, 2013; Drakulich et al., 2012; Harding et al., 2013; Rose & Clear, 1998). Moreover, research has also shown that the neighborhoods where returning prisoners reside play a critical role in reentry (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). Returning prisoners are especially vulnerable to the effects of social isolation in neighborhoods because they already face multiple inequalities with the labor market, human capital, public assistance, and social stigma (Bushway, Stoll, & Weiman, 2007; Chiricos, Barrick, Bales, & Bontrager, 2007; Crutchfield, Matsueda, & Drakulich 2006; Harding et al., 2014; Harris, Evans, & Beckett, 2010; Travis, 2005). Poor men of color are disproportionately affected by these social problems because they often return to neighborhoods that are racially homogenous and economically disadvantaged. This makes them more vulnerable to the negative effects of incarceration (Clear, Rose, & Ryder, 2001). Several studies have shown that returning prisoners who live in more disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to recidivate. Kubrin and Stewart (2006) found that neighborhood concentrated disadvantage predicted recidivism in Multnomah County, Oregon. Mears, Wang, Hay, and Bales (2008) analyzed administrative data for the state of Florida and found that a county's resource deprivation was associated with recidivism. Hipp, Petersilia, and Turner (2010) found that neighborhood disadvantage, social disorder, and access to social services predicted recidivism among parolees in California. Looking at recidivism in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, Kirk (2009) found that former prisoners who returned to their preincarceration parishes upon their release from prison were more likely to recidivate than those who were forced to move elsewhere. Similarly, Stahler et al. (2013) found that prisoners returning to Philadelphia neighborhoods were more likely to recidivate when they lived near higher concentrations of other ex-offenders who recidivated.

The empirical evidence on neighborhoods and incarceration is equivocal (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Travis et al. 2014). The evidence offers a complex picture of incarceration's effects on various dimensions of neighborhood processes, crime, and recidivism (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). What is apparent from the literature is that there is a strong concentration of crime, arrests, and incarceration within the same neighborhoods that is also accompanied by multiple social disadvantages including poverty, unemployment, school failure, and family disruption (Berg & Huebner, 2011; Clear et al., 2003; Harding, Wyse, Dobson, & Morenoff, 2014; Sampson, 2012).

Summary

Over the last 30 years, there has been a massive expansion of the U.S. criminal justice system. The "get tough" on crime policies that emerged during the 1980s greatly contributed to the growth in prison populations. During this time, the United States used incapacitation as a major crime control strategy. In 1992, the U.S. Department of Justice released a report stating, "there is no better way to reduce crime than to identify, target and incapacitate criminals who commit staggering numbers of crimes whenever they are on the streets" (p. 3). Using incarceration as a crime control

strategy has contributed to the United States having the highest rate of incarceration in the world (Pager, 2007). Importantly, the expansion of incarceration has not affected all groups equally. Incarceration is primarily concentrated among poor, uneducated minority men living in disadvantaged neighborhoods where there are already stratifying processes in play resulting in collateral consequences for earnings, family, and neighborhoods (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010).

In this section, we highlighted how the systematic concentration of incarceration among disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups may maintain or exacerbate social inequality among those in the criminal justice system, as well as those connected to the incarcerated (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). While we have limited our scope to the economic, familial, and neighborhood consequences, the long-term effects of incarceration also include health outcomes (Braverman & Murray (2011)) as well as political disenfranchisement (Uggen & Manza, 2002). Ultimately, the increased use of incarceration and the resultant racial and ethnic disparities will continue to raise important questions about the varied ways in which incarceration can have implications for understanding inequality and opportunity structure across the life course.

Directions for Future Research

Research on race, ethnicity, and the criminal justice system has generated an impressive set of complex results (Travis et al. 2014). Nevertheless, there are two important directions we see for future research on this topic. First, research on the criminal justice system and stratification should continue to investigate the ways in which incarceration influences individual and neighborhood processes, in particular, civic engagement. Scholars have argued that increased incarceration harms the civic processes by exacerbating barriers to political participation within a marginalized segment of the population. This can fuel distrust of the criminal justice and political systems (Lee, Porter, & Comfort, 2014; Weaver & Lerman, 2010). It is estimated that one in 40 adults cannot vote due to a felony conviction, and as many as one in four Black men are disenfranchised in some states (Manza & Uggen, 2006). Along this line of inquiry, a small but growing body of research suggests that felon disenfranchisement laws impact the civic engagement participation of nonfelons leading to reduced voting participation for entire communities (Bowers & Preuhs, 2009; Uggen & Manza, 2002). As Burch (2014) argues, when incarceration is highly concentrated in a few neighborhoods, those places are likely to lose political participation which effectively silences the community's collective voice.

In a neighborhood-level analysis, Burch (2014) found that residents of the highest incarceration neighborhoods were less likely to vote, engage in civic and political activities, and volunteer. By reducing neighborhood engagement in civic and political life, incarceration dampens the political influence of neighborhoods. Further, scholars have linked trust to civic participation (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Putnam, 2000). People with higher levels of trust are more likely to participate in civic life. However, communities with higher rates of disadvantage, crime, and incarceration are likely to

weaken the ability to form ties and build trust among community members. As such, distrust develops in neighborhoods where resources are scarce. Massey (1996, p. 407) suggests that neighborhood poverty creates various types of alienation because it erodes public order. Indeed, individuals within these communities are more likely to feel powerless which reduces trust and the building of a cohesive community. As Paxton (1999) noted, trust is important because people who trust others are more likely to form personal ties, as well as participate in civic activities.

Next, racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented at every stage of the criminal justice process (Rehavi & Starr, 2014; Stolzenberg, D'Alessio, & Eitle, 2013). They are more likely to be arrested, detained, and incarcerated relative to their baseline populations (Johnson, 2015). As a result, scholars have emphasized the importance of exploring the cumulative impact of disparities across multiple decision points. Kutateladze et al. (2014) note "the racial disparities that occur at one stage of the justice system may be partially or wholly offset by subsequent case-processing decisions (p. 515)." By examining disparities at multiple points in the criminal justice process scholars can then assess both the direct and indirect effect of race on case outcomes (Spohn, 2009).

In their multistage analysis, Wooldredge, Frank, Goulette, and Travis (2015) found that Blacks, particularly young Black men, experience greater disadvantage across multiple outcomes—pretrial release, plea, and incarceration decisions. They further note that the indirect effects of race are so prominent that racial disparities continue to persist even when race is not considered during the sentencing decision. These results highlight how racial disparities can be observed at various stages of the criminal justice system and future research should continue to explore how race along with other factors influence official decision-making across multiple points in the criminal justice process using in-depth interviews in order to give voice to those most impacted by the disparities.

Conclusion

The United States has witnessed an unprecedented increase in the number of individuals under criminal justice supervision. Since the 1980s, individuals incarcerated in jails and prisons increased by 500%. This growth has been disproportionately concentrated among racial and ethnic minorities, with the United States imprisoning more Blacks than "South Africa did at the height of apartheid" Alexander (2012, p. 24). Pager (2007) notes that Black males are especially disadvantaged because they are more likely to be incarcerated than they are to attend college, or join the military. If these trends continue, prison will no longer be a rare event among minority populations, but instead represent a normal transition into adulthood.

These persistent disparities have led scholars to increasingly explore how the growth of incarceration has exacerbated social, economic, and political inequalities (Travis et al. 2014). In general, the weight of the evidence suggests that the over-reliance on incarceration has resulted in a number of collateral consequences that impact more than those "deserving" of punishment. Specifically, it reduces familial

attachments, leads to severe depression and other behavioral maladjustments among children of incarcerated parents, and substantially reduces earning potential across the life course (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Sampson & Loeffler, 2010). Incarceration certainly has a proper place in democratic societies. However, the neighborhoods most affected by criminal justice policies, generally, have the highest levels of disadvantage, violence and concentration of racial and ethnic minorities (Peterson & Krivo, 2010; Sampson, 2012). Therefore, scholars and policy-makers must be attentive to the cumulative disadvantages of mass incarceration as well as develop more effective punishment alternatives.

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Notes

- 1. Prior research has highlighted that violent crime is overwhelmingly intraracial (Wolfgang, 1961). O'Brien (1987) notes that this results from the physical and social segregation of racial minorities and Whites in the United States.
- Violent victimization includes rape/sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault.
- These declines reflect Blacks starting at higher rates of offending and victimization than are Whites.

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