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RESEARCHERS ASSESS IMPACTS OF MASS INCARCERATION IN THE UNITED STATES

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—In a series of studies published in a special issue of *Criminology & Public Policy* (CPP) on mass incarceration, researchers examine several emerging topics related to mass incarceration: penal developments at state and local levels; collateral consequences of imprisonment on already disadvantaged groups; and possibilities for decreasing the number of incarcerated individuals in the United States. Senior Editor for the issue, Marie Gottschalk, of the University of Pennsylvania, highlights the fact that the United States has the largest prison population in the world, that includes over 7 million Americans under some form of correctional supervision.

Research explaining mass incarceration in the United States has routinely examined factors at the national level. However, several researchers featured in this issue explore mass incarceration in a novel way—by assessing the impact policies at state and local levels have on the incarceration rate. Mona Lynch, of the University of California at Irvine, contends that mass incarceration is more of a ground-up phenomenon than a top-down phenomenon, and begins with local-level policies. In her study, Lynch argues that mass incarceration has been led by Southern and Sunbelt states, like Arizona and California. Penal policies and sentencing changes implemented by these states have been national trendsetters and have led to the national increase in prison populations. Joshua Page, of the University of Minnesota, also examined mass incarceration from the state level. Page contends that prison officer unions present a unique impediment to reducing prison populations. In his study, Page found that successful prison officer unions, like those in New York and California, obstruct efforts to implement sentencing reforms, close prisons, and reduce correctional budgets by generating fear among voters and politicians.

Professors Katherine Beckett and Alexes Harris, both of the University of Washington, examine the impact monetary sanctions have on mass incarceration. The authors find that in many instances, fines and fees are imposed by the criminal justice system as supplements to lengthy prison terms. These sanctions are determined by statute, not an individual's income, which often generate long-term cycles of debt for the offender and routinely land them back in prison for a parole violation. Collateral consequences of mass incarceration can affect more than just the offender. Heavy burdens are also placed on the offenders' family and community. Professors Sara Wakefield of the University of California, Irvine and Christopher Wildeman of Yale University examine the effects of parental incarceration on their children's behavioral and mental health problems. The authors find that parental incarceration exacerbates child behavioral and mental health problems. Specifically, the children of incarcerated parents were found to be more aggressive, depressed, anxious, and in some instances, delinquent.

Professor Todd Clear, of Rutgers University, explored the potential of justice reinvestment programs to reduce correctional populations and budgets. Clear argues that the current fiscal crisis in the United States has presented an unprecedented opportunity to decrease the prison population by spending money on community corrections rather than on incarceration. To do so, Clear proposes that justice reinvestment initiatives be used to provide subsidies to private-sector employers who are willing to hire the offenders who would otherwise be sitting in prison with no access to employment.