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RESEARCHERS INVESTGATE CALIFORNIA'S DECARCERATION POTENTIAL

TALLAHASSEE, FLA—In a recent study published in *Criminology & Public Policy* (CPP) [Volume 10, Issue 2], researchers examine what lead to the 34% reduction of California's imprisonment population under former Governor Ronald Reagan and the potential for a similar reduction in 2011. Professors Rosemary Gartner and Anthony N. Doob of the University of Toronto, along with Franklin E. Zimring of the University of California at Berkeley, found that the decline in the prison population under Reagan was the result of three events occurring simultaneously, a process that took a number of years to fully experience.

Gartner, Doob, and Zimring argue that the ever-expanding prison population in the United States, along with decreasing correctional budgets makes the study of California's decarceration and ways to control prison populations timely and important. To reduce the prison population in his state, Reagan amended correctional policies to decrease the number of people being sent to prison, releasing more people at a faster rate, and sending fewer people back to prison who violated their parole. The authors note that similar tactics today would be difficult to implement without confronting several ideological obstacles first, including changes in the state's political climate. If political ideologies are overcome, sentencing guidelines should be amended to reduce the number of offenders sent to prison. The authors argue that specific attention should be given to determinant and truth-in-sentencing laws.

Policy essayist, Mary Bosworth of the University of Oxford argues that reducing prison populations is desirable on democratic and moral grounds and is consistent with a movement known as "penal moderation" that is evident in both the United States and Europe. Bosworth asserts that penal moderation is possible, but will require more public support. Bosworth references cases in Scotland, England, and Wales where the public has been increasingly more supportive of lenient penal sanctions and therefore argues that it is possible in the United States as well.

Conversely, policy essayist, Shawn Bushway of the University at Albany, SUNY, cautions against decarceration, asking whether or not decarceration is actually desirable on crime control and criminal justice grounds. Bushway argues that decarceration does not decrease the number of people in the criminal justice system, it just shifts the venue and changes the type of punishment received. Further, Bushway writes that the political, ideological, and economic conditions California was experiencing under Reagan are fundamentally different than the conditions today and policy makers cannot simply mimic the steps that Reagan took to decrease the prison populations. Therefore, Bushway urges more clarification about the nature and purpose of alternatives to incarceration before they are assumed to be better and more effective than prison.