**Mass Incarceration of African Americans in the United States**

**Policy’s that affect mass incarceration of African Americans in the United states**

**Mass Incarceration among African Americans**

A social problem is a social condition that creates a disruption on a particular group of people, that may cause long term and present damage. Social issues that have adversely affected African American people in the United States are inherent in racism-both structural and societal that have led to disparities in the criminal justice system which is evident in mass incarceration.

Mass incarceration of African Americans has increased steadily over the years, with African Americans 5 times more likely to be arrested more than their white equals in a country where the rate of incarceration is now 500 times higher than it was about 40 years ago (Sheet, 2015). Normal police duties like traffic stops also bear a significant worry for African Americans, given that they are more likely to be arrested than their white counterparts during traffic and pedestrian stops (Hetey et al., 2016). The war on drugs has also contributed to this problem, with African Americans in America more likely to be arrested than their Caucasian counterparts, although drug use and prevalence is equal among all races.

**Past and Present Policies Affecting the Rate of Mass Incarceration**

Clear policies and crime laws implemented in the 1980s and 1990s led to the problem of mass incarcerations, an example being the sentencing policy that paved way for indeterminate sentencing. Further, as a result of enacted punitive policies during the reigns of former US presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, accepted laws like the three strikes, life without parole, and mandatory minimum sentence among others led to the increase in arrests and prosecution, with the communities heavily affected being African Americans and Latinos who are at more risk of arrests. The crime laws were further enforced in the 1994 Clinton Crime Bill. With the war on drugs peaking in the 1980s and 1990s, the criminal justice system, led by the judges, correctional and parole officers, shifted their approach to dealing with criminals, employing the so called tough-on-crime policy, with the African-American community once again bearing the direct consequences of imprisonments rising and sentencing durations extended (Wakefield et al., 2016).

However, the past laws, mostly which worked to increase mass incarcerations and sentencings severity are being undone with a raft of reform policies, with a focus on dealing with police brutality, restorative justice, sentencing laws and decarceration. The policy of decarceration has gained traction, supported by both conservative and liberal political leaders led by former President Barack Obama (Kubrin & Seron, 2016). Five states – namely, Connecticut, Michigan, Mississippi, Rhode Island, and South Carolina – have already gained prison reductions of between 14 and 25% highlighting its vital acceptance (Schrantz et al., 2018).

**Key Figures and Policies Targeting Criminal Justice Reforms**

These policies are being supported by key figures and groups that have taken the rights of the African-American and other marginalized communities seriously. Policies to deal with issues like police brutality and perception of the African American community to law enforcement have been incorporated, including sensitization and police education. Behind the success of new policies and movements, vital figures and leaders have shaped the message on mainstream and social media. The front to address police brutality and criminalization of African Americans has been spearheaded by Patrisse Khan-Cullors, the co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement. Another famous figure is architect Deanna van Buren, who designs alternatives to prisons and jails. Her focus is on restorative justice standing opposed to the tough-on-crime policy and mass incarceration by seeking an alternative to cramming prisons and corrective facilities.

**Mass Incarceration in American Policies**

In the United States (U.S.), mass incarceration is a major social problem seen in the last decades. Social experts argue that lack of appropriate policies, negligence, or institutional discrimination are the main drivers of such vice. This social disruption phenomenon triggers serious concerns of social justice in that it has been inclined to minority groups. As a result of an upsurge in social unrest and crime, empirical data indicate that massive imprisonment started in the 1970s and has thus transformed American social inequality. War on drugs policy is one of the contentious issues in the American justice landscape, with some arguing that it is biased. The imprisoned social group linked to illicit drugs suffers severe social and economic consequences for generations. Ideally, this policy on drug war plays a significant role in achieving peaceful tranquility in a particular nation. It is alleged that drug-lords fund terror activities within and outside U.S. territories, and therefore, there is a close correlation between drug menace and socio-economic stability.

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The policy on the drug war is spearheaded at the national level. However, enforcement is carried out at the state level. Despite a joint obligation to suppress the acquisition of illicit drugs, the U.S. international drug policy does not fully agree with approaches promoted by the foreign community. At the global scene, illegal drug business constitutes a multi-dimensional problem that poses profound implications for the U.S. Across the border, drug trafficking undermines both regional and political stability and strengthens the role of transnational criminal gangs. Despite the availability of critical data by various government agencies dealing with illegal drug surveillance, it is unfortunate to note that such data is not adequately designed to shape the policy-making process (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). However, a call for reforms on criminal justice has been in the public domain.

The application of drug policy is at the federal level and is not appropriate in solving mass incarceration due to possession of banned drugs (Sacco, 2014). Over the last decades, some states have legalized cocaine use, while others are still maintaining the status quo. As such, an alleged criminal may flee a given state due to an issued warrant of arrest and would fail to be arrested. Thus, at the national policy level, offenders are likely to exploit the existing loopholes. The symbolic use of drugs as a representation of social upheaval and rebellion started in the 1960s, and it later transitioned out to national threat. President Richard Nixon enacted a national policy on the drug war in 1971 and immensely scaled up drug control agencies’ dominance backed with compulsory penalizing measures. Though a commission led by Governor Raymond Shafer unanimously called for decriminalization of marijuana, Nixon turned down their recommendation (Dufton, 2012). The opposing faction argued that drug abuse could be addressed using drug therapy rather than punitive punishment. Nixon’s opponents stressed that the main cause of delinquency was moral poverty.

Nonetheless, the current state of the drug war has relatively transformed due to a series of law reforms, such as the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010. Unlike before, several States have legalized marijuana as a recreational commodity. Currently, the war’s intensity on drugs has drastically reduced compared to its peak in the 1980s. During each administration, some of the main objectives of the war on drugs were to reduce criminality prompted by drug abuse as well as to counter financial aid earned by drug-terror related groups.

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